

CHALLENGES OF CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: FOCUS ON ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS' COMPETENCE

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Few decades ago, quality education in prestigious university was something like a lifelong guaranty that you would be employed, well-paid and successful. XXI century turned this idea into stereotype and started to provoke people constantly increase their professionalism. It is the demand of time (not very convenient for lazy ones, unfortunately).

Most of modern students have much in common: they would definitely turn to the teacher who can combine the best achievements of past and present, and can make the learning process natural and enjoyable. In this case, they get educational stuff which is active, multifunctional and highly sought. How do they know what they need? Society and rhythm of life set the goals.

Innovative teachers have to be very avid in process of getting information and very critical in process of reproducing it. Teaching skills are not something permanent and constant as your name is, on the contrary, it is something you should work on during your whole life. Russian sociologist Dobrynina G., considers that the person can become the real teacher - professional only if his work coincides with his inborn aptitudes [2].

In fact, nowadays traditional education is replaced by self-education. Many scientists consider 'self-education' as a combination of: self-esteem, self-determination, self-management, self-control, self-realization and self-management [1].

I recently did some research for a conference presentation via an email questionnaire for experienced teachers, to find out about their continuous professional development (CPD). Most of the 57 teachers who responded had been teaching for ten years or more, in private language schools, state schools and colleges. One question asked if they had any challenges in process of their professional development. Another question asked what activities they had been involved in to keep up their CPD. I also asked those who considered their CPD to be inadequate what activities would be ideal for them.

This survey showed that the group of teachers aged from 20 to 30 (30 % of all respondents) are rather curious and ambitious. They are 'data-overeaters': "eat" everything and try on their students. They implement something new willingly, but very often don't

analyze either progress or regress. The main reason is concentration on teaching process far more than on students' results.

The next group, age from 30 – 45 (20%) are experienced enough, and still very keen on and enthusiastic about their work. These teachers tend to use successful methods of the past and invent something new based on their own productive class events.

The most experienced group, aged from 45 (50%) has a great number of various teaching methods and techniques. On the other hand, very often they don't feel the need to change something and spend rather little time for self - education.

The first reason of these very different approaches is the attitude to English language itself.

- The youngest group sees the language as unavailable part of modern life, uses it both for enjoyment and self-development, but tends to improve teaching skills as a demand of administration.
- The second group has such opinion that English is an easy way to use hobby in their work. They use it also for work and pleasure, and master their skills either because of their own wish or as a demand of time.
- The third and the most proficient group consider English as a part of core curriculum. The great number of teachers uses it at private lessons rather than at school. They mostly improve their skills because it is something like a habit or rule (if they do improve them).

So, the main target group, which will continue their self-education willingly and with minimum of internal and external obstacles, is the group of teachers aged between 30 and 45.

The second challenge of continuous professional development is external. It is caused by various reasons. The respondents mentioned:

- low level of postgraduate education;
- misbalance between state and commercial educational centers;
- standards of education;
- complicated software;
- low-speed Internet;
- inadequate salary.

This challenge can be overcome if university language departments, postgraduate departments for teachers, commercial language courses cooperate and work on principles of heredity. Also some scientists recommend to introduce the alternative system of teachers' evaluation both at schools and universities: on the one hand, students get their grades for

learning; on the other, teachers get their grades for teaching. These grades will be the main reason for promotion and/or increasing of salary [3].

The next step to hasten the promotion is regular attending of conferences, seminars, practical workshops. According to this system, teachers will be able to get the higher grade (and higher salary) only if they within limited period (e.g.3 years as it is now) visit at least 5 seminars or workshops, publish few articles and involve their students into some project in order to use the newly-gained knowledge and skills. The perfect variant would be to consider the students' feedback but not the characteristic given by colleagues only. Active participants, not just “visitors” should be encouraged and promoted for further courses. Professional development should be reflected in on-line teacher's portfolio, available for verification of governmental and non-governmental structures.

The third mentioned obstacle is the time. To be more exact – its absence or shortage. We should notice the interesting fact from the survey: while the third group argued that they do not have enough of time, the first and the second blamed the low-speed Internet as the main retarding factor. Nowadays, the high – speed Internet and convenient software are unavailable for professional development. Lack of time can be overcome by watching on-line resources and taking part in webinars. The feedback on different viewed on-line recourses should be also reflected in teacher's personal on-line portfolio. The main accent should be made on distant on-line courses and Open Course Ware (OCW), rather than lectures in hot classrooms. New technologies open great variety of resources. OCW are course lessons created at universities and published gratis via the Internet [2]. According to the website of the OCW Consortium, an OCW project:

- is a free and open digital publication of high quality educational materials, organized as courses.
- is available for use and adaptation under an open license
- does not typically provide certification or access to faculty [5].

And, if the teacher really tries to escape “one-size-fits-all” approach with his students, he can have the free access to the lectures or handouts of the most experienced and recognized professionals from all over the world. Students have ‘European Credit Transfer System’ [6], which enlarges their educational opportunities; teachers also need such system to broaden their skills and what is more important, to escape the formality of postgraduate education. In such conditions, I suppose, many of them will become much more loyal to their students because they will be also taught and evaluated by specialists.

To sum up, all external challenges can not be overcome in one day, after copying the experience of other countries or implementing new technologies everywhere. Diversification of educational process and higher salary also should not be considered as the main obstacles. The major challenge is in people's minds: "it's not worth of my efforts, time and money" should be changed on "I'm alive: I need fresh food, fresh air, fresh impressions, fresh ideas and fresh people with the same 'fresh' attitude to life". You will not get fresh air if you don't open the window of your home. You will not be able to be a good teacher if you don't open your mind for brand new and undiscovered.

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