Lesson Study in Action: A Multiple Case Study of EFL Teachers

İlknur Bayram[a], Özlem Canaran*[b]

Article Info

Abstract

Traditional professional development efforts aimed at changing teacher behavior through seminars sometimes fall short of meeting contextual needs of schools and teachers. Contemporary professional development points to a change in this 'training' perspective, and acknowledges professional development as a complex undertaking grounded in active teacher participation. Lesson Study can respond to the demands of this paradigm shift, yet its adoption in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts is limited. This multiple-case study aimed at exploring the Lesson Study process experienced by EFL teachers in a Turkish higher education context. Potential benefits of the model and what might prevent its effective implementation were investigated. Participants were 20 EFL teachers. Data from reflective reports, interviews and a questionnaire were analyzed through cross-case analysis. Results showed Lesson Study provided a collaborative learning environment, and improved teachers' knowledge-in-practice. However, teachers' misconceptualizing Lesson Study and lacking support mechanisms were detected among potential pitfalls. To accommodate teachers' professional development needs, schools should adopt practices recognizing their potential as researchers, reflective practitioners, and change agents. It would be helpful to encourage teachers to experiment with Lesson Study, using it as a catalyst for change and benefiting from its advantages to teacher learning.

Uygulamada Ders İmecesi: Yabancı Dil Olarak İngilizce Öğretmenleri Üzerine Bir Çoklu Durum Çalışması

Makale Bilgisi

Öz

Öğretmen davranışını seminerler yoluyla değiştirmeyi amaçlayan geleneksel mesleki gelişim çalışmaları, okulların ve öğretmenlerin bağlamsal ihtiyaçlarını bazen karşılayamamaktadır. Öğretmenlerin mesleki gelişimi üzerine güncel alan yazın, bu geleneksel yaklaşımda bir değişikliğe işaret etmekte ve mesleki gelişimi öğretmenin etkin katılımına dayanan bir süreç olarak değerlendirmektedir. Ders İmecesi, bu paradigma değişikliğine cevap verebilen bir model olarak kullanılabilir, ancak yabancı dil olarak İngilizce öğretimi bağlamında uygulamaları oldukça sınırlıdır. Bu çoklu durum çalışması, Türkiye'de bir vakıf üniversitesinde İngilizce öğretmenlerinin deneyimlediği Ders İmecesi sürecini araştırmaktadır. Çalışmada, modelin faydaları ve uygulanmasını engelleyen unsurlar araştırılmıştır. Çalışmaya 20 İngilizce öğretmeni katılmıştır. Veriler anket, yansıtıcı rapor ve görüşme yoluyla elde edilmiş ve çapraz durum analizi yapılmıştır. Sonuçlar, modelin öğretmenlere işbirlikçi bir öğrenme ortamı sağladığını ve mesleki uygulama üzerine bilgilerini geliştirdiğini göstermiştir. Ayrıca, öğretmenlerin modeli doğru kavrayamamaları ve süreç boyunca yeterli destek alamamış olmaları yaşanılan zorluklar arasındadır. Sonuç olarak, okulların araştırmacı, yansıtıcı düşünen ve değişim elçisi olan öğretmenlerin mesleki gelişim ihtiyaçlarını karşılayacak ve potansiyellerini keşfedebilecekleri uygulamaları benimsemesi gerektiği düşünülmektedir. Öğretmen mesleki gelişimine sağladığı katkılardan dolayı öğretmenlerin, değişim için bir katalizör olarak Ders İmecesi uygulamasına teşvik edilmesi önerilmektedir.

*Corresponding Author: ozlem.canaran@tedu.edu.tr
[a] Dr., TED University, Center for Teaching and Learning, https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8109-8051
[b] Dr, TED University, Department of English Language Teaching, https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2605-7884

Introduction

After graduation, a career-long professional development journey begins for teachers during which they will learn how to fine-tune their teaching skills to better serve the needs of their students (Diaz-Maggioli, 2012). Therefore, continuous professional development (CPD) of teachers has always been a hotly debated topic in all fields of education including the field of English Language Teaching (ELT). Making a distinction between training and development, Ur (1997) states that applied science and craft models of CPD have connotations of 'training' imposed on teachers not taking their prior experience into consideration, whereas reflective CPD models carry connotations of 'development' initiated by teachers themselves, helping them construct knowledge personally. Teachers are highly critical of CPD offered to them in the form of trainings, or workshops given by a content specialist, in a scheduled time, and without considering their school and classroom context. However, they particularly value CPD opportunities which take place in their own workplace during regular working hours, and are connected to their school and classroom setting (Garet et al., 2001). They also point out that CPD that involves mentoring and coaching benefit their practice more.

Richardson and Diaz-Maggioli (2018) suggest that for a CPD practice to have a powerful effect on teachers, it should be impactful, needs-based, sustained, peer-collaborative, in-practice, reflective, and evaluated. High quality CPD must also occur over a long period of time, and it should include school-based coaching (Adey, Hewitt, Hewitt & Landau, 2004). Lesson Study (LS) with its emphasis on collaboration and reflection on teachers' classroom practices is regarded as a CPD model that incorporates many features of effective professional development (Lewis & Perry, 2014).

Lesson Study

An integral part of the teaching and learning process in Japan (Fuji, 2014), LS is a CPD model which originated in the East. The model spread to the world after studies began to refer repeatedly to its potential as an approach to improve teaching and learning (Wiburg & Brown, 2006). LS is job-embedded, and carried out collaboratively with a group of teachers who design, teach, analyze, and reflect on a research lesson (Fernandez & Chokshi, 2002). A usual LS implementation is carried out in an iterative cycle comprised of the following four steps; (1) Study curriculum and formulate goals, (2) Plan, (3) Conduct research, and (4) Reflect (Lewis, Perry, & Murata, 2006). Teachers start the LS process by selecting a topic and developing learning goals. Then, they prepare a lesson plan, which is implemented in a real classroom setting by one of the teachers. This specific lesson is called a research lesson, and it is observed by the other teachers in the LS team. Eventually, teachers reflect on this lesson by discussing the observed student behavior and reactions (See Figure 1 for the LS Cycle used in this study).
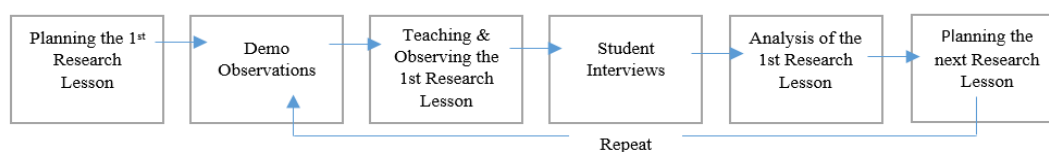

Figure 1. *Lesson study cycle in the study*

Teachers engaged in these steps work in collaboration to improve their teaching by analyzing their teaching strategies, evaluating their methods, giving and getting feedback from their peers and carefully examining the result of their efforts (Zepeda, 2012). In each LS cycle, teachers work together to refine their lesson plans to improve their teaching through analysis of and reflection on their own lessons (Lewis, 2016), which eventually leads to an improvement in student learning outcomes (Dudley, 2012). LS is reported to develop teachers' pedagogical content knowledge (Coenders & Verhoef, 2019). There is also evidence that teachers' involvement in LS as active participants encourages them to sharpen their reflective skills (Stigler & Hiebert, 2009), and enhance their knowledge about learners (Xu & Pedder, 2015).

The model has been used in various countries both in initial (Amador & Weiland, 2015; Cajkler & Wood, 2015) and in-service teacher education (Obara & Bikai, 2019; Takahashi & McDougal, 2016). Similarly, the implementation of LS in Turkey has recently been increasing among teachers from diverse backgrounds. In a similar fashion to the tendency around the world, LS has also been a popular professional development model particularly among science and mathematics teachers in Turkey (Kartal, Ozturk, Ekici, 2012; Yilmaz, Yetkin-Ozdemir, 2019). Results of these studies showed that the model resulted in an increase in the content and pedagogical content knowledge of teachers. Promising results led to the adoption of the model by teachers from different disciplines such as language teaching. In their study, Karabuga and Ilin (2019) worked with five EFL teachers to explore the challenges and benefits of LS and found out that they found the model demanding because of its requiring a great deal of time and effort. However, they also reported that their involvement in LS was worthy of their efforts as it improved their subject knowledge and teaching practices. In a similar study, Yalcin-Arslan (2018) investigated how LS impacted eight preservice EFL teachers' learning and professional development, and found out that teacher learning was facilitated as a result of observations and reflections in the model. Songul et al. (2018) tried out an online version of LS with four EFL teachers from different high schools and concluded that LS increased teachers' knowledge of instructional strategies and technology. LS has also proven to play a facilitative role in the development of EFL teachers as teacher researchers (Demirbulak, 2011).

Although the studies mentioned above have promising results, collaborative and reflective models such as LS are rarely practiced by teachers in Turkey. They are even rarer among university teachers. This necessitates more research to be conducted to explore how these models are implemented and what potential impact they have on the CPD of teachers.

Purpose of the Study

LS is mostly used by mathematics and science teachers in mainstream education. However, there is a lack of research base to claim that LS might serve as an effective CPD model for EFL teachers (Norton, 2018; Yalcin-Arslan, 2018). This study is one of the few research studies in Turkey that is undertaken for this purpose. The purpose of this study is to investigate how LS is interpreted by EFL teachers and what possibilities and challenges might arise during its implementation.

Method

Research design

As we gathered data from and examined several cases, this study was designed as a multiple-case qualitative study (Merriam, 2009). The multiple-case study design aims to explore a case in depth, and it enables researchers to examine a phenomenon from different perspectives through comparisons among several cases (Yin, 2014). This design was considered appropriate for our study which set out to thoroughly examine how teachers benefit from LS as a CPD model. Cases in this study are 'empirical units' (Patton, 2015, p. 422). Groups of teachers who implement LS in teams were treated as cases for analysis. The cases started right after teachers came together as teams to engage in LS, and ended when they completed their LS cycles, wrote up their final report, and presented their findings to their colleagues. Participants were informed about the research aims and methods, and their consent was obtained. They were ensured that they may withdraw from the study any time they wanted without causing them any harm.

Research site and participants

A foundation university in Turkey served as the setting of this study. Ethical approval was obtained from the university's ethics committee. The research setting was purposefully chosen by considering the fact that the researchers would be provided easy access to the site, and the administration would let teachers engage in LS for a prolonged period of time. To illuminate the research questions under investigation and help us reach an in-depth

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understanding, we tried to select information-rich cases as suggested by Patton (2015). The participants were chosen through convenience sampling (Creswell, 2007) taking two criteria into account. First, the teachers had to have at least two years of teaching experience to ensure that they have gained a certain amount of classroom experience and improved their pedagogical practices. Second, teachers had to display willingness to try out a new CPD model and take part in the study. Teachers were informed that they would have to write reflective reports, observe their peers, be observed by them, prepare a final report and make a presentation if they accepted to participate in the study. They were further advised that interviews would be held with them, and we would confer with them to verify the results of our study. Participants were represented by numbers to respect their anonymity (See Table 1 for details of study participants).

Table 1. Participants of the study

Team	Term	Teacher No	Gender	Age	Major	Experience (Years)
1	2016-17 Spring	1	Female	24	ELT	2
		2	Female	24	ELT	2
		3	Female	25	ELT	3
		4	Female	24	ELL	2
2	2016-17 Spring	5	Female	27	ELT	5
		6	Male	26	ELT	4
		7	Female	32	ELL	9
		8	Male	39	ELL	3
3	2017-18 Fall	9	Female	25	ELT	3
		10	Female	25	ELT	3
		11	Female	26	ELT	4
4	2017-18 Fall	12	Female	26	ELT	4
		13	Male	29	ELT	6
		14	Female	25	ELT	3
5	2017-18 Spring	15	Female	26	ELT	4
		16	Female	24	ELT	2
		17	Male	26	ELT	4
6	2017-18 Spring	18	Female	25	ELL	3
		19	Female	27	ELT	5
		20	Female	27	ELT	5

* ELT: English Language Teaching, ELL: English Language and Literature, MS: Media Studies

Data collection and analysis

Data were collected through reflective reports, final LS reports, interviews, and questionnaire. Each teacher wrote three reflective reports, and one final LS report per each group was prepared to document LS findings (Cerbin, 2012). Individual interviews aimed at eliciting teachers' opinions regarding LS were conducted with 15 teachers. An online questionnaire developed by Cerbin (2012) was slightly modified and conducted with the participation of 15 teachers.

Data were analyzed through cross-case analysis as described by Miles and Huberman (1994). To understand what has happened in a single case, we, first, analyzed reflective reports, final LS reports, interviews, and the questionnaire separately for each case. We noted down the major themes emerging from a specific case so that we could later compare those themes with other cases. Using the constant comparative method, we examined similarities and differences across all the six cases in order to see if the themes applied beyond one specific case. We refined and eliminated themes until we agreed on all the themes emerging from cases (See Table 2 for the emerging themes).

Table 2. Emerging Themes

Main Theme	Theme	Sub-theme	f	%
Possibilities	Collaborative learning environment	Combined forces	28	48.3
		Companionship	16	27.6
		Fulfilling a common purpose	14	24.1
	Teacher knowledge-in-practice	Reflection on classroom practices	34	33.7
		Looking at learners from a different perspective	26	25.7
		Increase in subject knowledge	28	27.7
		Transforming a lesson	13	12.9
Barriers	Misconceptions	Skill refinement	18	15.9
		Observing teacher behavior	41	36.3
		Overemphasis on lesson planning	25	22.1
		'Scientific' research	29	25.7
	Lack of support mechanisms	Administrative support	31	38.3
		Facilitator support	23	28.4
		Expert opinion	27	33.3

Findings

Findings revealed that LS provided teachers with a collaborative learning environment, and increased teachers' knowledge-in-practice. Despite these possibilities, LS was found to have some barriers that might hinder its effective adaptation to the Turkish EFL context.

Possibilities presented by LS

Collaborative learning environment

A key finding was that LS provided teachers with a safe learning environment based on collaboration and peer support. It should be noted that teachers in this study were not used to working in teams as part of a CPD model, and they repeatedly emphasized it took a tremendous team effort to finish the LS process. Their comments suggested they valued the collaborative nature of LS because it showed them working together was advantageous in many ways. Teacher 3 reported, 'The phases [of LS] showed me that when teachers combined their forces in achieving instructional goals, they could create great work. Different perspectives and experiences made things much better, and collaboration made our job a lot easier.'

Initially, teachers voiced their concerns about the demanding nature of LS. They highlighted it required teachers to carry out several different tasks in a specific period of time and order. This could result in conflicts and disagreements among teammates in terms of allocation of duties, and difference of opinion, which could negatively affect the overall LS experience. This caused teachers to feel doubtful about the success of LS. However, through the end of the process, they noted they learned how to function well as a group by respecting each other, being understanding, taking on responsibilities, and showing eagerness. Teacher 16 indicated, 'As a collaborative study in every sense, LS taught me how to work as a team effectively. Generally, I consider myself as an easygoing person, so I work well in group activities. However, I often end up taking more responsibility. Surprisingly, it wasn't the case in this LS team. Everyone took equal responsibility willingly. Therefore, I learnt having righteous and understanding team members is crucial when working with a group.'

Teachers were also satisfied with the constant companionship provided by the facilitators and team members. They supported each other through constructive feedback and discussions in every phase of LS. This experience enabled them to reconsider their existing beliefs in regard to teamwork. Teacher 12 wrote, 'It actually affected my collaboration with colleagues a lot. I had been thinking a collaborative study would be difficult to implement, but thanks to my facilitator and colleagues, the collaboration and discussions led to positive outcomes all the time.' Teachers' doubts as expressed by Teacher 12 seemed to diminish during the end of the process.

LS united teachers in their attempt to accomplish a shared aim. This also contributed to the formation of a collaborative learning environment. Teachers worked together for a term to finish LS, and one essential factor that kept them going was their enthusiasm to find answers to the pressing questions they framed in the beginning. Teacher 15 commented as follows: 'Trying to achieve a common purpose kept us together. We all wanted to do something to address our research question. This helped us focus our discussions at times when we diverted from our real question. We all knew that we had an ultimate aim to achieve.' It is clear that LS enabled teachers to establish harmonious relationships as colleagues who gathered to fulfill a common purpose. Teacher comments showed the feelings of collegiality increased as teachers progressed through the LS process. They got to know each other better as they often worked together, and continuous group work made it possible to gradually learn more about each other's attitudes and beliefs about issues such as curriculum, lesson planning and language teaching methods. In addition to being more familiar with each other professionally, some group members were observed to develop strong personal bonds, as well.

Teacher knowledge-in-practice

Teachers found LS very beneficial in terms of its increasing their knowledge-in-practice through constant reflection on their classroom practices. Throughout the phases of LS, teachers had to think critically about their decisions regarding in-class activities, interaction patterns, student responses, and materials development. To fine-tune their lesson plan, they analyzed even the minute details very carefully. This is reported to improve their reflective skills. Teacher 9 shared her reflections: 'Attempting to make things better each time enables us to go through the lesson and teaching process with a critical eye focusing on even minor details. Through observing various teachers and class dynamics, I realized how these variables had a different impact on the same lesson, which provided me with some insights regarding the unexpectedness of teaching.'

The 'unexpectedness of teaching' when coupled with the student perspective opened up new opportunities for reflection. LS was reported to provide teachers with ways to consider learners and the learning process from a different point of view as underlined by Teacher 3: 'It definitely changes one's attitudes towards teaching and learning especially in terms of student thinking and how they learn.' Taking students into account in the teaching process was an important moment of revelation for teachers because as emphasized by Teacher 5, teachers in this study tended to value teaching more than learning. Teacher 5 reflects on her culture and teacher education program to provide an explanation for their tendency to underestimate learning; 'If it weren't for LS, I would never be able to realize that we should look at lessons from our students' perspective. In both our culture and undergrad studies, teaching and teachers are given more emphasis than learners and the learning process. This is how we are raised and educated as teachers.' This somewhat natural inclination was broken as teachers learned how to look at a lesson from students' point of view by taking their ideas and reactions about a lesson into account. Teacher 10 also commented, 'LS teaches you step by step to be student-oriented. Through student observations, interviews and video recordings, you have solid evidence of what students think about a particular lesson, and you get to understand them better.' Teacher 18 also indicted, 'I realized I had a black box in my head about students. Generally, I used to underestimate their potential before LS.'

Teachers reported that LS increased their subject matter knowledge by enabling them to reflect on what they know and don't know about a subject. Before picking a learning problem, they had lengthy discussions about the topics students had difficulty in learning. During these discussions, they had to refer to their own understanding, conceptualization and interpretation of a specific topic. For instance, a group of teachers wanted to explore why students could not paraphrase effectively while writing articles. Teachers' discussions to tackle this problem unearthed the fact that teachers themselves had strikingly different ideas from each other as to what effective paraphrasing means. Teacher 6 reflected 'LS showed us paraphrasing was a difficult and complex process often misunderstood by both students and teachers. We had some ambiguous thoughts about this concept. Therefore, firstly we tried to conceptualize the term to clarify what it meant to us all.'

Teachers also reported LS enabled them to learn about effective lesson planning. Therefore, teachers spent a considerable amount of time to effectively plan their lessons. They discussed the learning outcomes, interaction

patterns, activities, timing, approach, and the rationales behind their decisions. This process helped them to learn from each other how to plan more effective lessons. Teacher 17 indicated, 'We don't usually plan lessons on paper. When we do so, we do it on our own and in a very casual way. LS helped us break this routine and take lesson planning very seriously. This experience made me believe we should plan lessons in detail from time to time because such kind of lesson planning teaches you many things you might otherwise not be able to learn.'

LS also enabled teachers to implement, observe and reflect on their lesson plans during research lessons. This created another learning opportunity for teachers. They reported that during the implementation of a lesson plan, they could, either as observers or teachers, identify what they needed to have done to better teach the lesson. This promoted teacher learning in regard to how to teach a skill or how to design activities. Teacher 1 commented, 'Having finished three cycles and implemented three research lessons in three different classes, I can certainly say I now know more about how listening can be taught more effectively.' Based on their reflections and analyses, teachers also learned how to improve a lesson. Especially in the second and third cycles of LS, teachers reported they were content with the way they transformed their lessons through modifications. Teacher 20 said, 'Formerly, I had no idea about whether or in what ways I could make a lesson better. I used to think about things that went well in my lesson, and things I needed to change, but that was it. I didn't think about how I would modify the lesson if I had to reteach it in another classroom. But now, we see improving a lesson is just as important as planning it in the first place. Looking at the first, second and third lesson plans, we could easily spot the differences and the progress we had made.'

Barriers to the implementation of LS
Misconceptions

Teachers reshaping LS in their own understanding presents a barrier to its effective implementation. They may mistakenly think LS primarily aims at refining teachers' pedagogical skills. Teacher 19 noted, 'I don't think LS is the right model to use to improve my teaching skills. I can do so with other models such as micro teaching.' This interpretation seemed to influence the perceptions of the teachers regarding the model. Since teachers engaged in CPD activities to polish up their classroom management skills, their main motivation was to achieve satisfactory outcomes in this regard. They also wished to observe their peers to develop their classroom practice. Teacher 7 indicated, 'This model helps us see our colleagues in class and how they implement a lesson similar to the ones we teach. Can't we do the same thing through peer observations?' Peer observation was not common practice in the setting this research was conducted. Therefore, during research lessons, teachers were inclined to focus on how their colleagues dealt with classroom management issues, and exploited materials. For instance, having observed a more experienced colleague, Teacher 5 reflected as follows: 'I think this study is more suitable and practicable for more-experienced teachers because they know well in what areas the students face difficulties or problems.'

Another misconception was that teachers thought LS was mainly about lesson planning. Teachers in this study were observed to spend most of their time to plan research lessons and modify them based on students' feedback and their own reflection. They concentrated on this process so extensively that their efforts mostly centered on improving the lesson plan and making it as flawless as possible. This is highlighted in the comments of Teacher 13: 'We analyze an-hour-long lesson plan and modify it so many times to make it look perfect. I don't think it is worth all the hassle. It is impossible to do the same thing for all the lesson plans we need to teach. So I don't think LS is a sustainable model.' This comment is a typical example of the way teachers new to the model tended to conceptualize it. Teachers' discussions regarding research lessons in this study were usually about the details of the lesson plan and how it was conducted in class. This obviously had a considerable effect on how the model was interpreted by teachers.

Last but not least, teachers believed that LS was specifically designed to carry out research, but they felt confused about the type of research they were supposed to conduct. Teachers were inclined to believe that scientific research and classroom-based research should be split into two dichotomous categories. Therefore, they wanted to clarify whether LS focused more on theory than classroom practice. Teacher 4 reflected on this challenge as

follows: 'I just can't understand what exactly we are trying to do. Are we trying to carry out scientific research or solve the problems we experience in class?' Assuming that LS was a tool to conduct scientific research, they felt not enthusiastic about acting as researchers. The reason why teachers shied away from scientific research may stem from the fact that they found it demanding. Findings showed that they had difficulty in zooming in on the research, making student thinking observable, collecting and analyzing data although they appreciated the chance to carry out research in their classes in a systematic way. Teacher 8 reported, 'You have a chance to conduct research with all its aspects such as finding a problem to study, writing a research question, conducting experiments, analyzing the results and writing a final report. I would not be able to gain this experience if it were not for LS.' However, they also reported feelings of distress and pressure caused by the research process. Teacher 14 highlighted, 'Neither I nor my friends know how to do research. We receive support from our facilitator, but I do not find it enough.' Believing that they were not competent researchers, teachers asked for collegial support, but did not find it sufficient, either. They attributed this incompetence to their pre-service teacher education. Teacher 7 commented, 'Let's admit we superficially learn how to do research in our pre-service education. As an MA student, I still don't know how to conduct a proper scientific research. This affects the research process we are supposed to carry out during LS.

Lack of support mechanisms

Findings revealed that for teachers to engage in LS, several support mechanisms need to be in place. Most importantly, teachers needed support from the administration to cover for their classes for meetings and observation. Teachers in this study taught 20 hours a week and the administration helped them by arranging their schedules to enable them to observe research lessons and attend meetings. Teacher 20 emphasized, 'I don't think most of the heads in other schools will be willing to cover for teachers so that they can do LS. It was definitely our head who made it possible for us.'

Teachers also needed facilitator support. In this study, there was a facilitator in each team who had prior experience in the implementation of LS. Facilitators offered guidance to the team members about how to conduct LS. This guidance was found to be valuable by teachers because facilitators helped teachers keep their motivation to finalize the LS process. Teacher 11 indicated, 'Without our facilitator, it would be very difficult to have fruitful meetings, proceed from one cycle to the next and write the final report. Since she knew all these processes, having her with us was very heartening.' It should be noted here that the guidance offered by facilitators in this study were mostly about the implementation of the model. Nevertheless, teachers could not receive support from an expert who could facilitate the research process. For instance, teachers occasionally needed to refer to studies conducted similar to their research focus. They also asked for support in terms of developing effective research questions. Since they lacked such expert opinion, they felt incompetent, which reduced their confidence in the quality of research they carried out. Teacher 1 noted, 'I guess we should have had a person from whom we could get advice on issues such as finding a research question, data collection tools and data analysis. Without such support, I've always felt we were doing something wrong.' This feeling resulted in teachers' constantly voicing their concerns about the research they were carrying out and decreased their motivation at times.

Discussion

Findings suggest that to take full advantage of LS in the EFL context, researchers and practitioners need to be well-aware of its challenges and the ways to face them. Research contends that one of the factors that plays a key role in determining the quality of CPD programs is the collective participation of team members (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Garet et al., 2001; Richardson & Diaz-Maggioli, 2018). In Turkey, as a result of not being provided with enough opportunities to work collaboratively in the work place, teachers tend to seek compensation for their professional development in seminars, workshops and/or MA programs. This study justifies LS can be a useful guide for teachers who wish to try out how collaborating with their colleagues in a nonthreatening environment could foster their professional development. Kriewaldt (2012) asserts that engaging in LS results in a shift in teachers' practices from individual to collegial activity. The same was true in our case,

as well. When working with their colleagues in a systematic way for an extended period of time, teachers seem to create a close-knit community, and a strong bond begins to form among team members. This might set the scene for a nonthreatening atmosphere where everyone can share ideas, offer suggestions and initiate discussions, all important contributors to the effectiveness of collaborative CPD programs.

As suggested by Borko (2004), teacher learning can be fostered by strong professional communities. Teachers in this study reported they increased their knowledge in several aspects through their participation in LS. Our findings corroborate what Lewis and Hurd (2011) underline about the contribution of LS to teacher learning. Discussing their ideas openly, getting feedback from their peers and students regarding their classroom practice, and reflecting on their lesson plans promoted teacher learning with regard to subject matter knowledge and knowledge of students. Little (2002) asserts that teacher learning communities contribute to instructional improvement, as well. Teachers in our study reported LS revealed the fact that they understood some concepts in their fields superficially. Through reflection and critical discussion, they received gains in content knowledge, which, later, was associated with the improvement of their classroom teaching.

As underlined by the situated learning theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991), we cannot separate learning from the activity and its context. In the same way, teacher learning is fostered when CPD takes place in teachers' own contexts and classrooms (Putnam & Borko, 2000). By reflecting on their instructional plans, carefully examining videotapes of research lessons, conducting in-depth interviews with students, and analyzing samples of student work, teachers add more both subject matter and pedagogical knowledge to their existing repertoire. These findings are in line with the findings reported by Yalcin-Arslan (2018) and Vrikki, Warwick, Vermunt, Mercer, and Van Halem (2016). The findings of this study further suggest LS fosters teacher learning by enabling them to examine their practices in their own setting through collaborative interactions with colleagues and students. In her study with pre-service EFL teachers, Yalcin-Arslan (2018) found out that LS raised teachers' awareness about their students. In another study conducted with the participation of teachers from 64 schools that implemented LS in Singapore, it was found out that LS resulted in an increase in teachers' understanding of how students learn (Lim, Lee, Saito, & Haron, 2011). Teachers in this study also underlined that LS enabled them become more student-oriented. Having few opportunities to reflect on what students think about a lesson or how they make sense of the activities teachers bring to their classes, teachers used to think that students would not be of any help to them in interpreting and analyzing a lesson. Noting that the language classes in Turkish higher education are mainly teacher-centered and text-book driven (British Council, 2015), we believe one of the significant transformations teachers went through was in this aspect. Halfway through the LS process, they began to point out that the model helped them recognize that students could offer valuable feedback and suggestions about how a lesson could be improved. Therefore, viewing the lesson from the perspective of the students is another important finding of this study. Our findings are in line with Lee (2019) who suggests LS improves teachers' skills about student thinking as they plan and reflect on lessons.

Although LS is a well-defined CPD model, its implementation may pose different challenges to teachers implementing it in different contexts. In our case, we found out there were some issues to be considered before its implementation. Firstly, LS originated in Japan, which has a different cultural background in educating and developing teachers. LS has been implemented in Japan since the early 1900s (Fernandez & Yoshida, 2004), and is a well-established practice among Japanese teachers. Its interpretation by other cultures has some potential risks, one of which lies in the understanding of the gist of the model. Teachers in our cases (and maybe rightly so) drew a comparison between LS and other CPD practices they know, such as micro teaching, peer observation, and action research. Although this seems to help teachers relate with the model in the first place, a deeper analysis reveals it might also cause them to underestimate the core meaning and value of LS. We, therefore, strongly recommend the reason why teachers need to 'study' lessons in such a comprehensive model as LS should be made clear to them.

Another common misconception was the teachers' tendency to perceive LS as a tool to conduct a scientific research study. This considerably changed the way they perceived it and made them question their competency as

teacher researchers. Teachers also articulated unease about collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data. Hargreaves (1996) claims that teachers believe it is mainly a researcher's responsibility to carry out research which is mostly theory-based. Because of this long-held assumption, teachers in our study felt reluctant about doing research, stating that it is not their job to do it. However, as pointed out by Nunan (1997), the distinction to be made between practitioner research and regular research should not rely on the person who carries it out, rather it should focus on the quality of the research activity itself.

This study also revealed support mechanisms are crucial to the success of LS. In our case, teachers needed support in three different forms; administrative, facilitator, and expert. Administrative support is a prerequisite for LS. We think schools should deal with issues such as finding substitute teachers, arranging meeting time and places, releasing LS participants from extra workload etc. if they want teachers to fully benefit from this experience. In our case, this was achieved well, which was appreciated by teachers. LS in Japan is carried out under the guidance of mentors who offer advice and foster communication within the team (Chichibu, 2016). Similarly, we had facilitators in each group, who had finished one LS implementation before. Their support was perceived to play a key role in the smooth implementation of the model. However, teachers lacked expert support, which had a considerable impact on the way they formed research questions and sought answers to them. Teachers continuously underlined they felt insecure trying to develop a sound research question, design data collection tools, and eventually analyze and interpret data. They reported a university professor could help them in this process by offering expert opinion on such issues. Similarly, in a study carried out by Yayli (2012), it was found out that conducting research presents challenges to teachers especially at phases such as data analysis and interpretation, and they require assistance to overcome such challenges. In CPD models such as LS, this process can be facilitated through mediators who, as suggested by Ur (2016), might be experienced teachers or teacher trainers having enough time to read research articles, and share insights with teachers, and thus making research accessible to them.

Conclusion

This study aimed to find out the benefits and challenges of a LS implementation in a Turkish higher education context. Although studies recently began to report on the contributions of the model to EFL teacher professional development in Turkey at tertiary level (Bayram & Bikmaz, 2018; Bayram & Canaran, 2019; Karabuga & Ilin, 2019; Yalcin Arslan, 2018), we are still in need of a sound research base that will assist us in knowing how to integrate the model into our culture. It should also be noted that studies in Turkey exploring the potential of the model as a CPD tool tend to produce similar results to the studies in different parts of the world. Thus, we are of the opinion that in countries such as Turkey where LS is a recent phenomenon among EFL teachers, we need to do more than reporting its benefits on teacher professional development if we wish future LS practices to reach a wider audience, and to improve its implementation. However, we do strongly believe in the assertion put forward by Lillge (2019) who stated that differentiating PD practices rather than insisting on "one size fits all" attitude will benefit EFL teachers in the long run enabling them to apply PD learning in their classroom practices.

Both Japan and Turkey have a long tradition of education. However, a comparison between these countries reveals that they differ significantly from each other in terms of CPD practices. Turkey is still struggling with issues such as lack of professional staff, collaboration, feedback and systematicity in teacher professional development (Bayrakci, 2009). This implies that we need further investigation before we can fully understand and effectively adapt the model to our culture. In addition to these challenges, concepts inherent in LS such as learner-centeredness, and teacher research are relatively new in the Turkish educational practices. Without reaching a common understanding as to the implications of these concepts for CPD, we cannot be optimistic enough to expect LS to solve our educational issues no matter how promising the model is. That being said, it is also apparent that we need to experiment with such models more to see what it is that we need to learn to support our teachers in more effective means. We also have to think of ways to modify the model so that it better suits our established educational practices rather than transferring it without making any alterations. Thus, LS might be implying a

change in our educational philosophy and we should accept that it will take time and effort to redesign and internalize it.

Limitations and Recommendations

This study has potential limitations. Since this was a qualitative study, the number of participants was limited, and they mostly shared similar backgrounds in terms of their ages, education, and work experience. Future research might examine how teachers from diverse backgrounds perceive LS. As most of the teachers who took part in this study were new teachers, it was not possible to make comparisons between their understandings of the model to that of the experienced teachers. Additionally, this study was conducted at a foundation university. Future researchers might wish to focus on the implications of the model on experienced teachers employed at state universities.

Although their contributions to LS is well-documented, knowledgeable others and experts could not be integrated into this study because of lack of access to such people in our context. This study might be replicated including the support of a knowledgeable other and an expert, and to what extent they affect the implementation of the model could be investigated. Contrastive studies might also focus on LS implementation with and without the support of knowledgeable others.

LS becomes more meaningful with follow-up studies that assess the outcomes of the implementation of the model. However, we could not follow up on the effects of LS in participating teachers' classroom practices and their students. Investigating whether students noticed a difference in the teaching practice of LS participants could be a starting point for future studies. The model's effect on student learning outcomes could also be a potential research venue.

Statement of Publication Ethics

We declare that the research has no unethical problem and we observe research and publication ethics.

Researchers' Contribution Rate

Researchers contributed equally to every phase of the study.

Conflict of Interest

The study has no conflict of interest.

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