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The Role of the School Principal in Motivating Teachers for Professional Development: Case Study of the Municipality of Gjakova in Kosovo

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Abstract

Teachers must always increase their knowledge and develop personally and professionally since teaching is a process that needs to be expanded and improved. This is increasingly in harmony with the perspective of lifelong learning as a characteristic feature of the complexity of the teaching profession, with the main aim of adapting to the rapid changes in development and the current needs of the time. The aim of this study is to look into the impact of professional development on improving teaching quality and the school's cooperation with teachers in achieving professional development.

This paper uses a qualitative research method, where 13 principals of primary and lower secondary schools of the Municipality of Gjakova in Kosovo have participated in the research. From the principals' responses, data were collected based on their opinion regarding the professional development of teachers and practices of cooperation and ensuring the professional development of teachers in the schools where they work.

The results of the research show that the professional development of teachers is considered necessary and important in facing more successfully the challenges of the teaching and learning process, teachers adapt more easily to changes in the educational system and can advance faster in terms of personal and professional.

Keywords: professional development, teachers, principals, cooperation.

1. Introduction

Kosovo has had a long and challenging educational journey. Changes in education were required beginning during this time period, as the primary goal was to improve the quality of instruction. Teachers, schools, and other school participants have an important role in improving the quality of education and obtaining the best possible results. Teachers, who required professional development, were also a part of the changes in the educational process. Seeing the

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value and necessity of professional development, MEST partnered with various organizations to offer professional development programs. Also, the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology 2011 drafted the Strategic Plan for Education in Kosovo 2011–2016 (KESP), and among the areas and priorities of this strategic plan was to “build an effective and sustainable system of teacher’s development that will be suitable for improving the quality of education” (MEST, 2011: 50). As a continuation of this strategic plan, the Strategic Plan for Education in Kosovo 2016–2021 places a strong emphasis on advancing teachers’ professional development, establishing a sustainable system, and integrating it into their work throughout the teaching process. Guskey (2000) emphasizes that professional development should be considered an “ongoing, job-embedded process of which every day presents a variety of learning opportunities” (Guskey, 2000: 19).

Over a relatively long period, research has identified the continuous development of teachers as one of the fundamental aspects to raise the quality of schools (Borko, Putnam, 1995).

The effectiveness of teacher policies and instructional techniques is also thought to be significantly influenced by this continuing professional development (Desimone et al., 2006).

Changes in education are related to the professional development of teachers, and these changes Werler (2017) sees as “governmental measure that is intended to improve quality of teacher education and school efficiency” (Werler, 2017: 134).

Most changes in the education system are based on professional development, on improving student learning achievements; “*in fact, education reform is often synonymous with teacher professional development*” (Sykes, 1996: 181), this explains also the statement of Fullan (2016) “educational change depends on what teachers do and think” (Fullan, 2016: 97) also Hargreaves and Fink (2006) states that “change in education is easy to propose, hard to implement, and extraordinarily difficult to sustain” (Hargreaves, Fink, 2006: 1).

Studies on teacher professional development have been conducted for decades. According to Desimone (2009), development improves teaching practice and enhances student achievement. In particular, the author claims that a host of study experiences present the professional development of teachers as a challenge to professional measurement. Consequently, the main features of learning experiences throughout the professional development of teachers are one way to address this challenge.

According to Avalos (2011) “teachers learning, learning how to learn, and transforming their knowledge into practice for the benefit of their students’ growth” (Avalos, 2011: 10).

An important feature of professional development is the participation and cooperation of all teachers. Usually, these *collective participations* aim not only at sharing new information with the whole group but also at sharing the ideas of the group, and teachers with each other for better opportunities to implement these ideas in the classroom, sharing personal experiences, providing feedback on shared experiences and constructive discussion with the primary goal of developing and improving teachers’ knowledge, skills, abilities and practices.

This participation and cooperation can be realized where it is planned for the motivation of learning between teachers with a sustainable system (Cordingley et al., 2005).

The crucial thing for the teacher’s professional development is the degree of teachers’ support by the management and the degree of professional development based on personal needs and individual development plans of teachers, all this, in the framework of a coherent approach and harmonized with the mission and development objectives of the school (MEST, PIK, 2016).

According to Earley and Bubb, (2004), “professional development does not just happen – it has to be managed and led” (Earley, Bubb, 2004: 80).

A well-run school monitors, analyzes, regularly evaluates, and based on that undertakes actions for its quality improvement. According to the Strategic Framework for teacher development in Kosova, the determination of needs for professional development comes from teachers and the school has the opportunity to draft the activity plan that corresponds to the teacher’s needs, and these activities can be developed within the school in cooperation of teachers in between or cooperation between schools (MASHT, 2017). Díaz-Maggioli (2004) specifies that “good administrators are providers, facilitators, communicators, organizers, and evaluators of professional development” (Díaz-Maggioli, 2004: 154).

School and school directors should present the teachers’ needs that except professional development programs determined by the Ministry of Education, draft development plans, and other activities within the school that increase the teaching quality, thus implementing professional development based in school (European Training Foundation, 2020).

Schools should offer conditions that teachers learn in the school where they work, cooperate, exchange ideas and experiences, keep continuous relations with each other and learn from each other (Fullan, 2001), with the creation of a positive climate in school teachers rise professionally and in the meantime, it is developed the school quality.

Dufour and Berkey (1995) offers 10 ways of promoting professional development, some of the most important of which are: “identification, promotion, and protection of common values; ensuring systematic cooperation in the school; commitment to professional development; providing staff development programs” (Dufour, Berkey, 1995: 3-5).

The purpose of our study is to look into the impact of professional development on improving teaching quality and the school's cooperation with teachers in achieving professional development.

2. Materials and methods

In order to understand more clearly and in-depth the issues raised in the paper, the qualitative method of data collection was applied, conducted through semi-structured interviews with the principals of primary and lower secondary schools in the municipality of Gjakova. Through this method, opinions and beliefs collected from the words and expressions of research participants are obtained (Matthews, Ross, 2010). The qualitative data collected allows the researcher to get a more in-depth understanding of the opinions of the participants in the research on the school's collaboration with teachers for professional development and the impact of professional development on improving teaching and learning quality.

The research questions are:

- Does the support of the school principal affect the professional development of teachers?
- What are the forms of motivation and cooperation used by school principals for the professional development of teachers?

Populations and research samples

Our study is focused on Gjakova city, as a result, the population includes primary and lower secondary school principals. Thirteen school principals were interviewed in the research.

The size of the sample (13 school principals) is a sufficient number to represent the region of Gjakova in the Republic of Kosovo. The included subjects belonged to different ages (31-60 years) and also had good work experience (between 11-30 years of work experience) (See Table 1).

Table 1. Participant features

Code	Gender	Age	Experience
D 1	Male	51-60	21-30
D 2	Male	31-40	11-20
D 3	Female	41-50	11-20
D 4	Female	41-50	11-20
D 5	Male	51-60	21-30
D 6	Male	51-60	21-30
D 7	Male	41-50	11-20
D 8	Male	41-50	11-20
D 9	Male	51-60	21-30
D 10	Male	41-50	11-20
D 11	Male	41-50	21-30
D 12	Female	41-50	11-20
D 13	Male	51-60	21-30

Research instrument

In this study, interviews were used as a research instrument. During the interview, principals were asked 5 questions through which data was collected based on their perception of teacher professional development and on the practices of cooperation and ensuring teacher professional development.

Data analysis

To analyze the interviews conducted with the directors, thematic analysis was used, where the interview questions were designed and developed by the researchers, and the questions were

previously sent to the persons involved in the research (directors). We conducted an interview with each participant individually, which lasted approximately 20 to 30 minutes, and the variables included in the research were also coded (See [Table 1](#)).

3. Results

Results from interviews with school principals

Since a thematic analysis was done, in the results section, we present a table which presents the themes and sub-themes extracted, as well as the frequencies of evidence statements in percentages (For more details, see [Table 2](#)).

To the first question: Do you think the professional development of teachers is important and why? With a very high frequency of responses, all school principals see it as very important and necessary as a process, considering it even vital for improving and developing the teaching process and being a successful teacher.

Below are shown two perspectives of principals on this issue:

D7: 'It is very important because education is an ongoing process and in this principle, professional development is also an important factor of teaching.'

D3: "CPD has value for teachers and I think they raise the quality of teaching and learning".

One of the responsibilities of schools/principals is to ensure that the teaching staff in schools is being continuously professionally developed. For this reason, principals were interviewed with the question: How do you as a principal ensure that all teachers are involved in professional development?

From all the answers provided, it is obvious that the principals see it as one of the aspects that is part of their planning for the school. This is because they see the success of the school as closely linked to the continuous professional development of the teachers. With this in mind, most principals have already created some sort of database in their school for the training conducted by each teacher.

Based on this planning, principals develop practices for selecting teaching staff according to their personal training needs, school training needs, and the number of training each teacher has.

Below is a principal's perspective on this issue:

D12: 'I analyze the training of each teacher, make a list of who has been, who needs it most. We instruct them to participate and then in turn everyone is involved in the training.'

Principals were asked: How do you help teachers regarding their professional development?

The point of view of principals, from most of their answers, is related to the professional independence of teachers and the level of their cooperation with teachers. Their central tendency is to define school-based professional development, taking into account the interests of teachers but also the school's need for specific training.

Principals appreciate the skills of their school teachers and in the context of cooperation with them. Principals agree that part of the training for which school teachers themselves are trainers take place in schools because they facilitate the process of understanding and acquisition of training content and make the effectiveness of this training more secure.

Two perspectives on this collaboration:

D4: 'Training should be done in schools, trainers should realize the training at our request and in our school. At the end of the training, an evaluation should be done through tests and everyone who gets certain points based on them should also get the certificates'

D12: 'In our school, we have teachers who are certified as "trainers", then we can hold the training in our school, I think it would be much better since the teachers are freer, they make discussions and questions and suggestions more easily, I think that the training becomes more concrete.'

The common point of the school/principals with the teachers is the quality assurance in education, the principals were asked: How do you cooperate with the teachers to achieve this?

Most school principals have shown very similar attitudes.

Regular joint meetings with the teaching staff, defining the positive and weak aspects of the teaching process, frequent meetings both individually or with the professional, continuous reporting, classroom monitoring, and then conversations and advice with teachers for improvements where needed.

Common attitudes of principals include the care of proper planning and organization, starting from the daily, monthly, and annual plan, during which topics, activities, teaching methods and techniques, use of technology, and organization of meetings and meetings are discussed. In which the objectives and evaluation practices for their realization are set, etc.

Two principals think so:

D10: 'At the beginning of the school year we present the objectives and goals we want to achieve. During the year we discuss how much they are doing, and where are the setbacks and help them to overcome them and achieve the planned results.'

D12: 'Meetings with staff, conversations about the challenges that teachers have, their requirements in relation to the challenges that they encounter during teaching. I try to analyze the requirements of each teacher separately and discuss them in order to reach their solution'.

The interview question was also asked: In your school, what are the practices that motivate teachers to cooperate with each other during and after professional development training?

From the answers of the principals, in all schools, the emphasis is placed on the exchange of information between teachers. The most common forms are joint meetings, constructive discussions, sharing information from teachers who have participated in the training, determining the positive aspects of the training but also the less likable aspects, etc.

In one of the schools, the principal offered the practice of assisting teachers to each other in class. Then, in the organized meetings, the observed specifics and the benefits from the contents of the attended training are discussed.

Answers from two principals

D13: 'I give teachers the opportunity to go to each other's classes to see how they are applying the knowledge gained from the training and to share the experience gained. To help each other with everything they have learned in training to tell about everything and the good and bad they have experienced from training'.

D8: 'In our school, cooperation is necessary for work, it is always talked about, it is like a kind of collegial rule and task. This was done as a "regulation" in our school'.

Table 2. A thematic analysis presented through a tabular representation of the main themes, sub-themes and the frequencies of evidence statements

Themes	Sub-themes	Frequency N = 13	Percentage %
The importance of professional development	Important	13	100
Reasons why teachers should participate in trainings	Teaching and learning quality increase	5	38.46
	New teaching methodologies	4	30.77
	Professional and personal growth	4	30.77
Inclusion of teachers in professional development	Analysis and notes for teachers, ranking	8	61.54
	Databases	1	7.69
	New teachers	1	7.69
	Old teachers	1	7.69
	Teacher's initiative and demand	2	15.39
Aid from principals for teacher professional development	Holding trainings at school	6	46.15
	Research, self-evaluation for trainings the teachers need	4	30.77
	Shorter trainings for specific subjects	3	23.08
The form of cooperation between the principal and teacher	Joint meetings, discussions, ideas, consultations	8	61.54
	Organization, planning of objectives	5	38.46
School practices that	Training analysis	5	38.46

motivate the teachers to cooperate with each-other during and after the professional development training	Discussions, experience exchange	6	46.15
	Participation in class	2	15.39

4. Discussion

School principals who successfully carry out their duties, in the school, must promote and support the continuous professional development of all school personnel and at the same time find a way to cooperate between the staff, the school, the students, and the community (Buleshkaj, Mehmeti, 2013).

From the findings of the paper, the professional development of teachers is considered not only necessary but also very important due to the changing demands of students and the school, the more successful coping with the challenges contained in the teaching and learning process, the adaptation of teachers to changes in the education system, personal and professional advancement of teachers. In Yangambi's research with principals and teachers, the results show that the professional development of teachers is important and vital for the teaching profession (Yangambi, 2021). Also from the research of Chalikias et al. (2020), conducted with 180 teachers in Athens, the results showed that the school principal should be a leader of teachers for professional development and a supporter of lifelong learning (Chalikias et al., 2020).

The same attitudes of the principals include frequent and regular meetings with teachers, the organization and planning of professional development by the principals as well as by the teachers affect the improvement of the quality of school teaching in general.

According to Bredeson (2000), "The role of the school principal is to encourage, nurture and support teacher learning, not to be the gatekeepers or governors of teacher professional development" (Bredeson, 2000: 390).

Principals emphasize the level of cooperation, the positive climate that is created, the climate of constructive debate, creating an environment in which teachers share with each other and help each other. From the systematic reviews and meta-analyses of 18 articles by Garcia-Martinez et al. (2021), the findings showed that principals play a key role in creating a climate of cooperation in the school and that the obstacle to creating a climate of cooperation is that teachers are reluctant to share experiences and teachers' non-participation in training (Garcia-Martinez et al., 2021).

5. Conclusion

According to the conclusions of this study, one of the most important and decisive variables for increasing the quality of teaching and learning is the teacher's professional development. School/principals ensure that all teachers are involved in professional development, that there is cooperation and interaction between principals/school and teachers, that school/principals motivate school staff to organize meetings and discussions with colleagues, and that teachers cooperate, discuss, and exchange ideas about professional development practices and their implementation in the learning process.

The director's planning for professional development, organization, the creation of a positive climate in the school, the use of appropriate cooperation practices between the staff, motivating the continuous professional development of teaching, and the improvement of student results and the quality of the school.

6. Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors of the manuscript declare that there is no interest in conflict, and all reference materials were dully acknowledged.

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Appendix

Table 1. Questionnaire

Nr.	Questions of interviews with school directors
1.	Do you think the professional development of teachers is important and why?
2.	How do you as a principal ensure that all teachers are involved in professional development?
3.	How do you help teachers regarding their professional development?
4.	How do you cooperate with the teachers to achieve this?
5.	In your school, what are the practices that motivate teachers to cooperate with each other during and after professional development trainings?