

Male Vs Female Teachers' Professional Development: The Case of Chlef Middle School Teachers of English

التطور المهني لدى أساتذة و أساتذات اللغة الإنجليزية: أساتذة التعليم المتوسط بالشلف أنموذجا

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Abstract

The adoption of the English language worldwide is becoming an incomparable incentive for the teachers to switch from the traditional teaching assumptions and approaches that imposed methods and techniques to approaches that constantly make them have thirst for reflection and professional development. Algerian educational reform, being no exception, has called for changes in instructional practices to improve the quality of teaching. This research paper gives an insight into teacher development by middle school teachers of English, and examines whether or not their gender affects their development. A study was conducted with thirty-eight (38) female teachers and ten (10) male teachers, from ten different middle schools of the Chlef area, Algeria, to whom a questionnaire was administered. The findings revealed that the teachers progress considerably, and gender-related factor affects to a certain degree their professional development.

Keywords: Professional development- middle school teachers of English- Algerian educational system- gender discrepancies.

الملخص

إن الاستعمال الشاسع و العالمي للغة الإنجليزية يحث الأساتذة على الانتقال من افتراضات التعليم التقليدية و المناهج التي فرضت أساليبها و تقنياتها إلى المناهج التي تحتاج لمعلمين يسعون باستمرار للتفكير بممارساتهم الخاصة و التطور مهنيا. إن الإصلاح التربوي في الجزائر، كونه ليس استثناء، حث و نادى بطرح تغييرات في الممارسات التعليمية بهدف تحسين نوعية التعليم. يسعى هذا البحث العلمي للبحث في مسألة تطوير المعلمين عبر تسليط الضوء على أساتذة اللغة الإنجليزية للمرحلة المتوسطة من التعليم. تناقش هذه الدراسة العلمية السبل و الطرق التي عبرها يمكن للأساتذة تطوير أنفسهم مهنيا. كما أنها تتفحص مدى تأثير عامل الجنس على هذا التطور. أجريت هذه الدراسة مع ثمانية وثلاثون (38) أساتذة و عشرة أساتذة (10) من عشر مدارس متوسطة مختلفة في منطقة الشلف بالجزائر، الذين قدم لهم استبيان. كشفت النتائج أن الأساتذة يطورون أنفسهم بشكل ملحوظ، كما أن عامل الجنس له تأثير على التطور المهني للأساتذة. الكلمات المفتاحية: التطور المهني، أساتذة اللغة الإنجليزية للمرحلة المتوسطة، النظام التربوي في الجزائر، التفاوتات الجنسية.

1. Introduction

Over the last few decades, teacher professional development, formerly known as in-service education and training (Craft, 2000), captured imagination and urged inspiration of a great deal of scholars. Increasing demands for professional high standards and inevitable teachers' accountability for their professional development made teachers feel a great need to improve their skills and quality of their teaching. Despite the efforts made to improve the quality of English Language Teaching, professional development in Algeria still seems to be in its embryonic state- the fact that hampers

both teachers' and learners' enthusiasm and progress (Iddou, 2018). As any other gender- based process, professional development appears to vary according to teachers' gender. As a matter of fact, men are found to benefit more than women, and feel more satisfied when they do well in their job (Doble and Supriya, 2010).

2. Review of the Literature

Professional development, a “smooth and gradual change” (Iddou, 2018) against a “tyranny of technique” (Dewey, 1933), increasingly seen as a powerful means for improving student achievement and learning (Rosemary et al, 2007), is defined as a “*complicated, prolonged, highly situated and deeply personal process that has no start or end point*” (Johnson and Glombek, 2011:xi). This suggests a continuing learning of teachers through academic coursework, workshops, conferences, and access to new technology. Teachers' development is believed to be effective “*only if teachers are conscious enough and reflect on their teaching, and work in collaboration with their colleagues*” (Iddou, 2018: 7). In line with this, Fullan (1991: 326) asserted: “*Educational reform will never amount to anything until teachers become...seamlessly inquiry-oriented, reflective and collaborative professionals.*”

Grimmet (2014) pointed out that the concept of professional development changed to professional learning, i.e., from something done to teachers, by experts, for instance, to something done by or with teachers following their pedagogical needs and concerns. As a matter of fact, professional learning has been defined by Doecke et al (2008) as an

“Important form of capacity building, and is a lever for reform and both school and system-wide levels ... [Professional development should not be viewed] as an add-on but rather, as an integral part of teachers' professional lives which best occurs over a sustained period of time instead of one-off professional development sessions which are generally perceived to be of little value” (Quoted in Bell and Albridge, 2014: 13).

According to the literature (Craft, 2002; Foord, 2009), professional development builds and deepens teachers' knowledge, strengthens and fosters their performance skills, and therefore ameliorate the quality of their teaching in order to be effective and good learning facilitators . Constant with this view, Rosemary et al, (2007: 12) contended: “*...the important goal of professional development is to engage teachers in very rigorous thinking with complex ideas, then to take disciplined action within a framework of evidence-based literacy education*”.

Professional development, as a continuous learning, splits into two forms: conscious that occurs in formal manners such as conferences, seminars and workshops that teachers attend- it refers to what teacher educators and stakeholders do for the teachers, and unconscious that happens in informal manners such as picking knowledge naturally (not planned) from experience, colleagues, books, television and internet- it refers to what teachers do for themselves (Iddou, 2018).

Keeping gender in view, literature suggests that men and women differ in the way they develop professionally (Crompton & L., 2006; Craig, 2007; Baxter et al., 2008; Craig and Mullan, 2010; Doble and Supriya, 2010; Anxo et al., 2011). Unlike men who give more importance to their job than to their family, women regard work and family equally important, and both as the sources of their satisfaction; inhibited by the work from taking care of their families, women feel unhappy, disappointed and frustrated (Doble and Supriya, 2010). Parenthood has been asserted to be the starting point for the appalling increase in inequity and radical change in the time distribution between men and women (Anxo et al., 2011; Craig and Mullan, 2010; Baxter et al., 2008). On the same wavelength, Craig (2007) and Crompton et al. (2006) contended that the huge burden of taking care of newborn and of the increasing amount of housework usually falls disproportionately on the woman and tends to affect men to a much lesser degree. Consequently, juggling children and a career is felt to be much more complicated by women than by men, which makes the strategies they develop different (Anxo et al., 2011).

3. Background of the study: Professional Development of Middle school Teachers of English

Though Algerian Educational system has witnessed over the last decades significant changes, designed to foster, reinforce and improve the quality of teaching, teachers professional development, the backbone of the teachers and students' success (Iddou, 2018), still remains sluggish and sticks to the traditional teaching approaches. Consequently, teachers feel dissatisfied and unable to keep pace with the demanding high teaching standards.

4. Statement of the Problem

Professional development of middle school teachers of English is still in its embryonic state, and the weekly seminars, conferences and workshops they attend are felt insufficient and ineffective since they do not cover all their needs.

5. Purpose of the Study

This study is an attempt to:

- shed light on professional development of Chlef middle school teachers of English.
- examine the extent to which their gender affects their professional development.

6. Research Questions

- How does professional development impact middle school English teachers' professional classroom practices?
- To what extent does gender affect English middle school teachers way of developing professionally?

7. Research Hypothesis

According to what is mentioned so far, it is likely to find the following:

- Professional development is expected to affect to a lesser extent middle school English teachers classroom practices.
- Male teachers are expected to develop more professionally than female teachers, as the latter are totally devoted to their families.

8. Limitations of the Study

This research corpus, taken from only ten middle schools of Chlef and whose participants were predominantly females, could have an impact on the findings and, consequently, final conclusions may have been affected by the results.

9. Methodology

To investigate how Chlef middle school teachers of English develop professionally, and the extent to which their gender affects their classroom practices, the quantitative method is used; and given the impossibility to study the whole population, our only recourse was the use of sampling. We used sampling because it is fundamental to all statistical methodology of behavioural and social research, more specifically random sampling that is considered as an objective method of sampling (Singh, 2006).

A) Research Instrument

Because of its popularity, easy design, costless nature in the matter of time and money (Gray, 2004), and its unique advantage over other research tools (Singh, 2006), a questionnaire was used to explore the way Chlef middle school teachers of English develop professionally and the extent to which their gender impacts on their professional classroom practices. The questionnaire was divided into three sections: A, B and C which are partly based on El- Fiki (2012), who in turn adapted Richards, Gallo, and Renandya's (2001) survey. Section A of the questionnaire was designed to answer the second research question.

Following Stronge (2007), section B of the questionnaire contained 14 items that concern teachers' professional classroom practices (see appendix). We used a four level scale through which the respondents gave their answers on their progress. As for section C, it was meant to examine the tools that teachers use for their development in addition to the weekly seminars, workshops and conferences they attend. This section is divided into two parts: C1 and C2. The first part (C1) was meant to see how often teachers use these tools; and the second (C2) was intended to examine the extent to which these tools make their progress (see appendix).

B) Participants

The population targeted in this study was teachers of English from ten middle schools; they were forty eight (48) teachers: thirty eight (38) female teachers and ten (10) male teachers. They were split according to their gender to see whether or not gender is among the factors that affect teachers' professional development and learning.

C) Data Analysis

For a better data analysis, we used descriptive and statistical analysis. The two questions, where teachers were asked to tick the box which best corresponds to their progress, say how often they make use of the tools for development and to what degree these tools make them progress in their profession, were analysed quantitatively.

10. Results

As indicated earlier, the aim of this research paper is to examine how Chlef middle school teachers of English develop professionally, and the degree to which their gender impacts on their

class practices and their development. The results are reported on the base of the research questions that were formulated earlier, and believed to be interconnected. Therefore, professional classroom practices, and the tools that teachers use for their development are examined according to teachers' gender. Teachers were found to leave an important number of items without answers. For this reason we added the fifth level 'No Answer' in our analysis, though a four level scale was used in the questionnaire addressed to the teachers.

Section A

➤ Biographic Background of the teachers

The table below gives information of our participants in terms of their gender. Our corpus includes forty eight (48) informants: 79.16% females and 20.83% males.

Number of the participants	Males	Females
48	10 (20.83%)	(79.16%)

Section B

➤ Professional Classroom Practices

As mentioned above, professional classroom practices are investigated in terms of our respondents' gender. We examined the issue through asking them to tick the box which best corresponds to their progress in each of the given classroom practices.

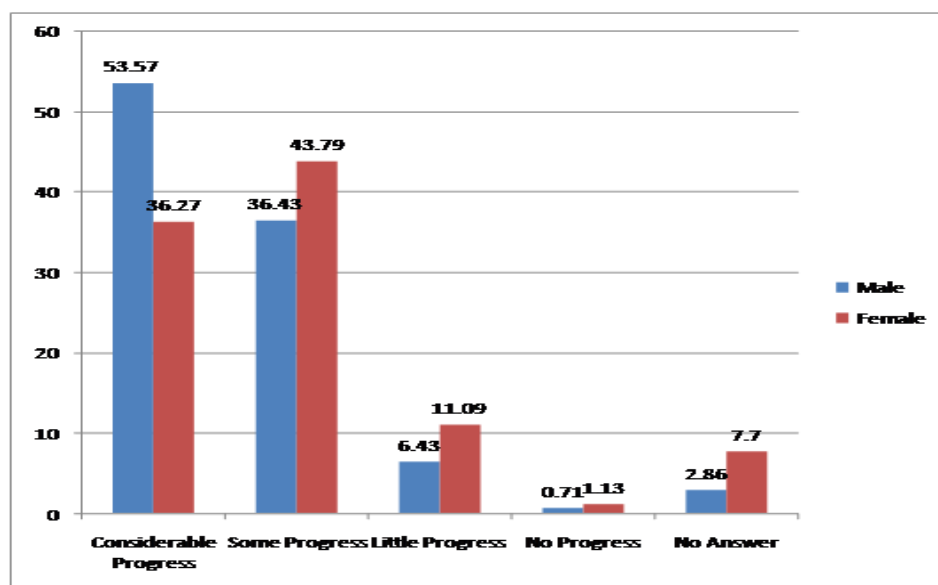


Figure 01: Professional Classroom Practices According to Gender

As revealed by the above figure, the calculated mean shows that professional development influences considerably teachers' classroom practices, but with different degrees. As far as gender is concerned, professional development appears to have more power on male teachers, whose most responses fall under the category of 'considerable progress', than on their female counterparts. A proportionally larger number of female teachers (43.79%) who fall under the category of 'some progress' reflects their slow-going development. A more or less considerable number of female teachers left most of the items without answer; this may be due to the nature or non applicability of the items.

Section C

Frequency of the use of tools for development and their impact are again investigated in the matter of teachers' gender. We tackled the issue through the following question:

- In addition to the weekly seminars, workshops and conferences you attend, say how often you make use of the following tools for development and to what degree they make you progress in your profession.

C-1. Frequency of the Use of Tools for Development According to Gender

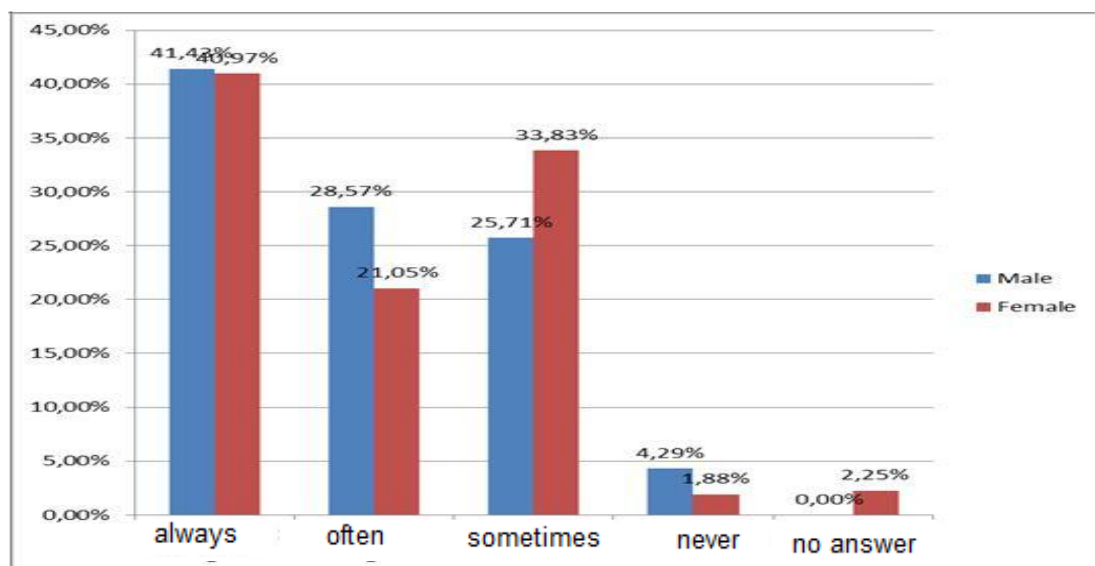


Figure 02: Frequency of the Use of Tools for Development According to Gender

The figure discloses that the great majority of the teachers use tools for development, with a nuance between male teachers and their counterparts. 41, 43% of male teachers are reported to 'Always' use these tools against 40, 97% of female teachers. 28, 57% of male teachers contended

they 'often' use tools for development against 21, 05% of female teachers. On the other hand, tools for professional development are found to be 'sometimes' used by 33.83% of female teachers against 25, 71% of male teachers.

C-2. The Impact of the Use of Tools for Development

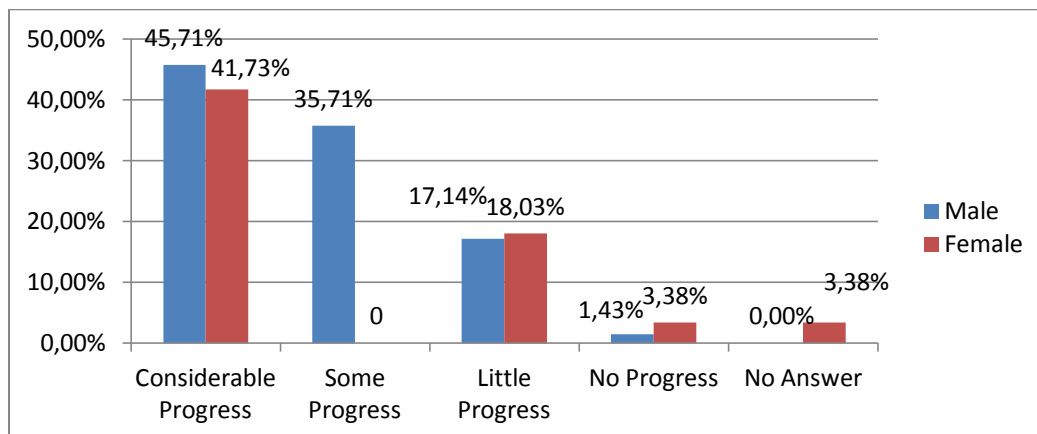


Figure 03: The Impact of the Use of Tools for Development According to Gender

The obtained results reveal that both male teachers and their female counterparts are reported to make a considerable progress by means of tools for development. Thus, one can safely claim the considerable positive influence of these tools on the teachers' classroom practices. However, it is worth noting that the degree of the impact differs with the difference of gender, in that most of these tools are found to have more influence on male teachers' practices than on females'. 45.71% of male teachers are found to make a considerable progress in their classroom practices against 41.73% of female teachers. 35.71% of male teachers fall under the category of 'some progress', while none (0%) of their female counterparts fall in this category. Finally, the difference is reported insignificant between male teachers who fall under the categories of 'little progress' and 'no progress', and their female counterparts who fall in the same categories.

11. Discussion

As indicated earlier, this research paper was meant to examine how Chlef middle school teachers of English develop professionally, and to see whether or not their gender impacts on their development. Contrary to what has been hypothesized, the results at hand show that Chlef middle school teachers of English are significantly influenced by professional development provided, in that it helps them to develop their teaching practices, therefore, their understanding and awareness of the teaching principles (Iddou, 2018). Despite its importance, formal (top- down) professional development alone does not seem to quench teachers' thirst for development- the reason why they make recourse to informal (bottom- up) development to reach the desired goals and keep themselves

up to date. As regards gender, it is not surprising to find male teachers more responsive to professional development. Female teachers' sluggish progress and their inability to keep pace with their male counterparts is a response to environmental pressures, imposed by domestic responsibilities, and psychological factors. In this respect, Thomas, Thomas & Smith (2019: 01) claimed: "...career breaks for child-rearing, and women's self-beliefs about their abilities can impact negatively on their careers."

12. Conclusion and Recommendations

The results of this study show that regardless of the quality of the professional development provided to Chlef middle school teachers of English, the latter are found to take advantage of it. But they, actually, appear to be, to various degrees, autonomous seeking better strategies and tools that best meet their needs. Additionally, due to a male- dominated society which exerts pressures on women, most female teachers in this study are reported unable to progress as effectively as their male counterparts do.

Grounded on these findings, it can be recommended to: 1) recognize that not all aspects of teacher professional development can be (or should be) addressed in courses (Villegas- Reimers, 2003), therefore there must be a wide range of approaches and tools provided to the teachers; 2) improve teachers' education through involving them in the design of their development programmes that cover all their needs; 3) include courses on how teachers use technology in the classroom; 4) encourage teachers to have reflective discussions with each other and with administrators both formally and informally; 5) accept change and have the willingness to develop.

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Appendix

QUESTIONNAIRE TO TEACHERS

Dear Teacher,

This questionnaire is part of a research project on English learning and teaching in the middle school. It is anonymous, so do not write your name.

Would you please answer the questions honestly? Thank you very much for your cooperation.

Section A

➤ Gender: Male.....

Female.....

Section B

Classroom practices (professional aspects of the teacher)	Considerable progress	Some progress	Little progress	No progress
Communication skills				
Effective lesson plans				
Positive reinforcements (praising the learners' efforts)				
Knowledge of the subject matter				
Class discussions				
Using pedagogical tools other than the textbook				
Variability in assessment				
Language skills				
Discipline behaviour				
Time management				
Class size management (large classes)				
Mixed ability management (classes with different levels)				
Raising learners' attention and motivation				
Learner- centred lessons				

Section C

In addition to the weekly seminars, workshops and conferences you attend, say how often you make use of the following tools for development and to what degree they make you progress in your profession.

C-1

Tools for development	Always	Often	Sometimes	Never
Reading English books and EFL journals				
Using the internet and new technology				
Learners feedback				
Headmaster observations				
Discussions with colleagues				
Watching English channels				
Self-observation : making reflective notes, before, during and after class				

C-2

Tools for development	Considerable progress	Some Progress	Little progress	No progress
Reading English books and EFL journals				
Using the internet and new technology				
Learners' feedback				
Headmaster's observations				
Discussions with colleagues				
Watching English TV channels				
Self-observation : making reflective notes, before, during and after class				

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR KINDLY ANSWERING THIS QUESTIONNAIRE.