

Teacher professional development trends: Perspectives of teachers and principals in Kosovo

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Teachers enhance their professional competencies, knowledge, and performance by attending various professional development activities, whose main goal is to assist them in helping students to achieve better results. The effectiveness of such events depends on matching the professional development to teachers' needs, experience, and objectives. This research investigates teacher professional development (TPD) trends in Kosovo and the impact of the attended activities on teachers' professional practices. It employed a mixed-methods approach with data from 518 teachers and eight principals of 24 primary and lower secondary schools in Kosovo. The quantitative and qualitative findings show that training sessions and workshops are the most frequently utilised methods of TPD in Kosovo. Participation in other formats is negligible as teachers are mainly interested in the programs carrying credits necessary for the renewal of their licenses. While teachers assessed the attended events as considerably helpful, principals tended to complain about the training facilitators and the lack of monitoring. The research recommends that Kosovar teachers should start accessing other TPD formats since the current offerings are incompatible with the contemporary methods. Further research is recommended as such studies are scarce in this research context.

Introduction

Teaching has become an increasingly multidimensional, dynamic, and highly demanding occupation as a result of globally dominating requirements and policies, which “have fundamentally changed the concept of quality education and what it means to be a teaching professional” (Browes & Altinyelken, 2022, p. 189). Teachers are expected to meet parents' expectations about students' success and to cope with social, economic, and technological developments (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). They also have to adapt to continuous and frequent reforms introduced by policymakers. To fulfil these incremental requirements and pressure, teachers have to continuously refine their skills and competencies through various professional development opportunities (Cole, 2012; Darling-Hammond, Hyler & Gardner, 2017). Thus, in addition to the contractual obligations, “Constantly improving and refining instructional practice so that students can engage in deep learning tasks is perhaps the single most important responsibility of the teaching profession and educational systems as a whole” (Fullan, Rincon-Gallardo & Hargreaves, 2015, p. 4). Therefore, in supporting teachers to improve their professional competencies, educational systems encourage, back, and even compel them to engage in various professional development activities.

As elsewhere, teachers in Kosovo are supported and obligated to attend various teacher professional development (TPD) activities aiming to improve their pedagogical skills and capacities. However, Kosovo's educational system has been subject to unique circumstances and a series of reforms. Initially, due to political developments, which culminated with an armed conflict in 1998-1999, Kosovo's teachers were prevented from

taking part in any TPD program throughout the 1990s. During this period, Albanian teachers were dismissed and convicted, schools were closed down, and the educational process was organised in “attics and cellars” (Nelles, 2005, p. 74). As a result of the war atrocities in 1998-1999, “Around 90% of the Albanian population fled their homes” (Webber, 2009, p. 451). After Kosovo was liberated in June 1999, various multinational organisations offered financial and professional support to assist Kosovo shape its educational system in line with contemporary international trends and policies (Tahirshylaj & Fazliu, 2021).

Over the last two decades, Kosovo’s education system has been subject to continuous reforms. Initially, Kosovo’s educators were asked to replace traditional teacher-centred learning with learner-centred approaches. This change was followed by the introduction of two curricula and a series of new policies promoting a competence-development teaching approach (Tahirshylaj, 2021). Consequently, Kosovo’s teachers have been supported to attend different TPD programs to master the new instructional methods (Zabeli, Anderson & Saqipi, 2018). Alongside these reforms, Kosovo students participated for the first time in the *Program for International Students Assessment (PISA)* in 2015 and they were ranked the third from the bottom of the list (OECD, 2016). Following this result, the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology (MEST) announced profound reforms in the educational system. Amongst others, it launched the *Education Strategic Plan (KESP) 2017-2021*, which listed TPD as one of seven main components, charged with improving the quality of teaching and students’ attainment. In 2017, the Ministry also introduced a *Teacher Development Strategic Framework (TDSF)*, which defines TPD methods, identification of teachers’ professional development needs, licensing of TPD providers, teacher licensing procedures, and other aspects of the TPD process. (MASHT, 2017). Given the importance of this process in the research context, this study attempted to identify the main TPD methods applied in Kosovo’s schools and their impact on teachers’ professional practices. It constitutes a part of author’s doctoral research, which was focused on exploring the role of the principal in the TPD process (Krasniqi, 2021).

Theoretical framework

It needs to be noted that due to the space limit, only an abridged review of literature on various TPD facets is unfolded below. Thus, Earley and Bubb (2007) defined TPD as “an on-going process building upon initial teacher training and induction, including development and training opportunities throughout a career and concluding with preparation for retirement” (p. 3). Darling-Hammond, Hyler and Gardner (2017) posited that TPD is a “...structured professional learning that results in changes to teacher knowledge and practices, and improvements in student learning outcomes” (p. 2). Beijaard (2019) argued that in addition to helping teachers to advance professionally, continuous learning affects their identity as well. Evans (2002) argued that a teacher may gain new perspectives in different learning formats. According to her, a teacher may acquire new skills and knowledge in a training program, and from discussions with colleagues.

The literature recognises traditional and school-based activities as two major TPD methods. The main models belonging to the first group are training sessions, workshops, and conferences. According to various scholars, these approaches have been gradually losing ground to the other models because they are detached from real classroom situations (Adey et al., 2004); they are not taken seriously by teachers (Diaz-Maggioli, 2004; Harwell, 2003), their format and content are standardised (Petrie & McGee, 2012), and they are mostly one-shot events, which do not take teachers' needs and experience into account (Mitchell & Sackney, 2011; Earley & Bubb, 2007). Nevertheless, there are scholars who have found that a workshop or conference may affect the participants positively, if it has specific goals (Adey et al., 2004) or if it includes follow-up workplace activities (Borko, 2004).

Of the school-based TPD models, the activities of professional learning communities (PLCs) are widely applied in the advanced educational systems. Mitchell and Sackney (2000) defined PLCs as "groups of people who take an active, reflective, collaborative, learning-oriented, and growth promoting approach toward both the mysteries and problems of teaching and learning" (p. 9). Coaching is another TPD method, whose objective is to help teachers to enhance their professional competence to students' benefit (Knight, 2009). Study groups are forums of teachers working together to address certain problems common among students (Mullen & Huntiger 2008). Mentoring is designed to help novice and pre-service teachers to apply theories in real classroom situations (Schwille, 2008). Action research helps teachers to reflect on their practices and activities and to share professional experiences (Altrichter et al., 2002). Teachers also contribute to and benefit substantially from discussions and collaborative activities with peers. According to Hargreaves and Fullan (2012), "Teachers will be short on professional capital if they spend most of their professional time alone, if they do not get feedback and support from colleagues" (p. 102).

Teacher learning is a social process whose impact and efficiency depend on teachers' professional needs, experiences, expectations, and motivators (Earley & Bubb, 2007). It should be noted that since requirements for teachers change over time, professional development programs should match their objectives, needs, and career stages (Day et al., 2007). Even though governments spend substantial amounts on TPD programs, their impact on students' achievement remains weak (Harwell, 2003; Borko, 2004) and the offered programs often fail to achieve significant impact because of the complexity of the educational system (Mullen & Huntiger, 2008). However, McMeeking, Orsi and Cobb (2012) argued, "Measuring the effects of a PD program on student achievement is a complex issue because any effect would be indirect" (p. 165). Meanwhile, Kennedy (2016) cautioned that there is a significant amount of data about student learning, but not about how teachers learn or how they integrate novel ideas into professional activities.

Method

This research utilised a mixed-method research design. Initially, quantitative data were collected from teachers about the TPD methods used in their schools, and the impact of the attended TPD sessions on teachers' professional practice. The second phase included

interviews with principals, who shared their experiences and opinions related to the TPD process. The relevant legal framework in Kosovo was also reviewed because it contains details that affect different aspects of the TPD process.

Research purpose

According to the literature and Kosovo's policies, continuous professional development is designed to improve teachers' pedagogy, leading to better student attainment. For instance, the KESP (2016) stipulated, "One of the key factors directly affecting the enhancement of teaching and learning quality is teacher professional development," (p. 66). This document advocated that traditional TPD models have not been efficient, therefore, teachers need to attend more school-based learning activities. Similarly, the TDSF (2017) concluded that students' success depends on teacher quality, which is directly affected by their professional development. Furthermore, the renewal of teachers' licenses in Kosovo is conditional on participation in TPD activities and positive evaluations by their principal. The legislation stipulates that a teacher has to complete 100 training hours in five years for the renewal of the career license, which is obligatory for all the teachers. Even though these and other educational policies attribute such importance to continuous professional development, this process is scarcely explored in the research context. Therefore, aiming to identify the main TPD models applied in Kosovo's schools and the effect of the attended programs, this study set out to answer the following questions:

1. What are the main TPD methods applied in Kosovo's schools?
2. What is the opinion of teachers and principals about the impact of attended TPD programs on teachers' professional practices?

Research methods

This research employed a mixed-method approach as the goal was "To understand [the] phenomenon more fully than is possible using either quantitative or qualitative methods alone" (Gay, Mills & Arian, 2012, p. 483). It utilised the explanatory sequential typology, which envisages collection of quantitative and qualitative data in two phases (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The mixed-method approach was deemed appropriate given that due to various factors and experiences, teachers and principals may have different opinions about the TPD offerings. Therefore, quantitative and qualitative data are complementary and help the researcher to create a clearer picture of the phenomenon. The respective legislation was also reviewed since the use of more sources of information is a form of triangulation that contributes to the trustworthiness of a research (Gay et al., 2012). As a result of this approach, complementary findings were generated, numbers were interpreted, accuracy was attached to words, and the research topic was explored more profoundly (Caruth, 2013).

Data collection and analysis instruments

The data for this research were collected from 24 primary and lower secondary schools out of 927 such schools operating in Kosovo (MASHT, 2020). The participating schools

were located in urban areas in four major towns in Kosovo and the data were gathered from October 2019 to March 2020. The quantitative data were collected from teachers through an evaluation scale, which contained nine closed-ended questions, a number of which were taken from OECD's questionnaire (2013). The intention was to collect data about the TPD opportunities offered to the participating teachers and their impact on teachers' professional practice. Initially, teachers were asked to confirm the number of days they spent in TPD activities over the last 12 months. Afterwards, they had to confirm the TPD programs they had attended during this period. Next, they were requested to assess the impact of the attended activities on their professional practices by selecting one of the five-point Likert scale options varying from very helpful (5) to unhelpful (1) (Appendix A).

However, given that the difference between the positive and negative assessments attached to the questions listed in the scale was large the answers were collapsed through the SPSS software into three groups, termed helpful, unhelpful, and neutral. The initial results are presented in Appendix A. Since the survey was completed by 518 respondents, the obtained data were processed through descriptive and inferential statistics (Gay et al., 2012). The statistical procedures employed were frequency distribution of the attributive variables, descriptive statistics of the numerical variables (mean, standard deviation), factor analysis to test instrument's validity, and Cronbach's Alpha as a measure of instrument reliability. The scale reached a high level of reliability ($\alpha = 0.853$). The findings also showed that the scale was valid since the variance was explained by the first factor, which was 46.7%.

In addition, thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used to analyse the qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews with eight principals. They were recorded fully, transcribed verbatim, and translated from Albanian into English. The average length of interviews was 46 minutes, range 36 to 67 minutes. Referring to the guidelines of Braun and Clarke (2006), the data were analysed according to the inductive approach as the researcher was interested in exploring the situation in the research context rather than looking for similarities with other studies. Thus, the researcher firstly familiarised with the data during the transcription of the interviews and noted down the preliminary ideas about potential codes. Afterwards, the researcher conducted an exhaustive reading of the transcripts, highlighted the initial codes, and generated the first themes. In the next stage, the researcher looked for possible patterns between the themes to eliminate potential overlaps and then arranged them into major themes. Following this, the identified themes, which emerged from principals' recounts about the TPD process in their schools, were named. An educational leadership expert was asked to read the transcripts, identify, and generate themes by following the same procedures. Afterwards, the researcher and the expert compared their notes, findings, and conclusions, which led to the removal of overlapping sub-themes and the generation of the themes presented below. The goal of this double-check was to ensure higher validity and reliability of the research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Also, they agreed about the vast majority of codes and themes, which indicated a high level of "consistency between evaluators" (Bajpai, Bajpai & Chaturvedi, 2015, p. 20) and that the classification was not conducted arbitrarily.

Sample

Since Kosovo is a small country and its policies regulating TPD are almost uniform, random sampling was deemed appropriate for selecting the schools and respondents. The sample included 24 primary lower secondary schools located in urban areas. Given that the researcher had no prior information about schools' characteristics, they were picked randomly from the lists available on the official websites of the respective municipalities. The questionnaire was administered to 720 teachers, respectively 30 teachers per school. The demographic characteristics of the subjects included gender, age, employment status, educational background, and work experience. More than three quarters of them were female teachers and the rest were males. As for the age, the largest group comprised of teachers 40-49 years old, less than a quarter of them were 30-39, and little more than a quarter of them were 50-59 years old. In terms of the position, the division between class and subject teachers was almost equal. The highest number of respondents held bachelor degrees and less than one quarter of them have finished masters studies. Lastly, the vast majority of the participants have been teaching for more than 15 years and only 1.2% were novice teachers.

The second sample included eight principals, selected randomly from the group of 24 schools. The geographical distribution included two principals per town, and four were females, four were males. The average age of the interviewed principals was 46.8 years, range 38 to 56 years. Their mean teaching experience was 14.8 years, varying from 5 to 30 years. They have been principals, on average, for 7.5 years, range 1 to 20 years of experience. Except for one, the principals possessed masters degrees that were focused on educational leadership.

Results

As indicated, quantitative and qualitative research methods and instruments were utilised for collecting the data for this research. The findings are presented according to an explanatory sequential approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The quantitative results reveal teachers' opinions about the professional development methods applied in their schools and their impact on their professional practices, whilst the qualitative data depict principals' opinions and experiences with this process.

The return rate for the administered questionnaire was 72% (N=518). In the first section of the questionnaire, respondents were asked to indicate the number of days they spent on TPD activities over the last 12 months. The data show that teachers spent 6.5 days on average in such activities and the duration of attendance ranged from 0 to 30 days. Around 49% of the participants confirmed to have been 1-10 days in TPD activities and around 12% between 11 and 29 days; 15.8% of respondents stated they had not participated in any TPD activity during this period and only 2.1% of the respondents confirmed to have spent 30 days in such events, whilst 23% of respondents did not reply to this question. The most frequently reported attendance was 6 days, which was reported by 7.9% of respondents.

The main TPD activities attended by teachers

Table 1: Frequency of attended professional development activities

No.	Types of professional development activity you attended over the last 12 months	Attendance			
		Yes		No	
		<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
1	Training/workshops (e.g. on subject matter, teaching/learning methods, and/or other education-related topics).	399	77.3	117	22.7
2	Conferences or seminars (where teachers and/or researchers present their research results and discuss educational issues).	227	43.9	290	56.1
3	Formal qualification program (e.g. degree programs).	152	29.5	363	70.5
4	Observation visits to other schools.	254	49.1	263	50.9
5	Participation in a professional learning community formed in the school for the professional development of teachers.	327	63.5	188	36.5
6	Participation in a professional learning community with teachers of other schools formed for the professional development of teachers.	245	47.7	269	52.3
7	Participation in action research.	149	28.9	367	71.1
8	Participation in mentoring programs.	174	33.7	343	66.3
9	Participation in study groups.	117	22.6	400	77.4

The results from Table 1 show that traditional TPD methods prevail over the school-based ones. Of them, training sessions and workshops are the most common amongst teachers, meanwhile, activities of study groups are fewer in number. More specifically, more than three quarters of the teachers attended training sessions/workshops and less than three quarters of them participated in the activities of PLCs existing in their schools. Meanwhile, involvement in other learning events is considerably limited. Less than the half of the respondents confirmed to have visited other schools, collaborated with PLCs of other schools, or attended conferences/seminars. Meanwhile, only around one third of them were part of mentoring programs, formal qualification programs, and action research projects. Lastly, less than quarter of them participated in study groups.

Before presenting the qualitative findings, it needs to be noted that the researcher had no prior information about the participating schools. Thus, referring to interviews with principals, it was decided to divide them into two groups for the purposes of this question. The first group, comprised four schools, which were beneficiaries of a project called the "Champion School," which included 16 training programs, delivered by the German Corporation for International Cooperation (GIZ). The second group consisted of four other schools that are not beneficiaries of this project, but their teachers attended training sessions offered by the GIZ as well, though not as regularly as their colleagues from the first group. However, the eight principals recounted almost unanimously that teachers in their schools have been attending mainly external training programs, and the training on the Kosovo Curriculum Framework (KCF) which is mandatory. Furthermore, they highlighted that the TPD process is license-driven since teachers are interested mainly in the offerings carrying credits needed for license extension. On the other hand,

when talking about school-based activities, principals usually referred to workshops and activities of professional communities, which are obligatory school bodies that operate according to the grade and curricular area. They meet on a monthly basis and discuss work plans, syllabi, development of student tests, and other issues related to the school.

Even though the quantitative and qualitative data show that external training programs are used much more frequently for the professional development of teachers, principals shared many complaints about their delivery. They raised a range of concerns in relation to the training and post-training experiences, noting that teachers encounter various challenges when they go back to the school after such activities. Thus, the findings indicate that the following themes prevail in the TPD process: license driven TPD, budgetary constraints, inadequate trainers, and lack of monitoring.

License driven TPD

Principal 1 confirmed that the school she leads had organised dozens of school-based workshops in the past. However, she noted that they held only five such activities over the last two years. Explaining the reasons for this situation, she said, “When we are beneficiaries of grants, we prefer external training programs. As a champion school, we prepare the TPD plan, present our requests to the GIZ and they address them. This format is easier for us.”

Principal 2 explained that they tried to organise school-based activities but they were not very successful since their school is small. “I consider that external training events are more successful because they are delivered mainly by field experts,” he said convincingly.

According to principal 3, both TPD models are important for the staff of her school. However, she stated, “Teachers prefer school-based activities, and they more willing to take part in them. Perhaps they feel more comfortable as they are used to school’s environment.” At a later stage, she explained that her staff is in general not willing to attend TPD activities and hesitate to speak about the challenges they encounter, because, as she put it, “They believe they know everything about teaching.”

Principal 7 said with pride that they are privileged to attend various TPD activities organised by the GIZ. She underlined even though school-based learning activities may be useful and attractive, due to the license renewal criteria teachers are more interested in training programs recognised by the MEST. “A teacher may collect 200-300 credits through school-based activities, but if they are not on the list of the training programs accredited by the MEST, they have no value for the license renewal,” she said.

Even though they are not a “Champion School,” principal 4 confirmed that his staff had attended training sessions offered by the GIZ as well. He narrated that they have held only three school-based workshops over the last four years. The most recent was a workshop on the new curriculum implementation. He explained that the instruction presented during the training on new KCF were unclear, therefore, they had to elaborate

everything in detail. This principal underscored that the interest of teachers in TPD offerings has increased in recent years, but mainly in those that carry credits.

According to principal 5, her school utilises both external and school-based professional development activities, which are important and mutually complementary. She explained that she continuously encourages teachers to be lifelong learners given that she has been a teacher trainer for a long time and has attended over 60 training programs during her career. She also revealed that the number of training programs she has attended was one of the main reasons for her to be selected as the school principal since she had more certificates than any other applicant.

Principal 6 also confirmed that both methods are important for teachers, but they attend mainly external learning activities, which, according to him, are more helpful than the school-based ones. "School based-activities are somehow vague. Teachers like to go out, socialise, and be in a different environment," he said with certainty.

Principal 8, who had only one year of experience as a principal, could not say much about the professional development preferences of his staff. But he confirmed that they have been focused lately mainly on the training on the implementation of the new curriculum.

Budgetary constraints

Even though the majority of the participants believe that school-based learning activities are helpful for teachers, they admitted that they rarely organise such events due to the lack of budget and suitable facilities. It should be noted that school-based activities in the participating schools are usually workshops bringing teachers of a school together in an event. But only two out of the eight principals highlighted that teachers prefer school-based sessions. In their view, teachers find them more productive and concrete given that they are designed and implemented based on the school's needs. However, these principals seem to prefer this TPD format since they have control over the entire process, starting from the approval of the training material to monitoring the application of introduced novelties in the classroom. For instance, principal 5 was strongly convinced that school-based activities are effective as they are based on the school's needs and are conceptualised and implemented by teachers. Complementing her, principal 7 also said that school-based learning events are more suitable for teachers because they address their challenges and teachers learn from concrete examples.

In addition to workshops, two principals noted that their schools were part of an inter-school PLC that was supported by the GIZ. The teachers of these schools used to visit each other and exchange experiences, and students were involved in quizzes and competitive sports activities. However, this cooperation ended after the GIZ stopped supporting, because the schools had no funds to continue similar activities and the MEST did not support this program. By contrast, principal 1 did not find cooperation through PLCs helpful for teachers. She explained, "Honestly speaking, I could not see any benefit out of such activities. Other schools learned from us, we could not learn anything from them. Nevertheless, it's fine; we have explained some things to other schools." The same

principal added that teachers are not very eager to attend school-based activities because they carry no credits for the license renewal.

Inadequate trainers

External training sessions are planned, accredited, and organised by the MEST in cooperation with Municipal Education Directorates (MED). According to the participants, the MEST has been focused since 2017 mainly on training teachers in the new curriculum. Even though the vast majority of the teachers have already attended this training, they faced challenges when trying to implement it in practice. As a result, the interviewed principals had to organise supplementary school-based workshops with the teachers since, according to them, the secondary trainers presented incorrect instructions. In the opinion of principal 3, when the trainer is competent then teachers learn a lot and are capable to transfer the acquired knowledge to their colleagues. To substantiate this conclusion, she reported:

Our school is one of the 10 schools that participated in the pilot testing of the new curriculum. The first group of teachers attended the training delivered by trainers from Finland, Austria, Germany, and the MEST. We had no problems as they provided clear instructions. The second group attended a training delivered by MEST-trained trainers. The information and instructions they presented were wrong and teachers were not able to implement them properly, therefore, we had to organise a workshop in the school.

Lack of monitoring

Lack of monitoring is another major shortcoming of the external learning activities highlighted by principals. They reported that teachers attend training sessions, but no one inspects whether they are implementing the ideas introduced in those activities. They defined the lack of monitoring as an extra burden for them because they have to check on whether teachers are complying with the provided instructions. However, often principals are not familiar with the instructions presented in the activities attended by teachers as they cannot participate in all of them. They also noted that the lack of monitoring demotivates teachers to attend other activities, because, as principal 5 said, “Once the training is over then everything is over.”

The impact of TPD activities on teachers’ professional practices

Results presented in Table 2 show that teachers regard most of the activities they have attended as considerably helpful. Again, the highest scores were attributed to training programs and the lowest to action research projects. More specifically, training sessions/workshops are the most helpful for teachers (82.2%); then observation visits to other schools (81.7%); school-based PLCs (81%); PLCs with teachers at other schools (80.9%); mentoring programs (79%); conferences/seminars (78.3%); qualification programs (73.8%), study groups (73.4%), and the last one were action research projects (72.7%).

Table 2: The impact of attended TPD activities on teachers' professional practices (N=518)

No	Professional development method	Helpful	Neutral	Unhelpful
1.	Training/workshops (e.g. on subject matter, teaching/learning methods, and/or other education-related topics).	82.2%	14.2%	3.6%
2.	Conferences or seminars (where teachers and/or researchers present their research results and discuss educational issues).	78.3%	15.7%	6.0%
3.	Formal qualification program (e.g. degree programs).	73.8%	15.2%	11.0%
4.	Observation visits to other schools.	81.7%	13.1%	5.2%
5.	Participation in a professional learning community formed in the school for the professional development of teachers.	81.0%	15.2%	3.8%
6.	Participation in a professional learning community with teachers of other schools formed for the professional development of teachers	80.9%	14.2%	4.9%
7.	Participation in action research.	72.7%	15.5%	11.8%
8.	Participation in mentoring programs.	79.0%	12.5%	8.5%
9.	Participation in study groups.	73.4%	14.8%	11.7%

Principals' perspectives on the impact of TPD activities

In addition to teachers, principals were also asked about the impact of TPD activities on professional practices. The prevailing opinion amongst principals was that attendance in TPD activities should be a system priority as it is indispensable for the enhancement of teaching quality, students' attainment, and improvement of the school in general. In their opinion, through such activities teachers acquire new teaching techniques, necessary for making the educational process more attractive for students, responding successfully to various changes in education, and mastering contemporary skills and knowledge. Nevertheless, they could not describe concretely how TPD activities affect teacher's professional activities. However, they strongly believe that this process should be a continuous priority for the entire educational system.

Continuous priority

Expressing his belief that TPD activities have a positive impact on teachers' performance, principal 6 noted, "The professional development of teachers should be a priority of the state, educational system, school, and teacher, and we should see it that way." Furthermore, principal 3 concluded, "The more professionally developed teachers are, the more attractive their classes will be." Consequently, the principals believe that teachers have to continually invest in their professional development in order to keep pace with other developments and future demands. "We are witnessing that technology and everything else is advancing rapidly, therefore, we should follow the trends, which would be possible only through continuous learning," principal 8 posited. Sharing a similar

opinion, principal 5 noted, “Educators have to keep abreast of changes in the education system and that can be achieved through continuous professional development.” He also stressed that changes happening in other fields have forced teachers to become researchers and to prepare for the challenges awaiting them in the classroom.

Furthermore, they did not hesitate to commend the training sessions that had a positive impact on teachers. One of them was the training on the preparation of students’ tests. According to principal 4, this training has been helpful for teachers and students, especially the latter because they know exactly how they have earned test grades. Reporting a positive experience with a training session organised by the GIZ, principal 7 noted, “The training was about student-centred learning. Upon the return from this training, teachers wanted to know if it would be held again so that other colleagues could attend it, too.”

Discussion

The goal of this research was to understand TPD trends in Kosovo and the impact of attended TPD activities on teachers’ professional practices. It revealed that teachers spent on average 6.5 days per year in professional development activities, mainly in training sessions and workshops. Nevertheless, almost one quarter of participants did not reply to the question about this issue. This implies that they may have attended the aforementioned training sessions at an earlier stage and they were offered no other opportunities or were not interested in the new offers. Kosovo’s legislation stipulates that teachers have to complete 100 training hours in five years for the renewal of their licenses through programs accredited by the MEST. Thus, the teachers who complete 2.5 full training days in a year and continue the same trend for the next four years meet the required license renewal quota.

Quantitative and qualitative findings show that the dominant TPD methods in the research context continue to be training programs and workshops. Obviously, this trend is in line with the concepts included in the TDSF, which recognises training programs, accredited by the MEST, as the main teacher learning methods. Furthermore, schools hold workplace learning activities quite rarely and they mostly comprise workshops bringing larger cohorts together. Additionally, while only a negligible number of teachers reported having participated in action research, coaching, mentoring programs, or study groups, principals mentioned none of these formats. They focused mainly on offering explanations about school-based workshops since the prevailing view is that training sessions and workshops are the only TPD methods. Unfortunately, this tendency and TDSF’s instruction are at odds with the KESP, which acknowledges that traditional TPD formats have been ineffective and teachers should be offered learning opportunities customised to their needs and expertise. In addition, even though teachers have been encouraged to change their instructional approaches, the TPD system in Kosovo has not adopted the more efficient models applied by the advanced educational systems promoted by various scholars (Diaz-Maggioli, 2004; Bredeson & Scribner, 2000). However, if Kosovo teachers are required to involve in such projects, they would need a strong

support from educational professionals to master such concepts. For instance, findings by Vula and Berdynaj (2011) indicated that action research conducted collaboratively between university professors and mathematic teachers helped students to better understand mathematical concepts. But Kacaniku (2020) found that Kosovo teachers face difficulties in becoming researchers because they acquire limited research skills during the undergraduate and graduate studies and consider it a complex scientific task.

This research identified two main reasons why Kosovo's teachers neglect school-based learning activities involving smaller groups of participants and based on attendees' needs. First, qualitative data show that teachers are in general reluctant to attend non-mandatory learning events because they carry no credits necessary for the renewal of teacher licenses. Meanwhile, teachers' interest in TPD opportunities has increased after the introduction of the teacher licensing criteria. Thus, meeting the license quotas is their main objective (Mehmeti, Rraci & Bajrami, 2019). However, it is worth noting that if TPD comprises training sessions and workshops only "then this limits teachers' perceptions of learning possibilities" (Cole, 2012, p. 5). But scholars have also found that when a TPD event is focused on specific objectives, such as subject matter or teaching methods, it affects teachers positively (Borko, 2004; Guskey & Yoon, 2009). In addition, Borko (2004) has found that a TPD activity is more effective if it includes follow-up activities. Second, school-based TPD opportunities are neglected because the MEST has focused almost entirely on training teachers for the new curricular instructions. Principals reported that instructions deriving from the CFK are rather complex and the information provided in the delivered training sessions failed to equip the teachers accordingly. As a result, school-based workshops had to be organised to further elaborate on the issues that were not comprehended by the teachers, which demotivated them to participate in other learning activities.

However, it is likely that the educators have not understood the importance of this reform and the MEST has not made sufficient efforts to explain it to them. Also, the absence of research into the impact of the new curriculum on students' attainment and teaching methods led to a lack of communication between the main stakeholders about the necessary adjustments to this training. One of the main goals of the KCF is to transform the teaching process from objective-based to competence-based teaching, which is a completely new concept in Kosovo. Instead of being demotivated, teachers should have demanded and should be provided with more training programs on this aspect. This is especially important given the vast majority of participants have not been prepared during their university studies to teach according to competence-based education principles. The application of this approach becomes even more complex given that the MEST had no budget to support the schools to implement this reform, and teachers have to use old textbooks, which are incompatible with the concepts promoted by the KCF (USAID, 2017).

Qualitative findings showed that external training sessions, like those offered by the GIZ, are preferred in this study's context because such a format is less complicated for the beneficiary schools, the sessions are delivered by experts, and teachers are interested in accredited programs. However, without referring to a specific training session, principals

complained about the training facilitators and the lack of monitoring. Similar concerns were raised by Matherson and Windle (2017), who noted that the experts who deliver training programs often lack classroom experience; therefore, such events do not achieve the desired effect. Also, two principals specified that teachers prefer external events as they socialise with peers, which aligns with the findings of Bredeson and Scribner (2000) that such occasions are an opportunity for peer collaboration.

This research found discrepancies between the opinions of participating teachers and principals regarding the impact of the attended professional development activities on teachers' professional practices. According to quantitative data, more than three quarters of participating teachers found the majority of the attended activities helpful, especially training sessions and workshops. Even though principals acknowledged the importance of TPD, they focused mainly on highlighting the negative aspects of those events. Unsurprisingly, principals have adopted such a perspective given that they deal mainly with the organisational aspects and have formed such an opinion based on the feedback they received from the teachers. This suggests a lack of a communication between teachers and principals, which is a very important element of the teacher learning process (Stoll, 2010). Furthermore, given that there are no studies in Kosovo that assess the effectiveness of the applied TPD methods, there is little evidence about the impact of the programs attended by the teachers. Such uncertainty does not prevail only in Kosovo. Kennedy (2016) posited that research has not managed yet to show how teachers learn best, and McMeeking, Orsi and Cobb (2012) also argued that it is difficult to measure the impact of the attended development programs on the student learning as their effect is rather indirect.

Limitations and recommendations

The findings of this research should be interpreted with caution due to several limitations. Initially, the conclusions about the impact of the attended TPD opportunities were drawn based on the perceptions of a group of teachers collected quantitatively and accounts of a very small group of principals expressed through interviews. Had teachers been interviewed, they would probably have offered deeper insights about the influence of the attended TPD activities on their professional practices. However, given that the goal of the dissertation was to investigate the role of the principal in the TPD process, it was considered that interviews with principals would offer a clear picture of the research topic. In addition, the sample included only teachers of schools located in urban areas and their experiences with TPD events may differ from their colleagues working in rural regions. Furthermore, it did not explore differences between the teachers of smaller and larger schools pertaining to the TPD alternatives. Therefore, qualitative research exploring opinions of teachers of different schools about the effectiveness of the attended TPD events is recommended.

The findings of this research show that the MEST has initiated educational reforms, but the same practice has not been followed regarding the TPD opportunities. Thus, Kosovo's teachers, principals, and policymakers need to reconsider their approach towards TPD opportunities, given that scholars have found that study groups, peer

observations, teacher networks, mentoring programs, and inquiry projects are more effective formats of professional development (Earley & Bubb, 2007). Additionally, Knight (2009) concluded, “The worst consequence of an overreliance on traditional forms of professional development may be that poorly designed training can erode teachers’ willingness to embrace *any* new ideas” (p. 2). Thus, the MEST is advised to align its TPD policies with contemporary TPD trends, to encourage and allow teachers to attend various learning activities, and to find a way for awarding credits to teachers participating in such events. It also needs to create professional mechanisms that measure the effectiveness of the various learning activities, which could change the attitude of all the stakeholders towards this process.

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Appendix A: Impact of TPD on teachers’ professional practices

The impact of attended teacher professional development activities on teachers’ professional practices, measured by five-point Likert-style scale: VH = very helpful; FH = fairly helpful; N = neutral; LH = little helpful; UH = unhelpful

No	Types of professional development activities you attended over last 12 months	VH	FH	N	LH	UH
1.	Training/workshops (e.g. on subject matter, teaching/learning methods, and/or other education-related topics).	41.8%	40.5%	14.2%	2.8%	0.8%
2.	Conferences or seminars (where teachers and/or researchers present their research results and discuss educational issues).	44.2%	33.3%	15.8%	3.3%	3.3%
3.	Formal qualification program (e.g. degree programs).	42.3%	30.4%	14.9%	4.8%	7.7%
4.	Observation visits to other schools.	48.2%	32.9%	12.9%	1.2%	4.7%
5.	Participation in a professional learning community formed in the school for the professional development of teachers.	46.7%	33.5%	15.4%	2.5%	1.9%
6.	Participation in a professional learning community with teachers of other schools formed for the professional development of teachers.	48.2%	32%	14.2%	2.4%	3.2%
7.	Participation in action research.	40.2%	31.7%	15.2%	3.7%	9.1%
8.	Participation in mentoring programs.	40.0%	38.3%	12.2%	1.7%	7.8%
9.	Participation in study groups.	42.0%	30.5%	14.5%	3.8%	9.2%

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