Instructor Exchange as a Continuous Professional Development Activity:
Are we Ready to Change?

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Abstract
Continuous Professional Development (CPD) has been conducted through different activities for more than three decades in the field of education. However, due to various reasons, institutions have encountered major issues in the application processes of commonly accepted CPD activities, leading to modification of existing and creation of new forms of activities in line with contextual requirements and needs. With this in mind, this study aimed to explore the process and outcomes of a new form of CPD activity, namely instructor exchange, specifically developed for a School of Foreign Languages in one of the top-tier state universities in Turkiye employing a qualitative case study methodology. Analyse-apply-evaluate cycle was followed in the study considering contextual factors of the institution including but not limited to the requirements of international accreditation. Data was collected from 22 English instructors through classroom exchanges, semi-structured interviews and document analysis, followed by creation of themes according to participants' responses. For the development of the form used in semi-structured interviews, a comprehensive literature review was conducted and expert opinion and advice were obtained. Following the exchange activity, interviews were conducted by 10 of the whole population of participating instructors. The results indicated that the instructor exchange activity helped instructors to improve themselves professionally despite some challenges and it is possible to implement this activity as a school-wide practice. The emerging themes may be used to bring a new dimension to design future CPD activities based on instructors' suggestions.

Keywords: Continuous Professional Development, Teacher Exchange, Instructor Exchange, Accreditation, English Language Education

Introduction

Professional development has been an indispensable component of educational programs for long years and it has attached extra attention in accordance with the increase in awareness towards quality assurance in higher education institutions across the world. Borg (2018) defines professional development as "a key strategy for teacher improvement and … any activity which is designed to bring about positive change in practising teachers' competence." (p.195). Although most of the literature focuses on pre-service teacher education and equipping the prospective teachers with necessary knowledge and skills, there has been a shift in the value attached to in-service trainings and professional development activities to be offered to teachers by their workplaces. As teaching is a field continuously expanding in accordance with societal and technological progress, there is a need for professionals to constantly improve their practices in the context of teaching. In this respect, Continuous Professional Development (CPD) was described as "a learning process resulting from meaningful interaction with the context (both in time and space) and eventually leading to changes in teachers' professional practice (actions) and in their thinking about that practice." (Kelchtermans, 2004, p. 220). Educational institutions thus pursue new ways to arrange a variety of CPD activities not only to cater for their teachers' needs but also to contribute to their professional practice and expertise.

Despite the awareness of and will for offering a variety of activities for continuous professional development, institutions have encountered difficulties during the implementation of commonly accepted forms, which led to various descriptions of an effective CPD activity. Within this scope, according to Borg (2015) and Villegas-Reimers (2003), an effective continuous professional development activity a) is based on a constructivist approach, b) is a long-term process, c) is related to teachers' needs, d) is related to school reform e) includes teachers in decision making procedures, f) encourages teachers to work in co-operation, and g) involves reflective designs in which teachers can reflect their perceptions on the activities. Findings from various studies in the literature indicate that teachers prefer informal ways of exchanging ideas with colleagues by collaborating with them (Ekşi, 2010; Yaşar, 2019; Zerey, 2018), which demonstrates the need of collegiality in the design of professional development activities. With the help of collegiality, individualism" and "isolation can be prevented (Arnold, 2002; Shah, 2012) and thus, collaboration improves quality of teaching, students' performance and educational processes. It is a fact that formative feedback provided in a supportive collegial environment is the most influential way to improve teachers professionally (Coe et al., 2020). Therefore, it is of utmost importance to take all the factors into consideration while designing professional development activities so that they contribute to improvement of student learning and teaching quality.

Reference to quality in the context of education evokes the mechanisms of quality assurance, the most prevalent form of which in education is accreditation. In the context of higher education, Eaton characterizes accreditation as the principal mechanism employed by universities to prove and improve their processes and practices (2021), which can be accomplished "through constant assessment" (as cited in Aslan, 2009, p. 291). Accreditation is accepted as an important status granted to the higher education institutions to maintain the achievement standards in long-term (Yüksel, 2013). While accreditation may take different forms, the focus of this paper will revolve around programmatic accreditation in higher education institutions. Programmatic accreditation schemes in higher education include a number of standards related to constituents of a quality program such as curriculum, mission,

faculty, facilities, equipment, recruiting processes, program development, student services, etc. and professional development indicating that accreditation status is possible only if relevant compliance criteria are met. Therefore, continuous professional development is conducted as part of programs' accreditation arrangements, which is considered an essential constituent of academic development (Gosling, 2009). This leads programs considering or being subject to accreditation process to make necessary arrangements and improvements to meet quality criteria with regard to professional development of academic and administrative personnel as well as administrators. In this framework, Staub (2019) mentions establishment of a continuing professional development unit in their program in the scope of initial accreditation as a step towards meeting the accreditation criteria. This is only an example demonsrating the role and importance of continuous professional development in quality assurance, specifically accreditation.

Although there is still debate going on regarding whether accreditation is an effective tool in maintaining quality, to be recognized at an acceptable level worldwide in accordance with globalization and requirements of the current era, many programs including but not limited to engineering education, teacher education and intensive English education within higher education settings are in pursuit of accreditation across the world including Turkiye. There are prevalent accrediting agencies for intensive English program education, all of which include instructor professional development, which may take different forms as part of quality criteria. Therefore, accredited intensive English programs create policies and adopt strategies to contribute to their instructors' professional development, which will also serve for compliance with and maintenance of accredited status. Based on features of effective continuous professional development (Borg 2015; Villegas-Reimers, 2003) and taking into consideration the quality criteria of accrediting agencies, this study aims to explore instructors' perceptions regarding the adaptation process of a new form of CPD activity, namely instructor exchange, as implemented in the School of Foreign Languages of a large state university in Turkiye accredited by an international non-profit specialized accredited body seeking responses to the following research questions: (i) *What are the instructors' perceptions about benefits and drawbacks of the instructor exchange activity? (ii) What are the instructors' attitudes towards the implementation of the instructor exchange activity as a school-wide practice?*

Methodology

Research Setting

The research was conducted at one of the top state universities of Turkiye. As it is a large university and the students attend the intensive English program to meet eligibility criteria for language proficiency, there are approximately 200 instructors employed under the umbrella of the School of Foreign Languages. The School of Foreign Languages is accredited by an international specialized accrediting agency and it was granted 10-year re-accreditation just a few years ago. In accordance with the number of instructors serving for the program and requirements of the accrediting agency, all CPD activities are designed in an analyse-apply-evaluate cycle. Needs analysis is conducted at the beginning of each academic year to determine professional development needs of the instructors and there is a sound evaluation system as part of School practices.

Participants

22 English instructors from the School of Foreign Languages participated in the research. The instructors were reached through e-mail and the ones that volunteered were involved in the study. Institutional Review Board approval was obtained before the initiation of the study and informed consent was received from each participant. Demographic information of the participants is illustrated in Table 1 below:

	Age	Experience	Degree	Gender
Participant 1	32	7 years	MA	Female
Participant 2	41	19 years	MA	Female
Participant 3	39	17 years	BA	Female
Participant 4	40	16 years	BA	Female
Participant 5	42	18 years	MA	Female
Participant 6	34	12 years	MA	Female
Participant 7	33	12 years	MA	Female
Participant 8	34	12 years	MA	Female
Participant 9	32	8 years	BA	Male
Participant 10	30	8 years	MA	Female
Participant 11	36	8 years	MA	Female
Participant 12	29	6.5 years	MA	Female
Participant 13	45	25 years	MA	Female
Participant 14	32	10 years	MA	Female
Participant 15	28	6 years	MA	Female
Participant 16	40	19 years	PhD in progress	Female
Participant 17	50	30 years	BA	Female
Participant 18	31	6 years	MA	Female
Participant 19	39	15 years	BA	Female
Participant 20	36	11 years	PhD in progress	Female
Participant 21	36	13 years	PhD in progress	Female
Participant 22	39	16 years	BA	Female

Table 1. Study Group

Instruments

An instructor exchange activity training explaining the exchange cycle and procedures was designed to inform instructors. Two instructor self-reflection forms were prepared: one to be used after the exchange and the other for use after the reflection meeting. While the former included questions mainly related the flow of the lesson in the original and exchange classes, the latter aimed to detect generally shared perceptions by the instructors. After the instructors filled out the forms reflecting on their own practices, semi-structured interviews were conducted using an interview form, the questions of which were adapted from Centre for Teaching Support and Innovation (2017).

Data Collection and Analysis

Instructors were informed about the research procedures with a training including a general presentation about the aims and processes of the activity at the beginning. They made pairs of two and decided the day and slot that they would switch. They were free to apply any kind of activities in line with the pacing of the class. After they finished the lessons, both instructors wrote an individual reflection about the exchange process including short information about their lesson plan and opinions about the similarities and differences of two classes. Also, they were expected to mention activities that worked and that did not work as anticipated. Lastly, two instructors came together and discussed about their reflections, which was followed by filling in the form designed for collecting perceptions after the meeting with the exchange partner. Following the meetings, semi-structured interviews were conducted either face-to-face or through zoom with 10 of the whole population of instructors. That is, while 22 instructors participated in the whole exchange activity, only 10 instructors were interviewed to reach in-depth understanding of their experiences. The interviews lasted around 30 minutes and they were recorded in line with consent from participants. Reflection papers were collected from instructors and semi-structured interviews were transcribed verbatim. The data from semi-structured interviews and reflection papers were analysed by using the steps of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to determine the themes that would be the light of future CPD activities and criteria of instructor exchange guidance. Instructor Exchange Activity Cycle is illustrated in Figure 1 below:
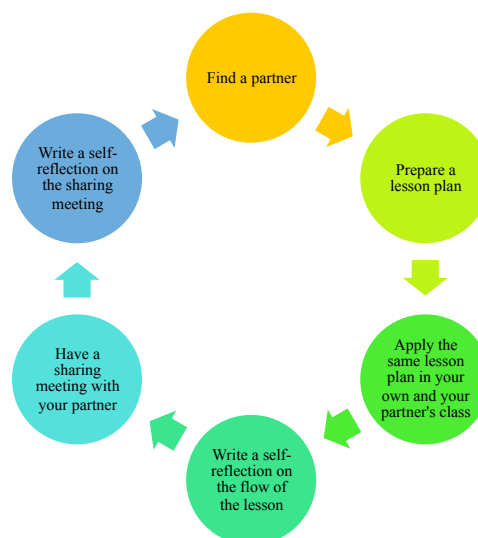

Figure 1: Instructor Exchange Activity Cycle

Findings

The themes that emerged from the analysis of interviews and reflection papers are *collegial interaction*, *change in educational context* and *engagement in self-reflection*.

Collegial Interaction

In the scope of collegial interaction, many instructors mentioned how the exchange activity contributed to their learning from their peers in different phases. Regarding the new teaching ideas triggered by meetings with partners, some of the participants explained they gained ideas on warm-up activities to break the ice, reading exercises, group activities and yielding a positive atmosphere in the classroom by turning on the music. Apart from few instructors who stated they could not learn a lot from their partners, nearly all of the instructors stated that they are eager to use their partners' ideas in their future lessons such as classroom management ideas, conducting skill activities in different styles and changing their attitudes towards students.

> "*My partner told me she had the students stand while they did the speaking activity. This sounded like an interesting idea. I would be willing to try it.*" [Participant 19]

> "*I think I can use her idea to divide reading into parts to boost student engagement.*" [Participant 11]

> "*There weren't any new ideas I can integrate into my teaching.*" [Participant 8]

Although instructors used a projector, a computer, YouTube, a Digi book, Quizlet, Mentimeter, Padlet, Nearpod, Qr Code Generator, and Google Jamboard as technological tools and applications, 19 participants reported that they did not learn any new technologies during the meetings. Only one participant hoped to use it in the future.

> "*My partner has used Nearpod in her lesson as a visual presentation tool instead of PowerPoint. Although I heard of Nearpod before, I haven`t used it in my classes. She told me about the advantages of Nearpod. I might consider using it in the future.*" [Participant 20]

Except for one instructor, all instructors agreed that the reflection meetings were fruitful in regard to discussing teaching ideas with different instructors and learn from them, observe a different class and to hear about how their own classes perform with a different instructor. Instructors had the chance to look at the teaching material from a different perspective and exchanged ideas. During the meeting, they got the opportunity to explain and justify their teaching style and gain some insights about their partner`s teaching style, which gave them the chance to question and reflect on their teaching. Therefore, instructors felt that the meetings were very useful.

> "*Learning about what other colleagues are doing in their own classes and how they are teaching the very same material you are teaching in your own class is always stimulating.*" [Participant 6]

"It was comforting to hear that my students were quiet and not so willing to participate in other classes as well. As I mentioned in the post-exchange reflection, I tend to blame myself when students do not actively participate in class. It was also nice to hear that her class was pleased with the lesson they had with me. After this meeting, I felt more comfortable and thought that each class had different dynamics and we should adjust our teaching and expectations accordingly." [Participant 10]

"It is not necessary to observe a teacher in her/his class while teaching; I can do this by only talking to the teacher". [Participant 12]

Change in Educational Context

Many instructors stated that the exchange activity was a break from their routine, bringing excitement to their regular schedules. This may be considered one of the reasons why instructors noted mostly positive views towards the instructor exchange activity. They realized that the outcome and especially the process can be very different in two classes, therefore the atmosphere of the class needs to be accepting and open to learning. In order to keep students' motivation level high, instructors should have the ability to be flexible and adapt their teaching accordingly.

"As a teacher, I enjoyed being in a different class, even for one hour, and doing a planned lesson with different students." [Participant 21]

"What I gained at the end of the day is the fact that students need to feel comfortable with the teacher and affective aspects of the classroom should not be ignored. If I did it all over again, I would probably find a lighter and more fun activity to kick the day off with some energy. Maybe I would go for an activity that involved movement." [Participant 11]

Every new practice including a change in educational context comes with its challenges, which was also the case in the instructor exchange activity. Regarding the challenges, not being able to predict how the students would react to an instructor, not knowing what kind of activities would work in a new classroom, not knowing the students' characteristics, their names and exact levels were the challenges stated by instructors. Also, students' unwillingness and hesitation towards speaking, time restrictions, the performance of the students, the difficulty of the content, and students' shy characteristics challenged the instructors. Additionally, instructors had to answer some questions coming from students about the reason of this change and explain the procedure for each late comer again. On the other hand, some of the instructors stated that they did not face any challenges during exchange.

"Another challenge was not knowing the exact levels of the students. After the class ended, I realized that I had allocated more time than they needed for the 2nd and 3rd exercises. Unfortunately, because of that, I didn't have any time left for the video activity. If I had known they would do so well, I would have had some time left for the video and the role-play." [Participant 3]

As for the successful sides of the lessons, instructors indicated that the lessons were smooth, successful, productive, and effective. Students were eager to join the discussions and answer

the questions related to the activities. Also, use of technology was welcome in the classes. The warm-up activities helped instructors to break the ice. General elicitation questions and brainstorming in pairs were effective practices.

> *"It helped me remember how a different audience can change my reactions and management during a class and accordingly I had a chance to be able to adapt my own teaching methods or style in a different classroom environment."* [Participant 8]

For the differences between the classes regarding student participation, instructors stated that it was highly affected by the proficiency level of the students. While the participation was high in the highly achieved classes, it was lower in classes with lower level of proficiency. In terms of willingness to communicate, all instructors stated that although some students might be shy at the beginning, students were happy and wanted to have a conversation during the lessons. Instructors did not face any problems regarding the flow of the lesson, even though the proficiency level of students could affect the timing of the activities.

> *"They were not as comfortable as my own students at the beginning of the lesson, as it was not a situation they were used to and they did not know me, but this situation did not last long. They easily adapted and participated in the lesson."* [Participant 21]

> *"The flow of the lesson differed to some extent. I could teach the exchanged class more fluently and without any student interruption. They followed all my instructions without questioning the activities."* [Participant 14]

Engagement in Self-Reflection

Finally, most of the instructors had positive insights towards the processes of exchange activity as it became a good way of self-reflection. They said that it created some sort of excitement and got them out of their daily teaching routines. Majority of instructors stated that the activity helped them to reflect on their own practices and evaluate their own teaching with a critical eye. Also, they had a chance to observe what kind of differences may occur in different classes with the same materials and activities.

> *"It is a good way of self-reflection. It forces the teacher to leave his/ her comfort zone without feeling intimidated by the presence of an outsider as in the peer observation process, and gain insights on his/her own teaching. Sharing ideas with partners in this exchange activity may help teachers keep their teaching up to date."* [Participant 2]

> *"I understand that it is important to take into consideration the dynamic of that specific class when it comes to preparing the lesson but also essential to not give yourself a hard time in terms of your teaching abilities when something does not work precisely the way you hoped it would."* [Participant 12]

> *"Reflection part was the fruitful part about this activity because there I repeated the same thing, the second time I knew better what I was doing so while reflecting what made it better, I had the chance to reflect upon myself...*

so if you were to ask me which part I liked the most I would say the reflection part." [Participant 1]

Having the opportunity to see and compare two different classes taught by two different instructors including themselves, in the scope of self-reflection, instructors questioned what worked well and what did not work well in their original and exchange class and made critical evaluations.

"It actually showed me the teacher talking time was higher in my own class compared to the one in the exchange class." [Participant 6]

"It helped me to understand myself, my teaching style, my abilities or inabilities" [Participant 8]

"I'd say it reminded me that in most situations, being flexible and patient is paramount. Rushing through materials, which could have been the case, may lead to students' not understanding material, ideas, and such." [Participant 9]

Critical evaluation of practices naturally led to conclusions and suggestions by the instructors for the design of the activity so that it could make a greater contribution. First of all, one hour exchange was not enough to be able conduct the lesson plans and build a rapport with students. Secondly, the timing of the class exchanges was not the best as there were exams during the week. The exchanges should be planned in some free weeks. Finally, one time training session did not become so effective for instructors to catch all the ideas of and important facets of instructor exchange. Therefore, there should be longer and a series of training sessions next time.

"It was a new and nice experience for me since I'd never been in a class exchange activity before. I just think next time this kind of activity is planned, the purpose should be more clear…We need to set an objective or a focus for the exchanged lesson…For example, if I had problems with teacher talking time, I would tell the observer about that and he/she would focus on that in the observed lesson." [Participant 10]

"Maybe the whole experience could result in more reflection if both teachers covered the same material in the exchanged class (e.g. both teachers teaching the same piece of the unit such as reading + vocabulary). So that when they meet again, they can compare their lesson plans and talk about how effective they are." [Participant 11]

"My suggestion is to extend the amount of time that this practice is implemented (between 1 day -1 week) to give the students the chance to get used to the newly introduced instructor and his/her teaching style; thus, lower the negative outcome of the affective filter." [Participant 20]

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this study contributed to the professional development practices in higher education context with a specific focus on intensive English education with important implications. First of all, this study proposed an instructor exchange activity by making

necessary arrangements to the extent that it would serve as a means to improve instructors' professional practices and expertise in the context of a School of Foreign Languages. The exchange was realized in the form of a piloting activity, the outcomes of which would then be used to determine whether it would be applicable as a school wide practice. The results of the piloting process indicated challenges, successful practices, similarities and differences between original and exchanged classes in terms of different class dynamics such as student participation, whether the activity led to new teaching ideas and technologies. The findings of this study demonstrated that the instructor exchange activity included the necessary means to stimulate collegial interaction prompting the instructors for cooperative work and self-reflection, which are constituents of effective CPD activities. Furthermore, the activity would be applicable as a school-wide practice taking into consideration the suggestions made by the instructors, which will contribute to specification of the instructor exchange framework in accordance with instructors' needs leading to a more systematic implementation of the activity in the long run. However, this study is not without limitations. First of all, the instructors working in a single state university participated in the study and although 22 instructors were involved in the exchange activity, the number of instructors taking part in the interviews was limited to 10. Also, the findings are based on perceptions of the instructors, which is a restricting factor for generalisation of results to the whole population of instructors teaching in intensive English programs.

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