A Survey on the Professional Development Needs of Part-time College English Teachers in Taiwan

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Part-time faculty members provide an increasing amount of instruction in higher education institutions around the world. However, due to their marginal status, these teachers' professional development needs are often neglected. The current study attempts to find out how to better support part-time college English teachers in Taiwan. Using a questionnaire as the main instrument, the results show that these teachers yearn for more institutional support and professional development activities initiated by their departments. The author calls for more efforts to study and meet the professional development needs of part-time college English teachers.

Key words: part-time college English teachers, professional development needs

INTRODUCTION

Confronted with the demands of accountability, a fast-changing social landscape, and diversity among students and their needs, higher education institutions are facing new challenges in terms of their function and role (Ministry of Education, Taiwan, 2008). To meet these challenges, Camblin Jr. and Steger (2000) suggest that the faculty must continue to engage in

professional development activities, or they will face obsolescence. As evidenced by the increasing number of faculty development centers on campuses, universities around the world have taken active measures to help the faculty maintain high skill levels and to keep abreast of new development in teaching and research. Recent literature on higher education has also addressed the need for continuing to professionalize faculty members (e.g., Jarvis et al., 2005; Marcinkiewicz & Doyle, 2004; Mathias, 2005; Trowler & Bamber, 2005).

A quick scan of the literature reveals that many studies on faculty development are concerned with the development of full-time, tenured-position teachers. Part-time teachers are not normally included in many school- or department-based development activities. However, part-time faculty members provide an increasing amount of instructional services in higher education institutions around the world. According to recent surveys, they make up about half of all instructional staff at American universities and colleges (Baron-Nixon, 2007; Lechuga, 2006). Blackwell et al. (2001) report a similar figure for the UK—part-time teachers make up between one third to one half of all teachers working in higher education in the country. In Taiwan where the current study was conducted, no such figures are available. However, with significant institutional budget cuts in recent years, it will not be surprising if a similar pattern is identified here. On university campuses around this island nation, part-time teachers are responsible for teaching many of the foundation and core English courses taken by freshmen and sophomores, thus playing a crucial role in students' English learning at the tertiary level.[1] In fact, for many non-English majors, these are the only English courses they will take in their undergraduate study. To ensure outstanding learning outcomes, part-time English teachers, like full-time

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[1] In the researcher's institution, a large language teaching center at a leading university in Taiwan, a total of 226 hours of language courses were offered in the fall semester of 2009. Among these hours, 133 were taught by part-time teachers. In other words, part-time teachers are responsible for nearly 60% of all instruction taking place in this particular institution.

faculty members, also need to engage in professional development activities. However, as stated earlier, they are usually excluded in such activities, and there is no study which specifically focuses on the professional development needs of these teachers. The current study intends to fill this research gap.

Literature Review

The Evolution of Faculty Development

Nelson (1983, as cited in Camblin Jr. & Steger, 2000) defines faculty development as any endeavor "designed to improve faculty performance in all aspects of their professional lives—as scholars, advisers, academic leaders, and contributors to institutional decisions" (p. 70). As Torrey (2002) further explains, this term is often used to classify activities provided by higher education institutions to "improve scholarship, contribute knowledge to an academic or professional field, or keep current in a discipline" (pp. 15-16).

In their book titled *Creating the future of faculty development: Learning from the past, understanding the present*, Sorcinelli et al. (2006) explain what the term "faculty development" refers to in each phase of higher education in the U.S. Table 1 is a summary of their discussion.

TABLE 1
Five Ages of Faculty Development in the U.S. (Adopted from Sorcinelli et al., 2006)

Phase	Time	Conceptualization of Faculty Development
Age of the Scholar	1950s to early 1960s	• Faculty development efforts focused mostly on improving and advancing scholarly competence.
Age of the Teacher	mid 1960s to 1970s	• Teacher development was viewed as key to faculty vitality and renewal, and attention mainly focused on improving teaching.
Age of the Developer	1980s	• Faculty development broadened to address curricular issues, faculty needs at different career stages, and collective as well as individual faculty growth.
Age of the Learner	1990s	• Student learning rather than teaching took

		center stage; greater student diversity called for a greater range and variety in teaching and learning methods, skills, and sensitivities.
Age of the Network	21st century	• Meeting higher expectations for members of higher education institutions requires collaboration among all stakeholders.

According to Sorcinelli et al. (2006), the Age of the Learner witnessed a rise in nontenure-track and part-time positions in academia. This trend has continued into the new millennium (i.e., the Age of the Network), as higher education institutions respond to government-imposed funding restrictions by cutting down tenure-track positions and offering more part-time contracts (Abbas & McLean, 2001). The next section is devoted to a discussion of this latter type of appointment, followed by a brief summary of research related to the professional development of these teachers.

Part-time Teachers in Higher Education Institutions and Research Related to Their Professional Development

In the literature, part-time college faculty is variously referred to as part-timers, adjunct, or contingent faculty (Baron-Nixon, 2007). According to Torrey (2002), part-time faculty members provide institutions "with a flexible workforce that allows them to adjust to enrollment changes, fill temporary vacancies, teach specialized courses, and reduce faculty costs" (p. 81). Although the employment of part-time teachers is not a recent phenomenon, they, as mentioned earlier, now constitute a significant percentage of the teaching force in higher education. As also stated by Torrey (2002), these part-timers may be exploited due to their low pay, exclusion from departmental or school activities, or being assigned to teach classes at undesirable hours. However, they should be seen as valuable resources for an institution, as many part-timers are hired to offer specialized or professional courses which respond to changing student interests and help students to connect their academic studies to the workplace. Students can also benefit

from the experience and age of part-time teachers who are retired faculty or career professionals (Torrey, 2002). Furthermore, part-time teachers often teach evening and weekend classes, enabling institutions to "expand class schedules to serve our evermore time- and placed-challenged students" (Lyons, 2007, p. 1). As Lyons (2007) summarizes, many higher-education institutions cannot function effectively or efficiently without part-time teachers playing an important role in the instructional delivery system.

In the past decade, the field of faculty development has witnessed a greater focus on the status, welfare, and professional development of part-time faculty. Research has been conducted to assess the extent of use of part-time teachers in higher education (Husbands, 1998), to investigate their job satisfaction (Maynard & Joseph, 2008) and enhancement (Knight, 2007), and to examine different means to help their professionalization (Blackwell et al., 2004; Burnstad et al., 2007; Nolan et al., 2007) and connect them to institutional missions (Baron-Nixon, 2007). Abbas and McLean (2001) call for more efforts to support and integrate part-timers into departments and schools, as they will be an important part of universities of the future. The current study is a response to this call, as it intends to investigate the professional development needs of part-time college English teachers. The research questions are:

(1) What resources do part-time college English teachers need to improve their teaching?
(2) What areas do these teachers want to improve on?
(3) According to these teachers, what type of professional development activity is most beneficial for improving these areas?

Research Methodology

The primary data source was a questionnaire designed to understand the participants' professional development needs. Interviews were also conducted with six part-time teachers. The interview data mainly served to provide more

insights to part-time teachers' work experiences and professional development needs. Whenever relevant, data from this source will be reported to support the major findings from the primary data.

Participants

To find prospective participants for the study, a research assistant and I first located the websites of English-related departments and language teaching centers of all types of universities in Taiwan (comprehensive, technological, public, and private) and looked for lists of part-time English teachers on the websites. Once these teachers were identified, my research assistant sent them (a) a recruitment letter explaining the purpose of the research and (b) a copy of the Questionnaire on the Professional Development Needs of Part-Time College English Teachers (Appendix A, partly adopted from Hutti et al., 2007; also see Jameson & Hillier, 2008) by snail mail.[2] Because of budget limit, it was impossible to reach all the part-time English teachers in Taiwan. As a result, a total of 637 copies of the questionnaire were sent out, and 84 were sent back to the researcher (a return rate of 13.2%). Out of the 84 copies, four had to be excluded because they were incomplete (three out of four) or the respondent did not follow the directions (one case). In other words, 80 returned questionnaires were valid. Table 2 provides a summary of these participants' background.

TABLE 2
Summary of Participants' Background

Items	Results
Gender	*male*: 21 (26.3%)
	female: 59 (73.7%)
Age	*20-30*: 12 (15.0%)
	31-40: 32 (40.0%)

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[2] Although more costly and less efficient, I decided not to email the questionnaire to the potential participants because email might arouse less attention and interest from the recipients.

	41-50: 22 (27.5%)
	51-60: 10 (12.5%)
	61+: 4 (5%)
Years of part-time teaching	*1-5*: 41 (51.2%)
	6-10: 29 (36.3%)
	11-15: 6 (7.5%)
	16-20: 2 (2.5%)
	21+: 2 (2.5%)
Numbers of current schools	(1) *1-3*: 64 (80%)
	(2) *4-6*: 15 (18.8%)
	(3) *7-9*: 1 (0.2%)

The Questionnaire

The design of the questionnaire was mainly inspired by my personal reading of several works on teachers' professional development (e.g., Hutti et al., 2007; Jameson & Hillier, 2008; Richards & Farrell, 2005). In Hutti et al.'s (2007) study, a part-time faculty needs assessment form was devised and administered to part-time faculty of the University of Louisville at Kentucky as the initial step to set up a year-long faculty development program. In the form, a total of 54 items, ranging from *Grading practices* to *Writing letters of recommendation*, were included for the respondents to choose the top three areas they would like to improve on. Based on my knowledge of the TEFL field and personal experience as a part-time and full-time faculty member in Taiwan, I included 15 items (in addition to a blank space to allow the respondents to include other areas not mentioned in the questionnaire) for the respondents to choose from. To answer the third research question on suitable professional development activities, I looked for inspiration from works like Richards and Farrell's (2005) book on professional development for language teachers to find the range of professional development activities teachers can participate in; the result is a list of professional development activities as seen in Appendix B.

Interviews

To further probe into the participants' experiences and professional development needs as part-time English teachers, I interviewed a variety of participants. At the end of the questionnaire, teachers were asked to indicate whether they would like to participate in a follow-up interview; 39 of them agreed. To "ensure the representative presence of particular subgroups of the population under study" (Mackey & Gass, 2005, p. 120), the current study adopted stratified sampling. The specific characteristics taken into consideration included gender, age, whether they were pursuing a higher degree (e.g., Ph.D.), and number of years working as a part-time teacher. As mentioned earlier, the original pool of potential interviewees was 39. Applying stratified sampling resulted in 18 participants.

Out of the 18 teachers invited to participate in the semi-structured interviews, ten agreed to do so. I further chose six of them to be interviewed. Again, this decision was made to ensure maximum variation in terms of interviewees' background and teaching experiences. Each interview was conducted in Chinese, the first language of the researcher and the interviewees, to reduce any chance of miscommunication. Each interview, lasting about 30 minutes, was recorded and transcribed verbatim by a research assistant for further analysis. Table 3 summarizes the background information of the six interviewees.

TABLE 3
Background Information of the Interviewees

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Year*	Pursuing Ph.D.
Mary	Female	24	1	No
Luke	Male	26	1.5	Yes
Max	Male	34	2.5	No
Sandy	Female	40	7	Yes
Mike	Male	50	12	No
Mandy	Female	52	14	No

* indicates the number of years the participant had worked as a part-time teacher at the time of the interview.

Results

Research Question 1: What Rresources do Part-time College English Teachers Need to Improve their Teaching?

One of the questions in the questionnaire asked the participants to list the resources that they do not have but would help to improve their teaching. Table 4 is a summary of the results.

TABLE 4
Needed Resources Listed by Teachers

Resources	Frequency
Teaching materials	16
Seminars/workshops	8
Opportunities to interact with coworkers	7
Teacher lounge/office	7
Copy cards	5
Library access	5
Teaching consultant	3
Exam pools	1

As shown in the above table, teachers had diverse needs, but one noticeable finding is their desire to participate in professional development activities, whether formal (*seminars/workshops*, *help from teaching consultants*) or informal ones (*interaction with coworkers*). Also, five of the eight items frequently mentioned by teachers (*teaching materials*, *teacher lounge/office*, *copy cards*, *library access*, and *exam pools*) pertain to basic teaching needs, suggesting that many of these needs were probably not sufficiently provided to the teachers.

Research Question 2: What Areas do Part-time College English Teachers Want to Improve On?

As indicated in the questionnaire, teachers were asked to choose three

areas for which they would like to improve on. Table 5 summarizes the results.

TABLE 5
Areas Teachers Would Like to Improve On

Areas	Frequency
Integrating technological tools for teaching	40
Establishing a positive learning environment	31
Designing class activities	30
Stimulating and sustaining student motivation	30
Encouraging student participation in class	29
Helping weaker learners	18
Choosing a suitable textbook	14
Helping students prepare for standardized exams	13
Learning about TESOL theories	8
Learning about course design and syllabus development	8
Constructing midterm and final exams	5
Improving students' listening ability	4
Improving students' speaking ability	4
Improving students' reading ability	4
Improving students' writing ability	2

As can be seen from Table 5, the top five areas which part-time college English teachers want to improve on are integrating technological tools for teaching, establishing a positive learning environment, designing class activities, stimulating and sustaining student motivation, and encouraging student participation in class, respectively. 50% of the survey respondents (N=40) indicated that they would like to learn more about how to integrate technological tools into their teaching. Another noticeable trend is that out of the top five areas, three of them, namely, establishing a positive learning environment, stimulating and sustaining student motivation, and encouraging student participation in class, pertain to classroom dynamics or the affective factors in language learning.

Research Question 3: According to These Teachers, What Type of Professional Development Activity is Most Beneficial for Improving These Areas?

In the questionnaire, teachers were also asked to choose two types of professional development activities they felt were most beneficial for improving themselves. Table 6 summarizes the results.

TABLE 6
Professional Development Activities Perceived by Teachers as Most Beneficial

Activities	Frequency
Workshops organized by the department	55
Teacher meetings	50
Peer observation arranged by departments	28
Other workshops	13
Study groups formed among teachers	10
Conferences on English teaching	5

The top three professional development activities perceived by teachers as most beneficial were *workshops organized by the department*, *teacher meetings*, and *peer observation arranged by departments*, and the top two activities were chosen by over 60% of the participants. Both results suggest that many part-time teachers yearn for more professional development activities initiated by their departments.

Discussion

This study sets out to understand the professional development needs of part-time college English teachers in Taiwan. The results suggest that these teachers hope to be better supported with different resources. The resource that is most frequently mentioned is teaching materials. As one participant noted on the questionnaire, "Unlike full-time teachers, I cannot ask for free textbook samples from publishers. Maybe the department can consider setting up a little library for us." Analysis of the returned questionnaires also revealed that unlike their full-time counterparts, these part-time teachers were

not always provided with offices or even basics like copy cards and library access. Some teachers also felt that more interaction with their colleagues, whether formally or informally, would help to improve their teaching.

The current study also helps to identify the areas which part-time college English teachers want to improve on (the second research question). Half of the participants indicated that they would like to learn more about how to integrate technological tools into their teaching. With advancement in technology and the proliferation of language labs on university campuses, it is not surprising that language teachers feel a pressing need to learn more about this area. As one of the interviewees, Max, a third-year part-time teacher, shared in the interview, he believed that the integration of technology into teaching would help him diversify his instruction. He felt that his current use of technology, mainly restricted to basic audiovisual equipment such as CD player and overhead projector, was inadequate and could not arouse students' learning interest.

Another noticeable finding from the data pertaining to the second research question is teachers' concern for learning about the affective factors in language learning and teaching. Part-time college English teachers in Taiwan are often assigned to teach large-size, mixed-level compulsory courses. Arousing these students' learning motivation is a challenging task, even for experienced teachers. Sandy's remarks, a veteran college English teacher, best illustrate many teachers' concern in this area. She said in the interview, "I have taught for many years. I think I've got adequate knowledge about teaching." She continued, "In recent years, I became more concerned about the affective factors in my teaching. In your questionnaire, I was asked to pick three areas. Without any hesitation, I chose *establishing a positive learning environment*, s*timulating and sustaining student motivation*, and e*ncouraging student participation in class*."

The participants were also asked to choose the types of professional development activities they saw as most beneficial for learning about their areas for improvement. The results suggest that many participants hope that their departments will organize workshops, teacher meetings, or peer

observation sessions, implying that they yearn for more actions taken by their departments to help them become more professionalized. As Luke shared in the interview, "I would appreciate if someone could tell me whether I am doing the right thing or not. Maybe one meeting or two in a semester or some workshops to allow me to see how others teach."

Conclusion

The current study is an effort to understand the professional development needs of part-time college teachers, a much neglected group of teaching staff in higher education around the world. The study is limited by the sample size, partly due to the low survey return rate. This rate reveals the fact that part-time teachers represent an unstable teaching force which is difficult to reach. Before addressing their professional development needs, more studies need to be conducted to understand the status and employment of these part-timers in higher education, especially in countries like Taiwan where they are much employed but often neglected. To ensure sizeable data which will help to depict a general picture, such studies should be initiated or supported by school or government authorities. Other studies can also focus on the effectiveness of different professional development activities (e.g., peer observation and workshops) on the professionalization of part-time teachers. Departments and universities should focus on providing basic needs to part-time teachers (such as telephone, copying, and computer and library access) and routinely including them in meetings and events. The department office could also consider preparing a handbook specifically written for new part-time teachers (Hutti et al., 2007) and organize faculty development programs tailored to these teachers. The government can collaborate with universities to work out policies which would offer privileges such as travel subsidies, tuition benefits, and other incentives (Bach, 1999; Woodson, 2005) to encourage those part-time teachers who are hard-working and dedicated to their teaching. It is hoped that these teachers will be viewed as important contributors to the quality of higher education and their needs are better

addressed.

THE AUTHOR

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APPENDIX A

Questionnaire on the Professional Development Needs of Part-Time College English Teachers

Background information

1. **Gender**: ☐ male ☐ female
2. **Age**: ☐ 20-30 ☐ 31-40 ☐ 41-50 ☐ 51-60
3. **Educational background** (please specify your highest degree, specialization, school, and year of graduation, e.g., MA in TESOL, UCLA, 2003): _____
4. **Please tick yes ____ if you are currently pursuing a higher degree.**
5. **Number of years that you have worked as a part-time college English teacher**: ____
6. **Number of universities/colleges you currently hold part-time positions**: __
7. **School names**: _____
8. **Courses you are teaching**: _____

Professional development needs

(1) What resources that you don't have would help to improve your teaching?

(2) Please check (✔) 3 areas you would like to learn more about to improve your teaching.
   ___ Learning about TESOL theories
   ___ Learning about course design and syllabus development
   ___ Integrating technological tools for teaching

___ Encouraging student participation in class
___ Designing class activities
___ Constructing midterm and final exams
___ Choosing a suitable textbook
___ Helping weaker students
___ Establishing a positive learning environment
___ Stimulating and sustaining student motivation
___ Helping students prepare for standardized exams
    (e.g., TOEFL, IELTs)
___ Improving students' listening ability
___ Improving students' speaking ability
___ Improving students' reading ability
___ Improving students' writing ability
Others (please specify): _____

(3) Please check (✔) 2 types of professional development activity you feel are most beneficial for improving these areas:
___ Teacher meetings
___ Study groups formed among teachers
___ Peer observation arranged by departments
___ Workshops organized by the department
___ Other workshops
___ Conferences on English teaching
___ Others: _____

Participation in the follow-up interview

If you are interested in participating in a follow-up interview for my research project (about 30 minutes in duration; the interview will be audio-recorded and arranged according to your preference for time and location), please complete the following items; I will contact you once I receive the following information:

A Survey on the Professional Development Needs of Part-time College English Teachers in Taiwan

Name:
Telephone number:
Email address:

Thank you for your help!