

Teacher Autonomy and Preferences in Professional Development: A Comprehensive Survey of Florida Educators

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Abstract

Most educators around the world are required to participate in professional development activities in order to renew certification or licensure and ensure employees are up to standard. This study examined the professional development needs of 1,167 in-service teachers in Florida, United States, through a comprehensive survey. Findings revealed discrepancies between the current decision-making process for teachers' professional development and their preferences. Teachers expressed a strong preference for autonomy in identifying their professional development needs, as well as a desire for more diverse formats, such as teacher observations and conference attendance. Additionally, the study found that teachers highly value professional development activities during designated days set aside by the school system and express interest in incorporating college or university settings into their experiences. The survey results also highlighted teachers' preferences for effective professional development experiences, encompassing four key components: addressing what teachers need to know, demonstrating how to do it, suggesting best practices on implementation, and leaving time for specific questions. Furthermore, teachers demonstrated a clear understanding of their professional development needs, covering a range of topics such as effective teaching practices, classroom management, and integrating technology. Based on these findings, the study proposes a centralized professional development system, allowing teachers to input their needs and search for approved opportunities, ultimately enhancing the quality and effectiveness of professional development programs.

Keywords: teachers, professional development, centralized professional development system

Introduction

Professional development refers to many types of educational experiences related to an individual's work. Doctors, lawyers, educators, accountants, engineers, and people in a wide variety of professions and businesses participate in professional development to learn and apply new knowledge and skills that will improve their performance on the job. Many fields require members to participate in ongoing learning approved by the profession, sometimes as a requirement for keeping their jobs. Professionals often also voluntarily seek new learning.

In education, the term professional development may be used in reference to a wide variety of specialized training, formal education, or advanced professional learning intended to help

administrators, teachers, and other educators improve their professional knowledge, competence, skill, and effectiveness (Education Reform, 2013). It helps educators increase their knowledge and skills to address students' learning challenges. In practice, professional development for educators encompasses an extremely broad range of topics and formats. For example, professional development experiences may be funded by district, school, or state budgets and programs, or they may be supported by a foundation grant or other private funding source. They may range from a one-day conference to a two-week workshop or to a multiyear advanced-degree program. They may be delivered in person or online, during the school day or outside of normal school hours, and through one-on-one interactions or in group situations. They may be led and facilitated by educators within a school or

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provided by outside consultants or organizations hired by a school or district (Education Reform, 2013).

Research defines "effective professional development" as structured professional learning that results in changes in teacher practices and improvements in student learning outcomes. Effective professional development must include thoughtful planning and careful implementation with feedback (Mizell, 2010). According to the researchers, effective professional development must include the following components: content-focused, incorporates active learning, supports collaboration, uses models of effective practice, provides coaching and expert support, and offers feedback and reflection (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Educators benefit most by learning in a setting where they can immediately apply what they learn -in the school where they work. However, other professional development may occur at an educator's school district office or professional development center/school, a third-party site such as an education service center, corporate office, or learning center; another school, school system, state, or a foreign country, a college or university (summer or evening courses, or institutes), local, state, or national conferences, seminars, or workshops or online (Mizell, 2010).

The typical modes of professional development include but are not limited to (1) individual reading/study/research, (2) study groups among peers focused on a shared need or topic, (3) observation: teachers observing other teachers, (4) coaching: an expert teacher coaching one or more colleagues, (5) mentoring of new educators by more experienced colleagues, (6) team meetings to plan lessons, problem solve, improve performance, and/or learn a new strategy, (7) faculty, grade-level, or departmental meetings, (8) online courses, (9) college/university courses, (10) workshops to dig deeper into a subject, (11) conferences to learn from a variety of expertise from around the state or country, (12) whole-school improvement programs and (13) proprietary programs by private vendors (Mizell, 2010; Smet, 2022).

There are numerous ways and resources for teachers to find and participate in professional development opportunities. One of the most accessible ways for teachers to discover professional development opportunities is through online platforms and social media. Educational websites, blogs, and forums often share information about upcoming workshops, webinars, and conferences. By joining these online communities, teachers can not only stay informed about the latest events but also engage in discussions and share experiences with fellow professionals (Mizell, 2010; Rodesiler, 2017). Another valuable resource for teachers is their local educational agencies and professional associations. These organizations often provide a variety of professional development opportunities tailored to the needs of their members (Budiwati, 2019; Humes, 2001). School districts and educational institutions also play a vital role in offering professional development opportunities for teachers. Many schools organize in-house training programs, workshops, and seminars that are specifically designed to address the learning needs of their teachers (Rutter, 2017; Zulfitri, 2020). Teachers who are interested in pursuing higher education or obtaining specialized certifications can explore opportunities offered by universities and colleges. Many institutions provide graduate programs, professional certificates, and continuing education courses designed to enhance the skills and knowledge of educators. These programs not only allow teachers to deepen their understanding of their subject matter but also provide them with the latest pedagogical approaches and strategies (Avdeeva, 2020; Learning Forward, 2017; Parsons et al., 2019). Lastly, professional development conferences and workshops are other excellent ways for teachers to learn about new teaching strategies, educational trends, and technologies. These events often feature expert speakers, panel discussions, and hands-on sessions, providing valuable learning experiences and networking opportunities. Teachers can search for conferences and workshops relevant to their fields by visiting websites of educational organizations, professional associations, or event management platforms (Rosen, 2018; Taylor et al., 2011).

Professional development allows teachers to engage in discussions that challenge their beliefs and create new understandings (Parsons et al., 2019; Rodesiler, 2017). It also allows teachers to develop relationships with each other, expand

their professional networks, and foster learning (Parsons, 2019). Teachers improve their practices and increase their quality and student learning through professional development (Pharis et al., 2019). Professional development yields three levels of results: (a) educators learn new knowledge and skills because of their participation; (b) educators use what they learn to improve teaching and leadership; and (c) student learning and achievement increase because educators use what they learned in professional development. The results of professional development can be assessed through techniques such as surveys, tests, observations, video recordings, and interviews. If administrators become better leaders and teachers become more effective and apply what they learn so that students achieve at higher levels, professional development is worth the cost (Mizell, 2010).

While few educators would argue against the need for the importance of professional development, specific programs, and learning opportunities may be criticized or debated for any number of reasons, especially if the professional development is poorly designed, executed, scheduled, or facilitated or if teachers feel that it is irrelevant to their teaching needs and day-to-day professional responsibilities, among many other possible causes. Teachers often complain that professional development does not address the real challenges they face in their schools and classrooms (Mizell, 2010). They also suggest that the professional development activities usually are not relevant to their teaching (Parsons et al., 2019). States, school districts, and school administration regularly conduct needs assessments using data from surveys and interviews to identify areas of professional learning most needed and desired by educators. Data from these sources can help ensure that professional learning is not disconnected from practice and supports the areas of knowledge and skills educators want to develop (Mizell, 2010).

In this study, we aim to explore the professional development experiences and preferences of in-service teachers in Florida, United States, and propose a Centralized Professional Development System based on the survey results. This research will provide insights into the current state of professional development for educators, identify areas for improvement, and offer recommendations for enhancing the quality and effectiveness of professional development programs.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to collect and analyze data about in-service teachers' professional development activities and determine their current professional development needs.

Objective

The primary objective of the study was to investigate the professional development experiences and preferences of in-service teachers in Florida, United States. Through the data collection, researchers aimed to propose a Centralized Professional Development System grounded in the survey's findings.

Research Questions

1. What are the current professional development experiences and preferences of in-service teachers in Florida, United States?
2. What insights can be gathered about the present state of professional development for educators, and what are the areas that require improvement?
3. What are the current professional development needs of in-service teachers, and how can the quality and effectiveness of professional development programs be enhanced?
4. How can a Centralized Professional Development System be designed based on the findings of the survey?

Methodology

Participants

Ten thousand nine hundred fifty-two (10,952) in-service teachers located in the state of Florida were invited via email to

participate in this study by completing an online questionnaire. One thousand one hundred sixty-seven (1,167) participants completed the entire questionnaire. The participating teachers represent a diverse range of roles, grade levels, and genders.

Table 1, most of the participants were female, accounting for 84.32% (984) of the respondents. In contrast, male participants represented a smaller portion at 15.68% (183). In total, there were 1,167 participants who completed the entire questionnaire.

Table 2 provides a breakdown of the respondents based on their current position. Content Area Teachers, such as those who teach English, Math, or Social Studies, made up the largest group with 52.44% (612). General Education Teachers, who typically teach all subjects in preschool or early elementary, accounted for 17.31% (202). Support teachers, including those who work with ESOL, ESE,

or Gifted students, represented 15.25% (178) of the participants. Additionally, Elective or Special Area Teachers made up 11.40% (133), while the "Other" category, which may include administrators or other educational roles, accounted for 3.60% (42).

Table 1
Tabulation of Participants

Gender	<i>n</i>	%
Female	984	84.32
Male	183	15.68
Total	1,167	100

Table 2
Role at the Teachers' Current Position

Current position	<i>n</i>	%
Content Area Teacher (English, Math, Social Studies, etc.)	612	52.44
General Education Teacher (all subjects - preschool, early elementary)	202	17.31
Support teacher (ESOL, ESE, Gifted, etc.)	178	15.25
Elective or special area teacher	133	11.40
Other	42	3.60
Total	1,167	100

Table 3 outlines the grade levels in which the participating teachers were primarily involved. The largest group of respondents worked at the Intermediate Level (grades 3-6), comprising 31.88% (372) of the total. Meanwhile, 22.79% (266) taught at the Secondary Level (grades 9-12), and 20.31% (237) worked at the Middle Level (grades 5-8). Teachers at the Primary Level (grades K-2) made up 15.85% (185) of the participants, while Vocational/Adult Level teachers accounted for 5.57% (65). The "Other" category, which may encompass various other education levels, represented 3.60% (42) of the respondents.

Table 3
Grade-level Teachers Primarily Involved in

Grade level of teachers	<i>n</i>	%
Secondary level (Grades 9-12)	266	22.79
Intermediate level (Grades 3-6)	372	31.88
Primary level (Grades K-2)	185	15.85
Middle Level (Grades 5-8)	237	20.31
Vocational/Adult level	65	5.57
Other	42	3.60
Total	1,167	100

Instruments

The survey instrument employed in this study was developed through a combination of researcher-created questions and items from the Standards Assessment Inventory (SAI) in order to explore in-service teachers' professional learning experiences. The SAI, a 50-item survey designed by Learning Forward (2017), assesses teachers' perceptions regarding the alignment of their professional

learning with the Standards for Professional Learning. In addition to incorporating selected SAI items, the researchers included several supplementary questions that delved deeper into aspects such as decision-making, setting, and time allocation for professional learning. Furthermore, demographic data was also collected to provide supplementary insights, resulting in a total of 62 items within the survey instrument.

Results

Decision Making in Professional Development Need Assessments

In the research paper, several survey questions were focused on understanding the decision-making process concerning teachers' professional development needs, activity selections, and time periods. The findings, as presented below, reveal that although most professional development needs assessments are conducted by school districts, teachers demonstrate a preference for self-identification of their needs through professional development plans.

Table 4 highlights the primary decision-makers responsible for determining teachers' professional development needs at their current schools. Most respondents, 54.67% (638), reported that their school district (or school board) is responsible for assessing and deciding their professional development needs. In contrast, 27.59% (322) of the participants stated that they personally assess and decide their needs through a Professional Development Plan. School administration plays a role for 15.94% (186) of the teachers, while the "Other" category accounted for 1.80% (21) of the responses, which may include alternative sources of decision-making.

Table 4
At Your Current School, who Decides Mostly on Your Professional Development Needs?

Responses	<i>n</i>	%
My school district (or school board) assesses and decides my professional development needs	638	54.67
I assess and decide my professional development needs (Professional Development Plan)	322	27.59
My school administration assesses and decides my professional development needs	186	15.94
Other	21	1.80
Total	1,167	100

Table 5*Who do you Think Should be the Main Decision Maker About Your Professional Development Needs?*

Responses	<i>n</i>	%
Myself (Professional Development Plan)	1009	86.46
My school district (or school board)	96	8.23
My school administration	62	5.31
Other	00	0.00
Total	1,167	100

Table 5 explores teachers' perspectives on the preferred decision-maker for their professional development needs. A significant majority, 86.46% (1009), believe that they should be the primary decision-makers through a Professional Development Plan. Conversely, 8.23% (96) of respondents think that their school district (or school board) should hold this responsibility, and 5.31% (62) feel that the school administration should be the key decision-maker. Interestingly, no participants chose the "Other" category as their preferred decision-making source.

This section of the survey results indicates a discrepancy between the current decision-making process for teachers' professional development needs and their preferences. While most assessments are conducted by school districts, teachers express a strong desire for autonomy in identifying their needs through professional development plans. This insight may inform future strategies and policies in addressing teachers' professional development requirements.

The next section of the survey delves into the decision-making process surrounding the selection of professional development activities for in-service teachers. The findings demonstrate that despite most of these activities being determined by school districts and administration, teachers express a preference for personally identifying the type of professional development activities they engage in.

Table 6 presents the current distribution of responsibility for selecting appropriate professional learning activities, such as courses and workshops, once teachers' professional development needs have been determined. Nearly half of the respondents, 47.73% (557), indicated that their school district (or school board) selects their professional learning activities. School administration is responsible for this selection for 26.74% (312) of the participants. Meanwhile, 22.37% (261) of the teachers reported that they personally choose their professional learning activities. The "Other" category, which may encompass alternative decision-making sources, accounted for 3.17% (37) of the responses.

Table 6*Once Your Professional Development Needs are Determined, who is Currently Responsible for Selecting Appropriate Professional Learning Activities (courses, workshops, etc.)?*

Responses	<i>n</i>	%
My school district (or school board) selects my professional learning activities	557	47.73
My school administration selects my professional learning activities	312	26.74
I select my professional learning activities	261	22.37
Other	37	3.17
Total	1,167	100

Decision-Making in Selection of Professional Development Activities

Table 7 examines teachers' preferences regarding who should be responsible for selecting appropriate professional learning activities. A significant majority, 89.89% (1,049), believe that they

should be the ones to select their professional learning activities. In contrast, only 3.26% (38) of respondents think that their school administration should be in charge of the selection, while 3.61% (52) feel that their school district (or school board) should hold this responsibility. The "Other" category was the preferred decision-making source for 2.40% (28) of the participant.

Table 7*Who Should be Responsible for Selecting the Appropriate Professional Learning Activities (courses, workshops, etc.)?*

Responses	<i>n</i>	%
I should select my professional learning activities	1,049	89.89
My school administration should select my professional learning activities	38	3.26
My school district (or school board) should select my professional learning activities	52	3.61
Other	28	2.40
Total	1,167	100

This section of the survey results also reveals a discrepancy between the current decision-making process for selecting professional development activities for in-service teachers and their preferences. While most activities are determined by school districts and administration, teachers overwhelmingly prefer to have autonomy in identifying the type of professional development activities they engage in.

Decision Making in Selection of Time Period for Professional Development

The survey collected data on when educators typically engage in professional development activities and when they would prefer to

engage in these activities. These results provide insights into the current trends in professional development timing and preferences among educators.

Table 8 presents the distribution of responses regarding when educators typically engage in professional development activities. The majority of respondents (63.07%, *n* = 736) reported engaging in professional development during days a school system sets aside solely for this purpose. Other common engagement times were after school on an educator's own time (11.83%, *n* = 138), at school but before classes begin or after they end (9.00%, *n* = 105), during the summer and other school breaks (8.14%, *n* = 95), and during the regular school day (7.03%, *n* = 82). A small percentage (.94%, *n* = 11) of respondents selected the "Other" option.

Table 8
When do you Typically Engage in Professional Development Activities?

Responses	n	%
During days a school system sets aside solely for professional development	736	63.07
After school, on an educator's own time	138	11.83
At school, but before classes begin or after they end	105	9.00
During the summer and other school breaks	95	8.14
During the regular school day	82	7.03
Other	11	.94
Total	1,167	100

Table 9 provides information on when educators would like to engage in professional development activities. The preference for engaging in professional development during days a school system sets aside solely for this purpose was even stronger in this table, with 83.12% ($n = 970$) of respondents selecting this option. This suggests that educators highly value these designated professional development days. Other preferences included after school on an educator's own time (7.88%, $n = 92$), during the regular school day (4.97%, $n = 58$), at school but before classes begin or after they end (2.83%, $n = 33$), and during the summer and other school breaks (.60%, $n = 7$).

Comparing the results from Tables 8 and 9, it is evident that educators' preferences align with the current trend of engaging in professional development activities during designated days set aside by the school system. Moreover, there is a clear preference for having professional development opportunities during these designated days rather than during other times, such as after school, during the regular school day, or during school breaks. This preference may be due to the convenience and focus provided by having dedicated time for professional development, as well as the potential for collaboration and networking with colleagues during these days. The data from this section of the survey indicate that most educators are engaging in professional development activities during designated days set aside by the school system, and this timing is highly preferred by the respondents.

It is essential for school systems and professional development providers to continue offering and supporting these dedicated

professional development days, as they are highly valued by educators and are likely to contribute to a more effective and collaborative learning experience.

Decision-Making in Selection of Settings for Professional Development Activities

In addition to the timing of professional development activities, the survey also collected data on where these activities typically occur and where educators would prefer them to take place. These results can provide insights into the effectiveness of current professional development locations and potential areas for improvement.

Table 10 presents the distribution of responses regarding where educators' professional development activities typically occur. Most respondents (80.21%, $n = 936$) reported that their activities take place in their school district office or professional development center/school. Other common locations included a third-party site such as an education service center, corporate office, or learning center (8.23%, $n = 96$), online (web-based) (7.03%, $n = 82$), and other locations (1.63%, $n = 19$). Less common locations were another school, school system, state, or a foreign country (1.20%, $n = 14$) and a college or university (summer or evening courses or institutes) (.94%, $n = 11$). Only a small percentage (.77%, $n = 9$) of respondents reported attending local, state, or national conferences, seminars, or workshops as their typical professional development activity location.

Table 9
When Would you like to Engage in Professional Development Activities?

Responses	n	%
During days a school system sets aside solely for professional development	970	83.12
After school, on an educator's own time	92	7.88
During the regular school day	58	4.97
At school, but before classes begin or after they end	33	2.83
During the summer and other school breaks	7	.60
Other	7	.60
Total	1,167	100

Table 10
Where do your Professional Development Activities Typically Occur?

Responses	n	%
An educator's school district office or professional development center/school	936	80.21
A third-party site such as an education service center, corporate office, or learning center	96	8.23
Online (web-based)	82	7.03
Other	19	1.63
Another school, school system, state, or a foreign country	14	1.20
A college or university (summer or evening courses or institutes)	11	.94
Local, state, or national conferences, seminars, or workshops; or	9	.77
Total	1,167	100

Table 11 provides information on where educators would like to have their professional development activities. While the preference for having activities at the school district office or professional development center/school remained the most popular choice (49.10%, $n = 573$), there was a substantial increase in the preference for a college or university setting (summer or evening courses, or institutes) (31.02%, $n = 362$). This suggests that educators may value the additional knowledge

and resources provided by higher education institutions. Other preferences included online (web-based) (13.62%, $n = 159$), a third-party site such as an education service center, corporate office, or learning center (2.66%, $n = 31$), and other locations (2.14%, $n = 25$). Preferences for another school, school system, state, or a foreign country (.77%, $n = 9$) and local, state, or national conferences, seminars, or workshops (.69%, $n = 8$) remained low.

Table 11*Where would You Like to have Your Professional Development Activities?*

Responses	n	%
An educator's school district office or professional development center/school	573	49.10
A college or university (summer or evening courses or institutes)	362	31.02
Online (web-based)	159	13.62
A third-party site such as an education service center, corporate office or learning center	31	2.66
Other	25	2.14
Another school, school system, state, or a foreign country	9	.77
Local, state, or national conferences, seminars, or workshops; or	8	.69
Total	1,167	100.00

Comparing the results from Tables 10 and 11, it is evident that while the majority of professional development activities currently take place in a school district office or professional development center/school, there is a growing preference for utilizing college or university settings for these activities. This may be due to a perceived higher quality of education and resources available at these institutions, as well as the potential for collaboration with other educators and experts in the field.

The data from this section of the survey indicate that while most educators' professional development activities currently take place in their school district office or professional development center/school, there is a notable preference for incorporating college or university settings into their professional development experiences. School systems and

professional development providers may consider partnering with higher education institutions to offer more diverse and potentially higher-quality professional development opportunities that align with educators' preferences.

Decision-Making in Selection of Professional Development Formats

The survey also collected data on the types of professional development formats educators typically participate in and their preferred formats. These results can provide insights into the effectiveness of different professional development formats and potential areas for improvement in meeting educators' preferences.

Table 12*What Kinds of Professional Development Formats Are You Typically Offered to Participate in?*

Responses	n	%
Faculty, grade-level, or departmental meetings	533	45.67
Team meetings to plan lessons, problem solve, improve performance, and/or learn a new strategy	317	27.16
Whole-school improvement programs	129	11.05
Workshops to dig deeper into a subject	76	6.51
Study groups among peers focused on a shared need or topic	53	4.54
Coaching: An expert teacher coaching one or more colleagues	40	3.43
Online courses	19	1.63
Total	1,167	100.00

Table 12 presents the distribution of responses regarding the types of professional development formats educators typically participate in. The most common formats were faculty, grade-level, or departmental meetings (45.67%, $n = 533$) and team meetings to plan lessons, problem-solve, improve performance, and/or learn a new strategy (27.16%, $n = 317$). Other formats included whole-school improvement programs (11.05%, $n = 129$), workshops to dig deeper into a subject (6.51%, $n = 76$), study groups among peers focused on a shared need or topic (4.54%, $n = 53$), coaching with an expert teacher (3.43%, $n = 40$), and online courses (1.63%, $n = 19$).

Table 13 provides information on the types of professional development formats educators would prefer to participate in. Notably, observation of other teachers emerged as the most preferred format (29.91%, $n = 349$), followed by attending

conferences to learn from a variety of experts from around the state or country (23.14%, $n = 270$). Preferences for team meetings (20.39%, $n = 238$) and faculty, grade-level, or departmental meetings (17.22%, $n = 201$) were still present but lower than their current prevalence. Other preferences included online courses (4.20%, $n = 49$), college/university courses (1.97%, $n = 37$), and individual reading, study, or research (1.20%, $n = 23$). Comparing the results from Tables 12 and 13, it is evident that while faculty and grade-level meetings and team meetings are the dominant formats for professional development currently, educators express a strong preference for additional formats, particularly observation of other teachers and attending conferences. These preferences may be due to the perceived value of learning from experienced peers and diverse expertise in different settings.

Table 13*What Kinds of Professional Development Formats Would You Prefer to Participate in?*

Responses	n	%
Observation: teachers observing other teachers	349	29.91
Conferences to learn from a variety of expertise from around the state or country	270	23.14
Team meetings to plan lessons, problem solve, improve performance, and/or learn a new strategy	238	20.39
Faculty, grade-level, or departmental meetings	201	17.22
Online courses	49	4.20
College/university courses	37	1.97
Individual reading, study, research	23	1.20
Total	1,167	100.00

The data from this section of the survey indicate that there is a discrepancy between the current professional development

formats offered and educators' preferences. To better align with educators' preferences, school systems, and professional

development providers may consider offering more opportunities for teacher observation and conference attendance. By diversifying professional development formats, educators may benefit from a more comprehensive and engaging learning experience that caters to their individual needs and preferences.

Professional Development Needs Assessment

The survey's final section asked participants to identify their most emergent professional development needs. Respondents were asked to select only one topic that would be most beneficial

for them at this time. The results provide insights into the areas where educators feel they need the most support and guidance.

Table 14 presents the distribution of responses regarding the most beneficial professional development topics for educators. The topics selected were Effective Teaching Practices (34.36%, $n = 401$), Classroom Management (16.88%, $n = 197$), Content - Subject Specific (English, Math, Social Studies, etc.) (12.77%, $n = 149$), Integrating Technology into Teaching (11.05%, $n = 129$), Assessment (10.28%, $n = 120$), Dealing with ESOL students (5.40%, $n = 63$), Parental Involvement (4.80%, $n = 56$), Dealing with ESE Students (4.46%, $n = 52$), and Other (2.83%, $n = 33$).

Table 14

If Available, Which One of the Following Professional Development Topics Would be the Most Beneficial for You At This Time?

Topics	<i>n</i>	%
Effective teaching practices	401	34.36
Classroom management	197	16.88
Content - subject specific (English, Math, Social Studies etc.)	149	12.77
Integrating technology into teaching	129	11.05
assessment	120	10.28
Dealing with ESOL students	63	5.40
Parental involvement	56	4.80
Dealing with ESE students	52	4.46
Other	33	2.83
Total	1,167	100.00

Discussion

The results of this study revealed that teachers have clear preferences and insights regarding their professional development. Teachers desire a greater voice in their professional development decisions, emphasizing the importance of autonomy in identifying their needs and selecting appropriate activities. They also express a preference for effective professional development experiences, characterized by four key components: addressing what they need to know, demonstrating how to do it, providing best practices on implementation, and allocating time for questions. Additionally, teachers demonstrate a clear understanding of their professional development needs, highlighting their readiness to engage in targeted growth opportunities. To address these preferences and needs, the study suggests the implementation of a centralized professional development system, enabling teachers to easily access and participate in relevant, high-quality programs while ensuring their voices are heard throughout the process.

Teachers Want their Voice in their Professional Development

In this study, over one-third of the participating teachers reported having little to no input in various aspects of their professional development learning decisions, including the identification of their professional development needs, the selection of activities, and the scheduling and location of these activities. The teachers overwhelmingly expressed a desire for increased control in these decisions. Understanding that teachers value autonomy in identifying their professional development needs, selection of professional development activities, and the time and place of these activities, policymakers and educational leaders may consider implementing changes that accommodate and support this preference (Desimone & Garet, 2015; Desimone & Stuckey, 2014; DuFour, 2016). This can lead to more efficient and effective professional development experiences that genuinely engage teachers and contribute to the improvement of the educational process (Sancar et al., 2021; Smet, 2022).

One potential approach to addressing this preference is to create a flexible and customizable professional development framework that allows teachers to determine the most suitable activities, timeframes, and locations for their professional growth (Gathara, 2019; Humes, 2001; Rosen, 2018). This could involve offering a range of professional development options, such as

online courses, workshops, and seminars, from which teachers can choose based on their individual needs, interests, and schedules. By providing a variety of options, teachers can engage in professional development at their own pace and in a manner that suits their personal and professional circumstances (Rutter, 2017).

Another strategy could be to establish a system for ongoing communication and feedback between teachers, school administration, and district-level authorities (Jun, 2014; Taylor et al., 2011). This could involve regular meetings, surveys, and other communication channels that allow teachers to express their preferences and concerns regarding their professional development experiences. In turn, policymakers and educational leaders can use this feedback to make informed decisions and adjustments that better cater to teachers' needs and preferences (Andeeva, 2020; Carlson et al., 2017).

Encouraging collaboration and peer support among teachers can also contribute to a more autonomous and engaging professional development experience. By fostering a culture of collaboration and shared learning, teachers can collectively identify their professional development needs, explore various learning opportunities, and support one another in their growth. This collaborative approach not only empowers teachers but also promotes a sense of community and shared responsibility for continuous improvement (Budiwati, 2019; Zein, 2017).

Lastly, providing targeted training and resources for teachers to effectively assess their professional development needs and make informed decisions about their learning experiences is essential. This could include offering workshops and guidance on self-assessment techniques, goal-setting strategies, and best practices in selecting and scheduling professional development activities. With the necessary skills and knowledge, teachers can confidently navigate their professional growth with greater autonomy and ownership (Meesuk et al., 2021; Sancar et al., 2021).

By implementing these strategies and policies, educational institutions can create a more supportive, empowering, and engaging environment for teachers' professional development. This, in turn, can lead to improved teacher performance, job satisfaction, and overall educational outcomes (Guskey & Yoon, 2009; Jacob & Lefgren, 2002; Mizell, 2010).

Teachers Prefer Effective Professional Development

It is noteworthy that a significant number of teachers expressed clear preferences for effective professional development (PD)

experiences. Their suggestions for an effective PD program encompass four key components, each of which contributes to a comprehensive and practical learning experience for educators: (1) tell what teachers need to know, (2) demonstrate how to do it, (3) suggest best practice on implementation, and (4) leave time for specific questions.

Firstly, teachers emphasized the importance of PD programs addressing what they need to know in order to enhance their teaching practices. This may include updates on educational policies, emerging teaching strategies, or subject-specific content. By addressing these essential topics, PD programs can ensure that teachers are well-informed and equipped with the necessary knowledge to improve their classroom performance (Ramos – Rodríguez et al., 2022).

Secondly, the participants highlighted the value of demonstrations on how to put new strategies and methods into practice. This could involve live demonstrations, video recordings, or interactive workshops where teachers can observe and engage with the practical application of the new techniques. These demonstrations provide a clear and tangible understanding of how the strategies can be implemented in real classroom settings, enabling teachers to visualize and adapt these methods to their own teaching contexts (Kelly et al., 2022; Zulfitri, 2020).

The third component emphasized by the teachers is the provision of best practices for implementing new teaching and learning strategies. This may include guidelines on lesson planning, classroom management, and assessment techniques that align with the newly introduced strategies. By offering clear and actionable best practices, PD programs can support teachers in incorporating these new approaches into their daily routines in a seamless and effective manner (Beijaard et al., 2004; DuFour, 2016).

Lastly, the participants stressed the importance of allocating time for specific questions and discussions during PD sessions. This allows teachers to clarify any doubts, share their experiences, and engage in collaborative problem-solving with their peers and facilitators. Providing dedicated time for questions and dialogue fosters a deeper understanding of the new strategies and methods while also promoting a supportive learning environment (Mizell, 2010).

The teacher participants in this study expressed a strong preference for professional development programs that are comprehensive, practical, and engaging. They particularly value programs that involve actual teachers demonstrating the effective implementation of new teaching and learning strategies, as this provides a relatable and authentic learning experience. By incorporating these components into PD programs, educational institutions can better support and empower teachers in their ongoing professional growth (Zein, 2017).

Teachers Know their Professional Development Needs

The survey results show that teachers have a clear understanding of their professional development needs. This insight sheds light on the areas in which teachers seek to enhance their skills and knowledge, ultimately contributing to the improvement of their teaching practices and overall educational outcomes. The identified professional development needs encompass a range of topics, including effective teaching practices, classroom management, content-specific knowledge, integrating technology, assessment, dealing with ESOL students, parental involvement, and addressing the needs of ESE students.

Effective Teaching Practices: Teachers recognize the importance of honing their skills in effective teaching practices to ensure that their students receive the highest quality education. By engaging in professional development that focuses on evidence-based instructional strategies, differentiated instruction, and collaborative learning, teachers can continually adapt and refine their teaching methods to cater to the diverse needs of their students. This ultimately leads to increased student engagement, understanding, and academic achievement.

Classroom Management: Teachers understand that effective classroom management is pivotal in creating a positive learning environment where students feel safe, supported, and motivated

to learn. Professional development in this area may involve exploring strategies for establishing clear expectations, fostering positive student-teacher relationships, and addressing behavioral issues in a proactive and constructive manner. By enhancing their classroom management skills, teachers can facilitate a more productive and harmonious learning environment for their students.

Content - Subject Specific (English, Math, Social Studies, etc.): Developing and maintaining content expertise in their specific subjects is crucial for teachers to effectively deliver curriculum and support student learning. Professional development in this area may involve staying up to date with advancements in subject-specific knowledge, exploring innovative teaching methods, and identifying resources that enhance the learning experience. By deepening their understanding of the subject matter, teachers can more confidently and effectively engage their students in meaningful learning experiences.

Integrating Technology into Teaching: Teachers recognize the growing importance of incorporating technology into their teaching practices to foster 21st-century learning skills and enhance student engagement. Professional development in this area may involve training in the use of educational software, digital tools, and online resources, as well as strategies for effectively blending technology with traditional teaching methods. By embracing technology integration, teachers can create more dynamic and interactive learning experiences that cater to the digital landscape in which today's students thrive.

Assessment: Teachers understand the critical role that assessment plays in monitoring student progress, informing instructional decisions, and evaluating the effectiveness of their teaching practices. Professional development in this area may involve exploring various assessment methods, such as formative and summative assessments, as well as strategies for providing constructive feedback to students. By refining their assessment skills, teachers can more accurately gauge student understanding and tailor their instruction to address individual needs.

Dealing with ESOL students: As classrooms become more linguistically diverse, teachers acknowledge the need for professional development in working effectively with English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) students. This may involve exploring strategies for differentiating instruction, scaffolding language acquisition, and promoting cultural awareness and sensitivity. By enhancing their skills in working with ESOL students, teachers can better support the academic and social integration of this growing population.

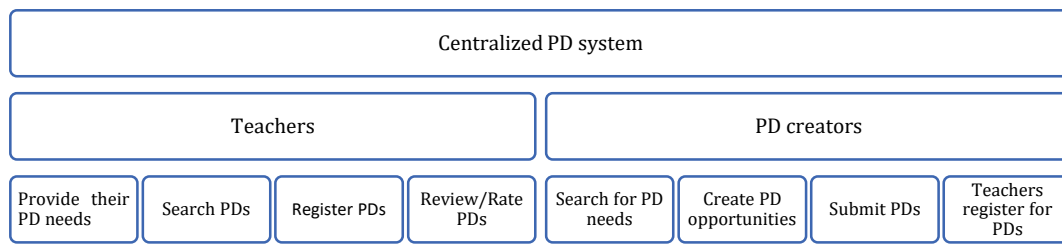
Parental Involvement: Teachers recognize the significant impact that parental involvement has on student success and well-being. Professional development in this area may involve learning strategies for effective communication with parents, fostering positive parent-teacher relationships, and engaging parents in their child's learning process. By strengthening their skills in promoting parental involvement, teachers can create a more collaborative and supportive educational community that benefits both students and their families.

Dealing with ESE Students: Teachers understand the unique challenges and opportunities associated with teaching Exceptional Student Education (ESE) students. Professional development in this area may involve learning strategies to accommodate diverse learning needs, implementing individualized education plans, and fostering an inclusive classroom environment. By enhancing their expertise in working with ESE students, teachers can better support their academic, social, and emotional growth of these learners, ensuring that all students have the opportunity to succeed.

Teachers need/want a centralized Professional System

Perhaps one of the most important results of the study is that participants strongly suggested a centralized professional development system in which teachers can input their professional development needs and search for available PD opportunities listed in the same system that is approved by the school district/board. The responses to open-ended questions provided enough detail for such a centralized system (Figure 1).

Figure 1
Design of Teacher-Preferred Centralized PD System



The proposed platform aims to streamline the process of identifying, registering, and participating in professional development courses and workshops for teachers. This platform will not only benefit the teachers but also the professional development creators, as it will provide them with insights into the demands and preferences of the educators. By offering a comprehensive system that addresses the needs of both parties, the platform will help in enhancing the quality and effectiveness of professional development programs.

The platform will facilitate a seamless flow of information and collaboration between teachers and professional development creators. Teachers will be able to input their professional development needs, search for available courses and workshops, register for the selected opportunities, participate in the programs, and review and rate the experiences. This will allow teachers to have a clear understanding of what is available and select the most relevant and beneficial professional development opportunities.

On the other hand, professional development creators will be able to search for the needs expressed by teachers, create opportunities that cater to those needs (online, hybrid, or face-to-face), and submit detailed information about their programs, including descriptions, syllabi, summaries, and sample lessons. This will help them to design and deliver effective and engaging courses and workshops tailored to the requirements of the teachers. Moreover, by receiving feedback and reviews from the participants, creators can modify and improve their offerings, ensuring continuous improvement and relevance.

The centralized online professional development platform will also offer several advantages over the traditional methods of searching for and participating in professional development opportunities. First, it will save time and effort for teachers by providing a one-stop-shop for all their professional development needs. They will no longer have to browse through multiple websites or rely on word-of-mouth recommendations to find suitable courses or workshops. Second, the platform will ensure that the professional development opportunities listed are approved by the school district or board, ensuring quality and credibility. Third, the platform will foster a sense of community among teachers and creators, as they can share their experiences, learn from each other, and collaborate to enhance their professional competencies.

In conclusion, the survey results highlight the need for a centralized online professional development platform that caters to the needs of both teachers and professional development creators. By providing a user-friendly and comprehensive system, this platform will enable teachers to access relevant and high-quality courses and workshops while creators can design and deliver programs that effectively address the requirements of the educators. Ultimately, this platform will contribute to the overall improvement in the quality of education and the professional competencies of the teachers.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore the professional development experiences and preferences of in-service teachers in Florida, United States. The findings of the study revealed a discrepancy between the current decision-making process for teachers' professional development and their preferences, emphasizing the need for increased autonomy and more diverse

professional development formats. The findings also highlighted the importance of aligning professional development opportunities with teachers' preferences, such as designated days for professional development, partnerships with higher education institutions, and incorporating observation of other teachers and conference attendance as part of their learning experiences. Additionally, the participants expressed a desire for more effective and comprehensive professional development programs that address their specific needs, such as effective teaching practices, classroom management, content-specific knowledge, integrating technology, assessment, dealing with ESOL students, parental involvement, and addressing the needs of ESE students.

Based on these findings, the research paper proposes the design of a Centralized Professional Development System that streamlines the process of identifying, registering, and participating in professional development courses and workshops for teachers. This platform will benefit not only the teachers but also the professional development creators, as it will provide them with insights into the demands and preferences of the educators, enabling them to design and deliver effective and engaging courses and workshops tailored to the requirements of the teachers.

In conclusion, the implementation of a Centralized Professional Development System, along with the consideration of teachers' preferences and needs, can lead to more efficient and effective professional development experiences that genuinely engage teachers and contribute to the improvement of the educational process. By fostering a supportive, empowering, and engaging environment for teachers' professional development, educational institutions can enhance teacher performance, job satisfaction, and overall educational outcomes.

Study Limitations

This study, as with any research endeavor, presents some limitations that should be acknowledged and taken into account when interpreting the findings. One of the most notable limitations is the small sample size ($n = 1,167$), which restricts the generalizability of the results. A relatively limited number of participants makes it challenging to extrapolate the findings to a broader population of teachers or educational settings, particularly considering the diverse backgrounds, experiences, and contexts of teachers across different regions.

Another significant limitation is the geographical scope of the study. Since it collected data exclusively from the state of Florida, the results may be influenced by specific regional factors, such as local educational policies, professional development programs, and cultural aspects. This restricts the applicability of the findings to teachers and educational settings outside of Florida. It is important to exercise caution while attempting to generalize these results to other states or countries with different educational systems and contexts.

Additionally, the cross-sectional design of the study provides a snapshot of teachers' perspectives and preferences at a single point in time. This design does not account for potential changes in teachers' needs and preferences that may occur over time, particularly as educational policies, practices, and technologies evolve. Longitudinal research would be beneficial to better understand the dynamic nature of teachers' professional development needs and preferences.

Despite these limitations, the study does offer valuable insights into teachers' perceptions of their professional development experiences. The results shed light on the aspects that teachers find most helpful and the areas that need improvement in order to enhance the effectiveness of professional development programs. This information can be useful for policymakers, administrators, and educators who are seeking to create more meaningful and impactful professional development opportunities for teachers in the future. However, it is important to keep these limitations in mind when interpreting the findings and considering their implications for practice and policy.

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