



# The Use of Video Teleconferencing in a Teacher Training Program

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## Abstract

*Using the right tools while integrating technology into teacher training programs is a complex task. It is important to ask which applications are more effective while educational institutions prepare their teachers for making them more qualified instructors. This study investigated English teachers' perspectives on the use of video teleconferences in teacher training concept. In a study in the Department of Foreign Languages, Turkish Military Academy, Turkey, a questionnaire developed by Lokmacioğlu was administered to 31 English instructors. Before taking the questionnaire participants attended three internet-based video teleconference sessions with Professor Stephen D. Krashen, one of the gurus in English Language Teaching, in different times in one year during their in-service teacher training programs. The overall study findings indicate that instructors are positive towards the use of video teleconferences and they are found effective in terms of professional development, motivation and knowledge of methodology. Most instructors, however, have some doubts of replacing the conventional teacher training programs totally with video teleconference sessions. In the light of the findings, Institutions in charge of improving teachers' professional development are recommended to take advantage of distance learning technologies as supplementary elements which may provide a sustainable development and a positive change for teachers.*

## 1. Introduction

Distance learning through internet-based technologies is becoming a widely accepted phenomena in higher education and this leads educators to rethink their instructional approaches [1,2,3]. Although the studies have different results on the effectiveness of the distance education [4,5,6], web-based applications particularly video teleconferences are believed to enable institutions to promote their conventional classroom-based programs [7]. Video teleconferencing refers to having a face to face interaction with a subject matter expert from the field despite the long distances and that creates a vital opportunity for participants to reinforce knowledge and enhance their professional development [8,9,10].

Video teleconferencing for teacher training programs is based on the idea that a two-way communication link expands the reach of scholars to instructors who otherwise not have access [11] and learners can develop questions, interact synchronously to gain understandings and access primary sources of information [12] as the training courses and in-service teacher training programs are designed to promote knowledge, enhance skills, and change beliefs [13,14]. Additionally, the notion "a teacher training involves giving novices theoretical knowledge or ready-made answers" restricts the trainees in terms of self-inquiry or critical thinking [15]. Video teleconferencing, on the other hand, emulates meetings, conferences consisting of workshops and seminars with reduced travel costs and faster access [16,17,18]. It seems that teachers as well as students have an important opportunity to take advantage of this practice in order to expand their professional activities.

Although video teleconferencing has been widely used to conduct long-distance clinical case discussions and even identified as "a priority for development in medical education" [19], the uses of this procedure is not extensively applied for in-service teacher training programs [20]. However, it is unrealistic to expect teachers to enhance their sense of methodology and classroom practices unless they have been kept informed about the essence of the methodologies by its initiators and prominent figures [21]. These communication sessions with "gurus" of the field clarifies misunderstood concepts and enables teachers to understand the topics introduced in the conventional classroom-based training programs [22].

On this basis, instructors need to meet subject matter experts and experience the video teleconference sessions during the conventional in-service teacher training programs, so they will be able to improve their professional development, knowledge of methodology, classroom application and raise their motivation. Thus, Understanding the teachers' perspectives about the effectiveness of video teleconferencing would provide valuable information for teacher mentors.



## 2. Methodology

This paper reports on a survey on video teleconferences for in-service teacher training programs conducted with a group of teacher-officers at Military Academy, Turkey, in the academic year of 2013-2014. A total number of 31 (21 male and 10 female) instructors participated in the study. Subjects were all English instructors between the ages of 23 and 47. It was a heterogeneous group made up of teachers from different level of experience and education.

Most of the participants had BA degree and half of the instructors had less than three years teaching experience. Almost half of the instructors are newly hired English teachers. In other words, they were inexperienced instructors. They were being given a questionnaire for the effectiveness of video teleconference sessions at in-service teacher training programs. Before taking the questionnaire, participants attended three video teleconference sessions in different times in one year. Each teleconference lasted for about one hour.

The instrument of this study was designed by Serkan Lokmacioğlu, an English instructor in Military Academy and a PhD candidate in Hacettepe University. It was checked by three other experts in the field for interrater reliability. The questionnaire for the effectiveness of video teleconference sessions (VTS) for in-service teacher training programs consisted of twenty items in five sections. Section one (five items) focused on teachers' expectations about the VTS. Section two (six items) asked about the instructors' views for the effectiveness of the VTS. Section three (four items) aims to understand whether or not it is beneficial for their professional development. Section four (two items) asked about the motivation and last section (three items) focused on the methodology and classroom applications. There was also an open-ended question part which results in suggestions given by the instructors. All descriptive statistics and the results of the statistical analysis were generated using SPSS 16.

## 3. Findings and Discussion

ITEM NO	ITEM GROUP	ITEM NAME	Strongly Disagree %	Disagree %	Not Sure %	Agree %	Strongly Agree %	$\bar{x}$	SD
1	Expectations	Need of video teleconferences in teacher training			16.1	25.8	58.1	4.42	.137
2		ELT methodology			6.5	54.8	38.7	4.32	.108
3		Native experts			19.4	22.6	58.1	4.39	.144
4		National experts	3.2	16.1	38.7	35.5	6.5	3.26	.167
5		Comforting atmosphere				22.6	77.4	4.77	.076
6	Effectiveness	Beneficial in general			12.9	32.3	54.8	4.42	.129
7		Effective than conventional programs		22.6	29	32.3	16.1	3.42	.184
8		Interaction with professionals		6.5	6.5	35.5	51.6	4.32	.156
9		Replacing with conventional programs	3.2	16.1	38.7	29	12.9	3.32	.182
10		Supporting application				45.2	54.8	4.55	.091
11		Time		9.7		77.4	12.9	3.94	.131
12	Professional Development	Contribution to knowledge of theory				64.5	35.5	4.35	.087
13		Enhancing classroom practices			12.9	51.6	35.5	4.23	.120
14		Learning needs of professional development			12.9	48.4	38.7	4.26	.122
15		Gaining teacher experience			9.7	67.7	22.6	4.13	.101
16	Motivation	Encouraging for further research			19.4	58.1	22.6	4.03	.118
17		Attending a similar session				38.7	61.3	4.61	.089
18	Methodology	Revising classroom activities		3.2	38.7	45.2	12.9	3.68	.134
19		Using ELT materials			6.5	64.5	29	4.23	.101
20		Improving teaching techniques			6.5	77.4	16.1	4.10	.085

Table 1: Instructors' views on video teleconference sessions

The data we present in Table 1 is a summary of the results. This shows the names of the item groups, item names and percentages of instructors' answers. The last two columns demonstrate the mean scores and standard deviations. As the table above shows, the majority of the instructors are highly positive about the necessity of video teleconferences at in-service teacher training programs. As can be seen in the results of the expectations section, the instructors strongly expect to be given English Language Teaching Methodology as a content matter during the sessions. In addition, they wish to see more native experts on the field compared to national ones in a comforting atmosphere. It appears that English instructors display an eagerness to meet international figures in their field.

In the second section, the instructors were asked to state their views about the effectiveness of video teleconference sessions. The results show that they have some doubts of replacing the conventional teacher training programs with video teleconference sessions although they strongly believe that this application is beneficial in general. Instead, the instructors are of the opinion that these internet-based sessions can be a very effective supporting application within in-service teacher training programs. This finding of the current study is line with those of Maltempi & Malheiros's research [2].

Regarding the third, fourth and fifth item groups, it clearly shows that instructors found video teleconferences very effective in terms of professional development, motivation and methodology. As to their verdicts, sessions contributed to their knowledge of theory, enhanced their classroom practices and enabled them to realize the needs of professional development and teaching experience. Besides, these sessions encouraged instructors to do further research and attend similar sessions.

As we mentioned before, in the questionnaire conducted to English instructors, there were two open-ended questions aiming to improve the effectiveness of future applications. The first question was 'What were the best contributing parts of the sessions?' Teachers had the following opinions:

- ...Question-answer part (7)
- ...Having direct contact with Krashen /Native expert was a nice opportunity (6)
- ...Sample classroom applications, techniques/methodology contributed to develop my

techniques of ELT (4)

- ...Enlightened me about using ELT teaching materials

The second question was 'How can these sessions be more beneficial for you?' Teachers had the following opinions:

- ...Sessions should be more frequent (7)
- ...Sound quality should be better (6)
- ...Sessions could be longer, more interactive (3)
- ...A smaller/comfortable hall would be good (2)
- ...Handouts of the content of the sessions should be given before (2)
- ...Wish to see national experts as well
- ...Sessions could include more topics

In the light of the data, one can easily infer that instructors were highly satisfied with meeting the native expert and asked direct questions to him. Teachers strongly believed that this contributed to their methodology and techniques they used in the classrooms. They seemed to feel enlightened about using English Language Teaching materials as well. The answers to the second questions revealed the fact that there were some uncomfortable technical problems such as sound quality which lowered the effectuality of the sessions.

#### 4. Concluding Remarks and Suggestions

One major outcome of the survey was that Instructors saw video teleconferences as effective supplementary application and they were against removing conventional in-service teacher training programs. Video teleconference sessions widened the perspectives of teachers and enhanced their professional development but they were not seen efficient for teacher training singlehandedly. Therefore, Institutions had better use them as an integrated tool to boost teachers' efficiency within the conventional classroom-based applications. It also revealed the fact that Instructors never felt sufficient about the right methodology. Although teachers had a long pre-service education, they wished to see methodology as a content matter during the sessions. In addition, using this internet-based audio-visual contact with a native face in a comfortable atmosphere seemed very important to English instructors. This raised their motivation and knowledge of theory, and functioned as a refreshing training. It can also push teachers to learn more about their field in the future. This result coincides with Liu's research which was done in 2012 [18].

The two open-ended questions in the questionnaire aiming to find out the best contributing parts of the sessions and alternative ways of enhancing the benefits provided valuable results. On the basis of these results, it would be useful to offer some suggestions for the institutions that have intentions to



organize video teleconferences. First, teacher mentors should take notice of having an enough question-answer part, in other words, interactivity section at the end of the sessions. Secondly, Native speakers had better constitute the majority of the educators and focus on the methodology and use of ELT materials as content matters, because teachers are not perfect when they face difficulties of choosing the right methodology and technique in the class. It would be good to make the content rich in topics and tell these topics to the speaker before. Another important conclusion that could be drawn from the second question is that to better the quality of teleconferencing, it needs to be organized frequently for lasting impact. Also, since the voice quality is very important while having a face to face internet connectivity, the technical problems particularly the sound system should be well-established. Finally, it is important that handouts of the sessions need to be given before the connection and instructors should be prepared for the event.

In conclusion, teachers had a clear view of attending video teleconference sessions and believed in the necessity of meeting important faces from the field and wished to have different applications apart from the relatively dull classroom-based programs. Future research should focus encouraging such different trends that could create a change on instructors' professional expertise and lead them to apply similar usages in the classroom for students which is the final aim of teacher training programs.

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