A Case Study on Staff Development Program at a Private University in Cyprus

Kıbrıs'ta Özel bir Üniversitenin Personel Geliştirme Programı Üzerine bir Çalışma

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to determine both advantages and deficiencies of the staff development program at Foundation English department of one of the most known private universities in North Cyprus. The study is based on positive and negative aspects of the staff development program from the views of their own lecturers. The sample for this study consists of 14 volunteer staff members out of 30 lecturers. These volunteer lecturers consists of 10 female and 4 male lecturers of Foundation English school from different age ranges and nationalities. The data were gathered by using the interview method, including 7 interview questions which were developed by the researcher. The collected data were analyzed by identifying and categorizing the data. The results of this study claim that there are several problems within the staff development program of the private university. Along with the explanation of these problems, the study also presents the causes of these problems and possible solutions as well.

Keywords: *academic content, staff development program, university, professional development, lecturers*

Öz

Bu çalışmanın amacı Kuzay Kıbrıs'taki özel bir üniversitenin personel gelişim programının eksiklikleri ile faydalarını belirlemektir. Bu çalışmanın önemi, personel gelişim programını üniversitenin kendi çalışanlarının bakış açısından tanımlamak ve programın yararları ile eksikliklerini çalışanların sözleriyle belirlemektir. Bu çalışma özel bir üniversitenin İngilizce hazırlık bölümünde yapılmıştır. Çalışmaya 30

personelden 4'ü erkek 10'u kadın olmak üzere, farklı yaş aralıklarında ve farklı uyruklardan 14 personel gönüllü olarak katılmıştır. Bu nitel çalışmada araştırmacı tarafından hazırlanan 7 soruluk açık uçlu bir anket kullanılmış ve veriler birebir görüşme yöntemiyle toplanmıştır. Araştırma sonunda edinilen veriler analiz edilmiş ve bu bilgiler ışığında personel geliştirme programında çeşitli sorunların olduğu tespit edilmiştir. Bu sorunlar 4 başlık altında incelenmiş, bu sorunların neden kaynaklandıkları ve olası çözümlerine de çalışmada yer verilmiştir.

Anahtar sözcükler: *akademik, personel gelişim programı, üniversite, profesyonel gelişim, akademisyen*

Introduction

Staff development or in other words, professional development is an essential part of the institutions in terms of their sustainability. It would not be wrong to say that the quality of an institution is understood by the quality of their employees. Therefore, personal development is quite significant for organizations. According to Graham Webb (2013), Staff development can be considered as procedures, policies or programs which not only support, but also facilitate the staff so that employees' productivity will improve and the needs of the institution will be covered. Another definition was made by Bruce Joyce and Beverly Showers (1988). They claim that staff development can be briefly defined as "human resource development system" (Cited in Sleeter, 2011).

Some experiments have shown that staff development programs cause positive changes on teachers' behaviors such as teachers become aware of their strengths and weaknesses, what they need to learn, how they teach, how to modify what they have learned, how their colleagues' teach and how to set goals (Fullan, 2014). In addition to these, Blandford (2012) states the purposes of staff development as following: to develop practice skills, to use acquired information in order to meet students' needs, to contribute, to follow the current issues related with their profession, to contemplate how to improve ongoing standards and to widen their existing knowledge.

Staff development in primary, secondary or even high schools is easier when it is compared to universities so the other issue will be the role of staff development in higher education. University lecturers' background can differ. They may have graduated from various departments so their areas of expertise can show an alteration as well. In parallel with this, different teachers may need different kind of training which make it a bit more challenging.

Khan et al. (2014) suggest that Academic professional development is a significant

plan in terms of educational research, in which not all of the researchers consider the effectiveness of it. Effects of professional development on academicians change from person to person depending on their culture, university administration and job satisfaction.

The changing of world always effects the education inevitably. The teaching or learning environments of universities are also affected by this change. Nicolls (2014) highlights that nowadays staff development in universities is more than a choice, it is a requirement. Another essential function in universities is the identification of the personnel who will suffer from this staff development. Identifying the needs of personal development in universities contains faculty surveys, class observations and informal discussions such as faculty, department or level meetings (Zepeda, 2012).

Fullan (1982) by stating: "Nothing has promised so much and has been so frustratingly wasteful as the thousands of workshops and conferences which led to no significant change in practice when teachers returned to their classrooms" (p. 263) reviews the reasons of failure in terms of teacher trainings in seven points which are stated below:

1. *One shot work-shops are widespread but are ineffective.*

2. *Topics are frequently selected by people other than those for whom the in-service is intended.*

3. *Follow-up support for ideas and practices introduced in in-service programs occurs in only a very small minority of cases.*

4. *Follow-up evaluation occurs infrequently.*

5. *In-service programs rarely address the individual's needs and concerns.*

6. *The majority of programs involve teachers from many different schools and/or school districts, but there is no recognition of the differential impact of positive and negative factors within the systems to which they must return.*

7. *There is a profound lack of any conceptual basis in the planning and implementing of in-service programs that would ensure effectiveness (Fullan, 1982: 263).*

Moon (2013) claims that staff development courses were used to increase the importance of the course on work practice. This was provided by focusing on existing behavior, then on what had been learned before and later on how behavior in practice may not be same. In this way progress of people would be built into the structure of reflection.

Fullan (2014) suggests that teacher training must be related with innovation, continue during the implementation phase and consist formal and informal trainings such as workshops, teacher-exchanges.

Sparks and Loucks Horsley mention five staff development models. Three of these models aim to increase the number of the teachers. These models are respectively; individually guided staff development model, involvement in a development / improvement process and inquiry. The other staff development models are the observation / assessment model and the training model which aim to improve teaching skills of the teachers (Sleeter, 2011).

Horne and Pierce (2013) claim that there must be seven elements to be taken into consideration by teachers in terms of staff development. These elements are respectively an initial meeting between the director and their employees, peer or classroom observations, data collection from other sources, being agreed by the director, an interview to target professional action, preparation of the statement and follow up meetings.

According to Hopkins and Harris (2013), if the following strategies are used, people will have a greater potential to improve themselves: Extracting important points or ideas from presentations and lectures , cooperating with others and working efficiently, studies and theorizing, memorizing, developing concepts.

In North Cyprus, there are six private, four public and one both public and private universities. The first university in Cyprus, Eastern Mediterranean University, was founded in 1979. Until the millennium, there were only five main universities in Cyprus which were respectively; Eastern Mediterranean University, Girne American University, Near East University, European University of Lefke and Cyprus International University. Along with the year 2005, more universities were founded and Turkey's existing universities started to have campuses here.

The education system differs from university to university. Not all universities have the same or all departments within their faculties. Especially foreign universities who have campuses in Cyprus have two or three departments here. However, all universities in North Cyprus have their foundation English schools.

Foundation English Schools or English preparatory Schools are one-year programs which aim to teach English. In this one year students have intensive English courses. However, teaching strategies differ from institution to institution. For instance İstanbul Technical University's English Preparatory school has grammar based English education whereas Girne American University's Foundation English School offers communicative approach in their education system. In addition to this, in Girne American University students are categorized according to their levels such as A1, A2, B1 or B2 and they study that level for one semester, if they pass their exams they move up into next level. On the other hand, in

Cyprus International University students study these levels module by module in 7 or 8 weeks.

After a detailed review of literature, the main topic of this study has been decided. It is about staff development program of a Foundation English School (from now on it will be mentioned as FES) of a private, international university which is located in North Cyprus. This study evaluates efficiency of the staff development program of FES from their lecturers' perspectives and it addresses following research questions:

- Research Questions

1. How is the program carried out?

2.What kinds of trainings does the program offer?

3.What are the advantages and deficiencies of the program?

4. What are the needs of the program?

Methodology

A qualitative case study method was used in order to answer the research questions stated above. The main aim of the study is to find out the advantages and deficiencies of the staff development program of a private university. Since what we look for was words, it was more preferable to use this method.

The case: a private university and its foundation english school

The private university where the research has been conducted is one of the prominent universities of North Cyprus and has grown into a very strong university. It serves 15.000 students from all around the world (over 103 different countries).

The university has ten faculties and ten schools which are faculty of politics, faculty of

health sciences, faculty of engineering, faculty of communication, faculty of humanities, faculty of law, faculty of business and economics, faculty of pharmacy, faculty of education and faculty of architecture, design and fine arts, vocational school, school of sports, school of nursing, school of aviation, school of health, marine school, school of performing arts, school of tourism and hospitality, a graduate school and a foundation English school.

FES serves nearly 1.000 students per semester with 30 academic personnel (7 male, 23 female) including the director and the secretary and four coordinators. Academic staff includes eighteen Cypriots, four Turkish, three British, a Pakistani, a Jordanian, a Belarus, a Dutch and an Indian. 17 of the staff members also have a master's degree.

FES has four levels based on Common European Framework. These levels are A1, A2, B1 and B2. A1 Students who are determined through the placement exam of FES, study one semester same as level A2 students. During the semester A1 students catch up level A2s and at the end of the semester or in other words in the final exam if they get 60 out of 100, next semester they study level B1. If they do not score 60, they repeat the level A2. Students who successfully finish level B1, go to their faculty. Level B2 is only for students who will study in English Language Teaching, English Language Literature, Translation and Interpretation, Master's and Ph.D degrees.

The study was conducted in the 2015-2016 academic year at Foundation department of the university. After the briefing, the researcher interviewed the volunteer lecturers one by one and asked them the interview questions. Based on lecturers' answers, the data were analyzed and categorized.

Participants

All the lecturers participated in the study voluntarily. The participants consisted of 4 male and 10 female lecturers. In the research (n=9) 64% of the participants were between the ages of 23-30. (n=5) 36% of the participants were between the ages of 32-47. Most of the participants were 24 years old (n=4 / 29%).

Data collection instruments and application

In accordance with the aim of this study which is to examine staff development program of FES, specific data were collected via interviews. In light of the literature reviews of many articles and books related with staff development, seven interview questions which can be seen below were developed by the researcher. For the validity of the interview questions, the opinions of two lecturers from the ELT department at Cyprus International

University were obtained. By making face to face interviews with 14 lecturers of FES, the data were collected.

The Interview questions

1. Can you describe staff development program of the school briefly?
2. Which workshops, seminars have you taken so far?
3. Are you satisfied with the training you get?
4. What specific results have you seen from implementing the training?
5. Are there any problems within the training program?
6. Do you have any suggestions on how to improve the program?
7. How do you think you'll benefit from the renewed program?

Results

Based on the information gathered through face to face interviews with the personnel, lecturers of Foundation English School suffer from different problems associated with staff development program that the school offers. Besides the similar complaints, some different personal problems were identified as well. The determined issues and factors will be presented under the four categories.

About the program

Analysis of the data revealed that most of the lecturers defined the program similarly. They said that in Foundation English School, there are some workshops and meetings which are held by the director of the school. Sometimes international guests make presentations. There are trainings for the testing team. Every semester peer observations are done. If any staff member attends a conference out of school, s/he holds a meeting about the conference and shares her/his experiences with the rest of the staff members. Finally, there are overseas conferences that coordinators attend every year. On the other hand, one out of fourteen lecturers claimed that there is not a staff development program in the school by saying "I have no idea. Is there a staff development program here?".

Trainings that the program offers

The results indicated that 10 out of 14 staff members are satisfied with the trainings they got from the school. They took trainings about IELTS writing and speaking exam, how to use the book "speak out" and Common European Framework of Reference. These lecturers also claimed that after those trainings, they have realized their mistakes, learned much

information and after implementing them into their teaching, students became more motivated.

Two of the lecturers stated that what they get from the university cannot be named as trainings, they are nothing but "sharing ideas". Some of the ideas can be useful but not all of them, they claimed. In addition to these, lecturers stated that most of the ideas cannot be used in classrooms because of not having enough technological devices.

Two of the staff members disagreed with the rest of the lecturers. According to them they do not even get trainings. They supported their idea by saying "Did we take trainings?" and "I didn't take any." as an answer to the question: "Which trainings have you taken so far?".

Advantages and Deficiencies of the program

In the light of the analysis, it is determined that 12 out of 14 staff members focused on the negative parts of the program. According to them, workshops are not enough, workshop hours are inappropriate and lecturers cannot attend the conferences they want. One of the lecturers pointed out that "we covered testing team members' classes so they could take a training but we came to school on Saturday to take the same training while they were at home". Or another one stated that "we cannot go overseas conferences, only coordinators can. They do not even mention us local conferences. Only testing team members and their friends attend them and we learn it afterwards".

Another problem is that some trainings are repetitive such as "how to mark essays" and "speaking exam". Besides, some lecturers claimed that the program only covers the theory, there is no practice. It is also stated that most of the training topics are not up-to-date and they consist of just titles. Lastly, it is said that lecturers are not free to use new methods and they are expected to be alike. On the other hand, according to two of the staff members, there is no problem within the program. Everything is fine. However, they did not mention any advantages of the program as well.

Needs of the programs

Besides the problems of the program, lecturers are also asked about possible solutions for these problems. 13 out of 14 staff members expressed their suggestions, only one of them said that "we got used to the program. I have no suggestions." Lecturers suggested that there must be more workshops and trainings and they must be done by people who are expert on those subjects. Lecturers must be free in terms of their teaching styles. Apart from observing

each other, lecturers should also observe other English classes from various universities. Trainings must be attractive, in detail and up-to-date. Workshops must be open for everyone, they must be on weekdays from 9 to 5 and some lessons can be canceled for trainings. There must be an environment for lecturers to share their ideas. School must force lecturers to attend conferences. It must also give lecturers scholarships in February to attend overseas conferences. Lecturers' weaker points must be identified and then teachers must take workshops according to their deficiencies.

Conclusion and discussion

Overall the issues have been stated above, most of the staff members have problems related to the staff development program of the English school. The prominent problem is that there is not enough workshops and trainings and they are not done by experts. Another important issue is that lecturers cannot attend all conferences, only limited people can, so this leads to problems among teachers. Also time is a problem. All teachers agreed that trainings must not be at the weekends.

These problems might have happened due to lack of communication. Lecturers may talk or discuss among themselves how the program should be. However, nobody expresses their suggestions to the director. They also complain about workshops are not enough but if the workshops were more, most of the lecturers would complain about that as well. When it comes to limitation of conferences topic, the researcher thinks that the reason of keeping workshops secret is to prevent future problems such as what if everyone wants to attend the conference? Then who will teach at school? However, that still leads to problems. For a solution to this, a meeting can be held and lecturers can be told that there is a workshop about curriculum / testing... next week, but there is only a limited space and because of that only the people who are in curriculum team / testing team will attend there. If you want, you can attend the workshop individually unless you have a class to teach during workshop hours or after providing a solution to your teaching hours. It is highly possible that if lecturers are told about the workshops in advance, most of them may decide not to attend them but because it is done secretly, it takes attention and causes complaints.

In Australian Universities, there is a central unit which is responsible for the staff development. Some of these units deal with only academic staff, some of them have a service to all employees. Some of them focus on learning and teaching, others focus on development of research and leadership in the university. (Hicks, 1999). There can be a "continuous education unit" as a part of the staff development program and volunteer lecturers can study

or do a research in different areas.

On the other hand, success can be rewarded to encourage the staff. If lecturers who published articles or contributed to conferences can receive awards, this will encourage all staff members. Lecturers can also be awarded according to their performance. If a lecturer makes a difference in his/her teaching, at least s/he can be appreciated.

In the United States of America, as a staff development program, lecturers take off - site and school - site trainings. There are staff development funds so these trainings continue both during the semester and in summer (Elmore, 1997). There can be a fund for staff development in FES as well. In February lecturers of FES do not have a semester break, sometimes there can be translation assignments but most of the time they are free. This time can be used as training time and they can be sent to overseas trainings or conferences.

Faculty of the MAT program suggested that there must be four main constituents for a staff development program. They are: Language teaching knowledge, skills, attitude and awareness. (Freeman, 1989). All staff members might not have graduated from ELT department so only the ones who graduated from ELL or Translation departments can take trainings about fundamentals of ELT such as material development, Common European Framework of Reference, curriculum and testing. The rest of the constituents such as current issues in ELT or general teacher training, professional development workshops can be taken by all lecturers. Lecturers should take training about teaching skills such as methods how to teach grammar or vocabulary, how to start the lesson, how to teach reading, writing, listening and speaking lessons. Workshops about attitude in other words the relationship between lecturers and students is also quite important. Lecturers must have known how to behave towards students in advance when they do not submit their homework or they speak rudely. Lastly lecturers must be aware of the rules and regulations in the institution. When students ask questions related with the program, school, examinations, they must answer instead of sending them to the coordinators or the ones who are responsible.

Recommendations

This study has been done with 14 out of 30 lecturers. For future researches, the number of the lecturers can be increased or the same study can be done with the rest of the lecturers for an exact result. There can be a comparative study between two or more universities as well. Another study can be conducted to find out the effectiveness of the staff development program by observing the performance of the lecturers before and after the

trainings.

In short, according to FES lecturers, there are both advantages and deficiencies in the staff development program. In order to rectify these deficiencies lecturers must be cooperative, focus on solutions, share the things that make them uncomfortable or their ideas at staff meetings and remember that communication is the key. Staff development is one of the most important aspects in terms of continuous development and it is important to work on the deficiencies of the program and develop it because if the staff of a university is well trained, the quality of the university is equally high.

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