

An Evaluation of an Innovative In-Service Teacher Training Model in Turkey

Mustafa Öztürk¹

¹ Assoc. Prof. Dr. Erciyes University, Education Faculty, Kayseri, Turkey

Correspondence: Mustafa Öztürk, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Erciyes University, Education Faculty, Kayseri, Turkey. E-mail: mustafaozt@gmail.com

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Abstract

A project, with the support of the UNICEF and the Ministry of National Education in Turkey (MoNE), was carried out to develop and implement an in-service teacher training programme aiming at changing participating teachers' perceptions and practices regarding inclusive education. Within scope of the programme, ten separate modules were developed, each of which focusing on developing teachers' skills in certain aspects of inclusive education. Within the project, an in-service teacher training model was developed to guide the design of the ten modules in terms of the process, content and materials utilized. The model encompasses hands-on and inspiring teaching methods, the teachers' collaboration and flexibility in terms of bringing the teachers' ideas and experiences to the process. For this study, of these modules, "Teaching and Assessment" was chosen to evaluate the effectiveness of the in-service teacher training model in terms of ensuring teacher change. The module aimed at developing the participating teachers' pedagogical skills in order for them to carry out differentiated instruction and formative assessment. Approximately eight thousand teachers were trained through the Teaching and Assessment Module across Turkey from September to November in 2018. Data for the present study was collected through focus group discussions (FGD). In total, four FGDs were held with randomly selected 27 teachers who participated in the Teaching and Assessment Module. Content analysis was performed in order to analyse the data obtained from the FGDs. According to the results of the study, it was found that although a "one-shot" in-service training approach was implemented, significant changes occurred both in the teachers' perceptions, awareness and practices regarding inclusive education. However, it was noted that certain factors such as the organization, in particular the place and time of training sessions could be improved. Furthermore, excessive use of worksheets and lack of subject specific examples were criticised by some FGD participants.

Keywords: in-service training model, teaching and assessment module, teacher change, inclusive education

1. Introduction

Inclusive education is an educational approach which is based on a belief that schools, lessons and curricula should be designed in a way that diverse learning needs of students, particularly those who are disadvantaged, could be met effectively. There has been a growing body of literature on the educational values of inclusive education in terms of ensuring a high quality education for all children (Forlin and Chambers, 2011; Rajeswari, 2017; Savolainen, Engelbrecht, Nelc, & Malinena, 2012; UNESCO, 2016). Thus, inclusive education seems to have gained momentum across the world as countries begin to put students with diverse educational needs into mainstream schools (Clark, Dyson, & Millward, 2019; Forlin and Chambers, 2011), a policy which is also supported by UNECISO and UNICEF. In the Incheon Declaration for Education 2030 by UNESCO (2016, p. 7), the vision for education for the next fifteen years is stated as follows:

Inclusion and equity in and through education is the cornerstone of a transformative education agenda, and we therefore commit to addressing all forms of exclusion and marginalization, disparities and inequalities in access, participation and learning outcomes. No education target should be considered met unless met by all. We therefore commit to making the necessary changes in education policies and focusing our efforts on the most disadvantaged, especially those with disabilities, to ensure that no one is left behind.

However, it can be observed that even the idea of inclusive education is not adequately accommodated within the Turkish educational system (Düşkün, 2016; Oral, 2016). Students with special education needs (SEN), students with socio-economically disadvantaged background and even gifted students are usually neglected in Turkish schools for the sake “average” students, because schools and teachers are not adequately prepared to address the diverse learning needs of such different groups of learners (Öztürk & Mutlu, 2017). It is a well established fact that transitioning to inclusive practices in schools requires stakeholders (e.g. teachers, principals, families) to develop a range of knowledge, skills and attitudes (Frattura & Capper, 2006; Savolainen, et al., 2012; Sari, 2007). However, among these, the attitudes of teachers towards inclusive practices play a very crucial role in the successful implementation and sustainability of inclusive education in schools (Forlin & Lian, 2008; Hammond & Ingalls, 2003; Savolainen, et al., 2012). Thus, the first step to be taken to promote inclusive practices in schools should focus on teachers’ developing favourable attitudes towards inclusive education. However, changing the attitudes of teachers who are particularly used to traditional ways of teaching poses a serious challenge both to schools and teachers themselves. Therefore, professional development could be considered as an effective tool to take on the challenge of changing teachers’ attitudes and creating inclusive schools where diverse needs of students are met.

The relevant literature assertively argues that improved professional development of teachers makes a direct impact on student achievement particularly for those with disadvantaged backgrounds (Coe, Aloisi, Higgins, & Major, 2014; Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012). Thus, high-achieving educational systems invest in the professional development of their teachers (Coe, et. al., 2014; Hargreaves, Lieberman, Fullan, & Hopkins, 2010). However, Avalos (2010, p. 10) warns us that “teacher professional learning is a complex process, which requires cognitive and emotional involvement of teachers individually and collectively ...” (p. 10). As Hunzicker (2010) cleverly puts it, “sit and get” kind of seminars where teachers are required to sit still and listen for long periods of time do not seem to be a good model of professional development practice because they do not involve teachers neither cognitively nor emotionally as voiced by Avalos (2010). What teachers prefer to see in professional development activities is stated by Hunzicker (2010, p. 177) as follows:

[Teachers] are motivated by opportunities to address problems- and create solutions- that relate directly to their lives. They prefer open-ended learning activities and function best when they have voice in the direction and pace of their learning. Therefore, effective professional development is anything that engages teachers in learning activities that are supportive, job-embedded, instructionally focused, collaborative and ongoing.

In the light of the discussion made above, it could be said that how professional development training is designed is significant in terms of obtaining desired outcomes for professional development of teachers. As stated by Fullan (2016), poorly handled professional development activities generate significant costs because they may cause frustration, loss of time and energy both for schools and teachers. Keeping all these in mind, an in-service training model was developed and implemented through a project entitled “Inclusive Education Teacher Training Module” with the support of the UNICEF, the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) and Erciyes University in Turkey. Ten in-service training modules were developed in the project, each lasting for 24 hours. One of the core modules of the project, which intended to provide teachers with generic pedagogical competencies, was the Teaching and Assessment Module. The module aimed at equipping teachers with knowledge, skills and attitudes to address the educational needs of all students, in particular the needs of the disadvantaged such as the disabled and SEN students. In essence, the module particularly emphasized building the teachers’ competencies (i.e., knowledge, skills and attitudes) so that the teachers could carry out constructivist teaching, differentiated instruction and formative assessment. These approaches were adopted in the module as they are found to be appropriate for inclusive practice (Tomlinson, 2004; 2009).

In the implementation of the Teaching and Assessment Module, the participating teachers attended a 40-hour in-service training sessions in the course of 5 to 10 days depending on their availability. While 16 hours of the training focused on the concept of and generic competencies concerning inclusive education, 24 hours were allocated to the development of pedagogical competencies, in particular differentiated instruction and formative assessment. Approximately eight thousand teachers attended the training of the Teaching and Assessment Module from October to November in 2018 across Turkey. The purpose of this study is to explain the in-service training model, which was used to develop the Teaching and Assessment Module and evaluate the effectiveness of the model from the viewpoints of the participating teachers.

1.1 The Context

According to 2016 figures, approximately more than 1.2 million teachers are employed both by the MoNE and the private sector in Turkey (Çelik, Yurdakul, Bozgeyikli, & Gümüş, 2017). Approximately 83 percent of the teachers

(about one million) work for the MoNE and the MoNE is the sole responsible body to provide these teachers with in-service training (MoNE, 2018). However, the in-service training provided by the MoNE have widely been criticised for being ineffective due to its structure and delivery modes which do not allow right professional development opportunities for teachers (Bayar & Kösterelioğlu, 2014; Karip, 2018; Uştu, Mentiş Taş, & Sever, 2016; Yurtseven Yılmaz & Gülççek Esen, 2015). The actual needs of teachers are ignored when in-service training is delivered only in a “sit and listen” manner. In this case, such practice results in teachers attending in-service training sessions unwillingly and fulfilling an obligation (Bümen, Ateş, Ural, Acar ve Çakar, 2012; Bayar & Kösterelioğlu, 2014).

In-service training practices in Turkey are traditionally based on rote learning and lack flexibility. Teachers usually follow a syllabus and are expected to keep up with the instructor at all times regardless of what their real needs are and what professional experiences they have. Because they are usually organised in a “one-shot” and “sit and listen” manner, they are not embedded in the real professional context of teachers. Therefore, such training practices have a fragmented structure that does not take into account what teachers already know and what they need to improve for their current practices (Bayar & Kösterelioğlu, 2014). To put it differently, instead of following a developmental path that equips teachers with pedagogical tools to handle their real problems emerging from practice, they are fed with certain recipes taken from textbooks that they already mastered during their undergraduate education. However, teaching is a practical profession in which one’s theory about teaching and learning largely depends upon her/his reflections on her/his practice (Day, 1999). Thus, fruitful results cannot be expected from such training practices without understanding what teachers’ real needs are.

Furthermore, the practices of in-service training in Turkey do not adequately make use of inspiring teaching methods which allow hands- and minds-on activities. They are usually delivered in a tutor-centred manner and mainly in the form of lectures followed by multiple choice tests for evaluation (Bayar & Kösterelioğlu, 2014; Uştu, et al., 2016). Such practices lead a uniform structure where teachers’ diverse needs are not taken into account resulting in one-size-fits-all training. Besides, skills cannot be gained by just listening to the instructor, but by working collaboratively to solve real classroom problems. Therefore, it can be concluded that a different approach to in-service training practices needs to be developed in order to ensure that teachers reflect on their practice and are actively involved in the process.

1.2 In Service Training Model

“In-service teacher education is broadly defined as any learning opportunity for practicing teachers” (Koellner & Greenblatt, 2018, p. 1). Today broadly speaking, two types of in-service training can be distinguished. While traditional in-service training consists of one-shot seminars and workshops in which a trainer provides knowledge taken from textbooks in the form of lectures, non-traditional in-service training offers teachers learning opportunities that allow them to examine their own practices through such means as mentoring, coaching and peer observation (Bayar & Kösterelioğlu, 2014; Borko, Jacobs, Koellner, 2010; Koellner & Greenblatt, 2018). In fact, when in-service practices are considered in the world today, there seems to be a shift from traditional approaches to more innovative ones where teachers are expected to reflect on their beliefs and actions within the context of their actual classroom practices.

Two main reasons can be mentioned for a shift to innovative in-service practices. Firstly, traditional in-service practices have been heavily criticised as being ineffective to improve teachers’ competencies due to its limitations such as “minimal or lack of collaboration, lack of relevance to the daily work of teachers, lack of teacher engagement, limited knowledge, and lack of application to the classroom practice (Fullan, 1995; Lieberman; 1995; Miller, 1998)” (Bayar & Kösterelioğlu, 2014, p. 324). Secondly, there is “... a shift from many educators aligning with behavioural theories of teaching and learning to more constructivist, sociocultural, and situated theories of teaching and learning” (Koellner & Greenblatt, 2018, p. 1).

As was mentioned above, a model of in-service training and a number of modules were developed in the project, Inclusive Education Teacher Training Module. The model had to be in line with the existing directive for in-service training of the MoNE. Therefore, the in-service training was applied in the form of one-shot workshops. In this case, the designer of the in-service model faced the problem of eliminating the inadequacies and limitations posed by “one-shot” in-service models in order to achieve the desired outcomes for teacher change. Thus, this paper attempts to evaluate from the trainee teachers’ perspectives whether an engaging and effective in-service training could be ensured through one-shot workshops.

To this end, the model was built up on two main pillars. The first pillar takes into account the characteristics of high quality professional development practices. Borko, et al. (2010) states that there are broadly two characteristics of high-quality professional development of teachers: the characteristics related to the content and the characteristics

related to the process and structure. “Two features stand out as content characteristics of high quality PD: the content should be situated in practice and it should be focused (at least in part) on students’ learning” (ibid., p. 549). As for the process and structure, what seems to work out well is “... engaging teachers in active learning and building a professional learning community” (ibid., p. 550). Thus, these features of high quality professional development made up the main framework of the model developed in the project.

The second pillar of the model based on the considerations of ensuring teacher change. When the relevant literature is reviewed, the accounts of change which are not successfully implemented either point to teachers who are not involved in and leave it to others to implement the change process or point to a school culture which imposes change on teachers with its own vision ignoring their ideas and values (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012; Hargreaves, Lieberman, Fullan & Hopkins, 2010). Teachers must find the process of change meaningful, so they should individually contribute to it with their free wills (Fullan, 2016). Since meaning is something to do with personal connection, it should ensure teachers’ engagement and conviction. It is also stated that collaboration and partnership among people are paramount for a successful implementation of change (Day 1999; Fullan 2016; Hargreaves et al., 2010).

Therefore, the model that was developed in the project based on the idea that improvements in skills and understanding could be achieved only if the ownership of participating teachers is ensured. To promote the participating teachers’ ownership, the in-service training model takes into account what the teachers believe, think and need. The underlying philosophy of this approach is based on what is stated by Duffy (1994: 596) with the following remarks: “instead of telling teachers what to do, we must empower them to decide for themselves what must be done. This means investing in the minds of teachers instead of investing in sets of directions for them to follow”.

Thus, the model developed in the project has a structure that allows the teachers to bring their beliefs and ideas into the process. Although pedagogical choices teachers make depend on a variety of factors such as school culture, examination system of the country, their experiences and career stages and expectations of educational stakeholders, the most important factor relates to their beliefs about the teaching and learning process (Darling-Hammond, 2008; Day, 1999). The aforementioned factors, in particular, teachers’ beliefs about the teaching and learning process, may create a school environment where either students are expected to carry out discovery learning by actively engaging in lessons or they learn with an emphasis on the delivery of factual content. Therefore, the model gave special attention to the teachers’ beliefs about the teaching and learning process to ensure a change in their classroom practices.

Furthermore, there was a need to create opportunities for the participating teachers to reflect upon their practices and take control of their learning which many of them at the beginning tended not to consider as part of their profession. However, today’s complex structures of societies and rapid changes taking place in every aspect of life force us to develop teacher-generated knowledge that is appropriate to specific contexts where teachers serve. In Smyth (1987: p. 4)’s words:

Practitioner-generated knowledge that is embedded in and emerges out of action is coming to be seen increasingly as the basis for a new and emerging paradigm in the education of teachers. Taken for granted ways of applying specialised knowledge to resolve particular recurring problems no longer seem to work, if they ever did anyway.

One way to achieve such a vision can be realized by incorporating reflection in in-service teacher training. With this in mind, the in-service model can be said to have created opportunities for the teachers to reflect upon their practices as voiced by many of the FGD participants in the present study. They stated that in the beginning of the training, they felt very vulnerable not because they did not have adequate subject matter knowledge, but because they were not prepared sufficiently for differentiated instruction and formative assessment. However, they succeeded in reflecting upon their practices as they became aware of their shortcomings in their practices. Also, they began to question their beliefs and ideas as they reflected upon their practices.

In the development of the training model, a number of principles were also considered. Below are the generic principles that guided the development of the activities and materials of the training (adopted from Gollob, Krapf, Ólafsdóttir, & Weidinger, 2010: 123):

Inductive – presenting learners with concrete problems to resolve or make a decision on, and encouraging them to generalise these to other situations – rather than by starting from abstract concepts;

Active – encouraging teachers to learn by doing, rather than being told;

Relevant – designing learning activities around real life situations of the school and classrooms;

Collaborative – employing group work and co-operative learning;

Interactive – teaching through hands on activities, discussion and debate;

Reflective– encouraging teachers to reflect and build upon their existing experiences to create knowledge that suits their own school and classroom realities.

Participative – allowing teachers to contribute to their own learning, for example by suggesting topics for discussion, or by assessing their own learning or the learning of their peers.

Based on the above discussion, an in-service training model (Figure 1) was developed to promote the teachers' competencies for inclusive education. Thus, they were able to develop various strategies for teaching classes with students who have mixed abilities, various readiness levels and different socio-economic/cultural backgrounds in order to ensure that class time is efficiently used for everyone.

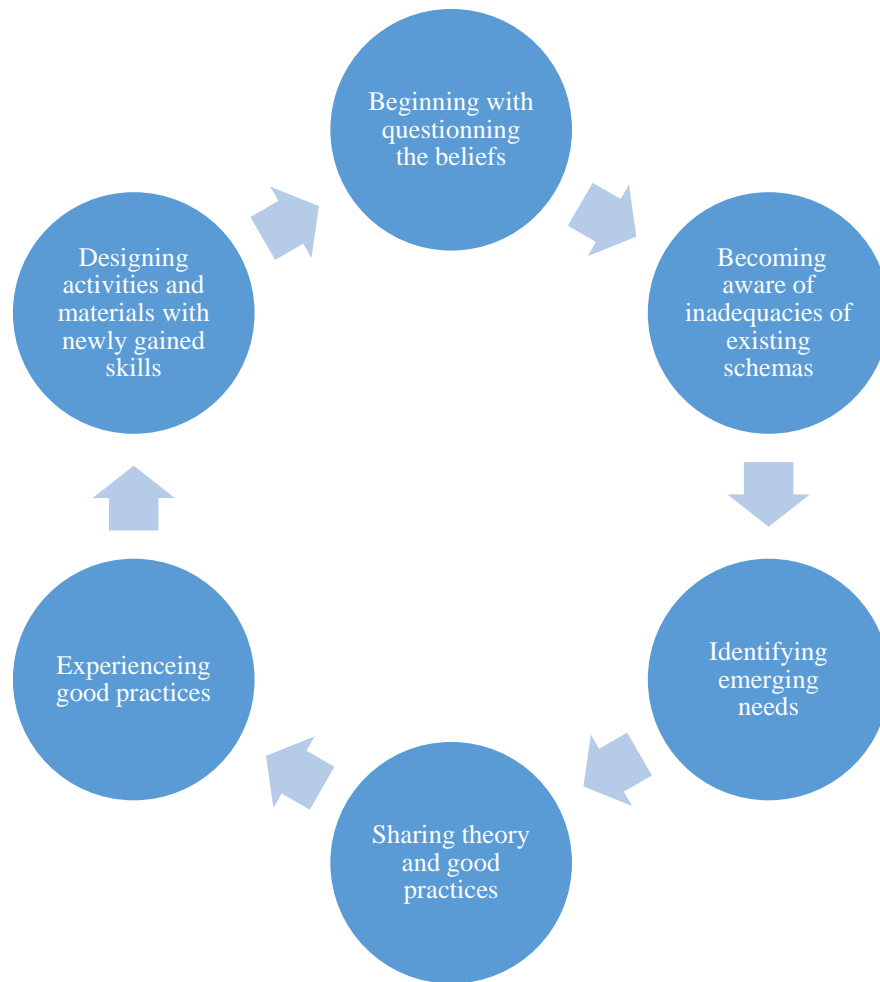


Figure 1. The model of in-service training

2. Method

To evaluate the effectiveness of the in service training model, focus group discussions were carried out with the teachers who were trained through the Teaching and Assessment Module. FGD is a conversation technique that a researcher moderates a discussion with a group of purposely selected individuals who share similar backgrounds to reveal their personal experiences, beliefs, and attitudes (Hayward, Simpson, & Wood, 2004; Nyumba, Wilson, Derrick & Mukherje, 2018). Furthermore, FGD allows researchers to understand collective views and experiences as well as the meanings behind those views and experiences (Asmamaw, Mohammed, & Lulseged, 2011; Mfune, 2013).

In the present study, four FGDs were carried out with the teachers who completed their training through the Teaching and Assessment Module from September to October in 2018. It is recommended that a minimum of three to four FGDs are sufficient for a research topic where complex issues are not investigated (Burrows & Kendall, 1997). The

participants were selected by taking into account specific features such as gender, teaching experience and school level. In every FGD a balanced participation was ensured in terms of gender, teaching experience and school level. The focus groups had 6-8 participants. The participants' characteristics are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Characteristics of the participants

Characteristics	N
Gender	
Female	14
Male	13
Teaching experience	
Teaching experience with less than 10 years	7
Teaching experience with 11-20 years	11
Teaching experience with 21+ years	9
School level	
Pre-school teacher	4
Primary school teacher	10
Middle school teacher	6
Upper secondary school teacher	7
Total	27

The discussions were guided and moderated by the researcher by introducing some ideas to help the groups have a natural and free conversation about their experiences and the impact of the training in terms of whether a change took place in their practices. The discussions were also organised in a way that the participants had plenty of opportunity to talk with each other, rather than answering the researcher's questions directly. This allowed the researcher to adopt a role of facilitator rather than a controller so that discussions took place among the participants rather than between the participants and the researcher as suggested by Bloor, Frankland, Thomas, & Robson (2001) and Hohenthal, Owidi, Minoia, & Pellikka (2015). The issues raised during the focus group discussions focused on the effectiveness of the training. Because all the participants in the FGDs had similar experiences, i.e., working for the MoNE and the trainees of the Teaching and Assessment Module, the group felt easy to interact with each other.

During the FGDs, the researcher used a focus group schedule which was developed to see what changes occurred in teachers. The focus group schedule was piloted before the actual data collection and finalised after some of the items were revised. The final version of the FGD schedule was made up of four main sections/themes. The first section included questions aiming to obtain background information of the participants. The second section asked the participants to reflect on the teaching and learning process which took place during the training with regard to their needs. The third section dealt with how the outcomes of the training were made use of by the participants while teaching in their own classrooms. The fourth section focused on general evaluations of the participants about the process especially in terms of the strengths and weaknesses of the model.

In order to conduct an in-depth and rich analysis, FGDs were carried out around one and half to two hours. The discussions were recorded digitally by the consents of the participants. For the analysis of the data, content analysis was used (Morgan, 1988). First, in the process of analysis, the digitally recorded data was transcribed. The transcriptions were later coded by the researcher (Charmaz, 2006; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2006). Following this, a number of related and similar codes were combined in order to obtain a more refined coding. Finally, the researcher looked for wider themes which combine the codes for the purpose of making sense of the data collected and highlighting important messages provided by the participants (Charmaz, 2006; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2006).

3. Findings

Four main themes were obtained as a result of content analysis. These are: general evaluations of the training, strengths of the training, weaknesses of the training and changes occurred in the teachers' classroom practices. The findings are

presented below under the headings of themes.

3.1 General Evaluations of the Training

It was clearly stated in all the FGDs that the training was very useful in terms of both professional and personal development. The participants stated that working and socialising with their colleagues made significant contributions to their professional development and personal motivation. The participants welcomed the efforts aimed at addressing common problems, building upon their experiences, sharing good practices and discussing the current issues under the guidance of the trainers as illustrated by the below quotations taken from FGDs:

“Many of us didn’t want to have this training in the beginning because we were thinking that this would be one of those boring, lecture-based training sessions that we had in our professional careers. However, our attitude changed on the first day. The training was built upon our real problems and provided us with tools to overcome them”.

“Focusing on our real problems and bringing our collective experience to solve them made a big difference in terms of our attitudes to the training. Everyone was willing to contribute to the process.”

In all the FGDs, a specific reference was made to reserved teachers who were biased against the training in the beginning and who thought that it would be “useless” as put by the participants. However, according to the accounts of the participants of the FGDs, they were also involved in the process very soon when they realised that this training provided opportunities to build upon their experiences. The underlying reason for changing the attitudes of those reserved seems that the training process made the teachers “feel valued and good”. This was indeed stressed in all the FGDs:

“We believe that the reason why this training was great achievement was that we felt valued. We felt that our opinions and experiences were important.”

“Instead of covering some theoretical stuff following from a PPT presentation, the training allowed us to bring our ideas and experiences to the process. That made a big difference as we felt that our opinions were valued.”

Creating such a training environment where teachers actively shared experiences and learned from one another also seems to be helpful in terms of providing the participants with psychological support that they need. Almost half of the FGD participants indicated that isolated work structure in the long run wore off the motivation of the teachers as illustrated below:

“Doing collaborative work with our colleagues was like a therapy to us. We are a group of professionals who usually work in isolation. Working with others, doing posters, developing lesson plans and materials etc. together increased our motivation and ... we felt good.”

The attitudes of the trainers also seem to have played an important role in the success of the training because a strong reference was also made to the attitudes of the trainers in the FGDs. Apart from few exceptions, the participants were generally happy with the performance of the trainers. For them trainers of in-service training should be “emphatic”, “non-judgemental”, “humble” and “smiling”:

“We should be able to make a personal connection with the trainer if in-service training is to be successful. This training achieved that. Trainers were like one of us, not looking down or judging us for the things that we didn’t do perfectly.”

“Our trainer brought food on the first day for breakfast, and then we did ice-breaking activities. That changed everything. We liked her, she liked us and we never wanted it to finish after a week.”

Friendly atmosphere established among the group members seems to be continuing even after the training finished more than one month ago. These connections among the teachers appear to be evolving into networks that teachers support one another professionally. Approximately one third of the participants claimed that they were still in contact with their colleagues from the training:

“Our relationship is still continuing. We still have communication among us. I visited some of my colleagues in their schools. We started cooperating with each other. Last weekend four of us worked together to produce teaching materials.”

“I got to know all the teachers in my town thanks to this training. Through our what’s app group, we get opinions of others about specific problems we face in our schools.”

3.2 Strengths of the Training

According to the findings, the strongest side of the training is the way it approached in-service training. The in-service training model developed within the project was based on hands-on activities that the participants were required to engage in actively by reflecting on and solving real problems about their practices. This indeed seems to have worked well as its benefits were stressed by almost all the participants as illustrated below:

“We loved every single hour of the training. We were doing things all the time. There was no time to be bored or distracted by some personal thoughts.”

“In our group particularly very experienced teachers had opportunities to reflect back and stated openly that they did many things wrong.”

The participants also listed the strengths of the training in terms of its structure and content, assessment strategy and materials. As for the structure and content, the participants usually made references to its consistency and balance between theory and practice. Although the whole programme was organised in a way that took the participating teachers' existing knowledge and experiences into account, it also introduced certain good practices and theory when needed (please see Figure 1). Participants were happy to have a consistent programme that they were able to follow with ease. According to the some participants, the coherence of the programme was ensured with a syllabus making references to the activities and materials to be used for each slot. When asked to describe a typical session in the training, the participants more or less defined it as follows:

“Things usually started about our ideas of the topic. For example, what we believe about teaching and learning. Then the trainer started playing “the devil’s advocate” that why what we said would not work in classes with full of pupils coming from different backgrounds and with different levels achievement. Then we started to talk about what we should do to overcome our inadequacies and offered each other our own solutions. Then the trainer showed us good examples and gave us some theoretical background information. Finally, we developed new teaching activities and materials working in groups and presenting them to get feedback from the group.”

The practice of assessment implemented in the training is also stated to be one of the strongest parts by the majority of the participants. Since a hands-on approach required an appropriate assessment method, trainees were asked to prepare portfolios to demonstrate if they developed the right skills. Therefore, portfolios included lesson ideas, lesson plans, and materials that could be used in actual classrooms. The participants believed that such assessment practice would also make them aware of the strengths of the formative assessment:

“We were expecting to have a test in the end as this was the standard assessment in all of our previous in-service training sessions. For the first time in my life I prepared a portfolio and I am very proud of it. I included everything that I developed during the training as a proof for my learning. It helped me a lot to organise my thoughts and it serves a helpful resource that I still make reference after the training.”

Finally, some FGD participants claimed that materials and activities used during the trainings were innovative and worth learning. The training course included many differentiated worksheets and activities that seemed to open up new avenues for some of the participating teachers:

“I had never prepared a worksheet in my life before the training. We used plenty of different worksheets in the training that were eye-openers. I cheated from them and adopted some to my teaching. I feel some excitement similar to that in my early years in the profession.”

3.3 Weakness of the Training

A number of weaknesses or inadequacies were also mentioned by the FDGs participants. These could be categorised in three sub-themes. The first weakness is related to the organisation of the training. The second criticism is about some activities of the course and the third one is about the classroom management issues.

The training was organised locally by the local education authority of each province in Turkey. Therefore, quite different practices emerged in terms of organising the place and timing of the training. The biggest criticism was about the lack of standards because in some cases the training was carried out in centres that were not appropriate for the goal (they were either too small or far away from the city centre). The timing of the training was also thought to be problematic in some cities as teachers had to take the course after 3 pm when they finished the lessons in the school. This caused both logistic and personal problems:

“Our training started at 3 pm just after the school day. The teachers were already tired. It was

difficult to pay attention to the training. If it had been organised at a better time, it would have been more productive.”

In some cases, inadequate time management seems to have resulted in not being able to follow the program fully as illustrated below:

“We started the day very late, at three o’clock. People had to take their children from the school so they wanted to leave the training early. This created a pressure on the trainer to speed things up.”

In some cities, the training was organised half day for the duration of two weeks and according to the FGD participants this is the best solution for time management:

“In our case, the training started at 08.30 am and finished 12:30 every day for two weeks. This suited really well to everyone because we could organise our school day and other personal errands easily”.

As for the activities, some of the participants pointed out that some activities seemed repetitive and too much work was required with worksheets. In fact, this criticism also somehow related to the big picture in the sense that 10 modules prepared in the project were simultaneously given to the teachers in the same centres. Therefore, while a class was taking the Teaching and Assessment Module, another class was taking another module. And some of those modules such as “Inclusive Learning Environment” and “School and Family Partnership” had many educational games that required the trainees to engage with game activities around the centre:

“In our module we had to work really hard with planning and developing materials. It was really educative as we learned new stuff but seeing other groups playing around the yard made us a little bit jealous. Our module might have included more educational games.”

A final issue was brought up during the FGDs was that the trainings did not address the teachers for a specific school level. Although this was an issue that was brought up by a few participants, others thought that participating in the training with the teachers from other school levels was the strong part of the training because it created extra learning opportunities for themselves. Because this training aimed at increasing the awareness of the teachers and the development of basic skills concerning inclusive education, it was generally thought to be appropriate by the FGD participants. However, it was suggested that in the next stage a subject-based new training should be built upon these basic skills:

“This training was very helpful for introducing new ideas and developing some basic skills. However, subject based courses should follow this to make change sustain.”

A few participants also shared their observations about the results of the training and stated that it was more helpful to primary school teachers than subject area teachers working in upper secondary schools. The fundamental reason for this is that when all participants were primary school teachers in the training session, sharing and learning from one another were realised more effectively. For those classes that had teachers from a variety of subject areas such as history, maths and chemistry, sharing of instructional experiences were more limited.

3.4 Changes Occurred in Teachers’ Classroom Practices

The fundamental aim of the training was to achieve a change in the teachers’ beliefs and classroom practices to a certain extent. According to the accounts of the participants of the FGDs, this goal seems to have been achieved well. All the participants believe that the training contributed to their professional lives positively. Since the FGDs were carried out at least one month after the training was completed, the participants were able to provide concrete examples of their professional gains resulting from the training. During the FGDs, a great number of specific accounts of change were mentioned. These accounts could be grouped into two: an increase in awareness and changes in practices/attitudes.

According to the accounts of the participants, the in-service training made them aware of broadly three issues. They are presented below in order, from the most supported idea to the least supported idea. The first area of awareness is concerned with the participants’ practices about the teaching and learning process. The majority of the participants seem to have realized that lecture-based lessons do not provide effective learning outcomes for their students:

“One of the activities in our module was that one volunteer turns around facing the wall and gets the class to draw a figure by just telling them what they should draw. Obviously no one could get the right figure. This activity was very useful for the whole group to see the inadequacies of lecturing. Many of us openly confessed how wrong we had been teaching.”

The second area that a change in belief/perception has been observed by some participants is related to awareness

about disadvantaged students and their learning needs:

“I used to do hands-on and engaging lessons but after this training, I realised that I was paying attention to only high achievers. For example, in the past I would expect only high achievers to answer my questions and I would only encourage them -without realising- to speak out in the class. Now I try to get low achievers on board as well. I encourage them to speak out, engage in and achieve something in the lesson. I could see their excitement in their eyes. I cannot believe that how stupid I was before.”

A number of the FGD participants also stated that they had come to realise that they had not been practicing an inclusive pedagogy in their daily classroom activities as illustrated by the quotations below:

“After the training I started to look at things from a bright side. Before I used to think why something would not be possible. Now I focus on how I can make it possible.”

“I used to prepare my students towards competitive national examinations. I realised that I saw them like racehorses. Having had the training, I came to realise that education was not a race, but it was about nurturing them with all their individual differences.”

When asked if any change occurred in their practices after the training, more than half of the participants provided concrete accounts of change. Their accounts could be categorised into three: changes in teaching methods, changes concerning attitudes towards students and changes taking place in communication styles.

Almost the half of the FGDs stated that their classroom practices had improved since the training. Although they do not fully adapt differentiated instruction and formative assessment to every single class they teach, these teachers seem to have started experimenting hands-on and differentiated instruction and observing their merits themselves:

“I used to teach my lessons by lecturing. After the training, for the first time in my life, I did an activity in the class. It was a real success and then I did few other hands-on activities. Even in the university we were told that we should do student-centred teaching but no one had shown me how to do it until I took this training. Now I have a pretty good idea of student-centred teaching.”

“I used to focus on academic achievement, giving lots of multiple choice tests. After the training, I gave up giving such tests and started to do hands-on lessons in which students could actively engage. In this process, I realised that relationship between learning and fun was very important. Students learn better when they have fun during the class.”

In this regard, some of the activities used in actual training seem to have served well some of the participants as they used them in their own classrooms. Those who claimed to use some activities of the training in their classes said that it was much easier for them to use those activities because they had experienced them and as a result they felt confident in using them.

Almost one third of the FGD participants stated that a change had been taking place about their certain attitudes especially for those students coming from disadvantaged backgrounds. A number of stories were shared by the participants and below are two of them:

“I have a Syrian student. I used to be prejudiced against him that he couldn't learn because he was sitting at the back of the class all the time doing nothing. When I returned to my classroom after the training, the first thing I did was to make a connection with him. I encouraged other students to include him in their groups and organised activities needed for group work. Now I am surprised to see how big progress he made.”

“I am a physical education teacher and previously I did not use to pay attention to students' individual differences. For example, I used to get fat students to race with fit students. Now I never do such things. I learned in this training that small achievements were really important for student motivation and now I ensure that everyone in my class achieves something in the lesson.”

Finally, a few participants stated that their communication with the students had improved. This group of participants seems to have developed empathy for their students and, as a result, have become more sensitive towards them:

“I used to talk to young children as if they were high school students, I changed this attitude.”

“After having been engaged in this process, I realised that I did not empathize with my students and not tried to understand them. Now I started to empathize and communicate with them, which made a big difference in their attitudes towards the lesson.”

As seen in the findings stated above, a “one-shot” in-service training that the participants took recently generally supported their learning needs and contributed to their practices positively. The issues which emerged from these findings are discussed below.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

A model of in-service training was developed within the project “Inclusive Education: Teacher Training Module”. The project has 10 modules, each concerned with specific dimension of inclusive education such as working with children exposed to violence, working with children seeking asylum, and working with children with special education needs. One of the core modules of the project which concerned every teacher was the Teaching and Assessment. This module aimed at increasing pedagogical competencies of the teachers in terms of ensuring inclusive classroom practices. Four FGDs were carried out with the teachers who took the Teaching and Assessment Module to evaluate the effectiveness of the in-service training model implemented in training sessions that they recently experienced.

During the FGDs, the participants were asked to evaluate the training from different aspects, particularly in terms of professional development resulted from the training. The FGDs were conducted at least one month after the training finished so that it was possible to evaluate the change which took place in the awareness and classroom practices of the participants. Almost all the FGD participants considered the training highly beneficial and appropriately organised in terms of gaining new professional skills. Despite its limitations specified above, the training made a significant contribution to the teachers’ classroom practices and awareness about how teaching and learning process should be carried out.

In-service training practices in Turkey are usually criticised for neither providing the right qualities with teachers nor encouraging them to be life-long learners. These criticisms fall into three categories as stated by many authors (Bayar & Kösterelioğlu, 2014; Karip, 2018; Uştu, Mentiş Taş, & Sever, 2016; Yurtsene Yılmaz & Esen, 2015):

- Traditional teaching methods which are used in in-service training sessions do not inspire teachers to do things differently. Trainers do not practice what they preach in terms of hands-on and active learning principles. Training practices are usually carried out in the form of seminars in which teachers are required to follow theoretical information from slides.
- The content of in-service training sessions is largely based on some theoretical knowledge taken from textbooks rather than real problems of teachers emerging from their daily practices. Therefore, they lack developing teachers’ skills regarding how to handle real problems of their practice.
- Teachers during the in-service training sessions are not usually asked to collaborate with their colleagues but work individually (i.e. in isolation), which limits learning opportunities that cooperation might allow.

The participants who took part in this study also strongly supported the above mentioned inadequacies of traditional in-service training practices that they received throughout their careers. In fact, many participants pointed out that in the beginning they were sceptical about the training because they thought that this too would be one of those “boring and irrelevant” training sessions that they had to endure in the past.

As stated in the literature review, today’s teachers are required to adopt more inclusive practices. However, the expected change has not been adequately reflected in classrooms yet because teachers find it difficult to cope with externally imposed change, as argued strongly in teacher change literature (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012; Fullan, 2016). Furthermore, in order to adopt change, as Fullan (2016) argues, teachers first need to be aware of the potential of the change and then should develop necessary skills. To be able to involve teachers in the change process, the in-service programmes should first manage to convince them of the need for change. Thus, it is of utmost importance to incorporate teachers’ ideas, experiences, beliefs and values in the in-service training model.

With this in mind, the in-service training model developed in the project attempted to overcome the above mentioned inadequacies of in-service training practices in Turkey. In order to ensure teachers’ ownership of the process and to make it more relevant to their needs, the in-service model was structured in such a way to build upon teachers’ real problems of practice. The model also allowed the participants to bring their experiences to the process. Moreover, in order to make sure that teachers develop new skills, first they experienced exemplary activities and then were supported to develop their own activities and materials in teams under the guidance of the trainers. By doing so, the programme tried to overcome one of the major problems of teacher training practices that what is preached do not reflect what is done (Darling- Hammond, 1998).

As Stoll and Fink (1996) point out, most of the time a change brings along risks leading one to feel insecure. Therefore, if we want teachers to try out new things and start to change their practices, a safety net is needed. This safety net was

created by setting up an active and supportive network among the trainees. As stated in the FGDs, although the training ended more than a month ago, the groups were still cooperating and communicating with each other actively. In order to achieve such a result, the model of the training was carefully designed to create a collaborative group culture. To this end, a number of ice breaking activities and team works were utilised. Thus, the participants stated clearly that they felt belonging to the group at the very beginning, which in turn helped to develop positive interactions among the participants.

Although the participants of the FGDs were generally seemed to be satisfied with the training that they had, they also pointed out a number of areas which needed improvement. First and foremost, organisational issues created a setback. Indeed, the first principle of adult learning is to set up the right conditions for the trainees in terms of place and time of training. This principle was overlooked in some cities which decreased the motivation of the teachers. Although one of the strongest sides of the training was specified as activity based nature of the training, still some participants stated that they would prefer some PPTs in the programme at least just to relax a bit because they were all the time actively creating something.

Although in the literature “one-shot” style in-service trainings are criticised for being ineffective (Hunzicker 2010; Koellner and Greenblatt, 2018), the results of this study indicate that they could still be beneficial provided that their content, process and structure are appropriately organised. The in-service training model which was developed within the project was situated in practice and engaged teachers in active learning providing a supportive learning environment for the trainee teachers. Despite all its limitations, “one-shot” in-service training practice, if managed well, could still be useful in terms of bringing changes in teachers’ awareness, perceptions and practices. It can also empower teachers to certain extent and provide them with support and network they need.

Although it is difficult to make generalizations with regard to its results from such a qualitative study, based on the findings obtained from the present study the following suggestions can be made. They should allow teachers to reflect upon their beliefs and perceptions about the teaching and learning process and to view their practices in terms of strengths and weaknesses. They should also serve as tools with which they make justifications of their teaching practices. Once teachers come to realise the areas in need of development, they should support them by allowing to experience exemplary activities and to share good practices. Furthermore, in order to develop new skills, the in-service training should allow plenty of room for practice in cooperation with colleagues. Only through such an approach, is it possible to make in-service training meaningful for teachers. A good model of in-service training should be flexible, neither rigidly programmed nor chaotic and provide teachers with a sense that they are achieving something worthwhile in the process. Finally, in this process teachers should be empowered to take responsibility for producing their own practical theories rather than merely being told.

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