

Suggestions Developed by Teachers to Increase Participation in In-Service Training Activities

İlker Köstereliöğlü

Department of Educational Sciences, Amasya University,
TURKEY.

ikostereli@hotmail.com, ikostereli@amasya.edu.tr

ABSTRACT

This study aimed to identify teachers' suggestions to increase teacher participation in in-service training activities planned to contribute to professional development of teachers in Turkey. The study group was composed of 35 teachers attending distance education Classroom Teaching MA program at Amasya University, Institute of Social Sciences. The study was conducted in the fall semester of 2013-2014 academic year. Teachers were involved in brain storming about in-service training implementations in Turkey and they were later asked to provide their ideas about the issue in written format. Obtained data were analyzed descriptively. Based on the findings, teachers expect the trainers assigned to in-service-training to be experts in their field. Moreover, the views most emphasized included that planned activities should be consistent with teachers' needs, educational process should be organized in order to encourage active participation and the learning process should not be conducted in the format that includes solely reading aloud the content. Along with these views, a total of twenty-six complementary and related suggestions were developed by teachers. It is expected that research findings based on teacher views will contribute to the development of effective programs in the future in addition to identifying the elements that affect the quality of in-service training activities in Turkey.

Keywords: In-service training, teacher, professional development, attitude

INTRODUCTION

Concepts of transformation and development are often emphasized in the current era. As in all professions, changing conditions and the emphasis on development affect the responsibilities of teachers working in the field of education, define their roles and create the need for professional development to undertake these roles. Teachers should be supported in educational aspects to meet their professional development needs and to continue their profession effectively. Activities organized in this framework are planned and implemented as in-service training activities.

Quality education services are required to raise qualified man power that is necessary to ensure social development. Good quality teacher education is crucial to train teachers well, to provide necessary knowledge, skills and positive attitudes towards their profession and to ensure high quality teaching (Şahin, 2008). Research shows that teachers play a highly effective role in developing student achievement (Rockoff, 2004; Rivkin et. al.,2005; Lai et. al., 2011, Koedel and Betts, 2007). In line with this view, especially developed countries regard in-service training activities as a component of their social development plans in order to increase both teacher quality and student performance (Villegas-Reimers, 2003).

Teachers receive the training required for the profession before they start teaching. In Turkey, these services are provided in a 4-year training process in faculties of education under

universities. After starting the profession, some of the knowledge acquired during teacher training process may become outdated, ineffective and forgotten when they are not used. Therefore, teachers need to be retrained and supported through educational activities in various fields and topics of education such as the structure and organization of the education system. In-service training programs are organized in these cases to meet teachers' needs in those areas.

IN-SERVICE TRAINING

Trainings are provided to teachers in different time frames while they practice their profession based on various reasons such as renewing their knowledge, providing new knowledge and ensuring the use of new information. The educational activities provided to teachers in this framework are called in-service training.

In-service training is a process that gives the opportunity to develop the self and advance to a higher position in the organization as well as providing the human resources the information and skills that the profession entails. These trainings can be on-the-job trainings or can be undertaken in various environments outside work (Şişman and Arı, 2009). In-service training, on the one hand, change and develop the knowledge and skills levels and attitudes of professionals for their own benefit and for the benefit of the organization and on the other hand provide the opportunity to meet professionals' personal and social needs (Gültekin and Çubukçu, 2008).

In-service training programs are necessary to review and develop the knowledge gained during previous training and to ensure the foundation of a strong base for teaching through acquiring related approaches and techniques (Moeini, 2008). Although in-service training programs are found to generate positive effects on teachers' professional development, teachers may not always be willing to attend these activities based on different reasons. Bosley (2004) mentions some barriers facing professional development such as lack of time, insufficient support, travel requirements and other job-related responsibilities.

This study aims to identify the expectations of teachers in Turkey in order to increase participation in in-service training activities. It is believed that suggestions developed by teachers in the framework of the study will contribute to identification of teacher attitudes towards these activities undertaken to increase teacher quality and the problems related to them. The problem statement of the study was identified as "What suggestions have been developed by teachers to increase teacher participating in in-service training activities".

METHOD

Research Model

This study set out to identify teachers' suggestions regarding participation of teachers in in-service training programs. Written views of teachers to an open-ended question were collected qualitatively and evaluated for this purpose. The study utilized case study method - a qualitative research method - since it allows detailed information about one or more cases.

Working Group

Working group of the study was composed of 35 teachers attending the MA program in Amasya University during 2013-2014 academic year. 59% of the teachers participating in the study were males and 41% were females. 35 teachers attended the program in the particular semester.

Data Collection Tool

Before data collection phase, discussions were undertaken with teachers using educational technologies via internet access regarding the following topics: What is in-service training?, Is in-service training necessary? And what are the positive and failing aspects of in-service training activities in Turkey? Brainstorming method was used in the discussions to enable teachers to express their thoughts. Following this phase, the question form consisting of one open-ended question was sent via e-mail. Teachers were asked to develop suggestions to increase teacher participation in in-service training activities considering the negative aspects of the trainings. Study data were composed of teacher views provided to the question in the form voluntarily.

Data Analysis

Returned question forms were read and analyzed descriptively. Statements that reflected teacher views in the context of suggestions were examined in terms of frequency and percentage distribution and data were presented. Research data were shared with another researcher, an instructor who analyzed the data as well. Frequency distribution obtained by both researchers was compared. It was identified that 99% agreement was reached between researchers.

FINDINGS

Based on the analysis of the views collected from teachers participating in the study, it was identified that teachers developed 26 suggestions regarding the problem statement. Table 1 presents these suggestions:

Table 1. Teachers' suggestions to increase participation in in-service training activities

<i>No</i>	<i>Suggestions</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
1	Organizing in-service training activities by experts in their fields,	24	11.7
2	Taking teachers' educational needs into consideration during the planning phase of in-service training activities	23	11.2
3	Organizing in-service training activities based on volunteering rather than compulsory attendance principle	17	8.3
4	Not using the method of having trainers click on the slides to read during the training phase of in-service training programs	15	7.3
5	Allowing sufficient time for in-service training activities to ensure meeting the objectives of the program	15	7.3
6	Arranging the time frame for the in-service training activities in a manner that will meet participants' expectations	13	6.3
7	Planning in-service training activities based on practice and active participation rather than theory and theoretical lectures	13	6.3
8	Organizing in-service training activities in physically appropriate environments	11	5.4
9	Evaluating the effectiveness of the planned activities by taking participant views following in-service training activities and taking those views into consideration (in the future)	8	3.9
10	Selecting contemporary and functional content that can be adapted to work conditions rather than selecting topics that are already known	8	3.9
11	Ensuring that in-service training activity is taught by experts with teaching experience and ability to empathize with the participants	7	3.4

12	Linking the participation in in-service training activities with career advancement opportunities or with the performance system evaluation	7	3.4
13	Ensuring that trainers assigned to teach in in-service training activities have satisfactory rhetoric/oratory and communication skills	7	3.4
14	Notifying the teachers beforehand about program objectives	6	2.9
15	Increasing the number and variety of in-service training activities to address teachers' social interests as well	6	2.9
16	Ensuring that teachers participating in in-service training activities do not perceive their participation as a requirement based on their incompetence	5	2.4
17	Informing teachers about the contribution of the in-service training to motivate them for participation	5	2.4
18	Taking teacher views into consideration during the planning of in-service training activities and having teachers participate in the decision making process	3	1.4
19	Ensuring the productivity of the in-service training activities that are organized	2	1
20	Giving priority to teachers working in less advantageous condition such as villages in the provision of in-service training support	2	1
21	Removing the perception in teachers that they know enough and that they are already competent	2	1
22	Planning in-service training activity process in a manner that is both fun and can relieve teachers from the stresses related to their profession	2	1
23	Not selecting the trainers for in-service training activities from among teachers themselves	1	0.5
24	Utilizing effective materials during the implementation phase of in-service training	1	0.5
25	Organizing in-service training activities in a location away from school and work	1	0.5
26	Ensuring that trainers assigned to teach in in-service training activities do not create the impression that "I know everything, not the teachers" through their approach and discourse	1	0.5
Total		205	100

In order to increase teacher participation in in-service training activities to ensure professional development; teachers participating in the study mostly stated that in-service training activities should be taught by experts in their fields (11.7%) and that teachers' educational needs should be taken into consideration during the planning phase (11.2%). These views were followed by teacher suggestions that participation in in-service training activities should not be compulsory (8.3%), that in-service training activities should not be composed of trainers' reading from the slides prepared beforehand (7.3%) and that time frame for the activities should correspond with teacher expectations (6.3%). Another teacher expectation from the in-service training (7.3%) is the provision of sufficient time to reach the expected learning objective. Another view supported by teachers (6.3%) at a high level is the necessity to plan in-service training activities in a manner to include more practice and active participation rather than theory and theoretical lectures.

Teachers (3.9%) emphasized the necessity to determine whether the anticipated objectives have been met or not following the planned activity by taking teacher views into consideration. Another important issue raised by teachers (3.9%) that they thought to be related to teacher participation in in-service training activities concerned the necessity of not organizing the in-service training activities continually in the same topics that are already known by teachers. Teacher expectations (3.9%) regarding this issue included selecting

contemporary and functional content that can be adapted to work conditions rather than selecting topics that are already known.

Teachers believe that trainers assigned to teach in in-service training activities should have teaching backgrounds and experience (3.4%) and that trainers should not be selected from among their colleagues (0.5%) in addition to having trainers who are experts in their fields as previously mentioned. They believe that trainers can have empathy with the participants only in such cases. Teachers exemplified the instances that made them think empathy is required in the following suggestions: trainers in in-service training activities should not create the impression that “I know everything, not the teachers” through their approach and discourse and that teachers should not be made to feel that the reason for their attendance is related to their incompetence.

Teachers (1%) stated their expectations that the organized activities should be fun and reduce professional stress, the number of activities that are offered should be increased and the activities should be diversified to address their social interests. Additionally, they stated expectations that the activities should be held in a location away from school and that the learning environment should be enhanced with various materials.

Another suggestion provided by the teachers (3.4%) is related to providing incentives for participation in in-service training activities through linking these activities with advancement opportunities in their careers.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on research findings, teachers developed 26 suggestions to encourage their colleagues' participation in in-service training activities. When these suggestions are grouped among themselves, they can be classified under these headings: trainers and the qualities of trainers, qualities of the environment in which in-service training activities are organized, quality of the training to meet the educational needs of teachers and implementation of the training process.

Teacher expectations were mostly found to center on the qualities of the trainer who provides the in-service training. Trainers are expected to be experts in their fields and not selected from among their colleagues but trainers should have teaching background and experience. Trainers should have effective communication with the participants, should be able to empathize and have positive attitudes towards teachers so as not to give the negative impression that they are incompetent. It is believed that instances that will negatively affect teacher attitudes towards in-service training activities may include the presentation of activities in a manner to imply that they are required to overcome failure or incompetence and as a result teachers will develop likewise perceptions.

In his study on 2273 secondary school teachers throughout Turkey, Özer (2004) identified that about half of the teachers did not attend any in-service training programs in the last three years and that the majority of the teachers were unwilling to attend those programs. On one hand, teachers stated that they expected to obtain professional benefits from in-service training programs and they preferred university instructors and experienced teachers as trainers. On the other hand, teachers were unwilling to attend those programs due to factors such as lack motivating factors to attend activities for professional development, not being consulted when program topics were identified and not being free to select the program they desired to attend.

Teachers especially emphasized that in-service training activities should not be regarded as a pure knowledge transfer process. They believed that the often encountered practice of trainers' reading from the slides during the in-service training process is effective on their negative attitudes towards attending these programs. In this context, teachers desired the diversification of trainings to address their social interests, implementation that will relieve teachers from being only passive listeners and generation of active environments as a result of planning activity based learning environments. It was identified in Gülmez's (2004) study that in-service training activities were insufficient to meet the requirements and expectations of teachers. Along the same lines, in their study, Karasolak et al. (2013) found that teachers presented less than average attitude in attending in-service training activities. Especially in the last two years, some activities titled information meetings and in-service training via video conference systems for 2 weeks during seminar periods at the beginning and end of academic year. Although these activities may be beneficial since they provide equal opportunities, save time and are cost efficient, the effectiveness of these activities for teachers should be carefully investigated. Arslan and Şahin (2013) undertook a study in this context and identified that teacher views regarding the presentation of in-service training activities via video conferencing were generally negative. It is determined that providing these activities via video conferencing would not be productive.

One of the suggestions regarding the methods to increase teacher participation in in-service training activities is related to linking them with career advancement opportunities. In their study that examined teacher participation in in-service training activities in some developed countries and in Turkey, Yazıcı and Gündüz (2011) found that participation in in-service training activities resulted in pay rise in USA, contributed to being employed with a higher pay in Denmark, was required for promotion in Australia and Switzerland and was effective in performance evaluation and career advancement in England. However, in our country, the certificates obtained from in-service training programs have no effect on career advancement and pay rise although they provided a specific score in career advancement practices such as expert and head teacher for a short while.

One of the views most emphasized by teachers was the quality of training activities in meeting their needs. Teachers believed that trainings focusing on the same, already mastered topics should not be organized. Teachers suggested that in-service training activities should be organized with content whose objectives and learning content should be beneficial in their profession and they should include contemporary and functional content that can be adapted to work conditions. Parallel to these teacher views and considering the significant cost for institutions to offer these trainings, Küçükahmet (1972) emphasized the need to free in-service training activities from their conference type structures and to provide an actual learning atmosphere in which learning can really take place. Provision of environment appropriate to the specified characteristics will positively contribute to participants and create motivation. The researcher identified a significant correlation between meaningful participation in teaching activities and achievement. Otherwise, teachers would attend the in-service training activities just to attend them and develop negative attitudes.

The following suggestions were developed based on the research findings:

1. All the information that needed to be shared with teachers should not be presented to them in the form of in-service training
2. Effective and quality training activities should be organized in provinces based on efficient cooperation between Universities and Directorates of National Education in the context of a provincial in-service training action plan

3. Learning environments in which teachers can actively express themselves should be created instead of using in-service training process as transfer of knowledge
4. Training activities should be diversified to include fields that will generate teacher interest
5. Perceptions such as participating in in-service activities is based on incompetence should be left.
6. Activities should be planned effectively since teachers will be more motivated to attend other activities when they feel and observed the benefits of trainings
7. The real problem in our country is to find the answer to the following question: Do teachers really want to develop themselves? Provision of educational policies that will generate the need for professional development should be given priority.

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