

“Gawe” Factors Affecting Teachers’ Barriers to Professional Development: The Albanian case

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Citation: Leka K. (2022) “Gawe” Factors Affecting Teachers’ Barriers to Professional Development: The Albanian case, *European Journal of Training and Development Studies*, Vol.9 No.3, pp.16-28

ABSTRACT: *The purpose of this study is to better comprehend the viewpoints of teachers in Durrës' pre-university schools regarding their professional development needs and the obstacles they face. The study explored three main factors that affect teachers' barriers to professional development in Albania such as teachers' gender, teachers' age, and teachers' working experience (Gawe Factors). SPSS 25 was used to evaluate the information gathered from 416 respondents via the questionnaire, in order to achieve a more thorough and professional study. The questionnaires were completed between September and October of 2022. The study gives light on the relationship between these variables and professional development obstacles and lays the foundations for further and more in-depth explorations regarding the factors and barriers that teachers face in relation to their professional development*

KEYWORDS: Gawe, teachers, barriers, professional development, Albanian

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been an increase in teachers' interest in professional development. Globalization of society and economics, technological advancements, and more mobility exert increased pressure on education to meet high standards and improve quality, hence increasing the complexity and difficulty of teaching.

According to OECD (2019, p. 49) “Professional development is defined as activities that develop an individual’s skills, knowledge, expertise and other characteristics as a teacher.” Professional development in the teaching profession is also described as any action, plan, or plan of action intended to alter the attitudes and behaviors of instructors in order to increase student accomplishment (Guskey, 2002).

In the research on teacher education, however, training and development have been identified as two essential objectives. While In-Service Training (INSET) programs are the most prevalent type of teacher training, development programs emphasize teachers' long-term improvement (Freeman, 1989). According to Richards and Farrell (2005, p.4), development "serves a longer-term objective and aims to promote teachers' understanding of teaching and of themselves as instructors". Numerous aspects of a teacher's work often serve as the basis for reflective review.

Attending in-person or online courses or seminars, conferences where researchers present their work or discuss educational issues, enrolling in a degree program, making observational visits to other schools, engaging in peer or self-observation, and participating in formal mentoring arrangements are some of the most well-known professional activities. Participation in a network of professionals supporting children, in addition to mentoring activities is also an important professional development activity for teachers nowadays. Despite the need for professional development, instructors may confront obstacles such as challenging working circumstances, overcrowded classrooms, and lack of student respect. The emergence of numerous types of professional development may pose a systemic difficulty, but their effects may be lessened by collaboration issues between professional development organizations and organizations that evaluate instructors. The quality and scope of the instruments used to observe, oversee, and provide feedback to teachers on their instruction are in constant need of improvement.

Poorly structured seems professional development that is either nonexistent or episodic, as opposed to continuous and comprehensive. It frequently indicates financial restrictions, a lack of skilled facilitators, unpredictability, and logistical difficulties. It may reflect funders' and politicians' preconceived notions about what teachers do and how students should learn. It may have a brief duration and be unrelated to it.

This article reviews many professional development studies released between the years of 2000 and 2020. Following a comprehensive review of numerous papers and books, three hypotheses were evaluated in an effort to arrive at accurate results and recommendations:

- H1: There is a relation between gender and the barriers to professional development (G factor).
- H2: There is a relation between age and the barriers to professional development (A factor).
- H3: There exists a relation between years of working experience and the barriers to professional development activities (WE factor).

LITERATURE REVIEW ON BARRIERS TO TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

To construct a quality designation for continuing professional development, it is essential to conduct an effective needs analysis that combines the curricular, instructional, material, and pedagogy knowledge bases of the teachers. Knowledge bases give conceptual underpinnings for professional development.

Professional development should be a crucial strategy for enhancing education, increasing teaching standards, and enhancing student learning (Girvan et al., 2016; and Witte & Jansen, 2016). High-quality professional development can result in, among other positive effects, the provision of chances for peer learning, the strengthening of individual teaching skills, and the creation of a healthy school culture (Willemse et al., 2015).

Personalized professional development is the most efficient method of instruction for educators (Meissel et al., 2016). Adult learning theory emphasizes the significance of continual, high-quality professional development, which demands educators to become adult learners for life

(Hiebert et al., 2002). Many types of professional development activities exist. Certain activities focus on goal-setting for children's learning, development, and well-being, as well as joining a network of child-care professionals.

Additional duties include unit planning and curriculum development as stated (Pehmer et al., 2015). Daresh & Arrowsmith, 2003 also stressed the obligations of new instructors, such as the preparation of classes, the monitoring of student conduct, and the adherence to school policies. Furthermore, Yohon (2005) in a survey of new teachers, highlighted five challenges that teachers face, that are: assessment instruments, student motivation, curriculum development, lesson planning, and standards documentation. finding and understanding new leadership research advances (Witte & Jansen, 2016). Moreover, programmers and decision-makers desire more in-depth studies demonstrating the impact of professional development design aspects on program success (Witte & Jansen, 2016).

According to studies, certain professional development programs do not meet the threshold necessary to have a substantial impact on their practice or student learning (Wei et al., 2010). Many instructors view professional development as a duty consisting of a one-day in-service training or workshop, with little or no expectation of what the instructor should do with the information or how the instructor should share it with colleagues (Guskey & Yoon, 2009). Birman et al. 2000 stated that longer-duration activities give higher subject-area material focus, more opportunities for active learning, and greater coherence with teachers' prior experiences. This is reinforced by Garet et al., (2001) 's assertion that longer professional development sessions are more likely to allow for an in-depth discussion of the topic, pedagogy, and student conceptions/misconceptions. The authors also feel that lengthy activities will provide teachers with additional time to test out new classroom strategies and obtain feedback on their teaching (Sedova et al., 2016). Barrera-Pedemonte, (2016) offered nine alternatives for professional development in the survey: courses/workshops, education conferences or seminars, qualifying programs, observation visits to other schools, and membership in professional organizations. A network of teachers, individual or group research on a topic, mentoring, peer observation, and coaching. Other studies also examine these and additional forms (Erickson et al., 2016).

Collective engagement is the desire for professional development shared by groups of teachers from the same school, department, and class (or grade level) (Garet et al., 2001). Through collective engagement, professional development programs are intended to contribute to a shared culture among all participants. Consequently, teachers at the same school, grade level, or subject develop a shared understanding. Common subjects may include educational goals, methods, problems, and solutions (Maggioli, 2012).

Gender, age, and working experience (GAWE) as factors affecting teachers' professional development

There are many studies that identify some teachers' structural factors that can influence teachers' professional development.

In a study report prepared by the Australian Government Quality Teacher Program, on 2002-2003, factors that affect the impact of professional development programs are related, besides

other background variables, with teachers' gender and teacher's experience (Ingvarson et al., 2005, p. 26).

A study conducted by TALIS (OECD, 2019, p. 55) showed no statistical significance difference between gender and professional development of teachers. However, according to this study, the largest differences in favor of female teachers were in Mexico (around six days more on average), followed by Poland and Korea (around four days more), though none of these differences is statistically significant. However, male teachers led in a number of countries, the largest differences being reported in Portugal and Italy (more than four days) and Turkey (less than three days). Again, these differences are not statistically significant. According to the same study, on average, the amount of professional development that teachers received decreased with the age of the teacher and the correlations between age groups are all statistically significant. This indicates that on average less experienced teachers receive more days of professional development than more experienced teachers (Ibid).

Focusing on these variables, the study, the results of which are presented below, is an attempt to examine how these variables affect the professional development of teachers in the Albanian context.

METHODOLOGY

The quantitative method was used for this study. The use of the questionnaire allows us to analyze and understand the needs and barriers faced by teachers in professional development programs, as well as allowing comparing or drawing valuable conclusions on what teachers need depending on age, gender, or working years. In order to obtain a more detailed analysis the computer program SPSS 25 was used to elaborate on the gathered data. The questionnaires were filled out by teachers and school principals from Durres municipality during the period of September- October 2022.

Research instruments

In addition to the analysis of the literature review, part of this study is also the analysis of the questionnaire which consists of four sections.

Section I: provides information about respondents' age, gender, location, and education;

Section II: the professional development activities that teachers attended in the last 12 months;

Section III: teachers' need for specific professional development activities;

Section IV: the barriers faced by teachers in professional development activities;

Section V: activities available for professional development.

The sampling

The sample of this study is made up of 416 respondents, teachers, and school principals from Durres municipality during the period September - October 2022. Teachers were asked about their professional development activities during the 12 months prior to the survey. The sample was randomly chosen from 16 pre-university schools in Durres city, the second biggest city in Albania, after Tirana, the capital of Albania. The population size was 1054 teachers and the

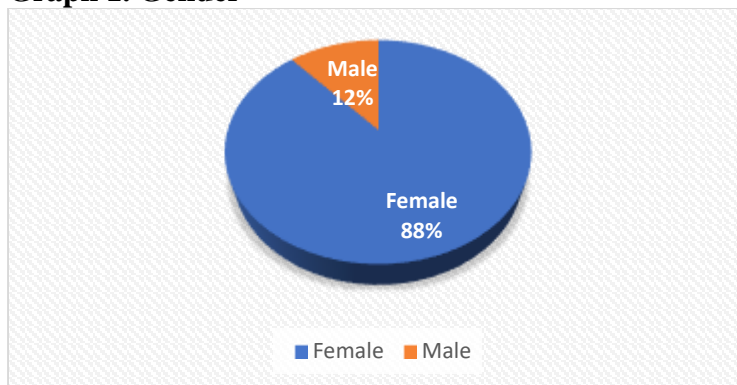
number of teachers who compiled the questionnaire was 416. The following formula was used to calculate the sample, the error margin was 3.66, the confidence level 95%, the population proportion 60% and the z score was 1.96.

$$n' = \frac{n}{1 + \frac{z^2 \times \hat{p}(1-\hat{p})}{\epsilon^2 N}}$$

Respondents' distribution by gender

The information this study obtained from the 416 questionnaires shows that most of them were females 88% and 12% are males (Graph 1).

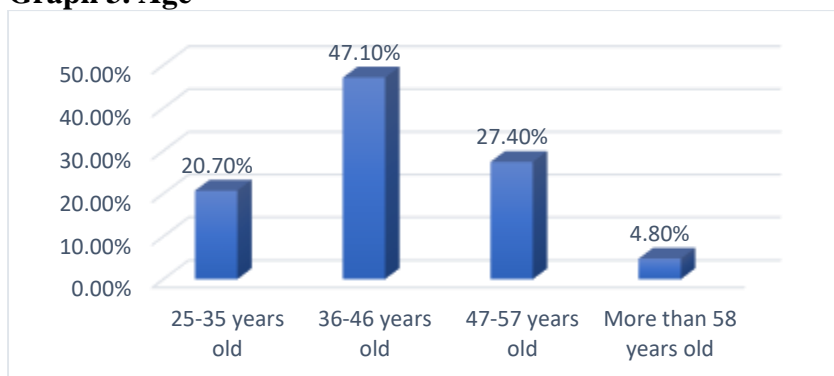
Graph 1. Gender



Respondents' distribution by age

Data in the following graph show that 47.1% of respondents are between 36-46 years old and only 4.8% are more than 58 years old.

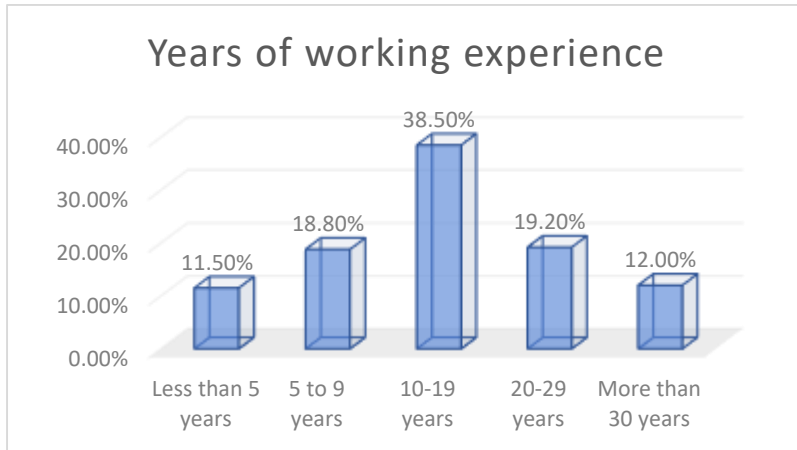
Graph 3. Age



Respondents' distribution by working experience

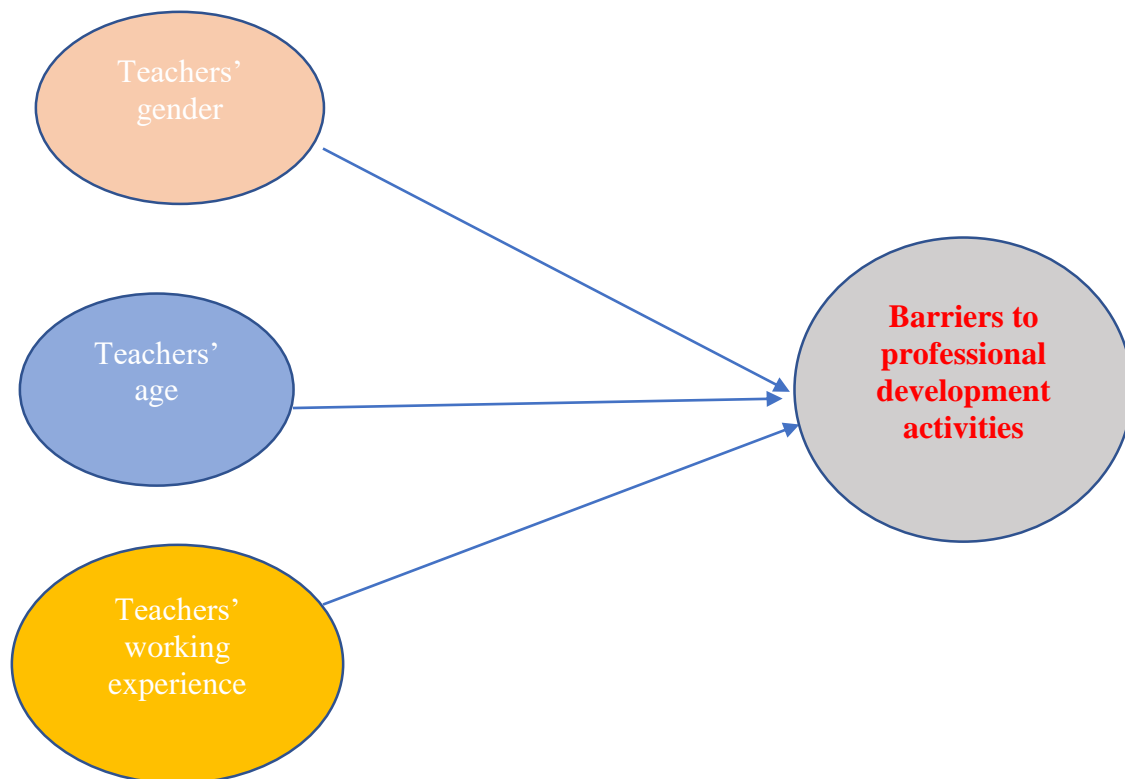
The most part of respondents have been teaching for 10-19 years that is to say 38.5% while 11.5% have been teaching for less than 5 years and 12% for more than 30 years (Graph 3).

Graph 4. Years of working experience



3.2 Statistical model

The analysis of this study refers to the following statistical model:



Crosstabulation between gender, age, and years of working experience as independent variables and the barriers to professional development activities, as dependent variables have been measured.

Independent variables are:

- Teachers' gender (G factor)
- Teachers' age (A factor)
- Teachers' years of working experience (WE factor)

Depended variables is:

- Barriers to professional activities

MAIN FINDINGS

To analyze the three hypotheses, we first look at the test of the reliability test that showed that Chrombach alpha = 0.824

Crosstabulation, based on the chi-square test ($p < 0.05$), showed that there is a tendency to use online courses and seminars mostly by professionals of all categories. The second choice for the professional activities mostly attended is: "Courses/seminars attended in person".

Three less frequented activities from the professionals are mentoring activities, conferences where researchers present their research or discuss educational issues, observation visits to other schools, and, despite the years of experience.

Regarding the first hypothesis, *there is a relation between gender and the barriers of professional development*, the study revealed some findings as following:

According to the respondents' responses of the questionnaire, the most difficult barrier for males and females is the conflict with the work schedule they face. For male teachers, this percentage is 29.2% which is greater than for female teachers is 22.8%. For 15.2% of female teachers' problems related to the attitudes of colleagues is another barrier to professional development while for 12.5% of male teachers individual problems is faced as a barrier to their professional development. For 12.5% financial problems is also another important barrier that they have. Attitudes of families (indifference) is faced as a barrier for 8.2% of female teachers.

Table 1. The relation between teachers' gender and barriers on professional development

The barriers	Gender		Total
	Female	Male	
Negative attitudes towards courses	10 2.7%	2 4.2%	12 2.9%
Professional development conflicts with my work schedule	84 22.8%	14 29.2%	98 23.6%
Monotony of course content	46 12.5%	4 8.3%	50 12.0%

Ineffectiveness of course trainers	14 3.8%	2 4.2%	16 3.8%
Knowledge outside of content	4 1.1%	0 0.0%	4 1.0%
Place of training	38 10.3%	4 8.3%	42 10.1%
Course planning problem (Not suitable for teachers)	8 2.2%	2 4.2%	10 2.4%
Insufficient number of courses	18 4.9%	0 0.0%	18 4.3%
Barriers related to school functioning	14 3.8%	4 8.3%	18 4.3%
A lot of work and a lack of time	2 0.5%	0 0.0%	2 0.5%
Problems related to the attitudes and practices of managers	6 1.6%	0 0.0%	6 1.4%
Problems related to the attitudes of colleagues	56 15.2%	4 8.3%	60 14.4%
Individual obstacles	14 3.8%	6 12.5%	20 4.8%
Financial problems	20 5.4%	6 12.5%	26 6.3%
Family and health problems	2 0.5%	0 0.0%	2 0.5%
Lack of professional development opportunities	2 0.5%	0 0.0%	2 0.5%
Attitudes of families (indifference)	30 8.2%	0 0.0%	30 7.2%
Total	368 100.0%	48 100.0%	416 100.0%

Regarding the second hypothesis: H2 : *There is a relation between age and the barriers to professional development (A factor)*, crosstabulations , based on chi square test ($p < 0.05$) showed that professional development conflicts with the work schedule is seen as a barrier to their professional development for all teachers, but the teachers aged between 36-46 face it more than the others (30.6%). 10% of teachers who are more than 58 years old have fewer

difficulties with this barrier, while 21.1% of teachers aged 47-57 and 14% of teachers aged 25-35 see it as a barrier.30.0% of teachers aged 58 years old or more answered that the monotony of course content is a barrier for them. Interestingly the same percentage of 30.0% of teachers aged 58 years old or more face as another barrier the attitudes of families (indifference).

Table 2. The relation between teachers' age and barriers on professional development

The barriers	Age				Total
	25-35	36-46	47-57	More than 58	
Negative attitudes towards courses	0 0.0%	4 2.0%	8 7.0%	0 0.0%	12 2.9%
Professional development conflicts with my work schedule	12 14.0%	60 30.6%	24 21.1%	2 10.0%	98 23.6%
Monotony of course content	8 9.3%	26 13.3%	10 8.8%	6 30.0%	50 12.0%
Ineffectiveness of course trainers	0 0.0%	14 7.1%	2 1.8%	0 0.0%	16 3.8%
Knowledge outside of content	0 0.0%	2 1.0%	2 1.8%	0 0.0%	4 1.0%
Place of training	8 9.3%	14 7.1%	18 15.8%	2 10.0%	42 10.1%
Course planning problem (Not suitable for teachers)	2 2.3%	4 2.0%	4 3.5%	0 0.0%	10 2.4%
Insufficient number of courses	12 14.0%	4 2.0%	2 1.8%	0 0.0%	18 4.3%
Barriers related to school functioning	6 7.0%	12 6.1%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	18 4.3%
A lot of work and a lack of time	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	2 1.8%	0 0.0%	2 0.5%
Problems related to the attitudes and practices of managers	2 2.3%	0 0.0%	4 3.5%	0 0.0%	6 1.4%
Problems related to the attitudes of colleagues	16 18.6%	26 13.3%	16 14.0%	2 10.0%	60 14.4%
Individual obstacles	2 2.3%	8 4.1%	8 7.0%	2 10.0%	20 4.8%
Financial problems	2	18	6	0	26

	2.3%	9.2%	5.3%	0.0%	6.3%
Family and health problems	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	2 1.8%	0 0.0%	2 0.5%
Lack of professional development opportunities	2 2.3%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	2 0.5%
Attitudes of families (indifference)	14 16.3%	4 2.0%	6 5.3%	6 30.0%	30 7.2%
Total	86 100.0%	196 100.0%	114 100.0%	20 100.0%	416 100.0%

Regarding the third hypothesis, *there exists a relation between years of working experience and the frequentation in professional development activities (WE factor)*, the crosstabulation analysis, based on chi square test ($p < 0.05$), showed that, only 4.2 % of teachers with more than 30 years of professional experience had confirmed that have participated in mentoring activities. There is a lack of orientation of teaching toward the research and there is a lack of interest in them to participate, only 5.1% of teachers with 5-9 years of working experience and 2.5 % of the respondents with 10-19 years of working experience with a total of only 1.9% of teachers and school leaders who attended conferences.

There is a lack of culture of observation also as an important activity that can help teachers to improve their professional skills. Only 2.5 % of respondents with 10-19 years of experience observed or were observed and 4.2% of teachers and school leaders with 30 years or more of experience, in total only 1.4%.

CONCLUSIONS

As this study revealed there are a number of obstacles to the successful implementation of professional development for teachers in Albanian context. The conflict with the work schedule, is evaluated as one of the biggest barriers for teachers' both males and females. Female teachers' development carrier problems are also related to the "attitudes of colleagues" while for male teachers "individual problems" is faced as a barrier to their professional development. Financial problems is also another important barrier that they have. Attitudes of families (indifference) is faced as a barrier mostly for female teachers.

The study also revealed that conflicts with the work schedule is seen as a barrier for all teachers, but the teachers aged between 36-46 face it more than the others, while teachers aged 58 years old or more answered that the monotony of course content as well as the attitudes of families (indifference) are the biggest barriers for them.

The study also showed that there is a lack of orientation of teaching toward the mentoring activities and the research and there is a lack of interest in teachers to participate in them. There is a lack of culture of observation also as an important activity that can help teachers to improve their professional skills, besides the working experience.

Because of these barriers the research revealed teachers' negative attitudes toward professional development, confirming the results of Guskey and Yoon, (2009) according to which professional development is considered by teachers as a duty consisting of a one-day in-service training or workshop, with little or no expectation of what the instructor should do with the information or how the instructor should share it with colleagues and students.

Recommendations

Taking into consideration this some measures should be undertaken in order to minimise the barriers to teachers regarding professional development, such as:

- Provide financial support for teachers to enable professional development. If the institutions provide this support, the teachers will feel more responsible to turn this institutional investment into an effective product for the school where they work.
- To encourage and motivate mentoring and observation, as very good methods for professional development. Creating a friendly approach in the application of these forms would promote the exchange of positive experiences among colleagues in order to improve teaching.
- Teachers, both males, and females, young and old, with less or more experience, should be helped to find a balance between their academic and emotional learning needs, especially those who are new and may be going through a lot of acculturation and adjustment. Teachers face increased pressure if the policy does not respond in this way, making it impossible for them to focus on what they perceive to be the much more crucial task of comprehending the cultural backgrounds, family and home situations, and emotional needs of their students. Participant choice should be allowed in the selection of professional development offerings by policymakers.
- There should be more focus on encouraging teachers in scientific research regarding issues that concern them. This new approach will help them develop professionally to understand their problems in depth and to address them in the right ways. The establishment of a motivational system that promotes and encourages this branch of professional development of teachers, would help reduce many other barriers in their professional development for both males and females, new and old teachers, with less or more years of experience.
- This study can be considered as a step to be followed by further and more in-depth explorations regarding the factors and barriers that teachers face in relation to their professional development

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