

Analysis of Teachers as Researchers in the Classrooms: Lesson Study Experience from EFL Teachers' Perspectives

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Abstract

As an inquiry based model, Lesson Study highlights teacher professional development in the field of English language teaching by giving teachers the role of researchers in classrooms. Gaining widespread popularity in different educational contexts and holding a great promise as a model of professional development, the Lesson Study model forms a basis for the present study aiming to provide insights into how teacher development is structured through social context and collaboration between colleagues when involved in an inquiry process, and how that learning leads to perceptual changes in teachers' views of the model and changes in teaching practices. The results suggest that the teachers had a positive attitude towards practice both at the beginning and at the end of the study. Although the teachers had initially some concerns before they actually experienced the model and it was their first experience with it, practicing the Lesson Study model seemed to meet their expectations, resulted in improvements in knowledge as well as teaching practices and perspectives, and made a contribution to personal and professional development with the help of engagement in professional collaboration, self-reflection, sharing of content knowledge and teaching experiences, peer observation, and critically discussing how to further enhance student learning.

Keywords: *Professional Development, Teacher Inquiry, Lesson Study, Teacher Collaboration, Teacher Learning*

Teachers have different requirements at different times during their careers, which show a tendency to change in accordance with the changes arising in the needs of the schools or the institutions in which they work (Richards & Farrell, 2005). Those changing requirements urge teachers to update themselves as teacher education should not be regarded as a process which begins and ends with formal training but as a continuing process. Teacher education cannot be expected to prepare teachers to cope with all the challenges they may face during their careers, which gives birth to the need for further professional development.

Professional development has gained increasing significance as a way to provide an opportunity for teachers to match their teaching goals with their students' learning needs as a result of

innovations and reforms (Diaz-Maggioli, 2003). These innovations and reforms have brought about changes in the roles of teachers in classrooms as teachers have begun to keep up with new curriculums, assessments, methods, techniques and so on. Put differently, the more a change in the role of teachers has existed, the more teachers have had to catch up the latest trends in order to improve themselves for the sake of their own professional development (Turhan & Arıkan, 2009).

Bearing the importance of professional development in mind, reformers provide in-service training opportunities to teachers in the form of one-shot workshops, seminars or conferences consisting of outside experts with little information about the local context (Wilson & Berne, 1999) and which are presented in the form of a prescription with lots of seemingly irrelevant advice and tips, teaching little to the teachers and promoting a feeling of occupational isolation (Beatty, 1999; Lieberman & Mace, 2010; Little, 1982; Meyer, 20005; Snow-Geron, 2005). However, Kotelawala (2012) and Gutierrez (2015) found that teacher development promoting joint inquiry, teaching practice and reflection is more likely to result in professional growth.

The increasing focus on professional development of teachers has resulted in growing international interest in Lesson Study (LS) as a model of high-quality professional development forming a link between teacher learning and teacher practice (Doig & Groves, 2011). LS involves collaborative planning, peer observation, collaborative dialogue, re-teaching and reflection in order to be able to improve teaching practice (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011; Harle, 2008; Kotelawala, 2012). That growing international interest has paved the way for a substantial body of research on the effectiveness of LS in terms of promoting teachers' professional development (Cerbin & Kopp, 2006; Fernandez, 2002; Hurd & Lucciardo-Musso, 2005; Kotelawala, 2012; Nami et al., 2016; Rock & Wilson, 2005; Takahashi & Yoshida, 2004).

Originally practiced in Japan and drawing wide attention in the U.S., LS is mainly practiced in mainstream education; therefore, there are very few studies which report on the application of it in English language teaching contexts and no study has been conducted with university level English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers in Turkey. In this regard, the current study aims to shed light on the benefits of practicing LS with prep school EFL teachers in order to see how, if any, this practice may contribute to their professional development and lead to changes in their beliefs and perceptions regarding the LS model of professional development and their teaching practices. The present study is worthy of attention in that it examines how teacher learning is shaped by social context and collaboration between colleagues, and how teacher-learning leads to perceptual changes in their views of teaching and in their views of the LS model.

Lesson Study in Language Teacher Development Contexts

In LS practice, a group of teachers collectively identify and formulate the learning goals, design a detailed lesson plan, teach the lesson, debrief the comments collected during instruction, draw conclusions and teach the revised lesson in another session to improve the quality of instruction (Lewis, 2002a,b; Lewis et al., 2009; Fernandez, 2002; Ono & Ferreira, 2010). The final product of this collaborative process is a detailed lesson or research plan, during which teachers can have various opportunities to reflect, evaluate, analyse, share and construct knowledge with their peers (Chokshi & Fernandez, 2005), which could make them identify themselves as professionals in their fields (Wilms, 2003).

Tasker (2014) identifies LS as a framework used by teachers in order to find a gap between where their students are now, and where they would like them to be, and then look for ways that would bridge that gap by means of creating a research lesson which focuses on re-directing student learning through changes in teaching practices and design of artefacts that will help their learners achieve the long-term goal they have established. It is a reflective process as teachers are expected

to reflect upon their practices, students' learning and the relationship between them (Lenski & Caskey; 2009), which could encourage teachers to have a detailed understanding towards their teaching, their students and their profession (Cerbin & Kopp; 2006).

Like other inquiry-based models of professional development, LS is teacher-directed, collaborative, and non-evaluative, and based on concrete everyday classroom practices, in which groups of teachers try to co-plan a lesson focusing on a particular content or unit of study (Johnson, 2009; Hiebert & Stigler, 2000), which triggers them to take ownership in their professional development (Hawley & Valli, 1999). To draw attention to significant qualities of LS, Lewis (2006) states:

... a flexible system for learning from practice that requires particular supporting materials and knowledge, conditions, habits of mind, and institutional structures to flourish...[it] interconnects intimately with many local structures, both adapting itself to them and is also transforming them (p. 12-13).

Although the LS model has paved the way for a great number of studies in the fields of mathematics and science teacher development, only a few studies have been mainly interested in applying it to English language teaching contexts due to the fact that it is mainly experienced in mainstream education. In this regard, Hurd and Licciardo-Mosso (2005) conducted a case study focusing on how LS could help teachers in terms of practicing differentiated instruction. The results of the study suggested that the model regarded teachers as professionals and encouraged them to use skills and experiences in a way that would increase student achievement along with increasing their knowledge as professionals. Regarded as a tool encouraging teachers to be effective learners themselves in a safe and collaborative environment, the practice promoted building of efficacy for teachers because of the fact that teachers noticed that they could be able to improve their students and themselves.

Tasker (2014) conducted a study in the field of professional development of language teachers, probing to investigate EFL teacher learning through participation in lesson study. The study was mainly interested in cognitive development of teachers and remarked that practice of the LS model enabled an effective conceptual tool mediating teachers' learning and bringing about expansive transformation. Additionally, the study incorporated administrators into the process and the results draw attention to the fact that school administrator involvement is of vital importance for school change.

Dealing mainly with EFL teachers' viewpoints regarding the practical implementation of the LS model, Haghhighifard and Marzban (2016) claim that LS procedures in classrooms can benefit English language teachers in terms of promoting their teaching and providing them with an opportunity to get the characteristics of an effective professional development in their teaching process, which may stem from the fact that the model displayed differences when compared to other traditional professional development practices. Teachers had the opportunity to gain awareness towards the strong and weak points of their teaching through a collaborative teaching practice.

Along the same line, Nashruddin and Nurrachman (2016) aimed to highlight a guideline on the LS by picturing its application in a private senior high school in Indonesia. Providing many significant benefits of the LS model such as development of teacher candidates' new insights into the needs of students, an increased awareness towards different teaching strategies, and grasping the importance of collaboration, the study identified numerous challenges in relation to the implementation of the model. The challenges involve issues such as time and school administrative structures, which were impeding teacher collaboration.

Considering previous research and interest in applying the LS model in different educational contexts and settings, the present study intends to shed light on the empowering dimension of the LS model both in terms of content and form and to provide an example for educational decision makers in terms of whether it can be adopted and performed as a model for effective and sustainable language teacher professional development.

Methodology

Research Questions

The present study mainly intends to gain an awareness towards the benefits of practicing LS with prep school EFL teachers by evaluating the model from teachers' perspectives as it would enable the practitioners to see how, if any, this practice may contribute to EFL teachers' professional development and result in changes in their beliefs and perceptions regarding LS and their actual teaching processes. The research questions are:

1. How do EFL teachers perceive LS as a form of professional development before they practice it?
2. Does the teachers' participation in the LS cycles lead to any changes in their perceptions regarding the LS model and in their teaching practices in the process of professional development?

Data Collection

Three data collection instruments were utilised in accordance with the research questions, each with a qualitative nature: interviews with participant teachers (pre- and post-), teachers' reflective journal entries, and field notes of the researcher.

The semi-structured interviews consisted of four questions that aimed to see how the teachers defined the LS model, the appealing or helpful aspects of it, the benefits on their teaching practices, and what evidence they could suggest for the efficiency of the model before and after practicing it in their teaching context. The model was practiced within 20 weeks and pre-interviews were conducted with the teachers at the beginning of the study and post-interview at the end. The interview questions were delivered to the participants on paper and the participants were required to write their opinions and thoughts in accordance with the interview questions. After they finished writing their responses to the interview questions, the researcher examined their responses and asked for clarification if there was a point that required it, which was recorded by the researcher.

Additionally, participant teachers were required to keep reflective journals after each meeting in order to reflect upon their experience with LS, which were intended to support the data obtained through interviews. The reflections of the teachers were presented in the form of extracts supporting their statements in interviews. Moreover, the findings from interviews and reflective journal entries were supported through field notes kept by the researcher throughout the practice with an aim to see the process from the researcher's perspective.

Participants

The present study relied on convenience sampling strategy in order to achieve research objectives. Therefore, in order to find volunteer participants for the present study, an invitation letter that informed the teachers working at the department about the content of the study (i.e. goals, time, expectations etc.) was sent through e-mail and the teachers were asked to state whether they would volunteer or not. An introduction meeting was held with some teachers who wanted to learn about the study and the process in detail and a presentation was delivered by the researcher. The study

was conducted with five voluntary teachers who signed a consent form to participate in the study and practice the model.

The data regarding the qualities of the five teachers participating in the research process is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. The EFL Teacher Participants in the Study

Name of the participant teacher	Nationality Gender Age	Educational Background	Teaching Experience
Participant Teacher 1	German Male 47	BA in Latin/History MA in English Language Teaching	16 years teaching adults
Participant Teacher 2	Turkish Female 29	BA/MA in English Language Teaching	7 years teaching adults
Participant Teacher 3	Turkish Male 53	BA in English Language Teaching	31 years teaching children and adults
Participant Teacher 4	Turkish Male 41	BA/MA in English Language Teaching	17 years teaching children and adults
Participant Teacher 5	American Male 29	BA in European History Minor Degree in Spanish and Psychology MA in Education and TESOL	5 years teaching adults 1 year teaching adolescents

Findings

The pre-interviews findings were compared with post-interviews in order to see whether the perceptions of the EFL teachers showed changes after practicing the LS model. The key words extracted from pre- and post-interviews for each question are displayed in tables together with their frequencies at the beginning and at the end of the study.

Table 2. The Interview Questions (Pre- and Post-)

1. How would you describe “lesson study” to someone who had never heard of it before?
2. What do you see as the most helpful or appealing aspects of “lesson study”, and why?
3. Do you think “lesson study” will affect/affected you or your teaching in any way? How?
4. If “lesson study” works... for you, for your group and school, for your students, what kind of evidence will you expect to see/ can you provide after you have experienced?

The first question in the pre- and post-interviews aimed to see how EFL teachers could define the LS model before and after practicing it. In Table 2, the key words extracted from pre- and post-interviews regarding the first question were compared and the results were displayed with their frequencies

Table 3. The Frequencies of Descriptions Given for LS Model at Time 1 and Time 2

Keywords	Frequencies		
	Pre-	Post-	Total
Collaboration among teachers	3	5	8
Aid for solutions to difficulties/problems	2	5	7
Lesson planning	2	3	5
Leading discussions to improve a lesson	2	–	2
Coming together with an aim	–	2	2
Enhancing teachers' teaching abilities	–	1	1
Triggering students to take responsibility	–	1	1
Redesigning the lesson to the benefits of learners	–	1	1
Attempt to overcome occupational isolation	1	–	1

Table 3 shows that the LS model is mainly defined as a process which involved collaboration among teachers. The EFL teachers were found to focus mostly upon the collaborative part of the process, as indicated in the following extracts:

Extract 1:

It demands a few teachers to come together and work cooperatively on teaching problems. (Teacher 2/Pre-)

Extract 2:

A lesson study is a collaborative form of professional development in which teachers work on a specific aspect of instructional practice to address a problem they perceived as affecting learning negatively. (Teacher 1/Post-)

As shown in Table 3, another statement expressed most commonly by the EFL teachers is finding solutions to the problems faced in the classrooms before and after practicing the model in their teaching context. On the other hand, some EFL teachers seemed to regard LS practice as a process which only aimed to plan a lesson by bringing a few teachers together.

Extract 3:

It is not something unfamiliar for language teachers, but the process goes reversely than we are used to. It is a detailed, student-centred, needs analysis focused lesson planning. (Teacher 5/Pre-)

Extract 4:

I would describe it as an attempt to overcome occupational isolation by identifying a problem and working collaboratively on solutions to resolve it. (Teacher 1/Pre-)

Considering the findings in Table 3, it can be inferred that the EFL teachers mostly regarded LS practice as a process which requires teachers to collaborate, to discuss about the difficulties experienced while teaching, and to show a collaborative effort to solve those problems through planning a lesson before they practiced it. Likewise, those teachers are observed to focus on those aspects to describe LS model after they practiced it.

The second question in the pre- and post-interviews aimed to find out the most helpful or appealing aspects of the LS model before and after practicing it. To achieve this aim, the key words extracted from pre- and post-interviews regarding the second question were compared and the results were presented with their frequencies in Table 4.

Table 4. The Frequencies of Helpful or Appealing Aspects of LS Model at Time 1 and Time 2

Keywords	Frequencies		
	Pre-	Post-	Total
Triggering collaboration	4	4	8
Sharing ideas	–	5	5
Providing experiences	–	3	3
Contributing to professional development	2	–	2
Being student centred	2	–	2
Attempt to overcome isolation	–	2	2
Creating opportunity to learn new things	–	2	2
Helping to see the shortcomings	–	2	2
Leading to discussions between teachers	1	–	1
Contributing to the quality of teaching/learning	1	–	1
Taking ownership over profession	–	1	1

As Table 4 indicates, the EFL teachers mostly looked at the LS model as helpful in terms of collaboration among teachers. The teachers seemed to appreciate the opportunity to collaborate with their colleagues and support each other both at the beginning and at the end of the study.

Extract 5:

The most appealing aspect is encouragement of collaboration. Lesson Study will hopefully generate an understanding that colleagues' views, experiences, perspectives are valuable. (Teacher 1/Pre-)

Extract 6:

I found the most helpful aspect of Lesson Study to be the collective knowledge of all of the teachers. As an outsider in this educational culture, it was helpful for me to have a number of insiders who have experience here and whom I could share my ideas with and I could listen to. (Teacher 5/Post-)

Table 4 also indicates that all of the EFL teachers felt that the LS practice enabled them an opportunity to share their ideas with each other and it would be very helpful for them after they got involved in LS practice.

Extract 7:

I think the most appealing aspect of it will be the inclusion of students' needs. This is because it is a student-centred, needs-analysis based process of lesson planning. (Teacher 5/Pre-)

Moreover, LS practice was found to be appealing because they believed that the LS practice helped them to overcome the isolation they were normally experiencing and provided them an opportunity to learn new things from each other and to question themselves in terms of their failures after they had the LS experience. Those helpful aspects were not touched upon by any of the teachers before the practice took place.

Another point worth mentioning is that some EFL teachers expected the LS practice to be helpful in terms of discussions they would hold with their colleagues during meetings and they thought that it would make contributions to the quality of teaching and learning at the beginning of the study. However, those points were not addressed after the teachers carried out LS practice with their group. Lastly, the LS model was seen as helpful as it was thought to trigger ownership over the teaching profession since the LS practice treated them as agents of the teaching process. Although that point was suggested at the end of the study, it was not mentioned before the teachers had the LS experience.

Extract 8:

A group of teachers come together with the aim of trying and finding solutions to the difficulties affecting learning and teaching in classes. Perhaps, the quality of teaching and learning will enhance rapidly as a result of being involved in LS process. (Teacher 3/Pre-)

When Table 4 is considered as a whole, it can be suggested that LS practice was expected to be helpful in terms of encouraging collaboration, contributing to professional development and to the quality of teaching in classrooms at the beginning of the study.

The third question in the pre- and post-interviews probed to find out whether LS practice was expected to have an effect upon the teachers’ teaching before they experienced it and whether it influenced their teaching practices at the end. For this reason, the key words extracted from pre- and post-interviews regarding that question were compared and the results were displayed with their frequencies in Table 5.

Table 5. The Frequencies of the Effects on Teaching Practices at Time 1 and Time 2

Key words	Frequencies		
	Pre-	Post-	Total
Being more reflective	3	4	7
Being more solution-oriented	3	–	3
Triggering changes/shifts in teaching perspectives	–	3	3
Being open to collaboration	–	2	2
Being more tolerant	1	–	1
Being more critical	1	–	1
Being adaptable to all classes	1	–	1
Contributing to self-confidence	–	1	1

As shown in Table 5, the EFL teachers seemed to expect that the LS practice would make an impact upon their teaching at the beginning of the study and their responses in the post-interview reveals that their expectations were met as they made different suggestions about the impact of the LS practice on their teaching at the end of the study. The EFL teachers were observed to expect mostly

that the practice would make them more reflective as they stated that the process triggered them to reflect upon themselves, their teaching practices, beliefs and the like at the end of the study. One of the teachers suggested that he became more reflective after getting involved in LS practice although he was not observed to have had such an expectation at the beginning.

Extract 9:

I hope it will make me to be more reflective. The dialogue with other teachers is important to widen my horizon. (Teacher 2/Pre-)

Extract 10:

I believe that lesson study did affect my teaching in that it made me a more reflective teacher. I am questioning every step I take now. (Teacher 2/Post-)

In addition, the EFL teachers stated that they would be more solution-oriented as LS practice involved discussing about problems and trying to solve them collaboratively before they experienced the LS practice with their group. However, none of the teachers touched upon that point as a factor of the LS practice at the end of the study.

Extract 11:

I hope so. We have already been trying to find out some basic problems to tackle with. I will follow the ways we will find as solutions. That will of course affect my teaching practices. (Teacher 4/Pre-)

Another effect of LS practice on teaching practices was put forward in terms of changes in teaching perspectives at the end of the study. Despite the fact that such an effect was not mentioned at the beginning of the study, some teachers suggested that LS practice paved the way for the changes in teaching practices of teachers. Likewise, some EFL teachers also noted that they felt that they could collaborate with their colleagues on teaching issues and get support from other teachers in terms of teaching practices after they experienced LS practice. That impact of the LS practice was not observed by any of the EFL teachers at the beginning of the study.

As Table 5 displays, some EFL teachers suggested that LS was expected to influence their teaching practices in such a way that they would be encouraged to be more tolerant, to make self-criticism and to adapt what has been learned to other classes at the beginning of the study. Nonetheless, those impacts were not pointed out by any of the teachers as an impact of the LS model on teaching practices at the end of the study.

Extract 12:

This practice will make me to be reflective and tolerant because of some collaborative enterprise. You will listen to other people's opinions and the way to become more tolerant is listening to other people. Because when you get other ideas and if you are a little bit open-minded, you will question your own ideas and beliefs about your teaching because listening to other people will tell you something which you are not aware of and you will learn something. If you process it, you will adapt something. I mean the process in itself is something that makes you more tolerant. (Teacher 1 / Pre-)

Lastly, one of the EFL teachers was observed to specify that the process contributed to her self-confidence and she believed that she could achieve the things to empower learning in her classrooms after she experienced LS practice. On the other hand, the issue of self-confidence was not mentioned at the beginning of the study.

When Table 5 is taken into consideration as a whole, it is seen that the EFL teachers expected to become more reflective and solution-oriented when they practiced the LS model with their group at the beginning of the study. In addition to being more reflective, the teachers were observed to be influenced from LS practice in terms of experiencing changes in teaching perspectives and collaboration with colleagues at the end of the study.

The fourth question in the pre- and post-interviews mainly dealt with the evidence suggested for the expected benefits of the LS model before practicing and the observed benefits after practicing it from the teachers' perspectives. In this respect, the key words extracted from pre- and post-interviews regarding that question were compared and the results were given with their frequencies in Table 6.

Table 6. The Frequencies of the Evidence at Time 1 and Time 2

Key words	Frequencies		
	Pre-	Post-	Total
Positive feedback from students	3	5	8
Happiness of teachers	–	3	3
An increase in commitment of teachers	2	–	2
Changes in teachers' beliefs	–	2	2
Showing an effort to evaluate themselves	1	1	2

As presented in Table 6, the EFL teachers suggested evidence for the benefits of practicing the LS model mostly in terms of getting positive feedback from their students both at the beginning and at the end of the study. Some EFL teachers were observed to hope that they could see an increase in excitement or motivation of their students when they conducted the sample lesson designed collaboratively in their classrooms. Eventually, all of the teachers suggested that they could observe that the lesson worked well in their classrooms as based upon the positive feedback they got from their students.

Extract 13:

Of course, I would like to see that the students are attentive, participate in the learning activities. They show excitement and they are fun during classroom teaching. (Teacher 3 / Pre-)

Extract 14:

Lesson Study worked on the students since they really enjoyed the lesson. We could observe them during the lesson. They saw they could do more. They were more active. They had pleasure from it, which was also proven in their comments. (Teacher 4 / Post-)

The other evidence suggested by the EFL teachers is that the teachers themselves were happy with the result at the end of the study. Moreover, some teachers had an expectancy to see that there could be an increase in commitment of teachers as they suggested that the process could make them more passionate. However, none of the EFL teachers touched upon teacher commitment while suggesting evidence for the benefits of the LS practice at the end of the study.

Extract 15:

The kind of evidence I would like to see is an increase in commitment. I believe commitment or passion is what teachers need to be effective. If learning needs to be effective, we need passionate teachers. (Teacher 1 / Pre-)

As Table 6 indicates, the EFL teachers stated that they could suggest the changes in their beliefs as evidence showing that LS practice really worked and provided benefits at the end of the study. Those teachers claimed that they began to do things that they could not attempt to do before when they were involved in LS practice. The issue of changes in beliefs was not referred to by any of the EFL teachers at the beginning of the study.

Lastly, one of the EFL teachers noted that he wanted to see that he could evaluate himself in terms of his teaching practices, beliefs and experiences as evidence of the benefits of LS practice at the beginning of the study.

Extract 16:

I think we teachers will begin to learn the defects we have and try to correct ourselves through evaluating ourselves. (Teacher 5 / Pre-)

Extract 17:

It really worked for me because I learned so much for my own teaching. I shed light into myself and reflected upon my own teaching style. (Teacher 2 / Post-)

When Table 6 is handled completely, it is revealed that the EFL teachers mostly provided getting positive feedback from their students as evidence showing that LS model really worked for them.

Discussion

When considering the first aim of the present research, which focused on how the EFL teachers perceived the LS model before and after they practiced in their teaching context, the results reveal that the teachers mostly defined the LS practice as a process involving collaboration among colleagues and finding solutions to the problems encountered during teaching after they practiced it as they did at the beginning of the study. What is striking is that all of the teachers used those terms (i.e., collaboration and finding solutions) while defining the LS practice. The research on professional development of teachers emphasizes the significance of collaboration and how it contributes to the success of teaching/learning and teacher satisfaction as working towards a common goal in collaboration is considered as central to school reform and to combat teacher isolation (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011), which is highlighted by the teachers in the present study as their perceptions suggest that they favoured the collaborative nature of the LS model and expected that it would bring changes into their teaching. In this regard, the collaboration through LS is helpful in terms of reducing isolation experienced among teachers and developing a common understanding of how to improve instruction and learning in a systematic and consistent way (Takahashi & Yoshida, 2004).

Furthermore, at the end of the study some teachers describe the practice as a process of developing a lesson plan through discussing and collaborating with peers, as described at the beginning of the study. Being one of the critical underpinnings of the LS model (Doig & Groves, 2011), lesson planning should not be regarded as an investment of many hours on improvement of a mere lesson plan. Instead, lesson planning could be viewed as a vehicle to develop the knowledge and beliefs of teachers and the professional community so as to be seen as an efficient investment of resources (Lewis et al., 2009). In the present study, the LS practice was the teachers' first real experience of

collaborative planning and they thought that they contributed to that joint product through their ideas, experiences and practices, which was compatible with the previous research.

In addition to those key words mentioned above, some teachers perceive LS practice as a process which brings teachers together with a joint aim to be achieved in collaboration. The LS model enables teachers to develop professional communities of inquiry which have ownership of the improvement effort, a commitment to inquiry, shared goals, and a feeling of responsibility to their colleagues and learners (Lewis et al., 2009). Besides, the LS process begins with setting a goal for the students that teachers want to address through their instruction and is maintained with working on research lessons serving as explorations of instructional strategies which might result in the achievement of the goal (Fernandez, 2002). The teachers in the present study held discussions about the problems preventing effective teaching in the classroom and collaboratively set the goal of making the learning content relevant to the students in order to motivate them and trigger their participation in classroom activities.

Another definition given by the teachers at the end of the study suggests that the teachers regard the LS model as a practice which contributes to the teaching abilities of teachers. Gutierrez (2015) claims that learning is a social and situated process and that teachers learn and improve their teaching practices best in the classroom. In this regard, LS can enable teachers to improve their instruction as it helps development of teachers' knowledge by building professional teacher communities through the improvement of teaching materials (Lewis et al., 2009). In accordance with the improvement in teaching abilities of teachers, LS is also defined as a practice which encourages students to take responsibility for their own learning and redesigning the lesson to the benefit of their students, which seems to result from the fact that the teachers in the present study mostly were concerned about the students being reluctant to take responsibility in the classrooms. That concern of the teachers formed the basis for the research lesson conducted throughout the study.

The second issue aimed to be understood in the interviews was concerned with teachers' perceptions regarding the most appealing or helpful aspects of the LS model before and after they experienced it in their own context. The most striking point is that the teachers stated that they found the LS model appealing at the end of the study since it provides them with an opportunity to share their ideas and with experiences through which they could make the best lesson, which was not mentioned at the beginning of the study. Throughout the LS practice, the teachers share, examine and negotiate ideas and take decisions, which enable richer and more diverse ideas than they could have individually (Tasker, 2014).

Similar to the perceptions of teachers at the beginning of the study, the teachers find collaboration with peers as one of the most helpful aspects of the LS practice at the end of the process. Ono and Ferreira (2010) describe the most remarkable feature of LS as teachers collaboratively involved in action research with the aim of improving the quality of their instruction.

Although the teachers mentioned that the LS practice would benefit them by contributing to professional development and encouraging a student-centered teaching process at the beginning of the study, at the end of the study, they found it appealing as it would help them overcome isolation experienced at teaching institutions. The previous literature reports similar findings regarding teachers' feelings of isolation in their field (i.e., Beatty, 1999; Lieberman & Mace, 2010; Little, 1982; Snow-Gerono, 2005). Additionally, Meyer (2005) remarks that teaching is such a largely isolated profession that one educator has rare opportunities to have a relationship with another in a powerful way. In this regard, collaboration with peers to deal with common problems and possible solutions is suggested to produce dialogue and relationships which can support in terms of reducing

feelings of isolation and empowering teachers as professionals (Hawley & Valli, 1999). As a collaborative model of professional development, the LS practice enables a context for teachers to develop a supportive network in which teachers work together, share their experiences, build upon their knowledge and develop in their profession (Hiebert & Stigler, 2000; Lewis, 2002a,b). Collaborating with each other also helps teachers construct their knowledge, share it with others and finally build a more comprehensive knowledge base for the teaching profession (Chokshi & Fernandez, 2005).

Another point regarding the appealing and helpful aspects of LS practice from teachers' perspectives at the end of the study is that the teachers found the practice as an opportunity to reflect upon and evaluate themselves and see their shortcomings through discussions with their peers and observing the research lesson. During the LS practice, collaborative planning leads teachers to share criticism with their colleagues because the focus is not on a single individual. Furthermore, Gutierrez (2015) suggests that engaging in continuous collaborative and constructive self-assessment and discussions as in the LS process paves the way for deepening teachers' analyses of their instructional practices.

When the second research question is considered in terms of the effects of the LS model on teaching practices, the results indicate that it influenced teachers mostly in terms of encouragement of reflection on teaching practices at both ends of the study in the same vein found at the beginning of the study. The teachers suggest that they began to question every step they would take after practicing the LS model as they could question, explore and reflect on every phase of their teaching and learning process. The teachers mentioned the shifts in their teaching perspectives as a result of getting involved in LS practice as it puts the students at the heart of the processes and demands teachers to carefully observe their students in their learning process and hold discussions on actual classroom practice (Takahashi & Yoshida, 2004), which was not observed at the beginning of the study. Focusing mainly upon students and actual classroom practices collaboratively leads teachers to revise their teaching practices; therefore, teachers experience a shift from the traditional view of teaching involving demonstrating and telling students what to think towards a teaching process helping students take responsibility for their own thinking and learning (Harle, 2008).

Furthermore, the teachers suggest that practicing LS encouraged a desire to collaborate with their peers as they could observe how collaborating with peers would benefit them. Rock and Wilson (2005) draw attention to the principles of social constructivism and to the nature of knowledge and belief construction by focusing upon professional collaboration and suggest that "professional collaboration occurs as teachers of various levels of experience work together in groups to study their practice through the implementation of a research lesson" (p.79). Observing that the process leads to improvements in teaching practices and student learning might have encouraged the teachers in the present study to voluntarily collaborate with their peers for their future practices and professional growth.

Moreover, one of the teachers mentions self-confidence by suggesting that practicing the LS model of professional development gave teachers an opportunity to believe in their capacities and feel more confident in teaching process, which corroborates with the findings of the study by Rock and Wilson (2005), revealing that participation in LS triggered a feeling of empowerment and an increase in professional confidence of teachers. The teacher holds the belief that the process made her believe in her capacity to achieve the things she really wanted to do, as put by Wilms (2003) indicating that LS practice makes teachers feel like professionals.

To see the effects of practicing the LS model on their perceptions and on their teaching aimed to be investigated in the second research question, teachers were asked to suggest evidence in their

interviews and reflective journals. The results reveal that the teachers show their satisfaction with the process and the feedback from students as evidence asserting that the practice was worth getting involved in and met their expectations. The teachers claimed that the increasing enthusiasm and active participation of their students in research lessons revealed that the process worked well. Cerbin and Kopp (2006) put forward that the LS practice enables teachers an opportunity to observe and have a deeper understanding of how their students learn from the lesson, where they get stuck, what changes occur, and how they interpret ideas, which in turn provides the kind of data that can be directly applied to make improvements in the lesson.

Lenski and Caskey (2009) define the LS approach as a method of professional development encouraging teachers to reflect upon their teaching practice via a cyclical process involving joint lesson planning, lesson observation, and examination of student learning. The LS model already aims to trigger teachers to become reflective practitioners using what they have learned from research-based lessons in order to cooperatively revise and implement future lessons (Rock & Wilson, 2005). In this respect, the teachers in the present study seem to reflect upon their teaching practices by taking their observations during research lessons into consideration and making an effort to improve their teaching in accordance with what they observed.

Conclusions and Implications

The results obtained through pre-interviews reveal that the EFL teachers had a positive attitude towards LS practice and expected LS to provide them benefits in various aspects before they experienced it and although it was their first experience with such a practice. The teachers expected to see that LS would provide them a new perspective, increase their teaching confidence, and improve their teaching knowledge and practices through collaboration with peers.

Taking the post-interview data into consideration, it is realized that the teachers took advantage of the LS practice as they mostly expressed their ideas in terms of positive aspects of LS. The practice appears to have met their expectations, led to improvements in their beliefs, knowledge and teaching practices and contributed to personal and professional development.

When the results are considered as a whole, one of the major implications of the study relates to the quality of being an evidence-based approach to teaching improvement and teacher development. The traditional professional development processes through workshops, and seminars presented in the form of prescriptions with lots of advice and tips (Wilson & Berne, 1999) do not provide teachers with an opportunity to look closely at their students and their work and do not suggest evidence for how their students learn and what changes take place as a result of improvements they presented in classroom teaching. However, the LS model is an evidence-based approach to teaching improvement and teacher development because the observations through research lessons provide important insights on student learning and the data that could be directly applied in making improvements in the lesson in comparison to the data obtained through quizzes, exams or tests (Cerbin & Kopp, 2006). Therefore, those who design or organize professional development practices should bear in mind that the development practice should provide evidence for the teachers and the other researchers about its practical consequences.

The last implication regarding the second research question is concerned with the insight on gaining a deep awareness towards students through collaboration with peers in the process of practicing the LS model. The discussions with peers, observing students during research lessons and sharing constructive feedback can help teachers notice that the students could learn better and participate actively if they are presented with improvements in accordance with their needs as practiced in the present study. This finding draws attention to the significance of keeping the individual learning needs of students at the heart of professional development activity, focusing upon those needs from

different perspectives and showing a collegial effort to meet those needs (Hiebert & Stigler, 2000; Hurd & Licciardo-Musso, 2005).

Limitations and Suggestions for Further Studies

The present study is not without limitations. Being a qualitative study in nature, the study was conducted with limited number of participants. Future research could be conducted to examine how the LS model could be perceived in different educational contexts with larger groups of EFL teachers having different backgrounds. Furthermore, practicing a professional development model becomes more meaningful with follow-up studies to observe potential outcomes and assess long-term efficiency of the model.

About The Author

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