Teachers` Viewpoints on the Practical Implementation of Lesson Study in EFL Classrooms

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Abstract

Lesson Study is considered as an updated way of professional development which aims at improving the teaching process and as a result improving students' progress. This study applied an empirical implementation of lesson study in the EFL context in order to investigate teachers' viewpoints on the practical implementation of lesson study. To this end, 15 Iranian EFL teachers were selected through random sampling. The survey method was employed and "teachers' viewpoint on practical implementation of lesson study" questionnaire was administered to them after the implementation of lesson study in their classrooms. The results showed that teachers had positive viewpoint toward the different parts of the questionnaire that deals with teaching and learning procedure. Lesson study is used as a tool to provide teachers with an opportunity to emphasize the quality of teaching that consequently affect the quality of learning.

Keywords: Lesson Study, Professional Development, Learners` Advancement, EFL context.
1. Introduction

Japanese lesson study has been a popular professional development approach in recent years. The main reason why lesson study was introduced as a form for professional development for Japanese primary school teachers is that teachers in Japan had recognized the power of teachers helping each other, and had seen these teachers develop the curriculum and lessons used in their schools. The system of teachers teaching teachers were then experienced (Doig & Groves, 2011).

A perfect lesson plan will be successful provided that it is performed by well-educated and powerful teachers. This can be reached through reforms in teachers training courses. Teachers use trial and error procedures in choosing their teaching methodology but never had or have given the chance to reflect and be reflected by other teachers. Teacher professional development has been tried in many ways such as curriculum change, bringing new the technologies right into the classrooms, advances in pedagogy or using them all together. The reason behind these activities is to improve students' outcome, whether they be focused on understanding, attitude, skill or engagement. However, it was suggested that the money, time and effort put into professional development for teachers, did not always result in the intended way.

In teacher training colleges the courses are based on knowledge of subjects in educational science like teaching methodology, theoretical principles of teaching skills and a practical course in which pre-service teachers were just passive observers in the classroom who watched the teaching process of an experienced teacher. However the role of teachers' professional development was not so significant, thus teachers' pre-service and in-service training were changed in order to empower them in teaching-learning process. Building a challenging situation in which teachers would have the opportunity to reflect on their teaching process is needed (Gooya, 2001, 2010).

As Bakhtiari quoted, most researchers believe that investing on human source and choosing qualified educators are the key factors of Japanese educational success. However in such organizations the teachers improve their sense of commitment in order to develop and modify their deficiencies. Others believe that Japanese cooperative work is the key answer to their salient promotion in their education system (Bakhtiari, 2009).

2. Statement of the Problem

Teachers' professional development, in its expanding meaning, is improving in personal roles which leads to increasingly long term learning in students. Therefore, teachers' professional abilities, is inevitably considered as a turning point to permanent learning and teachers' professional development (Eleonora, 2003). The importance of developing these abilities is so much that those teachers with low abilities were called incompetent (Raouf, 2000). As a matter of fact investing on teachers' professional abilities should be considered as a key index in educational human source management because this task will gradually leads to teachers' professional development and as an ultimate result causes students' learning advancement (Holland, 2009).

The experiences done in Japan, Canada, USA, Hong Kong and Australia show that their teachers participated in an ongoing continuous progress of their teaching and understanding of the differences in the ways lessons are typically designed and implemented. For example in Australia a significant attention was paid on the teachers' professional trainings emphasizing on increasing and developing their teaching abilities since proficient
teachers are the main factors in determining learners’ achievement (Australian Department of Education and Children’s Services, 2006). The pattern they use in their classrooms is known as lesson study and its effects on the educational system of developed countries was significant so that after implementation of lesson study in their classrooms, they take the highest ranking amongst other countries in international studies. So the new procedure may show its effectiveness in other countries to reach educational objectives. Lesson study process is helpful for developing lesson plan, co-learning within teaching group, and it maintains supporting pedagogical content knowledge (Saki, 2013).

Stigler and Heibert (1999) mentioned that teachers are often blamed when the students' performance scores are below the expectations; consequently teachers are more expected to take the responsibility for this failure without tackling them any tools to recover from the disaster. Not only they are blamed for the learners' lack of achievement, but they are also disregarded as the main factor for solving the problem (Coe, 2010).

When comparing Iranian teachers with their colleagues in other countries, it becomes clear that Iranian teachers almost do not have any method to raise their teaching skills. On the other hand the ways to reach the teaching and learning objectives are not the same in every country due to teachers and students cultural and educational background (Mortazimehrabani, 2003).

Seyf (1996) believed that School deficiencies especially teachers' teaching style is the major responsible factor for students' failure. Also, in a study carried out by Sadeh meymandi it was concluded that, on the students' viewpoint, teachers methodology is the most important factor in students' advancement or failure (Sadeh maymandi, 2013). When looking for the characteristics of teachers who students believe they are the best, the answer would be the teachers who helped students to have different and better strategies to learn a subject better. Thus the kind of professional development which provides teachers with these skills would be beneficial to the students' advancement (Doig & Groves, 2011).

Up to now a lot of efforts have been put into practice to improve the ways the teachers are trained but there is no attention to their professional development to become more responsible for the failures. So the view should be looked back to the teachers instead of the educational programmers and policy makers. Teaching methodology should focus on teaching for conceptual understanding. Improving overall student achievement does not involve finding more extraordinary teachers but, raising the performance of teachers which needs a system for developing professional knowledge and giving teachers the opportunity to learn about teaching (Stigler and Hiebert, 1999).

Teachers' professional development is crucial due to Iranian ministry of education policies cited in the Document of Fundamental Reform. Different things were done to improve qualification of teaching such as pre-service and in-service training programs but they have failed to be as effective as they are expected. The reason is that the former two-year teacher training collages were mostly based on theoretical courses and pre-service teachers were allowed to attend schools for their practical courses only once a week and just in the second year (Moghaddam, 2015).

It was not long ago that Iranian teachers practiced projects like action research and educational group activities. It is worthy to be mentioned here that the scientific attempts of Sarkar arani, Khakbaz, Fadaei, and Mosa poor in 2007 provided the opportunity and facilitated the use of modern ways of lesson study practice and its results in developed countries consequently caused Iranian educators to follow these projects (Saki, 2013).
3. Research Question
This study discusses the research question reiterated as follows:

- What are the teachers' viewpoints about practical implementation of lesson study?

4. Review of Literature
The English term lesson study comes from the Japanese words jugyo- kenkyu which are commonly translated as "lesson study" since jugyo means "lesson" and kenkyu means "study" or "research". During lesson study process, a group of teachers work together to plan, discuss, reflect and analyze an investigative research lesson and at last design a detailed and revised syllabus related the teaching goal. One team member teaches the research lesson (kenkyu- jugyo ) while colleagues observe and collect data on student learning. A broad and comprehensive discussion follows the observation; focusing on evidence, reflection of the other teachers and proposed lesson revisions. The team re-designs the instructional plan based on these reflections, experiences and documents. Later findings are considered for further lesson study cycles (Lewis, 2002; Stigler and Hiebert, 1999).

Lesson study is defined as teachers collaboratively plan, implement, reflect and revise and re-implement a lesson (Lewis, 2002; Fernandez, 2002; Yoshida, 1999). Stigler and Hiebert (1999) viewed lesson as a promising school based activity which provides gradual change over time. The principals of lesson study verifies the idea that learning is a social and situated process and the classrooms is the best place for the teachers to learn and collaborate in order to improve their teaching practice (Gutiierrez, 2015).

Teachers participating in lesson study put themselves in the cycle of instructional improvement while planning, observing and revising lessons (Lewis & Tsuchida, 1998). In lesson study, a group of three to five teachers, usually chosen from the same grade level, meet together, and collaboratively work on a “research lesson” designed in order to impact the students' achievement (Fernandez, Cannon & Chokshi, 2003; Cheung & Wong, 2014). Lesson Study is used regularly throughout the Japanese education system. It is a specified form of action research done in classroom focusing on the development of teaching knowledge in practice (Dudley, 2014).

Lesson Study (LS) is considered as a way of professional development which aims at improving teaching, developing and sharing practice knowledge, and improving students’ progress (Lewis & Tsuchida, 1998; Stigler & Hiebert, 1999; Yoshida, 1999; Maskit, 2011; Kazemi, 2014; Moghaddam et al., 2015; Coe, 2010; Gutierez, 2015; Allen, 2015). The process involves a group of teachers who collaboratively plan, teach, reflect and re-teach a lesson. These four cycles of lesson study has been used in Japan since the 1870s during Meji government by primary school teachers. In that time education schools where not managed by the national government so educational researchers and policy makers tried to find new methods in order to improve the teaching styles (Sato, 2008, cited in Dudley, 2013; Makinae, 2010).

Reflection is a necessary component of learning how to teach. It is the process of thinking critically about experiences and actions that enables teachers to connect theory and practice, and to develop more sophisticated thinking style of teaching and learning. Teachers should care more about what to teach and how to reflect on their actions in order to promote learning objectives which is central to successful teaching and as the result develops learning.

In a lesson study cycle choosing the research lesson is a very important; it is only a by-product of the reflective processes that include a more profound understanding of the
lesson objectives, how the students learn and an improved pedagogical knowledge (Campbell, 2003). As Tsui and Law (2007) stressed, since the focus of the investigation is on the lesson and learning not the individual teacher, LS encourages a safe environment for collaboration which in turn may increase self-efficacy and self-confidence of the teachers.

5. Method

Based on the research question a survey method was employed to measure teacher's viewpoint on implementation of lesson study in EFL classes.

This study was conducted on female senior high schools supervised by the Research Department of Shiraz Education General Office. The total number of female teachers in District Two of Shiraz Education Office was 52 at the time. The final sample of the study comprised 15 teachers who were selected by cluster random sampling. Lesson study procedures were conducted in their classrooms in order to find out the impact of lesson study on their teaching and learning procedures and find out their viewpoints toward lesson study.

For collecting data of the study, a set of questions with close ended answers were chosen. This expert-made questionnaire was used in the MA thesis of Mohammad Taghi Emadi. The validity of the questionnaire was evaluated through content validity. In order to validate its suitability of the test with the research objectives and to clarify the test items, the written questionnaire was checked and revised by Emadi’s supervisor. The items were, afterwards, revised by three professors and three PhD students in the field. At last, it was evaluated through pilot study among 30 teachers for the final check and was analyzed to know about ambiguity of the items, appropriateness of the questions with items, and to know if the items matched the teachers' level of teaching. The reliability of the questionnaire was determined through Cronbach Alpha Coefficient, which equaled (0.92) by using the pilot study results through SPSS 18 software (Emadi, 2008).

This questionnaire had 20 items, eight of which were about the impact of lesson study in teaching methodology, five were about the impact of lesson study on students learning process, two of them were about the impact of lesson study on in-service teaching programs, three items were about practical performance of lesson study and two items were about the cooperative impact of lesson study on teachers. A Likert scale format was used for the questionnaire that ranged from 1 to 5 (1. Strongly agree; 2. Agree; 3. Neither agree nor Disagree; 4. Disagree; 5. Strongly disagree).

For conducting LS, the first step is to form a team. The number of teachers in the experimental group was 15 so there were three teams, each containing five teachers which collaboratively taught in five different classes. The teachers of each team had to gather according to the time table they had (at least two sessions before starting the study) in order to discuss and write the lesson syllabus and to articulate the goals of the lessons which were going to be taught. In order to achieve the goals a daily syllabus was designed based on the grammar points which were taught. For the purpose of this study the grammar structures were conditional sentences type one and two. Each team analyzed and planned for the study i.e. talking about how to observe and collect evidence of the learners' learning difficulties during the process.

The next step was the teaching process. One of the members of each team was selected as a volunteer to teach the first lesson based on the syllabus while the others carefully observed the learners learning process based on the responses they gave and the reactions they had during the teaching process. After finishing the teaching phase, the
teachers of each team had a reunion again and discussed what they had already observed and reflected on the teaching process. The teachers revised the syllabus based on their observations where the learners had the most difficulties. By revising it is meant that some parts were added and some parts were omitted based on the learners' difficulties and leanings.

Next, another member of the team (in some groups the same teacher again) re-taught the lesson based on the revised syllabus in another class and the others observed, reflected, collected data and noticed if there were any improving changes in the students' learning process. Since the grammatical syllabuses which were chosen were product oriented, the process continued in some classes to the extent that the teachers fully achieved their predetermined goals. There were two grammar points chosen for the study so these procedures were performed for each individually.

Then the questionnaires were administered to teachers participated in the study after finishing the LS procedures. The teachers fulfilled the different questions in Likert scale format. This survey helped to find the answer of the research question.

6. Results
In this part the data related to teachers' viewpoint is analyzed using descriptive statistics. The frequency and the percentage of items were compared in order to describe the teachers' viewpoint of how the teachers in experimental group viewed lesson study implementation in their classrooms.

As it was mentioned before the survey related to teachers' viewpoint were consisted of 20 items which were categorized in five different parts. The descriptive statistics of the data collected from the participants showed that teachers in lesson study group had distinguishably a positive viewpoint toward the implementation of lesson study in their classrooms. Table 6.1 presents the percentage of the different parts of the survey.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items of the questionnaire</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Nor agree</th>
<th>Neither disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Number of items in the survey</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Impact of lesson study on teaching methodology</td>
<td>31.7%</td>
<td>41.7%</td>
<td>23.35%</td>
<td>3.35%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Impact of lesson study on learning process</td>
<td>29.3%</td>
<td>34.7%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Impact of lesson study on in-service teaching programs</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Practical performance of lesson study</td>
<td>24.4%</td>
<td>53.3%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cooperative impact of lesson study</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>33.4%</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
<td>0%</td>
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The first part consisted of items 2, 5, 6, 8, 12, 13, 15 and 20 which are about the impact of lesson study on teaching methodology. As it is clear about 73.4% of teachers...
agreed (31.7% strongly agreed and 41.7% agreed) that lesson study helped them choose a proper technique to be used in their classroom and in some ways developed their teaching style. Among the remaining 23% about 3.3% of the teachers did not believe on the impact of lesson study on teaching which is very little on the whole.

The impact of lesson study on learning process of the students was the second part of the survey. Describing data from Items 1, 4, 14, 16 and 17 showed that about 64% (29.3% strongly agreed and 34.7% agreed) had a positive view that lesson study can improve learning process. The percentage of teachers who did not think that lesson study is helpful for the students is 4% which is not very significant.

The third part includes items 3 and 9 which discussed about the impact of lesson study on in-service programs. The statistics showed that lesson study, on teachers' viewpoint, would be beneficial to be taught in in-service training programs. About 66.6% of the participants agreed (33.3% strongly agreed and 33.3% agreed) that they preferred lesson study implementation to in-service training. Only 3.4% of the teachers disagreed on this items.

The fourth part was practical performance including items 10, 11 and 18. The descriptive data showed that more than 77.7% (24.4% strongly agreed and 53.3% agreed) of the participant had positive view on lesson study implementation. This high percentage showed that teachers viewed lesson study that can be practiced in different levels and for different subjects. The percentage of teachers who disagreed on these items was 2.3%.

Items 7 and 19 described the collaborative work of teachers through lesson study procedures. The data showed that 60% of the teachers (20% strongly agreed and 40% agreed) had the idea that lesson study improved collaborate work between teachers. 6.6% of teachers did not agree on these items.

Practical performance of lesson study had the highest ranking (77.7% positive) and collaborative work of teachers had the lowest ranking (60% agreed) amongst all the parts. None of The participants did not choose strongly disagree for any items of the questions.

Figure 6.1 provides the visual graph of teachers’ viewpoint on different items of the questionnaire
7. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this study suggest that performing LS procedures in classrooms will help English language teachers to promote their teaching and help them get the characteristics of effective professional developments in their work. Most teachers had an appositive attitude toward using lesson study in their classrooms which is in line with what Ektefai Nejad (2006) suggested. The reason may be that, in this model teachers found a significant difference between lesson study and other traditional professional development. Teachers noticed the strong and weak points of their teaching. In fact lesson study provided teachers to talk about ideas they never thought about (Moghaddam et al., 2015) when they experience a collaborative teaching practice.

The impact of lesson study on teaching methodology was obvious. The reflection, peer review and revision on teaching process by other teachers during teaching process enabled them to modify the teaching technique they use in order to get the most effective style which leads to students' educational achievement.

Teachers' viewpoint on the impact of lesson study on in-service programs was positive. As Sarkar Arani (2006; 2015) stated, in-service teachers' training requires the teachers to study some pre-designated books to pass in order to receive a certificate in professional development but Japanese lesson study emphasizes learning by doing. Participating in practical experiments instead theoretical ones is also verified what Kazemi (2003) claims to be an ineffective professional development.

The impact of lesson study on students’ learning process was the other part that teachers agreed on positively. This is similar to Rock and Wilson’s (2005) findings. The reason behind this may be the revision of the teaching process as stated by Emadi (2008). An effective professional development entails learning and lesson study is seen as a tool for professional development.

The last part indicated the collaborative work among teachers which is another key feature of lesson study. Moghaddam (2015) indicated that in Iran most of teachers’
professional development is done individually because they just rely on tests. This part has the least agreement among all. As Sarkar areni (2008) noted, one of the most important parts of lesson study is collaborative working of teachers and teachers should open the doors to their colleagues if they want to give and receive reflect.

To wrap up the findings of the study regarding the teachers’ viewpoint on lesson study implementation, a noticeable positive viewpoint was observed on the practical performance of lesson study and its effects on teachers’ methodology improvement which leads to students learning advancement. It was surprising to say that none of the participants had chosen "strongly disagree" in any items. This indicated that lesson study was beneficial for them in some ways. In fact they considered lesson study as a model to promote their teaching knowledge (pedagogical content knowledge) when sharing ideas and reflecting on teaching process.

The only considerable remark is that teachers were not satisfied with cooperative work of teachers as much as the other items this may be because lesson study in Iran lacks a strong cooperative culture as stated by Kazemi (2014) and that most of activities in Iran tend to be done individually(Moghaddam et al., 2015). Thus, teachers did not have an efficient concept of how to plan and perform lesson study.
References


Raouf, A. (2000). Developing Teacher Training Center Perspective. Educational tools publication, the educational research and planning organization. Tehran.


Appendix I
Teachers' Viewpoint on Practical Implementation of Lesson Study Questionnaire

Dear colleagues,

These questions are followed by the lesson study procedure you performed in your classrooms. Its aim is to understand the teachers’ viewpoint on the implementation of lesson study. I request you to read each statement carefully and choose the answer which is similar to your own opinion.

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<td>1. Lesson study brings changes to students' learning activities</td>
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<td>2. Lesson study is helpful for effective teaching process</td>
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<td>3. Lesson study can be considered as an in-service training program</td>
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<td>4. Lesson study makes teachers more confident for the students' learning process</td>
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<td>5. Lesson study empowers teachers in teaching process</td>
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<td>6. Lesson study help teachers to figure out teaching deficiencies</td>
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<td>7. Lesson study promotes teachers’ cooperation in an effective teaching process</td>
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<td>8. Lesson study improves teachers’ professional development</td>
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<td>9. Lesson study is more preferable then other in-service programs</td>
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<td>10. Lesson study is an opportunity for observing teaching process</td>
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<td>11. Lesson study can be conducted and performed in Iran</td>
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<td>12. Lesson study is beneficial for improving teaching methodology in different school subjects</td>
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<td>13. Lesson study promotes teaching profession</td>
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<td>14. Lesson study motivates students to study more</td>
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<td>15. Lesson study is beneficial for elementary school teachers</td>
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<td>16. Lesson study causes the students to trust their teachers more</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>Lesson study improves students learning</td>
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<td>Lesson study can be used for different school subjects</td>
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<td>Lesson study leads to more cooperation between colleagues</td>
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<td>Lesson study is useful for high school teachers</td>
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