

## **Self-Directed Professional Development; A Hope For The Professional Needs Of Secondary School Teachers**

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### **Abstract**

Teachers' professional development is always an important area of investigation for researchers. Researchers are agreed that professional development opportunities enhance the effectiveness of teachers teaching and students' learning. This study intends to investigate the effectiveness of a new approach of professional development called self-directed professional development. This study was focused on the awareness, engagement and effectiveness of self-directed professional development approach at secondary school level. The participants of the study were included secondary schools' English teachers in district Swat. Through systematic random sampling techniques a total of 194 respondents were selected in the sample group. The respondents were investigated through a likert scale questionnaire and the collected data were analysed through percentage, mean, standards deviation and chi square tests. The results revealed that secondary school teachers are not aware about the online available resources, nature of self-directed professional development but they were informally engaged in self-directed professional development practice and all accepted the effectiveness of this approach for the professional development of teachers. Based on the results it was recommended that concern authorities may work on teachers' capacity building, develop separate online portals for the professional development of teachers.

**Keywords:** Professional development; Teachers' competence, Awareness, Engagement, effectiveness, self-directed learning

### **Study Background**

Like all developing countries on the globe, Pakistan is also facing financial crunches (Malik, Khan, Chofreh, Goni, Klemeš, & Alotaibi, 2019). These financial crunches have significant impacts on the quality of education, teaching and learning (Arif, Liaqat, & Afzal, 2019). Furthermore, with the emergence of educational competitions, demands, and uncertain future in the academia and comparison of local, regional and national educational systems with international standards have bounded the governments throughout the world to work for the sustainable development of education along with other aspect of collective national life. Meeting national and international standards, satisfying local demands and the requirements of the stakeholders have put more responsibilities on teachers' shoulders, that required more opportunities of in-service learning to be up-dated with the research-oriented practices and techniques to prepare the future generation (students) to perform their diverse roles in future societies (Shaheen, Ahmad & Shah, 2018).

Teachers as agent of change has important role in building of the society. They are inculcating the state / nation's vision in students which is the future of nation. Teachers' competences in teaching and their own subject enable them to perform the duties effectively (Hussain, Alamzeb, & Niqab, 2018). Further, they are also required to up-date themselves through in-service professional development trainings and workshops for their jobs. Loucks-Horsley, Stiles, Mundry, Love, and Hewson (2009) have define teachers' professional development as an activity that enhance teachers' professional knowledge, skills, expertise and teaching behavior. The enhancement of teachers' knowledge, skills and teaching behavior has close correlation with teachers' teaching and students' learning. Therefore, teachers are supposed to refresh their knowledge about teaching, learning, assessment, curriculum, learners' psychology and educational standards during their pre-service education (Gaumer Erickson, Noonan, Brussow, & Supon Carter, 2017). But the corporate nature of the current world it is impossible for a professional (teacher) to remains effective in his/her field till the time to embrace and adopt the required changes, that demands for in-service training, and professional development opportunities (Bayar, 2014).

There are different modules adopted by state, provincial, regional, local government and independent schools systems for the professional development of teachers to achieve the targets of up-dating teachers' knowledge, skills and teaching behavior. All these models are considered effective models for the professional development of teachers from or another perspective (Kuijpers, Houtveen, & Wubbels, 2010). But it is difficult to understand what are the impacts of these models on Teachers professional development and students' academic performances?. As every model of professional development target a specific domain of teachers' professional live. Some models are effective for teaching techniques, but weak in developing assessment, classroom management, guidance and critical skills of teachers and vice versa (Heller, Daehler, Wong, Shinohara, & Miratrix, 2012).

Therefore, it is important to provide maximum opportunities of professional development to teachers to regularly, develop different aspect of their professional life. However, this will required a huge amount of money, time and energy which is far behind the reality, that government would be able to conduct such lengthy training programs and bear the financial, human and physical resources on it (Opperman, Liebig, Bowling, Johnson, & Harper, 2016). Alternatively, in Pakistan government has adopted different mechanisms for teachers, professional development including, mentoring, professional societies, joint ventures with the support of US Aids, Germany and British council, trainings conducted by Provincial Institutes of Teacher Education, Regional Institutes of Teacher Education and Elementary colleges etc but the results were not that much convincing (Desimone, & Pak, 2017). There may be various reasons for that these professional development programs were launched and stopped but the most common factors included; low motivation, no cascading mechanism, lack of financial resources, lack of sustainability and required facilities.

All these demands, challenges and international standards have been intensified with the advent of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) which has reduce the distance among the nations of the world and bring them at a single click through internet on smart phone and computers. As ICT has the role in enhancing the quality standards, international practices, accreditations which demands for continues professional development of teachers to inline their professional duties with recommended professional standards (Cosgun, & Savaş, 2019). It also provides the opportunity of professional development to teachers through different educational websites, academic forums, learning channels, webinars and social media.

Furthermore, a new concept in the area of professional development is self-directed professional development. This model was launched against the traditional models of professional development that focused on top-down approach for teachers. These models have been criticized for low teachers' engagement, low motivation and irrelevant materials. On the contrary self-directed professional development model focus on teachers' engagement, identifying available opportunities and collaborative learning for teachers (Liu, Miller, & Jahng, 2016). Furthermore, self-directed learning concentrates on teachers' initiatives on their identified practicing problems. It allows the teachers to decide the nature of learning, and method of desired learning. Furthermore, self-directed professional development doesn't mean that all learning in self-directed professional development will be done by the individual teacher himself-herself, but the individual will collaborate with different experts, and they will ask for help from different sources, persons (Desimone, & Pak, 2017)..

Likewise, Minott (2010) viewed that self-directed professional development is a choice model that meet the individual needs effectively. This model supports individual teacher's needs and provides him/her the opportunity to learn according to the requirements, pace, time and even choice. After the introduction of learning technologies new learning opportunities have been explored for the professional development of teachers. According to Harper, and Milman (2016) there are numerous online learning opportunities, such as social media forums, google apps, educational

sites, webinars and much more, that support the self-directed learning of professionals. These enable the professionals to interact, discuss their professional issues, and come up with amicable solutions. Furthermore, these interactions also enhance professional engagement in field challenges, issues and leads towards the sustainable solutions at a low cost.

The effectiveness of self-directed professional development model has been accepted by different researchers and experts. Mushayikwa, and Lubben (2009) believed that it's the best approach in current scenarios that supports teachers in enhancing their teaching competence. Likewise, Weir (2017) viewed that elementary teachers have positive views about the effectiveness of self-directed professional development. There are further evidences of its effectiveness in the available literature and this model of professional development also reduces the financial burden on institutions. Therefore, this paper intends to investigate secondary school teachers' awareness, engagement and effectiveness of self-directed professional development model for teachers' professional development.

### **Research objectives**

This study investigated the following research targets;

1. To find out secondary school's teachers awareness about self-directed professional development model
2. To investigate teachers' engagement in self-directed professional development ventures
3. To discover the effectiveness of self-directed professional development model in teachers' professional competence

### **Research questions**

The researchers have made efforts to answer the following research questions based on the empirical data collected from the participants of this study;

1. What is the awareness level of secondary school teachers on self-directed professional development model?
2. What types of forums are used by secondary school teachers for their professional development?
3. What are perceptions of secondary school teachers about the effectiveness of self-directed professional development model in the enhancement of their professional competence?

### **Significance of the study**

The findings of this study might be beneficial for teachers, educational leaders, policy makers, school owners and to overall society, as the results may provide them the awareness about this new model of self-directed professional development, available resources and opportunities for the professional development of teachers at secondary level. Furthermore, the findings may

provide an insight to the educational leaders and policy makers to further strengthened the self-directed professional development ventures.

They study might also be significant for the teachers community as most of the teachers have very low probability to attend professional trainings for enhancing their professional competence. Likewise, the policy maker can also take benefit from the findings to design policies related to self-directed professional development programs for teachers, they may also utilize the results to proposed online ventures and plat forums for teachers where they may discuss their professional problems and they may provide support and guidance. In nutshell this study might be important to all the stakeholders of teaching learning process throughout the education system in the country.

### **Study delimitations**

Due to time and resources restraints this study was delimited to the teachers of secondary schools teaching English as a subject at secondary level in government schools of district Swat.

### **Research methodology**

This quantitative descriptive study was carried to investigate secondary school teachers' understanding, engagement and effectiveness on self-directed professional development model. The participants of this study include, the teachers of secondary schools in district Swat, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. Furthermore, teachers in this population for the study were those who are actively involved in the teaching of English to secondary level students.

There are seven tehsils in district Swat with total of 119 government secondary schools where 78 for boys and 41 for girls were specified. There were total 388 English teachers in district Swat (EMIS, 2018). The researchers adopted systematic random sampling techniques to select a representative sample of the study follow Raosoft sample size calculator, the sample size for this study was comprised on 194 participants of the study (Raosoft Sample size calculator).

Furthermore, the data were collected through a likert scale questionnaire with five options from strongly agreed to strongly disagreed from the sample group. The questionnaire was pilot tested before the final administration for data collection on 35 participants who were not the part of the sample group. The reliability co-efficient  $\alpha = .849$ , that revealed that the questionnaire has enough reliability coefficient value for data collection. Similarly, the content validity of the instrument was measured through expert opinion from three PhD Doctors of Centre for Education and Staff Training, university of Swat. After the finalization of the questionnaire for final data collection, the researchers collected the data and were analysed through descriptive and inferential statistics.

### **Results and discussions**

After data collection data normality test was carried out to measure the normal distribution of data set. The skewness was .391 and the kurtosis was -.721 which was with in  $\pm 1$ , that revealed that the collected data was normally distributed.

Table 1. Experience, Qualification and gender of the sample group

Experience	Frequency	Percent	Qualification	Frequency	Percent	Gender	Frequency	Percent
Less than 5 years	21	10.82	Master & B.Ed	99	51.03	Male	131	65.52
6 to 10 years	128	65.97	Master With Med	86	44.32	Female	63	32.47
11 and above	45	23.19	Master with MPhil	09	04.63			

The table explains the demographic information of the study participants. There were 64.97% respondents having 6 to 100 years of teaching experience while teaching English at secondary level and 23.19% are teaching for more than 11 years that reflects the majority of the study sample have enough teaching experience in the teaching of English. Furthermore, huge majority of 51% have done masters with professional qualification of B.Ed and 44.32% have Master along with B.Ed and M.Ed academic and professional qualification. Similarly, majority of the sample group belongs to the male participants which constitute 65.52% of the sample group while 32.47% were female participants. The demographic information showed that the sample group was a true representative for the population.

Table 2. Teachers' awareness level of self-directed professional development

Statements	Mean	SD	df	$\chi^2$	Sig
Aware of the nature of self-directed SPD Model	1.49	.98720			
Aware of ICT support for SPD for teachers	1.31	.53419			
Aware of relevant educational resources	2.66	.98110			
Aware of LMS/educational channels	3.12	.79112	04	2.07	.211
Aware of social media usage for SPD	3.87	1.7921			
Aware of free available resources for SPD	3.92	1.8720			
Aware of online webinars/workshop of my subject	3.51	1.0276			

Table 3 reveals teachers awareness about self-directed professional development model/approach. The mean scores 1.49 and 1.31, SD .9872 and .53419 reflected that the participants of the study were not aware of the nature and ICT related support for self-directed professional development. Furthermore, the mean scores 2.66 and 3.12 SD .9811 and .79112 shows that the participants of the study were unclear about relevant educational resources and LMS/educational channels.

On the other hand the participants were found aware about social media use, free available educational resources and webinars and workshops conducted in their field of English teaching as shown by the mean scores 3.87, 3.92 and 3.51, SD 1.7921, 1.8720 and 1.0276. The chi square value 2.07 was no significant at .211 which is higher than Sig value of .05. The results reflected

that most of the participants are not aware about the self-directed professional development approach for the professional development of teachers at school level.

These results were in contrast to the results of Weir (2017) who concluded that teachers were aware about the self-directed professional development programs, opportunities and available support for enhancing their professional competence. Similarly, these results were also not in favor of the results of Gaumer Erickson, Noonan, Brussow, and Supon Carter (2017) who concluded that teachers do take benefit form ICT related resources in Turkey. Teachers were aware of self-directed professional learning; they were the part of different learning communities. Furthermore, they adopted various formal and informal mechanisms for their professional learning.

Table 3. Teachers' engagement level in self-directed professional development approach

Statements	Mean	SD	df	$\chi^2$	Sig
Member of professional groups on social media	3.78	.99311			
Join research webinars on linguistics/literature	1.23	1.6242			
Collaboration with field experts and organizations	2.09	1.0129			
Integrate new concepts in teaching of English	3.55	.97881	04	7.93	.047
Adopts reflective practices for personal development	2.11	1.0023			
Prioritize professional goals through self-management	3.72	.98561			
Part of collegial learning networks nationally	4.03	.89915			

Table 3 shows secondary school teachers' engagement in self-directed professional programs. The mean scores of participants 1.23, 2.09 and 2.11 with SD 1.6242, 1.01129 and 1.0023 showed that they were not actively participating in webinar on linguistics and literature, they have low collaborations with field experts and relevant organizations and most of them were following traditional professional development approaches instead of reflective and modern practices.

They results shows that secondary school teachers have membership and active participation on different social media groups. The participants were agreed that they learn from these from these social media groups as shown by the mean score 3.78 with SD .99311. Similarly, the mean scores 3.55, 3.72 and 4.03 with SD .97881, .98561 and .89915 showed that the participants integrates new concept in teaching of English while teaching, they have prioritized professional goals for their professional development and have good learning networks following collegial plate forums. Furthermore the chi square value 7.93 was significant at .047 that shows that the current level of respondents' engagement is significant.

The results of this study are in accordance with Mushayikwa, and Lubben (2009) findings that teachers are always engage at different plate forums where they discuss the professional issues, the criticize the contents and policy and provide creative feedback on different perspectives of teaching learning process. These engagements are sometimes formal but mostly through informal means they are participating on social media forums. Furthermore, the results were also in

compliance to the findings of Penuel, Sun, Frank, and Gallagher (2012) as their results showed that teachers through collaborative approaches, collegiality and self-management enhance their professional competence. Similarly, professional growth has been evident as an important and motivational factor responsible for teachers' professional development in different studies (Morrow, 2010; Bayar, 2014 and Liu, Miller, & Jahng, 2016).

Table 4. Effectiveness of self-directed professional development approach

Statements	Mean	SD	df	$\chi^2$	Sig
SDP approach satisfy teachers professional needs	4.33	.76651			
SDP is convenient in term of time/ resources	4.29	.78653			
SDP increase professional motivational of teachers	4.21	.89261			
SDP ventures address teachers professional issues	3.99	.99871	04	78.91	.000
SDP is effective for new learning opportunities	3.57	.98711			
SDP support professional learning of teachers	4.13	.71982			
SDP enhance teachers engagement in learning activities	4.11	.76541			

Table 4 exhibits the perceptions of study sample about the effectiveness of self-directed professional development model/approach. The participants were agreed with all the statements that self-directed professional development is effective for the professional development and competence of teachers at secondary school level. Furthermore, according to participants' perceptions this approach of professional development is more effective than the traditional model as shown by the chi square value of 78.91 which is significant at .000.

These results were in accordance to the results of Cosgun, and Savaş (2019) as they concluded that self-directed professional development in ICT tools are effective for teachers in the personal learning and they can also take support from this online resources in supporting their teaching in classroom. Similarly, the Harper, and Milman (2016) have concluded that educational technologies one side challenges the traditional teaching practices but on the other it has further improved the quality of teachers' teaching and students' learning.

## Conclusions

The results its discussions of the current study enabled the researchers to concluded that professional development is an important aspect of teachers' professional life. It has positive impact on teachers' teaching and ultimately contributes into students' academic achievement. Furthermore, teachers were aware about the traditional top-down models of professional development but they were not satisfied from those trainings and workshops as they considered that those programs don't meet their needs.



Furthermore, the participants of the study were not aware about the nature, tools, resources and practices of self-directed professional development. This was new for them, yet they were to some extent aware of some aspect of SPD. Majority of the respondents were not aware about the educational channels available free of cost, and other web-based resources significant for their professional development.

Secondary school teachers were found engaged on social media where they discuss their professional issues. They were involved in personalized learning formally and informally, but still there was space for further improvement. The resources were not active in webinars and online workshops and training in linguistics and literature teaching.

On the effectiveness of this new approach for teachers' professional development the participants of the study appreciated it as they were agreed that this model will satisfy their individual needs, classroom challenges that they face. Furthermore, this model is effective as teachers can benefit from it according to their pace and time.

### **Recommendations**

The researchers recommended that the educational ministry may make arrangement of facilities required to achieve the benefits of SDP. Further, it is recommended that a capacity building workshop may be arranged for teachers to make them aware about the free resources for their professional development.

It was also recommended that like sabaq foundation, teacher-focused forums may be development which concentrates on the instructional, assessment and learning psychology sciences for teachers. Furthermore, it may also provide self-learning modules for teachers to refresh their knowledge and skills.

At provincial and district level there must be official interactive groups on social media where the concern heads may also be the member, so that they could be aware about the ground reality and work for the betterment of teachers professional needs.

Future researchers are recommended to work on self-directed professional development at university level that how university teachers' professional needs may be satisfied. Covid-19 taught us that ICT tools can support us in any situation for which the professional development of teachers at all level is indispensable.

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