Secondary school teachers’ opinions about in-service teacher training: a focus group interview study

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to determine the secondary school teachers’ opinions about in-service teacher training programs in Turkish Educational System. In order to provide in-depth information about teachers’ opinions, the focus group interview method was used in this research. The participants of this study are nine secondary school teachers. The findings revealed that teachers strongly desire to receive trainings on curriculum, scientific developments in their own fields, drama and theater. Teachers suggest that a needs analysis should be conducted in order to inform for planning of trainings.

Keywords: In-service teacher training, professional development, secondary school teachers

1. Introduction

A growing diversity of student population, a dynamic society and its needs, continuous changes in expectations about the quality and assessment of education, rapid changes in information and technology, lead schools and instructors to face with tasks and greater expectations with respect to parents and society. In fact the issues for teachers and teachers’ education to fulfill these requirements are continuing and complex (Moeini, 2008).

In-service teacher training has grown in importance and status and has developed as a global trend for three decades. It has been viewed by many countries as the key element in strategies to raise the quality of educational provision (Hayes, 1997, p.1). Professional development programs or in-service training programs enable teachers to become highly qualified by improving, increasing and advancing their knowledge through a better understanding of effective instructional strategies.

Teachers’ own power of their abilities to enhance students’ learning and achievements can play a vital role in determining a student’s performance in the classroom (Cheung, 2006; Woolfolk-Hoy and Spero, 2005). The main

* This study is part of a Comenius Regio project (with project number 2010-1-TR1-COM13-16589-1) funded by European Union.

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method for the introduction of educational innovations is usually in-service training. However, it has been shown
that in many cases, in-service training does not actually achieve its main objectives, namely the implementation of
new teaching strategies and a significant change in students’ achievements (Guskey, 1986; 2002).

It is accepted in Turkey that the in-service teacher training is just as important as pre-service teacher training. In
this sense, the Turkish Ministry of National Education (TMNE)’s role is to provide teachers education which they
need through the in-service training. The purposes of the in-service teacher trainings are to enable individuals to be
successful in their professionals, to develop professionalism and skills of lifelong learning, to make their adaptation
to the changes and to improve their required performances to meet the students’ needs (TMNE, 2011).

In Turkey, research show that the teachers are dissatisfied with in-service trainings (Aydoğan, 2002; Doğan, 2009; Gökdere and Çepni, 2004). Furthermore, Gültekin and Çubucu (2008) identified primary teachers’ opinions on in-service training via survey and proposed that qualitative research should be done about this topic. In
this study, it was aimed to determine teachers’ opinions about in-service training activities and their proposed
solutions of what can be done to improve the effectiveness of the in-service training activities via the focus group
interview method.

2. Methods

A qualitative method with case study design (Stake, 1994) was used which provided a great deal of information
about teachers’ opinions about in-service teacher trainings. The number of participants involved in the study group
was determined by considering the number of participants proposed in the literature for focus group interviews.
According to the literature, there are different opinions about the number of participants and the appropriate number
of participants for focus group interviews varies from a minimum of 4 to maximum 12 (Creswell, 2005; Gibbs,
1997; Goss and Leinbach, 1996; Kitzinger, 1995). However, it is usually required to perform these studies with a
small number of participants. According to Edmunds (2000); if the group be more than 10 people, this may affect
the dynamics of the group and make it more difficult to control the group (As cited by Çokluk, 2011: p.102). The
participants of this study are 9 teachers with different professional experience working in secondary schools in the
spring semester of the 2010-2011 academic years. Information on the secondary school teachers’ genders,
educational degree, professional experience and the number of in-service training activities they ever attended is
given in Table 1.

| Teacher* | Gender | Education degree | Professional experience (years) | Number of in-service teacher trainings enrolled |
|----------|--------|------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| T1       | Female | Graduate         | 9                               | 5                                             |
| T2       | Male   | Graduate         | 35                              | 17                                            |
| T3       | Male   | Graduate         | 18                              | 10                                            |
| T4       | Male   | Graduate         | 23                              | 8                                             |
| T5       | Female | Graduate         | 16                              | 7                                             |
| T6       | Male   | Graduate         | 16                              | 3                                             |
| T7       | Male   | Master’s degree  | 24                              | 10                                            |
| T8       | Male   | Graduate         | 11                              | 10                                            |
| T9       | Male   | Graduate         | 15                              | 7                                             |

* For the ethical considerations, name of the teachers was coded as T1 (Teacher 1) to T9 (Teacher 9).

The focus group interview method was used in this research for data gathering. The audio-taped focus group
interview was conducted with nine purposefully selected experienced teachers under a moderator and an assistant
moderator. The focus-group interview form was developed by researchers containing six questions about the pros
and cons of the in-service training, effects of inservice teacher trainings to professional life, expectations from in-
service teacher trainings, and the distance in-service teacher training. Focus group interview form was prepared by
examining the studies in the field of in-service training (Demirtaş, 2010; Özkam, 2010). Due to the possibility of
teachers may not understand some of the questions, alternative questions were prepared.

The interview lasted about 90 minutes. The recorded tape was transcribed verbatim and analyzed by using the
content analysis method by the two authors. Intercoder reliability of two independent raters was calculated by using
3. Finding

3.1. Teachers opinions about pros and cons of the in-service teacher trainings

Teachers emphasized that in-service teacher training is necessary to keep track of new developments, to provide personal and professional development and to share problems and ideas during interview.

T2: “There is continuous innovation in educational science. There are constantly changes. Advances in technology make the in-service training inevitable. So I think that definitely should be.”

T7: “Some in-service training courses contribute to our professional lives. We learned through in-service training to use the computer. I am 60 years old. But now I can use computer to develop all kinds of relevant materials for my own lessons. I owe this in-service training course. I cannot deny it.”

T4: “We had attended an in-service training related to the implementation of new curriculum. One of our friends, a teacher, "Oh, I have relieved," he said. When asked about the cause he replied that he was facing with this problem. So thanks to the training of teachers in the same field we can share our problems with friends.”

Teachers reported as the most negative aspects of in-service teacher trainings, inadequate qualifications of trainers, trainings in comfortless buildings, insufficient of organization

T2: “Instructors are not literate enough. Chemistry curriculum has changed in such a way that allows teachers to really suffer. For example, some of the teachers talked about their troubles with curriculum at an in-service training. Instructor had to say that she is not advocate of the system; only the introducer.”

T7: “During the first in-service training, I have attended the place we have to stay in was a student hostel. Forty people slept in one room. A very messy space. Then, I began usually not to prefer to enroll in-service training.”

T9: “We cannot find in-service trainings related to our branches; very rare and rooms are limited.”

Several of the teachers noted some problems about in-service teacher training course that to register for courses is difficult, the duration of courses is inadequate for subjects, the evaluation in courses is not an objective, when the subjects was determined it was not consulted with teachers.

3.2. Teachers’ opinions about distance in-service teacher training

Teachers reported to being in the form of distance education in-service training courses will give the opportunity to re-monitoring the trainings. So, they emphasized distance in-service training programs may be positive. On the other hand, they think that would be difficult to achieve the feedback during trainings via distance training.

T4: “Distance in-service training idea came to me a little cold. But it may be ok in cases where necessary. What’s more, it will be beautiful if we can listen to the lessons at home.”

One of the teachers mentioned for distance in-service teacher training that it has to be ensured primarily that teachers have a good knowledge of using computers.

T5: “You maybe laugh. But I can’t open the camera on my computer yet. In other words, first our computer knowledge should be enhanced.”

3.3. Teachers’ opinions on in-service teacher trainings topics

Teachers mentioned that the in-service teacher trainings topics are very general. They think that the topics should be like content-specific instructional strategies, curriculum knowledge, foreign language, and use of smart boards which will become more useful to themselves.

T6: “I think the issues of in-service training needs to be determined for the individual disciplines. Now look at the list that in-service training topics written; have many common topics. I am one do not know to select which one,
cannot distinguish which one that it is beneficial. Very general topics...”

T2: “I want to emphasize something. Different teaching techniques we use, especially in the branch of chemistry. But in combining the methods with content knowledge; we are missing too. In-service training courses for completion of this will be better.”

3.4. Teachers’ suggestions to in-service teacher trainings

Teachers have made their suggestions for determination of the issues related to in-service trainings such as taking opinions of the teachers, doing needs analysis, and putting instructors’ presentations to the website.

T9: “Contact us to determine issues, not managers. Apply us a survey. For example, there are a few courses in my head. These are essential things for the teacher. But no in-service training was done for them.”

T4: “Needs analysis should be done in determining the in-service training issues. Needs analysis was not used much in the ministry’s trainings.”

T9: “For example, sometimes instructors make very good suggestions. Therefore, after trainings are completed; all the presentations, information, documents related to education should be put on the web portal. Thus, instructions do not go into oblivion.”

4. Conclusion and Discussion

In this study, teachers emphasize as positive opinions of in-service trainings as letting them to keep track of new developments and making a positive influence to their professional lives. Also, they think that they are provided the opportunity to share problems and thoughts with their colleagues. Gültakin and Cubukcu (2008) have also identified that teachers regard in-service trainings as an aid to their personal and professional growth. On the other hand, teachers reported the negative opinions of in-service trainings as the inadequacy of the instructor qualifications, training periods and environments. In addition, teachers also indicated the points such as determination of issues is not done in line with the requirements by consulting with teachers; inadequate training given according to their field, identification of participants to the in-service trainings is not an objective. Inadequacy of the instructor qualifications (Ozer, 2004; TMNE, 2006) and the inadequacy of the training period (Özturk Akar, 2007) are emphasized as the negative aspects of in-service trainings in the literature. In this study, teachers mostly found to have an unfavorable view for in-service trainings. In other words, existing in-service trainings does not meet the expectations of teachers participated in the survey. Or there are many missing aspects of these trainings. As a support to this result; various research made for in-service training activities in Turkey show that teachers in different fields are also not satisfied with the in-service training activities (Aydoğan, 2002; Doğan, 2009; Uçar and İpek, 2006).

Teachers think that they should come to a sufficient level of computerized communication technologies before applying distance in-service trainings. In addition, teachers reported that when and if necessary in-service training can be done from distance. Teachers find it as a positive feature that distance in-service training courses give the opportunity to teachers to watch the training over and over again. Jung (2001), despite the limitations of the in-service training, emphasizes it would provide teachers to more easily access the trainings and improve the computer literacy.

In this study teachers think that contents of in-service trainings being general are often a problem and there should be more training related to their own field. This result is consistent with some of the findings of Kanlı and Yağbanan (2002) who found that they leaned towards in-service trainings in compliance with the developments in their own fields.

Teachers make their suggestions for the improvement of the in-service trainings such as taking opinions of teachers for determination of the contents, doing needs analysis; putting instructors’ presentations to the website.

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