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## Teachers' Perspectives on Continuing Professional Development

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### Authors' contributions

*This work was carried out in collaboration between all authors. Author RYK designed the study, formed the methodology part of the research, coordinated the research team and supervised the work. Authors ADD and FT collected data from the teachers. Author ADD also, managed the analysis of the research. Authors DB and FT did the literature research, drafted parts of the manuscript, developed the first version of the study. Author FT managed the results and conclusion of the study. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.*

### Article Information

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### ABSTRACT

**Aims:** A school in which professional learning occurs among teachers is beneficial to both teachers and students. Professional learning is something teachers do, as they learn and share information and materials, and strive to improve student learning outcomes. Teachers are engaged in collaborative learning process through PL in order to develop their teaching skills and knowledge. Teacher collaboration has been acknowledged as critical in the teacher learning literature, but PL has been studied in a small number of research articles.

**Research Design:** This paper explores how teachers' PL of planned or unplanned events is viewed and experienced within school.

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**Methodology:** To research teachers' social interactions, behaviors and views ethnographic approach was adopted as a qualitative method. For data collection semi-structured interview form is used.

**Results:** The findings from this research would show to what extent teachers' views on how PL could be effective to enhance their teaching skills and whether they could identify basic components of PL within their own schools.

*Keywords: Professional learning; professional development; teacher education.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 What is Professional Development?

The importance of improving schools, quality of lessons and success of teachers and students has led to head attention to professional development as a way to achieve these goals. Thus teachers' continuing professional development (PD) has become a major focus within the systematic educational reform and school improvement literatures because of the belief that student learning and success are in large part due to the effectiveness of teachers [1,2]. Professional development is seen as an essential mechanism to enhance teachers' content knowledge, improve their classroom practices and enhance learning outcomes [2,3].

Research has shown that professional development is most effective when it is long-term, collaborative, and school-based. It should focus on the learning of all students, be linked to teachers' daily school practices, and connected to teachers' prior knowledge as well as to the curriculum content and guidelines. Adjusting the professional development programme to participants' diversity of behaviors and beliefs increases its effectiveness [4-6].

Teachers can learn through participation in various courses in school when they reflect on their own teaching and in observation of and reflection on others' teaching in co-operation with colleagues. Learning can occur in planned reflection meetings between teachers, or teachers can learn from unplanned conversations with other colleagues before or after teaching, or in parent-teacher meetings. Thus, learning may occur in various ways, both formally and informally [7].

Professional development is simply considered as participation to professional development programmes that focus on teacher learning in and from practice [5,7]. This participation results

in continuing changes in teaching practices, the acquisition of new knowledge, understandings, skills and strategies that enhance and build upon our current knowledge [5,7,8].

According to a research [8] our goals for professional development in education may include

- Advancing students' learning
- Exploring options and gaining new perspectives and ideas
- Learning new methods or approaches for advancing our teaching
- Acquiring knowledge and skills that transfer to reformed curriculum
- Acquiring knowledge and skills that help us independently carry out new approaches.

### 1.2 What is Professional Learning?

The concept of teacher professional learning (PL) has a complex structure that we should bring together. Multiple, fragmented strands of literature from teacher professional development, teaching and learning, organizational learning, and teacher change have tended to remain separate [9].

Some researchers [10] defined PL, with its specific characteristics, as: "PL is a style of direct interaction between at least two co-equal parties voluntarily engaged in shared decision making as they work toward a common goal" (p. 5).

More specifically, a group of researchers [10] identified six characteristics of PL as;

- 1) PL is voluntary. Teachers may be required to work in close proximity but they cannot be "made" to collaborate. Teachers must make a personal choice to work collaboratively.
- 2) PL is based on parity or equality. Teachers who learn professionally must believe that everyone's voice must be heard and that all ideas/opinions are valued. The amount

of what individual teachers may offer in the PL process may differ, but teachers recognize that what they offer is essential to the PL process.

- 3) PL requires shared goals. Teachers will conduct PL process when they have a common goal. If they are working with poorly defined goals, it can create miscommunication and frustration rather than learning.
- 4) Teachers may share responsibility for key decisions. They may divide up the duties and responsibilities during PL, but each teacher's effort and offerings carry the same weight in the PL process.
- 5) Teachers share accountability for results and outcomes. This occurs through shared responsibility and shared decision making processes.
- 6) Teachers who are part of a PL process share resources. Everyone is responsible for sharing resources. This increases commitment and reinforces each teacher's value in the process.

Reportedly, teachers' PL has been credited with fostering reflectiveness, triggering new perspectives in fellow collaborators, increasing transferability of knowledge and providing social support [8].

All of these characteristics are essential in the PL process. They must occur as part of the day to day practice of teachers, rather than in isolation or occurring intermittently. Team learning is the coursework that nobody offers. It is the ability to think and learn together [11]. PL requires deep conversations and complex strategies for learning together. It does not occur without resources, hard work and the persistence of the team to stay focused on a shared goal.

A research reported that PL does not happen by chance. It must be structured, taught and learned. A collection of "superstar" teachers working in isolation does not produce the same results as a group of interdependent colleagues who have the same focus and share and develop professional practices together [12].

PL implies that the teachers who are involved share responsibility and authority for making decisions about their common practices. Teacher PL is necessary in an era of continuous change and improvement, since it is seen as an opportunity for involving many individuals to solve the complex educational problems of

modern times. A wider range of demands can be addressed by using a collaborative approach than by individual, isolated efforts [13].

Within schools, teacher PL is often referred to as workplace learning. Traditionally, formal professional development occurs when educational innovations are introduced to teachers through systems of workshops, presentations or projects. Conversely, informal learning occurs in interactions among teachers and their reflections upon their practice, sometimes planned and often happened. It is obvious that teacher learning occurs not only in formal learning environment but also in all the fields in which the teacher participates: namely the classroom, the community of teachers, and the school environment [5].

### **1.3 Benefits of Teachers' Professional Learning**

Numerous benefits arising from PL of teachers have been reported as evidence of the need for building a more effective learning environments among teachers. The most significant benefits of PL among teaching staff is an improvement in teacher professional development [14,15] and teacher professionalism [16,17]. Findings have shown that teachers report learning from colleagues as a powerful learning environment [18,19]. While learning, teachers can exchange knowledge, ideas, attitudes or experiences; develop and discuss new materials, receive feedback from colleagues, and give each other moral support [20-22].

PL has been shown to yield improved teacher performance and higher teacher satisfaction [23-29]. Teachers' PL can also enhance teacher confidence and commitment [30]. If schools are to increase their effectiveness and meet the needs of all learners, it is necessary for teachers to increase their capacity to work together in collaborative teams [19].

A research report lists eleven benefits teachers gain through PL: moral support; increased efficiency; improved effectiveness; reduced overload; synchronized time perspectives between teachers and administrators (i.e., shared and realistic expectations about timeframes for change and implementation); situated certainty of collective professional wisdom; political assertiveness; increased capacity for reflection; organizational

responsiveness; opportunities to learn; and continuous learning [31].

Moreover, researchers generally agreed that teacher PL should ultimately lead to school quality and organizational effectiveness [19,32] and improvement in students' behaviour, attitude, learning and achievement [33,12,34,35].

If teachers are to sustain engagement with the challenges involved in promoting student centered teaching approaches in classrooms, they need to continue learning, and to be supported to do so by their schools. Moreover, the advantages brought about by PL for both students, teachers, organizations should lead to many studies on PL. Unfortunately, there are few studies reported in the literature in Turkey. Therefore, this article addresses the research question, 'What are the perspectives and experiences of teachers on PL in Turkey?'

#### **1.4 Challenging Learning Environments in Turkey's Schools**

Turkey's 15-year-olds achieve lower-than-average scores in the PISA 2009 reading assessment (464 mean score compared to the OECD average of 493). Their performance in both mathematics and science is also below the OECD average in PISA 2009, but Turkey is among the three countries with the largest performance improvement in PISA assessments of mathematics (between 2003 and 2009) and science (between 2006 and 2009). The impact of socio-economic status on students' reading performance (19%) is higher than the OECD average of 14% [1].

According to an OECD report raising the achievement in Turkey's primary schools (32 108 in 2012) and secondary schools is linked to developing the conditions for schools, their school leaders and teachers to succeed [36]. Fifteen-year-old students have a positive view of their relationship with teachers and of their learning environment. Nevertheless, school principals reported on PISA 2009 that teacher and student behaviour hindered learning to a greater extent than the OECD average. On the 2008 OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS), teachers also reported that the disciplinary climate was rather negative. Turkey's urban schools face an influx of large families from rural areas as well as above-average class sizes, double-shift schools and lack of resources, while key challenges facing rural areas include

under populated schools, lower academic performance, teacher turnover and low participation of girls in education [37].

The OECD Education Policy Outlook Report also interpreted that school principals tend to follow a style of administrative rather than pedagogical leadership, reporting on TALIS 2008 that they performed primarily tasks related to budget and its allocation. Principals are recruited on the basis of an oral exam, as well as being appointed by provincial directors. Principals of specialised schools might require experience in that particular type of education. Also on TALIS 2008, more school principals than the OECD average reported that a lack of qualified teachers, support, personnel and materials hindered instruction at their schools. With numerous reforms and challenges in schools, school leaders should have access to quality initial training and on-going support to develop their effectiveness, not only as administrative leaders, but also as pedagogical leaders to support school improvement [37].

On TALIS 2008, teachers in Turkey reported average levels of self-efficacy, but below-average job satisfaction. Teachers can begin their teacher training in specific secondary high schools. They must have a bachelor's degree from an accredited programme, be under 40 years old, and pass the Public Staff Selection Exam. They are placed in schools by the MoNE based on their exam scores and, to some extent, on their interests. In 2013, the teacher candidate test has been revised to include assessments on subject-specific knowledge [36]. TALIS results indicate that 18% of teachers in Turkey were in their first two years of teaching in 2008 (more than double the OECD average). In addition, beginning teachers tend to be assigned to disadvantaged areas, which can further hinder capacity in these schools. About 70% of school principals reported that a mentoring programme exists for first-year teachers and that in-service training is defined and planned by both the central government's Directorate General for Teacher Training and Improvement and the local government [37].

However, the proportion of teachers reporting participation in professional development was below the OECD average. From 2000 to 2010, teachers' salaries more than doubled in primary and upper secondary education, but salaries in 2010 were still below the OECD average (by

more than 15% for starting salaries and by 40% or more for salaries at the top of the scale) [36].

## 2. METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Purpose of Research

In order to describe and analyze opinions and experiences of teachers about PL, this research examined perceptions about how well PL in schools organize changes to reach expected results. This research adopted descriptive case study approach to provide deeper insights into teacher PL both in formal and informal areas by describing and analyzing teachers' opinions and experiences from the secondary schools in Erzurum. This descriptive case-study design guided by interpretive epistemology [38] was employed to explore the meaning that the participants gave to their professional learning experiences as they developed their reflective skills within the organizational context of a professional learning community. A researcher [39] notes that descriptive case studies are most appropriate when the research seeks to provide an in-depth explanation of how a phenomenon is experienced. In this research, the phenomenon was the school-based implementation of the professional learning model and the research focus was on how this is experienced by principals, teachers and students. In this case study research, semi-structured interviews were implemented in order to find out the opinion of teachers and their engagement in learning discourse.

The research focused on activities and practices of PL to identify how discussions, made among the teachers about solving problems in teaching and the practices of the departments, was improving the teachers' learning. Social structures within school systems were leading to teachers' PL where the teachers had opportunity to improve their own teaching skills. The descriptive case study approach has been used to examine the teachers' PL approaches, expectations and their challenges in experiencing PL.

### 2.2 Research Questions

To explore PL perceptions a qualitative research approach was selected. In this research 'factual' or 'descriptive' design was used since it could highlight facts or describe situations or events [40]. The research has been designed to examine teachers' views on how PL could be effective in enhancing their teaching skills and

whether they could identify basic components of PL within their own schools.

All data were collected in the participants' natural setting, taking into consideration the context and the social environment within which participants' interaction and professional learning experiences were taking place.

This article specifically addresses the following research questions:

- 1) What kind of activities do teachers take part in order to foster PL?
- 2) When do teachers practice PL?
- 3) How does PL improve professional development?
- 4) What do teachers expect from PL?
- 5) What are the views of teachers on the necessity of PL settings?

### 2.3 Sample

The interview group of the research consisted of 20 subject teachers working at 5 different secondary schools. The criteria used for selection were the willingness of teachers to be interviewed and the different socio-economic backgrounds of schools from Erzurum, a province in Turkey.

At each school, semi-structured interviews were conducted with four teachers. The teachers who were invited to be interviewed were selected on the principal's recommendation as being willing to participate. The interviews were held in the participants' schools. All of the teachers were interviewed individually. Interviews with the teachers explored modes of implementation and perceptions of PL supported in the school culture.

The data collection instrument, developed by the authors, was a semi-structured interview form. It listed 5 questions and required participants to verbally respond to each section. During the interview the authors recorded the participants' response and they also helped the participants to give deeper insights regarding each question.

### 2.4 Findings

Data gathered from 20 teachers working in 5 schools with different socio-economic levels by semi-structured interview as a qualitative research technique were separated into 5 themes which are the preferred activities for

professional development: Contexts where PL is practiced, how PL improves professional development, teachers' expectations and recommendations on PL, and teachers' views on the necessity of forming learning settings.

Abbreviations used are CHS for Cumhuriyet High School, AHS for Anatolian High School, ARVHS for Anatolian Religious Vocational High School, VHS for Vocational High School and SSHS for Social Sciences High School.

#### **2.4.1 Preferred activities for professional development**

It is found that 80% of the teachers preferred individual learning to develop professionalism. They reflected on the processes that they individually engage in. Some of them stated that they pursue scientific publication related to their field, others said that they study from source books, read books related to education and to their field of specialty. Also, some of them stated they took part in self-development and in-service courses and projects. Moreover, some of the teachers have post graduate degrees. One of the teachers has travelled to see the education systems of different countries. Another teacher collaborated with his wife in writing a book related to his subject area, Biology. One other teacher has participated in social clubs via the Internet.

Some quotations from the statements of teachers are as follows:

“There are courses, activities and social responsibility projects I participated individually. Also I took part in in-service courses (ARVHS 3).”

“I took part in about 15-20 in-service courses, private courses related to my subject area and also self development courses and seminars such as NLP (AHS 2).”

“Firstly, I have studied in order to develop myself and I prepared my lessons with the aid of scientific books. I have been using the Internet, CD and computers for 5 years. Moreover, I took a computer course and courses organized for projects (AHS 4).”

“I attended seminars which are organized by the MEB (Ministry of National Education). Also, I took part in seminars and MEOIT project (Movement of Enhancing Opportunities and Improving

Technology) for my pedagogic development (SSHS 1).”

Participants expressed that they had been trying to develop themselves professionally. They referred to their individual learning as mainly by reading books, taking part in in-service courses and social groups during this process.

Despite a consensus on the characteristics of professional development that lead to teacher learning and change [41], we are still unable to predict teacher learning based on these characteristics. In the context of current research on professional development and teacher learning, misunderstanding the nature of teacher learning by underplaying the complexity of the problem leads to focus on the micro context (individual teachers or individual activities or programmes) to the exclusion of influences from institutional and macro (school system) contexts [42].

The impact of teachers' professional development on pupil learning and achievement has been examined. Additionally, empirical research findings have served to heighten the potential efficacy of coaching and mentoring as professional development tool [43].

#### **2.4.2 Contexts where PL is practiced**

When teachers were asked, ‘When do teachers practice PL?’ they stated that they got help from their colleagues in different areas in order to solve problems.

##### *2.4.2.1 Having a problem related to field*

Most of the teachers pointed out they are sharing knowledge on field of expertise with both subject teachers and other teachers. One of the veteran teachers shared that students from vocational schools were not so interested in his/her branch (foreign language), so has not yet attempted self-development and cooperation with colleagues. Another teacher shared that learning from colleagues was hard if you are the only teacher in your field. And one of the teachers expressed that they have been learning what progress has been made in the curriculum by the help of new teachers. Direct quotations of some teachers:

“When a teacher from different subject area asks a question related to our subject, we try to help them. When we cannot solve a problem or forget a topic, we consult our fellow colleagues.

Particularly when some topics are simplified or complicated in the curriculum, we get help (ARVHS 2).”

“In time, some information can be forgotten. If I come across such a situation, I would consult my colleagues (CHS 1).”

“We help each other with minor subjects such as ‘geographic location’ in the subject of ‘History’ (CHS 3).”

A researcher [44] discussed the ways to show more evidence that teachers acquired specific knowledge and skills them accurately, additional assessment methods should be used. One way to do this is a demonstration in which a teacher teaches a lesson involving the targeted knowledge to a group of teachers.

#### *2.4.2.2 Having a problem related to pedagogical proficiency*

Sixty five percent of the teachers expressed that they help each other or get help from the counseling service when they experienced a problem related to discipline. However, some of the teachers stated that they did not ask for help about pedagogical proficiency according to their experiences. The following statements are directly quoted from the interviews.

“We do not share scientific information, but we share our experiences. We try to help new teachers by sharing with them what we did 10 years ago in a similar situation (ARVHS 1).”

“When we come across a different profile of student or a different event, we shared our experiences on the issue. This way, we gain foresight and can improve the way in which we address such issues. (ARVHS 2).”

“Since I have had 20 years of teaching experience, I do not share anything in terms of pedagogical profession (VHS).”

One of the factors substantiating the performance of effective teachers is their rich pedagogical knowledge that is built up over time and experience. Pedagogical knowledge is unique to each teacher and only gained through teaching practice. It is pointed out that expert teachers are not born with pedagogical knowledge and it is a lengthy process for student teachers and new teachers to acquire the skills

and knowledge needed to become expert teachers in their fields [45].

Pedagogical knowledge is more critical than knowledge of subject matter that required for effective teaching. It relates our perspective to teacher behaviour in the classroom that can maximise student learning outcomes. Identifying specific practices which are fundamental to supporting student learning is important and it is at the heart of building an effective professional training system for teachers’ development [46].

#### *2.4.2.3 Having a problem related to general knowledge*

While 75% of the teachers stated that they would share with colleagues what they learn about the latest events via the Internet and media, 45% stated that they share information they gathered from books. Direct quotations from teachers are as follows:

“I learn interesting and useful information related to their specific field from my colleagues. I thought I got cultured especially by means of information that vocational teachers shared (ARVHS 2).”

“We interpreted our information gathered via media and newspaper. We usually talk about up-to-date events (AHS 3).”

“I read books a lot. My fellows read, too. We share information we read with each other during our free times (AHS 4).”

Teachers have stated that in order to overcome problems in various areas of pedagogical proficiency and general culture, they practiced PL. Sharing knowledge in their field and in general culture was easier than knowledge in pedagogical proficiency.

#### **2.4.3 How PL improves professional development**

Teachers stated that learning from other subject teachers encouraged them professionally. This learning opportunity increased teachers’ content knowledge, both in their own and other professional areas, improved empathy among teachers, developed their commitment and sympathy to their profession, expanded their vision, made them feel more comfortable in their professional setting. It also allowed teachers to get to know each other better, helped them gain

alternative perspectives in addressing problems and let them experience social and cultural diversity. Additionally, it also helped them recognize their weaknesses and strengths, and ensured harmony within the school. Only one of the teachers asserted that there has been no gain from other teachers in terms of professional development. Quotations from teachers are as follows:

“It had widened my perspective and has expanded my vision. I feel myself comfortable and safer (AHS 4).”

“I am developing my skills. I force myself to listen to other teachers and overcome communicational problems. I feel more self-confident and wish to learn new issues each day. My self-confidence is getting better and each day I want to learn new issues (VHS 4).”

“It does not isolate me from other teachers. Being in communication with other branch of teachers helps me to understand students' needs (AHS 2).”

“It helps me to understand issues from different perspectives. Dealing with similar problems supports us in coming closer to each other (AHS 1).”

“Our encouragement increases. When you find substantial common grounds, you tell yourself; ‘I am on the right path.’ (ARVHS 4).”

“It helps us to see our weaknesses related to our professional areas and thus, demands us to perfect them. It contributes to our cooperation among other colleagues. And this provides harmony within the school. This helps us to appreciate our profession. If we don't have this type of sharing we tend to think of those in the teaching profession as self-centered and so we may start to dislike the profession (ARVHS 2).”

“There is a socially and culturally diverse environment. When someone experiences similar problematic situations, unavoidably this affects you either positively or negatively (ARVHS 1).”

When the teachers were asked ‘How PL improves professional development?’ they said that PL has improved empathy among teachers, developed their commitment and sympathy to the teaching profession and promoted their vision thinking expanded their vision? Also, few

teachers stated that it has provided insight into understanding students' needs and their own weaknesses.

In the literature the effectiveness of PL lies in the impact on both teaching practices and student learning. It is reported that effective PL has an impact on teacher knowledge, teacher practice, student learning outcomes and teacher efficacy [47].

Similarly, a research report proposed a conceptual framework for the study of effects of professional development on teachers and students. In this framework, professional development alters teacher knowledge, skills, attitudes and beliefs. This results in changes in instructional practices and leads to improved student learning [41]. The teachers were engaged in a learning process which involves gaining new perspectives by crossing significant boundaries to unfamiliar learning territories. This approach leads to learning in the process [48].

#### **2.4.4 Teachers' expectations and recommendations on PL**

Some of the participating teachers stated that they need formal settings in order to regularly collaborate and share with their colleagues and that their in-service training courses need to be improved so that they can be more productive and active. In addition, some teachers expressed that teachers' lounges could also provide facilities for teachers to learn from their fellows. Some quotations are as follows:

“I wish we would share our experiences in our school. So, teachers could meet the needs of each other and also teach more effectively. If there had been a possibility for two teachers with different professional areas to teach the same topic to students, this would be useful for both teachers and students (AHS 2).”

“There should be settings established for regular mutual sharing among teachers. In-service trainings need to be constantly organized, and teachers should actively participate in them (ARVHS 2).”

“Teachers' lounges were established to serve your research issue. However, they do not provide this service any more. Some teachers get together there, and they don't share their experiences related to teaching (ARVHS 1).”



According to our findings, nearly all of the teachers recommended teachers be given opportunity to be involved in PL settings determined by school directors.

Beyond teaching by experience alone, the dispiriting early professional learning journey of the teacher-learner reinstates the importance of initial teacher preparation, through which teacher candidates are prepared to integrate a diversity of experiences, perspectives and material into the subject curricula [49].

#### **2.4.5 Teachers' views on the necessity of forming learning settings**

The findings show that teachers need to improve their pedagogical knowledge, establish common understanding and form learning settings amongst colleagues in order to provide a better learning environment for their students. Direct quotations from teachers as follows:

"Yes, learning settings are important, they should be formed. It is important for improving knowledge and keeping sustaining knowledge. I see it is significant to establish a common understanding and for acquiring values (ARVHS 1)."

"Yes. Because, the student's profile is constantly changing. To keep up with these changes, this type of setting should be established. Sometimes, we forget details in some issues. When the students display low level of performance, teachers need not force themselves to improve professionally. Gradually, this results in diminishing our professional competency. To avoid this result, there should be dynamic PL settings (ARVHS 2)."

"Sure, yet the school system functions in such a way that it screens this necessity. We are drowned in huge paperwork. None of us steps up to change this due to possible negative reaction. Every one of us don't step up due to possible negative understanding (ARVHS 4)."

"Absolutely, it must happen. For me, the teaching profession requires intellectual capacity and a firm character. Reading books is not sufficient. Once you get to know information, it should be shared with others to gain deeper insights. I believe this will get rid of shallow opinion. Thus, one will have a deeper understanding and will provide a holistic perspective (AHS 1)."

"It must happen, but I have hesitations. Not everyone is cooperative, nor are we alike education wise. Some are just showing off. When they see you having trouble solving some problems related to your subject, they tell the students that the teacher is not able to solve that problem (AHS 3)."

"This must be practiced. I have an opinion that even a veteran teacher can have weaknesses, that's why mentoring or consulting works better. I think that mutual learning settings would highly contribute for the betterment of education and teaching (VHS 3)."

"Certainly, it is needed. We should form learning settings to establish the society of future, and to avoid isolated information formed by experience. Our profession cannot afford to bear self-centeredness, we need to centralize the future of our society (VHS 4)."

Generally participants agreed with the necessity of forming learning settings. Only one teacher hesitated, remarking that some people were not willing to cooperate. In a study it is also emphasized the need for a school culture that values and supports PL, in addition to recognizing the benefits of building teacher networks both within and across schools [50].

### **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Even though this research was conducted with a limited number of high school teachers from Erzurum, Turkey, the findings reveal the understanding of teachers' PL apart from their formal workplace settings.

According to the results of the interview, none of the teachers think that in-service professional training programs are useful or meeting the teachers' needs. Similarly, in the literature it can be seen that many opportunities in professional development do not result in long-term curriculum reform, and do not meet the needs of the students [4]. Research shows that professional development such as one-day workshops have very little effect on teachers' way of teaching, school organizations and curriculum and students' learning [51,52]. The reasons for this are lack of follow-up and inconsistencies in implementation, since the experts do not know the needs of students, institutions and teachers [8].

Findings from the interviews reveal that most of the teachers relate their professional development to their individual efforts. They think that better practices support good learning. It can be seen that the teachers enhance their professional competency by reading books, attending symposiums or workshops and learning from the experience of veteran teachers. Although our findings show that teachers in Erzurum, Turkey mostly struggle individually to gain professionalism, literature suggested better results when PL settings are formed [19,53-57].

Findings have shown that all teachers have informal learning settings within schools. All of the teachers learn from their colleagues, especially those topics related to content and pedagogy. A research on the needs of teachers for PL settings found that teachers were in need of knowledge of content, pedagogy, using of resources and concrete materials, using technology, educational context and assessment [58].

The authors viewed learning with colleagues in classrooms as having high risk. The challenges to teachers and their pupils are considerable. Also, teachers frequently mentioned that they faced administrative issues and problems due to a heavy work load. Both teachers and pupils need resilience and self confidence to take the risks involved. We also viewed such learning, and the institutional support that is essential for it, as indispensable if high quality educational provision is to be sustained in schools. In order to get over these problems, most of the teachers get help from school counseling service while some of the teachers get support from their colleagues. Also, some teachers stated that they handled classroom management solely from their experiences.

Our research also highlights the benefits of PL to professional development, and suggests that informal PL would be as beneficial as structured PL activity, in terms of providing a comfortable environment for both new and veteran teachers to develop their pedagogical knowledge, general culture and skills.

However, few teachers believed communicating with colleagues regarding both classroom management and subject based problems to be useless, because it complicated the problem rather than provided a solution.

There is considerable research to support that PL is the most powerful kind of professional

development [59,60-62]. Some researches have shown that collaborative teacher research is highly effective [63-65]. A research reported that PL settings established within their department or schools, have contributed to substantial improvement on the quality of teachers [66].

A research suggested long-term, site-based professional development opportunities would engage teachers in the learning process, built current knowledge and practices, helped them examine their beliefs with the intent to transform practice, and allowed them to explore authentic and personal questions as they developed answers [8].

Our findings on teachers' understanding about PL showed that learning from colleagues encourages them professionally. In a study it was stated that PL has also been linked in a positive way to teachers' sense of self efficacy [67]. It was claimed that learning from colleagues can contribute to teachers' desire to remain in the teaching profession [68].

The findings also showed that PL within schools helped teachers to enhance subject based knowledge as well as teachers' general knowledge. These learning opportunities for teachers developed empathy among teachers, and enhanced their commitment and allegiance to the teaching profession. This result is supported by the research [69] which stated that teachers' learning from their colleagues has helped to improve their involvement and ownership. A research [70] revealed that teachers' learning from other teachers helped formed a social image of themselves, and the interaction enhanced their allegiance to the profession [71].

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

Moreover, reports of PL initiatives tend to focus on the process and outcomes of the PL; often describing how the generally accepted characteristics of effective learning were incorporated into the PL design [72,73,58].

How teachers learn professionally within the school system is also a good indicator of their autonomy and independence in problem solving [70]. Our research results also reaffirmed that teachers' PL enhanced their problem solving skills both in and out of the classroom.

Change in school culture takes time, but there is evidence from our research that professionalism in some Turkish schools is developing towards a school culture where individual and collective PL are both seen as cornerstones of effective teaching experience. Yet in most of the schools there is no sign of PL efforts. This is also a valid future educational research study since there are hardly any studies on the topic of PL in the Turkish school system.

In conclusion, teachers' PL in school needs to be carried out deliberately. We need to construct an understanding and more organized settings in order to embed teachers' PL systematically. Appreciation of the idea will enhance both thinking and action within school cultures. Classrooms need to become places of learning for teachers as much as for their students. In order to develop classrooms in this way, teachers, their students and their schools, together with local and central government need to accept responsibility for developing and restructuring teaching and learning roles and relationships within them. It is recommended that teachers not to hesitate to learn from their colleagues and the studies on PL.

Note: This paper was the extended research of the proceeding named "Teachers' Perceptions And Experience On Professional Learning" presented at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual International Conference on Education and e-Learning, Singapore [74].

## COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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