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الاحتياجات المتراكبة، والواقع المنقسم: دراسة فينومينولوجية لتطوير المهني لمعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية (EFL) في أديس أبابا

Layered Needs, Divided Realities: A Phenomenology of EFL Teachers' PD in Addis Ababa

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الملخص

تبحث هذه الدراسة الفينومينولوجية في احتياجات التطوير المهني (PD) لدى معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية (EFL) في أديس أبابا. وهي تعالج فجوة في البحث النوعي من خلال استكشاف الخبرات المعيشة للمعلمين عبر المقابلات، ومجموعات التركيز، وتحليل الوثائق. وتُظهر النتائج أن احتياجات المعلمين منظمة بشكل هرمي، حيث يشكل تعزيز الكفاءة في اللغة الإنجليزية والمهارات التدريسية العملية الأساس الجوهري. كما تُشكِّل ثنائية صارمة قائمة على الموارد إطارًا محددًا لبقية الاحتياجات؛ إذ يحتاج المعلمون في المدارس محدودة الموارد إلى مواد أساسية، بينما يسعى المعلمون في المدارس المجهزة جيدًا إلى دمج بيداغوجي متقدم. ويرفض المعلمون بشكل صريح ورش العمل ذات الطابع الموحد(one-size-fits-all) ، وبدلًا من ذلك يدعون إلى تعلم مستمر وتعاوني ومندمج في الممارسة. وتخلص الدراسة إلى أن التطوير المهني الفعّال ينبغي إعادة تصوره جذريًا ضمن منظومة داعمة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التطوير المهني (PD)؛ معلمو اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية؛ الفينومينولوجيا؛ الاحتياجات الهرمية؛ ثنائية الموارد.

Abstract

This phenomenological study investigates the professional development (PD) needs of English as a Foreign Language teachers in Addis Ababa. It addresses a gap in qualitative research by exploring teachers' lived experiences through interviews, focus groups, and document analysis. Findings reveal that teachers' needs are hierarchically structured, with enhanced English proficiency and practical teaching skills forming the foundational core. A strict resource-based dichotomy shapes further needs: teachers in under-resourced schools

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require basic materials, while those in well-resourced schools seek advanced pedagogical integration. Teachers explicitly reject one-size-fits-all workshops. Instead, they advocate for continuous, collaborative, and practice-embedded learning. The study concludes that effective PD must be radically reconceptualized within a supportive ecosystem.

Keywords: Professional Development (PD); EFL Teachers; Phenomenology Hierarchical Needs; Resource Dichotomy.

1. Introduction

During the time when the level of education can be inseparably connected with the national development, the professional development of teachers has become a top priority. The profession of teaching is dynamic and complicated because it provides a practitioner with the opportunity to constantly renew and advance his/her skills as an adaptive expert to satisfy the changing needs of the students (Craft, 2000; Bransford et al., 2005). This is a more urgent necessity among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers. The second language teaching field experiences constant changes and the world political, cultural and economical exchange position of the English language compels the institutions to continuously address emerging requirements of the curriculum and students (Celce-Murcia, 2001). Therefore, it is generally agreed that one of the most important school-related factors affecting student achievement is effective professional development (PD) (Darling-Hammond and Skyes, 1999; Fullan et al., 2006).

The concept of PD has changed across the world to become wider and more inclusive of the concept of continuous development based on long-term teacher development (Freeman, 1989; Richards and Farrell, 2005). Nonetheless, old fashioned models tend to prevail which will involve top-down, fits all in-service training (INSET). These externally-inspired practices run the risk of creating a consumer-like attitude regarding the teachers, where the latter underestimates his/her own experience and has little say in the learning process and content (Borg, 2015). High-quality PD, in turn, is characterized by its relevance to the needs identified by teachers, the possibility of collaboration and reflection, job-embeddedness, and an appreciation of the experience of teachers (Guskey, 2002; Borg, 2015). This change highlights the importance of basing any successful PD

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program on an in-depth assessment of the urgent needs of teachers in their respective teaching settings.

Ethiopian context has provided a serious situation to consider this imperative. After several years of impressive growth in education, national policy is currently focused on the quality improvement. The Continuous Professional Development (CPD) framework is a platform set by the Ministry of Education (MOE) as part of its General Education Quality Improvement Program (GEQIP). This model promotes a bottom-up and school-based model which is responsive to the needs of individuals and institutions (MOE, 2009). There is however a wide gap between this policy vision and the implementation. National reports and assessments reveal that there are still some issues, such as lack of needs assessment of trainings, inconsistency of CPD practices, and the absence of evident connection between CPD practices and the practical outcomes, or practical classroom practice (MOE, 2008, 2009). As it is mentioned in the Addis Ababa context, the enforcement of CPD is by no means entirely achieved and it is even seen to not make any meaningful impact on the professional competence of teachers (BGREB, 2010).

In the case of EFL teachers in Ethiopia, these systemic issues are supplemented by historical and subject-specific baggage. The fact that English is the medium of instruction since secondary school has given special and a heavy burden to EFL teachers; they are expected to form the basis of language skills on which all other academic subjects are based. However, the history of English language education is also characterized by a vicious circle, in which the teachers who studied English as a foreign language teach the next generation, a process that has been associated with a decline in proficiency since the 1970s (Kahsay, 2016; Negash, 2006). This has led to a general foreign language anxiety and low levels of proficiency by both students and teachers, which has allowed a scenario in which, as one report puts it, teachers teach what they know, what they have... They are not able to give more than they have (Mejena, 2003). Such background renders the necessity of pertinent, empowering, and efficient PD not only an administrative issue but also a general demand towards the quality of education.

Nevertheless, there is one critical gap in the research despite these identified challenges. Although the literature has reported the systemic CPD implementation

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issues, there are limited qualitative, in-depth research studies that put the voices and lived experiences of EFL teachers at the center in defining their own developmental needs. Majority of study in the Ethiopian setting uses quantitative designs that might not be able to best represent the subtle perceptions, beliefs, and contextual battles that define the professional worlds of teachers. This paper fills this gap by taking the Heideggerian hermeneutic phenomenological approach. It goes beyond considering externally developed PD programs to rather investigate and explain the nature of the perceptions of EFL teachers themselves based on their lived reality.

To this end, the study is guided by the following three specific objectives:

To phenomenologically investigate and describe the core teaching-related professional development needs (e.g., pedagogy, assessment, technology integration) as perceived by EFL teachers in Addis Ababa.

To explore and interpret the personal and strategic development needs (e.g., English language proficiency, collaborative learning, professional advocacy) that underpin EFL teachers' professional growth and identity.

To analyze how the articulation and prioritization of these needs are mediated and shaped by teachers' specific institutional contexts and resource environments.

By pursuing these objectives, this inquiry seeks to understand professional development not as an administrative event but as a continuous, lived process of "becoming." The insights generated are crucial for informing the design of PD that is not only effective but also emancipatory, empowering Ethiopian EFL teachers as agents of their own growth and, ultimately, of meaningful educational improvemet.

2. Materials and Methods

This study employed a qualitative research design grounded in Heideggerian hermeneutic phenomenology. This philosophical approach is fundamentally concerned with interpreting and understanding the lived experiences (Erlebnisse) of individuals within their specific world (Lebenswelt). It moves beyond

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describing events to uncovering the deeper meanings individuals ascribe to their existence and professional practice. For this inquiry, it is ideal for exploring the subjective, often tacit, understandings that English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers hold regarding their professional development needs. As van Manen (1990) asserts, phenomenology is the "systematic attempt to uncover and describe the structures… of lived experience." In contrast to Husserl's transcendental phenomenology, which seeks essences through the bracketing (epoché) of the researcher's presuppositions, the Heideggerian hermeneutic tradition posits that understanding is always interpretive and that the researcher cannot be separated from the world of the participants. We are all, as Heidegger described, "Being-in-the-world"; our interpretations are shaped by our pre-existing involvement in a shared social and historical context. Therefore, this study did not seek to bracket the researcher's perspective but to engage with it reflexively, using it as a vital tool for a deeper, dialogical interpretation of the teachers' narratives. The aim was not to find a single objective truth but to present a rich, contextualized interpretation of the phenomenon—the perceived professional development needs—as lived by EFL teachers in Addis Ababa.

2.1. Participants and Sampling Strategy

Participants were sampled using a purposive sampling strategy since they were able to give rich and in-depth information on the phenomenon. The research was carried out in five sub-cities of Addis Ababa in the government secondary schools in order to have a variety of institutional settings. The main sources of data were the sixteen (16) EFL teachers, who were chosen amongst four sub-cities, i.e. Yeka, Gullele, Arada and Akaki Kately. Out of these four sub-cities, two schools were picked, and two teachers were picked out of each school, and there was a variation in the gender, years of teaching experience (between early-career teachers and very experienced teachers), and the socio-economic background of the area serviced by the school.

The size of the sample is justified by the rules of phenomenological inquiry, according to which depth, richness, and detailed study of lived experience are more important than breadth or statistical generalizability (Creswell and Poth, 2018; van Manen, 1990). This was in order to achieve a stage of thematic saturation, whereby, no additional data would provide any new information about

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the underlying structures of the experience (Guest et al., 2006). The intensive experience of 16 individual stories, which was supported by the focus group discussions, presented considerable and repeated evidence of the crucial themes that make the phenomenon under investigation.

The study was also supplemented with two Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) comprising of eight people to further enrich the data and get to know how the needs are socially constructed and negotiated among peers. The teachers in the first FGD were selected among the same group of sub-cities (Yeka, Gullele, Arada, Akaki Kality) and the second FGD was done with four teachers of the Addis Ketema sub-city. Such design created the opportunity to study similar and dissimilar views in and between various administrative areas of the city. Also, two contrastive school settings were analyzed in terms of the official school Continuous Professional Development (CPD) portfolios, teacher supervision checklists, and a document analysis. Such methodological triangulation of voices, group discussion and institutional artifacts played a vital role in increasing the level of credibility and richness of the findings through a multi-faceted, corroborative analysis of the phenomenon.

2.2. Data Collection Procedures

The semi-structured interview guides were the main data collection tools, both in individual interviews and FGDs. The format ensured that the main thematic domains regarding professional development requirements were always addressed and at the same time the flexibility to explore new ideas and trace the personal story of participants. The qualitative interview as Kvale (1996) observes is a construction site of knowledge, a sharing of the opinions on a topic of common interest. The 17-39-minute one-on-one interviews allowed the teachers to have a personal and confidential time to candidly reflect on their own struggles, their developmental paths, and their unmet needs. The interviews were necessary to reach the first-person aspect of lived experience. The 55-minute-long FGDs created an active atmosphere in which participants were able to develop, discuss, and designate their opinions together. This encounter frequently produced new knowledge, with the participants illuminating, challenging, or confirming one another, bringing out the socially negotiated aspect of professional requirements. Each interview and FGD was carried out in a mutually agreed and quiet place, and

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audio-taped with the consent of the participants, and subsequently transcribed word-to-word to be analyzed.

The interview protocols were highly validated before the actual study. Five EFL teacher education experts had reviewed them and piloted them with teachers not part of the main study on a think-aloud protocol. This was done to make sure the questions were clear, relevant and able to draw reflective narratives on professional development.

2.3. Data Analysis

The analysis of data was done through the hermeneutic interpretive process which was iterative and cyclical and not linear. It was directed by the method of phenomenological analysis used by van Manen (1990), who suggests immersing in the data in order to reveal the aspects of the lived experience in form of themes. The interpretive team to apply interpretive rigor and dialogical reflection comprised of two members, namely, the main researcher and a second expert, who was a PhD in English Language Teaching (ELT) graduate at Dire Dawa University.

It was initiated by having several close readings of every transcript to get the holistic meaning of the account of each participant. Preliminary notes were taken on the margins recording the interpretive thoughts of the researcher, questions and notes of important statements. After this, a collaborative coding procedure was undertaken in detail. With the help of a hermeneutic lens, the team was in a continuous movement between the components of the text (particular statements) and the entirety (the whole transcript and the phenomenon itself), which is called the hermeneutic circle.

The first descriptive codes were created individually and discussed during regular meetings. These codes were grouped into developing thematic patterns (e.g., Anxiety over Language Proficiency, Need for Practical Classroom Strategies, Frustration with Resource Scarcity). The view of the external coder was invaluable in the context of challenging the assumptions of the primary researcher, revealing aspects that would otherwise have been omitted, and making

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sure that the themes that developed were well rooted in the accounts of the participants and not the preconceptions.

These themes were then actively analyzed on all data sources, i.e., individual interviews, FGD transcripts, and documents. The team sought convergences, divergences and relationships among themes and continually compared and refined them in a discussion until agreement was achieved. As an example, one of the themes arising in personal interviews regarding the absence of technology was elaborated and made more contextual by discussions in FGDs that indicated a radical dichotomy between those schools that had resources but lacked integration skills, and those schools that did not have access to the basics. The analysis of the documents offered an institutional perspective on the same, giving a form to these articulated needs (or lack thereof) within the official planning and evaluation documentation. This data and analyst triangulation greatly reinforced the credibility of the analysis.

The last phase was combining these consensually-validated themes into a textured description of the nature of the phenomenon. It was aimed at creating an interesting story of the perceived professional development needs that was tightly anchored in the words and experience of the participants themselves. The credibility was also promoted by member checking (when participants confirmed their interpretations), descriptive writing which was thick, and open triangulation of data sources and methods as stipulated by Lincoln and Guba (1985).

2.4. Limitations and Reflexivity

This work is placed in the Heideggerian school of thought, in which the pre-understanding of the researcher is identified as the very basis of the interpretation. The 12-year experience of the researcher in the Yeka and Gullele sub-cities offered the necessary background to experience the hermeneutic circle. To keep this fore-structure open and dialogical, rigorous reflexivity was upheld by ensuring that the journaling was constant, discussion with the interpretive team was critical, and member checking wherein the validations of the participants were in opposition to the initial interpretations and refined their original interpretations. The main constraints that are taken into consideration are more situational: some of the teachers might have been limited to articulating subtle

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experiences because of the use of the English language, which is not a native language of participants. Moreover, the attention to government schools does not allow gathering information about the PD experience in the private institutions.

3. Conclusion

The contemporary phenomenological study has examined the lived experience of EFL teachers in the secondary schools in Addis Ababa to give some insight into the intricate nature of their professional development needs. The emphasis on teacher voice due to hermeneutic interpretive approach to the research leads to the fact that the study is not based on the list of weaknesses, but on a multi-layered reality. These needs are not arbitrary as the results clearly indicate that they are hierarchical, identity driven structure, radically mediated by institutional context and are a powerful critique of top-down development models currently in existence. It is found that there is an underlying core that is not subject to negotiation, as in both, there is a requirement to increase English language proficiency and the requirement to learn communicative pedagogy. These are not technical, but they are part of professional identity that teachers collectively develop that of subject master and teaching expert. This is the dual burden, which is unique to the EFL teachers in the Ethiopian system, where English is the instructional language, which brings about the sense of vulnerability which lingers and the PD that is a response to this underlying identity. Another crucial resource based dichotomy that cuts across the professional world is also revealed in the study. In the schools that have enough resources, the demands change to higher levels of pedagogical unity where in the under-resourced schools, the demands are directly linked to the struggle of the basic resources and infrastructure. It is materially manifested in this dichotomy which is in turn, the radical difference in the meaningful and the perfunctory CPD portfolios, which render standardized PD programs ineffective as well as unfair, and this is what drives the feeling of professional alienation.

Ideally, these findings emphasize the need to have teacher development as a socio-constructivist and ecological approach. The teachers preference in the continuous, collaborative and job embedded learning is associated to the theory of the communities of practice, developed by Wenger, that indicates the failure by the current system to form such genuine communities of professionals. Further,

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the diagnostic and non-growthful quality of the supervision checklist is an example of a panopticon systematically (Foucault) and its orientation is on surveillance, not on nurturing, which translates a very grave disconnect between the evaluation and the growth structure. According to the paper, the solution to those needs lies in the radical re-conceptualization of the PD ecosystem, in which the delivery of discrete training units is substituted by the establishment of the enabling conditions that would enable the teacher-led and context-specific professional development.

Thus, the concluding policy and practice-related recommendations of the given study are as follows: To Educational Policymakers and School Leaders: 1.Mandate and Resource Foundational Language Development: Learn that the English language proficiency represents a professional development area of EFL teachers. Implement long-term and efficient language improvement methods (e.g. fluency workshops, conversation clubs, access to immersive digital media) as one of the indivisible parts of CPD. 2.Adopt a Differentiated, Context-Sensitive Policy on PD: Abandon city-wide training requirements. Empower sub-city and school-level leaders in accomplishing actual needs assessment and disbursement of resources. The pedagogical innovation should be invested in well-resourced schools and the under-resourced schools investment should be evidently founded on the provision of basic instructional resources and facilities and then superimpose pedagogical education. 3. Professional Time of Collaboration should be institutionalized: Policy needs to define and protect a regular and scheduled time on the school calendar, which can be used by peers to observe each other, conduct lesson study, and meet within professional learning groups. This change in the organization is needed to bring PD down to a culture of inquiry.

To PD Facilitators and Teacher Educators:

1. Model Praxis-Based and Dialogic Approaches: The whole PD to EFL teachers should be modelled as cyclic praxis where planning, doing and evaluation will focus on teachers own classrooms as the learning centre. Facilitators should use the very communicative and student-centered approaches which they encourage.

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2. Incorporate Training in Alternative Assessment: Educate teachers to know how and with confidence to develop and implement formative and performance-based testing, which will fulfill communicative teaching goals, and thereby help in bridging the crippling divide between pedagogy and the exam-driven system of evaluation.

3. Be Coaches and Bridge-builders: Go beyond being a knowledge deliverer. PD facilitators are supposed to be coaches that help teachers to negotiate their specific issues and critical friends that help them to translate policy into practice that is contextually relevant.

Towards Implementation: First Steps in the Real Life

These recommendations must be converted into action by taking small and achievable steps. As possible solutions, educational leaders could start pilot programs in a sub-city or two, such as: 1) establishing guarded and cooperative preparation time between EFL departments; 2) matching well-equipped and under-equipped schools in mentorship associations to share resources and strategies; and 3) establishing educator-led innovation laboratories to design and test context-sensitive assessment tools. Such pilots would generate locally relevant models and evidence before scaling in order that systemic changes would be informed by viable accomplishment and proprietorship.

Lastly, the transformation of professional development, in the complex educational context in Ethiopia, should pay tribute to the lived reality of the teacher. It must be re-envisioned as an enabling ecosystem that is not only building individual strength but also dealing with the systemic injustices that constrain it. This means listening to and believing teacher self-assessment of their needs as it has been the case in this study and working jointly with them in developing a coherent, responsive and equitable system of continuous professional growth. This is the most important partnership that will ensure that English language education in Ethiopia is of good quality in future.

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6.Declaration of Absence of Conflict of Interest

We, the undersigned authors of this article, declare that there are no conflicts of interest related to the research from which this article was derived, nor to its authorship or publication. The study was conducted independently as part of a doctoral dissertation at Addis Ababa University, and no financial or personal relationships have influenced the research process or outcomes.

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7.Author's Contributions

Yoseph Feleke Sahle (PhD Candidate, Addis Ababa University) was responsible for the conceptualization of the study, the research design, and all data collection procedures, including individual interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis. He performed the data analysis and interpretation, drafted the original manuscript, and carried out all revisions and finalization of the text.

Dr. Abebe Gebretsadik Woldearegawi (Adviser, Addis Ababa University) supervised the entire research process, provided critical review and editing of the manuscript, offered methodological guidance, validated the interpretive findings, and approved the final version for submission.

Both authors have read and approved the final manuscript.

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