

Chapter 53

Teachers' Professional Development in the Digitized World: A Sample Blended Learning Environment for Educational Technology Training

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ABSTRACT

Professional development for in-service English language teachers has increasingly become a need in higher education not only in Turkey but across the world. Due to the limited time teachers have and the distance between the source of service and the potential participants, using digitized activities and materials have naturally become a necessity. The purpose of this research is to report the potential impact of the course described below and discuss the role of blended learning experience of professional development on the participating teachers. The theoretical background of the study is experiential learning initiated by Kolb and socio-constructivist learning theory by Vygotsky in that both theories highlight the role of experiencing the change and focus on personal meanings and learning with and from others in real and online environments.

INTRODUCTION

Professional development for in-service teachers has increasingly become a need in the education field not only in Turkey, but across the world. Due to the limited time teachers have and the distance between the source of service and the potential participants, using digitized activities and materials have naturally become a necessity. In the digitized world, teachers are expected to develop their technological pedagogical knowledge so as to keep up with the developing pedagogical innovations.

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With the growth of digital facilities, professional development activities for teachers have become more visual and comprehensible. However, in developing countries, teachers who grew up with non-technological environment experience challenges in the digitized world, which makes it really difficult to deal with the changing nature of the training materials for their professional development. Turkey is one of the examples of such educational settings with several contextual constraints for the integration of digitized teacher development activities. Moreover, teachers do not have enough opportunities offered by their institutions. However, they attempt to develop professionally by searching materials on the Internet and attending relevant conferences or short courses.

It has also been observed that professional development activities which are more regular, organized and focused on the integration of technology into teaching rather than learning about how to use technological tools are needed. The training program offered in this study is planned according to this need. The purpose of this research is to report the potential impact of 'The Certificate Program for Educational Technology' (ETUSP) course described in this study and discuss the role of blended professional development program on the participating teachers. The theoretical background of the study is experiential learning initiated by Kolb and socio-constructivist learning theory by Vygotsky in that both theories highlight the role of experiencing the change and focus on personal meanings and learning with and from others in real environments.

Literature Review

It is widely believed that teachers are key to putting information technologies in the hands of students by integrating it into the teaching and learning process. By using technology as a natural and necessary part of classroom practice, teachers can give students the knowledge and experiences they need. Therefore, for students to be better prepared to 'learn with technology, teachers need to be better prepared to 'teach with' technology (Luke, Moore, Sawyer, 1998 as cited in Fossum, 2010).

There are also pedagogical theories to guide technology integration in classrooms. Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) is a framework for teacher knowledge for technology integration prepared by Koehler and Mishra (2006). They argue that developing good content requires a skillful interweaving of three sources of knowledge: technology, pedagogy and content. They also assert that there is no single technological solution that addresses every teacher, every course or every view of teaching. For a productive technology integration teachers should consider all three issues within complex relationships rather than in isolation.

The Substitution Augmentation Modification Redefinition (SAMR) is another model for technology integration. This model was prepared by Puentedura (see Figure 1). It displays a new way to look at the different levels of integrating technology into the classroom.

As Dexter, Anderson and Becker (1999, p.223) explained, 'For teachers to implement any new instructional strategy, they must require new knowledge about it and then weave this together with the demands of the curriculum, classroom management and existing instructional skills'. Teachers need information about how, as well as why, to use technology in meaningful ways. Lack of knowledge regarding either element can significantly decrease the potential impact that these powerful resources might have on student learning. Lock (2006) explains in his study that described shortcomings in traditional professional development models have started a shift toward community based models to provide the continuous support teachers need to promote for teaching better, thus enhancing student learning. With advances in Information Communication Technologies (ICT) and ICT infrastructures in schools, online

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