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The Significance of Summer Retreat on the Teacher's Professional Development

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Abstract

This study aims to gather teachers' perspectives on summer training. To achieve the aim of the study, a questionnaire tool has been developed to investigate the attitudes of the teachers who are experienced in teaching. Therefore, sample selected are from the male and female teacher's in-service, they are (23) from primary and preparatory schools. The questionnaire is used to survey teachers and seek their points of view and their experience

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with summer training. The study reveals that the majority of teachers have positive attitudes towards summer training. Thus, the teachers believe that these pieces of training improve the teacher's capacity, interpersonal skills, mindfulness, and performance. However, the teachers request more support and training to help them develop their professional and educational capacity. The study concluded with recommendations for further studies to investigate the relevant institutions to seek their concerns about extra and continuous training for the teachers in service.

Keywords: retreat, educational, professional, development, training

أهمية التدريب الصيفي في التطوير المهني للمعلمين

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قسم اللغة الإنجليزية، كلية الآداب، جامعة الموصل، الموصل، العراق

الملخص

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى جمع آراء المعلمين حول التدريب الصيفي. لتحقيق هدف الدراسة، تم تطوير أداة استبيان للتحقق من مواقف المعلمين ذوي الخبرة في التدريس. لذلك، تم اختيار عينة من المعلمين والمعلمات العاملين، وعددهم (23) من المدارس الابتدائية والإعدادية. تم استخدام الاستبيان لاستطلاع آراء المعلمين ومعرفة تجاربهم مع التدريب الصيفي. كشفت الدراسة أن الغالبية العظمى من المعلمين لديهم مواقف إيجابية تجاه التدريب الصيفي. وبالتالي، يعتقد المعلمون أن هذه التدريبات تحسن من قدراتهم ومهاراتهم الاجتماعية، ووعيهم، وأدائهم. ومع ذلك، يطلب المعلمون المزيد من الدعم والتدريب لمساعدتهم على تطوير قدراتهم المهنية والتعليمية. اختتمت الدراسة بتوصيات لإجراء دراسات إضافية للتحقق من المؤسسات ذات الصلة لمعرفة اهتماماتها بشأن التدريب الإضافي والمستمر للمعلمين العاملين.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التدريب الصيفي، تدريب، تعليمي، مهني، تطوير، تدريب

1. Introduction

1.1 Preliminary

for many years, discussions in educational literature have centered on whether "the quality of teachers is the most significant factor within schools that affects student success and enhances the overall quality of education" (Macía & García, 2016). In this context, educational leaders, theorists, and researchers have concentrated on the most effective ways to improve teaching quality to boost student learning and achievement. Each year, nations allocate millions of dollars to enhance the skills and qualifications of their teachers by expanding their access to professional development opportunities (Guskey & Yoon, 2009). Teachers' professional development plays a vital role in enhancing student achievement. Due to its complex nature and the way, it evolves throughout a teacher's career, providing a clear definition of professional development is challenging, and current research does not effectively articulate this concept (Sancar, et al., 2021).

Generally, professional development refers to different types of experiences related to a person's work in a wide variety of jobs, professions, and other business practices. It indicates the learning and applying the new knowledge and skills which can improve the performance of the work (Bautista et al., 2022).

In education, researchers such as Mizel (2010) have shown that teacher's qualifications and school leadership are the most significant factors that increase student outcomes. For teachers to be effective, it is precarious to expand their knowledge and skills continuously to implement the most effective learning and teaching performance.

Sims et al., (2025) indicate that professional development is the most effective strategy for the school's system that strengthens the teacher's performance levels. Therefore, it is important to use different tools to develop the teachers' profession.

1.2 What is Summer Retreat?

The noun retreat has different meanings. According to the Cambridge dictionary, it means to move back and away from someone or something, especially if the person is frightened or trying to be alone: for example, (She burst into tears and retreated to the

bedroom. It is also meant to go away from a person or place because he or she does not want to fight anymore (Cambridge, 2021). While the *educational definition of retreat* can be defined as a planned period of withdrawal from regular teaching, learning, or administrative duties, usually conducted in a quiet or secluded setting, with the purpose of fostering reflection, renewal, and collaboration. Unlike the military sense of retreat, which implies defeat or forced withdrawal, the educational retreat is voluntary and constructive, offering teachers, students, or administrators the opportunity to step back from routine pressures, engage in meaningful dialogue, and generate new ideas for growth and improvement. It serves as a purposeful pause that strengthens community, enhances professional development, and supports strategic planning within educational institutions. (Jacobs, 2010)

In education, the retreat is a good way to re-enhance school programs and helps teachers develop and improve their skills. It is a way to gather the teachers at a pace where they can exchange ideas and experiences. Whether the education system is looking to set the quality for the term or give teachers a much-earned relief during the year, school retreats not only can improve teaching techniques, but also build self-esteem, self-confidence, and cohesiveness as well. Moreover, summer retreat can refer to restoration and stress relief, by which numerous summer retreats are tailored to assist educators in revitalizing, alleviating stress, countering burnout, and enhancing resilience following a challenging academic year. Additionally, it refers to collaboration and team spirit, which means that these retreats offer a chance to break away from the typical school setting to strengthen connections, enhance team unity, and align everyone for the upcoming year (Candelario, et al., 2025).

1.3 Problem of the Study

According to Mizell (2010), research has shown that a teacher's professional quality is an important factor that raises student outcomes. The learning process has to be as effective as possible by the teachers; they have to continually expand their knowledge and skills to implement the best educational practices. However, not all the teachers are willing to attend the summer training, nor the educational institution provides continuous support.

This contradiction is the key challenge which is highly important to be investigated to know the factors that prevent the teachers from participating in the summer training.

1.4 Hypothesis

It is hypothesized that the summer retreat is a strategy used to allow the teachers to continue and strengthen their skills throughout their careers. They learn and solve problems together to ensure and exchange experiences.

1.5 Aims of the Study

In this study, the researchers try to find out to what extent the teachers in-service is engaged with the program development and whether their opinions were taken into consideration. The study investigates the teacher's points of view and their willingness to attend training during the summer holiday. In addition, to the aforementioned purposes, the study seeks for the teachers' expectation of the educational institution to provide needed support.

1.6 The Research Questions

This study will find answers to the below questions;

1. Do the teacher's in-service value the summer retreat?
2. What is the anticipation of the teachers on the summer training?
3. Are teachers' points of view considered for the teaching program development?

1.7 Significance of the Study

The study tries to shed light on the importance of summer training for teachers; and how this activity enhances teachers' skills in the teaching process. It tries to explore valuable information about teachers' perceptions of the importance of summer training. The researchers survey the teachers to investigate the capacity of the teachers, whether they

value the role of summer training, and whether they experienced any summer retreats. The main beneficiaries of this study are the Ministry of education, supervisors, and teachers.

1.8 Literature Review

While reviewing related literature, it is important to examine some studies and research that have been done in this field. Based on an article by Harris (2006), the article discusses the strategy for identifying the needs of teachers' professional development. The article is concerned with a program that helps teachers identify their own needs for professional development. The article debates the engagement of teachers in this process, which is an effective strategy for teachers' professional development. It exemplifies how the teachers' needs are diverse and how both professional and personal dimensions are interrelated. They reflect the needs of the teachers and the institutions in which they are working. Identifying these needs is the strategy that is developed, implemented, and evaluated with a group of teachers. The study reports on teachers' reactions to their participation. It provides insights into the needs of the teachers and how diverse the needs are. It examines their responses to the applied process.

Another research was done by Darling-Hammond (2010, 2017), in her studies; she states that teacher professional learning is crucial to increase their interest in supporting the skills that the students need to learn and how to prepare them for further education. The study considers refined forms of teaching as important forms to develop students' competencies, such as critical thinking, problem-solving, collaboration, and self-direction. Meanwhile, effective professional development is a requirement that assists the teachers to learn, it is a technique to refine the pedagogies needed to teach these skills. However, the study has indicated that many initiatives of professional development have been unsuccessful in teacher practices and learner outcomes. The study reviews different studies that have verified a positive relationship between teacher professional development and student outcomes.

Continuous professional development is essential both throughout the academic year and throughout teachers' careers (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). There is a strong consensus on the

elements that make professional development effective. It should be tailored to meet the needs of both students and teachers, involve teachers in its planning and development, be integrated into a broader change strategy, encourage collaboration across the school, and be assessed for its impact on teacher practices and student outcomes (Hawley and Valli, 2001). Incorporating professional development into daily practice also enhances classroom effectiveness (Brugar and Roberts, 2017). Additionally, Walpole and McKenna (2015) emphasize that the design and execution of professional development ought to be a responsive and iterative process that takes participant feedback into account. In the absence of such opportunities, teachers are less inclined to modify and advance their teaching methods.

According to these studies, a conclusion can be made, is that the studies focused on the perception of the teachers and how to set out effective strategies to prepare teachers highly qualified to cope with the development of pedagogy. It became clear that the need of the teacher is of high importance for their professional development.

2. Methodology

2.1 Participants

In this study, 60 teachers from different primary and preparatory schools have been participated. Those participants are both males and females and they are teachers of English, Chemistry, physics, Math, and Science. Their age ranges from 24 to 40 years old. A questionnaire was developed to survey the teachers' points of view on the significance of summer training. It was circulated to the teachers of public schools from Bardarash district in Duhok province. The questionnaires were shared by a Google form.

2.2 Instrument and Procedure

The researchers have developed a questionnaire to include the items that help gather relevant data and information that are important to contribute to the purpose of this study. The development of the questionnaire was based on the literature review and the study questions.

The questionnaire comprises two parts; the first part of the questionnaire is dedicated to general information and the specific background of the participants which are essential to understand the environmental surroundings of the respondents. In addition, one open end question to know the areas that the teacher prefers to be improved for their professional development. As for the second part of the questionnaire, it comprises 13 items with Likert-type scales. The scales ranged from; Disagree (D), and Neutral (N), Agree (A). To have face validity for this questionnaire, it is examined by jury members who have experience in the field. The items are created to address different areas that retrieve the teachers' points of view regarding the significance of the summer training and its role in improving the teachers' professional development. For example, the items investigate if the teachers' feedback has been taken into consideration for program development.

Furthermore, if the teachers update their knowledge to know the new emerging concepts and research at national and international levels. The items ask if the summer training is applicable to enhance the performance of the teacher, and how these trainings improve the social and interpersonal skills of the teachers. Further to that, the items investigate if the teacher's in-service has positive feedback towards the summer training. The items are formed in different ways that seek the participants' points of view. A number of the items are developed to indicate if the teachers need more training if they are supported by sufficient resources to cope with the global development of technology and pedagogy and if they are well trained to achieve the desired goal. Whereas some items were formed to ensure if the educational institutions have any plan to develop the teacher's professional skills. The purpose of this formation is not to get the teacher's responses directly towards or against the summer training and the availability of the resources, but to consider different points of view and to have a clearer image of the status of the teachers' capacity.

The questionnaire is sent online through a link of Google form to the teachers from the primary and preparatory public schools from Bardarash District in Duhok province. Teachers filled in the questionnaires through the Google form and submitted them directly. The questionnaire includes directions and instructions on how to fill in the questionnaire;

it is designed to not retrieve any personal information so as to keep the respondents anonymous.

After the data had been collected automatically by the Google sheet, the researchers used the percentage statistical to analyze the data electronically through the Microsoft Office/ Excel application and by using the below equation; the number of responses divided by the total number of participants multiplied by 100. The item: $(\text{responses} / \text{participants}) \times 100 = \%$.

Overall, standard deviations range from 0.29 to 0.89, indicating moderate spread in responses depending on the item.

2.3 Limitations

Generally, there were some limitations in the sampling, selection of the participants, and the design of the items. The teachers who participated in the questionnaire were 60 only they were from males and females. The target schools were the primary and preparatory public schools from Bardarash District in Duhok province.

2.4 Data Collection

For the quantitative data, an interpretive research analysis was conducted. The purpose of the interpretive research is to understand the setting and the background from the point of view of the participants. The questionnaire was sent out through a Google form Link to each teacher, and then teachers filled in the questionnaires and submitted them directly. 23 questionnaires were received from the teachers. The questionnaires carried the responses of the participants. Responses to the items were received and calculated automatically by the Google sheet.

2.5 Data Analysis and Results

The questionnaire conducted helped to obtain unbiased views from the teachers about the significance of the summer retreats and their importance in enhancing the teachers' mindfulness. The rationality that is applied to introduce the findings was inductive analysis because data was gathered first and then integrated inductively to generate interpretations.

The first part of the questionnaire is devoted to gathering general information about the background of the participants whether they have been participating in any summer training and also if they want to highlight a specific area to be developed. 18 of the teachers said that they have experienced teaching for more than 5 years.

Table 1

Participant's Information and background

Participant's information and background			Respon dents	%	Total
1	How long have you been teaching?	1 - 5 Years	4	17 %	23
		More than 5 Years	18	78 %	
3	Which grades are you teaching?	Primary	16	70 %	23
		Preparatory	7	30 %	
4	Have you received summer training before?	Yes	9	39 %	23
		No	14	61 %	

The emerging response that is worth mentioning is that 14 of the teachers said that they have not received any summer training. Regarding the teachers' inputs for the open question which asked their opinion about the areas that they want to be improved, 11 of them prefer the teaching approaches to be improved.

Responses to the second part of the questionnaire revealed that 15 of the teachers agreed that their feedback is considered to develop the teaching program, and no major differences were noticed among the respondents about their awareness of the new emerging concepts, research, and latest trends at national and international levels. 16 of the teachers rejected

the items that show the non-applicability of summer training to enhance the teacher's performance, in contrast, 19 of the teachers agreed on the fact that summer training improves the teacher's social and Interpersonal skills.

Almost all the teachers said that summer training will improve the knowledge, and teaching methodology of the teachers. While 14 of the teachers showed their agreement in fact that the teachers have positive feedback on summer training. 22 of the participants said it promotes the teacher's instructional effectiveness and interaction.

Regarding the aims, goals, objectives, and significance of the curriculum, 12 of the teachers said that they are well clarified to the teachers, but 12 rejected the availability of needed resources. 19 of the teachers confirmed that additional training is a perfect strategy to maintain the teacher's professional effectiveness, at the same time 12 of them confirmed that they are not well trained to achieve the desired goals. Concerning the educational institutions, if they are keen to develop the teacher's professional skills, 13 of the teachers rejected this interest among these institutions. Accordingly, 20 of the teachers said that they need more training and resources to cope with the global development of technology and pedagogy.

Table 2

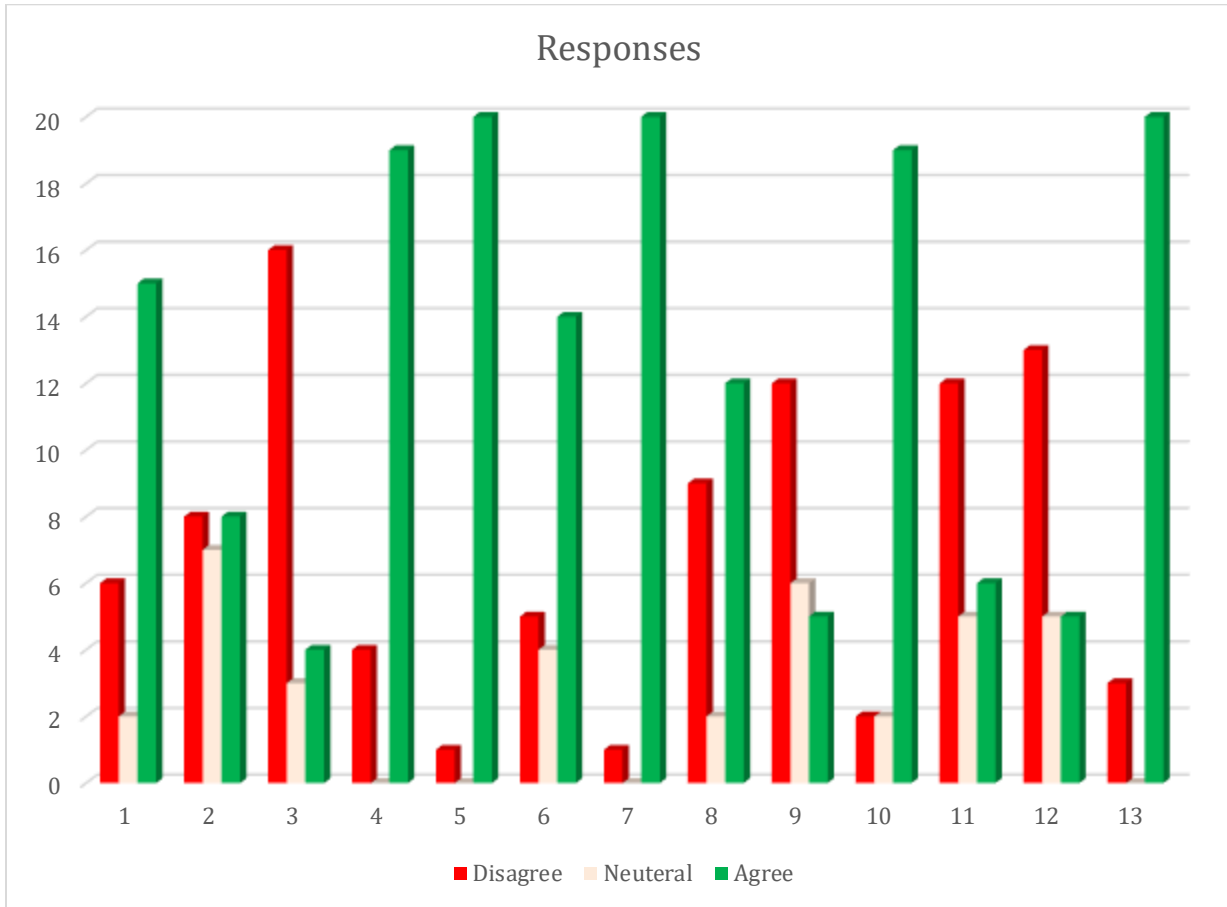
Respondents to the Items

#Items	Number of the respondents				Percentage %		
	D	N	A	Total	D	N	A
1	6	2	15	23	26 %	9 %	65 %
2	8	7	8	23	35 %	30 %	35 %
3	16	3	4	23	70 %	13 %	17 %
4	4	0	19	23	17 %	0 %	83 %
5	1	0	22	23	4 %	0 %	96 %

6	5	4	14	23		22 %	17 %	61 %
7	1	0	22	23		4 %	0 %	96 %
8	9	2	12	23		39 %	9 %	52 %
9	12	6	5	23		52 %	26 %	22 %
10	2	2	19	23		9 %	9 %	83 %
11	12	5	6	23		52 %	22 %	26 %
12	13	5	5	23		57 %	22 %	22 %
13	3	0	20	23		13 %	0 %	87 %

Figure 1

Graphical view of the responses



3. Conclusions and Recommendations

3.1 Conclusions

The conclusions that appear from the questionnaire responses and data analysis consider the summer retreat as an effective strategy for teachers. The findings revealed that the teachers have a positive attitude towards the summer training. Also, it was observed that most of the teachers believe that summer training is an effective way to improve the teacher's capacity, interpersonal skills, mindfulness, and performance. However, the majority of teachers ascertained the non-availability of the required support and resources to implement this strategy. And they are asking for more support and training that helps them to build their educational capacity.

3.2 Recommendations

Due to the outcomes and the findings that have been obtained from the study, it becomes clear that most of the surveyed teachers agreed on the fact that the majority of the teachers have positive feedback towards the summer training, and they believe that this training increases their interaction, interpersonal skills, and they develop their performance. Also, the teachers see that the educational institutions are not very keen to support the teachers and the resources are not available.

Therefore, the researchers recommend further research to highlight the factors behind this gap and also to investigate the relevant institutions to clarify the reasons and justification.

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Appendix A: The Study Questionnaire

Part one: Participant's background

1. How long have you been teaching?
 - a) Less than 1 year
 - b) 1 - 5 Years
 - c) More than 5 years
2. Which grades are you teaching?
 - a) Primary
 - b) Preparatory
3. Have you received summer training before?
 - a) Yes
 - b) No
4. In what areas do you like to improve as a teacher?

Part 2: Please select one of the options: Disagree (D), Neutral (N), Agree (A)

Items
1. Teachers' feedback is considered for teaching program development.
2. Teachers are aware of the new emerging concepts, research, and latest trends at national and international levels.
3. The summer training is not applicable to enhance the teacher's performance.

4. The summer training improves the teacher's Interpersonal and social skills.
5. In-service teacher training improves knowledge, teaching methodology, and practice.
6. The majority of the teachers in-service have positive feedback on summer training.
7. Mindfulness promotes the teacher's instructional effectiveness and interaction.
8. The aims, goals, objectives, and significance of the curriculum are well clarified to the teachers.
9. Teachers are supported with the required resources.
10. Extra training is considered to be a perfect strategy to maintain the teacher's professional effectiveness.
11. Teachers are well-trained to achieve the desired goals.
12. The educational institutions are very keen to develop the teacher's professional skills.
13. Teachers need more training and resources to cope with the global development of technology and pedagogy.