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Factors Affecting the Professional Development of Faculty Members: A Case Study of Ilam Branch, Islamic Azad University, Iran

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Abstract

Professional development is a continuous process of individual and experimental tests that must empower individual educators to make complex decisions; to identify and to solve problems; to connect theory and practice in learners' output; and to enable educators to offer learning opportunities to students and prepare them in terms of provided world class standards and citizen responsibilities of adults inspired by these assumptions, the present study aimed to identify factors affecting the professional development of its faculty members. The statistical sample consisted of 209 individuals all of whom were faculty members of the Islamic Azad University, Ilam Branch, Iran that were studied by a census method. The survey instrument was a research-made questionnaire whose content and face validity was confirmed by a panel of experts and its reliability coefficient turned out to be at a desirable level. SPSS21 software and factor analysis technique were employed to analyze the collected data. The results of the factor analysis showed that four development services such as structural-service maturity, institutional directorial maturity, personal and character maturity and network-social maturity were identified as factors affecting the professional development of faculty members which explained 50.89% of the total variance altogether.

Keywords:
faculty members, Ilam Province, Islamic Azad University, professional development

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INTRODUCTION

Higher education system is a dynamic system whose dynamics require consolidation of their constituent components strengthen. Some of these components include notably students, faculty members, university autonomy, academic groups, resources, and facilities, and there is no doubt that among higher education system's content components, faculty members are one of the most influential components. According to Baldwin (1998), faculty members are a vital asset of each academic collection, and therefore, promoting the faculty members professional knowledge is believed to improve the quality of education delivered at a university level.

In the past, it was believed that educated members could update and upgrade their professional knowledge and skills through research and the study of literature. Yet, the rapid changes of today's world have led to the rejection of this idea "one of the main challenges that higher education is facing now at the global level is the qualitative development and growth of universities board members (Wille & Wilson, 1999).

Professional development is a continuous process of group and individual and experimental tests that must empower individual educators and educators' communities to make complex decisions; to identify and solve problems; to connect theory and practice as is reflected in learners' productions; and to enable educators to offer the learning opportunities to students and prepare them by providing them with world class standards and citizen responsibilities of adults and work (Rolnis, 2009).

Professional development in higher education is a strategy to improve the learning and teaching quality of researchers and educators as well as to develop the culture of lifelong learning. Although individual lifelong learning signifies a professional (expert) work-life; however, professional development only considers the work aspect and the professional life (teacher / researcher) and is one of lifelong learning component (Nigholls, 2000).

Rezaeian et al. (2014) report that the most important factors affecting the maturity of individuals include process, personal, organization management, communication, and strategic human resources management factors. Safari and Niazazari (2014) examined the factors affecting professional development of faculty members of Islamic Azad University of Azadshahr. The factor analysis resulted in extracting five underlying components, where the psychological factor explained 8.45% of the total variance, the sociocultural factor 8.23%, the institutional factor 8.18%, the directorial factor 8.46%, and the management factor 7.68%.

Gholifar (2010) introduced four groups of individual, organizational and managerial, professional skill and organizational culture factors affecting the psychological empowerment (trust, autonomy, competence and meaningfulness) of faculty members. King (2004) believed participation in training courses and conferences, regular professional interaction, professional association's membership, consultation with experts, and rethinking in professional things to be useful resources for professional development.

Schuster et al. (2010) in a research described factors like sources supply, financial support and general outlooks of faculty members and education system administrators as the professional growth factors.

Tile (2006) states that professional development is a planned activity that improve the individual professional performance in order to operate in the following areas. Skinner (2005) stated that key activities of professional development are included of: study groups, journal clubs, monitor, discussion groups, online learning, and members of professional organization, education and training.

Staisee (1987) has offered a more scientific definition of skills development faculty members as follows: "Activities that faculty members are involved with them in service to assist themselves in raising knowledge of their specialty, their abilities and skills in managing the process of learning education, and improving their research skill and capability and increasing sensitivity and their knowledge of the students, raising a sense of belonging and affiliation to their respective college and university group, making their sense of job satisfaction, and finally, treat as logical and compatible people with their en-

vironment and community.

The present study tries to recognize factors affecting professional development and maturity of faculty members of Islamic Azad University of Ilam province in order to take an effective step to improve future actions by the aim of increasing the quality level of universities faculty members.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research is applied in terms of aim and is survey in terms of data collection method. The site of study was is Ilam Province in 2015. The statistical population was consisted of all faculty members of Islamic Azad University in Ilam province (N=209) and due to the small size of the population, the census method were used for samples studying.

The data collection tool was a researcher-made questionnaire which its validity was confirmed by experts panel and its reliability was determined by using Cronbach's alpha coefficient (α=0.81). The resulting alpha coefficient shows research tool acceptable reliability. According to the research type, descriptive statistics, factor analysis and chi-square test were used for data analysis. Using factor analysis, questions related to factors affecting the professional development of faculty members of Azad University in extracted factors, were classified. The above issues were performed using $SPSS_{21}$ software.

RESULTS

Personal and professional characteristics of the studied sample

The frequency distribution of statistical sample showed that the teaching place of majority of the faculty members of Ilam province Islamic Azad University (63.8), was Ilam city and 50.5% of whom are active in the field of human sciences education. 51.9% of them were in age from 30 to 50 years old and 81.5% were men. In terms of marital status, 88.4% of them were married and work experience of most of them (48.1) was from 5 to 10 years. 72.9% of them, had academic degree of lecturer and status of 54.3% of them was contract employment.

Factor analysis

The determined variables was entered to explanatory factor analysis in order to determine the factors affecting the professional development of faculty members. Based on the collected data, KMO value was 0.789 and the Bartlett value was 2591.930 which is meaningful at 1% level of significant, indicating that the data were suitable for factor analysis. Eigenvalue was used to determine the number of factors. Eigenvalue is the relative contribution of each factor of total variance of all the research variables. It means that the more eigenvalues for a factor, the more contribution it has in explaining total variance and the less eigenvalues for a factor, the less contribution it has in explaining total variance. In this study, four factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 were extracted which totally explained 50.896% of total factors variance and the rest was related to factors which have not recognized in this analysis or its eigenvalues has been less than 1. According to obtained eigenvalues in Table1, first factor with eigenvalue of 4.438 had the greatest effect (17.918%) and the final (fourth) factor with eigenvalue of 2.311 had the least effect in explaining total variance.

Varimax method was used for factor rotation to a clearer separation of factors. Varimax

Table 1
Extracted Factors with Eigenvalues, Variance Percent and the Cumulative Variance

Factors	Eigenvalue	Percentage of variance	Cumulative percent of variance
First factor	4.438	17.918	17.918
Second factor	3.710	11.779	29.697
Third factor	2.420	11.281	40.978
Fourth factor	2.311	9.918	50.896

Table 2
Items Loaded to Each Factors and Related Factor Load

Factor name	Items	Factor load
Service structural maturity	Providing faculty members development fields by making job satisfaction conditions	0.712
	Coordinated pay system for all faculty members	0.661
	Make motivation for writing books and publishing articles	0.647
	Encourage and facilitate access to scientific resources	0.607
	Facilitate the exchange of professors between the country universities	0.534
	providing study conditions for professors	0.501
	providing conditions for faculty members interaction with the world reputable universities professors	0.512
	Enabling databases and developing communication with the world knowledge production centers	0.542
	Creating efficient research authorities such as science and technology parks and research centers in each university	0.561
	Facilitating the conditions for faculty members development by collecting clear procedures and norms at universities	0.552
	Setting official regulatory for facilitating professional development activities	0.500
Managerial organizational maturity	Establishing a regular assessment system of professional development activities by each department management	0.510
	Participation of faculty members in university decision makings through management	0.503
	Having a friendly and positive interaction between faculty members and management	0.512
	Management encourages of innovative teaching and research activities	0.502
	Creating suitable atmosphere and conditions for providing faculty views of management performance	0.671
	Giving educational and research responsibilities by the management to faculty members	0.501
	Preparing fields for faculty members participation in decision-making about university training programs	0.511
Personal Characteristic Maturity	Personal abilities(oratory, self-confidence and ...) in professional role playing	0.642
	Motivation and interest in them self-professional role (teaching and research)	0.657
	Having a sense of responsibility to the job and professional duties	0.586
	Having the spirit of facing with challenge and scientific developments in their specialty field	0.533
	Having a spirit of self-education (goal-oriented learning)	0.540
	Having spirit of self-assessment of their professional activities.	0.528
Network Social Maturity	Having an intimate relationship with other faculty members	0.503
	Gaining experience of experienced faculty members through social communication with them	0.664
	Participate in group and team activities with other faculty members	0.512
	Creating conditions for faculty interaction with trades and occupations representatives and the labor market	0.632
	Carrying out joint group projects in order to have the scientific support of other members	0.550
	Membership of faculty members in professional associations related to their specialty	0.543

method is the finest method to achieve a simple orthogonal structure. In this method, the correlation between the factors is so insignificant that it can be ignored. Varimax method increases large loads and reduce small loads in each factor, so that each factor only has a few limited variables with large loads and has much variables with small loads (or zero) in return (Kline, 2004). After reviewing the items related to each factor and its factor load, then factors were named as: 1) service- structural maturity, 2) managerial - organizational maturity, 3) person-

al–personality maturity and 4) network – social maturity (Table 2).

DISCUSSION

The first explained component resulting from the analysis of the determinants factors and as one of the important prerequisites for professional development of faculty members is focused on the service-structure maturity. This component consists of factors like: providing faculty maturity fields by creating job satisfaction conditions, parity pay system for all faculty members, making motivation for writing books and publishing papers, encouragement and facilitated access to scientific resources, facilitating the exchange of professors between the country universities, creating the studying conditions for professors, creating conditions for faculty interaction with professors of the world reputable universities, enabling databases and developing communication with the world centers of knowledge production, establishing efficient research organizations such as science and technology parks and research centers in each university, and so on. The second described component resulting from the analysis of factors affecting the professional development of faculty members to development is focused on the managerial-organizational maturity. Given this, effective factors such as: creating regular evaluation system of professional development activities by each department manager, participation of faculty members by managing university decision-makings, having a friendly and positive interaction between management and faculty, encouraging innovative teaching and research activities by management, creating suitable atmosphere and conditions for providing faculty members views of management performance, assignment of education and research responsibilities by management to the faculty members and creating fields of faculty participation in the university training programs decision-makings. This part of the study is in line with the results of Daily (1993) research which know important components of professional development as such: providing funding and management supports to attend the members of faculty to professional scientific conferences, inviting experts to attend to the School and holding workshop, which all of them somehow implies management factors affecting professional development and are also in line with research results of about the role of directors and importance of management factors in professional development of faculty members in higher education. The results of his study insist on basic and applicable management techniques such as salary increases, promotions, creating communities and a strong and effective communication between the members and democratic management of mentioned leaders in professional development of faculty members.

The third explained component in factor analysis of factors affecting professional development of faculty members is individual development. Among the important factors and affecting the maturity of the aspect of professional development we can mention below factors; personal abilities (speech power, self-confidence and ...) in playing their professional role, motivation and passion in playing their professional role (teaching and research), having a sense of responsibility to their professional and job duties and having the spirit of facing with challenge and science changes in their specialty field, having a spirit of self-training (goal oriented training) as well as having a spirit of self-examination (Self-assessment) of their professional activities.

The fourth component resulting from analysis of factors affecting the professional development of faculty is focused on network-social development. In this regard, we can refer to factors such as: having an intimate relationship with other faculty members, gaining experience of experienced faculty members through communication with them, participating in group and team activities with other faculty members, create conditions for interact between faculty members and representatives of unions and Jobs and the labor market, carrying out joint projects in order to have the support of other members and faculty members fellowship in professional associations related to their field of study. This part of the study is consistent

with results of Tylee (2006) which insist on factors such as, meet colleagues, working with colleagues and participate in workshops and conferences as factors affecting the professional development of faculty members and is also consistent with research results of Skinner (2005) which Consider the formation of study groups, magazines clubs, discussion groups and the formation of professional associations as factors affecting the professional development of faculty members.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Finally, bellow proposals are provided using the results of research carried out in order to contribute to the development and maturity of faculty members:

Formalization of professional development programs needs at first to provide favorable conditions for the implementation of the programs, therefore, taking in to consideration the maturity, development and optimization of organizational, structural, service and managerial conditions is one of the most important cases.

In addition to underlying conditions, development and maturity of the individual, personality and intellectual structure of faculty members in believe in lifelong learning and change is another important factor in achieving goals of professional development programs. This issue needs personal will and tracking and interest of faculty members and of course provide grounds for encouragement of management and structural planning of the higher education system will have an important facilitator and accelerator role.

Designing reward system and inserting the point of participation in professional development in-service courses in upgrade system and converting status of faculty members is a good effective and encouraging factor to achieve the goals of professional development programs.

Faculty members participation in design and content edit of programs and training, and making social networks of exchange of information and experiences between faculty members either in the form of software and in the context of the Internet virtual world or in the form of hardware and in context of inter-university congress and seminars.

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