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**ENGLISH TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND AWARENESS-KEEPING UP WITH THE CURRENT CHANGES IN TEACHING**

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**Abstract:** The field of English teaching is one which thousands of teachers worldwide have pursued as a life profession. The issues of expertise and professionalism, however, vary in the aspect to which we understand the obligations that are tied to the chosen profession. Most frequently, the misconception related to the issue of “preparedness” in teaching is that of gaining superficial knowledge i.e. a BA diploma in teaching English, a practical experience in a school or two, a diploma project on a topic which is conducted during the studies etc. and by this, the mission “being accomplished.” The false belief that is formed is that no further training or advanced development is further needed. However, in order to keep up with current changes in teaching, teachers must always pursue further practical development, termed as *the individual perspective*. This paper aims to identify the most crucial aspects of teacher development and also stresses the importance of teacher trainings in the process. It also implies that the individual perspective is achieved with the help and support of the Ministry of Education together with higher institutions. The case study was conducted with private and state university professors. A teacher survey consisting of 12 statements was used as an instrument in the study (see Appendix). Statements were divided into two main categories: the individual perspective and the institutional perspective and were ranked on a scale from 1-5 (least-most important).

Research questions were: “Are teachers aware of the importance of individual perspective development in their career?” “What are the areas which need further development?” and “How can teachers initiate institutional support?”

The findings and conclusions serve as implications for a wider general perspective in Macedonia and in the region.

**Keywords:** professional development, teacher training, perspective, support, awareness etc.

**1. INTRODUCTION**

During the current years of development, the field of education, namely teaching, has undergone the most changes: changes in the manner of classroom instruction, changes in the methods used, changes in the innovative approaches towards teaching, changes in basic concepts and theories and much more. One issue that has not reached the peak of change, however, is the concept of professional development, even though “with the demands, qualifications too soon become outdated as a result of changes in the field...” (Richards & Farrell 2005, pg. 10) What does the term stand for and why should it even be an issue of discussion? According to Richards & Farrell (2005), “development generally refers to general growth not focused on a specific job. It serves a longer-term goal and seeks to facilitate growth of teachers’ understanding of teaching and of themselves as teachers. It often involves examining different dimensions of a teacher’s practice as a basis for reflective review and can hence be seen as “bottom-up.” (2005, pg.4) The relevance of the topic presented in this paper is one which for many might be “known” but surprisingly “not practiced.” We encounter the issue of teaching as a “life-long” process everywhere and mention the same one to our students, but what is the level of our awareness regarding individual practical development and how much do we invest in it? Another concern is that of the institutional support i.e. how determined are our institutions in providing financial support or even in hosting such events in order to enhance teacher development in a continuum? What is the role of the Ministry of Education in supporting such events? Most cases regarding the above-mentioned issues refer to low self-awareness on both regards: teachers are either aware of the importance or not, but whatever the issue be, some are sceptic due to the cost-benefit factor; such events are time-consuming, they cost a lot, part taking in such events requires certain invitations for participation i.e. a wider circle of acquaintances, which might also be an issue among teachers in the region etc. The funds provided by the Ministry are often very low i.e. the conference costs twice as much as the budget offered by the Ministry usually one year after the actual event has even taken place. Other areas and scientific fields are better funded and much more support is granted in their favor, a quite ironic truth. The proverb states that: “if you wish to destroy a people, destroy its’ education system and on the contrary, if you wish to have a healthy generation and future, invest in education and nurture it” a bitter reality that is actually put aside and left unsaid. Lastly, a very crucial question relevant to the issue is “can teachers and educators in Macedonia initiate professional gatherings on their own, with the help and support of the higher institutions they work in or is this too big of a demand?” These issues will be discussed further in the paper.

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## 2. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY AND SIGNIFICANCE

The main aim of this paper is to point out and suggest the importance of continuous development in the field of education and teaching. Emphasis is therefore put on the long-term development and expertise needed in education and on the forms of practice that can be implemented in the region. The idea of teacher practical development came to me due to the low encountering's and organizations on behalf of us as individuals and of course, the institutions in which we are working in. The issue of always being in need of foreign experts when we ourselves know our circumstances and available resources is one that recently has begun to bother me. I personally have nothing against foreign investments nor expertise and attend various yearly workshops and trainings whenever am invited or notified. However, during these trainings I have met great teachers and educators from Macedonia. We have worked together, shared ideas and implemented them in our daily lives. The foreign presenter served merely as a model or a guide in the activities-we accomplished everything on our own. Therefore, the questions that arise here are: "can't we do the same?" and "what type of expertise should we have in order to conduct such educational gatherings?" As complicated as it may sound, I strongly believe that a first and foremost criteria that we should meet as teachers is the *initiative*. However, even before that, we must be aware of the impact that teacher practical development has on our future teaching profession. Therefore, another focus of the paper is teacher awareness as a factor for self-development., which brings us to the question: "what is effective professional development?" According to Hayes (2010):

"Effective professional development enables educators to develop the knowledge and skills; they need to address students' learning challenges. To be effective, professional development requires thoughtful planning followed by careful implementation with feedback to ensure it responds to educators' learning needs. Educators who participate in professional development then must put their new knowledge and skills to work. Professional development is not effective unless it causes teachers to improve their instruction or causes administrators to become better school leaders." (2010, pg. 10)

The outcomes of such professional development help not only in the overall achievement but also in the establishment of the expertise that teachers are required to have nowadays. The process of teaching goes hand in hand with that of learning i.e. teachers learn while doing, while experimenting, while consulting colleagues and of course while sharing opinions and insights. Some basic conceptualizations regarding teacher learning according to Richards & Farrell (2005) are as follow: teacher learning as skill learning, teacher learning as a cognitive process, teacher learning as personal construction and teacher learning as reflective practice. (pgs. 6-7)

## 3. THE INDIVIDUAL AND INSTITUTIONAL PERSPECTIVE: DETERMINING THE NEEDS OF BOTH

*By sharing our experiences and synthesizing the results-in other words-working together-we can do more to improve schools than any one of us can do alone.*  
(Joyce, B. *The door to school improvement*)

The issue of self-development on the individual basis is a matter of discussion among researchers and teachers on an everyday encounter. Questions of relevance regard experience and different theories of teaching, the methodology used, the resources and materials, the learners and their level etc. Most frequently, private and state institutions differ in certain circumstances and conditions, both in the conditions they offer their staff and of course in the conditions and classroom equipment that are installed for the learners. This is the reality that teachers deal with in Macedonia. There are times when the teacher has so much motivation and so much to do and share, that the budget might not even allow for it to happen. Such cases lead to teacher *self-non-development*. To make things clear: there are two cases of awareness on the self-development scale: 1. you have the inner strive and knowledge but do not have the circumstances and 2. you have the circumstances, but are unaware of the impact you can have on a learner. In such cases, the criteria for success will normally depend on the institutional perspective and its' demands. In this respect, according to personal insights, the institution should set the following criteria: manage to make a small budget for supplies which are needed for effective teaching; require from teachers' expertise in teaching and individual development (trainings, workshops, seminars, conferences) on a certain framework (weekly, monthly, yearly); and lastly, make the same ones applicable and economically manageable for all.

Joyce (1991) identifies five dimensions of institutional improvement that teacher development can contribute to:

1. **Collegiality**: creating a culture through developing cohesive and professional relationships between the staff (and the wider community), in which "broad" vision-directed improvements as well as day-to-day operations are valued.

2. **Research:** Familiarizing staff with research findings on school improvement, teaching effectiveness and so on, which can support “in-house” development
3. **Site-specific information:** enabling and encouraging staff to collect and analyze data on students, schools, and effects of change-both as part of a formal devaluation and informally.
4. **Curriculum initiatives:** collaborating with others to introduce change in their subject areas as well as across the school curriculum
5. **Instructional initiatives:** enabling staff to develop their teaching skills and strategies through, for example, generic teaching skills, repertoires of teaching methods and specific teaching styles or approaches. (1991, pg. 59)

The process of development is a long-term one. It demands certain criteria to be set, goals to be achieved and a framework of what is needed and how to manage it. The process also requires teacher expertise and a realistic level of necessity, based on the circumstances which are available and at hand. There must be a balance between what is required, what is needed and its' cost. Eraut (1995) suggests that in planning teacher-development activities:

- Change should be managed and phased so as not to put impossible demands on a person at any time. Teacher development also needs to be planned over a period of time to keep its demands at a realistic level.
- Each professional development activity has to be resourced and supported at a level that gives it a reasonable chance of achieving its purpose. Distributing resources over too many separate activities is likely to result in none of them being effective.
- Negotiation should take place, preferably with each individual teacher, about the proper balance between the teacher's personal needs and the needs of the school. A teacher's professional development plan should normally incorporate elements of both. (1995, pg. 250)

#### 4. METHODOLOGY

##### 4.1. Participants

Participants in the study are a total of 15 university professors, of both private and state universities in Macedonia. They are English teaching professors, which have been teaching for many years in the English departments and have been part of the educational system. Their fields of interest and expertise vary, however, their target audience are students which are to become future English teachers, by which they all share many common beliefs and theories. Also, they all have interchangeably collaborated among each other during different encountering's among institutions. Participants are of both genders, between the ages of 30-40 years old. 10 of them are PhD's and 5 are PhD candidates and in the process of research. Both categories are part of continuous development and usually partake in various conferences and seminars in order to follow requirements of the Ministry of Education and higher law.

##### 4.2. Study instruments

Instruments used in the case study are a teacher survey, consisting of 12 statements. Statements are divided into two categories: the individual development perspectives and the institutional development perspectives. Teachers have also provided suggestions and remarks regarding the issue.

##### 4.3. Research questions

The study attempted to answer the following research questions:

1. “Are teachers aware of the importance of individual perspective development in their career?”
2. “What are the areas which need further development?”
3. “How can teachers initiate institutional support?”

##### 4.4. Obtained results

The results which were obtained are presented below. (Table 1&Table 2)

*Table 1. Individual development perspectives*

1. My own development as a teacher is important.	All participants (15) agreed that this is the most important area.
2. I consider reflection and self-reflection as important items.	13 participants considered self-reflection as the <b>most important</b> , while 2 participants agreed it is <b>very important</b> .
3. Integrating innovation in teaching is an area that good teachers should develop.	11 participants considered the integration of innovative teaching as <b>most important</b> , 3 <b>very important</b> , while 1 participant regarded it as <b>important</b> .
4. Skills-based learning and the integrative approach need training.	12 participants agreed that this issue is <b>very important</b> , 2 agreed it is <b>most important</b> and 1 stated <b>important</b> .
5. I need to work on classroom management skills and improve them.	This question was likely to have been misunderstood and thought of as an issue that regards the level of management skills. Results were a tie of <b>important</b> (6) and <b>very important</b> (6) and 3 stated it was <b>least important</b> .
6. Teaching should be student-centered.	13 regarded the issue as <b>most important</b> , and 2 as <b>very important</b> .
7. Needs analysis is an important part of planning.	11 participants regarded the issue as <b>most important</b> , 3 as <b>very important</b> and 1 as <b>important</b> .

Institutional development perspectives results (Table 2)

*Table 2. Institutional development perspectives*

1. The institution I work in requires expertise.	13 participants agreed that the institution requires expertise and that it was most important, and 2 answered with very important.
2. Trainings and seminars are an area of importance.	A total of 12 participants agreed that this issue was most important while 2 answered with very important and 1 with only important.
3. The institution offers various workshops we can attend.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This question had very low responses, which implied that institutions do not really offer such workshops.</li> </ul>
4. The professional development of classroom instruction, innovative teaching and management are a key focus in my institution.	11 participants agreed for important, 2 for very important and an additional 2 for most important.
5. The institution funds various seminars and trainings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This question was very low as well. Responses implied that institutions did not fund such seminars and trainings.</li> </ul>

#### 4.5. Teacher suggestions and remarks

Teacher participants were very kind to even offer remarks and suggestions at the bottom of their papers (even though this was not required) by which it is evident that they truly are in for changes and are ready to take initiatives for a better self-development process. The most frequent remarks were:

**T1:** *“I believe that we should undertake actions that would facilitate the teacher development issue. Maybe even manage to host such events at our own workplace with the help of other colleagues.”*

**T2:** *“We can start by including associations such as ELTAM or even other institutions.”*

**T3:** *“This issue is dependent on both us and the institutions. I feel as if education has been forgotten recently...”*

**T4:** *“Your approach to the matter has really made me consider the case. It is true that we are passive in action-taking and should therefore take actions to move forward in our future development.”*

**T5:** *“Such events cost a lot. Teacher on-line trainings for e.g. cost up to 500 U.S. dollars, an amount that would never be re-fundable in Macedonia.”*

**T6:** *“Such events really to have an impact on our manner of teaching. They should be done more frequently.”*

#### 4.6. Research questions obtained

Regarding the first research question, *“are teachers aware of the importance of individual perspective development in their career?”* the case study shows that teachers are indeed aware of their professional development and individual perspective. They were very interested in participating in the study and agreed that it is a matter which should be further elaborated and an issue which should be solved. They believed that their careers depended upon their expertise and their future establishment.

Regarding question number 2, *“what are the areas which need further development?”* results proved that the areas which needed further improvement were on behalf of the institutions, namely, more frequent gatherings and funding of various seminars and trainings.

Regarding the last research question, *“how can teachers initiate institutional support?”* results implied that this would most likely depend on the institutional awareness and of course on the budget (if any). However, even self-initiatives can normally bring the change that is needed in professional development.

### 5. CONCLUSION

The case study attempted to bring to light an issue of relevance and importance in our professional development and career of teaching, namely the self-awareness initiative for personal and institutional support. In one of my courses in the MA program entitled “Practice in ELT and professional development of teachers” I asked my students two very crucial open-ended questions related to that of self-esteem: *“I do not ask for help because...?”* and *“My perceptions of others when they ask me for my help...?”* Students looked at me wondering what the relationship was with the issue of motivation and self-esteem. While discussing the responses, they reached the point of comprehension and acceptance. Traditionally, we do not ask for help due to the impression others might get of us and our professionalism, we hesitate to come forward with the truth that we are in the ongoing process of learning even while teaching and that expertise is achieved only when we reflect on our flaws and our lacks and we accept them. The second question I implied, relates to the first one. Again, they were hesitant. I continued my explanation, showing them how our own personal impression of others when asking for help from us reflected on the first assumption. They agreed. The task made clear why teachers are hesitant and do not take actions to change and actually even gave an insight on why we usually expect from other experts to show us the path. Instead of achieving it with the help of our own colleagues and teachers we know in Macedonia and with the infinite resources and experiences we have on a daily basis, we expect changes to happen from other factors and perceptions.

### 6. LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

The paper with all its inconsistencies attempted to share ideas and perceptions regarding the issue of teacher development on the basis of both individual and institutional perspectives. The idea that every other person is an expert in our field except for ourselves is one that is mistakenly assumed. The balance among self-needs and institutional needs go hand-in-hand with current developments. Taking into consideration our everyday encounters and experience, we should ourselves set the criteria and goals needed to achieve overall success and maintain professional development. Teachers in Macedonia should be aware of their self-worth and of their value and should take actions in implementing different trainings and workshops on a very frequent time-table. Even though the number of participants might be very low, the statements likely not as suitable as needed, this is only a case study or an initiative which began with the issue of teacher awareness in the process. Results and feedback proved that



teachers were aware of the need of such activities in their everyday profession and career. Let this serve as a starting point for all.

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**Appendix**

Teacher professional development survey	<b>On a scale from 1-5 (least-most important) please reply to the statements below on individual and institutional development:</b>				
1. My own development as a teacher is important.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I consider reflection and self-reflection as important items.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Integrating innovation in teaching is an area that good teachers should develop.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Skills-based learning and the integrative	1	2	3	4	5

approach need training.					
5. I need to work on classroom management skills and improve them.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Teaching should be student-centered.	1	2	3	4	5
7. Needs analysis is an important part of planning.	1	2	3	4	5

**Institutional development perspectives**

8. The institution I work in requires expertise.	1	2	3	4	5
9. Trainings and seminars are an area of importance.	1	2	3	4	5
10. The institution offers various workshops we can attend.	1	2	3	4	5
11. The professional development of classroom instruction, innovative teaching and management are a key focus in my institution.	1	2	3	4	5
12. The institution funds various seminars and trainings.	1	2	3	4	5

