TEACHING TRAINING EFFECTIVENESS IN UNDERPRIVILEGED AREA ON TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHING METHODOLOGIES IN TERMS OF INTEGRATING COMPUTER TECHNOLOGY (ICT) IN THE LESSONS TAUGHT

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Abstract

This paper is based on the findings of a teaching training project the authors conducted in a semi-subsidized school in an underprivileged area in the Beqaa, where most of its population is of a low economic status, and they are in dire need for financial and economic improvement. Study participants were nine teachers who met weekly three hours for three consecutive months. The study investigated the impact of teacher training programs on teachers' knowledge of new teaching methodologies adapted from the American context. The findings show that the teaching program was beneficial since it introduced the teachers to different new teaching methodologies and allowed them to shift from classical classroom methodologies to non-classical ones. Moreover, the program influenced all of the participants' teaching skills in terms of introducing them to different theorists, which helped while developing lesson plans and taking into consideration students with special needs. This was reflected through their teaching during the training program. This initial study adds to the literature in terms of encouraging teaching training in the public and semi-subsidized sector, which in return affects positively the students' motivation, engagement in the classrooms, and academic performance.

Keywords: ICT, teaching methodologies, student centeredness, constructivist teaching approaches, professional development

Introduction

New teaching methodologies being embedded in our education system day after day have had a strong influence on teaching-learning processes where schools, teachers, and students have found themselves facing this challenge; this fact has made schools and teachers in Lebanon, as well as other countries, get prepared to survive this phenomenon. In other words, with the changing nature of these new services required, there is a need to improve the skills of the Lebanese teachers especially with the current economic crisis and the importance of education more than ever. Yet despite recent improvements in pedagogy, schools located in underprivileged area in Lebanon still lack the basic teaching requirements, and improvement should be obtained.

Personal Information Led To Initiating this Study
During the researchers' stay at a selected mid-sized and mid-eastern State University in the United States of America in summer 2015 as members of the Fulbright program for Junior Development, more research about teaching methodologies and their effect on students' learning was developed; especially after conducting observations and interviews in public schools in Lebanon for a Ph.D. dissertation in which findings showed that public school teachers do not fully comprehend new methodologies such as constructivism, which are now occupying American classrooms. Thus, the researchers decided to meet American professional researchers and professors to learn from their experiences and transfer the knowledge to the Lebanese schools; especially as the American culture is integrated into the curriculum in the Lebanese private schools but not the public ones.

Thus, the researchers met many specialized experimenters in the constructivist learning approaches in the field of education. After observing that the higher education program in the mid-eastern State University stressed and aimed at switching from the traditional school to the non-traditional one, the researchers determined to benefit from every single data or detail they could attain from their stay in a university stressing the high importance on research and adopting constructivist methodologies. The researchers wanted to learn more on how educational pedagogy could be improved and how teachers could be motivated to integrate more learning approaches into their teaching routine in order to transmit this knowledge to the Lebanese schools. The university aim was to integrate the students in the learning system where they were given the responsibility to search for information based on the student-centered approach, project-based learning, and problem-based learning.

A brief summary of one of the meetings the researchers conducted with a higher administrator responsible for restructuring the curriculum indicated that it was expected for the students to build on their knowledge based on their needs (Hajal Chibani, 2017). In other words, the teachers showed the students the right way. For example, the teachers in such learning approaches gave the students the freedom to construct as if they had received a sand box and were given the freedom to play with it within a specific perimeter, which was the students' learning outcome. In fact, educators need to change education from the inside out. The teacher is a mentor or a facilitator, and the students are given the responsibility to build on their knowledge throughout their education experiences, following the students' learning outcomes. The teacher's job is to ask questions and to lead the students to figure out the answers based on their own needs and knowledge. Some of the students get back the work with good answers based on good critical thinking and others miss them; in this case, the teacher's job is to redirect these students to be able to come up with answers or solutions, in contrast to the old teaching methods when the teacher was the provider of information (Hajal Chibani, 2017). Effective educators change this gradually and shift the old school of education to a new interesting and active one where students never forget the knowledge they construct on their own. The teachers' comment on the student's work is very important. Hajal Chibani reported that the teacher gives the students projects to work on based on

project or problem-based learning approaches. The teacher in this case is a facilitator trying to let students apply what they learned to their community. Creating the conditions rather than the syllabus for the students to fill in the steps, the teacher teaches the students how to think of a conflict and find ways to solve it and how to tap into ideas they have not thought of. The teacher provides the students with more innovative ways to take roles in the education process The easy way to do this is to design the aim, go back to it, and determine what kind of learning to do. Hajal Chibani cites that in such cases, each time the teacher teaches the course, the syllabus will be different The teachers must have clear student learning outcomes and help the students achieve these outcomes in different ways by providing them with some readings considered as tools. If the students are engaged with the learning and are motivated, they might be learning more. Sometimes, students feel at ease if they receive the information instead of searching for it, but when they grow and start to contribute and pull knowledge to the world, they will definitely perform better. This is why group thinking and project examinations are required.

From here, the researchers' interest in conducting professional teaching training programs began. They have started researching more about the topic and decided to help as much as they could the underprivileged population in their country and share with them what they have learned from the American context. This research examines teachers' perceptions of the impact of their professional development experience on teaching practice and examines the impact of the training program on the teachers' skills perception on new teaching approaches and on the teachers' teaching skills performance.

Description of the Professional Teaching Training

The professional development program was supported by a grant the United States of America Embassy in Beirut awarded to the researchers. The project was a teacher training program that aimed to enhance the teachers' teaching skills and introduced them to new methodologies adapted from the American context the recipients observed and worked on during the Fulbright for Junior Faculty Development Program they attended and participated in during summer 2015 in the United States of America. The school in which the program was conducted was a semi-subsidized one where its population was of a low economic status and was in dire need for financial and economic improvement. As for the teachers, six had high school degrees, and six had BA degrees. As with all the public schools, the school was funded by the government since it was a semi-subsidized school. The students paid $200, a quarter of the fees, and the government paid the other 75% once a year, which was usually paid to the school after four years. For example, in 2015, the government paid the school the fees of 2011. It's also worth mentioning that some of the parents couldn't even pay 25% of the fees. Since the school bore a financial crisis and couldn't enhance the teacher's teaching skills and keep them up-to-date with all the educational enhancements other private institutions offered to their teachers, a professional development teaching program was beneficial for the students and for the teachers, especially as the school was not able to fund such programs to improve the teaching qualifications. If the teachers learned new skills and new learning approaches,

this would allow and prepare the students to develop higher order thinking and become ready for other upper educational cycles.

Thus, the trainers conducted a professional development teaching training workshop series for the nine preschool teachers employed in a semi-subsidized school in the Bekaa valley of Lebanon to enhance their teaching skills and introduced them to different English teaching methodologies. After discussing the school needs with the director of the school, it became clear that the school was in need of training the teachers on how to adopt the constructivist learning approach and other new learning approaches to facilitate and guide the learning process. According to the school's director, the teachers came from a traditional school system where they taught the students the way they had been taught in a very traditional way. The continuous training program was for 12 weeks. The trainers met the teachers as a group, listened to them, and discussed with them the different strategies they could implement in their classrooms with the limited facilities the school could afford due to the lack of financial benefits. In other words, the trainers (the researchers in this case) met the teachers once weekly for 3 months, which was an equivalence of 12 sessions (3 hours each).

The objectives behind the training program were multifold. The program aimed to: introduce the teachers to different theories of learning approaches, promote the teachers' awareness and comprehension of effective teaching and learning skills in relation to the constructivist learning approaches and integrate different learning approaches in the English daily lesson plan, encouraging critical thinking skill development, and apply different constructivist learning approaches in the English classroom. Other objectives were to introduce the American culture (use American stories and books) into the preschool curriculum in underprivileged schools and integrate it in the curriculum, utilize technology to engage with classrooms as part of the constructivist learning approach, provide teachers with facilities to be able to change/tweak the curriculum to fit disabled students and students with special needs, study the impact of the training program on the teachers' skills perception, and study the impact of the training program on the teachers' skills performance.

Capacity Building
Every Saturday from March 5th till May 28th, 2016, a capacity building workshop was conducted. The workshops were divided into three main parts.

1. Part One: The trainer introduced participants to the project and indicated the importance of participation in such professional growth programs. The trainer then discussed with the teachers their needs in order to enhance their teaching skills. Finally, by the end of the first part of the project, the trainer was invited to attend several classes in order to build on the teachers' needs for more efficient training.

2. Part Two: The trainer conducted capacity building workshop sessions to introduce the new teaching methodologies based on constructivist learning approaches and implemented these methodologies with the participants in their classrooms over a period of month.

3. Part Three: The trainer helped the teachers integrate the new learning approaches discussed in part two into their lesson plans and helped them implement them in their classrooms.

Finally, a last meeting was held with the teachers to hear their feedback concerning the program in the form of a focus group. The aim behind the meeting was to evaluate the teaching training program holistically and to try to take all feedback into consideration in order to improve future programs.

Brief Literature Review on
Effective Professional Development Characteristics

In a previous study conducted in 2015 in one of the universities in Lebanon (Al Chibani, 2015), findings indicated that little attention used to be given to professional development training programs because such programs used to be short and not followed up on by the administration or by the teachers themselves. However, beliefs changed where results from the teachers' findings showed positive significance, and attitudes towards long-term training workshops, where teachers had the chance to implement what they learned, shifted. When the teachers were provided professional development programs, their behaviors changed in a way that led to improvement and more effective teaching (Harwell, 2003). Little change was previously detected after such programs in the teachers' performance and attitudes; however, this negative attitude got changed over time and as studies showed better-educated teachers and what they did in class. Harwell (2003) explained that we could not expect change in students' attitude towards education if the teachers continued what they had been doing year after year. The professional development programs showed positive impact on teachers' motivation if the programs were designed to improve the students' performance too, providing the chance for the teachers to practice and implement what they learned in their actual classrooms. Joyce and Showers (2002) found that changes in teachers' beliefs were more likely to occur in settings in which the teachers considered learning a shared activity. If the teachers had the chance to implement what they discussed with the trainer and put into practice what they learned, they could positively affect their students. Harwell's findings stated, "Sustained, systematic professional development programs that unfold as processes over time are generally superior to individual workshops and seminars, which are one-time events" (2002, p.3). The teachers' professional development is important to the success of any education reform (Desimone, 2009; Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon, & Birman, 2002). Professional development programs were the main feature to the success of any reform initiative that led to school improvement and related program implementations (Fullan & Mascall, 2002). Teachers needed to be provided with enough professional development to be able to maintain their level of professionalism (Aminudin, 2012). Hargreaves (2000) explained that teachers started looking more towards professional development training to enhance their teaching. As a matter of fact, teachers' professional development comes from workshops and courses that are delivered to the teachers. However, due to the lack of opportunities, the teachers couldn't apply what they learned in such short workshops in actual classrooms. Gabriel, Day, and Allington (2011) reported that teachers who attended professional development training stated that such

workshops improved their teaching and showed positive impact on their development as teachers. Moreover, participation in professional development was believed to have positive impact on the teachers' abilities and allowed them to have good professional thinking, planning, and practice with their students and colleagues (Borko, 2004; Gabriel et al, 2011). Powell, Terrell, Furey, and Scott-Evans (2003) indicated that teachers experienced immediate and long-term impacts of professional development. The teachers also showed continuous development on their ability to reflect more deeply positive impact on their teaching ability. Powell et al. also added that teachers showed more confidence in their teaching ability when they attended professional development training. Thus, they became more knowledgeable. On the other hand, Clarke and Hollingsworth (2002) explained that such one-day workshops did not show improvement of teachers' teaching performance nor show positive impact on their perception of teaching. They claimed that one-day workshops have been shown to be ineffective in changing teaching practice. This is why they suggest having more than one-day workshops and arranging longer training sessions in order for teachers to have time to implement what they learn in such workshops. Teachers were unlikely to change what they believed directly, and thus they needed time to absorb new materials and methodologies to apply in their classrooms (Desimone, 2009).

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this investigation was to study the impact of the training program on the teachers' skills perception on new teaching approaches and the training program on the teachers' teaching skills performance.

Research Questions

The research questions were;

1. To what extent are long term teaching training programs effective on the teachers' teaching skills performance?
2. How do training programs affect the teaching perception of new teaching approaches?
3. What is the impact of training programs on the teachers' teaching skills performance?

Methodology

Researchers employed a qualitative research approach in this study. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) defined qualitative research as "a multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalist approach to its subject matter" (p. 2). In addition, Creswell (2003) defined qualitative research as "an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem" (p.15). Patton (1980) clarified that when we deal with qualitative measurement, we should take into consideration the kind of data gathered. He explained that the qualitative data was made up of detailed events and situations performed by people concerning their situation. The researchers also chose to use a qualitative method because they wanted to capture what people said about different learning strategies, about the strength of a particular situation they had, and about anything the people concerned

with the purpose of this study that could help them with to understand more and could answer the research questions of this study. According to Patton (1980), in qualitative methodology, the research sought to know and understand deeply what people had to say.

Participants
The training program was conducted with nine Preschool Teachers in a semi-subsidized school in the Bekaa area in Lebanon who teach 120 (K1 to 3) students.

Data Collection and Analysis
Employing a qualitative approach, the researchers had the chance to study the person's experiences in detail. This is why the data was collected in two parts.

To answer the first and second research question of this study, the participants completed two questionnaires to evaluate the program for future enhancement and to answer the research questions of this research:

- The first questionnaire was a pre-evaluation and a post- evaluation form in order to study the significance of such training programs and their impact on teachers' capacity building.
- The second questionnaire was an evaluation sheet in order to evaluate the program for future enhancement.

To answer the third research question, the trainer observed the teachers while teaching two of the lessons and completed an observation rubric based on the outcomes of the training workshops. The rubric was piloted and used by the trainer in a previous study the researchers conducted (Hajal Chibani, 2017). The rubric was divided into four main categories: Lesson Planning, Classroom Environment, Instruction, and Professional Development. Each domain was divided into sub-domains where the objectives behind each performance were specified. The observer had to choose 'Yes' or 'No' to indicate whether the performance was observed or not observed.

Finally, a focus group was conducted with the teachers for recommending future implementations.

Data Analyses
Document analysis was chosen as one of the research methods for this study as it was an unobtrusive method that provided stable data that can be reviewed repeatedly (Yin, 2003). This research method also had the advantage of providing broad coverage of information on professional development experienced by the teachers in the school investigated (Yin, 2003).

Consistent with the qualitative methodology used, the data analysis was done in two ways. First, data retrieved from both the diaries written throughout the program and from the pre- and post- evaluation forms filled by the teachers and the administration were analyzed. Second, the rubrics the trainer completed while observing two classes for each teacher -- 18 rubrics -- were analyzed

Results
Feedback from the trained teachers, showed that they agreed that the teaching training was beneficial and met its objectives. One of the teachers said "it is beneficial to attend such long training sessions and be able to apply them in our class." Another teacher said, "I started applying what we have been discussing in my classrooms, and technology is motivating the students."

The results obtained from the pre- and post-evaluation forms showed that the teachers gained more comprehension of the new teaching approaches. Their attitude towards the new non-classical approaches became positive, and considerable shift was shown from their answers.

Findings from the observation rubrics completed by the trainer showed that 77% of the teachers started adopting more of the new teaching approaches they learned during the teaching trainer in their classrooms. Their lesson plans included a variety of methods: 82% of the teachers' teaching methodology showed a noteworthy shift where they started moving away from the traditional methods. They had the initiative to prepare their own teaching facilities to simplify the learning process and engage the students more. Their instructions became clearer where they set a specific objective and focused on it until they made sure all the students acquired it.

Discussion
The purpose of this study is to study the impact of the training program on the teachers' skills perception on new teaching approaches and the training program on the teachers' teaching skills performance.

Al Chibani (2016) and Harwell (2003) have reported that teachers showed positive attitudes towards long-term training workshops where they agreed that they had the chance to implement what they learned. This is in line with this study's results where teachers agreed that the teaching training was beneficial. They agreed that they had the chance to implement what was discussed during the training sessions in their actual classrooms and to come back with questions to the trainers. In addition, the teachers also claimed that they gained more comprehension of the new learning approaches. Their attitude towards the new non-classical approaches became positive and a substantial shift was shown from their answers. This is in line with the findings of the study's literature review where Joyce and Showers (2002), Desimone (2009), Desimone et al.(2002), Fullan and Mascall (2002), Larke and Hollingsworth (2002), and Aminudin (2012) reported how the perception behind training programs changed and led to better educated teachers and what they did in class. They discussed the importance of professional development programs on teachers' motivation if the programs were designed to improve the students' performance too, providing the chance for the teachers to practice and implement what they learned in their actual classrooms. Moreover, Hargreaves (2000), Gabriel, Day, and Allington (2011), Borko (2004); and Gabriel et al, (2011) indicated that teachers who attended professional development training stated that such workshops improved their teaching and showed positive impact on their development as

teachers. This is in line with the study results, which indicated that teachers started applying more of the new learning approaches they learned during the teaching trainer in their classrooms and moved away from traditional methodologies.

Limitation

The study encountered many limitations to be avoided in future similar studies:

- Study participants may differ from the general population.
- The present study is concerned with only one outcome of the learning and teaching process, which is the impact of professional development on the teachers' perception of different learning approaches and of the importance of adopting a constructivists teaching approach, without taking into consideration the students' performance.
- This study did not take into account the teachers' qualifications and considered all the teachers of the same educational level.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

As a conclusion, the training workshop series achieved its objectives, and the teachers were introduced to new teaching methodologies, which they started to use in their classrooms. This reflected in return on the students' achievements and motivation, which is the end line objective of any learning process. Moreover, the program influenced all of the participants' teaching skills in terms of introducing them to different theorists, which helped developing their lesson plans and with full consideration of the students with special needs. This was reflected through their teaching throughout the training program. This initial study added to the literature in terms of encouraging teaching training in the public and semi-subsidized sector, which in return affected positively the students' motivation, engagement in the classrooms, and academic performance. Finally, the program introduced the teachers to different theories about teaching approaches, promoted the teachers' awareness and comprehension about effective teaching and learning skills in relation to the constructivist teaching approaches, integrated different learning approaches in the English daily lesson plan that encourage critical thinking skill development, applied different constructivist learning approaches in the English classroom, introduced the American culture (use American stories and books) into the preschool curriculum in underprivileged schools and integrated it into the curriculum, utilized technology to engage with classrooms as part of the constructivist learning approach, provided teachers with facilities to be able to change/tweak in the curriculum to fit with disabled students and students with special needs, studied the impact of the training program on the teachers' skills perception, and studied the impact of the training program on the teachers' skills performance.

Recommendation

Professional development for teachers is essential to maintain the level of education needed for the teachers to keep up with the changes in demand. Professional development for teachers is believed to be more effective in

creating effective change to teaching practice when it is designed in a professional way to last long term. Some teachers have questioned the effectiveness of one-day workshops and claimed that one-day workshops do not show improvement on the teachers' teaching performance nor show positive impact on their perception of teaching. This is why it is recommended to engage the teachers with more than one-day training programs since it has shown that it is ineffective in changing teaching practice, and, since teachers are unlikely to change directly what they believe. They need time to absorb new materials and methodologies to apply in their classrooms.

Thus, a few recommendations based on both the quantitative and the qualitative results are addressed to the trainer in order to obtain more effective results and implement in future training sessions.

- Demonstrate in front of the teachers a lesson that allows the teachers to implement the theory they have learned in their lesson plans.
- Train the teachers again in the beginning of the next academic year.
- Engage the students more in the training program.
- Conduct more studies such as this one—perhaps with teachers in upper elementary , high school and university to see if similar results are obtained or models
- Engage teachers with more than one-day training programs since it has shown that it is ineffective in changing teaching practice, and, since teachers are unlikely to change directly what they believe.

State of the Research and Future Directions
This study can be considered a pre-pilot study for future studies in order to see the effect of the recommended professional development programs on the teachers and how much the constructivist learning approaches are integrated in the classrooms lesson plans and not only in the general objectives of the subject matter. A comparison between the Lebanese teachers' perception of different learning strategies can be compared to that of teachers of other nationalities.

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