EFL Teachers' Attitudes towards the offered In-Service Teachers Training Seminars

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Abstract:

The present study aims to explore Algerian EFL teachers' attitudes towards the in-service training seminars they take part in. It attempts to find out how EFL teachers perceive and evaluate the content, the process, and the context of those training seminars. To achieve this aim, a Likert scale questionnaire was administered to a sample of 90 secondary school EFL teachers in Jijel- Algeria. The findings revealed that teachers do appreciate the relevant and engaging content covered during the seminars, as well as the training conduct and organization, albeit to a lesser degree. Conversely, the majority of teachers expressed their discontent over the training context including accessibility to the training location and appropriateness of the training rooms. Moreover, teachers voiced their concerns over the excessive focus on content and pedagogical knowledge and the lack of opportunities to practice the learned material and to receive feedback, as well as the insufficient time provided for the training session and for the completion of the given tasks.

Keywords: teachers professional development – training – seminars

1. Introduction:

Teaching has always been conceived of as an intellectual, dynamic, creative, yet challenging profession the requirements of which can only be met through engaging in ongoing learning and continuing professional development. As argued by Ayers (2001, p.122), teaching is "not something that one learns to do, once and for all, and then practices, problem-free for a lifetime". With its value being widely recognized, the issue of teachers' professional development (TPD) has fueled considerable research in the field of education. A wide range of TPD models has been suggested and adapted in different educational contexts, each of which has its merits and limits.

One of the early-developed models, yet a most frequently used one, to enhance teachers' knowledge and to develop their teaching skills is "training". This model can be implemented through a variety of formats, a common one is training seminars. A teacher training seminar is conventionally agreed to be one of the most cost-efficient training formats. Nevertheless, such format has also been subject to a considerable amount of criticisms, mainly regarding the standardized nature of the presented content and its appropriateness for varied levels of participants' expertise, as well as the few opportunities offered for participants to practice and receive feedback.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Teachers In-service Continuing Professional Development

Teaching is often described in terms of the metaphor of 'the learning journey'; a journey that begins during the initial pre-service course and spans the entire teaching career. Teacher learning is a lifelong process which needs to be structured according

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to the stages of a teacher's career. It is perceived as a continuum that includes three consecutive stages which are "indispensable and, although separate, interrelated" (Hartley and Whitehead, 2006, p.321). These are initial pre-service teacher education, induction into the profession, and in-service continuing professional development (Tannehill, Van Der Mars, and Macphail, 2015, p. 364). While pre-service teacher education relates to the theoretical education students of teaching receive prior to employment in schools, induction is construed as a time of transition when teachers are moving from preparation to practice (Feiman-Nemser et al., 1999, p. 4). It refers to the training and support new teachers receive in the initial one to three years of their teaching career.

The term 'in-service continuing professional development' (often used synonymously with in-service education/training, staff / personnel development, continuing education, and continuing personnel or professional development) is usually used to denote efforts to improve *practicing* teachers' professional competences throughout their careers. It includes "any professional development activity that a teacher undertakes singly, or with other teachers, after receiving his or her initial teaching certificate, and after beginning professional practice » (Edelfelt, 1975, p. 5). In fact, there exist clear differences in how educators define this term, particularly as related to 'when' the inservice PD activities begin. That is, whether inservice begins « after certification, after employment, after both, or even after a formal induction period » (Hite and Howey, 1977, p. 31). Nevertheless, there has been more or less a general consensus about what activities are included, and why teachers should engage in such activities.

Inservice teacher PD is usually used to refer to the range of formal or informal activities a teacher may participate in to improve his professional knowledge, attitudes, and skills. Such PD activities can serve a number of objectives 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 technique and objectives, new circumstances and new educational research;
- to enable individuals to apply centrally-led changes in 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 enhance their effectiveness.

OECD (1998, p.33-4)

There is a need, thus, to equip teachers with requisite knowledge, understanding, skills, attitudes and interests through providing them the opportunity to participate in different planned and organized in-service PD activities. Indeed, there are sound reasons for emphasizing this need for in-service PD activities for teachers. Leonard (as cited in Manichander, 2015, p.89) states the following reasons:

- Learning is a lifelong process and no formal training in an institution can fully prepare a person for professional services.
- In the area of teaching, new investigations are constantly revising our ideas of how and what to teach.
- All individuals have the tendency to repeat experiences and teachers especially have a tendency to teach as they were taught.

2.2. The Training Model of In-service Teachers Professional Development

Through history, a myriad of teachers' PD models have been suggested and adapted in different educational contexts. Though these models differ from each other in terms of the processes followed and the procedures used, all of them share a common aim which is to generate learning opportunities to teachers to enhance their professional knowledge and skills, to support them, and to provide avenues for them to grow and develop professionally. One of these models is training, which is, though an old model, still one of the most prevalent models in educational settings.

Training is defined as "instruction that is planned and focused on the acquisition of skills and knowledge for a specific task or purpose. The establishment of routines and habits... providing an individual with the know-how to perform a particular task" (Collins & O'Brien, 2011, p. 471-2). As a common form of TPD, training is characterized as "a model focused primarily on expanding an individual repertoire of well-defined and skillful classroom practice" (Little, 1993, p. 129). Sparks and Loucks-Horsley (1989, p. 14-15) assert that there are two main assumptions which undergird this model. The first one is that there are behaviours and techniques that are worthy of replication by teachers in the classroom. The second assumption is that teachers can change their behaviours and learn to replicate behaviours in their classroom that were not previously in their repertoire. According to Showers, Joyce and Bennett (1987, p. 79), the training model involves the following steps:

- Presentation of ideas and information by a presenter or team of presenters.
- Expert demonstration or modeling of strategies or skills.
- Simulated practice; opportunities for participants to practice what have been demonstrated and receive feedback on how they have performed the new skill or strategy.
- Follow-up of a variety of sorts by trainers, supervisors, and peers.

Being a large-scale model, the training model is regarded as the most cost-efficient way for large numbers of teachers to engage with experts and knowledgeable trainers and acquire knowledge and skills. It allows individuals to share the same knowledge base, ideas, and skills through a variety of training formats which can be employed in this model such as large group presentations and discussions, workshops, seminars, colloquia, demonstrations, role-playing, simulations, and micro-teaching (Guskey, 2000, p. 23). However, this model has also some shortcomings which render it unfit for the needs of effective TPD designs. The major shortcomings are identified by Guskey (2000, p. 23) as follows:

> The major shortcoming of training is that it offers few opportunities for choice or individualization. Hence, it may not be appropriate for the varied levels of educators' skills and expertise. Training sessions also must be extended, appropriately spaced, or supplemented with additional follow-up activities to provide the feedback and coaching necessary for the successful implementation of new ideas.

Little (1993, p. 138-9), also criticizes the training model of PD arguing that it does not reflect the major principles for PD. In particular, Little points out the following shortcomings of the training model: the shallow, fragmented nature of the presented standardized content, the passive roles teachers assume, the context-independent or 'one size fits all' mode of the training model, the apparent lack of principled and well-informed dissent that strengthens group decisions and individual choices, and the detachment of these activities from classroom practice.

2.3. In-service Teacher Training Seminars in Algeria

Teacher training plays an essential role in the success of any educational process. Hence, it is essential to provide teachers with quality training opportunities that meet their needs and help improve their teaching effectiveness. These opportunities can take different forms as they can also be provided by different institutions or individuals.

A common format of teacher training in Algeria is the training seminars which are often organized with the aim of improving teachers' content knowledge and /or pedagogical skills. A teacher training seminar is a training format which involves a presentation generally geared towards learning about a particular topic and covers some important facets of professional knowledge or skill. The structure of a training seminar is like that of a lecture or classroom learning; with a speaker or instructor imparting knowledge to a group of attendees. Training seminars are typically characterized by the use of visual aids, instructor-attendee interaction, and the use of exercises.

Different factors can determine the success or failure of a teachers training seminar. A major one is the qualities of the speaker – also referred to as the trainer or the seminar leader. A speaker should have valuable experience in his/her field; he/she should be well-informed and has something that participants can learn. He/she should have fresh ideas through reading and keeping abreast of the new things in his/her specialty. He/she should also have the desire and the ability to share his/her knowledge and experience with others in a clear and motivating way.

Teachers training seminars in the Algerian educational setting are generally presented by the inspector of national education of the subject. Having been a teacher for a long period, and receiving a whole year specialized training, the inspector is expected to have the necessary content and pedagogical knowledge and skills, as well as the needed experience to train teachers. Indeed, organizing and presenting teachers training seminars form part of the inspector's major roles. However, the inspector does not always play the role of the speaker. In many occasions, he just assumes the role of the organizer. As part of this role, the inspector plans and prepares the seminar or workshop's program deciding the date, time, place, and the theme and assigns the different aspects of the selected theme to the participant teachers who will be the speakers. In such situations, the inspector usually directs the seminar, takes part in the discussion, encourages participation in the discussion, as he may also summarize the discussion at the end.

As part of their CPD, Algerian teachers are required to attend the different organized training seminars. These seminars are held on a half-day (usually mornings only) or on a full-day basis including a coffee and /or a lunch break. They take place in schools usually selected by the inspector. The selected schools are usually those that contain an amphitheatre room which can accommodate the large numbers of teachers attending the seminar, and which provides for lecturing which is usually, though not always, the adapted method of presentation. While such method falls short of many requirements, it has proved to be a convenient one for instructing large groups, and a more efficacious one for presenting a rather large body of material in a relatively short period of time.

3. The Study

3.1. Statement of the Problem

TPD initiatives in Algeria have always sought to pursue the ultimate goal of improving teachers practices and resultantly students learning outcomes. Such goal, however, can only be attained if the PD activity has effectively been designed and

implemented. As widely argued, an effective PD activity is one that provides teachers with new relevant content which directly relates to their PD needs, is one that is conducted and organized in an interesting efficacious way- with adequate opportunities to practice and recieve feedback, and one that is implemented in a context that is conducive to effective learning.

Training seminars represent a common form of TPD in the Algerian context. Teachers of English, as of other subjects, are required to attend the organized training seminars as part of their continuing PD. However, whether those training seminars help equip teachers with the necessary knowledge and skills and allow them to successfully transfer the acquired skills into their everyday teaching practices is largely questionable. This depends to a large extent on whether the seminars exhibit the previously mentioned characteristics or not. Accordingly, this study is an attempt to provide an answer to one focal question: *What attitudes do Algerian EFL teachers hold towards the training seminars they participate in?* In other words, it attempts to find out what attitudes EFL teachers hold towards the content, the process, and the context of those training seminars. Finding such answers, it is believed, can open up research paths which can yield constructive suggestions and recommendations as to how those training seminars can be improved.

3.2. Research Methodology

This section describes how the study was conducted. It is divided into four subsections: (1) participants, (2) research design, (3) data collection tools and procedures, and (4) data analysis. The first subsection includes information about the number of participants, some of their defining characteristics, and how they were sampled. The second subsection provides a description of the overall study design while the third one reports on the research tools and procedures carried out. The last subsection provides a description of how the collected data were processed and analyzed.

3.2.1. Participants. In the current study, the target population of interest consists of teachers of English at Algerian secondary schools. However, as gathering data from this entire, large, and unaccessible population was not an option, the sample was selected from a sampling frame composed of teachers of English at secondary schools in Jijel, Algeria. The sample consists of 90 male and female EFL teachers who were selected using the stratified random sampling technique. The participants are thought to be particularly appropriate as subjects in this study for one main reason; that they had taken part in different teacher training seminars and could provide an in depth account of the seminars strengths and weaknesses through their reported attitudes and evaluations.

3.2.2. Research design. The current study is basically a survey research study. It is based on a quantitative data collection tool, namely a descriptive Likert scale questionnaire.

3.2.3. Data collection tools and procedures. Given that the questionnaire is particularly useful in describing and exploring participants' attitudes, it was opted for as a research tool in this study. The questions included in the questionnaire were developed based on the model suggested by Thomas Guskey in his book « *Evaluating Professional Development* ». Guskey (2000, p. 95) argues that questions related to participants' attitudes and reactions to the different PD forms can be classified according to three broad categories, including content questions, process questions, and context questions. Accordingly, the questionnaire used is divided into three main sections, each of which containing items about one of those three categories. The three sections are preceded by an initial section which was devoted to identify the sample background characteristics. A single five-point-Likert scale was used for all

the questions in the three main sections. The questionnaire items are presented in the form of statements with which participants are asked to indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree by chosing one of the five response options ranging from strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, to strongly agree.

3.2.4. Data analysis. The data generated were analyzed using the statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS) software. Using this software, the data obtained are first coded, entered into the software, and then processed. As a matter of fact, Likert scale data can be displayed in several different ways. Yet, a most effective one to succinctly and neatly display such data is the diverging stacked bar chart. Therefore, the findings of the present study are displayed in the form of diverging stacked bar charts which categorize data into negative and positive categories that are separated with a visual baseline. The charts are followed by a brief analytical description of the findings.

4. Results:

4.1. Participants Background Information

The sample in the current study consists of 90 participants, all of whom hold one of the required teaching qualifications. While 28 participants (31.1 %) graduated from the TTS with a diploma of a secondary school teacher, the remaining 62 teachers are graduates of the university; 25 among them (27.8%) hold a Master degree and 37 ones (41.1%) hold a Licence degree. There is a noticeable variation across the sample regarding the teaching experience. Out of the 90 participants, there are nine novice teachers; two in their first year and seven in their second year. 21 participants have been teaching for the relatively short period of three to five years, while the larger proportion of participants (35 ones) are those with six to ten years of experience. The remaining 25 participants are the most experienced ones with a teaching career lasting for over 10 years. That is, the participant sample is composed of teachers who have a wide range of teaching experience with careers ranging from one to more than ten years.

4.2. Training Content

The content of any teacher training activity is a critical feature that can, to a large extent, determine the success or failure of the training. The nature of the topics and the issues dealt with during the training can greatly affect teachers' attitudes towards the training sessions and, hence, their commitment to learning. Aiming to investigate teachers' attitudes towards the content of the training seminars they had participated in, they were provided with a set of nine related statements with which they were requested to indicate their degree of agreement or disagreement. The findings show that except for one aspect, participants' attitudes were for the greatest part positive. These are represented in the following figure.

Figure 1. Teachers' attitudes towards the content of the training seminars.
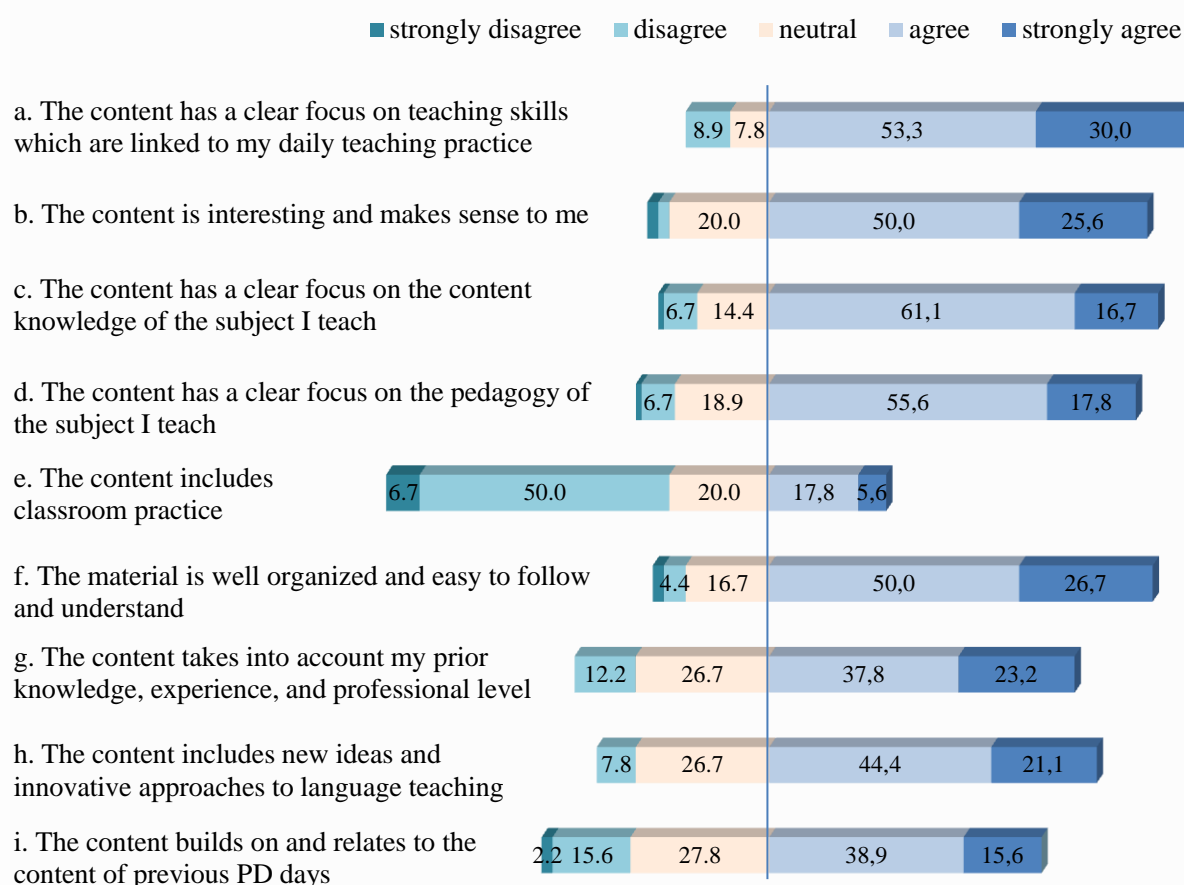
The content of the training seminars was found to be relevant to teachers as the majority of participants affirmed (30% strongly agreed, and 53.3% agreed) that the content delivered in seminars provides them with learning opportunities embedded in their day-to-day teaching practice. Moreover, the topics and the issues dealt with in the seminars seem to resonate with teachers. This was clearly reflected through teachers' positive ratings (25.6 % strongly agreed and 50% agreed) of the statement 'The content is interesting and makes sense to me'.

With regard to the focal interest of the training seminars, the findings show that the content teachers receive has a clear focus on both content knowledge (77.8% agreed) and pedagogical knowledge (73.4% agreed) of the subject matter. However, it is asserted that the seminars do not grant teachers ample opportunities to apply and practice the newly learned material. While the greatest part of teachers (56.7%) disagreed with the statement about inclusion of classroom practice, only less than one fourth (23.4%) of them agreed.

Organization of the material used in the seminars is also approved by the majority of teachers (76.7%) who agreed that the material used is usually well organized and easy to follow and understand. On the other hand, though it has widely been argued that teachers' professional needs and expertise should be counted for when designing and delivering PD activities, this was not always the case with the training seminars attended by participants. Only slightly more than half participants (23.2 % strongly agree, and 37.8% agree) assert that the training content takes into account their prior knowledge, experience, and professional level.

With reference to the nature of the content of the training seminars, almost two thirds of the participants agreed (44.4%) or strongly agreed (21.1%) that it includes

new ideas and innovative approaches to language teaching. On the other hand, the question of whether the contents presented in the training seminars form part of a coherent program was a point of much disagreement among teachers. While slightly more than half of the sample affirmed that the content presented builds on and relates to the content of previous PD seminars, 16 of them either disagreed (14) or strongly disagreed (two), and 25 were neutral.

4.3. The Training Process

Under the training process section were five subsections: the training objectives, the training provider, the instructional techniques and materials, the activities, and the timing.

The training objectives. Among the factors which may greatly inform the effectiveness of any TPD activity are the objectives sought to be accomplished. As conventionally argued, effective TPD activities are built around clear smart objectives that relate to teachers PD needs. Regarding participants' attitudes towards the objectives of the training seminars they participate in, they were reported to be greatly positive. Those attitudes are described in the following figure.
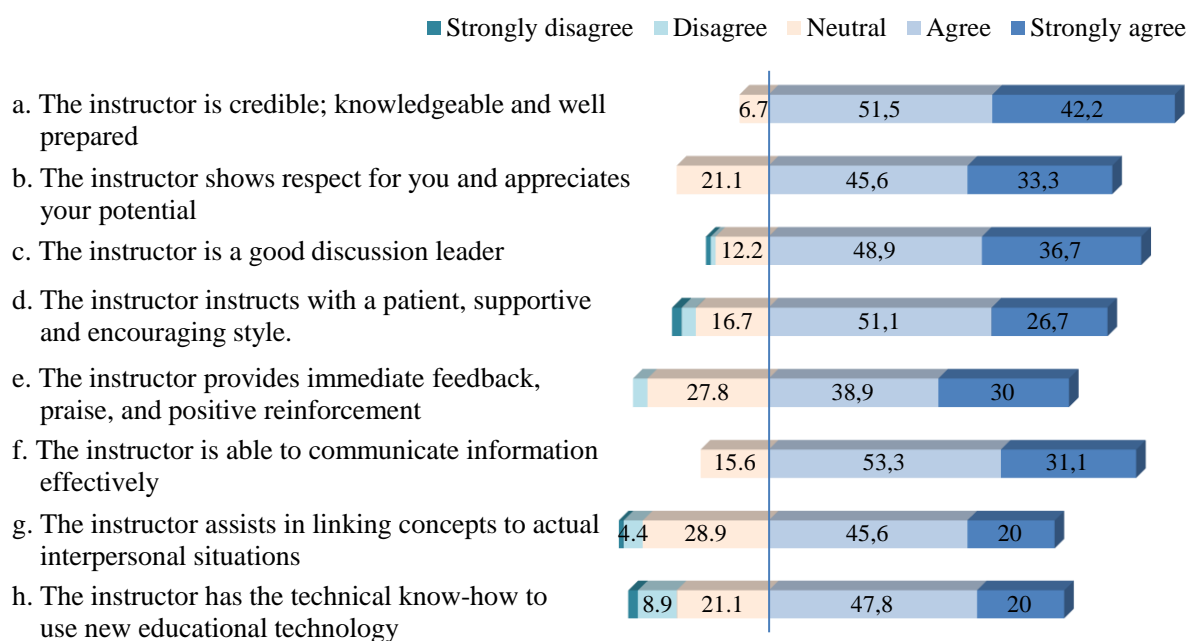
Figure 2. Teachers' attitudes towards the objectives of the training seminars
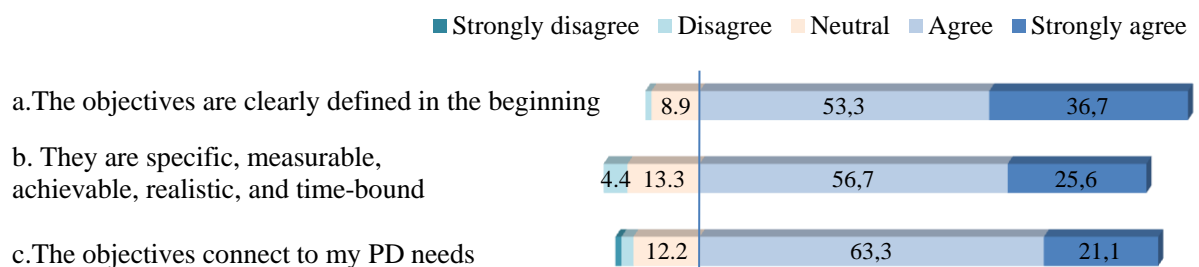
As teachers' responses demonstrate, the objectives of the training seminars are claimed to be clearly defined in the beginning (53.3% agreeing and 36.7% strongly agreeing). Furthermore, a high percentage of teachers (82.3%) believed that the stated objectives are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bound. Likewise, the objectives are reported to connect to the PD needs of the majority (84.4%) of participant teachers, and to disconnect to the needs of only three of them.

The Training Provider. The training provider (instructor) plays an essential role in teachers training seminars. However, to effectively perform his/her assumed role, the instructor should necessarily exhibit certain personal characteristics, as he/she should also have the skills and competencies required to facilitate teachers learning. The figure below presents the findings regarding teachers' attitudes towards the characteristics and skills demonstrated by the instructor.

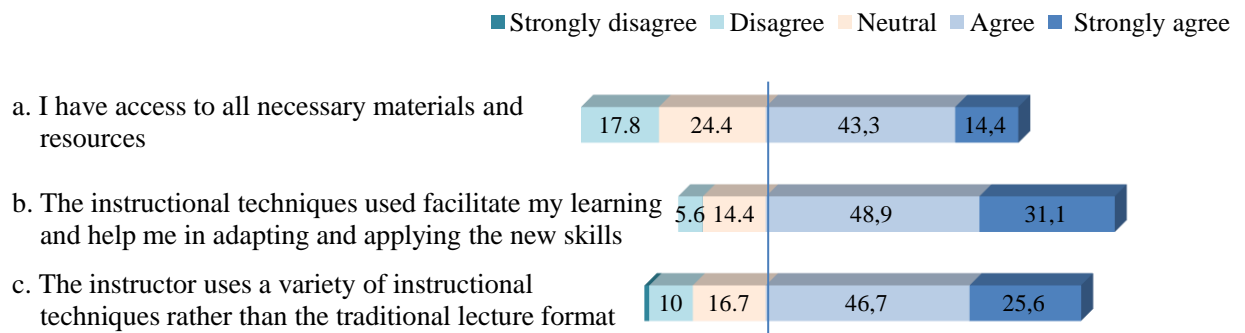**Figure 3.** Teachers' attitudes towards the training provider.

The findings show that the teachers' attitudes towards the instructor and the way he performs his role are largely positive. Indeed, an overwhelming majority of them judged the instructor's character and behaviour in very favourable terms. To begin with, no participant disagreed with three of the proposed eight positive statements. Apart from few teachers who took a neutral stand, the great majority of them acknowledged the instructor's credibility (93.7%), his courteous behaviour (78.9%), and his ability to communicate information effectively (84.4%). Equally acknowledged was the instructor's skill in leading discussion with a great majority of teachers (85.6%) agreeing with the corresponding statement and only 2.2% disagreeing. Likewise, most teachers (77.8%) expressed contentment with the instructor's patient, supportive, and encouraging instructing style.

As for the statement about providing feedback and the one about linking concepts to interpersonal situations, the percentage of positive rating decreased remarkably, whereas that of neutral stand increased (68.9% and 65.6% agreeing Vs 27.8% and 28.9% neutral respectively). Furthermore, though the instructor's skill in using new educational technology was approved by more than two thirds of the sample (67.8%), the statement about this skill received most disagreement with eight teachers disagreeing, and two strongly disagreeing.

Instructional techniques and materials. The teachers training process comprises a wide range of techniques and materials which are employed to transmit knowledge and help teachers acquire and further develop the desired skills and competencies. The availability, quality and variability of these techniques and materials may have quite a considerable effect on the overall quality of the training. The following figure demonstrates the findings regarding the participants' attitudes towards the techniques and materials used during the training seminars they had attended.
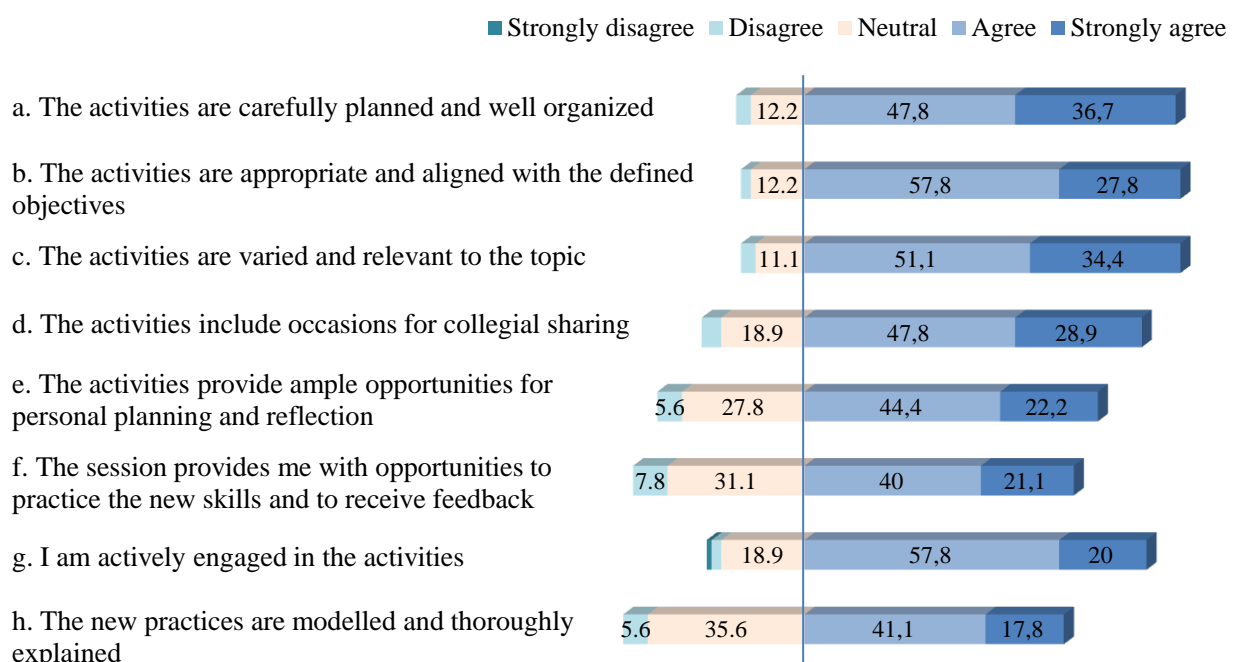
Figure 4. Teachers' attitudes towards the instructional techniques and materials used in the seminars.

■Strongly disagree ■Disagree ■Neutral ■Agree ■Strongly agree

a. I have access to all necessary materials and resources — 17.8 | 24.4 | 43,3 | 14,4

b. The instructional techniques used facilitate my learning and help me in adapting and applying the new skills — 5.6 | 14.4 | 48,9 | 31,1

c. The instructor uses a variety of instructional techniques rather than the traditional lecture format — 10 | 16.7 | 46,7 | 25,6

As shown in the figure above, not all teachers confirmed having access to the necessary materials and resources. Indeed, only slightly more than half of the participants either agreed (43.3%) or strongly agreed (14.4%) with the corresponding statement, whereas 17.8% of them disagreed, and 24.4% were neutral. On the other hand, the teachers' responses regarding the effectiveness and variability of the employed techniques were mostly positive. The great majority of teachers (80%) affirmed that the instructional techniques used facilitate their learning, and help them adapt and apply the new skills. Furthermore, while most teachers (46.7% agreed and 25.6% strongly agreed) maintained that the instructor uses a variety of instructional techniques rather than the traditional lecture format, nine teachers (10%) disagreed and 15 (16.7%) neither agreed nor disagreed.

The activities used in the training seminars. Teachers' training requires the use of a range of varied activities that are responsive to teachers' abilities and interests. Moreover, the employed activities should not only be carefully aligned with the intended learning objectives, but should also be carefully planned and organized to help attain those objectives.

Figure 5. Teachers' attitudes towards the the activities used in the training seminars.

■Strongly disagree ■Disagree ■Neutral ■Agree ■Strongly agree

a. The activities are carefully planned and well organized — 12.2 | 47,8 | 36,7

b. The activities are appropriate and aligned with the defined objectives — 12.2 | 57,8 | 27,8

c. The activities are varied and relevant to the topic — 11.1 | 51,1 | 34,4

d. The activities include occasions for collegial sharing — 18.9 | 47,8 | 28,9

e. The activities provide ample opportunities for personal planning and reflection — 5.6 | 27.8 | 44,4 | 22,2

f. The session provides me with opportunities to practice the new skills and to receive feedback — 7.8 | 31.1 | 40 | 21,1

g. I am actively engaged in the activities — 18.9 | 57,8 | 20

h. The new practices are modelled and thoroughly explained — 5.6 | 35.6 | 41,1 | 17,8
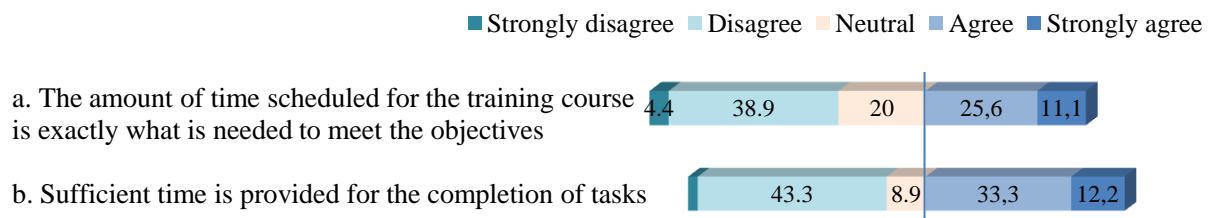
The findings show that the teachers' attitudes towards the activities used in seminars are largely positive. A quick reading through the results in the figure

indicates that teachers were satisfied with the training activities. This is clearly reflected in the high level of agreement teachers had with all the statements. The reported percentages of disagreement with the statements ranged from as low as 2.2% to only as high as 7.8%. The number of teachers who were neutral, however, was significantly different. To start with, an overwhelming majority of teachers emphasized the variation among and relevance of the activities, as well as their appropriateness and alignment with the defined objectives, giving the corresponding statements ('c' and 'b' respectively) the highest percentage of agreement (85.5%). Likewise, the planning and organization of activities were affirmed by 84.5% of the participants. These qualities must have increased teachers motivation to the extent that 77.8% of them agreed with the statement 'I am actively engaged in the activities'. Moreover, most teachers (76.7%) agreed that the activities allowed them to share and exchange knowledge and expertise with their colleagues. It is worth noting here that out of 90 participants, 17 took a neutral stand on these two statements. This number, however, increased considerably regarding the statements about opportunities for personal planning and reflection (25), opportunities to practice the presented skills and receive feedback (28), and the modelling of new practices (32). Accordingly, the level of teachers' agreement with these statements decreased to 66.6%, 61.1%, and 58.9% respectively.

The training seminars timing. A major factor influencing teachers' attainment of the defined training objectives is the amount of time scheduled for the entire training course and for the tasks set to be performed during the training. As a matter of fact, teachers undoubtedly need time to acquire the knowledge presented let alone to practice the new skills and receive feedback.

Figure 5. Teachers' attitudes towards the training seminars timing.

Legend: ■ Strongly disagree ■ Disagree ■ Neutral ■ Agree ■ Strongly agree

a. The amount of time scheduled for the training course is exactly what is needed to meet the objectives: 4.4 | 38.9 | 20 | 25,6 | 11,1

b. Sufficient time is provided for the completion of tasks: 43.3 | 8.9 | 33,3 | 12,2
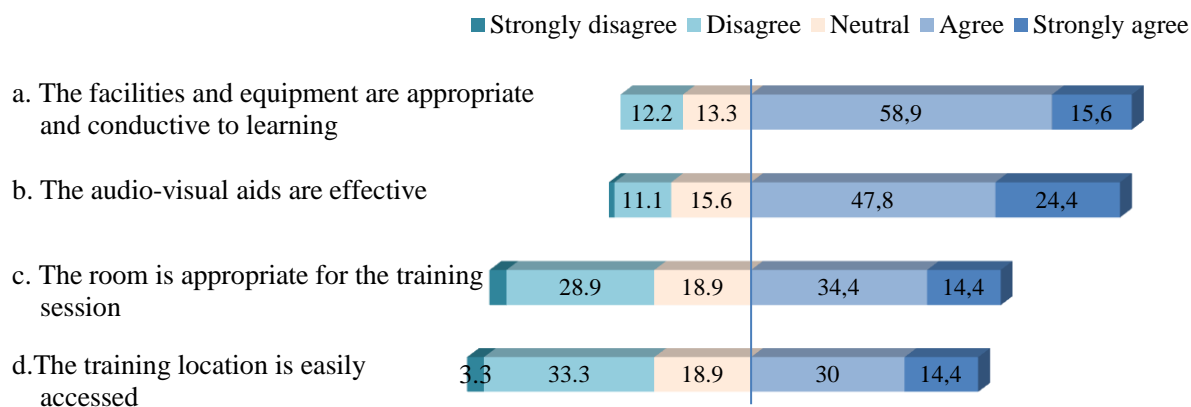
Regarding the teachers' attitudes towards the timing of the training seminars, they were found to be greatly different. Firstly, the amount of time scheduled for the training course was not always what was needed to meet the objectives. This is made clear through the large percentage of participants (43.3%) disagreeing and the relatively low percentage (36.7%) of those agreeing with the first statement, in addition to the 20% who were neutral. Similarly, the time provided for the completion of tasks during the seminars was sufficient according to 45.5% of teachers and insufficient for an equal percentage, while it was sometimes sufficient sometimes not for a proportion of 8.9 %. Therefore, the timing of the training seminars, albeit viewed positively by some teachers, seems to be a real matter of concern which needs to be addressed if the training is to reach its predetermined objectives.

4.4. The Training Context

Another factor, in addition to the content and the process, which can significantly influence the quality of TPD, is the context in which it takes place. This basically relates to the when and where of the PD. Therefore, teachers' attitudes towards the context of the training seminars they take part in are also elucidated and the findings are exposed in the figure below.

Figure 5. Teachers' attitudes towards the context of the training seminars.

■Strongly disagree ■Disagree ■Neutral ■Agree ■Strongly agree

a. The facilities and equipment are appropriate and conductive to learning
| 12.2 | 13.3 | 58,9 | 15,6 |

b. The audio-visual aids are effective
| 11.1 | 15.6 | 47,8 | 24,4 |

c. The room is appropriate for the training session
| 28.9 | 18.9 | 34,4 | 14,4 |

d.The training location is easily accessed
| 3.3 | 33.3 | 18.9 | 30 | 14,4 |

The results show that the context of the training seminars seems to evoke particularly varying responses from teachers. While some aspects were largely agreed upon, others were points of clear disagreement. To start with, the facilities and equipments are reported to have been appropriate and conducive to learning by the majority of teachers (74.5%). Similarly, audio-visual aids were claimed to have been effective in facilitating the learning of the largest part of teachers (72.2%). It is worth noting, however, that for 11 teachers (12.2%), neither the facilities were appropriate nor the audio-visual aids were effective, whereas the remaining teachers were neutral. Contrarily, the appropriateness of the room for the training session was somehow questionable. While only less than half (48.8 %) of the participants agreed that it is appropriate, a considerable proportion of them (32.2%) disagreed, and 18.9 % took a neutral position. The least positive aspect of the training context, however, is the location. For 34.4% of the participants the training location is easily accessed. Yet, for one third of them it is not, whereas 18.9 % were neutral to the corresponding statement.

5. Discussion:

The present study has demonstrated that EFL teachers' attitudes towards the training seminars they participate in vary depending on the training aspect in question. While the majority of teachers were found to hold positive attitudes towards the content presented in the training seminars, and, to a lesser degree, the conduct and organization of the training, their expressed attitudes towards the context of the training seminars were rather negative.

The content covered during the training seminars was viewed favourably by the majority of teachers. Most teachers approved the nature of the topics and issues addressed which were stated to be interesting, well-organized, and relevant for teachers' daily practice. In addition, with the focus being on both the content knowledge and the pedagogical knowledge of the subject matter, the training content was considered helpful in building and expanding the teachers' professional knowledge base. This focus on content and pedagogical knowledge, however, was adversely associated with a lack of focus on classroom practice. In fact, the lack of practicum and students teaching experiences does not only affect teachers' attitudes, but can greatly undermine the quality of the training session. Moreover, a good number of teachers believe that the training content discounts the importance of their level of expertise. This, however, is directly attributed to the standardized nature of the training seminars and the lack of content individualization characterizing this format. Furthermore, agreed upon by only half participants, including new ideas and approaches, and forming a coherent PD program do not seem to be typical characteristics of the training seminars teachers attend.

Overall, positive attitudes towards the training process - conduct and organization- were manifested by teachers. The training objectives, which are oten well-defined at the beginning of the training seminars, were conceived of as SMART ones which directly connect to teachers PD needs. Likewise, the training provider personal and professional characteristics as well as his performance were greatly appreciated by the overwhelming majority of teachers who approved the trainer good preparation and credibility, respectful behaviour, good discussion leading skills, supportive and encouraging style, and ability to communicate information effectively. The trainer's skillful use of educational technology, the way he helps linking concepts to actual interpersonal situations, and the immediate feedback and positive reinforcement he provides were also valued by teachers, though to a lesser degree.

On the other hand, the varied instructional techniques and materials used during the training seminars were regarded as effective in helping teachers apply the learned material. Yet, accessibility to the necessary materials and resources was not always granted. As far as the training activities are concerned, teachers' expressed attitudes were mostly positive particularly regarding their engaging nature, careful planning and organization, alignment with the training pre-defined objectives, variation and relevance, and the occasions they include for collegial sharing. However, only about two thirds of the participants considered these activities as effective in providing opportunities for personal planning and reflection and for practicing the new skills and receiving feedback. What was regarded mostly undesirable about the training activities was the fact that the new practices are not modelled by the trainer. In fact, modelling or demonstrating how the presented skill is performed in real-life school situations can help bridge the gap between theory and practice and, hence, can improve the teachers' transfer of the learned material to their everyday teaching contexts. A particular concern voiced by teachers was the training seminars timing. The amount of time scheduled for the training seminars was regarded as insufficient to cover the training content and to meet the pre-defined objectives. Likewise, the time provided for the completion of tasks was sufficient only for less than half participants.

As regards the context of the training seminars, the teachers held varied attitudes. While the quality of the facilities and equipments, as well as that of the audio-visual aids was somehow positively viewed by teachers, the appropriateness of the rooms for the training sessions, in addition to accessibility to the training location were real matters of concern for teachers.

6. Conclusion:

Though the attitudes expressed by teachers in this study are basically subjective descriptions of what they think and how they feel about the training seminars they attend, they greatly mirror the characteristics of those seminars. While some of those characteristics were indeed positive and greatly matched the characteristics of effective TPD activities, others were found to be negative ones which undoubtedly affect the overall quality of the training. Hence, attempts should be made to overcome the problems raised by teachers in order to minimise their negative effects.

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