

Higher institution faculty pursue personal and professional development driven by educational innovations in Russia

Profesorado de educación superior persigue el desarrollo personal y profesional impulsado por las innovaciones educativas en Rusia

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ABSTRACT:

The research paper envisages the ever rising demand on professional development for tertiary teaching staff dictated by educational evolution and innovative pedagogy in Russia. The article supports the idea that teacher development is a lifetime process starting from the initial pursue of this career till retirement. Therefore, this study makes an attempt to review the availability of internal and external models, in-service and outside trainings and experiences that possibly will enhance teachers' practices and professionalism throughout their careers. Driven by the awareness that even the most recent approaches today seem obsolete, the paper aims at illustrating what options are available now in a particular country at a specific time-scale. The quantitative and qualitative analyses of data collected demonstrate a paradigm shift in the urgency of continuous evolvement not only of professional, but also personal competencies mediated either by the administration or individual initiative.

Keywords: educational innovations, higher institution faculty, in-service trainings, professional development.

RESUMEN:

El documento de investigación preve la creciente demanda de desarrollo profesional para el personal docente terciario dictada por la evolución educativa y la pedagogía innovadora en Rusia. El artículo apoya la idea de que el desarrollo de los docentes es un proceso de por vida desde la el inicio de esta carrera hasta la jubilación. Por lo tanto, este estudio intenta revisar la disponibilidad de modelos internos y externos, formación en el puesto de trabajo y experiencias que mejorarán las habilidades y el profesionalismo de los docentes a lo largo de sus carreras. Impulsado por la conciencia de que incluso los enfoques más recientes de hoy parecen obsoletos, el objetivo del artículo es ilustrar qué opciones están disponibles ahora en un país en particular en una escala de tiempo específica. Los análisis cuantitativos y cualitativos de los datos recopilados demuestran un cambio de paradigma en la urgencia de la evolución continua no solo de las competencias profesionales, sino también personales, mediadas por la administración o la iniciativa individual. Palabras clave: innovaciones educativas, facultades de instituciones superiores, formación en el puesto de

1. Introduction

"There is no greater education than one that is self-driven." – Neil de Grasse Tyson

The third millennium is signified by enormous changes and shifts in global educational sphere opening new trends and opportunities for tomorrow's universities. Nearly all societies, both in developed and emerging countries, are engaged in these perplexing reforms where the role of educators is of utmost importance as they are the core 'variables and change agents' of these transformations by adopting innovative pedagogy and methodology. As Eleonora Villegas-Reimers (2003) states 'this double role of educators as subject and object of change' has forced them to pursue lifelong professional development in their career path to meet all challenges and alterations.

Educators work in diverse environments and even the demands placed upon them are quite complex and divergent. The key role of teachers is to equip learners with life and professional competences required and relevant to world's constant evolution. Therefore, these constraints accelerate the need for educators to strive for lifetime personal and professional development. Driven by ongoing educational changes the initial teacher education has proven to be insufficient and obsolete to provide them with necessary skills and competitive edge for lasting teaching vocation. Moreover, the knowledge-based and technically-equipped society puts even greater emphasis on the further education and professional development of university faculty making it an all-time task which should be prioritized, 'structured and resourced accordingly' reasons Scribner (1999).

With the advent and rapid worldwide progress of ITC in all social spheres higher educational institutions are becoming more and more independent with e-learning environments, learner-centred and autonomous courses. Hence, the educators need to assume multiroles and enlarge their responsibilities to design the relevant content, supervise and monitor learning process along with personal career-long development. In this context, teaching vocation considered as one of modern and essential professions, demands constant involvement of teacher professionalism, expansion of knowledge boundaries, constant research work with high level commitment and engagement. This in turn requires both self-motivation and support from education systems to open opportunities for the development and implementation of programs targeting the changing needs of learners and educators.

2. Methodology

The methodology of the research is based on the principles of content analysis of the previous and current investigations on the issue under study. And comparative method contributes to the revealing and comprehending the implications of continual personal development. Yet the empirical study through decades is considered to be the dominant method, making an attempt to increase the social awareness of professional perfection.

The participants of the survey were 53 faculty members of Plekhanov Russian University of Economics, Department of Foreign Language № 1. 50 of them are EFL teachers with diverse qualifications and degrees (Senior Teachers, Associate Professors, Ph.D Candidates and Doctors) and age range from 30-70; the other 3 are specialized in French and German.

2.1. Literature review

Teaching proficiency has huge and positive impact on students' knowledge attainment and later professionalism. Even the very choice of teaching profession and pursue of the goal to become an outstanding and competitive teacher requires not only developing practical skills, pedagogical expertise under the supervision and assistance of experts, as well as acquisition of specific knowledge, IT skills, elevation of specific ethical values and attitudes. In other words, educators should be multidimensionally competent and as Calderhead and Sharrock

(1997) stipulated in their article teachers should 'know where, what, when, who, why and how to teach'.

Recently, the ever swelling emphasis on improving and developing professional teaching capabilities has given rise to controversial arguments among educators and researchers. On the one hand, being a highly qualified specialist with a teaching experience of some decades and still feeling the urgency or be pushed to continual development is tackled by the majority as a sign of insufficient and inadequate standards of teaching. Yet an interesting argument was expressed by Guskey and Huberman (1995) who disputed this belief basing their view on their global work experience and collaboration. They proved their view by concluding that 'the vast majority of teachers ... are dedicated professionals who work hard under demanding conditions'. And these challenging conditions are triggered by 'the speed of change and the explosion of knowledge requiring people to learn afresh at many intervals throughout their lives' continued Nicoleta Duță and Elena Rafailă (2014), thus supporting previously cited scholars' view. Earlier in discussing the problem of life-long development Johnson (2009) said, 'people study to improve themselves and try to double their capability every four year to adapt themselves to the information age.' Nonetheless, another group of researchers opposed the significance and surge of life-long learning against 'the increase of life expectancy and old-age dependency ratio, the desire to improve life quality, physical and mental conditions...' This standpoint was claimed by Ates H. & Alsal K., (2012), Laal M., Peyman (2012) and Hursen C. (2014), who disputed microeconomic and global issues related to social and national welfare, technological constant evolution and life-quality progress.

In the tertiary educational sphere, where the greatest emphasis is on transferring global values and expertise to individuals, and to nurture information society with competitive skills, Drucker (1996) reasoned the necessity of life-wide learning for teachers saying that 'even high educated people need to learn something more.' And nearly a decade later Bozkurt (2005) confirmed this point by testifying that 'the firms have been forced to create differences and innovate themselves to compete in the global world'. The similar idea is strongly supported in our era, when 'it is essential to understand that innovation is not only physical or systematic, but also professional' (Arias-Bolzmann, L. G.; Llanos, P. W., 2019).

Educational institutions in this point complete an ultimate role as the future of any society starts from every citizen's rearing, like the growth of every tree depends on the planting of a corn. Moreover, this research work was an endeavor to prove that with the emergence of such concepts as personal brand, unique competitive edge, professional accomplishment, self-actualization, etc. not only higher institution faculty need to follow lifelong professional development, but nearly in any sphere or industry sector new opportunities for evolution, exploration, erudition and expansion are both welcomed and demanded.

These prospects we would later call 4Es which open new prospects for higher institution faculty to manage their personal brand development and pursue promising career path. Therefore, we would make a trial to verify that without continual development or progress even the best teaching techniques become outdated, without constant research and investigation educators lose the touch with reality and the future, the luck of all-time learning and knowledge-chase will make them suffer from underestimation and losing face, and without permanent development or growth they could be endangered to professional extinction, as a result, causing high-level staff turnover even in educational institutions.

3. Results

"It changed my job prospects overnight and changed the way employers viewed me. It's amazing how valuable five letters can be." - Vicky Rowland, CELTA graduate and English teacher, UK

The above quotation is very similar to what we face and experience in the fast changing and globalised educational environment. It reasons the ultimate need for educators to adopt lifelong learning strategy and always move forward, to embrace new boundaries and keep speed with technological rapid progress. 'Adapt or die' - it is the pace of technological change that is unprecedented in the modern era and which poses the greatest challenge for

jobs (bbc.news, 2018). As Polycom boss Mary McDowell thinks 'new technologies will make us more productive - RPA doesn't have to lead to a culling of staff, it can empower them and unleash their creativity. It's freeing them from doing the unproductive stuff.'

The following survey was carried on in several stages. In the initial stage the researchers brainstormed some controversial questions or quotes about teaching profession: How often do we need to refresh/upgrade our professional skills? Is teaching really life-long learning? Or is this about all specializations? Do coursebooks demand new teaching approaches? Is creativity crucial for teaching? The ideas and answers were quite divergent and belligerent, but the core point made by all the survey participants gained a convergent nature with the implication that 'either teachers take a constant personal-professional evolvement path or they are doomed to extinction.' By the researchers the personal and professional development is regarded and defined as a deliberate process or self-generated, initiated activity aiming at improving the level of work effectiveness and fruitfulness.

In the second phase of the investigation the researchers suggest a differentiation among three main ways of undertaking further activities which lead to enlarging and enriching professional expertise and competencies. Surely, the technological revolution has facilitated the mankind's improvement incredibly, and as Haydar A. and Kadir A. state 'Today, the most valuable source is Information.' In order to portrait the availability of certain certificate programs and professional development courses after graduation for educators, we have carried on a multidimensional investigation with an attempt to gather and demonstrate all achievable courses in the Russian market and classified them under the following headings.

Planned or Direct professional development certificate courses:

Cambridge Teaching qualifications and courses: CELTA, TKT (Teaching Knowledge Test), CELT-P, CELT-S, ICELT, Delta, Certificate in EMI Skills, Train the Trainer, BEC, FTBE, Professional Development courses, Seasonal Professional Development schools (by PRUE, Pearson, Macmillan, etc.), International TEFL and TESOL training courses;

These teaching qualifications and courses are widely accepted and valued by employers around the world. They are internationally respected as the quality standard.

Indirect or Unplanned – Webinars, Seminars, Conferences, Symposiums, Work-shops, IATEFL conferences, Competitions;

Self-generated - Reading and exploring articles, books, writing research works, watching videos, creating blogs, and peer-lesson attendance.

In the third stage of the survey there was suggested a list of questions for Self-evaluation or SWOT analysis of the personal competencies to highlight skills necessary to pursue lifetime learning.

What else can I do? What are my professional / personal strengths and weaknesses? What skills do I need for personal and professional development? The answers of survey participants were quite valuable and practical, assuring that 'educators should highlight and strengthen their strong qualities and hide their weak points during all their teaching career', 'they need to foster their Emotional Intelligence - 4S's: Self-awareness -trying to read and understand your emotions, as well as recognize their impact on work performance and relationships; Self-management – the drive to meet an internal standard of excellence, Social awareness and service orientation – the ability to recognize and meet customers' needs, and Social skills - manage their communicative skills and create rapport, boost adaptation capability and professionalism'. It is worth mentioning Demirel (2005) affirming that 'lifelong learning is based on continuity, creativity and learning how to learn by themselves,' what is the implication of each respond. Even 'interpersonal relationships were found to be a motivational factor in the complex process of lifelong learning' proves Jin Kuan Kok (2014).

The next survey phase is presented in Table 1. It analyzes the paradigm shifts in the contents and purposes of Winter Scientific Schools, which were annually organized by the Department of Foreign Languages 1, PREU. The review was based on data collected from in-house reports and proceedings, which reveal the following changing tendencies: issues related to Teaching Methodology, ESP Course Peculiarities were shadowed by the urgency of

Incorporating Online Resources both in class and self-learning processes, later (2015-17) a shift was traced in the increase of Blended Courses and Teacher Further Development, and the last two years under study were marked by the noteworthy changes recurring in the entire tertiary educational environment, which accordingly force and encourage the faculty to follow personal and professional development via continual evolution, exploration, erudition and expansion of their proficiency and personal brand. Ramli A. and Maslan M. F. (2015) included the following benefits 'upgrading of knowledge, sharing of knowledge between colleagues, an opportunity to refresh previous knowledge and acquire the latest information and recognition of practice.

Table 1
Paradigm Shifts in PREU Winter School Objectives

| Academic years | Winter Scientific Schools 16th-20th | Objectives |
|-----------------------|---|--|
| 2013-14 | Improving Educational and Professional Proficiencies in Higher Institutions of Economics | Methodology: teaching methods and techniques ESP course specifications & goals |
| 2014-15 | Enhancing Students' and Educators' Linguistic and Professional Competencies in Economic Higher Institutions | Virtual resources integrated in ESP curricula Academic language and its peculiarities |
| 2015-16 | Increasing Pedagogical Expertise "Pearson Solutions for Enhanced Students' and Teachers' Academic Mobility" | Pedagogical proficiency & expertise Blended learning models |
| 2016-17 | Increasing Pedagogical Expertise "Progression of foreign language teachers' competitiveness and individual rating in modern conditions" | Paradigm shifts in higher education Academic networking prospects |
| 2017-18 | Increasing Pedagogical Expertise "University of Tomorrow: Innovative Pedagogy and Methodology" | ICT and academic sphere Future trends in teaching and learning |
| 2018-19 | Education without borders "Current Modes and Trends in Teaching ESP" | Education evolution from board to humagram |

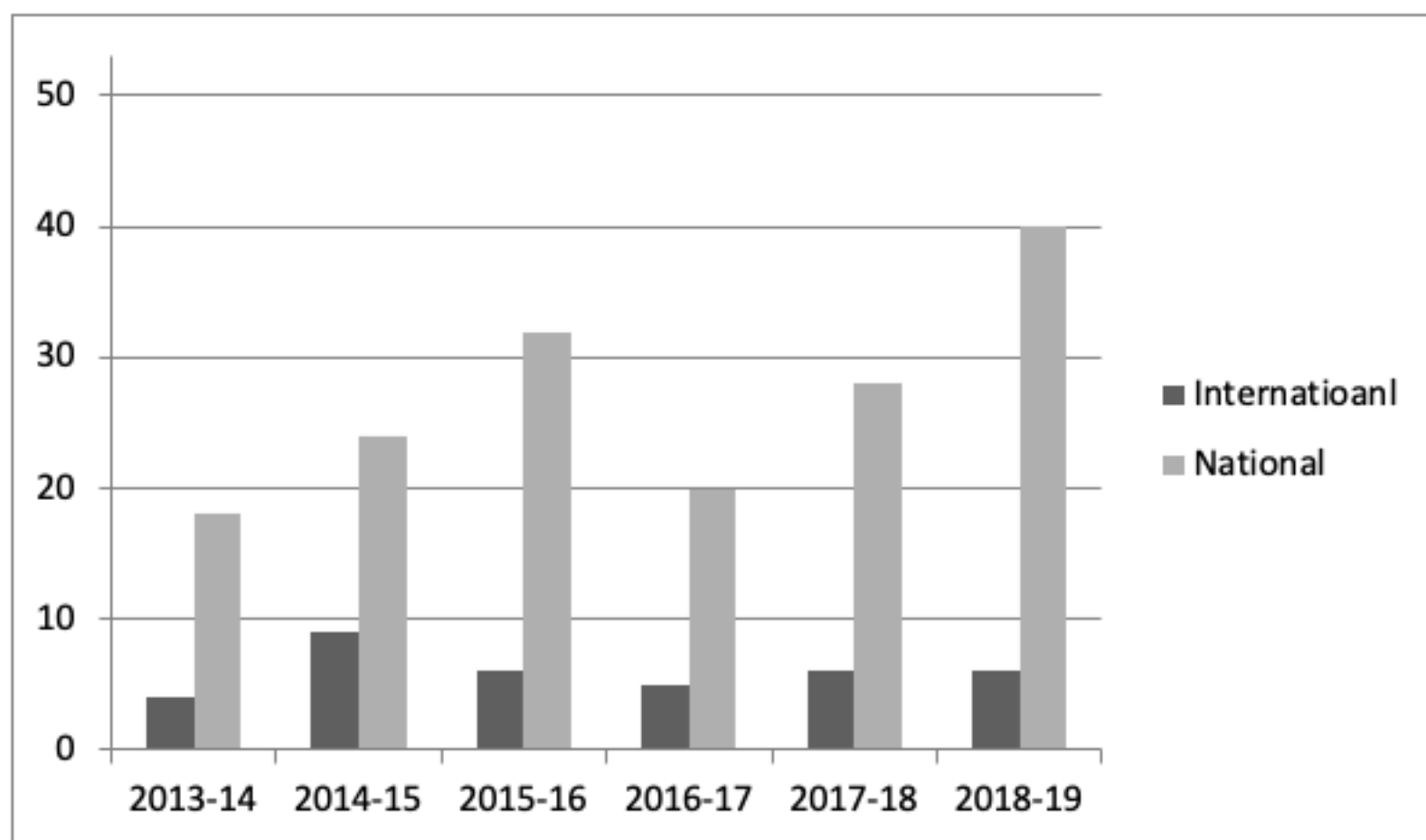
The bar chart below, based on official data of reports and recordings provided by the same department employing 53 educators, establishes the level of employee performance and attendance in national and international specialized courses between 2013-19. The investigations referring to data about quantity and quality of staff taking professional development programmes illustrate a fluctuating tendency within a 6-year span and a significant gap between national and international certified courses.

During the academic year 2013-14 the international programs of professional development were taken by only 4 faculty members, whereas in the national courses the number of participants was 18. In the next forthcoming academic years (2014-15, 2015-16) these figures nearly doubled reaching the peak (9 and 6 international courses, and 24 and 32 national ones respectively). As the diagram demonstrates, in 2016-17 there was spotted a substantial reduction (40%) in the proportion of the national teacher-training course participation, while the universal programs maintained the similar trend (5 participants). This decreasing trend could be explained by the growing pressure on the scientific research

work, the work-load upsurge, the paradigm shifts from purely traditional to blended learning environment, consequently the ever increasing necessity to focus on ICT evolvement and its integration in course designs. What refers to the final two periods (2017-18 and 2018-19) under the survey, it reveals a noteworthy growth in the in-company provided trainings and regaining position of the international ones (28 and 6, 40 and 6 correspondingly).

Overall, the faculty commitment and performance in professional development programmes can be marked rather higher, engaging more than the half of the staff, which emphasizes the necessity and urgency to follow life-long professional development policy to stay demanded and competitive. Coming to the great discrepancy between national and international programs, this trend is rooted in several factors: the unstable foreign currency rates, the enormous and time-consuming course requirements, which are incompatible with already existing tough workload, the insufficient motivation and financial support.

Figure 1
International and national certificates acquired
by Foreign Languages Faculty (2013-2019)



3.1. Discussion

Findings obtained from the qualitative and quantitative analyses of available certificate programs and professional development opportunities in the Russian market demonstrated the existence of a range of courses (over 12) provided either in-house or in outside premises from free to highly-priced ones.

It is of utmost importance to emphasize the fact that EFL teachers are language specialists and look like a multidimensional diamond where each angel needs to be carefully shaped and polished. If we compare it with a medal, at that point both sides should be cared and looked after. On the one side, it is your professionalism and competitiveness in class before learners who today start language acquisition since early childhood. Consequently, every target group of learners requires specific methodology, teaching approaches and teacher roles. On the other side, your academic profile, in such networking platforms as Google scholar, academia.edu, researchgate.net, elibrary.ru, or in-company websites, portrays your professional brand, expertise and competitiveness. 'Have you ever tried to search for you identity in the world-wide web? Just do it and you will understand that you are a Brand, and to manage it is in your own hands,' this a commonplace dialogue among colleagues who are mostly concerned about global and national changing trends in education, relentless stressful requirements and constant feeling of insufficiency, thus low morale. Another point

for contemplation is the importance of tutoring and providing private lessons. Are they really useful for professional development besides being helpful to earn more money? After long discussions with colleges, we assume that 'tutoring keeps our language level always in progress, in constant upgraded condition.' No academic course during undergraduate years offers acquaintance with the requirements and tactics of internationally accepted exams, like FCE, CAE, CPE, BEC, BULATS, IELTS, TOEFL, CAE, ILEC and other scholastic exams. Do we need these certificates? 'Not really, but we should complete them, should explore our professional strengths and weaknesses, in order to feel just in the shoes of our learners who would ask for support in preparation of these scholastic exams.'

To stay competitive and demanded we need to exploit and improve all the dimensions of the diamond, which we associate with teaching profession. Nowadays, we are pushed by current global educational trends to carry on constant research, investigate, explore and complete research work in diverse forms, as research papers, articles, and thesis, reports which demand creative and innovative skills. In order to foster our creativity we need extra time as it is a time-consuming activity, we need better self-management and need financing. Therefore, all these demands put great pressure on our time and small disposable income. So, educators constantly face the issues like Where to find these extra hours? How to improve time management and soft skills? These questions carry direct implication of the all-time learning necessities and insufficient capabilities in this fast-changing information age.

4. Conclusions

Even the short-term practices of personal and professional development enhance educators' confidence, enlarge the scope of competences and elevate their skills to meet the demands of the learners-driven educational evolution. Likewise, long-term and certified programs focused on 4Es arm at educators with relevant skills and expertise to gain excellence in the classroom management and to enjoy self-realization in this tough and challenging career path. Lifelong learning does not only enhance social inclusion, societal well-being and emotional quotient, but also increases competitiveness and ensure long-term employability in the knowledge era. Moreover, the advent and surge of ICT have provided the faculty with wider opportunities to build on their teaching expertise and skills, through combination of online study and observed teaching practices. Being successful in the knowledge economy requires mastering a new set of knowledge and competencies (A World Bank Report, 2003).

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