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ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: A SURVEY STUDY OF NEEDS AND EXPECTATIONS

ABSTRACT

Professional development should be an inseparable part of a teacher's professional career. Although it is the teacher's sole responsibility, the action he/she undertakes greatly influences learners' success. The goal of the paper is to investigate in-service English language teachers' professional development practices, as well as delve into their needs and expectations in this area. The data were collected through a semi-structured questionnaire. The results show that teachers are aware of the lifelong nature of professional development and undertake various activities to improve the quality of teaching, such as workshops or reading didactic literature. However, their attitudes, practices and needs differ and are contingent on their education level, experience and workplace.

Key words: professional development, English language teaching, needs and expectations analysis

ABSTRAKT

ROZWÓJ ZAWODOWY NAUCZYCIELI JĘZYKA ANGIELSKIEGO: BADANIE SONDAŻOWE POTRZEB I OCZEKIWAŃ

Rozwój zawodowy powinien być nieodłączną częścią pracy nauczyciela. Mimo, że nauczyciel jest w nim jedyną jednostką podejmującą się zadań doskonalących jego umiejętności, jego decyzje mają bezpośredni wpływ na postępy uczniów. Celem niniejszego artykułu jest przyjrzenie się rozwojowi zawodowemu nauczycieli języka Angielskiego oraz zbadanie ich potrzeb i oczekiwań w tym zakresie. Dane zostały zgromadzone za pomocą częściowo ustrukturalizowanego kwestionariusza. Badania wykazały, że nauczyciele są świadomi, że rozwój zawodowy jest procesem trwającym przez cały okres kariery zawodowej. Nauczyciele podejmują się różnych form rozwoju wpływających na poprawę nauczania, takich jak warsztaty lub czytanie literatury dydaktycznej, jednak ich opinie, praktyka i potrzeby różnią

się i są uwarunkowane ich poziomem wykształcenia, doświadczeniem zawodowym oraz miejscem pracy.

Słowa kluczowe: rozwój zawodowy, nauczanie języka angielskiego, analiza potrzeb i oczekiwań

1. Introduction

The quality of English teaching depends on many variables, such as the reason why a particular person undertakes the profession of teacher or the quality of in-service practice. In the latter, professional development is a pivotal practice. It concerns constant knowledge-enrichment, which leads to the teacher's greater understanding of the educational environment and the improving of their teaching practice. When teachers develop professionally, their awareness of educational paradigms increases, and the quality of their teaching becomes better, at the same time positively affecting students' practices and success. However, it is crucial to personalise professional development practices so that the teacher can address his/her needs.

2. Professionalism in education

Nowadays in education, emphasis is put on learner-centred approaches to the teaching-learning process. However, the teacher still takes the central position in the way he/she can use knowledge of linguistics, psychology, sociology, and pedagogy to help students learn English. Although the teacher is no longer an authoritarian person, it does not diminish his/her role, but makes pedagogical challenges in such a learning culture even greater. The description of the principles that a good teacher should follow and features he/she should be distinguished by are widely discussed both in language and in general education literature¹. Komorowska² divides the competencies of a good teacher into four groups: interactive skills, pedagogical skills, linguistic skills and didactic skills. The first group includes stating clear rules in the classroom, communicating ideas in a friendly way and praising students. Pedagogical skills encompass

¹ M. Wysocka, *Profesjonalizm w nauczaniu języków obcych*, Katowice 2003; E. Zawadzka, *Nauczyciele języków obcych w dobie przemian*, Kraków 2004; S.G. Paris, L.R. Ayres, *Stawanie się refleksyjnym uczniem i nauczycielem*, M. Janowski, M. Micińska (transl.), Warszawa 1997; E. Czykwin, *Samoświadomość nauczyciela*, Białystok 1995.

² H. Komorowska, *Metodyka nauczania języków obcych*, Warszawa 2003, s. 86–88.

preparing students for independent learning by presenting a great variety of diversified tasks and reacting properly to their errors. Linguistic skills consist of correctness and fluency in foreign language, and knowledge of and contact with the culture of a particular foreign language area. Didactic competencies are experience and diligence in teaching practice. In order to be capable of putting these skills into practice, the teacher needs to be reflective and autonomous, and understand his/her professional development in terms of lifelong learning.

Professionalism, regardless of the field of work, may be developed in different ways. With respect to language teaching, Wallace³ proposed three models of professional development. In the craft model, the experienced teacher is an expert and transfers knowledge and skills to a young trainee who has little experience. This way, wisdom and expertise is passed down from generation to generation. The applied science model is founded on experimentation as the basis for analysing ideas. It involves observation, developing an idea, testing it, getting results and drawing a conclusion. The third model is based on reflective thinking and teaching, which are ground practices in the process of becoming an effective teacher.

Being reflective in terms of teaching involves many variables and abilities, allowing teachers to widen their educational horizons. Farrell claims that "[r]eflective practice occurs when teachers consciously (...) subject their own beliefs about teaching and learning to critical analysis, take full responsibility for their actions in the classroom, and continue to improve their teaching practice"⁴. Richards and Lockhart⁵ define the reflective model as one based on collecting data on the teaching process, studying one's approaches, beliefs and premises which constitute educational practice, and the use of assembled information as a foundation for critical reflection and being able to change and improve what was originally thought to be right.

Research of the literature connected with reflective practice in education⁶ reveals that the term 'reflection' repeatedly appears with the descriptor 'critical', which leads to the conclusion that being critical in reflective practice is one of the major values. Barlett⁷ explains this concept in the following way:

³ M.J. Wallace, *Training Foreign Language Teachers: A Reflective Approach*, Cambridge 1991.

⁴ T.S.C. Farrell, *Reflective Practice in the Professional Development of Teachers of Adult English Language Learners*, Washington, DC 2008, p. 1.

⁵ J.C. Richards, Ch. Lockhart, *Reflective Teaching in Teacher Education*, Cambridge 1996, pp. 1-5.

⁶ T.S.C. Farrell, *Reflective Practice...*; J.C. Richards, Ch. Lockhart, *Reflective Teaching...*; L. Bartlett, *Teacher development through reflective teaching*, [in:] *Second Language Teacher Education*, J.C. Richards, D. Nunan (eds.), Cambridge 1990; M. Šaric, B. Šteh, *Critical reflection in the professional development of teachers: challenges and possibilities*, "Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal" 2017, 7(3).

⁷ *Second Language Teacher Education*, J.C. Richards, D. Nunan (eds.), Cambridge 1990, p. 205.

Becoming critical means that as teachers we have to transcend the technicalities of teaching and think beyond the need to improve our instructional techniques. This effectively means we have to move away from the 'how to' questions, which have a limited utilitarian value, to the 'what' and 'why' questions, which regard instructional and managerial techniques not as ends in themselves but as a part of broader educational purposes.

As Bartlett states, there is a need to move from reflecting on 'how' something is done to 'what' and 'why' it is done. These questions help teachers frame their focus in the process of revising the teaching-learning process as well as their general development. With a view to teachers as learners, reflective practice and developing independence are strongly connected. Just as independent learners know what makes their learning process more effective, so independent teachers seem to be aware of what they do and why they do it⁸. Such an approach triggers autonomous behaviours which are essential in professional development practice.

3. Teacher autonomy

Smith⁹ claims that teacher autonomy can be conceptualized in various ways. He distinguishes three dimensions of teacher autonomy:

- 1) teacher autonomy as (a capacity for) self-directed professional action;
- 2) teacher autonomy as (a capacity for) self-directed professional development;
- 3) teacher autonomy as freedom from control by others.

In the three aspects of teacher autonomy mentioned above a strong connection to professional development can be observed. In the first dimension an autonomous teacher is described as one who undertakes professional action in the broad sense. It includes operations of all kind embedded in the process of teaching itself, which is directly related to the learner environment as well. Thinking of the second dimension, professional development can be classified here as "a sub-set of professional action"¹⁰, which means that the focus is put on the process of the teacher's growth in his/her attitudes, beliefs, methods and all other aspects connected with developing the image of an effective teacher.

⁸ M. Ellis, *Introducing reflective practice: an experimental project in Silesia, Poland*, [in:] *Teachers Develop, Teachers Research: Papers on Classroom Research and Teacher Development*, J. Edge, K. Richards (eds.), Oxford 1993, p. 112.

⁹ R.C. Smith, *Teacher Education for Teacher-learner Autonomy*, Edinburgh 2003, p. 3.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 5.

The third element is connected with the constraints teachers encounter in the process of teaching which negatively affect their "capacity to grant learners greater freedom in learning"¹¹. Overcoming these obstacles makes the process of developing autonomous behaviours easier and personal professional goals more attainable.

4. Forms of professional development

The educational environment is ever changing, and so should teachers and their approaches to the teaching-learning process. The first step towards becoming an effective teacher involves critical reflection on the general purpose of professional development: the teacher should state a clear goal, that is, realise what the characteristics of an effective teacher are. Having in mind the goal, the teacher should understand how important being au courant with the changes within the curriculum and students' fields of interest and needs is. Then, as the foundation is set, some concrete steps should be taken. Reflective teaching is a crucial component of one's professional development. The actions teachers undertake influence learners' motivation and may be an incentive to act more responsibly and become autonomous. A variety of forms of professional development and the ways of implementing them into practice can be distinguished in the educational literature¹². There are individual forms, such as self-monitoring, keeping a teaching journal, teaching portfolios, analysing critical incidents, case analysis and action research. Among collective professional development activities there are workshops, teacher support groups, team teaching, peer observation or peer coaching. The majority of professional development forms involve reflective processes and promote teachers' autonomous behaviours. All of the forms mentioned above seem to be familiar, but when it comes to practice there appear some problems with understanding the idea and goal of applying them in the process of teaching. The most problematic terms need to be briefly discussed.

Self-monitoring is defined as "an evidenced-based strategy that involves systematically observing one's own behaviour and recording whether or not a target behaviour occurs"¹³. It aims at collecting information about one's own

¹¹ P. Benson, *Autonomy as Learners' and Teachers' Right*, Edinburgh 2000, p. 115.

¹² J.C. Richards, T.S.C. Farrell, *Professional Development for Language Teachers. Strategies for Teaching Learning*, New York 2005; M. Wysocka, *Profesjonalizm w nauczaniu...*

¹³ K.D. Hager, *Teachers' use of video self-monitoring to improve delivery of effective teaching practices*, "Teaching Exceptional Children" 2018, 50(5), p. 284.

teaching in order to enable better understanding of teaching practices¹⁴. Skinner¹⁵ emphasised the importance of teachers stating and answering the questions 'what' and 'why' as far as their classroom practices are concerned, which was later on confirmed by Bartlett¹⁶ in the context of critical reflection.

Another form of enhancing the teacher's reflective processes is case analysis. This kind of professional development activity helps teachers to better understand teaching situations and create principles about the teaching-learning process. "Cases are occasions for offering theories to explain why certain actions are appropriate"¹⁷. They are collected over a period of time (e.g. one semester) in the form of summaries of real-life classroom situations that can be later on analysed by other teachers in order to learn more about a specific issue concerning approaches to teaching¹⁸.

The next form of professional development requiring explanation is action research, in which the teacher takes on the role of researcher. Action research contains two elements which are crucial. Action involves the teacher changing teaching practice or intervention in particular areas to modify and improve the situation. Research concerns collecting data and information on changes introduced through action. It allows reflection on what has been done and provides a basis for further changes in teaching practice within the research context¹⁹.

Autonomous and reflective teaching paradigms are the basis of all the forms enumerated and described above. Teachers' autonomous behaviours are grounded in reflective thinking and are the result of such thinking. Are teachers, however, aware of this paradigm? Are teachers' mindsets directed at developing their professional competencies and becoming increasingly aware of the processes taking place in different educational contexts? Is the paradigm of reflective practice in use in all of these educational contexts? What denominates teachers' needs and expectations?

¹⁴ J.C. Richards, T.S.C. Farrell, *Professional Development...*, p. 34.

¹⁵ B.F. Skinner, *Science and human behavior*, New York 1953, p. 423.

¹⁶ *Second Language Teacher...*, p. 205.

¹⁷ *Case Methods in Teacher Education*, J. Shulman (ed.), New York 1992, p. 3.

¹⁸ J.C. Richards, T.S.C. Farrell, *Professional Development...*, pp. 126–127.

¹⁹ A. Burns, *Action research*, [in:] *Qualitative in Applied Linguistics. A Practical Introduction*, J. Heigham, R.A. Croker (eds.), New York 2009, pp. 114–115.

5. The aim and design of the research study

The research study aims at investigating English language teachers' needs and expectations in the process of professional development. It is a quantitative study, and the instrument used to collect research data was a semi-structured questionnaire partly based on AL-Qahtani's research study²⁰. It consisted of attitude statements and multiple-choice questions.

6. Sampling procedure and participants of the study

A convenience sample of 135 English teachers was recruited through word-of-mouth. The questionnaires were collected either in person by visiting schools or online.

The teachers' ages were quite balanced; the majority of them were between 36 and 50 years old (41%), and the second biggest group were teachers aged between 25 and 35 years old (38%). There were 19 teachers under 25 (14%) and 10 teachers who were over 50 years old (7%). A significant majority of the sample group, numbering 92, had completed a Master's Degree (68%), 31 teachers had completed a Bachelor's Degree (23%), and only 2 teachers had a Doctor's Degree (2%). There were also 10 teachers (7%) who declared other qualifications. Within the group of 135 teachers, 48 declared working in public schools (36%), and 51 of them in language schools (38%). There were 22 teachers who declared working in both public and language schools (16%), and 14 teachers who were freelance, preschool and university teachers. The sample (n = 135) was additionally divided into two groups encompassing younger and more experienced teachers. Group I consisted of 61 teachers whose teaching experience did not exceed 10 years (44%). Group II consisted of 74 teachers who had been teaching English for over 10 years (56%).

7. Results of the study

Table 1 presents the respondents' needs within the scope of professional development expressed in attitude statements. The values 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 indicate *strongly disagree*, *disagree*, *partly agree*, *agree*, and *strongly agree*, respectively.

²⁰ H.M. AL-Qahtani, *Teachers' voice: a needs analysis of teachers' needs for professional development with the emergence of the current English textbooks*, "English Language Teaching" 2015, 8(8), pp. 128–141.

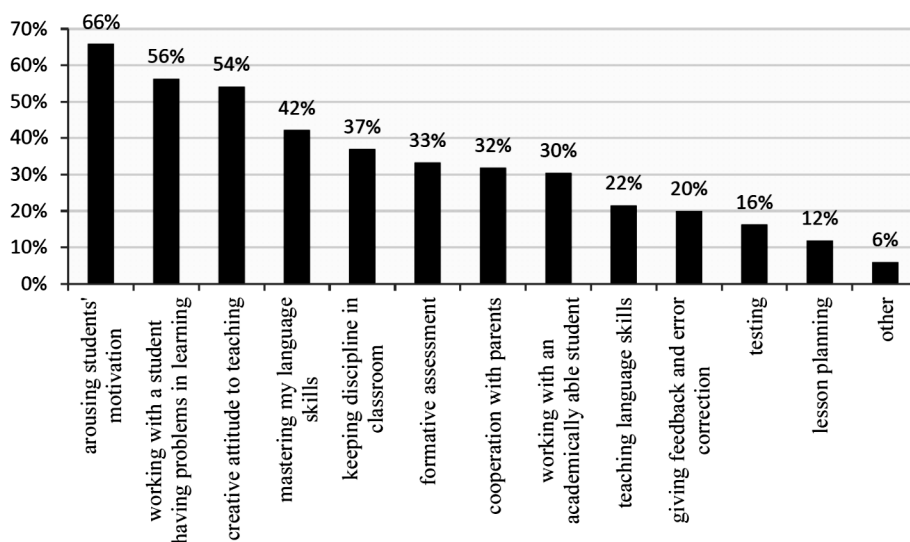
Table 1. The respondents' needs within the scope of professional development

Attitude statement	Mean	Median	Mode	Std. Deviation
Taking part in professional development activities should be an individual decision, not an obligatory element of the teacher's profession.	3.17	3.00	2	5
The need for professional development decreases along with job seniority and gaining professional experience.	3.53	4.00	4	5
Teachers should receive greater financial support within the scope of professional development.	3.63	4.00	4	5
Teachers should be proposed particular professional development activities by the employer.	3.27	3.00	4	5

Additionally, there were some differences found between the groups within the sample. The analysis of variance demonstrated that the more experienced teachers indicated more often, in comparison to less experienced teachers, their need for financial support when it comes to undertaking various forms of professional development ($U = 1781.0$, $p = 0.039$). Moreover, the teachers working only in public schools were more likely to claim that the need for professional development decreases along with gaining professional experience, in comparison to the teachers working in language schools ($U = 790.0$, $p = 0.002$). There were also differences between the groups in relation to the first statement. The respondents working only in public schools, in comparison to those working only in language schools, more frequently agreed that taking part in professional development activities should be an individual decision ($U = 948.0$, $p = 0.047$).

There were also data collected on the particular areas in which teachers need professional development, presented in the graph 1.

The majority of the teachers indicated the following options: arousing students' motivation, working with a student having problems in learning, and creative attitude to teaching as the ones they need support in. Mastering the teacher's language skills, keeping discipline in classroom, formative assessment, cooperation with parents, and working with an academically able student were also frequently indicated by the respondents. Fewer than one fourth of the re-

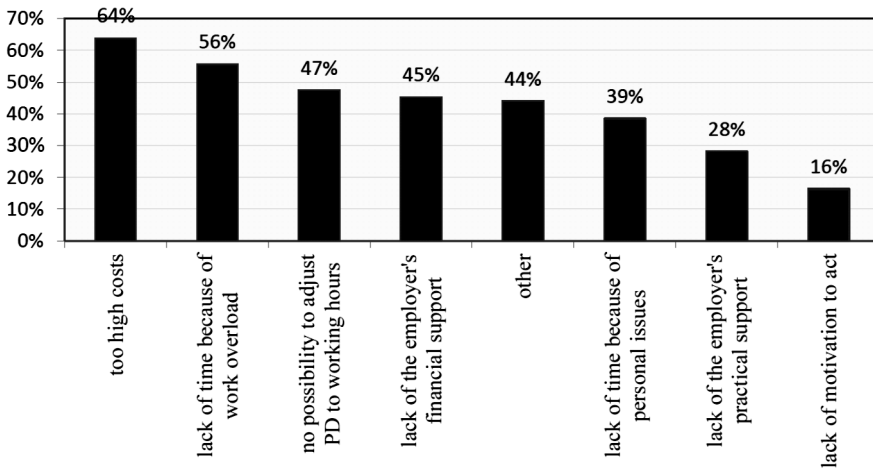


Graph 1. The respondents' needs for professional development (compiled by the Author)

spondents expressed a need for professional development in teaching language skills, giving feedback and error correction, as well as testing or lesson planning. What is interesting is that correlational analysis showed that those were younger teachers, who especially needed development when it comes to keeping discipline in the classroom (Spearman's $\rho = -0.306$, $p = 0.000$) and lesson planning (Spearman's $\rho = -0.177$, $p = 0.040$). Moreover, 6% of the teachers indicated other areas in which they needed professional development. They included working with a bilingual or autistic student, keeping teacher's motivation to teach, teaching big groups of students, technical language, employing new technologies in teaching, teaching outside the school classroom, and working on the teacher's good mental condition. Additionally, the more educated teachers more frequently expressed their need to develop their formative assessment skills (Spearman's $\rho = 0.179$, $p = 0.037$).

To investigate the subject area further, the teachers were asked about the reasons why they resigned from undertaking actions towards developing professionally. The graph 2 presents what they consider to be the obstacles to becoming a better teacher.

Among other reasons, the teachers indicated the subject area of the suggested forms of professional development as not relevant to the reality, not interesting subject area of the workshops, lack of high-quality workshops in the country, lack of knowledge about the events and workshops, little efficiency of

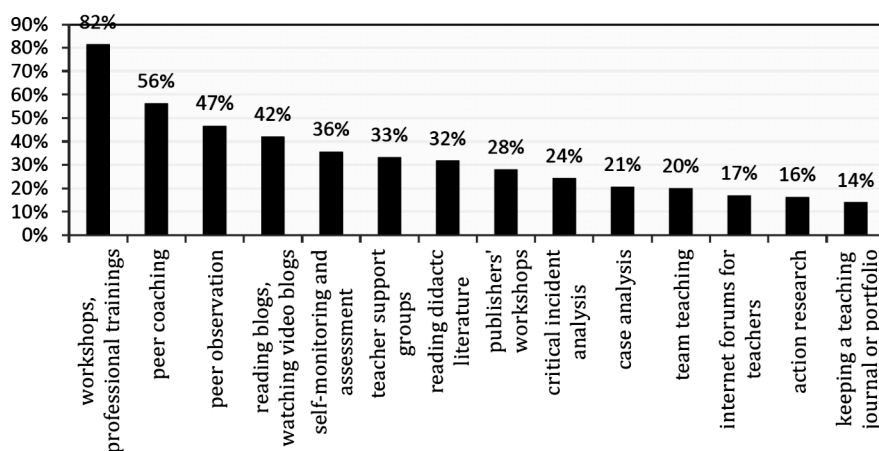


Graph 2. The respondents' reasons for resigning from professional development activities (compiled by the Author)

particular activities, or even no studies done which prove the teacher's professional development to influence students' success. There were correlations established between the length of teaching experience and the respondents' indicating the financial aspect and lack of motivation as factors preventing them from undertaking professional development activities. Too high costs of the services was an influential factor among the more experienced teachers (Spearman's $\rho = 0.326$, $p = 0.000$). Lack of motivation to undertake professional development activities was the leading reason for resignation among less experienced teachers (Spearman's $\rho = -0.199$, $p = 0.021$).

The respondents were asked to indicate which professional development activities would best address their needs. The results are presented in the graph 3.

Correlational analysis showed that more educated teachers were more willing to take part in teacher support groups (Spearman's $\rho = 0.198$, $p = 0.021$). Moreover, the more experienced teachers more often indicated reading didactic literature and listening to lectures on methodological issues (Spearman's $\rho = 0.183$, $p = 0.034$) or case analysis (Spearman's $\rho = 0.192$, $p = 0.026$) as effective ways in their own professional development. Also, these were younger teachers who were more likely to indicate peer observation (Spearman's $\rho = -0.243$, $p = 0.004$) and peer coaching (Spearman's $\rho = -0.169$, $p = 0.050$) as suitable for them in their own professional development.



Graph 3. The respondents' choice of effective forms of their professional development (compiled by the Author)

8. Discussion

The analysis of the research question reveals that the most prevalent needs indicated by the respondents concern the financial aspect. What is more, teachers from language schools more frequently expressed their need for constant development, unlike teachers from public schools, who claimed their needs become smaller as they gain more experience. The teachers working in language schools, then, seem to be more prone to thinking that they need constant knowledge updating and adjusting methods and strategies to the changing reality. On the other hand, this attitude among public school teachers shows that their needs and expectations are linked to their beliefs about teaching. Teaching is understood by them as a craft which can be mastered. Consequently, they express less interest in professional development practice along with gaining expertise, which reveals that they are not aware of the nature of professional development as a lifelong process. The fact that language school teachers expressed their need for constant professional development more frequently implies the problem prevailing in language schools' approach to educating teachers. My colleagues' and my personal experience reveal that language schools have a rather business or practical approach towards teacher training. Workshops that are organized in language schools focus predominantly on methodology to be used throughout term time. They do not aim at improving the teacher's general skills and competencies; teachers have freedom to take part in some workshops additionally, but they are not obliged to do so; whether they develop according to what they need depends on their will and motivation. Moreover, teachers working

in public schools expressed their need for more freedom by claiming that professional development should be an individual decision, which may stem from the fact that they have obligatory elements of professional development embedded in their profession, unlike teachers working in language schools. This shows they would like to have more freedom in terms of deciding on their personal professional development. By claiming that professional development should be an individual decision, the public school teachers may also indicate that they are overloaded with responsibilities connected with their profession, and additional obligatory practices are not likely to improve their professional and mental condition.

The respondents' choices of the areas in which they need professional development delineate the common problems or challenges teachers encounter in their career path. Motivating students nowadays is becoming more and more challenging. The needs indicated by younger teachers, for example keeping discipline in the classroom or lesson planning, show they lack the skills which accrue with experience. Moreover, the need to develop formative assessment skills, frequently selected by the more educated teachers, may indicate that in higher levels of education they become aware of the importance of constructive feedback and criticism which, if well-employed, may motivate students to achieve success.

When asked about the reasons for resigning from undertaking actions towards developing professionally, the less experienced teachers indicated lack of motivation much more often. One of the possible ways of interpreting the data is that more experienced teachers had a chance, throughout their teaching career, to observe the results and effects as a consequence of professional development. Less experienced teachers, on the other hand, may be overwhelmed in the first stages of their career with the classroom reality and challenges they encounter on their way. It may greatly depend on what phase they are going through at that particular moment in their career.

Looking at the respondents' choice of the effective forms of their professional development, we can see that more educated teachers were more willing to take part in teacher support groups. This may result from the fact that the teachers who work in public schools, where teacher support groups are often mandatory meetings, are required to graduate with a Master's Degree to get a job. On the other hand, teachers working in language schools are very often in the process of a Master's or even a Bachelor's Degree. Younger teachers' frequent choice of peer observation and peer coaching as effective forms of professional development implies that less experienced teachers are more aware of collaborative work as a means of gaining knowledge and expertise. They appreciate each other and the possibilities of sharing experiences and making

suggestions. More experienced teachers, on the other hand, seem to be more individualistic in their approach to professional development practices. The vast majority of the teachers agreed that workshops would be the most efficient activity in their own professional development practice.

9. Conclusion

Professional development is a very important concept not only among teachers, but in many other professions. It allows the mastering of skills, broadening of knowledge and, as a result, the ability to provide better services. In the teaching profession it may greatly influence students in terms of their motivation to learn and results in the learning process.

The first step towards improving the quality of teaching is to understand what it means to be an effective teacher and become aware of the teacher's central position in the educational process. The teacher is a person who administers the system of teaching-learning processes, considering students' needs and various factors within the educational and personal environment. The teacher takes on different roles which facilitate students' growth. These roles embrace controlling and organizing the teaching-learning process, assessing and supporting students, participating in activities, and being an informant, tutor and observer²¹. In all these activities it is crucial for the teacher to develop autonomous behaviours which make him/her more responsible for the processes taking place in education and going through decision-making in a more controlled way. Teacher autonomy may also be an impetus for the teacher to set goals and, consequently, undertake professional development activities. It also provokes thought and critical reflection, which is the paradigm of professional development.

Teachers' answers showed their positive attitude towards the idea of professional development. They are aware of different kinds of activities they consider effective, also providing their own ideas for professional development activities. They are also conscious of the obstacles which prevent them from undertaking particular forms of professional development. However, when it comes to professional development activities they considered effective in their own teaching practice, they rarely chose activities which engage reflective processes. Their answers reveal that they tend to think of teaching as it was presented by Wallace²² in the craft model, and they lack reflectivity in their thinking framework.

²¹ J. Harmer, *The Practice of English Language Teaching*, Harlow 2001.

²² M.J. Wallace, *Training Foreign Language Teachers: A Reflective Approach*, Cambridge 1991.

Teachers are not used to reflecting upon their practice, and that could be an issue when undertaking actions towards improving educational reality.

Further research on the topic should be done, as there are many areas within teachers' actual professional development which need more in-depth analysis. It would allow obtaining an actual image of teachers' professional development and their needs in this area. The research could include the analysis of the offer containing professional development activities for in-service English teachers, including offers proposed by public training centres and analysis of documents in both public and language schools. What is more, focus-group interviews or in-depth interviews, not only with public school teachers, but also with teachers in language schools, would allow an assessment of their needs and expectations.

Consequently, there are some implications for what could be done to facilitate teachers' professional development. Following Darling-Hammond, Hyler and Gardner²³ I would suggest that schools should regularly assess the employees' indications of areas they need support in and adjust forms of professional development to their desires. This way, professional development (especially in public schools) would become much more appropriate to reality and the constantly changing educational environment. Moreover, schools' schedules and the use of time should be reconsidered in order to make it possible for teachers to take part in different activities without the risk of being overloaded with responsibilities. It is also very important for language schools to investigate teachers' expectations and areas they need support in, and provide opportunities for attending workshops with more general subject areas, and not only based on the school's methodological approach.

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²³ D. Darling-Hammond, M.E. Hyler, M. Gardner, *Effective teacher professional development*, "Learning Policy Institute – Research Brief" 2017, [online], <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/teacher-prof-dev>, [access: 08.06.2019].

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