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THE IMPACT OF ONLINE EDUCATION ON ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE (EFL) TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN GEORGIA

I. Introduction

The spread of COVID-19 forced educational institutions in Georgia to switch to online education which caused an unprecedented transformation in education. The advancement in technology and the rise of online education also influenced teacher professional development. The shift to online learning required new skills and knowledge of new strategies from teachers, including EFL teachers, in order to successfully perform teaching using technologies¹. This made online education challenging² as well as full of opportunities in terms of professional development.

As English language proficiency is crucial in the globalized role, the importance of qualified and well-trained EFL teachers grows. Professional development for EFL teachers in Georgia traditionally included face-to-face training programs. The rise of online education provided alternative ways to acquire new knowledge and skills to meet the requirements.

Online education is associated with benefits such as flexibility, accessibility, and vast resources. However, alongside the benefits, it also presents challenges including lack of immediate feedback and interaction. Low level of computer literacy and access to reliable internet may be barriers for some teachers in Georgia, especially

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¹ Atmojo A.E.P., EFL Teachers' Online Teacher Professional Development Experiences amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic: Practices and Perceptions, *Journal of Language, Education, and Humanities*, Vol. 9, No. 1, 2021, 1.

² Hakim B., Technology Integrated Online Classrooms and Challenges Faced by the EFL Teachers in Saudi Arabia during the COVID-19 Pandemic, *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English Literature*, Vol. 9, No. 5, 2020, 33.

in rural areas. Therefore, online education was met with skepticism and excitement at the same time.

Taking into consideration its benefits and challenges, it is important to investigate to what extent online education affected EFL teachers' knowledge and their teaching practice. This article aims to study the impact of online education on EFL teachers' professional development in the context of Georgian educational institutions. The findings gave a picture of the situation that can be interesting for researchers and considered for future improvements.

II. Literature Review

The rise of online education changed the educators' approach towards education, teachers' role, their skills and professional development. Switching from face-to-face teaching to online mode caused some changes and teachers as well as students had to adapt them. EFL teachers needed to design online resources, acquire new knowledge, enhance digital literacy and pedagogical skills which would enable them to conduct a high-quality teaching process.

Alongside the challenges, online education brought opportunities to teachers that promoted their professional development in different ways. Before COVID-19, not every teacher was familiar with integrating technologies in the teaching-learning process. Online education gave them an opportunity to experience different teaching strategies and improve their digital skills³.

In spite of transmitting some of the challenges into opportunities, teachers "necessitated the provision of efficacious and coherent professional development training in order to smoothly navigate the transition"⁴. Professional development is described as a way of teachers' professional growth which may be undertaken in different forms such as informal and individual activities or formal ones⁵. It is the

³ Sundarwati E., Pahlevi M.R., EFL Teachers' Challenges and Opportunities of Emergency Remote Teaching during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Narrative Inquiry, *Language and Education Journal Undiksha*, Vol. 4, No. 2, 2021, 79-80.

⁴ Al-Bargi A., ELT Online Teachers' Professional Development During the COVID-19 Pandemic Outbreak: Perceptions, Implications and Adaptations, *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 10, 2021, 1161.

⁵ Atmojo A.E.P., EFL Teachers' Online Teacher Professional Development Experiences amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic: Practices and Perceptions, *Journal of Language, Education, and Humanities*, Vol. 9, No. 1, 2021, 3.

process which focuses on giving participants new experiences, skills or knowledge that allow them to transfer this knowledge into practice⁶. Professional development is highly important for improving student learning outcomes⁷.

As online education changed teachers' roles and required new pedagogical skills or knowledge from them, quality professional development became essential, especially in digital skills, in order to prepare or adapt materials for online teaching⁸ as well as to ensure continuous professional development⁹. During the pandemic, the main way of involvement in professional development programs was online programs. "Online professional development refers to courses, workshops, or learning modules that are delivered in an online format for teacher professional development."¹⁰ It is described as a complex process, needing relevant planning and implementation¹¹, which can be provided synchronously or asynchronously through different online platforms¹².

There are different practices and attitudes towards online education and professional development in different countries. On the one hand, online learning saves costs but on the other hand, there are concerns about the quality of teaching. The quality of online education depends on the quality of experiences of teachers and students¹³. EFL teachers generally participated in formal online programs as well

⁶ Holmes A., Signer B., MacLeod A., Professional Development at a Distance: A Mixed-Method Study Exploring Inservice Teachers' Views on Presence Online, *Journal of Digital Learning in Teacher Education*, Vol. 27, No. 2, 2010, 76.

⁷ Powell C.G., Bodur Y., Teachers' Perceptions of an Online Professional Development Experience: Implications for a Design and Implementation Framework, *Teaching and Teacher Education*, Vol. 77, 2018, 19.

⁸ Sundarwati E., Pahlevi M.R., EFL Teachers' Challenges and Opportunities of Emergency Remote Teaching during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Narrative Inquiry, *Language and Education Journal Undiksha*, Vol. 4, No. 2, 2021, 75.

⁹ Al-Bargi A., ELT Online Teachers' Professional Development During the COVID-19 Pandemic Outbreak: Perceptions, Implications and Adaptations, *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 10, 2021, 1161.

¹⁰ Powell C.G., Bodur Y., Teachers' Perceptions of an Online Professional Development Experience: Implications for a Design and Implementation Framework, *Teaching and Teacher Education*, Vol. 77, 2018, 21.

¹¹ Philipsen B., Tondeur J., Pareja Roblin N., Vanslambrouck S., Zhu C., Improving Teacher Professional Development for Online and Blended Learning: A Systematic Meta-Aggregative Review, *Educational Technology Research and Development*, Vol. 67, 2019, 1164.

¹² Atmojo A.E.P., EFL Teachers' Online Teacher Professional Development Experiences amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic: Practices and Perceptions, *Journal of Language, Education, and Humanities*, Vol. 9, No. 1, 2021, 4.

¹³ Holmes A., Signer B., MacLeod A., Professional Development at a Distance: A Mixed-Meth-

as in informal activities such as communication with their colleagues¹⁴. In Indonesia, although teachers experienced self-development, they considered online education as a chance to develop as a teacher with the help of training modules and their experience of online teaching¹⁵. According to the survey in Saudi Arabia, most of the teachers participating in the study had positive attitudes towards teaching English online¹⁶. As for Georgia, EFL teachers did not have much experience in online teaching and they did not know how to integrate technologies in the teaching and learning process. Although different training sessions were provided, they were less need-based and teachers had to collaborate intensively with their colleagues to share practices and overcome the challenges¹⁷.

It is highlighted that in order to achieve a successful implementation of online teaching strategies, online courses should involve not only content and technology but instructional design, assessment and course management¹⁸. Besides, teachers need support from their educational institutions¹⁹. They should provide necessary technologies to promote successful online teaching²⁰. Moreover, teachers need support in “learning best practices for using the technology”²¹. In Georgia, schools did

od Study Exploring Inservice Teachers' Views on Presence Online, *Journal of Digital Learning in Teacher Education*, Vol. 27, No. 2, 2010, 77.

¹⁴ Atmojo A.E.P., EFL Teachers' Online Teacher Professional Development Experiences amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic: Practices and Perceptions, *Journal of Language, Education, and Humanities*, Vol. 9, No. 1, 2021, 5.

¹⁵ Sundarwati E., Pahlevi M.R., EFL Teachers' Challenges and Opportunities of Emergency Remote Teaching during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Narrative Inquiry, *Language and Education Journal Undiksha*, Vol. 4, No. 2, 2021, 81.

¹⁶ Hakim B., Technology Integrated Online Classrooms and Challenges Faced by the EFL Teachers in Saudi Arabia during the COVID-19 Pandemic, *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English Literature*, Vol. 9, No. 5, 2020, 38.

¹⁷ Tabatadze S., Chachkhiani K., COVID-19 and Emergency Remote Teaching in the Country of Georgia: Catalyst for Educational Change and Reforms in Georgia?, *Educational Studies*, Vol. 57, No. 1, 2021, 87.

¹⁸ Holmes A., Signer B., MacLeod A., Professional Development at a Distance: A Mixed-Method Study Exploring Inservice Teachers' Views on Presence Online, *Journal of Digital Learning in Teacher Education*, Vol. 27, No. 2, 2010, 77.

¹⁹ Philipsen B., Tondeur J., Pareja Roblin N., Vanslambrouck S., Zhu C., Improving Teacher Professional Development for Online and Blended Learning: A Systematic Meta-Aggregate Review, *Educational Technology Research and Development*, Vol. 67, 2019, 1148.

²⁰ Sundarwati E., Pahlevi M.R., EFL Teachers' Challenges and Opportunities of Emergency Remote Teaching during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Narrative Inquiry, *Language and Education Journal Undiksha*, Vol. 4, No. 2, 2021, 75.

²¹ Shin J.K., Borup J., Barbour M.K., Quiroga Velasquez R.V., Webinars for English Language

not have necessary resources as well as some teachers and students did not have access to the internet²².

Overall, as the shift from face-to-face classes to online education required new skills and competences for teachers, participation in high-quality online professional development programs, formal or informal activities is important. Different studies depict that experiences and attitudes towards online professional development vary, however, it is clear that online education helped teachers develop and improve their digital skills that enable them to integrate technologies in teaching.

III. Research Methods

The article aimed to assess the impact of online education on the professional development of EFL teachers in Georgia. The study employed quantitative research methodology to address the following research questions:

- I. To what extent do EFL teachers in Georgia agree that online education has positively impacted their professional development?
- II. In what ways has online education influenced EFL teachers' professional development in Georgia?
- III. What are the perceptions of EFL teachers in Georgia regarding the effectiveness of online professional development opportunities compared to traditional one?
- IV. To what extent are EFL teachers in Georgia satisfied with the level of support and resources provided for online professional development?

To obtain comprehensive statistical procedures, a Likert scale questionnaire was developed to evaluate the impact of online education on EFL teachers' professional development, according to Georgian teachers' viewpoints. The questionnaire involved 10 items assessed in 5 points, ranging from "completely agree" to "completely disagree." 5 points corresponded to 'completely agree', 4 – 'agree', 3 – 'neutral', 2 – 'disagree', while 1 point referred to 'completely disagree'. The questionnaire was conducted in English.

Teachers During the Pandemic: Global Perspectives on Transitioning to Remote Online Teaching, AERA Open, Vol. 8, No. 1, 2022, 10.

²² Tabatadze S., Chachkhiani K., COVID-19 and Emergency Remote Teaching in the Country of Georgia: Catalyst for Educational Change and Reforms in Georgia?, Educational Studies, Vol. 57, No. 1, 2021, 87.

To standardize the questionnaire, it was given to 10 participants with the similar qualification to the target population. As the target population was teachers from schools and universities of Georgia, 10 of them were asked to fill out the form twice with a 15-minute interval. They were informed about the aim of the survey and the fact that the responses would be anonymous and confidential. The participants filled out the printed version. A coding system was used for measuring the correlation of the questionnaire in order to keep the results anonymous.

To measure the correlation between the two results, Pearson Correlation was applied. Table 1 represents the results.

Table 1: Correlation

		VAR00001	VAR00002
VAR00001	Pearson Correlation	1	0.878
	Sig, (2-tailed)		<0.001
	N	10	10
VAR00002	Pearson Correlation	0.878	1
	Sig, (2-tailed)	<0.001	
	N	10	10

Based on the results, Pearson Correlation equals to 0.878, which indicates that the correlation is high (more than 0.8) and the significance is $p < 0.001$. It means that there is a strong correlation between the two results, the result is statistically significant and the questionnaire is reliable.

IV. Participants

The target population was EFL teachers from educational institutions including schools and universities of three Georgian cities – Tbilisi, Kutaisi, and Batumi. Participants were informed about the aim of the study as well as the fact that their responses would be anonymous and confidential. The survey was conducted using an online version of a questionnaire created in Google Forms, and it was completed by 50 teachers.

V. Results Analysis

SPSS program was used for the statistical analysis of the collected data. Table 2 below shows the descriptive statistics for 10 items of the Likert scale questionnaire.

Table 2: Results

ITEM / STATISTICS	MEAN	MODE	MEDIAN	ST. DEVIATION	SKEWNESS	KURTOSIS
Online education has positively impacted my professional development as an EFL teacher	3.7	4	3.5	0.698	-0.693	1.259
Online education has helped me to improve my EFL teaching skills and strategies	3.7	3	3.5	0.814	0.142	-0.709
Online education has improved my ability to effectively use technology in the EFL classroom	4.3	4	4	0.626	-0.395	-0.612
Online education has improved my ability to communicate and collaborate with other EFL teachers	3.4	3	3.5	0.925	0.064	-0.789
Online education has improved my ability to design and deliver effective EFL lessons	3.8	4	4	0.680	0.209	-0.782
Online education has helped me to stay current with the latest EFL teaching trends and best practices	4.3	4	4	0.519	0.235	-0.957
Online education has provided me with more opportunities for professional development than traditional face-to-face workshops or conferences	3.6	3	3.5	1.030	-0.047	-1.125
I feel confident in my ability to effectively use online resources and tools for professional development as an EFL teacher	4.2	4	4	0.728	-0.330	-1.023

I am satisfied with the level of support and resources provided to EFL teachers in Georgia for online professional development	3.2	3	3	0.699	-0.298	-0.885
Online professional development is important for EFL teachers in Georgia considering the current state of the education system and technological advancements	4.2	4	4.5	0.404	1.547	0.407

The given data depicts that the mean scores for most items are higher than 3.5, with the exception of items 4 and 9, which present lower mean scores. Specifically, item 4 indicates that online education has not improved teachers' ability to communicate and collaborate with other EFL teachers (Mean=3.4) while item 9 reports lower satisfaction levels regarding the level of support and resources available for EFL teachers in Georgia for online professional development (Mean=3.2). Thus, these two items were negatively evaluated by the respondents while the rest of the items got positive evaluations.

Items 3 and 6 have the highest mean (4.3), which indicates that the participants positively evaluated the role of online education in improving teachers' ability to effectively use technology in the EFL classroom, as well as staying updated with the latest EFL teaching trends and best practices. Additionally, they have positive attitudes towards their ability to effectively use online resources and tools for professional development, as well as the importance of online professional development (Mean=4.2).

The median and mode for all items are also relatively close to the mean, particularly for items 3, 5, 6, 8 and 9 indicating a more or less normal distribution and accurate representation of the results. Furthermore, the standard deviation for item 7 is greater than 1, implying heterogeneous responses for this item (1.030). This variation may be due to the different experiences of teachers with professional development during online education. Conversely, item 4 has standard deviation close to 1 which indicates that the responses are more homogeneous (0.925). For all other items, standard deviations are less than 1, indicating that the answers are relatively uniform.

Regarding the Skewness and Kurtosis, the results fall between -3 and 3, indicating that the opinions are not substantially divergent. However, in terms of item 3 (Skewness = -0.395; Kurtosis = -0.612), item 7 (Skewness = -0.047; Kurtosis = -1.125), item 8 (Skewness = -0.330; Kurtosis = -1.023), and item 9 (Skewness = -0.298; Kurtosis = -0.885), both Skewness and Kurtosis are negative which indicate that the results are mostly lower than the mean.

Overall, based on the obtained data, the results can be regarded as reasonably reliable.

VI. Discussion

The findings of the study showed that the participants positively evaluated the impact of online education on their professional development. It is highlighted that online education helps the respondents stay current with the latest EFL teaching trends and best practices. Different studies also show that teachers consider online teaching and professional development as a chance to develop as a teacher²³.

Another finding of the study indicates that the participants did not evaluate the impact of online education on increasing communication and collaboration with colleagues while in the literature review, it is mentioned that teachers shared practices and tried to overcome the challenges through collaboration with each other²⁴.

In addition, different studies stress the importance of support by educational institutions during online education²⁵. Necessary technologies should be provided in order to help teachers conduct a high-quality teaching process²⁶. As it is mentioned, although some training programs were provided in Georgia, teachers

²³ Sundarwati E., Pahlevi M.R., EFL Teachers' Challenges and Opportunities of Emergency Remote Teaching during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Narrative Inquiry, Language and Education Journal Undiksha, Vol. 4, No. 2, 2021, 81.

²⁴ Tabatadze S., Chachkhiani K., COVID-19 and Emergency Remote Teaching in the Country of Georgia: Catalyst for Educational Change and Reforms in Georgia?, Educational Studies, Vol.57, No.1, 2021, 87.

²⁵ Philippsen B., Tondeur J., Pareja Roblin N., Vanslambrouck S., Zhu C., Improving Teacher Professional Development for Online and Blended Learning: A Systematic Meta-Aggregate Review, Educational Technology Research and Development, Vol. 67, 2019, 1148.

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lacked resources and expertise in using them²⁷. The finding of the presented study also depicts that the participants are not satisfied with the support and resources provided during online education in Georgia.

VII. Research Limitations

The obtained results indicate that online education had a positive impact on the professional development of EFL teachers in Georgia as well as online professional education is important for them, considering the current state of the education system and technological advancements. However, the results also show participants' dissatisfaction with the level of support and resources provided to EFL teachers in Georgia for online professional development. Moreover, the impact of online education on improving teachers' ability to collaborate with colleagues was not positively evaluated. It is important to note that the given results cannot be generalized due to the following reasons:

1. The number of respondents was limited, with only 50 EFL teachers engaged in the research;
2. The respondents included teachers from educational institutions located in only three Georgian cities – Tbilisi, Kutaisi, and Batumi. The results may differ significantly in other regions, especially in villages;
3. The research did not investigate the computer literacy of the participants or the quality of internet access they had during online education. Both factors could influence teachers' attitudes and the impact of online education on their professional development.

VIII. Conclusions

The quantitative research measured the impact of online education on EFL teachers' professional development in Georgia. EFL teachers from schools and universities of three Georgian cities participated in the research.

- Analysis of the findings illuminated mostly positive attitudes towards the impact of online education on the participants' professional development (Mean=3.7, Mode=4; Median=3.5);

²⁷ Tabatadze S., Chachkhiani K., COVID-19 and Emergency Remote Teaching in the Country of Georgia: Catalyst for Educational Change and Reforms in Georgia?, *Educational Studies*, Vol. 57, No. 1, 2021, 87.

- Another important finding was that online education was regarded to help the respondents stay current with the latest EFL teaching trends and best practices (Mean= 4.3, Mode and Median=4) Mean, mode and median are similar in case of Item 3 stating that online education had a positive impact on EFL teachers' ability to effectively use technology in the EFL classroom. However, Kurtosis and Skewness are negative which indicates that the results were generally lower than the mean.
- Online professional development is mostly regarded to be important for EFL teachers in Georgia considering the current state of the education system and technological advancements (Mean=4.2, Mode=4, Median=4.5)
- On the other hand, some of the respondents indicated that online education has not improved their ability to communicate and collaborate with other EFL teachers. Mean=3.4, while Kurtosis and Skewness are negative.
- The findings also illuminated that the respondents were dissatisfied with the level of support and resources provided to EFL teachers in Georgia for online professional development. Mean=3.2, Kurtosis and Skewness are negative.

IX. Recommendation

Although the overall results indicate that the impact of online education on EFL teachers' professional development, especially improving their ability to effectively use technology in the EFL classroom and staying update with the latest EFL teaching trends and best practices, was positively evaluated by the respondents, the following recommendations can be made:

- EFL teachers in Georgia should be offered increased support and resources for online professional development;
- EFL teachers in Georgia should be given more opportunities for professional development in both online and traditional modes;
- Collaboration among EFL teachers should be encouraged to facilitate their online professional development.

Abstract

The article aims to assess the impact of online education on English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers' professional development in Georgia. 50 teachers from educational institutions including schools and universities located in three Georgian cities – Tbilisi, Kutaisi, and Batumi participated in the quantitative research. A 5-point Likert scale questionnaire was used to answer the following research questions: 1. To what extent do EFL teachers in Georgia agree that online education has positively impacted their professional development? 2. In what ways has online education influenced EFL teachers' professional development in Georgia? 3. What are the perceptions of EFL teachers in Georgia regarding the effectiveness of online professional development opportunities compared to traditional one? 4. To what extent are EFL teachers in Georgia satisfied with the level of support and resources provided for online professional development? The results showed that the teachers positively evaluated the impact of online education on their professional development and the importance of online professional education, however, they are not satisfied with the level of support and resources provided to EFL teachers in Georgia for online professional development. The article might be interesting for researchers working on the topic.

KeyWords: Online Education, Professional Development, EFL Teachers

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