Chapter 13
Evaluation and Facilitation of an In-Service Teacher Training Program: Impact on English Primary Teachers’ Classroom Practices

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to evaluate and facilitate a two-week INSET program designed for the primary English teachers working at private schools in Istanbul, Turkey. Specifically, this chapter not just focuses on the perceptions of the participating teachers regarding whether the program was planned and implemented parallel to the determinants of effective INSETs suggested in literature, but also, investigates the impact of such a training program on teachers’ class practices. Additionally, the challenges the participating teachers went through while implementing what they learned into their teaching contexts were examined as well. In an attempt to facilitate follow-up, the findings of this study are hope to serve basis by providing suggestions for the development, improvement and implementation of new in-service teacher education programs; in return, it will also increase the quality of teaching and learning both in pre- and in-service teacher education.

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INTRODUCTION

In an era of school reforms, professional development of teachers is considered as the keystone to educational improvement contributing to the improvement of teachers’ knowledge as they are actively involved in the process (Hawley & Valli, 1999). In-service training programs (INSET) primarily attempt to improve the performance of the personnel already holding assigned positions in a school setting or to implement a specified innovation or program (Sapp, 1996). Unfortunately, educational leaders go on to create or conduct ineffective professional development training for teachers by undermining the fact that the professional development is a process that is intentional, ongoing, and systemic. “Instead, they tend to reinforce the perception of professional development as a series of unrelated, short-term workshops and presentations with little follow-up or guidance for implementation” (Guskey, 2000, p.17). As a result of this endorsement by the educational leaders, it endangers opportunities to build a school culture of continuous learning for all. Guskey highlighted the fact that effective professional development is a deliberate process, guided by clear purposes and planned goals; these goals, in return, form the criteria by which content and materials are selected, processes and procedures developed, and assessments and evaluations prepared.

Although the need for in-service for teacher development is obvious, educators highlight various shortcomings in most INSET programs. To improve those programs and design more effective INSET activities, course-evaluation is an initial step to be implemented (Tarrou, Opdal, & Holmeslan, 1999). Through systematic evaluation not just the side effects and outcomes but also the teacher needs for future educational opportunities can be identified. Nevertheless, follow-up evaluations of INSETs are often neglected in the language education programs (Mathew, 2006). It is necessary to include procedures for assessing impacts on instructors, program services, and learners, as well as to evaluate the context within which professional development occurs—including the extent of administrative support for professional development, and the very nature of professional development activities.

Similarly, in Turkish EFL context, evaluations of INSET programs are mainly based on macro-level through document analyses and interviews with government authorities, administrators and teachers; yet, not emphasizing the micro-level about the content of such programs, whether the pre-defined goals have been attained and what impact these course have on teachers, learners, and the school. This paper therefore examines an attempt to evaluate a two-week INSET course designed for primary English teachers working at private schools in Istanbul, Turkey. Specifically, in this chapter, the effectiveness of the training program, its impact on teachers’ classroom practices as well as the challenges the participating teachers experienced during this particular program were investigated. Finally, the study provides suggestion for facilitating future INSET programs. The research population included 51 primary English teachers. Data for this mixed method study were collected from questionnaires, classroom observations, stimulated recall protocols and focus group interviews which provided in-depth inside about the effectiveness of the overall training program. This evaluative study will serve as a sample for future in-service teacher education programs connecting what has been learned in the course with the classroom practices.