

Primary school EFL teachers' professional development needs in Benishangul Gumuz Regional State

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Abstract

The objective of this study was to investigate the primary school English language teachers professional development needs during in-service training in Benishangul Gumuz Regional state. There are three administration towns in Benishangul Gumuz Regional States such as Gilgel-Beles, Kemash and Assosa town administrations. Among them, Assosa town administration was purposively selected because the researcher lives in the area so that it was convenient to conduct the study. In Assosa town administration, there are four governmental primary schools namely Selam-Ber, Millennium, Benishangul and Assosa primary schools and all of the schools were considered in the study since their numbers were small. Since numbers were small all of 28 primary school EFL teachers found in four schools were purposively selected for the study. The study employed descriptive research design using both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Data were collected through questionnaires and interview from primary school EFL teachers. The finding of this study indicated that there were no need assessments of primary school EFL teachers' training before the CPD programme was designed. It also indicated that primary school EFL teachers did not perform the minimum requirements which were expected from them to be English language teachers. It also showed that primary school EFL teachers need professional development in subject areas especially on speaking, writing, grammar skills and vocabularies. Hence, the study

recommended that the stake holders should made need assessment before designing CPD programmes, since primary school EFL teachers professional development needs are on subject areas like proficiency skills, teachers themselves and different stakeholders should focus the CPD training based on their needs and primary school EFL teachers should work hard to perform minimum requirements which were expected from them to be English language.

Abbreviations

REB _____ Regional Education Bureau

CPD _____ continuous professional development

EFDR _____ Ethiopian Federal Democratic Republic

ESDP _____ Education Sector Development Program

EFL _____ English as a foreign language teacher

MoE _____ ministry of education

TESO _____ Teacher Education System Overhaul

TGE _____ Transitional Government of Ethiopia

TTC _____ Teachers Training Colleges

USA _____ United State of America

Key words

EFL teachers

Needs

Professional development

Introductions

Every education policy places teachers' quality at the very nucleus of learning and as a key determinant of variation in a students' achievement. Quality teacher professional development however does not occur by accident; it requires systematic and continuous implementation of teachers' professional development. In considering raising the quality of teaching, one must

begin at the teacher level. Teacher development must be seen as a continuum of learning, with teachers located at various places along the continuum (Craig et.al, 1998, p.1). This is necessary because a person who would educate others must be educated first and should possess a content and pedagogic knowledge in general and particularly in teaching English as a foreign language by practicing need base professional development.

Professional development is the cornerstone of teacher professionalism in general and English language teachers' specifically to bring quality of education. In different parts of the world, such as the USA, Australia, Japan, South Africa and Hong Kong, there has been a significant investment of effort in continuing professional development (CPD) programs to help improve teacher quality, not only to fulfill society's expectations of the teaching profession, but also to meet the changing needs of students. Whether individual teachers' participation in CPD activities arises from an interest in lifelong learning, a sense of moral obligation, a felt need to enhance professional competence and to keep abreast of recent developments in their field of work, the need to comply with mandatory government requirements, or for career advancement (Golding & Gray, 2006; Jasper, 2006), CPD is seen to be a foundational element in teachers' development (Luke & McArdle, 2009). It was also believed that professional development for teachers should be ongoing that all teachers at all levels shall practice it to improve their teaching skills. Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin (1995) describes professional development as a collaborative process, while Scribner (1999) asserts that professional development may look and be very different in diverse settings and even within a single setting it can have a variety of dimensions. Teachers believe that they must be empowered as transformative agents who through professional development should cultivate their knowledge of practice (Scribner, 1999, p. 2).

Professional development programs have been identified as one of the most successful measures to bring about teacher change in knowledge, skills and attitudes, which in turn translate into better classroom teaching, and eventually gains in student achievement (Yoon, Duncan, Lee, Scarloss, and Shapley, 2007). Guskey (2002) stated professional development programs as "systematic efforts to bring about change in the classroom practices of teachers, in their attitudes and beliefs, and in the learning outcomes of students. Therefore, it is very

important to give priority for teachers' development in order to bring quality of education and students change.

In the developing countries like Ethiopian educational system, planning and implementation of continuous professional development activities and opportunities for English language teachers is an essential necessity on the basis of the teachers' needs and preferences in order to make them effective teachers. The most effective forms of continuous professional development seem to be those that focus on clearly articulated priorities, providing on-going school based support to classroom teachers, deal with subject matter content as well as suitable instructional strategies and classroom management techniques and create opportunities for teachers to observe, experience and try out new teaching methods (*OECD, 2005:128*).

Objectives of Teachers' Professional Development Programmes

Accordingly, the practice of teachers' development training can serve a number of objectives (*OECD, 1998*), including:

- To update individuals' knowledge of a subject in light of recent advances in the area;
- To update individuals' skills, attitudes and approaches in light of the development of new teaching techniques and objectives, new circumstances and new educational research;
- To enable individuals to apply changes made to curricula or other aspects of teaching practice;
- To enable schools to develop and apply new strategies concerning the curriculum and other aspects of teaching practice;
- To exchange information and expertise among teachers and others, *e.g.* academics, industrialists; and
- To help weaker teachers become more effective.

Hence, continuous professional development is a planned, continuous and lifelong process whereby teachers try to develop their personal and professional qualities, to improve their knowledge, skills and practice, leading to their empowerment, the improvement of their

agency and the development of their organization and their pupils (Padwad and Dixit, 2011: 10)

Teachers Professional Development in Ethiopia

The first primary responsibilities of schools are to create literate citizens. In the Ethiopian context, teachers' training was begun in 1944 in one classroom in Minilik II School (MOE, 1973). As the Teacher Education System Overhaul (TESO, 2003) described, now days teachers' development programs are run at different levels like schools, colleges and university with target of produce teachers with sufficient subject matter knowledge; professionally skilled, ethical, committed and competent; and capable of applying student centred teaching and learning approach in order to enhance the growth of students with active, productive and problem solving skill (MOE, 2007a).

The policy document (MOE, 1994) indicates that education during the 'Dergue' regime was intertwined with complex problems in that it lacked relevance and insufficient training of teachers and low quality of education. To overcome these problems, the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopian Government set a new education and training policy. The policy states general and specific objectives of education, an overall strategy, and areas of special attention and prioritized actions. Among the three areas of special attention and prioritized actions, one focuses on teacher training and overall professional development of teachers.

A teacher's professional quality is comprised of different skills and competencies that need specific training in order to update and upgrade their teaching competency. The Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE) led by EFDR in 1991, recognized the need to upgrade the quality and professional competence of existing teachers through in-service training. Professional development of teachers is an important aspect of professional life of teachers as it has a significant positive impact on teachers' beliefs and practices along with its role in supporting the students' learning. The transitional government of Ethiopia recognized the need to upgrade the quality and professional competence of the existing teachers through in service training in 1994 and commissioned Livingstone to undertake research in this area. Livingstone (2001) after his research study asserted the need for teachers' professional development and made specific reference to the fact that endorsement should be considered

for different forms of learning such as for prior learning in another institution or field, formal learning through established routes, experiential learning or sharing usually in the workplace and etc. It is best if such a scheme is national and is operated by all institutions in comparable ways (p. 55). Teacher professional development in Ethiopia is undertaken as a priority issue to enhance teaching effectiveness of teachers to teach the students in increasingly diverse contexts and at high levels. It is to support their professional competency so they may transition over their careers into roles of high status and responsibility within their profession. In Ethiopia, it is now mandatory for all teachers at all levels that they should go through their continuous professional development program (CPD), completing a minimum of 60 hours of approved activities each year, as the basis for their on-going professional development.

In order to improve the quality of teachers as well as education in general and English language teachers specifically, MOE initiated a training program for teachers of primary and secondary schools under Education Sector Development Program (ESDP) in 2005 called Continuous Professional Development (CPD). It was mandatory in CPD that teachers spend 60 hours in professional development activities in each year at their schools. CPD focuses on improving the teaching-learning process with emphasis on active learning, practicing continuous assessment, managing large classes, subject area skills development and etc. The MOE gave CPD priority status assuming that it is the right of teachers and is of great value for national development (USAID, 2006). The aim of CPD is to improve the performance of teachers in the classroom and raise student achievement. It is a career-long process of improving knowledge, skills, and attitudes centered on the local context and, particularly, classroom practice (Chalchisa, n.d, p. 2).

The main aim of CPD in Ethiopia is to improve the teaching and learning processes through introduction of active learning, periodic evaluation, subject area knowledge, assessment, and facilitating enrollments. The CPD program is a privilege for teachers as it helps them to update and upgrade themselves with their subject areas, new outlooks, approaches, and policy directions. The CPD guideline states that “serving teachers and head teachers have the right to access high quality and relevant continuous professional development opportunities. If they are also expected to renew their teaching licenses there will need to be clear links between CPD, re-licensing and career progression” (MOE, 2004, p.3). In due course, TESO recognized the need for certification and licensing of teachers associated with CPD (MOE,

2004). The licensing and re-licensing of the teachers is also dependent on the successful completion of the CPD by them.

Statement of problems

English language teachers within the government school system in Ethiopia, especially at elementary schools level are not often qualified. One impending factor for this is that Ethiopian elementary school teachers are recruited from among those who fail the school leaving examination at grade ten. After they get trained in TTC for three years they get diploma in social science stream, languages streams or natural science without specific specialization, then those who are from social science and language streams teach English as a subject in elementary schools which has a great impact on quality of education in general and poor English language use. From the researchers' experience of teaching in TTC in part time and teaching in the university for upgrading teachers educators, the trainers needs more work on continuous professional development in-service training.

The government is working to solve the above mentioned problems in different ways, like amending curriculums, upgrading teachers, providing formal and informal trainings in order to increase students' achievements at every school levels. But, still quality of education is declining in general and particularly students' English language skills are declining every time. Therefore, it is very important to study on the elementary English language teachers' needs of continuous professional development which is the base for foundation. It is assumed that if children are refined well during their lower stage by their parents, they will be more effective at their adult and young ages, and if they miss-behaved at their lower age, it will be very difficult to reshape them. The same is true for educational system, that if teachers at lower levels are responsible for their students, taught them effectively and well trained, students will be more efficient in the rest of life. Eba (2014) stated that education which is not founded on strong foundation results in producing human capital which is not well equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge. The foundation is the primary teaching and the primary teachers. These have to be laid on perfect foundation. Therefore, this study will attempt to identify needs of elementary school EFL teachers CPD practice which will help them to fill their knowledge gap.

Objectives of the study

The followings are the specific objectives of this study:

1. To determine to extent available CPD programme meets primary school EFL teachers' learning needs.
2. To identify primary EFL teachers' need of continuous professional development

Significance of the study

Now a days, quality of English language teaching in Ethiopia is becoming poor and poor due to several reasons at all levels of educational institutions; among them quality of teachers is the most one, Hence, this study will mostly contribute to bring quality of English language teaching in the elementary schools by providing appropriate and need based CPD. Hopefully, this study will be also helpful to MOE and regional bureau of educations how to enhance quality of EFL teachers during their pre-service and in-service training. The study can also benefit EFL teachers to fill their gaps of day to day activities in teaching by engaging themselves in their need based CPD. The results of the study will also hopefully contribute a lot to CPD coordinators and trainee how to fulfill English language teachers' need in their professional development. It may help all concerned stakeholders to identify the strengths and weaknesses of school based EFL teachers' CPD program to take remedial measures against the challenges that primary schools EFL teachers faced in implementing CPD program.

Delimitations of the study

This study is focuses on primary school EFL teachers professional development needs in Ethiopia, Benishangul Gumuz Regional state. More specifically, it was limited Assosa town five governmental primary schools of English language teachers.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This is a descriptive survey that used both qualitative and quantitative approaches for data collection and analysis. Qualitative methods allow for identification of previously unknown processes, explanations of why and how phenomena occur, and the range of their effects (Dorney, 2007). That is, it works for an in depth understanding of the situation and individual

experiences. Qualitative research involves data collection procedures that result primarily in open-ended, non-numerical data which is then analyzed primarily by non-statistical method. These imply that the data drawn using qualitative methods provide complete information and real reflections of the meanings of the documents, people, and situations (Leedy and Ormrod, 2005).where as quantitative data have the potential to provide measurable evidence, to yield efficient data collection procedures, to create the possibility of replication and generalization to a population, to facilitate the comparison of groups, and to provide insight into a breadth of experiences (Creswell et al., 2010). Hence teachers' closed ended questionnaires were analyses by using SPSS software with frequency and percentage.

Sampling Techniques

In order to conduct the study, four public primary schools in Assosa town such as Selam Ber, Benishangul, millennium and Assosa primary schools were purposefully selected because they are relatively more convenient to the researcher and were close to living area for the researcher so that cooperation could safely be secured and time and cost that might be unwisely spend to go to farther areas could be safe to do the work. Additionally, the other reason why the researcher selected Assosa woreda for study was that EFL teachers in the Assosa woreda one's (schools) have got long years of experience in primary school teaching and training. According to BoE of the region, these teachers were transferred to Assosa woreda from different remotest woredas in order to be near to the town based on their experiences. Accordingly, all of 28 primary school EFL teachers from the schools were purposively selected for the study since their numbers were small.

Data Collection Instruments

In order to generate data about primary school EFL teachers' continuous professional development training needs, questionnaires and interview were prepared and trialed. Open and closed ended questionnaires were distributed for all of EFL teachers in the schools.

Similarly, interviews were made with the 10 EFL teachers selected randomly based on their volunteer at selected schools. The purpose of interview is triangulate whether they confirm orally in interview or not what they answered in questionnaires.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this study, English language teachers were asked how the CPD programme was designed, can EFL teachers perform the minimum standards to be English language according to MoE and what would be their future professional development training needs.

The design of EFL teachers CPD programme

In order to seek information about the presence of primary school EFL teachers' professional development needs before designing the programme, questionnaires were distributed. Therefore, teachers were asked to reply their responses whether or not teachers need were considered in designing before its implementation. The result presented in table below.

Table 13 the existence of EFL teacher's needs assessment in designing the programmes

No	Item	Responses	Frequency	Percentage
1	Is there was needs assessment before the designing of the professional development programmes for primary school English language teachers?	Yes	1	3.6
		No	27	96.4
		Total	28	100

In the above table, almost all of EFL teachers 27 (96.4%) replied that there had not been any need assessment of EFL teachers CPD programme before it was designed and implemented but only 1 (3.6%) of teacher replied that there had been EFL teachers' need assessment on their CPD training. Therefore, from the above data, it can be generalized that need assessments for EFL teachers' professional development programmes at primary school levels. From the interview data, teachers also responded that the CPD modules are not interesting to them in order to practice because there was no need assessment before the design.

The listed statements in below table are some of requirements for English language teachers teaching at primary school (Grade 1-4) that they must able to perform in teaching (MoE 2013 p 5). Accordingly, primary school EFL teachers were asked whether they can perform or not

in the classroom while teaching English language at primary school. The results discussed as follow.

Table two, EFL teacher's teaching performance

Do you perform the following statements confidently in teaching English at primary schools?		Responses					
		No	%	Yes	%	freq	Total
1	Greetings in English, getting lessons started, giving instructions, conducting lessons, communicating with students in the classrooms and ending lessons	27	96.4	1	3.6	28	100
2	ability to interpret meanings of sentences	15	53.6	13	46.4	28	100
3	On meanings of simple and compound sentences	18	64.3	10	35.7	28	100
4	on how expressing/talking about oneself, family, hobbies, etc	16	57.9	12	42.1	28	100
5	interprets writer's intention in short paragraphs and short essays: introduce, explain, describe, narrate, argue, or conclude ideas	20	71.4	8	28.4	28	100
6	How to write organized paragraphs using grammatically correct sentences.	21	75.0	7	25.0	28	100
7	How to write spelling of words	7	60.7	11	39.3	80	100
8	How to use grammar to communicate using social expressions such as asking, giving, telling daily routines, expressing likes, dislikes, etc.)	21	75.0	7	25.0	28	100
9	Word grammar (noun, verb, adjectives, etc.)	17	60.7	11	39.3	28	100
10	How to identify basic grammar rules (to be, has/have, imperatives, tenses,	23	82.1	5	27.9	28	100

	quantifiers, adverbs, possessives, etc.						
11	How to change sentences from one form to another	24	85.7	4	14.3	28	100
12	Techniques for teaching listening skills (listen and respond, listen and do, etc.)	18	64.3	10	35.7	28	100
13	How to identify language activities practiced individually, in pairs and groups	21	75.0	7	25.0	28	100
14	How to write and organize paragraphs with grammatically corrected	17	60.7	11	39.3	28	100
15	How to explain advantages and possible disadvantages of pair and group works in second language learning	18	64.3	10	35.7	28	100
16	How to reorder jumbled sentences to create organized paragraph	23	82.1	5	17.9	28	100
17	Effective classroom management	13	46.4	15	53.6	28	100

The above table indicated that there are different areas that EFL teachers needed to improve in teaching English at primary school level. The listed statements in the above table are some of requirements for English language teachers teaching at primary school (Grade 1-4) that they must able to perform in teaching (MoE 2013 p 5). However, many teachers indicated that they could not perform them in the classroom. For instance, 27 (96.4%) of EFL teachers at primary schools have problem of English in greetings, how to getting lessons started, giving instructions, conducting lessons, communicating with students in the classrooms and ending lessons and 15 (53.6%) of the respondents have a problem of ability to interpret meanings of sentences. On the other hands, 18 (64.3%) the respondents have problems on identifying meanings of simple and compound sentences and 16 (57.9%) have difficulties on how expressing/talking about oneself, family, hobbies, etc which is required from primary school EFL teachers. On the other hands, 20 (71.4%) of the respondents confirmed that they have

doubt on how to interpret writer's intention in short paragraphs and short essays: introduce, explain, describe, narrate, argue, or conclude ideas in the paragraph reading.

Similarly, it was expected from primary school EFL teachers to write organized paragraphs using grammatically correct sentences and how to write spelling of words correctly but, according to the above data, 20 (75.0%) and 17 (60.7%) of them respectively have difficulties to perform it. Likewise, 21 (75.0%) of the respondents have difficulties on how to use grammar to communicate using social expressions such as asking, giving, telling daily routines, expressing likes, dislikes and 17 (60.7%) of the respondent teachers have doubt how to use word grammar (noun, verb, adjectives, etc) which were one of primary school EFL teachers requirement to teach English at lower grades and 23 (82.1%) have difficulties on how to identify basic grammar rules (to be, has/have, imperatives, tenses, quantifiers, adverbs, possessives in teaching English.

Similarly, 24 (85.7%), 16 (64.3%), 21 (75.0%) and 17 (60.7%) of the respondent teachers confirmed that they have difficulties on how to change sentences from one form to another, techniques for teaching listening skills (listen and respond, listen and do, etc), how to identify language activities practiced individually, in pairs and groups and how to write and organize paragraphs with grammatically corrected respectively which were expected as criteria for primary school EFL teachers to be English language teacher in Ethiopia. In the same ways, it were expected from primary school EFL teachers to perform on how to explain advantages and possible disadvantages of pair and group works in second language learning but, 18 (64.3%) of EFL teachers have difficulties to do so in the study areas. It was also 23 (82.1%), and 13 (46.4%) of EFL teachers confirmed that they still have problems of how to reorder jumbled sentences to create organized paragraph and how to manage effective classroom respectively during teaching. However, Ethiopian MoE stated that an English language teacher who cannot use the English language him/herself in speaking and writing and who does not have adequate knowledge and awareness of the English language vocabulary and grammar expected of him/her, cannot teach English at schools effectively (MoE 2013, p2).

Therefore, from teachers' respond it might be possible to generalize that the stated statements in the above table and other similar requirements in document of MoE 2013 could be EFL teachers' training need in the future to be an effective teacher. On the other hand in open

ended questionnaires T1, T3, T5 and T8 stated that primary schools have the problem of English language proficiency, so that the training shall be focused on subject areas, like grammar, speaking, and writing skills. They also added teaching kids is very difficult, so that special training on how to teach and handle children in the classes should be the parts of training for primary school teachers.

EFL teachers' professional development needs

Based on above EFL teacher's low performance in teaching English language at primary schools, teachers were given five choices of named professional development designs to fill their interest they would like to participate if they had a chance to choose. The result of teachers' response in bellow discussed as follow in table three.

	Primary school EFL teachers' CPD training needs of future	Responses	
		frequency	Percentage
a	English language proficiency (speaking, writing, grammar and vocabulary skills)	28	100
b	ELT methodology	25	82.1
c	Action research	20	71.4
d	Experience sharing with senior stuffs	16	57.9
e	Classroom management techniques	10	35.7
f	If any?	—	—
	Total	99	100

Note $N= 99$ because teachers have been given a chance to choose more than one programme percentage is calculated for 99

In the above table, choices have been given for EFL teachers' to prefer their training needs in future in professional development. Accordingly, the data in the above table shows that most of the EFL teachers 28 (100%) at primary schools have interest in subject matter training

such as grammar, vocabulary, speaking and etc which shows that one of the most EFL teacher's training need in future. Similarly, 82.1% and 71.4% of EFL teachers have shown their desire to have training on English language teaching methodology and action research respectively in future. Similarly, the data in the above table also indicated 57.9% of the respondent teachers indicated that they have interest to have experience sharing with experienced stuffs in order to enhance their teaching experience and 35.7% of EFL teacher's needs training on ELT methodology.

Therefore, the above data reveals that most of EFL teachers at primary schools have skill gaps in subject area and other practices; so that the responsible bodies and teachers should take part to develop their skills and proficiency on the above mentioned areas to be effective teachers. Based on this idea different researches suggested that teacher development programmes should align with teachers' needs (Black and Williams, 1998). On the other hand, others researches indicated that the failure to relate programmes to participants' needs might result in resistance and makes everything difficult for implementation of the programme (Komba and Nkumbi, 2008). The EFL teachers' interview data on their CPD training need also shows that they were not practicing according to their needs and plan.

CONCLUSIONS

The main objective of this study was to identify primary school English language teacher's professional development training needs to enhance their teaching profession and bring quality of teaching in English language. Accordingly, the study found the following results:

- The stakeholders did not made need assessment of primary school English language teachers professional gap before they design the CPD programme, hence what have been prepared and implemented CPD programmes did not match with primary school EFL teachers' professional development training needs.
- The result of the study also revealed that primary school EFL teachers did not performed the minimum requirements which would be expected from them.
- The study also pointed out that primary school EFL teachers pointed out their professional development training needs on their English language proficiency (speaking, writing, grammar and vocabulary skills), ELT methodology, action research and effective classroom to be effective teachers.

Based the conclusions made above, the following recommendations have been forwarded.

- Before designing the CPD programme for primary school EFL teachers, need assessments should be done on teachers to fill their professional gap.
- Primary school EFL teachers should work hard to perform minimum requirements that were expected from them and the focused of primary school EFL teachers should be on subject area like English language proficiency skills, ELT methodologies and effective classroom management.

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