

**INVESTIGATING ELEMENTARY SCHOOL ENGLISH TEACHERS'
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AVENUES AND THEIR EFFECTIVENESS**

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to provide a detailed analysis and investigation of various professional development avenues in Taiwan to discover how EFL teachers' professional growth can best benefit from the different models, what difficulties teachers have encountered, and how they can be further supported in teacher professional development. The data sources for this study were comprised of two major parts: one was derived from the questionnaire as the pilot investigation for this study to understand EFL elementary teachers' general professional development experience, and the other was collected from the interviews with 24 elementary English teachers, using the pre-established protocol reviewed from the existing TPD literature accompanied by the results from the pilot investigation. This study first reviewed and investigated (1) all the possible EFL teacher professional development avenues, (2) to what extent the in-service elementary school EFL teachers found each of these avenues helpful, (3) what difficulties the teachers have encountered when participating in these models for their professional development, and (4) how the government, other educational communities, and school authorities can support teacher professional development. It is hoped that this study will provide the basis for understanding a much needed practical model of continuous professional development for ongoing English education reform in Taiwan.

Key Words: EFL teacher education, teacher professional development,
professional development avenue

INTRODUCTION

In Taiwan, the Ministry of Education made English a mandatory subject for elementary school students beginning in September, 2001.

Previously, English was a mandatory subject only for secondary school students. As a result of this English language education reform and the increased demand for, and shortage of, qualified teachers, job requirements for English teachers have become liberalized. Some teachers were asked to shift their roles from Chinese language teachers to English teachers, and some teachers were hired to be English teachers because they had obtained degrees in non-English fields from English-speaking countries. These EFL teachers were especially in need of support as they moved into teaching unfamiliar subjects. It is imperative to recognize the immediate needs for models of teacher professional development. A major goal of this study was to provide the basis for understanding a much needed practical model of continuous professional development for ongoing English education reform in Taiwan.

Strongly influenced by the continuous educational reform, particularly in English teaching, teachers today are given more opportunities for decision-making in their own curriculum design and teaching. However, teachers are seldom placed in the center of English education reform and English teachers' professional development has not yet been precisely studied in the past (Chao, Lo, & Yeh, 2006; Liu, 2000a & 2000b). It is imperative to give autonomy to teachers and cultivate teachers' long-term professional development.

With the enforcement of the Nine Year Integrated Curriculum, EFL teachers are facing more and more unparalleled challenges upon their teaching careers (Chang, 2004). First, the huge discrepancies in curriculum between elementary and junior high schools have proved difficult to merge and rationalize. Second, the Nine Year Integrated Curriculum now relies very heavily on collaborative teaching, e.g. team teaching or peer coaching, where teachers have to come together to design, carry out, and then evaluate their pedagogy. However, this underlying principle challenges many practicing teachers (Kao, 2000) since they are not prepared for these new demands from their past training. In addition, teacher roles are also expected to change dramatically compared with those of the past. To this end, teachers have to transform from being passive knowledge consumers to active learners and practitioners in their profession. Governments or educational communities like the Ministry of Education have been devoted to initiating a series of activities to help teachers enhance their professional development. However, limited research has to date been conducted in exploring the effectiveness of those professional development activities

as well as the immediate needs of EFL teachers' for their professional development (e.g., Chen, 2000; Chen, 2001; Chiou & Wu, 2000; Hsiao, 2001; Liu, 2000a & 2000b; Raw, 1996; Tseng, 2003). According to Liu (2000a), from 900 EFL-based conference papers in a period of 17 years, only 2.9 percent of the papers are concerned with EFL teacher professional development. She further indicates that in the past, much effort in EFL research in Taiwan mainly highlighted these four major areas: (1) the descriptive analysis of language, (2) the study of English instruction and teaching materials, (3) learner variables about language learning, (4) and the analysis of English literature. Concerning the compelling needs for EFL teacher professional development, research along these lines in this area should be embarked upon to provide the EFL field with an energizing force for improving English education.

In light of this, the purpose of the study was four-fold: (1) to review, identify, and investigate all the possible EFL teacher professional development avenues, (2) to determine to what extent the in-service EFL elementary teachers find each of these avenues helpful, (3) to understand what difficulties the teachers have encountered when participating in these avenues to their professional development, and (4) to report how the government, other educational communities, and teachers can support teachers' professional growth. To this end, a questionnaire as a pilot investigation was first designed to provide a general scope of how EFL elementary teachers develop their professional knowledge in their teaching career. Then, in-depth interviews with an established protocol were conducted with 24 EFL elementary teachers to provide a comprehensive understanding of EFL teacher professional development at the elementary school level.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section will first review the current situation of teacher professional development in Taiwan to identify how Taiwanese EFL teachers foster their professionalism in their teaching careers and further review and identify possible avenues for teacher professional development from the current literature.

Review of Teacher Professional Development (TPD) in Taiwan

The dominant model of teacher professional development in Taiwan

has often been based on what is known as the transmission model. In the transmission model, outside experts transmit their intended knowledge to their recipient audience. From this perspective, knowledge is regarded as passive and as an automated response to an external stimulus in the environment (Raw, 1996). Teacher professional development as mandated by the Ministry of Education has been limited to this model, involving workshop lectures, national and local conferences, school-based seminars, or advanced degrees and certificates (Tseng, 2003). Teachers are required to accumulate numbers of TPD hours and credits to either maintain their job or move up their salary scale (Chen, 2000; Chen, 2001; Raw, 1996).

Correspondingly, the models to carry out teacher professional development in Taiwan are formalized to certain traditional styles, such as one or two days during the school year so that the effectiveness of these TPD avenues is rather questionable. A lecture is the prevalent method to deliver the predetermined knowledge resulting in the fact that teachers are solely knowledge receivers. Workshops or events focusing on the more systematic planning of the relevance of topics, which last longer than two days only occur on an occasional basis. However, the other possible models that exist have been ignored, despite their appearing to offer better routes for teachers to gain their professional knowledge from. Scant research in Taiwan has addressed EFL teachers' critical needs for continuous support after participating in training events or workshops.

Review of Major Avenues of Teacher Professional Development in Taiwan

A general review of the literature was performed and categorized in order to understand all of the major avenues of teacher professional development in Taiwan. In the EFL field in particular, very few studies focused on either understanding all possible avenues of teacher professional development or investigating their effectiveness in order to provide a holistic picture about EFL teachers' needs for their TPD. Thus, the literature review is mainly drawn from teacher professional development literature in the education field. A total of 166 journal articles were reviewed to understand teachers' general professional experience and 26 were later identified for summarizing and categorizing the major avenues for the current study in Tables 1 & 2. Eight major avenues and 26 types of activities concerning teacher professional development in Taiwan include (1) seminars/conferences, (2) action research, (3) autonomous learning, (4) classroom visits & observations, (5) keynote lectures, (6) school-based seminars, (7) teachers' critical

reflection, and (8) collaborative teacher study groups as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Categories of Eight Major Teacher Professional Development Avenues

Eight Major Categories	Different Types (26 Types)
I. Seminars/Conferences (Chen, 1996; Dai, 2002; Huang, 1998; Hu, 1989; Liu, 2000a &b; Shih & Chu, 1999; Raw, 1996)	1. Teaching seminars 2. Domestic conferences 3. International conferences 4. School-based seminars 5. Featured workshops
II. Action research (Raw, 1996; Wang & Kao, 2001)	6. Individual action research 7. Collaborative action research 8. Theme-based studies
III. Autonomous learning (Dai, 2002; Hsiao, 2001)	9. TV programs 10. Broadcast programs 11. Audio-visual materials 12. Multimedia teaching material 13. Language magazines 14. Professional books 15. Textbooks or related materials
IV. Classroom visits & observations (Chen, 1999; Dai, 2002; Hu, 1989; Huang, 1998; Kao, 2000; Lu, 1999; Raw, 1996)	16. School faculty classroom observation 17. Visits and observations to other schools
V. Keynote lectures (Chen, 1999; Hu, 1989; Huang, 1998; Raw, 1996; Tseng, 2003; Wang, 1998)	18. Various types of featured lectures
VI. Degrees and course credits (Chiou & Wu, 2000; Huang, 1998; Raw, 1996)	19. Short-term credit courses 20. Study course in a series 21. Degree courses
VII. Teachers' critical reflection (Chen, 1996; Chen, 1999; Liu, 2000a &b)	22. Peer reflection 23. Professional cooperative reflection between researchers and teachers 24. Sharing of the experiences, stories, cases, and growth
VIII. Collaborative teacher study groups (Chang, 2001; Chao, Lo, & Yeh, 2006)	25. Consultation with peers 26. Regular group meetings

From the reviewed literature, eight major avenues were identified and different types of activities corresponding to each avenue were further categorized. The general characteristics of those eight avenues were illustrated and summarized as follow.

Table 2. Characteristics of Eight Major Teacher Professional Development Avenues

Categories	Description/Characteristics
<i>Seminars/ Conferences</i>	Conferences refer to a session where experts are invited to share their pedagogical research or experiences with audiences to provide a new insight to language teaching.
<i>Action research</i>	Action research involves teachers in a systematic investigation of some aspects of instruction in order to tackle instructional problems and improve teaching effectiveness and student achievement (McBrien & Brandt, 1997). There are different models of action research, such as individual action research, collaborative action research, and theme-based research (Raw, 1996).
<i>Autonomous learning</i>	Autonomous learning is closely related to teachers' self-engagement in personal professional development in either their language proficiency or language teaching with the aid of numerous supplementary materials, such as viewing authentic materials to enhance one's language proficiency or other resources to enhance personal English teaching skills and pedagogy (Hu, 1989).
<i>Classroom visits & observations</i>	Classroom visits and observations allow teachers to absorb new teaching strategies or approaches from other teachers to foster personal professional development in English teaching. Observations include both on-campus classroom observations and off-campus school observations (Chen, 1996).
<i>Keynote lecture</i>	A keynote lecture is a two to three hour lecture, arranged alone, usually directed by an experienced instructor comprising of a detailed introduction and discussion of some particular issues. Usually topics and issues are based on most teachers' concerns, such as remedial language teaching, creative language teaching, or using picture books for language teaching.

Table 2. (Continued)

<i>Degrees and course credits</i>	Degrees and course credits are short-term and/or long-term courses designed by schools to foster teachers' professional development (Raw, 1996).
<i>Teacher's critical reflection</i>	Reflective practice is often facilitated by an experienced teacher or researcher to provide opportunities for all group members to exchange personal teaching experiences and reflect on all possible language pedagogy cooperatively. Activities are designed for teachers to reflect on their own teaching. The activities, such as information and experience sharing, discussions with college professors, aim to expand one's professional knowledge in language teaching (Chen, 1999).
<i>Collaborative teacher study groups</i>	Teacher study groups, also known as collaborative study groups, are sustained by groups of between four and ten teachers who share similar interests, and reach their individual goals through interacting and collaborating with other colleagues (Cramer, G., Hrust, B., & Wilson, C., 1996). Matlin and Short (1991) characterized that "the study group is an opportunity to think through their own beliefs, share ideas, challenge current instructional practices, blend theory and practice, identify professional needs-as well as develop literacy innovation for their classrooms" (p. 68).

METHODOLOGY

Data Collection

The data sources for this study were comprised of two major parts: one was derived from the questionnaire as the pilot investigation for this study to understand EFL elementary teachers' general professional development experience, and the other was collected from the interviews with 24 elementary English teachers, using the pre-established protocol reviewed from the existing TPD literature accompanied by the results from the pilot study.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire was designed as a basis to provide a general scope

of how EFL elementary teachers develop their professionalism based on the following three categories: 1) what resources they resort to whenever they encounter any teaching difficulty; 2) what kinds of teacher professional development models they have participated in; 3) what kind of support teachers need in their teaching careers. Questions were also designed to recruit participants for further in-depth interviews. Then, the questionnaires were distributed via either emails or postal mail to 266 EFL elementary teachers throughout Taiwan. 216 were subsequently received. The return rate was 81%. Next, the findings from the questionnaires as well as the reviewed literature served as a framework to design an in-depth interview protocol to investigate what possible avenues of teacher professional development EFL teachers have experienced and how effective each avenue is. Through interviews, it is hoped to explore what EFL teachers' pertinent needs are and what difficulties they have faced for their professional development.

In-depth interviews using the designed inventory

The instrument for the interviews was a comprehensive protocol of eight major professional development avenues. Eight major TPD avenues were constructed from both the results of questionnaires and the reviewed literature. In-depth interviews with protocols aimed at exploring how EFL elementary teachers react to each TPD avenue, what difficulties teachers have encountered so far in those avenues, and how teachers can be better supported in their teaching careers. To this end, interviewees were first asked to describe their teaching background, how they manage their own professional development in their teaching careers, and how those eight major TPD avenues can be better improved. The interviewees next have to describe their experience gained in different professional development avenues. Then they have to assign a value number from ten (most useful; most frequent) to one (least useful; least frequent) toward each professional development avenue. Finally, interviewees are encouraged to review those eight avenues and add other models they have experienced. Interviewees were also allowed to suggest additional TPD avenues and give comments based on their experiences.

Participants

This study recruited participating teachers using the following criteria. The participants must be certificated to teach English at

elementary schools. The subject they mainly teach at school must be English. Homeroom teachers who were assigned to teach English were not the focus of this study. For the first phase, questionnaires were collected from 216 in-service elementary teachers who teach English from the first to sixth grade from the northern, middle, southern and eastern part of Taiwan, as shown in Figure 1. 56 teachers were from the northern part of Taiwan, 48 from central regions, 55 from the south, and 56 from the east. Most of the English teachers were female, with only twenty-six out of 216 male. Among those English teachers, nearly ninety-four percent were teaching in public elementary schools.

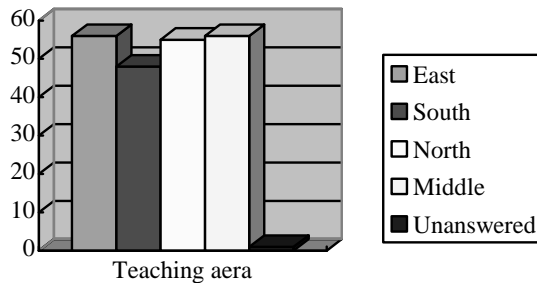


Figure 1. Distribution of Teachers' Teaching District

For the major study, participants for the in-depth interviews were 24 in-service elementary teachers (from Aug. 2005-May. 2006) who teach English from the first to sixth grade in elementary schools mainly from central Taiwan; including Taichung, Douliu and Chia-yi city as these were conveniently located for the researcher. Each interview was conducted for one to two hours at the interviewees' convenience. Most of the English teachers were female, while only two out of the twenty-four were male. Their teaching experiences range from one to six years. Two teachers had one year teaching experience, five had one to two years experience, six had three years experience, seven had four years experience, three had five years experience, and one had six years experience, as shown in Figure 2.

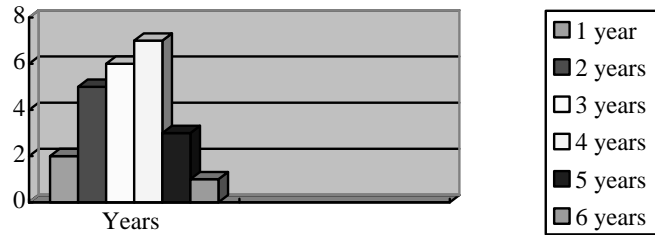


Figure 2. Year(s) of Participants' Teaching Experience

Data Analysis

From the beginning and throughout the study, data analysis took place alongside data collection to allow questions to be refined and new avenues of inquiry to be developed. To realize how teachers respond to eight major TPD avenues and what TPD avenues they have participated in, descriptive statistics were used to analyze teachers' responses toward the effectiveness and frequency of eight major TPD avenues from one to ten. Only those who had participated in certain avenues were considered as constituting valid data, and data from teachers who had no participating experience in the avenues were excluded. The final results were presented in the order from the most frequent to the least and the most effective to the least.

For the interview data, content analysis was also conducted to analyze and organize teachers' responses toward each avenue in line with (1) how they enhance their own professional growth; (2) what teacher professional development models they have participated in and to what extent they benefit from each; and (3) what support teachers need in their professional development. The method of graphic representation was adapted as the data analysis method so as to map the responses of all the participants while describing their experiences toward each avenue. In other words, participant's contributions to each category were documented graphically so that it will be easier to compare the viewpoints from each participant to the overall conclusion.

RESULTS

EFL Teacher Professional Development Avenues

A pilot investigation from questionnaires identified English workshops, conferences, and course credits as three major TPD avenues in Taiwan. Besides these three, a total of eight major TPD avenues and 26 types of activities were then identified in the literature and used to construct a comprehensive scope of TPD avenues as shown in Table 1. There are a few possible different formats of activity types characterizing each avenue. Twenty-four participants were interviewed to comment on their experience toward each avenue.

Participation Frequency & Effectiveness of EFL Teachers' TPD Avenues

The frequency of their participations are presented in Table 3 with the total number showing from the most frequent to the least: (1) Keynote lectures, (2) Autonomous learning, (3) Teacher's critical reflection, (4) Classroom visits & observations, (5) Seminar/Conferences, (6) Degrees and course credits, (7) Action research, (8) Collaborative teacher study groups.

Table 3. Participation Frequency of EFL TPD Avenues (from most to least)

Eight Major Avenues (The Total Number)	N	Percentage
i. Keynote lecture	240	33 %
ii. Autonomous learning	144	20 %
iii. Teacher's critical reflection	100	14 %
iv. Classroom visits & observations	80	11 %
v. Seminars/Conferences	72	10 %
vi. Degrees and course credits	64	9 %
vii. Action research	15	2 %
viii. Collaborative teacher study groups	8	1 %

Teachers indicated that among those five most frequent TPD avenues, three avenues (lectures, classrooms visits & observations, and seminars/conferences) were mandated by higher authorities as required

for teachers to take part in for their TPD. In other words, teachers claimed that support or information that they could receive from school or peers was usually subject to those mandated avenues. Little assistance or information had been provided to show teachers how to develop their professionalism through other new alternative TPD avenues, including action research and in particular collaborative teacher study groups. More specifically, the results showed that TPD avenues in Taiwan were still confined to the transmission training models characterized by educational experts who pass down theoretical knowledge and applications which teachers are expected to implement in their classrooms, including keynote lectures, classroom observations, and national conferences. On the other hand, teachers also have had no opportunities to initiate other TPD avenues relevant to their research interests on their own over the past years.

Furthermore, the sequences of the eight TPD avenues in terms of their effectiveness to enhance teacher professionalism are presented with the total value in Table 4 as follows: (1) Autonomous learning (2) Degrees and course credits (3) Keynote lectures (4) Teacher's critical reflection (5) Collaborative teacher study groups (6) Classroom visits and observations (7) Action research (8) Seminars/Conferences.

Table 4. The Effectiveness of TPD Participation (from most to least)

Eight Major Avenues (The Total Value)	N	Percentage
i. Autonomous learning	216	22 %
ii. Degrees and course credits	168	17 %
iii. Keynote lectures	122	12 %
iv. Teacher's critical reflection	118	12 %
v. Collaborative teacher study groups	114	12 %
vi. Classroom visits & observations	92	9 %
vii. Action research	82	8 %
viii. Seminars/Conferences	68	7 %

Teachers claimed the major reason that two kinds of transmission TPD avenues—degree and course credits and keynote lectures—graded by them as useful for their professional development, was that these two placed much emphasis on the demonstration of new teaching approaches

Professional Development Avenues and their Effectiveness

in four language skills that help expand their knowledge in teaching practice. In other words, teachers evaluated the effectiveness of TPD avenues simply based on what extent those avenues could provide useful pedagogical strategies or methods for them to use in their own teaching contexts. However, senior teachers, with more than three years of teaching experience, had some negative feedback upon the transmission TPD avenues like classroom observations, national conferences, and keynote lectures. Senior teachers complained that the contents of these transmission models were usually disjointed from one another making it impossible to provide teachers with an in-depth knowledge about English teaching. Therefore, teachers frequently admitted that they took advantage of time during the lectures or workshops to grade students' homework, and whatever innovative teaching methods college professors advocated were usually left in the conference room. To enhance their professional growth and exert their own autonomy, some teachers (N=9, 39 %) wish to participate in other types of TPD avenues, like collaborative teacher study groups or action research. Teachers said that they were in favour of the collaborative teacher study group avenue, because they can exchange information about language teaching, classroom management, and design of teaching activities with colleagues. Furthermore, they can collaborate with each other to resolve the compelling problems in their current teaching. However, teachers pointed out that they lacked enough knowledge and support to initiate a group like that. Many of them (N=15, 62 %) suggested that without support either from school authorities or other sources, they found it impossible to sustain a long-term support group among themselves. Similarly, half of them (N=12, 50%) projected the effectiveness and practicality of action research, but they also admitted that they have very little knowledge about it though they heard the term over and over again in the workshops. They wished to know more about it and work with a team to experience conducting action research and make changes in their own classrooms. A few teachers (N=2, 8%) indicated an additional avenue other than those eight; namely, end-product workshops. They explained that end-product workshops are usually scheduled lasting from one morning to one day for teachers to engage in hands on experience after the lecturers present the major ideas. Teachers need to either collaboratively or individually accomplish the ultimate goals set by the lectures, e.g. writing up a lesson plan for their actual classroom practice. They found it challenging to integrate what was learned into a fine

product in such a short time. They also admitted they could recall those ideas learned through hands on experience much better than those gained through simply attending lectures. Other difficulties that teachers have encountered in their TPD avenues will be discussed in the next section.

Difficulty that Teachers Have Encountered in Their Professional Development

A major difficulty that teachers have encountered in their professional development was that they were limited in their ability to participate in some particular transmission training models, including keynote lectures, Wednesday workshops, and conferences. Very limited support or information has been provided for teachers about some other new TPD avenues like collaborative teacher study groups and action research. A few teachers (N=3, 12 %) who had participated in a teacher study group complained that their efforts were not recognized by the Ministry of Education because no TPD hours could be awarded except the lecture-type TPD. They felt frustrated that what they can benefit from the most was not what the higher authorities expected them to learn. In addition, time constraints were another problem that hindered teacher professional development. Most of the teachers (N=23, 95%) said that the overwhelming amount of trivial affairs at schools and between 23 and 26 classes a week also made it impossible for them to participate in TPD avenues like collaborative teacher study groups or action research which require a long-term and continuous participation. In other words, without support from schools or higher authorities, there were only a few opportunities for teachers to try out other possible TPD avenues.

Furthermore, teachers were not satisfied with the TPD (N=18, 75 %) due to the fact that they cannot obtain information from those teacher professional development avenues they were frequently exposed to in order to adequately match their needs, particularly seminars & conferences (the total value=68, the least helpful). They indicated that college professors were often invited as guest speakers for Wednesday workshops but they found that they often provided little help in their professional growth. Mainly, topics presented were not relevant to their teaching contexts and the professors had insufficient experience at the elementary school level.

Moreover, a one-shot model to foster professional growth, like school faculty classroom observations/visits (the total value=92, the sixth) was regarded by teachers as less useful in their TPD. They explained that classroom visits to so-called “model teachers” are often arranged once or

twice in the semester for them to envisage the promises of certain teaching avenues. However, the teachers indicated that class visits are too idealistic from the contexts they are actually experiencing, making it difficult to apply those ideas to their own practice. Furthermore, by only attending some of the lectures once, teachers found it difficult to comprehend a pedagogical concept from lectures and transplant it into their daily classrooms. They found it impossible to adapt it directly to their own teaching contexts. One teacher pointed out that when adapting a new teaching avenue learned from attending a lecture, she also encountered numerous new problems during her teaching without continuous exploration, support, and systematic discussion.

Support that Teachers Need for Their TPD

After evaluating each TPD avenue, teachers were asked to identify how they can be better supported in their teaching career from their school, higher authorities, or government. To start with, despite lecture type avenues, such as conferences, keynote lectures, and degree and course credits, being the most common teacher professional avenues in Taiwan due to their cost-effectiveness, they were found to be fragmental, unsystematic, and irrelevant from one topic to another. This led to the realization that teachers always acquired similar, if not the same, information from those lectures over and over again and thus they were unable to further expand their knowledge scope. Therefore, teachers suggested that the lectures should be organized and planned on particular issues systematically. Many teachers indicated that topics should be centred on the practical use of language teaching methods at the elementary schools so that teachers were able to internalize the knowledge from speakers and easily adapt it to improve their teaching. Invited speakers in those degree and course credits, conferences, and keynote lectures are encouraged to obtain an in-depth understanding about language teaching contexts at the elementary schools to realize the difficulty and actual needs of elementary teachers.

Some teachers (N=6, 24%) also indicated that they look forward to taking part in other TPD avenues besides the transmission model. They particularly projected the usefulness and practicality of action research and teacher study groups. However, due to lacking knowledge about these two avenues and support from higher authorities or college professors, teachers found it difficult to conduct any project to foster their professional development like action research or collaborative

teacher study groups. To this end, teachers called for support from schools, MOE, higher authorities, or college professors to assist them to make other possibilities available. For example, with respect to a collaborative teacher study group, teachers expected that professors could work together with them to identify their teaching problems and needs, set common objectives, and reach the ultimate objectives in a long term manner. Given that these two avenues require teachers to have a long-term and systematic plan on coherent topics toward teachers' compelling concerns, teachers are hoping the higher authorities will make it possible for them not only to reduce the amount of administrative affairs and teaching loads in schools but also to earn the TPD hours through other more self-directed avenues so that teachers could be allowed to exert their own professional development autonomy.

CONCLUSION

This study provided a general scope of EFL elementary teachers' professional development avenues and an analysis of their effectiveness. Eight major TPD avenues were identified, including national conferences, action research, autonomous learning, classroom observations, teacher's critical reflection, and collaborative teacher study groups. Among those avenues, teachers were expected to accumulate their TPD hours from the transmission models characterized as one-shot and sit-and-get models to develop their professionalism like keynote lectures or national conferences. Very few opportunities were provided or organized for teachers in terms of other possibilities including autonomous learning, collaborative teacher study groups, or action research. Furthermore, what they have regarded as valuable avenues like autonomous learning (graded as the most effectiveness) or teacher study group (the fifth one) were neither encouraged nor mandated for TPD. Some teachers also pointed out that even though they projected the usefulness and practicality of action research or teacher study groups, they found it difficult and invalid to initiate these new TPD possibilities to foster their professional growth due to their limited knowledge and abilities. To resolve the problem, the Ministry of Education or school authorities can build a support system to assist teachers in participating in the long-term engagements, like collaborative teacher study groups or action research relevant to their interests and needs to improve TPD in Taiwan.

Appropriate TPD hours should be awarded for the effort exerted for self-initiated or self-directed TPD avenues instead of solely expert-directed or -controlled avenues. Teachers should be encouraged to be active participants, designers, learners in their own professional growth. A substantial body of research (Clair, 1995; Clair, 1998; Fullan, 1991; Jones, 1997; Raw, 1996) reveals that long-term focused professional development models must continue to evolve to meet the challenges of increasing standards of teaching and learning, and that these kinds of models are crucial to enhance teachers' improvement and students' achievement. Continuous learning opportunities that are based on long-term collegial support and empathy, shared concerns and strengths, and reflective practice offer teachers ongoing growth and foster inquiry (Cuban, 1988; Fullan, 1991; Hall, Wallace, & Dossett, 1973; Zepeda, 1999). Teachers could ultimately be empowered and grow in a process of professional development which allows them to plan and develop agendas that actively engage them in their own inquiries by identifying their needs, providing time for reflection and discussion, and striking balances between theory and practice.

It is interesting to note that novice teachers (with the teaching experiences of less than three years) remained positive about the transmission models for they sometimes could provide demonstrations of teaching approaches and directly remedy some teaching problems. Some senior teachers were negative about the transmission TPD avenues, because for them those avenues were egocentric and restricted at speakers' levels and unable to meet teachers' particular needs and interests. They criticized the top-down models also for not offering coherent topics or follow up activities for further support. Most of the time, singular events are offered in which outside experts come in and orally instruct teachers about what to change in their classrooms. Even if the theories expounded encourage active learning, the passive presentation of these ideas undermines the learning theory and tends to be ineffectively learned by teachers. Teachers equipped with rich learning and teaching experiences should be valued as meaning-generating learners, instead of passive receivers. Guskey (1998) states, effective professional development "rests not so much in the initial training, but in what happens afterward. It is the follow-up, the support, the ongoing professionally embedded assistance that make the real difference" (p. 7). The traditional top-down, transmission model needs to be followed up by collaborative, constructivist and empowering

forms of professional development (Monson & Pahl, 1991).

Transmission models, like conferences or workshops, remain the most cost-effective in terms of money and time and they will still be the most dominant avenues in exposing teachers to the latest perspectives, teaching techniques and approaches, and theories in Taiwan. However, change or innovation regarded as pertinent by outside experts, researchers, consultants, or administrators does not always match the actual needs of classroom teachers. The mismatch of the delivery of outsiders' knowledge and teachers' demands can possibly be overcome through ongoing collaboration and continuous professional conversations which have been proven to be a fundamental component of sustained teacher growth (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Lewison & Holliday, 1999; Short & Burke, 1989). Furthermore, when these models stand alone without either continuous support or systematic plans the expected effectiveness is still limited. Besides, they should also be designed and planned to support the moment-to-moment activities of actual classrooms. Otherwise, teachers would still question the distance between theory and practice and retreat back to what they used to believe.

A reasonable modification could be made from surveying theme topics needed the most by the practicing teachers and thus authorities could initiate the plan for a series of workshops centring on those themes. After the lectures, surveys should be designed and distributed at the end of workshops for further planning and adjustment to meet teachers' immediate and actual needs. In the past, needs analysis was seldom conducted for TPD and thus the discrepancies between what was mandated and what was needed were seldom addressed or matched. On the other hand, the typical comments from most teachers was that lecturers invited for their in-service workshops often emphasized teaching and learning theories which were not of interest to the audience. Mainly, teachers expected to learn teaching tips and methods that are handy and ready to implement. In other words, they perceived professional development as finding cures to their current situations and immediate contexts. Theories were perceived as being useless and irrelevant to their teaching practice. However, Liu (2000a & 2000b) claims that when lacking sufficient teaching theories or principles, teachers would become fossilized in their own language teaching. Chou (1997) also said that only by understanding the teaching theories could teachers realize how to transform various teaching approaches to fit in

their own contexts and create their own teaching methods. It is argued that teachers also need to undergo further professional development besides expecting direct adaptations and immediate remedies. Without theoretical frameworks, teachers become practitioners with skills and techniques. It is suggested that teachers should go beyond the go-and-get mindset and exert their own professional autonomy in their long-term development. A successful teacher professional development lies heavily on teachers' voluntary participation and intrinsic motivation to engage in self-improvement and continuous learning. Ultimately, the genuine TPD turns teachers into active learners and autonomous life-long learners.

It is suggested that college professors and practicing teachers could have a forum, like a collaborative study group, to decide their mutual learning agendas, and share both of their expertise in learning and teaching. Academia should not be the major knowledge constructors over the process of teacher professional development (Johnson, 2002). The underlying premise is that the work produced by teacher educators, the college professors, should aim toward a rich and shared understanding and open dialogue with practicing teachers. In the past, practicing teachers were narrowly viewed as technicians "who simply act as conduits for the implementation of theories, methods, and curricular efforts that come down from theorists and researchers who remain far removed from classroom life" (Johnson, 2000, p.3). More effort should be made to challenge the long established hierarchical views long positioned between the practicing teachers and the teacher educators by forming a professional learning community that expands on collective and mutual understanding (Chao, Lo, & Yeh, 2006). When college professors and practicing teachers are involved in an EFL professional community, teachers can be encouraged to plan, decide, and practice what works best for their professional development and growth. In this way, it makes knowledge transformation and transfer more possible. In a learning community like this, teachers could be better supported in ways of exerting their own existing knowledge, validating what they have learned, and expanding into the unknown which the transmission model could not provide. College professors could also serve the roles as knowledge co-constructors and co-learners in understanding more about the gap between theory and practice when engaging in the intensive dialogue with the practicing teachers.

The limitation of this study was that the participating teachers might come from diverse teaching and educational backgrounds, so their TPD

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experiences and reactions might vary accordingly. In addition, teachers from different regions also obtain very different access to TPD. Further research could possibly recruit more participants from all different districts and delve into the issues how the diverse backgrounds impact teacher professional development.

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