



An Investigation of Turkish Novice EFL Teachers' Perceptions of Lesson Study

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Abstract

This paper aims to investigate how three novice EFL teachers perceived Lesson Study, a Japanese professional development (PD) model, and its implications for their PD. This study was designed as a qualitative case study. The case in this study was three novice EFL teachers, who carried out Lesson Study during 2016-2017 fall term at the Department of Foreign Languages of a Turkish foundation university, and their implementation of the model. Data were collected using eight teacher reflective reports and audio recordings of 24 meetings. Data were analyzed through conceptualizing, coding and categorizing. Findings revealed that Lesson Study aroused teachers' enthusiasm for conducting research and it also encouraged them to focus more on learning than teaching; however, the model was deemed demanding by the teachers who struggled to get accustomed to the pace of it. They suggested that a mentor would facilitate the process. In terms of its contribution to PD, teachers noted that Lesson Study encouraged them to pursue PD and reflect on their classroom practice. Findings of this study suggest that Lesson Study might be integrated into the PD of novice EFL teachers with minor adaptations and the help of a facilitator. The model might address the PD needs of novice EFL teachers who seek to work in collaboration to reflect on their classroom practice.

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1. Introduction

The transition process from a teacher education program to their first real workplace experience is demanding for novice teachers. Varah, Theune, and Parker (1986) describe this transition process as a “sink or swim” situation in which novice teachers will either succeed in surviving in the profession or decide to leave it. The challenges novice teachers have to face in their initial years of teaching might put a great burden on teachers who

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have to deal with many confusions and tensions in an educational context (Farrell, 2006). If not adequately supported in this induction process, most novice teachers will feel isolated, stressed, inadequate, and frustrated (DelliCarpini, 2009). Pitton (2006) emphasizes that the teaching experiences of novice teachers are important determinants of their success; therefore, they should be given opportunities to reflect on their classroom experiences through professional development (PD).

Lesson Study, a Japanese PD model, is known to promote reflection, collaboration, observation and motivation (Cerbin, 2011; Dudley, 2015; Fernandez & Yoshida, 2004; Lewis & Hurd, 2011) and might therefore help novice teachers respond more effectively to the challenges of the teaching profession as well as facilitating their adaptation process. However, there seems to be only one study conducted in Turkey by Yalcin Arslan (2018) to explore how conducting Lesson Study will affect pre-service EFL teachers' teaching practices, but novice EFL teachers' perceptions of Lesson Study and its impact on their PD is an under-researched area in Turkey. This paper attempts to fulfill this need by addressing how Lesson Study is perceived by practicing EFL teachers who are new to the profession.

This study investigated how three novice EFL teachers implemented Lesson Study and how their Lesson Study implementation impacted their PD. The purpose was to find out the perceptions of the participant teachers regarding the Lesson Study model so that factors that might facilitate or hinder the implementation of the model could be discovered and necessary precautions could be taken.

1.1. Professional development for novice EFL teachers

Novice EFL teachers, sometimes called newly qualified teachers, are those who have completed their university degree in language teaching and have started teaching English in an educational setting “usually within 3 years of completing their teacher education program” (Farrell, 2012, p. 437). The first years of teaching are considered to be particularly important because it is during this time that teachers decide whether to continue or stop their teaching career (Faez & Valeo, 2012). Most novice teachers are required to fulfil the same tasks and respond to the same challenges as their colleagues who have a lot more experience than them (Farrell, 2012) and findings of research studies show that there are a number of issues that pose a problem for novice teachers. These issues are reported to be about managing a class (Akcan, 2016; McCormack & Thomas, 2003; Menon, 2012), curriculum and instruction-related challenges (Rogers & Babinski, 2002), teaching load (Farrell, 2006), and insufficient guidance and administrative support (Farrell, 2016). Gordon (1991) lists the difficulties that wait for novice teachers as unclear expectations, difficult work assignments, insufficient resources, isolation, and reality shock.

Making a meaningful difference in student learning is the principal aim of every educational institution, and research contends that this can be ensured through high-quality teaching (McRobbie, 2000). As Darling-Hammond (2012, p.9) points out “a highly skilled teaching force results from developing well-prepared teachers from recruitment through preparation and in-service professional development.” However, Farrell (2012) indicates that there is a gap between pre-service and in-service education of teachers who face many challenges, which, as stated above, might range from issues related to lesson planning to identity development. To better deal with the challenges in the first years of teaching, novice teachers should be offered effective PD opportunities. Gordon (1991) contends if these challenges are not addressed by schools, this results in teachers’ developing negative emotional and behavioral problems or their leaving the profession after two years.

Since novice teachers develop their capacity as professional teachers during the initial years of the profession, their in-service training is particularly important. They need to be supported in appropriate ways during their transition from being a student to becoming a teacher. However, the reality is that “supportive environments are the exception rather than the rule” (Farrell, 2012, p.436), and most novice teachers lack this kind of support or are not satisfied with the way their in-service training is designed and delivered. The reason for this dissatisfaction mostly results from being exposed to PD activities such as one-off workshops, seminars or courses during which teachers listen and leave. Borg (2015) lists many disadvantages of this kind of PD policy; teachers’ not taking ownership of their own PD, not playing an active and participatory role in deciding the content and the process of trainings, and overvaluing trainers’ knowledge and experience. Kearney (2015) suggests that although research demonstrates that PD helps novice teachers adapt to their profession, the question of how to develop and implement successful PD programs for novice teachers seem to be unanswered.

Research studies underline what aspects of PD novice teachers are unsatisfied with. Novice teachers do not have enough opportunities to observe their more experienced colleagues (Mann & Tang, 2012) and they perceive this as a drawback of the PD opportunities offered to them. Although deemed an important aspect of PD by novice teachers (Ekşi, 2010), sharing experiences and collaborating is reported to be lacking in PD offered to novice teachers (Baecher, 2012). Peer observation is known to contribute to PD because it facilitates collaboration among teachers (Kasapoğlu, 2002); however, most novice teachers lack this kind of support.

Visionary PD practices that are collaborative, inquiry-based, context-specific, classroom-based and teacher-led (Diaz-Maggioli, 2004) might be implemented to address the concerns stated above. As a PD model including many characteristics of visionary PD practices (Allison, 2014), Lesson Study might serve as an effective model for novice teacher PD.

1.2. Lesson study

Lesson Study as a form of PD blends many characteristics of visionary PD. Having originated in Asia and been especially popular in Japan since the late 1800s (Angelini & Alvarez, 2018), it spread to the west in the 2000s after the publication of Stigler and Hiebert's book, *The Teaching Gap* (2009). It can broadly be defined as “a form of systematic inquiry that has well-established practices and processes” (Cerbin, 2011, p. 4). Teachers engaged in Lesson Study work together to plan, teach, observe and analyze “research lessons” (Dudley, 2015). Research lessons are real classroom lessons with students, but what differentiates research lessons from usual classroom lessons is the fact that they are planned jointly by the Lesson Study team, audio and/ or video recorded, watched by two or more teachers and analyzed and modified in view of teachers' observations and student comments (Lewis & Hurd, 2011).

The model is known to contribute to teacher PD in important aspects. It promotes collegiality among teachers (Lewis & Hurd, 2011), encourages teachers to reflect on their lessons based on their own observations and their colleagues' comments (Fernandez & Yoshida, 2004), enables teachers to put themselves into their students' shoes, which raises their awareness about student learning (Lewis, 2002), and contributes to teachers' research skills and increases their motivation (Cerbin, 2011). Perry and Lewis (2009) report that Lesson Study improves teachers' and students' learning.

Although it offers a lot of benefits to teacher PD, Lesson Study has not gained much attention in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) around the world. It has recently been explored by researchers such as Tasker (2014) to understand how teacher PD is influenced by participation in Lesson Study. Yalcin Arslan (2018) analyzed how it affects the PD of pre-service EFL teachers in Turkey. However, the model is not widespread among Turkish EFL teachers and there are not many studies in the field of English Language Teaching that specifically aim to discover how novice EFL teachers practice the model and what issues and challenges they face in their implementations of Lesson Study (Coşkun, 2017). Taking this fact into account, this study aimed to explore how Lesson Study was perceived by and supported the PD of novice EFL teachers working at the preparatory program of a foundation university in Turkey.

The research questions addressed in this study were:

- How do novice EFL teachers perceive Lesson Study as a form of PD?
- In what ways does Lesson Study support novice EFL teachers' PD?

2. Method

This qualitative case study was conducted to develop our understanding of the nature of Lesson Study (Strauss & Corbin, 1994) when it is carried out by novice EFL teachers,

and to satisfy our curiosity about research participants' perspectives. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Fraenkel, Wallen & Hyun, 2011). The case in this study was three novice EFL teachers and their implementation of the Lesson Study model. It was designed as a holistic single case study, since the case was a "common case". (Yin, 2014).

2.1. Context of the study and the participants

The study was conducted at the English preparatory school of a Turkish foundation university in the fall semester of 2016-2017 academic year from October till February. The English preparatory school, at the time of the study, was offering general and academic English courses to 120 students with 18 EFL teachers.

Dudley's (2015) Lesson Study model had been piloted with the participation of three volunteer teachers in the spring semester of the 2015-2016 academic year and the possible issues that might be of concern to the researchers were determined and resolved (Bayram & Bıkmaz, 2018). The model, then, was introduced to the teachers in the department by the first author of this paper through an in-house presentation during which the pilot Lesson Study team also gave a talk about their Lesson Study experiences.

At the beginning of the 2016-2017 fall term, volunteer teachers were determined through a survey conducted at the school and the participants of the study were chosen among the teachers who had three or less years of teaching experience.

Table 1. Participant profile

Teacher	Gender	Age	Teaching Experience
T1	Female	24	1.5 years
T2	Female	24	1.5 years
T3	Male	26	3 years

As seen in Table 1, the participants of the study were three EFL teachers, one male and two females, whose ages ranged between 24 and 26. They had 12 hours of teaching load a week and had previously participated in traditional forms of PD activities within and outside the school. However, they had no experience of visionary forms of PD including Lesson Study.

2.2. Lesson study implementation

As stated earlier, the model was piloted and introduced to all the teachers in the English preparatory school a semester before it was implemented by the teachers taking part in this study. At the beginning of the fall term of 2016-2017, the three participant teachers came together and went through the following steps to implement the whole

Lesson Study process as suggested by Dudley (2015). The teachers held 24 meetings to finalize the Lesson Study process, each of which lasted approximately one hour.

Before the study, ethical permission was obtained from the university to access the setting and the participants. Participants were informed about the aim, duration, and requirements of the research and their consent was also obtained. The teachers were assured that their privacy would be maintained and the findings of the study would only be used for research purposes. They were also informed that they could withdraw from the study any time they wished, and their withdrawal would cause them no harm. Researchers tried to develop a trusting relationship with the participating teachers by being open to them regarding the aims of the study, respecting their time, energy, privacy and anonymity, and constantly negotiating with them throughout the process.

Step 1: Introduction to Lesson Study (Meetings 1 through 4): Although a pilot Lesson Study had been implemented to inform the participating teachers, they were also provided with Cerbin's (2011) book "Lesson study: Using classroom inquiry to improve teaching and learning in higher education" as a reference book since they needed more comprehensive information about the process as they would actively implement one themselves. They examined the book chapter by chapter as they proceeded and did whatever was suggested when deemed necessary.

In the meantime, they each wrote an essay on their teaching philosophies and then shared it so that they could get to know each other as professionals and talk about what their conceptualizations of teaching and learning were as well as how they implemented their philosophy in their classes.

Step 2: Finding a Focus (Meeting 5): Two teachers were offering Academic Presentation Skills Courses to Turkish freshman students and one of them was teaching General English to non-Turkish students who came to Turkey to pursue their MA studies. Their discussions regarding the problems their students faced centered on improving students' speaking skills. In light of this focus area, they each developed research questions and decided to work on how students outlined their speech before they gave an oral presentation, what they tended to include in their outlines and what were the reasons behind these tendencies.

Step 3: Planning the First Research Lesson (Meetings 6 through 12): Teachers collectively created the lesson plan for their first research lesson by paying special attention to students' needs and interests. This was observed to be a unique experience for teachers because they had never designed a joint lesson before. They also applied the backward design (Wiggings & McTighe, 2005) which enabled them to focus on learning outcomes before choosing instructional methods and assessment procedures.

Since Dudley's (2015) Lesson Study model required teachers to choose three case students from varying performance levels (high, average and low) to observe, teachers

selected their case students and created an observation protocol to facilitate their observations of these three case students. They also prepared consent forms to be signed by students before the first research lesson.

Step 4: Implementing the first Research Lesson: During the 70-minute research lesson, one of the teachers taught the lesson while the others observed and took detailed notes related to students' learning, especially focusing on the case students, their reactions to the instructions, their conceptions and misconceptions of the topic and the questions the students asked to their friends and teachers. The lesson was video recorded as well. After the lesson, each case student was invited for an interview (in Turkish) to be conducted by the teachers in the Lesson Study team. Questions asked to case students were; (1) What did you learn in this lesson? (2) What did you like most / least about the lesson? Why? (3) We will modify the lesson and implement it in another class, what do you suggest we should change? The interviews lasted almost five minutes each and were recorded.

Step 5: Reflection (Meetings 13 through 17): After the first research lesson, teachers watched the video recording of the lesson, listened to the audio recordings of the case student interviews and reviewed their observation notes. During the first reflection meeting, the teacher teaching the research lesson shared her reflections with the rest of the group, and her comments were followed by those of the observers. The teachers analyzed the research lesson in light of the following questions proposed by Cerbin (2011); (1) What did students learn as a result of the research lesson? (2) How did they learn? (3) How did the lesson work? (4) How did the lesson support student learning, thinking and engagement?

In reflection meetings, modifications to be made in the research lesson were agreed upon and the lesson plan for the second research lesson was, then, finalized.

Step 6: Repeating Steps 4 and 5 (Meetings 18 and 19): The implementation of and the reflection on the second and third research lessons were done as mentioned in steps four and five. Research lessons were implemented with the participation of 40 students in total.

Step 7: Sharing the Results (Meetings 20 through 24): For this step, the teachers, once again, analyzed all of the data they collected from three different research lessons, trying to come up with tendencies and similar patterns that would shed light on their research question. Based on their findings, they wrote a final report as suggested by Cerbin (2011) and also prepared an oral presentation to share their study and key findings with the rest of the teachers at school.

2.3. Data collection and analysis

Data in this study were collected through teacher reflective reports and audio recordings of meetings. All reflective reports were archived and meetings were

transcribed verbatim. All the data were merged and analyzed through content analysis to make inferences based on the research questions addressed in this study (Krippendorff, 2013). The transcriptions were repeatedly read by the researchers to assign codes to phrases. Codes were subsequently categorized into major themes. Researchers analyzed the data individually and compared their analysis constantly to achieve inter-coder reliability. To further establish the validity and the reliability of our findings, the analysis was shared with a teacher pursuing her PhD studies in ELT along with the participating teachers. The analysis was finalized after the modifications were made based on their suggestions.

Reflective Reports: Taking into account the fact that critically examining their experiences, teachers can better understand their professional practices and daily routines (Richards & Lockhart, 1994), the participant teachers were asked to write eight reflective reports during the planning, implementation, analysis and reporting phases of the study. The reports were written after each of these phases. Gibbs' (1988) reflective cycle was used to facilitate teachers' reflections. The teachers were given six questions to answer in their reflective reports considering the specific phase of the Lesson Study process they completed. The questions were: (1) What did you do? (2) How did you feel? (3) What went well and what didn't go so well? Why? (4) What lessons did you learn based on your experiences in this phase? (5) What would you do differently if you went through the same phase again? (6) How would you evaluate this phase regarding its impact on your PD? The reflective reports were written in teachers' native language and archived by the researchers.

Audio-Recordings of Meetings: The teachers had 24 meetings in total to finalize the Lesson Study process. Their meetings lasted approximately one hour each. Thinking that their discussions in those meetings could furnish the researchers with valuable insights into the teachers' understanding of the model, the teachers were asked to - upon their consent- audio record each meeting by their mobile phones and share the audio files with the researchers at the end of the process. The meetings were conducted in the teachers' native language. The data from reflective reports and audio-recordings of meetings were organized and archived by the researchers. The audio-recordings of the meetings were listened to and extracts from them which would help illuminate the research questions were transcribed verbatim.

The data coming from different sources were analyzed to reach a detailed understanding of the teachers' experiences. We went through the data by taking note of or highlighting key statements which we believed would help us understand how teachers experienced the Lesson Study process. The data was subjected to first cycle and second cycle coding methods as suggested by Saldana (2009). In the first cycle, descriptive codes along with in vivo codes were assigned to similar data chunks. In the second cycle, some codes were eliminated from the data set, yet some others which were

similar to each other were merged together. By reorganizing the initially coded data and through pattern coding, more common categories / themes were developed from the data set (Creswell, 2013). The coding was done separately by each researcher to increase the validity and the reliability of the findings. Intercoder reliability was calculated as suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994), and it was found to be 84%.

3. Results

3.1. Teachers' perceptions of lesson study

Our first research concern was to understand how the teachers perceived Lesson Study as a form of PD. The findings of the study indicated that Lesson Study was regarded by the teachers as a demanding process which, however, encouraged them to work in a more organized and systematic way. Findings further revealed that the teachers needed the guidance of a more experienced teacher to implement the process better.

First of all, the findings showed it took a lot of mental effort for teachers to understand the procedures of the Lesson Study model. They noted that:

“T1: It seems easy, but it actually is very demanding. It is an intensive model and it took some time for me to understand what it was.” (RR)

“T2: At first, I must admit that it scared me. I found the model confusing.” (RR)

“T3: Lesson Study is really a challenging model for teachers. It's like a puzzle, with a lot of unknowns.” (ARM)

The teachers added that Lesson Study had a systematic approach which required them to work in an organized and disciplined way. During the early phases of the process, the teachers seemed to struggle to get accustomed to the pace of the Lesson Study. They stated that:

“T1: It takes a good deal of discipline and organization to do Lesson Study, and this might be demanding for teachers like us.” (ARM)

“T2: You need to plan things carefully such as meeting times, observations and keeping records if you want to keep the model going smoothly, and this might be time-consuming at times.” (RR)

Lastly, the teachers highlighted that the model required the help of a mentor or facilitator who would offer guidance for the proper implementation of the process.

“T1: I wished to be monitored to be sure that we were on the right track.” (RR)

“T3: I would like to have a more experienced teacher to guide us through the process.” (ARM)

The teachers' perceptions about Lesson Study were observed to change especially after the analysis of the first research lesson because they experienced -in person- what one Lesson Study cycle (planning, implementation and analysis) looked like and how it should be applied. One of the teachers said "Things such as implementation, observation and analysis were gradually getting easier as we got accustomed to the model." Another teacher also commented "as we reached the end of the process, we thought that our hard work paid off and seeing the results of our study made us extremely happy and we felt like we finally discovered the delights of the Lesson Study experience."

The teachers also reported that Lesson Study generated their excitement about carrying out research as they became more and more curious while seeking answers to the research question.

"T1: Doing research was another thing that kept me focused during Lesson Study." (RR)

"T2: I have been excited about the results, from the beginning till the end." (ARM)

"T3: It was rather mysterious because we did not know what kind of answers for our research question we would get." (RR)

In addition, the teachers mentioned that they became more interested in learning as Lesson Study helped them turn their focus from teaching to learning. In other words, the model enabled them to be more learning-oriented.

"T1: Lesson Study reminded me that what students thought were as important as or even more important than what teachers thought about a lesson." (RR)

"T2: Lesson Study excited my curiosity about my students and my profession. It showed me that a lesson focusing on student learning would always be more effective than a lesson focusing only on teacher behavior." (ARM)

"T3: Considering the learning process is in the nature of Lesson Study and the model slowly trains you to focus on learning." (RR)

The findings of the study indicate that Lesson Study might seem very easy to conduct at the beginning. However, when teachers start to get involved in the different phases of the model, they tend to feel that implementing Lesson Study is more difficult than it seems. Within the scope of this study, this was especially the case for the planning and analysis phases. Another thing that caused problems for the teachers was the fact that the model had a cyclical pattern. So they had to finish one task before they started to do another one, which was reported to be not so easy considering the busy schedules of teachers. It was found out that the teachers were in need of a mentor teacher with experience both in teaching and the Lesson Study process to facilitate the implementation of the model.

The teachers in this study found the research component of the model motivating. Seeking answers to their research question helped them maintain their interest and motivation in the different cycles of the model. Another aspect of the model that generated teachers' motivation was its focus on pupils and their learning.

3.2. *How lesson study contributes to teacher PD*

Our second research concern was to explore the implications of Lesson Study for the PD of teachers. The findings showed us that the model might contribute to teacher PD in important ways. Firstly, it increases their motivation mostly because of the fact that it encourages teachers to collaborate.

“T1: Working together motivated us because we achieved more satisfying results whenever we worked collaboratively.” (RR)

“T2: When we got lost during the planning or analysis stages of the model, the atmosphere in the group lifted our spirits.” (ARM)

“T3: Thanks to my teammates, I believe that Lesson Study is a real motivation trigger.” (ARM)

Secondly, the teachers commented that Lesson Study created an opportunity to get their colleagues' and students' opinions about teaching and learning. They said that:

“T1: I have seen that different perspectives must be considered in the planning and teaching of a lesson.” (RR)

“T2: For the first time in my teaching career, I witnessed how my colleagues designed a lesson and created lesson materials.” (ARM)

“T3: I realized that I was designing lessons all alone. Lesson Study made it possible for me to hear what others think about a lesson.” (ARM)

In addition, the teachers underlined that observing students and the learning process was a great experience for them in that it changed their focus from teaching to learning and enabled them to recognize the real potential of their students.

“T1: I developed a new perspective into the learning process. Before this experience, I used to be a teacher who created lessons focusing solely on how I would teach them.” (RR)

“T2: Observing a lesson opens up windows into students' minds.” (RR)

“T3: Students surprised us in many ways. They responded in ways they had never done before. They came up with genuine ideas and suggestions. Seeing a lesson from their eyes is really different from what we think of it as teachers.” (RR)

Finally, teachers also commented that the analysis of research lessons facilitated reflection about the strengths and weaknesses of their classroom practice.

“T1: In the past I used to feel uncomfortable when something went wrong in my classroom, but now I see this as an opportunity to improve the lesson in a more conscious and careful way”. (ARM)

“T2: Lesson Study encourages you to think about your classroom practice, to research it in a way. And it helps you to do it taking the pluses and the minuses into consideration.” (ARM)

“T3: I used to think about my lessons before Lesson Study, but this was like a “I did this, but it didn’t work” kind of reflection. Now I know how deep I can go while reflecting, and reflection in a conscious way has become a habit for me.” (RR)

The results of this study demonstrate that Lesson Study enables teachers to work together, which results in a steady increase in their motivation. Discussing other teachers’ and students’ ideas about a research lesson was reported to be an eye-opening experience for teachers because in their daily practice they usually work in isolation. Student observations were reported to enlarge teachers’ view of their profession, enabling them to focus more on students and how they learn. The teachers also commented that by analyzing research lessons, they could become more reflective and consider more carefully what went well or bad in their lessons.

4. Discussion

This study presents findings about three novice EFL teachers’ perspectives of their Lesson Study implementation at a foundation university in Turkey. The findings of this study showed that Lesson Study is perceived to be a demanding model by teachers because of its systematic, collaborative and research-oriented nature, so care must be taken when implementing the model with novice teachers in order not to put another burden on their shoulders in addition to the challenges of being new in the profession. The teachers in our study suggested the presence of a more experienced teacher as a facilitator might greatly contribute to the implementation of the model as well as to raising teacher morale.

One of the aspects that makes experienced teachers different from novice teachers is that experienced teachers have a “deeper understanding of students and student learning” (Richards & Farrell 2005, p.30). Therefore, experienced teachers, acting as mentors, might offer invaluable help to novice teachers in their interpretations of student responses and reactions, which lie at the heart of Lesson Study.

Bieda, Cavanna, and Ji (2013) suggest a model called mentor-guided Lesson Study in which a mentor collaborates with the pre-service teachers during the different phases of the model. Pre-service teachers experiencing the model report that Lesson Study when guided by a mentor helps them focus their attention on student thinking. It has been also

found out that the model increases the mentors' capacity to facilitate the Lesson Study implementation of pre-service teachers, as well.

Our findings further suggested that working in a group increased teacher motivation. Teachers conducting Lesson Study felt an increased sense of motivation because the model provided them with a safe environment in which they could work in teams supporting each other at all times. Teachers' attitudes towards professional development are reported to improve when they practice Lesson Study. This might be attributed to the fact that because they enjoy the Lesson Study process, they find joy in learning professionally as teams functioning together for a shared purpose (Godfrey et al., 2019).

As suggested by Sali and Keçik (2018), writing lesson plans is challenging for novice teachers. Lesson Study benefits teachers in this regard by enabling them to incorporate different perspectives into their lesson planning, which is reported to facilitate the lesson planning process. In addition, the model includes lesson observations helping teachers observe how their lesson plans are put into action and what kind of reactions they receive from students in a real classroom setting. This is an invaluable opportunity for novice teachers who need to try out their ideas to see whether they work or not in their unique learning environment.

Our findings support the view of Day (1999, p.2) who argues that “teachers cannot be developed (passively). They develop (actively)” and argue that Lesson Study is a great tool to ensure the active participation of teachers in their own PD. Unlike common PD practices that are offered to novice teachers where the main mode of learning is individual rather than collaborative (Borg, 2015), Lesson Study creates a safe environment for teachers where they can openly share their ideas and participate in the decision making regarding the procedures of the model.

PD plays a key role in the improvement of the quality of teaching and learning (Muijs & Lindsay 2008), and our study suggests Lesson Study can serve this purpose because it benefits novice teacher PD in many ways. In her study, Yalcin Arslan (2018) explored how Lesson Study impacted the PD of pre-service EFL teachers and in line with the findings of this study, she found out that the model directed teachers towards learning-oriented professional growth by enabling them to discuss the relationship between teaching and learning.

Previous research findings resonate with the findings of this study. We found that the cooperative relationship among colleagues, as stated by Lewis and Hurd (2011), increased as a result of Lesson Study. This had a positive impact on teachers' motivation, a key factor in the PD of teachers especially in the early years of their career. Lesson Study is reported to improve teachers' motivation as well as their research skills (Cerbin, 2011). Exploring their ideas about teaching with the participation of a group of teachers who come from similar backgrounds is reported to increase the confidence of teachers, which might affect their motivation positively (Dotger, 2011).

Fernandez and Yoshida (2004) highlight that Lesson Study provides teachers with opportunities to reflect on their lessons. In this research, teacher reflection was reported to be facilitated by Lesson Study, as well. Our results are also in line with Lewis (2002) who assert that teachers' awareness about how students perceive lessons and in what ways they learn more effectively is facilitated through teachers' engagement in Lesson Study.

What practices in the classroom lead to more student learning is an important topic discussed by teachers engaged in Lesson Study (Coenders & Verhoef, 2019). Teachers in our study also reported that Lesson Study helped them become more learning focused. If teachers practice Lesson Study continually, this might improve their capacity as teachers who habitually question whether or not their teaching results in more student learning.

5. Conclusions

Freeman and Johnson (1998, p.413) suggest that “we as teacher educators must begin with the activity of language teaching and learning; the school and classroom contexts in which it is practiced; and the experience, knowledge, and beliefs of the teacher as a participant”. This study attempted to take this view into account and focused on teachers' teaching activities embedded in their school culture paying special attention to how they experience a specific PD model. However, further research needs to be conducted about how EFL teachers conceptualize the model and in what ways it should be modified or supported so that it could be better integrated into the EFL context. Our experience with Lesson Study has shown that it is potentially an effective model on condition that facilitator support is provided to teachers. In our case, the researchers were also acting as administrators in the school, so administrative support was not an issue. However, without administrative support it will definitely be very difficult for teachers to make the necessary arrangements for Lesson Study.

Since this study was conducted with a small number of teachers, findings may reflect a limited perspective and; therefore, cannot be generalized to a larger population. The data in this study were collected in a three-month period. Extending this time would definitely yield more reliable results. In addition to this, data collection tools in this study were limited to reflective reports and audio recordings of meetings. Collecting data through observations, field notes and researcher diaries would enable researchers to cross check the data from more sources. Taking these into consideration, we believe that the study might be replicated in different settings and a broader and more valid perspective might thus be adopted on how Lesson Study is perceived by novice EFL teachers.

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