

# The Role of Working Abroad as a Teacher on Professional Development

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## Abstract

International experience has been considered as a good opportunity for teachers to develop their professional development. Teachers while working abroad experience new teaching styles, curriculum, lesson plans, and lesson materials. Upon return home they implement them into their circumstances. This study investigates the role of overseas experience in professional development of teachers. 55 teachers who had at least a five-year international experience had a questionnaire and it was found that overseas experience deeply influences professional development of teachers.

**Keywords:** Teachers, International Experience, Professional Development, Implementation

## Introduction

Working abroad as a teacher has been considered as an opportunity for professional development because teachers bring their experiences into their classrooms and use new-found knowledge. Teachers acquire new educational experiences and skills in that they incorporate new information into existing courses, learn how to integrate technology into teaching, promote student-centered teaching, develop new methods and techniques, create effective lesson plans, exchange curriculum ideas and prepare materials to use in the classroom.

## Literature Review

Teachers while working abroad experience new pedagogical practices and implement them in their schools when they come home. Work experience abroad positively influences professional development of teachers. The experience of teaching abroad brings about changes in teaching methods of teachers. International teaching experience develops global awareness of teachers thus teachers change the content of the lessons by including references from the countries where they worked so they improve their teaching. Teaching with international experiences develop their cultural awareness and they use their awareness to motivate learners for better accomplishment in the classroom through using authentic materials, pictures and stories about their overseas experiences (Evans, 2004).

Teachers integrate their international experiences into their lessons. Their pedagogical approaches they acquired abroad impact on their own teaching style. Casale-Giannola (2000) in her dissertation listed some outcomes of international experiences as: enhanced teaching

skills and improvements in the curriculum. Rapoport (2006) states that the experience of teaching abroad as a teacher broadens teachers' teaching methods. International experience affects pedagogical styles of teachers and they can strengthen learning and understanding of learners by inspiring them (Germain, 1996).

Teachers who have worked abroad transfer their overseas experience to their classrooms upon returning home. Teachers change their views and curricula by including lesson materials from their experiences (Carlsen, 1997). Teachers integrate their new found knowledge into their circumstances and incorporate lesson plans, lesson materials and curricula into their home classes (O'Brien, 2006).

Teachers while working abroad develop their personal and professional development and transfer that theoretical and practical knowledge to their teaching style upon their return (Scholefield, 2006). Moreover, these teachers while living in another culture improves cultural awareness therefore develop a sense of understanding their students better, in particular international students in their classrooms. International experience is a good opportunity for the acquisition of new materials. Teachers using these new materials provide learners with a different perspective on teaching. Increased confidence is a key factor to create effective and fruitful lessons, increased confidence international teachers gain while working abroad enable them advance their careers, foster their teaching and prepare their students for better achievement (Hultquist, 2007).

### **Conclusion**

Teachers attend and benefit from workshops while abroad and develop teaching approaches. They collaborate with local teachers and acquire skills from their experiences. Teachers abroad are exposed to many curricula hence they learn about other education systems. Upon return home these teachers become creative teachers in their classrooms. Encountering with many kinds of curricula and interact with many teachers from other countries advance professional development of teachers. They can develop materials and make their lessons more enjoyable and productive.

### **Research Questions**

This study has tried to investigate the following questions:

- 1) Does experience of teaching abroad contribute to professional development of teachers?
- 2) Do teachers implement their experiences in their classrooms upon return home?

### **Research Methodology**

#### **Design of the Study**

This study investigated the contributions international experiences to professional development of teachers. This study uses descriptive research method which describes a situation analyzing the collected data without searching for cause and effect. Questions in the written questionnaire were clear enough to understand. Participants answered the questions in the questionnaire and their responses were analyzed and described.

#### **Participants**

The sample defines this case study is fifty five teachers consisted of 35 men and 20 women. They taught a variety of subjects including mathematics, social studies, and literature. All participants worked at a variety of school setting including private and public schools abroad

and it was ensured that all had at least a five- year international teaching experience. Participants currently work at private schools in Iraq where the researcher himself teaches as well.

### Data Collection

In this research a five point Likert scale was used ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The participants were delivered the questionnaires in their own schools by the researcher. The gathered data was entered into SPSS and analyzed using simple frequency distributions.

Table 1

#### Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.952	9

In table 1 the alpha coefficient for the nine items is .952, indicating that the items have relatively high internal consistency.

Table 2

#### Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Use_Experiences	55	3	5	4.47	.573
Cultural_Issues	55	3	5	4.42	.534
Pedagogical_Practices	55	3	5	4.31	.505
Encounter_Curriculum	55	3	5	4.24	.508
Motivate_Students	55	3	5	4.29	.497
Collaborate_Colleagues	55	3	5	4.20	.524
Lesson_Plans	55	3	5	4.20	.447
New_Found_Knowledge	55	3	5	4.27	.525
Acquisition_Materials	55	3	5	4.27	.489
Valid N (listwise)	55				

Table 2 shows the specific results such as mean and standard deviation for each variable which was entered into the analysis.

Table 3

#### I use international experiences as examples in the classroom

##### Use\_Experiences

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Ambivalent	2	3.6	3.6	3.6
Agree	25	45.5	45.5	49.1
Strongly Agree	28	50.9	50.9	100.0
Total	55	100.0	100.0	

50.9 % of the participants strongly agree and 45.5 % of the participants agree that they use international experiences as examples in the classroom upon return home. A total of 96.4 % of the participants integrate their international experiences into the content of their lessons.

Table 4

*I utilize cultural issues and incorporate them into the classroom***Cultural\_Issues**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Ambivalent	1	1.8	1.8
	Agree	30	54.5	56.4
	Strongly Agree	24	43.6	100.0
	Total	55	100.0	100.0

43.6 % of the participants strongly agree and 54.5 % of the participants agree that they utilize cultural issues and incorporate them into the classroom. A total of 98.1 % of the participants use cultural issues in their lessons.

Table 5

*I have learnt new pedagogical practices and implement them in my classroom***Pedagogical\_Practices**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Ambivalent	1	1.8	1.8
	Agree	36	65.5	67.3
	Strongly Agree	18	32.7	100.0
	Total	55	100.0	100.0

32.7 % of the participants strongly agree and 65.5 % of the participants agree that they have learnt new pedagogical practices and implement them in their classrooms. A total of 98.2 % of the participants develop new pedagogical approaches while working abroad and use them upon return home.

Table 6

*I have learnt new notions from other education systems by encountering their curricula***Encounter\_Curriculum**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Ambivalent	2	3.6	3.6
	Agree	38	69.1	72.7
	Strongly Agree	15	27.3	100.0
	Total	55	100.0	100.0

27.3 % of the participants strongly agree and 69.1 % of the participants agree that they have learnt new notions from other education systems by encountering their curricula. A total of 96.4 % of the participants agree that their views about curriculum change so they include new contents into their teaching curricula.

Table 7

*I motivate my students by using authentic materials, pictures and stories about my overseas experience*

**Motivate\_Students**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Ambivalent	1	1.8	1.8
	Agree	37	67.3	69.1
	Strongly Agree	17	30.9	100.0
	Total	55	100.0	100.0

30.9 % of the participants strongly agree and 67.3 % of the participants agree that they motivate their students by using authentic materials, pictures and stories about my overseas experience. A total of 98.2 % of the participants use their international experience stories and materials to inspire their students.

Table 8

*I collaborate with my colleagues more often upon return home and ask about their opinions.*

**Collaborate\_Colleagues**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Ambivalent	3	5.5	5.5
	Agree	38	69.1	74.5
	Strongly Agree	14	25.5	100.0
	Total	55	100.0	100.0

25.5 % of the participants strongly agree and 69.1 % of the participants agree that they collaborate with their colleagues more often upon return home and ask about their opinions. A total of 94.6 % of the participants state that collaboration with colleagues is a key factor for professional development. Teachers while working abroad ask for opinions of local teachers about the ways of teaching and it is clearly seen that teachers seek for collaboration with their colleagues to promote their teaching styles.

Table 9

*International experience has allowed me to create better lesson plans*

**Lesson\_Plans**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Ambivalent	1	1.8	1.8
	Agree	42	76.4	78.2
	Strongly Agree	12	21.8	100.0
	Total	55	100.0	100.0

21.8 % of the participants strongly agree and 76.4 % of the participants agree that international experience helped them produce better lesson plans. A total of 98.2 % of the participants are of the opinion that they experience new teaching styles, curriculum, and lesson content while working abroad. They successfully integrate them into their classrooms.

Table 10

*I have integrated new found knowledge that I acquired while working abroad into my circumstances*

**New\_Found\_Knowledge**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Ambivalent	2	3.6	3.6	3.6
Agree	36	65.5	65.5	69.1
Strongly Agree	17	30.9	30.9	100.0
Total	55	100.0	100.0	

30.9 % of the participants strongly agree and 65.5 % of the participants agree that they have integrated new found knowledge that I acquired while working abroad into their circumstances. A total of 96.4 % of the participants state international experience enables them to acquire new knowledge concerning their subject matter.

Table 11

*International experience is a good opportunity to acquire new teaching skills and teaching materials*

**Acquisition\_Materials**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Ambivalent	1	1.8	1.8	1.8
Agree	38	69.1	69.1	70.9
Strongly Agree	16	29.1	29.1	100.0
Total	55	100.0	100.0	

29.1 % of the participants strongly agree and 69.1 % of the participants agree that international experience is a good opportunity to acquire new teaching skills and teaching materials. A total of 98.2 % of the participants consider that working abroad brings about good opportunity to develop new teaching skills and teaching materials.

Table 12

**Model Summary**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.910 <sup>a</sup>	.829	.811	.212

a. Predictors: (Constant), Motivate\_Students, New\_Found\_Knowledge, Pedagogical\_Practices, Lesson\_Plans, Encounter\_Curriculum

In table 12, the variables motivate students, new found knowledge, pedagogical practices; lesson plans and encounter curriculum were used. The dependent variable is acquisition materials. The R Square shows that these five variables explain 82.9 % percent of the variance in the dependent variable.

Table 13

ANOVA<sup>a</sup>

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	10.697	5	2.139	47.399	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	2.212	49	.045		
	Total	12.909	54			

a. Dependent Variable: Acquisition\_Materials

b. Predictors: (Constant), Motivate\_Students, New\_Found\_Knowledge, Pedagogical\_Practices, Lesson\_Plans, Encounter\_Curriculum

In table 13 Sig < .01, then the model is significant at 99%.

Coefficients<sup>a</sup>

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.001	.288		.002	.998
	Pedagogical_Practices	.305	.124	.315	2.455	.018
	Encounter_Curriculum	.116	.145	.120	.799	.428
	Lesson_Plans	.281	.141	.257	1.985	.053
	New_Found_Knowledge	.140	.087	.151	1.616	.113
	Motivate_Students	.161	.123	.163	1.307	.197

a. Dependent Variable: Acquisition\_Materials

Table 13 shows how much influence independent variable exerts on dependent variable. The numbers under Standardized Coefficients, Beta show how much influence independent variables exert on dependent variable. The higher the number is the more influence it has on the dependent variable. In this study pedagogical differences have the highest influence compared with other variables.

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