A REVIEW ON THE EFFECTS OF A PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM ON EFL TEACHERS’ BELIEFS AND THEIR CLASSROOM PRACTICES

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to review prior empirical studies concerning the effects of a professional development (PD) program on teachers’ beliefs about English language teaching and their classroom teaching practices to raise the ignored and minimally addressed issues that could provide avenues for the future research in Vietnam. 20 published journal articles and dissertations were cautiously refined for “systematic reviews” that were employed as the only technique for a source of data in this inquiry. Findings from these studies indicated that teachers’ pedagogical beliefs and class teaching were found a development or a change in a wide range of studies, whereas no or little impact on teachers’ beliefs and their instructional practices as a result of teacher PD programs were uncovered in other research projects. Especially, most of the reviewed previous studies revealed certain limitations regarding research methodology, sample size, unnatural separation between teachers’ beliefs and their teaching practices, and relatively limited studies conducted in the field, particularly at secondary schools in the Vietnamese context.

NGHIÊN CỨU TÔNG QUAN VỀ ÂNH HƯỞNG CỦA CHƯƠNG TRÌNH BỒI DƯỠNG CHUYỂN MÔN ĐỐI VỚI TIN尼MỆ VÀ THỰC HÀNH GIÁNG DẤY TRÊN LỚP CỦA GIÁO VIÊN TIẾNG ANH

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THÔNG TIN BÀI BÁO

Tóm tắt

Bài báo này nhằm mục đích đánh giá các nghiên cứu thực nghiệm trước đây về ảnh hưởng của chương trình bồi dưỡng chuyên môn đối với tin niêm về giảng dạy tiếng Anh và thực hành giảng dạy trên lớp của giáo viên để tìm ra những thiếu sót của nghiên cứu trước đây và đề xuất hướng nghiên cứu tiếp theo tại Việt Nam. Để thực sự số liệu cho nghiên cứu này, phương pháp nghiên cứu lý thuyết hệ thống được sử dụng với nguồn tài liệu lý thuyết được chọn lọc từ 20 bài báo và luận văn khoa học liên quan đến lĩnh vực nghiên cứu. Kết quả cho thấy, có sự thay đổi trong tin niêm về giảng dạy tiếng Anh và thực hành giảng dạy trên lớp của giáo viên sau khi tham gia khóa học bồi dưỡng chuyên môn ở nhiều nghiên cứu trước đây. Tuy nhiên, một số nghiên cứu khác cho rằng có ít hoặc không có sự thay đổi trong tin niêm về giảng dạy tiếng Anh và thực hành giảng dạy trên lớp của giáo viên. Đặc biệt, hầu hết các nghiên cứu đều bộc lộ một số hạn chế nhất định như phương pháp nghiên cứu, mẫu đại diện tham gia nghiên cứu, sự phân chia tách biết giữa tin niêm và thực hành, và có rất ít nghiên cứu trong lĩnh vực này đặc biệt là tại các trường phổ thông ở Việt Nam.

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1. Introduction

Teacher professional development is considered as a key step and an essential component of educational reforms to enhance the quality of education [1, 2]. It generally refers to a cyclical, ongoing process and aimed primarily at facilitating changes or development in teachers’ professional knowledge, skills, beliefs or attitudes for the growth of teaching profession in their life [3, 4].

Obviously, professional development influences teachers’ beliefs and their teaching practices [5]. It is claimed that beliefs about teaching and learning serve as guidelines on the way that teachers teach [6], and exert an impact on their decision-making and planning processes, and that the approaches they employ in their instruction [7].

Teacher belief, one of the key issues in teacher cognition, has played a vital role in teacher education [8]. Researchers in this field have defined similar terms differently and different terms have been used to refer to identical concepts [9]. Bastukmen et al. [10] defines teacher belief as “statement teachers made about their ideas, thoughts and knowledge that are expressed as evaluations of what ‘should be done’, ‘should be the case’, and ‘is preferable’” (p. 244). According to Kagan [11, pp. 65-66], teacher belief is conceptualized as “pre- or in-service teachers’ implicit assumptions about students, learning, classrooms, and the subject matter to be taught.” However, beliefs are generally defined in the education literature as a ‘conceptual tool’ [9] or world views, and “mental models” that guide learning and teaching practices [12, p. 250], and focus on how teachers think about the nature of teaching and learning [13].

Teaching practices can elaborate the practice programs and strengthen the professional quality. As defined by [14], classroom teaching practices are the basic form of class teaching system in which the teachers systematically impart knowledge and develop their students’ intelligence basing on provisions of the teaching plan. Classroom teaching practice includes some class teaching methods, such as “attending the lectures, preparing for the courses, teaching methods, writing teaching plans, teaching demonstration, classroom teaching, assessment, correcting the assignments and the like” [14, p.1442].

As explained by Desimone [4], “In essence, examining the effects of professional development is analogous to measuring the quality of teachers’ learning experiences, the nature of teacher change, and the extent to which such change affects student learning” [4, p. 188]. Accordingly, in order to measure the effects of PD, Guskey [3] proposed a linear path model in which Guskey posits that changes in teachers’ classroom practice as a result of professional development participations can lead to positive changes in students’ learning outcomes, and then this can result in changes in teacher beliefs and attitudes.

Desimone [4] developed a conceptual framework embracing five core features of an effective PD program: content focus, active learning, coherence, duration and collective participation; and serving as a causal chain linking four core elements: (1) teachers first engage in a PD program, (2) this results in an increase of teachers’ knowledge and skills and/or changes in their beliefs, (3) leading to improved instruction or classroom practices, and (4), in turn, improved student learning. In her proposed core conceptual underpinning, initial elements, i.e. professional development, provoke changes in consequent elements.

Although the two models revealed certain significant discrepancies terms of the content, design, analysis and evaluation of teacher professional development programs [15], the two proposed models reveal certain similarities. Firstly, they are considered as influential linear path models with focus on single pathways [12]. Secondly, both models seek to work out patterns of change and interrelationships between different components or dimensions of professional development processes. More importantly, they all permits for measuring a theory of teacher change, for instance, professional development facilitates shifts in teacher knowledge, beliefs, or practice [16].

Over the last decades, the field of professional development has witnessed a number of studies on the impact of professional development programs on teachers’ beliefs about ELT,
their teaching practices and student learning throughout the globe [3], [4], [8]. Unluckily, studies pertinent to systematic literature reviews on the extent to which professional development courses have actually facilitated changes in the beliefs of EFL teachers’ and their instructional practices have been unexpectedly scarce, especially in in-service contexts. To address this gap, the current paper, therefore, reviewed a riotous array of prior research around the world and in Vietnam to explore the effects of a professional development program on teachers’ beliefs about ELT and their classroom practices, the current research situations in the field, and its limitations, then provide suggestions for future research directions. Specially, the present study was an attempt to shed more light on the following issues under question.

1. What are the effects of professional development programs on teachers’ beliefs about ELT and their teaching practices?
2. What are the limitations of the previous studies?

2. Methodology

In this research, Systematic Literature Review was employed as a principal tool to select and review prior studies in order to examine the impact of a PD program on teachers’ beliefs about ELT and/or their teaching practices and refine the shortcomings from these studies.

Systematic Literature Review (SLR), or Systematic Review, “a method to identify, evaluate, and summarize the state-of-the-art of a specific theme in the literature” [17, p.2] serves the purpose of the current study as it offers a systematic guideline to analyze the literature, and “allows the collection of literature information restrictively that permits a rigorous methodological analysis with lower bias than the traditional review” [17, p.2], and promotes the “trustworthiness, and arguably the value of the results and recommendations of the study” [18, p.153]. More specially, criteria for a systematic review by Rose et al.’s [18, p. 154] have been adapted for this paper as follows: (1) contain empirical research; (2) include studies based on exhaustive and reliable searching (be published in a peer-reviewed, an academic journal, a book or theses); (3) be connected to the effects of a PD program on teachers’ beliefs about ELT and/or their teaching practices; (4) be aware of the impact of a PD program on teachers’ beliefs about ELT and/or their teaching practices, covering this construct in the review of the literature in this paper.

Based on these criteria, the researcher examined various search engines embracing ERIC, Education Research Complete (ERC), Education Source, Academia, Research Gate, and Google Scholar to gather articles and dissertations in response to the purpose of the study. After the literature retrieval, only 20 out of hundreds of published journal articles and dissertations containing the effects of a PD program on teachers’ beliefs about ELT and/or their teaching practices as were cautiously selected, briefly summarized, and systematically reviewed.

3. Findings and Discussion

The following section reports the results reviewed previous studies and discussion.

3.1. What are the Effects of Professional Development Programs on Teachers’ Beliefs about ELT and/or their Teaching Practices?

Drawing on Table 1 below, previous studies generally yielded mixed results regarding the effects of a PD program on teachers’ pedagogical beliefs and their instructional practices. On the one hand, PD programs in these prior inquiries, to some extent, exert positive effects on teachers’ beliefs about ELT and/or their classroom practices. Teachers’ pedagogical beliefs and class teaching have been witnessed a development or a change in a great number of studies as a result of teacher PD programs [1], [2], [4], [6], [8], [10], and [11]. However, it is not very easy for their teaching beliefs and practices to be changed over time in certain circumstances or settings because of their low English proficiency, such as those in Coburns’ study, and the testing systems as indicated in some studies in Korea [5]. On the other hand, other studies have
uncovered that ESL/EFL teacher education programs have little or no impact on teachers’ beliefs or/and their teaching practices [17] – [20]. The major rationale for resisting changes in teachers’ beliefs and their pedagogical practices is the testing system which focuses on grammar and reading comprehension [19], [20].

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<th>Table 1. A Summary of the Selected Prior Studies (n = 20)</th>
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2. Limited or no changes in teachers’ beliefs about ELT and/or their instructional practices

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3.2. What are the Limitations of the Previous Studies?

It is evident from Table 1 that most of the studies reviewed reveal certain limitations. First of all, many of the research projects investigating EFL teachers’ beliefs and their instructional practices are methodologically limited. Some employed only one technique or method of data collection, such as questionnaire/survey [1] - [3], [5] or interview [4], [5], whereas few studies combined questionnaire and interview instruments [6] – [8]. These instruments, either individually or in combination, are not sufficient to examine the effects of PD programs on teachers’ beliefs and classroom practices. Therefore, a more appropriate qualitative approach should be required for methodological triangulation using diverse techniques of data collection and analysis [36]. As argued by Borg [7], lacking such triangulation may lead to the low validity of the results and thereby their implications. It seems that Coburn and Kereke avoided this disadvantage.

Secondly, given that some researchers conducted a case study that focused on only one teacher [17], [20] or several teachers [4], [5] to gather information about teachers’ beliefs and/or their teaching practices, it would be unlikely for them to generalize their findings to other cases.

Thirdly, some research made an investigation into the impact of a professional development on only teachers’ beliefs or on only teachers’ instructional practices [5], [10], [13], [17]. As pointed out by Borg [7], a study isolating teachers’ beliefs from their classroom practices produces an unnatural separation. Therefore, to deal with this problem, the researcher should deliberately concentrate on measuring the impact of teacher PD on both teachers’ beliefs and their class practices. Accordingly, the breadth of the overall findings will be made possible because of this holistic focus.

Finally, to my knowledge, there, currently, exist only a few research projects carried out to evaluate the impact of a PD program on the beliefs of EFL teachers about ELT and their teaching practices from the global context, especially from schools in Vietnam.

4. Implications and Conclusion

In summary, certain contributions to the existing literature regarding patterns of changes in teachers’ beliefs about ELT or/and their teaching practices as a result of their active engagements in professional development programs, and major shortcomings have been explored from the systematic review on the previous studies. Specially, the reviewed studies have highlighted certain implications for further research directions in the world as well as in Vietnamese context.

First, methodologically, questionnaire or/and interview was highly favored in many prior studies for a data source suggests that a mixed-methods approach embracing quantitative and qualitative data (e.g., journals and observations) should be adopted to attain triangulation of the data. Second, some reviewed studies merely with a small number of participants implied that future research projects should require a greater sample size that is more likely to enhance the finding generalizations to other contexts. Finally, although research projects pertaining to teacher professional development has aroused substantial attention worldwide and in Vietnam over many decades, there have, to the best of our knowledge, been few studies concerning the impact of a PD program on the beliefs of EFL teachers about ELT or/and their teaching practices in schools in Vietnam until now. Therefore, this research field should be a “fertile ground” for researchers in Vietnam.

Overall, it can be concluded that professional development programs for EFL teachers, to a greater extent, positively affect teachers’ beliefs about ELT and their classroom practices, and are, therefore, needed for teachers to grow their teaching profession and enhance learners’ learning outcomes. Additionally, it is suggested that further empirical investigations should be delved into this field to benefit researchers, teachers and stakeholders.
REFERENCES


