

## Exploring Algerian Higher Education EFL Teachers' Professional Development Needs

دراسة احتياجات التنمية المهنية لأساتذة اللغة الإنجليزية للتعليم العالي في الجزائر

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### **Abstract:**

Teacher development is a sub-part of teacher education that upskills in-service teachers. This study explores the Algerian higher education English language teachers' professional development needs. An open-ended questionnaire was administered to 25 teachers from different Algerian universities. The mixed methods analysis of the data showed that tutors needed to acquire technological and online skills, enrich their subject matter knowledge, develop their oral language proficiency, and improve their pedagogical classroom skills. It is suggested for them to rely on their personal means and initiatives and promote peer-collaboration to make professional development functional.

**Keywords:** Teacher development, teacher training, teacher needs, information and communication technologies, pedagogy.

### **ملخص:**

عملية تطوير كفاءات المدرسين تنمي المهارات التعليمية للأساتذة الموظفين و بالتالي فهي جزء فرعي من تكامل الكم المعرفي للأساتذ. هذه الدراسة تسعى لدراسة احتياجات التنمية المهنية لأساتذة التعليم العالي للغة الانجليزية في الجزائر. بعد إدارة استبيان مفتوح مع خمسة و عشرون أستاذ من مختلف الجامعات الجزائرية ، أظهر التحليل المختلط للبيانات أن المدرسين يحتاجون في الغالب إلى اكتساب المهارات التكنولوجية والمعلوماتية و كذا مهارات الاتصال عبر الإنترنت. كما انه من الواجب عليهم تنمية رصيدهم المعرفي حول المواضيع المدرجة وكذا تطوير كفاءاتهم اللغوية في الإلقاء الشفوي وتحسين مهاراتهم البيداغوجية. وعليه فإن هذه الدراسة تقترح على الأساتذة الاعتماد على وسائلهم و مبادراتهم الخاصة با إضافة إلى تعزيز التعاون والعمل الجماعي لجعل التنمية المهنية فعالة.

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## 1. Introduction

Teacher education does not end at getting a teaching certificate; it is an ongoing process that spans throughout the professional career of the teacher. One aspect of teacher education is teacher development, which takes place while teaching and which empowers teachers' capacities to adjust themselves to new trends in the teaching profession. Acquiring expertise in the subject matter is not the only competency required to meet learning targets. A set of other skills (such pedagogical and technological) are, by the same token, needed to improve quality teaching and positively impact students' learning.

Changes in the teaching profession are calling for teacher empowerment more than ever before. Increase in technology use, with all its consequences on educational methods and modes, is creating the need for revisiting teacher development. For example, the use of blended learning and the development of new language teaching models such as computer-assisted language teaching are compelling teachers to fully commit themselves to virtual teaching/learning and get hands on both computing and online skills.

Apart from conferences, study days, and occasional seminars, there are no formal teacher education programs in the Algerian higher education sphere. Teachers are more devoted to research tasks and rarely talk of pedagogy or other teaching practices. However, lately and with the outbreak of the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic, Algerian teachers have felt the need to evolve and get acquainted with the skills of information and communication technologies. As early as February 29<sup>th</sup>, 2020, and in the view of a potential suspension of courses because of the pandemic, the Algerian Ministry of Higher Education instructed teachers to publish their courses online in the Moodle platform to continue instruction (Mami & Deramchiya, 2020). Currently, the Ministry is officially espousing blended or hybrid learning as a new teaching paradigm. To cautiously try out this demanding online and classroom approach to education, it invites university establishments to teach and assess only secondary instructional units virtually.

In this new context, it has become unequivocally plain that teachers are in need for formal teacher education or development. Informal data indicate that the Algerian English foreign language (EFL) teachers are lamenting their limited mastery of online skills, and this new incentive is raising the question of the absence of teacher development. For example, many senior teachers are envious of the newly recruited teachers who have benefited from teacher training, principally with regard to technology use and online teaching practices.

To the researcher current knowledge, a few studies have been conducted in the Algerian EFL context to determine teachers' needs in terms of professional development. Mostly, the available studies have tackled teacher education in basic schools as it is an officially recognized framework. For example, Guemide and Benchaiba (2012) have dealt with teachers' needs in relation to information and communication technologies. As far as tertiary education is concerned, it seems an intriguingly neglected area. There is only one study by Kadri and Benmouhoub (2019) that has explored the consequences of the neglect of tertiary education pre-service training and examined teacher's coping strategies. Consequently, this study takes a

broader view and attempts to fill up the gap in the literature by exploring the potential needs of Algerian university EFL teachers in terms of professional development. It poses the following research question: *What are the professional teacher development needs of the Algerian University EFL teachers?*

The aim behind asking the above-mentioned research question is to look at the current Algerian university EFL teachers' professional needs and spur Higher Education authorities to cater for these prerequisites that are completely ignored. Moreover, this study will increase communication about professional needs and bring to light the most imperative demands to conveniently direct teacher development. Furthermore, the study definitely makes recommendations to address challenges to teacher professional growth.

## 2. Review of the literature

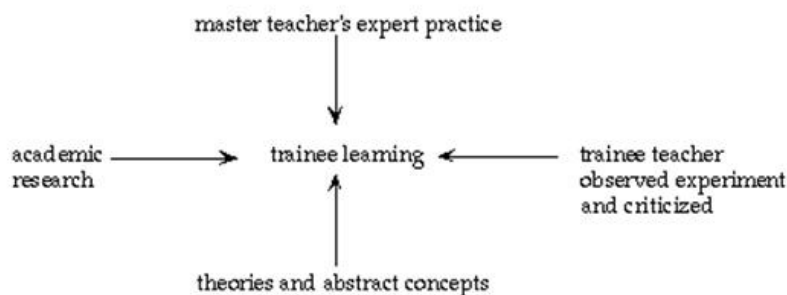
Teacher development can be opposed to teacher training in the sense that teacher training is a pre-service program that offers prospective teachers accreditation while teacher development is an in-service training. Before becoming a teacher, schools and universities prepare professionally prospective teachers to start their career with basic knowledge and practices of the profession. It is undoubtedly, not enough to have adequate mastery of the specialty. Other competencies such as classroom management, sequencing and imparting knowledge, and creating interest are, likewise, vital.

Teachers' development involves professional development of teachers already engaged in teaching or profession. However, this is not the only difference between teacher training and teacher development (Ur, 1997). It could be argued that teacher training is a passive activity while teacher development is an active one. In order to understand this deep-seated difference, we need to explain Wallace's (1991) models of teacher education in which he specified three types: the craft model, the scientific applied model, and the reflective model.

The craft model is the emulation of the practical skills of a more knowledgeable teacher like in craftsmanship. In this model, the novice teacher learns theory less teaching practices of the master teacher. In the applied science model, the teacher learns theories of teaching methodology and applies them in the classroom. Finally, in relation to the reflective model, teachers reflect on their teaching practices, learn from them, and apply them to improve their teaching. Accordingly, teacher training corresponds to the craft and scientific model and teacher development corresponds to the reflective model.

Figure 1 below illustrates teacher training, which constitutes an aggregation of craft and scientific learning in Wallace's (1991) model.

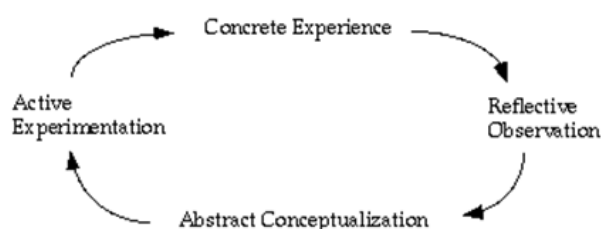
**Figure 1: Teacher training**



Source: Ur, 1997, para. 4.

As can be noted from the figure, the trainee teacher at the center receives knowledge and skills from the more knowledgeable teacher or from theory in general. Teacher development, on the other hand, can be illustrated as in Figure 2 below.

**Figure 2: Teacher development**



Source: Kolb, 1984 in Ur, 1997, para. 6

The reflective model is personal and cyclical. It starts with concrete teaching experiences; then, reflective observation; after that, theory-building (abstract conceptualization); and finally, putting into practice the newly learned knowledge (active experimentation). However, the process of development does not stop at this end of the chain; rather it is reset in motion again in pursuit of better and sound practices. In van Lier's (2010) words, it is "practice to theory, theory to practice", (p. 2).

The criticism that can be leveled to this model proposed by Kolb (1984) is the neglect of the influence of external theory learning. According to Richards and Rodgers (2014) as well as Kumaravadivelu (2001), teachers in the postmethod era should be familiar with theories of language learning/teaching and combine them with their teaching experience in order to try them out in the classroom and build their own theory. Likewise, van Lier (1996) has pointed out that the three main attributes of a good teacher are theorizing, practicing, and researching.

In view of that, teacher development is defined as teachers' reflections on their teaching practices in relation to their prior knowledge of theory and their day-to-day

experimentation in the classroom. Additionally, it is the thoughtful observation of teaching practices, building of personal theories, and application and evaluation of the learned knowledge. This teacher empowerment self-improving system is ongoing and spiral.

Teacher development can be carried out through meetings in which teachers share and discuss their practical classroom experiences (Ur, 1997), and it is practiced to gain professionalism in language teaching. The latter term means being autonomous and able to advance the field through personal and well-researched practices. The teacher has to fully embrace the identity of the profession; understanding the underlying principles of the job, rather than the mere application of the classroom technique recommended by mastery teachers or academicians.

With regards the needs of teacher development at higher education, several studies have dealt with this issue (Noom-Ura, 2013; MacPhail, Ulvik, Guberman, Czerniawski, Oolbakkink-Marchand, & Bain, 2019; Riley & Russelln, 2013). Amongst the most cited needs for teacher development are technology (Noom-Ura), textbooks and curriculum, discipline-related competencies, and online learning and support. With regard to research methods used in these studies, various research tools have been used to investigate higher education teachers' needs. Mostly questionnaires and interviews have been used to explore the teachers' perceived prerequisites for effective teacher development (Wood, Vu, Brown, Skalicky, Donovan & Bloom, 2011).

Teachers' needs undoubtedly vary from one context to another since universities have different content delivery procedures and materials. Additionally, the availability of didactic materials depends largely on the financial resources of the institution and the economic development of the country. This study explores the needs of Algerian university EFL teachers in terms of teacher development by means an open-ended questionnaire.

### **3. Research methodology**

An open-ended questionnaire was implemented with 25 EFL university teachers from various Algerian universities. Most teachers were experienced and only 5 of them were recruited during the past 5 years. The newly recruited group of teachers have benefited from a teacher training program during their first year teaching.

As far as the questionnaire is concerned, it included only one open-ended question that invited teachers to talk about their professional development needs. Its administration was carried out online via Google Form and it was answered in a week time. As the surveyed teachers were colleagues and friends, they all answered the questionnaire in due time.

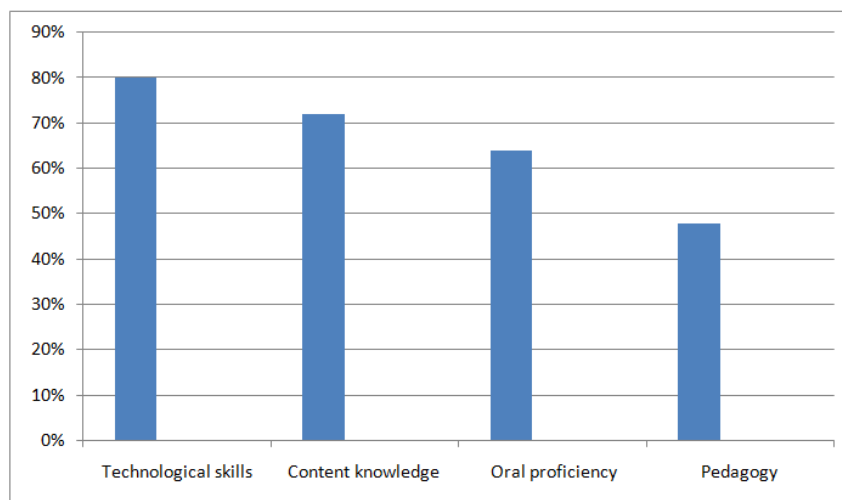
A mixed methods approach was adopted for data analysis. Firstly, the researcher grouped respondents' answers in a form of topics in line with Strauss and Cobin's (1994) open-coding stage of data of analysis in grounded theory. Then, continuing with grounded theory procedures, axial coding was used to find fine links between the categories set in the first stage (axial coding) and narrow down the number of categories. Finally, topics that emerged from the first and second stages of qualitative analysis were counted and presented numerically. This mixed methods approach turned out to be effective; it allowed drawing on the strong facets of qualitative and quantitative analyses to effectively understand the topic at hand (Creswell, 2013). Allwright and Bailey (1991) and Nunan (2005) have, likewise,

supported the use of mixed methods approach for the sake of understanding the research problem from diverse perspectives.

#### 4. Findings and discussions

The findings of this study unveiled numerous teacher professional development needs. The most urgent need, as can be seen in Figure 1 below, is technological and online support. The teachers confessed that they have limited skill or time to learn and use technological devices for education purposes. One teacher said that they are overwhelmed with academic work that they do not have time to spare for immersing themselves in technological skill-getting.

Figure 3: EFL university teachers' professional development needs



Additionally, the teachers highlighted the lack of basic technological means (such as computers) and internet access in university academic spaces. Indeed, despite the availability of computers in the reading and in multi-media rooms, the equipment is in lamentable state and the internet connection is brutally slow to the extent of causing boredom and frustration. Accessibility to technology and the internet, though crucial, turns out to be problematic in many universities round the world possibly because of their expensiveness and their poor maintenance. Previous studies have supported this view; for example, Wood et al. (2011) have reported that university teachers complained of limited access to the available technological equipment and the scarcity of modern technological means. It seems that teachers have to rely on their own means to ensure that the time they spend at university empowers them professionally.

Concerning the deficiency in technological skills, teachers should organize internal workshops wherein more-able ones and those who benefited from teacher training can monitor the learning and the use of Moodle Platform and other higher education platforms such Progres and SNDL (System of National Online Documentation). The newly recruited teachers did not complain about technology use. This is probably due to the fact that they belong to the z-generation and because they benefited from pre-service education. The only issue on which all the teachers agreed on is the fact that they are overwhelmed with work and that they are doing both traditional and online work.

The second major need raised by teachers is the limited competency in both a deeper understanding of the subject matter and oral English language proficiency. In other words, participants admitted that being a foreign language teacher has its limitations in terms of fluency in oral language use and mastery of content taught



probably because of their poor academic training. Inadequate oral proficiency in English is so common among foreign language teachers. Kosar (2020) has suggested the use of speaking clubs and prohibition of L1 use to upgrade teachers' mastery of speaking skills. Additionally, EFL teachers should expose themselves to English oral input by means of technology. Likewise, learning subject matter content via written and spoken materials can significantly help EFL teachers arrive at an up to standard understanding of content. Furthermore, teachers could increase their command of the specialty through peer-discussions in informal setting and formal settings like seminars, conferences, internal workshops, and taking part in international webinars.

Last but not least, tutors reported the need for training in specific issues such carrying out workshops; they said that they rely on students' presentations to run practical sessions, but they think that this practice is overused, and so expressed their desire to learn more about how to put theories into practice. There are no guiding syllabuses or teaching methodologies documents that could aid the early career teachers to do their job adequately till they get into grips with higher education system and methodologies. Mostly, teachers resort to peer-assistance or the craft model, that is, teaching the way they were taught themselves. Consequently, tutors should collaborate more; for example, senior teachers might like having novice teachers visit them and learn from them about how teach effectively; besides, peer-classroom visits can be scheduled to attend novice teachers' practices and give them tailored feedback. Furthermore, students' feedback, which can be done anonymously through questionnaires, could be helpful for sensitizing teachers to their teaching weaknesses and reflecting on ways to improve them.

## 5. Conclusion

This study was conducted to look at the professional development needs of the Algerian university EFL teachers. An open-ended questionnaire was administered to 25 teachers and the data generated by this research means was analyzed through mixed methods approach.

The findings revealed, first that teachers are in need for more technological tools and internet access at the university level as well as training to become skilled at the use of technological means of communication. Secondly, the tutors lamented their need for an adequate command of English language oral dimension and a deeper mastery of the content of the subject matter. Finally, the participants expressed their desire to evolve more in specific aspects of higher education teaching system such as implementing classroom workshops.

In the view of the complicatedness of needs, this inquiry suggests for teachers to resist surrendering to the drawbacks of teacher development and espouse the latter wholeheartedly. For example, teachers can rely on their own technological means to boost their professional empowerment, and they are advised to profit from the abundance of English written and audio-visual materials to individually and collaboratively enhance their oral mastery of language. Other alternatives such as local and online speaking clubs could be envisaged. Similarly, in our information age, content acquisition can be improved through immersing oneself in reading and attuning to online learning via virtual conferences, webinars, and YouTube academic videos.

Finally, in order to refine one's teaching habits, more teacher collaboration is needed through informal peer-discussions, workshops, peer-classroom visits, and students' feedback. Added to this, teachers need updating themselves with current trends in foreign language teaching and with experts' new insights. As a final thought,

university teachers should relate their research projects which consume up much of their time to solve more practical issues related to teacher development.

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