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## INVESTIGATING EFL TEACHERS' BELIEFS OF INFORMATION COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES USE IN SELF-INITIATED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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### ABSTRACT

*This study aimed to investigate the use of ICTs in University EFL teachers' Self-initiated professional development. The study participants were 35 EFL university teachers from Addis Ababa Science and Technology University. They were selected using total population sampling. Concurrent mixed methods were employed in the study. The data were collected using a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The data were then analyzed separately and finally mixed during the discussion of the data. The study's findings indicated that teachers' beliefs about using ICTs in self-initiated professional development were positive.*

**Keywords:** *Information Communication Technologies, EFL Teachers' beliefs, Self- initiated professional development*

### INTRODUCTION

Teachers receive pre-service training, but they are never fully prepared for all the challenges they face throughout their careers. Therefore, they are expected to prepare themselves for further professional development. This enables them to meet the changing needs of learners in the modern world. Professional development practices benefit teachers when the practices are on-going, (Villegas 2003, p.4). In Ethiopia, continuous professional development (CPD) is designed to improve students' achievement by developing the professional skills of teachers and teacher educators by upgrading and updating them with a wide range of their classroom strategies (MoE, 1994, pp.21-22, & MoE 2009).

According to MoE (2018) in the Ethiopian context, Higher Diploma Program (HDP) and English Language Improvement Program (ELIP) are examples of professional development programs created for teachers working in higher education institutions. The document further elaborated that the only formalized professional development program for instructors in higher education or teacher educators is the HDP. Through a licensure

program, this program seeks to enhance the knowledge and abilities of teacher educators in order to advance educational quality. But there is no plan or guidance for what should happen after the HDP is finished, (MoE 2018, pp37-41)

Scholars such as Ahmed, Almaz and Altshul (2005) stated that English Language Improvement Program (ELIP) was offered by the MoE, to English teachers and other subject teachers who use English as a medium of instruction. As they further explained, the purpose of the program was to enhance the low level of teachers' English and the quality of teaching in Ethiopian educational institutions. Then, in 2004 ELIP became a priority program of Ethiopia's wider Teacher Development Program (TPD), but, as to the researcher knowledge, this program is not currently being implemented.

MOE (2009) and Knowles (1975), indicated that teachers can actively engaged in their own learning process, working with their colleagues, identifying their own needs and the wide range of formal and informal activities that will bring about improvement of their own practice and the practice of others. Moreover, scholars such as Birhanu(2014), Hirpa (2015) and Malek(2016) have indicated in their studies that self- initiated professional development was being favored by significant number of English teachers. Meanwhile the use of technologies in teachers professional life have become a new normal as it provides teachers with meeting their professional needs. In this regard, Craft (1996), Jang (2020), Livingstone (2012), and Shifflet and Weilbacher (2016) indicated that technologies are providing opportunities for teachers in developing their professions. Similarly, EFL teachers in the Ethiopian higher institution can develop their profession taking their own initiatives with or without the assistance of others in order to meet their professional and their students' needs. With reference to this idea, this study is going to explore teachers' beliefs about the use of ICTs in their self- initiated professional development.

Although different top-down professional development programs have been introduced in Ethiopia for both EFL and other teachers for the past nearly two decades, they were reported ineffective and couldn't bring the desired change on teachers. (MoE (2015:19) &,Dereje 2014). The teacher development programs have also been criticized due to their top-down approach whereby the interests of teachers was overlooked (Seyoum 2016 cited in Tamirat and Chen, 2020). In addition, the two professional developments: HDP and ELIP were also reported to be ineffective as the HDP program lacks specialization or follows the general approach and the ELIP was not implemented properly.

Therefore, EFL teachers in the Ethiopian higher institutions can consider self- initiated professional approach.

Self- initiated professional development (SIPD) is currently being favored as compared to the top down professional development approach. Scholars such as Richards and Farrell, (2005 p.5), Birhanu (2014) and Malek, (2016) stated that self- initiated professional development should be the moral duty of teachers to qualify themselves and enhance the quality of their teaching practice. These researchers indicated that EFL teachers in Ethiopia held positive beliefs about self-initiated professional development in general. Meanwhile, Craft (1996) indicated that information communication technologies are bringing new possibilities for teachers to learn by themselves. In other words, these technologies enable teachers to undertake their own professional development and take advantage of the technologies in their professional lives and preparing their students for 21st century work (British Council, 2015, Craft, 1996 & Galaczi, & etal., 2018). The above mentioned researches indicated the possibility of self- initiated professional development for teachers without or within the support of ICTs. As far as the researcher reading is concerned, none of them has been conducted in relation to the use of ICTs in EFL teachers' professional development in the Ethiopian context.

Washington, (2019) explained that today students continue to involve in the areas of technology and access to information; therefore, teachers should be consistent with their students learning strategy. He also stated that effective PD in the 21st century comes from realizing this and finding ways to enhance teaching and learning strategies. EFL teachers in Ethiopian higher institutions can also utilize ICTs for their professional development to improve their classroom practice and meet students learning strategy need.

ICTs use in Teachers professional development has not yet been studied as a means of self-initiated professional development (SIPD) opportunity for teachers in higher institutions in Ethiopia. Therefore, this study tries to investigate EFL teachers' beliefs about the use of ICTs in their SIPD in the context of Ethiopian higher institution namely Addis Ababa Science and Technology University. The research question that guided this study was the following.

What are EFL teachers' beliefs about using ICTs in self-initiated professional development?

## **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

### **Beliefs**

Borg (2001, p.3) defined a belief as “a mental state which has as its content a proposition that is accepted as true by the individual holding it, although the individual may recognize that alternative beliefs may be held by others.” He also elaborated that beliefs dispose or guide people’s thinking and action. As he stated beliefs are propositions which are held consciously or unconsciously. For Khader (2012), beliefs are judgments and evaluations that we make about ourselves, others, and the world around us. Beliefs are personal ideas based on observation or rational thinking. He further explained beliefs as a group of ideas which are shaped in persons by their experiences and the overlapping of notions during the learning processes. According to this study, beliefs refer to the view or perception EFL teachers hold about the uses of information communication technologies in promoting their self- initiated professional development.

### **Teachers’ Beliefs**

“Teachers’ beliefs refer to teachers’ pedagogical beliefs which are important for the teaching learning activities in the class room,” (Borg, 2001:p3). As to Pajares (1992), teachers’ beliefs refer to as personal ideas that can provide comprehension, decisions, and assessments of teachers’ classroom practices. He further explained them as a set of strong feelings and attitudes of teachers about things that can affect the teaching-learning interaction. According to Both Borg (2001) and Pajares (1992) agreed that teachers’ beliefs can be referred as attitudes, values, judgments, axioms, opinions, ideology, perceptions, conceptions, conceptual systems, preconceptions, dispositions, implicit theories, explicit theories, personal theories, internal mental processes, action strategies, rules of practice, practical principles, perspectives, repertoires of understanding, and social strategy, in the context of the teachers teaching learning process.

As Khader (2012), Opre (2021), and Pajares (1992), stated what teachers believe in have direct implication on the teaching-learning transaction. As beliefs play an important role in teaching learning process, therefore studying them is helpful in comprehending what teachers think about teaching methods, classroom practice, and learning how to teach. Because their beliefs determine their classroom practice and the way they think about their profession, latest developments in their profession, their perception, motivation, and interest to know about the new concepts about their profession. According to OECD (2009), teachers’ beliefs are also important in accepting or rejecting new information For

example, participating in professional development activities can change teachers' classroom practice, but participating in professional development activities may arise from certain teachers' beliefs about the importance of professional development.

### **Sources of Teachers' Beliefs**

According to Richards and Lockhart (1994), cited in Farrell, (2013) teachers' beliefs are supposed to come from a variety of sources. For instance, teachers might develop their views through personal experiences, schooling and teaching experiences, and formal knowledge experiences. The same scholars stabilized the above mentioned idea in relation to the ESL teachers. According to their argument, in particular, ESL teachers' beliefs can originate from one of the following sources teachers' past experience as language learners (as a teacher it is common to refer back and to teach our students according to our beliefs of language learning experience), teachers also get their beliefs from the their previous experience of what works best in their classes which help teachers to select the better methods and techniques of teaching. They can also get from their established practice within a school. Teachers' beliefs can also come from educationally or scientifically based ideas, for example, a teacher may advocate the use of predicting style exercises in reading classes by drawing on his or her knowledge of research in second language reading. The above mentioned scholars proved that sources of beliefs can be varied and teachers' beliefs can be shaped by their previous experiences they have passed through as a language learner and teacher.

Concerning teachers' beliefs sources about technology usage, Shifflet and Weilbacher (2016) and Jang (2020) stated the following. According to these scholars, teachers' beliefs about technology use in their professional carrier are formed due to their personal and cultural experiences, as well as cognitive understanding. As they illustrated, when teachers see the usefulness of technology in their work, their attitude towards its use is easily influenced. This indicated that teachers who realize the ease of use of technology would be positive about using it.

### **Teachers' Beliefs about Technology**

In educational framework, the digital technology becomes vital in supporting the teaching learning process, (Opre,2021). Teachers' beliefs about technology on teaching, learning, and evaluation represent one of the strongest predictors of the way in which technology is capitalized. As Levin and Wadmany (2006) stated, teachers hold a set of beliefs about the value of technology use for teaching and learning. Teachers who adopt the technology are

believed to be successful in utilizing the technology for their professional development and classroom practice. However, teachers with traditional beliefs are anxious in utilizing technology in their professional development and classroom practice. Teachers' beliefs about technology can be varied for the following reasons.

According to Davis (1989), and Venkatesh et al. (2003), there are four most significant elements why users decide to use a particular technology. The first of these elements is the belief of performance expectancy, which refers to how much a person believes that employing the technology will assist him or her improve their effectiveness at work. Furthermore, they go on to say that effort expectancy, or how comfortable a user is using a computer system, is the second most important distinction. In addition the social influence is considered to be another influencing factor for teachers' belief. This refers to the concern individuals have when they are perceived using technology. Social influence has three main sub-divisions which are compliance, internalization, identification. Compliance refers to simply using a computer system due to the social pressure on the individual to do so, whereas internalization and identification refer to the extent to which social influence has an effect on individual's schemata and belief structure. The last element is the facilitating of conditions which deal with the availability of infrastructures to use the technology. The above mentioned are the sets of beliefs scholars stated that support the use of technology. Therefore, studying about the beliefs of technology use in teachers' professional life is significant as it determines their professional practice in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## **METHODOLOGY**

In this study, the researchers used concurrent mixed methods design which gives equal emphasis in terms of time and weigh in data collection and analysis. Using this research design, the researcher tried to study EFL teachers' beliefs in relation to the use of ICTs for self-initiated professional development. The researcher chose this design to use both quantitative and qualitative data to broaden the researcher understanding about the issues raised in the study

### **Participants of the Study**

40 respondents were expected to take part in this survey. However, only 35 teachers were able to complete the survey and return it to the researcher. From the Addis Ababa Science and Technology University, they were all EFL instructors. Twelve of the study's

participants had PhDs, while the remaining 23 were having MA degree. Their combined teaching experience is 3 to 15 years.

### **Sampling**

Due to their low population size, all of the teachers were included in the study. Based on the suggestion made by Cohn, Manion, and Morrison (2007:93), who suggested including the entire population when the wider population is tiny, this was carried out. In this study, the questionnaire was filled out using total population sampling. Four of the 35 teachers were chosen at random to participate in semi-structured interviews in order to supplement the information gathered from the questionnaire.

### **Instruments and Data Collection Procedure**

#### ***Questionnaire***

For the purpose of the study, all teachers were surveyed using a five-section Likert-type questionnaire. As a result, a series of questionnaires in the English language regarding the participants' academic status were created based on study questions and a review of related literature. A large portion of the survey questions were modified from those used in earlier research by Birhanu (2014), Hirpa (2015), Nagy & Habók (2018), Malek (2016), and Nazari N. (2019).

#### ***Interview***

A semi-structured interview was employed in this study as the semi-structured interviews are particularly useful for collecting information on people's ideas, opinions, or experiences. The interview was conducted with four randomly selected teachers. Among the interviewees, one of them was a PhD—but the rest three were PhD candidates. The interviews were conducted in English as the participants are good at English language skills

#### **Data Analysis**

The statistical package program SPSS 24 was used to enter the data gathered from the questionnaires. To discuss the topic raised by the research, tables and verbal descriptions were also employed in the data analysis of the questionnaire, which included percentage, frequency, mean, and standard deviation. Concerning the interview, by listening to the recordings, the transcriptions were checked for accuracy and consistency. Themes were then found utilizing open code4.02 and discussed once it had been evaluated. The researcher was able to evaluate and comprehend participant beliefs regarding using ICTs in SIPD with the aid of both instruments.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The analyses of the study are presented in two sections. The first section describes the quantitative data analysis about EFL teachers' beliefs about the use of ICTs in promoting SIPD. The second section discusses similar issue using qualitative or the interview data analysis in order to stabilize the data obtained by the quantitative data.

Table 1 consists of 9 items. Responses given to teachers' beliefs about the relevance of ICT were analyzed the following way. The first item that indicates ICT relevance in terms of updating teachers with new knowledge and skills of ELT was agreed by all 35(100%) teachers. In addition the mean score (M=4.45) and standard deviation (SD=.505) indicate their nearly strong agreement. From the data, the researcher can understand that all the teachers have positive beliefs about the relevance of ICT in updating themselves with new knowledge.

Table: 1. English language teachers' beliefs about the use of information communication technology in self-initiated professional development

	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	SD
I believe that the use of ICTs	N or %	N or %	N or %	N or %	N or %	Mean	SD
1 helps me updating myself with new knowledge and skills of ELT issues.	-	-		19	16	4.45	.505
	-	-		54.3	45.7		
2 gives me relevant information to my professional development needs.	-	-	1	15	19	4.51	.562
	-	-	2.9	42.9	54.3		
3 enhances my initiatives of self-professional development.	-	-	3	20	12	4.26	.611
	-	-	8.6	57.1	34.3		
4 provides me with wide-ranging self-improvement activities.	-	-	2	19	14	4.34	.591
	-	-	5.7	54.3	40		
5 makes me practice professional development activities by myself.	-	-	2	17	16	4.40	.604
	-	-	5.7	48.6	45.7		
6 makes me to involve in on line professional development programs.	-	1	7	14	13	4.11	.832
	-	2.9	20	40	37.1		
7 enables me sharing ideas, and experiences with my colleagues.	-	-	2	16	17	4.43	.608
	-	-	5.7	45.7	48.6		
8 helps me access ELT materials anytime, anywhere.	-	2	4	15	14	4.17	.857
	-	5.7	11.4	42.9	40		
9 enables me to make changes over the traditional	-	-	3	21	11	4.23	.598



Almost, all 34 (97.1%) of the respondents also agreed with ICT relevance for their overall professional development only 1(2.9%) of them didn't agree or disagree. The mean score ( $M=4.51$ ) and the standard deviation ( $SD=.562$ ) indicate teachers almost strong agreement. This indicates that all of them have positive beliefs about ICTs use in providing them with relevant information about their profession.

Enhancing teachers' initiatives of self – professional development was another theme of the importance of ICT. 32 (91.4%) of the teachers agreed or strongly agreed with this theme, but 3 (8.6%) of them didn't choose either agreeing or disagreeing. As the mean score ( $M=4.26$ ) and standard deviation ( $SD=.611$ ) indicate teachers' agreement. The result shows that teachers believe that ICT would enhance their initiatives for their improvement.

Concerning ICT relevance in providing teachers with wide range of self-improvement activities, 33 (94.3) of the teachers showed their agreement but only 2 (5.7%) of them showed their neutral position. The mean score and standard deviation ( $M=4.34$ ,  $SD=.591$ ) also indicate that teachers agreed with the stated idea. Thus, it may be argued that the results by and large showed that many teachers recognize that ICT provides them with wide range of self-improvement opportunities.

For item 5 that explains about ICT advantages in terms of making teachers practice professional development by themselves, 33 (94.3%) of the respondents agreed on while 2(5.7%) of them showed neutral stand. Moreover, the mean score ( $M=4.40$ ) and the standard deviation ( $SD=.608$ ) show teachers agreement. From the above data, it is possible to understand that a lot of teachers believe that ICT is advantageous in making teachers practice their professional development.

Concerning the use of ICT in making teachers involve in online professional development programs, 27(77.1%) of the teachers were agreed or strongly agreed but 1 (2.9%) of them disagreed the remaining 7 (20%) of them indicated their neutral opinion. In addition the mean score ( $M=4.11$ ) and the standard deviation ( $SD=.832$ ) are evidences for teachers agreement. This could imply that still majority of the teachers believe that ICTs would help them to involve in on line professional development.

ICTs use in helping teachers sharing ideas and experiences with their colleagues was asked in this questionnaire. Accordingly, 33(94.3%) of the teachers agreed on this point while 2 (5.7%) teachers preferred neutral position. What is more, the mean score and standard deviation ( $M=4.43$ ,  $SD=.603$ ) witnessed teachers agreement. From the above data,

it can be noted that the majority of the teachers believe that ICT would help them exchange professional ideas and experience.

Concerning ICTs benefit in terms of accessing ELT materials being wherever and whenever, 29 (82.9%) of the respondents they indicated their agreement, but 2(5.7%) of them disagreed on this theme. Some 4(11.4%) of the teachers chose neutral opinion. The mean score and standard deviation ( $M=4.17$ ,  $SD=.857$ ) indicate majority of teachers agreement. Accordingly, teachers believe that ICTs help them to access ELT materials without time and place limitation.

The last item in this section of questionnaire was ICT importance in enabling teachers to make a change over the traditional instructional practice. 32 (91.4%) of the teachers agreed on this idea as 3(8.6%) of them showed their neutral stand. In addition, the mean score and standard deviation ( $M=4.23$ ,  $SD=.598$ ) also another evidence for teachers' agreement. Thus, the above analysis shows that most of the teachers were positive about ICT role in enabling them change the traditional teaching practice.

Generally, from the above data, it can be noted that the majority of the EFL teachers' beliefs about the relevance of ICT in self-initiated professional development was positive. This is attested by the grand mean ( $M=4.32$ ).

### **Qualitative Data Presentation and Analysis**

In this section an interview data was analyzed to stabilize the data obtained through the questionnaire. The following interview questions were used in the study.

*How do you view about the use of information communication technologies in relation to your self-initiated professional development?*

#### ***EFL Teachers' Beliefs about the use of information Communication Technology in SIPD***

Concerning the use of information communication technology teachers' perception looks the following. T1 believes that he ICT is of great help for him. He stated that, for example, he usually utilizes You Tube in order to learn how a particular English lesson is taught by other native English speakers' teachers or ELT professionals. He further said the following.

I can simply open my mobile and google different kinds of materials or from the social media I may share materials with my friends as long as it is helpful for teaching English language even I may use the internet just simply sitting at my office I can get different materials so I think these are some of the benefits. There are ample or different opportunities in using ICT for the teaching of English languages as long as the person is using it for academic purpose.

T2 believed that the role of ICT is a lot in changing the practice of EFL teacher as they are directly or indirectly being affected by the influence of emerging technologies or Web2.0, technologies such as YouTube, Wiki, and social media etc. as these technologies are important in teaching English language skills. He also described additionally his beliefs about the usage of ICTs here under.

ICT has a big role in changing the practice of English teachers. Err... most of the time in our context large class size is a big challenge. We may not teach our students effectively the language skills if the class size is large, these technologies are very important... so, internet has a big role in changing our practice.

T3 understands that the invention of ICT is one of the greatest things happened in human life. She additionally explained that it is significant in helping teachers as the information teachers need is open and easily accessible and it is not limited in terms of time and place. She also believes that teachers can google different ELT materials that are important to the classroom teaching learning process. She further explained its advantage the following way.

We can supplement learners using the ICT... Concerning professional development, most of my readings come from or through ICT... As you know I am doing my PhD currently and ICT is my great... great support to have access for variety of current information related to my research topic as

well as other new things happening in the global situation so that is one of the right hand of most of us.

T4 on his own part described the role of ICT as an important means to make teachers' implement self-initiated professional development what is expected from teachers is only motivation. The technology has a lot of opportunity for EFL teachers who are interested to expose themselves to it. He believes that ICT and SIPD have positive relationship. The following extract taken from his interview stabilizes his idea.

Self-initiated professional development and information communication technology and SIPD are directly or positively correlated... if I am motivated I mean professionally develop ICT is of great importance. I have to apply various things just like applications of software or online courses and the like. In this regard, ICT play significant role in shaping our professional development.

According to the above analysis of the four interviewees many of the teachers have positive beliefs about the role of professional development in self-initiated professional development.

## **DISCUSSION**

This study was carried out to identify EFL teachers' beliefs about the use of ICTs for self-initiated professional development. In order to address this research objective, teachers' a questionnaire and an interview were employed. Accordingly, teachers' responses indicated the following.

According to the quantitative data, results by and large showed that many of EFL teachers in Addis Ababa Science and Technology University believe that the use of ICT plays an important role in in self- initiated professional development. Their belief about technology is similar with what Craft (1996) stated that ICTs are providing teachers with self- learning. Therefore, their positive belief about technology leads to them to take the advantage of the technology in their professional development. In other words, they believe that ICTs provide them with wide range of self-improvement ELT activities to meet their professional development needs. This finding is similar with Opre (2021) findings state that teachers' beliefs about technology represent one of the strongest

predictors of the way in which technology is capitalized. As their responses indicated, this in turn enables them to meet the current students need. According to the qualitative data, teachers believe that using ICTs are important in the development of their profession. Moreover, they stated that these technologies provide teachers with authentic teaching materials as well as varieties of English language skills trainings without time and location limitation. As a result, they were able to update themselves with new approaches of ELT knowledge and skills. All in all, majority of the EFL teachers' beliefs about the use of ICT in self-initiated professional development appeared positive. The findings about Addis Ababa Science and Technology University EFL teachers' beliefs about the use of ICTs for professional development are similar with the findings of other scholars such as (Livingstone, 2012), and (Motteram, 2013), too.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Based on the data analysis the following can be included about EFL teachers' beliefs about the use of ICTs in their professional development. Accordingly, Addis Ababa Science and Technology University EFL teachers believe that ICTs have a great role in their professional development effort. Because they think ICTs are helpful, and EFL teachers should use technology to promote their professional growth. This enables them to adapt to the changing needs of their students. The institution should also offer short-term training to EFL teachers on how to utilize the ICT resources that are accessible. This could improve how well teachers use ICTs for educational objectives. Trainings should also be given to stabilize teachers' belief in the utilization of ICTs for their professional development as these technologies provide them with open access professional development trainings at any time and any place. Moreover, since this is a case study, it may not address the entire Ethiopian higher institutions EFL teachers' belief about the use of ICTs in self-initiated professional development. Therefore, other interested researchers are recommended to fill the gap in this research area.

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