

**Investigating Factors Affecting Teachers' Professional Learning**

Volkan INCEÇAY<sup>1</sup> & Ayşen BAKIOĞLU<sup>2</sup>  
<sup>1&2</sup>Maltepe University & Marmara University, Turkey.

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**Abstract**

This study both aimed to present what factors effecting teachers' professional learning were and investigate these factors. How these factors affected teachers' professional learning were perceived by teachers and according to which independent and dependent variables they vary were researched. A total of 482 state primary school teachers working in Istanbul province; Kadikoy and Umraniye regions, in the 2006-2007 academic years participated in this study. It has been determined that there were variations in teachers themselves and school culture sub- dimensions according to having in-service training; in school management sub- dimension according to the reason of preferring the profession; in education policy makers and school management sub- dimensions related to class size; and school culture dimension in connection with school size. It was also found out that the factors do differentiate according to gender, having in-service training, teachers' career phases and class size. Some recommendations were made in relation to the findings.

**Keywords:** Teacher, Professional Development, Education Management, In-Service Education.

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**1. Introduction**

Continued professional development is seen as a necessity within the field of professional learning, yet it cannot be taken for granted since there are clear occasions on which teachers simply do not willing to involve in learning processes (Eekelen, Vermunt, & Boshuizen, 2006). When current school administration practices are examined, it is seen that not many schools have the anxiety for adapting changing conditions. This situation is not only valid for the school administrators but also it is valid for the teachers. The question of why principals and especially the teachers do not willing to learn gains importance (Celik, 2000). The answers that can be given to this question can be various: The expectations are increasing and they differentiate gradually, however, the present qualifications are not enough for the expectations; teachers are asked to adapt several innovations directed by the governmental administrative centre. In addition, it is seen that it is not possible for each teacher to do all these things on her/his own. So, this situation causes teachers to be reluctant to professional learning. When the principals are taken into account, their responsibilities are increasing gradually and during the process of decision making, as problems are not examined in detail, some solutions which are not correct appear and the principal feels left alone by the teachers (Bakioglu, 1998). Here the question of what professional learning for teachers means gains significance. The schools' being efficacious depends on the professional development of its teachers. If the teachers do not develop professionally, their classes would not show any improvement either (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996). As teachers in a school environment improve their teaching and share their practice with colleagues, the collective wisdom in that school increases. Moreover as the number of the teachers engaging in improved practice gets bigger, the school itself becomes a learning organization (Danielson, 2006).

The first step in the process of improving the qualities of schools is to remind teachers of their principal purpose which is to create differences in the lives of their students. Moreover, teachers need to keep individual learning journals. Potentially teachers are the most important people to constitute a learning community because they are the key people to increase or decrease the learners' success and their self-respect (Day, 1999). It is impossible to have schools with effective construction when the teachers do not learn professionally.

According to the report prepared by American Teaching Federation; School reforms cannot be realized without professional development. Nations can adapt though standards, create scenarios, determine the best studies about how learners learn, change the form of course books and evaluation,

support effective teaching strategies. However, unless the teacher is aware of all these things and knows how to do them, such cautions will be useless in determining successful practices. Then the logic of dealing with professional development is apparent; there is no more effective way of changing the schools (Hawley & Valli, 1999).

Factors effecting teachers' professional learning process are (Day, 1999): work experience, past events, career stage, social and political conditions, school cultures, leadership and colleague support, dialogue between the individual and the system, the quality of learning experience, the relation of learning experience with the cognitive and sensual needs, the responsibility of teachers' own learning. For this reason the questions such as (1) why teachers are reluctant to participate in individual and group learning? (2) If the teachers start their professional lives being motivated enough towards lifelong learning? (3) If the school administration prepares suitable environment and conditions for the learning of teachers (Day, 1999) should be answered. Unfortunately there are few studies on the factors affecting the professional learning of primary schools and the teachers working there and proper and concise examination of these factors in Turkey.

In this paper the questions such as; what the professional learning of primary school teachers is like, what the factors effecting teachers' professional learning are, what kind of results can occur and solutions can be suggested for the education system when the factors effecting teachers' professional learning are examined; were tried to be answered.

## 2. Methodology

The paper is in survey model. Professional learning of teachers working in primary schools of Kadıköy and Umraniye and the factors affecting this process were described related to the teachers' perceptions of them. Several results emerged after the factors were described and analyzed. In addition, the present situation was analyzed according to these variables.

### 2.1. Sample

The population of the study included the teachers working at state primary schools of Ministry of Education in Kadıköy and Umraniye in the city of Istanbul in the 2006 - 2007 academic years. According to the data of 2006-2007 academic years, 3018 teachers were working in 85 schools in Umraniye. In Kadıköy 2593 teachers were working in 75 schools. The required numbers of samples were obtained from the populous. The sample included 482 teachers whose questionnaires were analyzed and not seen to be too problematic to be evaluated.

### 2.2. Instrument

Self-device questionnaire for which expert opinions were taken and the information got from literature review was used as a data gathering method with random sampling. In the form, there were questions about the teachers' professional learning and the factors affecting this process. The identified items were prepared as a result of the literature review, the translation of the information from foreign resources and adaption of them into our country's conditions by the help of expert opinions. The questionnaire includes three parts. In the first part, there are 12 questions in the form of independent variables about the teachers' personality, profession and the characteristics of their schools. In the second part, there were 60 questions including some control questions on the factors affecting teachers' professional learning. In the third part, there is a section for the teachers answering the questionnaires to write down their opinions about the subject. A five scale likert type was designed for the second part of the questionnaire. In this scale the meaning of numbers are ; 1=totally disagree, 2=disagree, 3=can't decide, 4=agree, 5= totally agree. The questionnaire was given to different teachers working at different schools to be analyzed in terms of format and meaning. Reliability, Cronbach Alpha was calculated as  $r = .81$ . When the 12 unclear and misunderstood items were eliminated from the questionnaire containing 72 items, it was seen that Cronbach alpha degree increased. The questionnaire included 12 independent and 60 dependent variables. After the first application results, the questionnaire took its last form and was administered to the research group by the researchers. Benefiting from the expert opinions, some missing points and language mistakes were recovered and then the questionnaire applied to the sample group. In the main application Cronbach alpha reliability calculated as  $r = .83$  so, the questionnaire appeared to be highly reliable ( $0.70 < r < 1$ ). At the end of the research, after the questionnaires were analyzed one by one by the researchers,

the questionnaires that cause some hesitation about the reliability and validity were eliminated. After this elimination 482 questionnaires were analysed statistically.

### 2.3. Data Analysis

The gathered data were uploaded to the Microsoft Excel program and the uploaded data were analyzed by Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) program. By the help of this program, the frequency, mean and the standard deviation of given answers were calculated. In the first part of the questionnaire, there were some variables about the teachers' gender, marital status, number of children, subject, experience, institute of graduation, feelings against the profession, opportunity of receiving in-service training (INSET), number of students in their classes and schools in order to identify the teachers' demographic characteristics. The data received from this part were used as independent variables to analyze the factors affecting teachers' professional development. T-test was used since some of the independent variables such as; gender, marital status, having inset are two categorized. ANOVA variance test was used since the answers to some variables such as number of students, experience, and feelings against INSET could be more than two categorized. In order to identify which groups have difference, the double Scheffe test was used. Significance level was accepted as 0,05. Factor Analysis method was used for analyzing the information received by the testing tool. In the questionnaire Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) was looked for within 60 items and it was seen that there was a significant difference (Sig.,000). After real values were calculated by the Screen test, the number of factors which was thought to be useful for explaining the data was identified. It was seen that six factors would be enough.

### 3. Findings

The findings about the teachers' demographic information and independent questions: 66% of the teachers participated in the study was female and 34% were male. More than half of them are class teachers, 10 % are from science – mathematics group, about 9 % are social sciences group, 4 % art, 3 % physical education, 10 % are foreign language, and 10 % are the teachers of other groups. 20% of the teachers' experience is between 0 - 5 years, 40 % are between 6-10 years, about 16 % are between 11-15, again about 10 % are between 16 - 20, 5 % is between 21 - 25, and 7 % is 26 and more. Approximately half of them stated that they chose this profession because they loved teaching, 33 % of them chose because of unconscious preference at the university entrance exam, 14% chose because of other reasons. ¼ of the teachers mentioned that they have not received any INSET from anywhere, half of them stated that they received INSET in the last year and the other ¼ of them said that they had INSET before the last year. Half of the participating teachers enjoy their jobs, 13% of them hate teaching, 10 % of the teachers were fed up with their job, 9 % feel neutral. Students in the classes of half of the participating teacher's number between 30 - 40, 28 % of the teacher's number between 41-50, in the classes of 12 % of the teachers there were 51- 60 students.

When the data about the independent variables were analyzed, the general characteristics of the teachers; it can be said that being a teacher is mostly preferred by the females. It is an expected result to have more class teachers than others in the study since the study was conducted in the primary schools. The total percentage of the teachers who are in the 1-10 year career stage of the profession (% 62) shows that young teachers who are in the beginning of their profession are doing this job. The percentage of the teachers who chose this profession because of their ideals is % 45 and the percentage of the ones who chose because of wrong preference is % 32. The percentage of the teachers who had never taken any INSET courses is %27 and this can be stated as very low. The percentage of teachers who stated that they took INSET in the last year is the highest percentage in this group. The percentage of the teachers who took one or two INSET courses in total is 54%. If the number of the teachers who have never taken INSET is added to this number, the result is 81 % which shows that there is a general problem about the distribution of INSET. Although theory addresses the importance of professional learning activities to help teachers professionally in another study, it was revealed that the frequency to which teachers participate is rather disappointing too (Kwakman, 2003). Half of the teachers participated in the study told that they felt love for their profession and this can be counted as positive for our education system when it is thought that this profession cannot be done without love. The proportion of the ones who gave negative answer to this question (1/4) causes

anxiety. The percentage of students in classrooms which number between 30 – 50 reaches 86 % shows the inadequacy of the number of the schools and classrooms.

As for dependent variables; it was observed that female teachers were more willing to compensate their missing knowledge in comparison to male teachers. Female teachers could be said to be inclined to co-operate more in terms of professional learning. Female teachers by stating that the career grading system was less encouraging for professional learning made clear that this kind of system could not meet their expectations.

There was a significant difference between the teachers who chose this profession because of their ideals and the ones who chose because of their parents' will. The teachers who chose their jobs as a result of their ideals thought that the administration in their schools supported their professional learning. In another study conducted by Nomer (2002) in Istanbul on high school teachers, a significant difference was also found for the teachers choosing the profession as a result of their ideals.

The perceptions of teachers about the school administrators as one of the factors affecting professional learning process are negative when the population of their classrooms increases. This resembles with the fact that the increasing number of the students makes it difficult for the school management to create activities for the teachers' professional development as a finding of another study done by Bakioglu (1999) in order to examine the relation between the increasing number of the students in a school and the quality of the school.

The teachers who took INSET programs taught that the quality of these programs was not efficient. This is in parallel with the study conducted by Esme and others in which the teachers' perceptions were searched about the INSET activities in 2003 (Erdem & Uzal, 2006). That the teachers who attended INSET programs agreed with the item "Teachers' professional development increases the students' success." is significant. Since the teachers do not improve their teaching qualities, their students would not be able to make progress (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996).

In this study, it was observed that first career stage teachers believed the qualities of INSET activities were not efficient. From this point, it can be said that the INSET activities that these teachers participated did not positively affect professional learning processes. First career stage (Career Entrance) teachers' perceptions were believed to be high if they work in a kind of environment supporting their professions (Bakioglu, 1996).

The teachers whose classroom population was very much above the average limit were unwilling for professional improvement since they cannot feel autonomous. This finding was in consistent with the finding in another study done to show the feeling of autonomy was an indicator of job satisfaction (Pearson & Moomaw, 2005). Moreover, in Karakaya's (2004) study Turkish teachers determined the large classrooms as a reason to be reluctant to professional development. In this study, it was determined that 88 % of the teachers felt more committed to their school when the school culture was based upon professional learning. According to Toremén (2001) when the school culture is based on learning commitment to the school appears.

Teachers who thought that the INSET activities formed in accordance with the school needs were more useful constitute a proportion of 76 % participating teachers. In a study conducted by OECD (1998) it was also found that rather than the top to bottom INSET activities, activities designed according to the needs of the schools would be more beneficial. In another study, evidence showed that teachers' job satisfaction was likely to prevail when these activities were designed according to teachers' actual needs rather than top-down programs since it appeared that top-down process could cause regression and resentment and eventually hinder professional development (Nir & Bogler, 2007).

Four out of five teachers agreed on the fact that their educational productivity is negatively affected by financial deficiencies. This is in the area of education policy identifiers and the governments and should be looked into. Otherwise having troubles financially will continue to affect teachers' educational fruitfulness in a negative way (Güven, 2003).

The percentage of the teachers who thought that changes in curriculums were not distributed properly is 69 %. This was a very important finding for the educational administration. Teachers did not feel secure about the changes that were tried to be done in the subject curriculums. This kind of

changes in the curriculums place a very heavy learning load on teachers (Sykes, 1999). This is the point that the education policy identifiers and school administrations should take into account.

Teachers stated that they did not want to participate in the INSET activities created in the areas they feel inadequate with a percentage of 89. This is again in parallel with a study in which the teachers told that they did not want to take part in seminars, workshops designed for their needs (Erdem & Uzal, 2006).

The percentage of the teachers who were unwilling to develop professionally due to the large classrooms was higher than half the teachers participated in this study. In the city of Istanbul, a population for a school is about 16000 but it is up to 10000 – 15000 in international norms (Hesapcioglu & Meric, 1994). So, teachers lose their motivation for professional development since they are working in very crowded classrooms.

The percentage of the teachers who thought that teachers did not desire to learn professionally since school administrations would not want teachers to participate in decision making processes is 66%. This finding showed the importance of the fact stated by Celik (2003) that school administrators should take teachers' ideas in decisions that are to be taken. It was seen that 2/3 of the teachers did not need extrinsic motivation resources for learning. This is again in consistent with Tinaz's (2000) idea that a person learns better if s/he feels the need to learn intrinsically.

It was observed that the 90 % of teachers believed that the standards would increase if teachers work co-operatively. Similarly, Day (1999) states that the cooperation is key factor for professional development. Moreover it shouldn't be forgotten that teachers learn from their colleagues especially from the ones who in post in the same school with them (Hargreaves, 1996). About 50 % of the teachers participated in this study thought that Ministry of Education was not transparent in its practices. However, according to Hawley and Valli (1999) unless teachers in the classrooms internalize the changes that are tried to be made by education policy determiners these efforts will not work.

Teachers who believed the culture in the schools was not positive form the bigger group within the participants (61 %.). In the literature, it is argued that teachers learn when they question their work and make research. Because learning is identified as the process of asking questions, creating hypothesis, analyzing and drawing conclusion. The continuation of the known and certainty affects the questioning process in the profession of teaching in a negative way. By this manner, rather than "learners", "knowing person" is accepted as a term for teachers. As a result, learning and knowing are separated from each other and teaching forms the teachers' learning as a linear and constant process (Richert, 1995). On the other hand the culture in a school must positively affect teachers' professional learning. In a study, findings revealed that the culture of a school that fosters professional development is more likely to promote teachers' satisfaction related to these processes (Nir & Bogler, 2007). It must be taken into consideration that the schools have to fulfill certain conditions that are not present in schools now (Kwakman, 2003).

When the factors affecting teachers' professional learning were examined, it could be pointed out that teachers are especially affected by school administrations and school culture. Some of the key roles played by principals concern creating a culture in which teachers' professional learning is supported. A best behaviour is the principal who encourages and promotes the professional development of teacher, who supports the contribution of teachers to professional development (Danielson, 2006). In another recent study conducted by Nir and Bogler (2007) suggested that when teachers perceived the principal as supportive, teachers were more likely to express positive attitude towards the professional learning processes. Additionally, as education policy determiners Ministry of Education and the government are in the position of affecting this process.

Contrary to the literature, in this study significant differences were found in terms of gender variable. This is one of the most interesting findings of the study. Female teachers were found to be the advanced group in learning professionally whereas the male teachers need extrinsic motivation resources. It was also observed that teachers in our country need personal development plans so that they can follow their own improvement and plan the process. According to Day (1994) by the help of this kind of plans teachers with the other teachers and effectively will develop.

#### 4. Implications

School principals should form a school culture based on learning because this effects teachers' professional learning positively. While doing this, teachers should take part in decision making process. Teachers do not internalize the decisions taken by only the administration so, they will not participate in the activities voluntarily and this will not help the process of creating a school culture where learning is attached an important value.

Teachers' training needs as general and as subject need to be analysed. The subject, place, time and trainers of INSET activities should be determined in according to teachers' ideas and these activities should be put in important places in teachers' career planning and also they should be designed according to adult learning principles.

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