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Investigating Greek EFL Coordinators' Involvement in Online Elteachers Communities of Practice as a Means of Professional Development

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Abstract

This paper examines Greek EFL Coordinators' involvement in online ELTeachers Communities of Practice (CoPs) and its impact on their own and their trainees'/teachers' professional development. The study focuses on four (4) Greek EFL School Advisors who acted as Coordinators of four online CoPs training fourty-nine (49) EFL teachers using an online platform named 2gather developed by the University of Athens in the context of a national in-service professional development project in Greece. Founded on the theory of situated learning, CoPs have been defined as "groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis" (Wenger et al., 2002). The study involved monitoring the development of four online ELTeachers CoPs and their respective Coordinators' patterns of involvement and response using a mixed-methods approach which combined quantitative data and qualitative research of collective case studies (Dornyei, 2007) of the four groups of teachers. A comparison of the Coordinators' implementation of meaningful professional development (Franke et al., 2001) activities "before" and "after" their involvement in the online CoPs was carried out. Findings delineate the extent of the Coordinators' "reformed" training practice in terms of professional development activities provided to the teachers "before" and "after" their CoP involvement as well as their report on

their teachers' and their own perceived benefit. Results also highlight the role of the Coordinators' attitude towards the innovative model of teacher education for its feasibility and viability in Greece and contribute to furthering our understanding of effective implementation of online CoPs in the context of continuing professional development.

Keywords: professional development, online communities of practice, effective implementation, reformed training practice

Introduction

Teachers' professional development has been gaining increasing attention in the past twenty years all over the world (Vescio et al., 2008). In a climate of increasing accountability and effectiveness enhancement, there have been many attempts of educational reforms and interventions aimed at teachers' professional learning and their impact. However, serious doubts exist about the effectiveness of teacher education initiatives, that is, teachers' cognitive and belief restructuring as well as teachers' reformed classroom practices (Navarro & Verdisco, 2000). A large number of articles pertaining to this issue have been published covering different geographical areas, research and professional development procedures (Avalos, 2011). Research findings have clearly highlighted the imperative for an alternative solution (Lai et al., 2006) based on a widespread consensus on the mode of delivery. The paradigm shift gathering momentum with regard to the professional development of teachers over the past few years has been that of online professional Communities of Practice (CoPs).

The implementation of this model in EFL teachers' continuing professional development in Greece took shape in the form of ELTeachers online CoPs set up and officially launched in the academic year of 2014-2015. The investigation of the teachers' participation has confirmed that teachers can benefit from membership in supportive online Communities of Practice and has also provided evidence on the central role that online Communities of Practice can play in the teacher education field in Greece as an effective catalyst for the professional development of teachers (Kourkouli, 2018).

Therefore, it is the purpose of this paper to investigate a different aspect, the involvement of the four (4) Greek EFL School Advisors who acted as Coordinators of the four (4) online CoPs under research, training fourty-nine (49) EFL teachers. They made use of the same online platform named 2gather, developed by the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, in the context of a national in-service professional development project in Greece with the objective to acquaint teachers with teaching English to young primary school learners. Firstly, it is intended to delineate the extent of the Coordinators' "reformed" training practice by comparing the professional development activities they provided to their trainees "before" and "after" their

involvement in the ELTeachers online Communities of Practice. Secondly, it is attempted to highlight the impact of their involvement in terms of their report on their trainees' and their own perceived benefit. Thirdly, it means to showcase the role of the Coordinators' attitude towards the innovative model of teacher education for its feasibility and viability in Greece.

The research was conducted within the paradigm of a mixed-methods design which combines quantitative data with qualitative research of collective case studies (Dornyei, 2007) of the four ELTeachers CoPs.

This investigation contributes to deepening our understanding of effective professional development implementation and validates online CoPs as a dynamic and effective catalyst for enhanced teacher learning, reformed teaching and training practice. In addition, it provides a platform for other educators towards a true paradigm shift in teacher education in Greece.

Literature review

EFL teacher education context

Traditionally, teacher education programs are based on a "deficit" model, according to which teachers are in need of some sort of new knowledge or skill, which they do not yet possess but they should try to acquire (Day & Sachs, 2004). Therefore, attending teacher education programs is still considered the basic mechanism for the professional development of teachers. The usual practice consists of a visiting "expert" being the main agent for the transmission of knowledge to the trainees and the evaluation of learning outcomes through some sort of assessment procedure. Lecturing and presentations have been found to constitute the basic modes of training under this model, mainly due to the low implementation cost and relatively simple design (Diaz-Maggioli, 2004). However, the traditional teacher education model has been repeatedly found to be ineffective, taking the form of short-term, "spray-on" in-service PD seminars, failing to provide teachers with sufficient time, meaningful professional development procedures and activities (Kourkouli, 2015).

In Greece, over the past few decades, there have also been educational reforms taking place in order to contribute to the professional development of teachers. However, the educational model implemented, is more or less convergent with the traditional one delineated above. In-service teacher education policy in Greece, under the authority of the Ministry of Education, is highly bureaucratic and centralized, not leaving much space for initiatives. Teachers participate neither in the design, nor in the decision-making process on the educational policy development while teacher education policy is mainly characterized by lack of both long-term, coherent planning and consistency towards policy objectives, training content and forms. Organized by Instructional Coordinators (formerly School Advisors) who are selected by the Greek Ministry of Education in order to coordinate, supervise, provide advice and training opportunities for teachers appointed in the schools of their geographical

jurisdiction,teacher education programs mainly take the form of non-compulsory three-hour seminars, make no reference whatsoever to the methodological procedures required for the realization of the goals set and or to guidelines on the mode of training to be adopted. The proposal put forward is for a more appropriate, meaningful and promising form of teacher professional development.

Professional development

Constantly updating teachers' professional knowledge and skills becomes essential in an ever-changing world, therefore, it is considered indispensable to provide them with the appropriate professional development programs to achieve this goal. In Freeman's (1989) view, teacher education constitutes a superordinate term that encompasses both teacher training and teacher development as different strategies by which teachers are educated. Training is based on a process of direct intervention, leading to the mastery of specific knowledge and skills and is based on external criteria for assessing teachers' change. On the contrary, teacher development implies an idiosyncratic and individual process of influence, encouraging some sort of increase or shift in teachers' awareness which can be non-evaluative by external criteria. Therefore, any course focusing on the education of teachers should feature elements of both training and development in order to bring about some sort of change in teachers' beliefs, attitudes and teaching practices (Kourkouli, 2015: 8). Career growth as "an ongoing goal […] which involves change on multiple levels (Pennington, 1990: 132) is a necessary component of any effective professional development initiative. The understanding of teachers' and trainers' change as a constant process resulting from their everyday practice, involvement in professional development courses and cooperation with peers hints at the alternative normative – reeducative perspective of change (Richardson & Placier, 2001). It suggests the evaluation of the impact of teacher education courses in terms of the participants' understanding of the training content and its value and how this leads to the development of reformed practices.

The success of professional development programs is dependent then, not only on the content it covers, but on the processes used for professional development to occur and the context which participants apply their knowledge to (Wang, 2012). Therefore, professional development should be a long – term ongoing process of putting newly – acquired knowledge into practice through teachers' actual practice (Schlager & Fusco, 2004). It entails both gaining of new insights and accommodation of knowledge into their existing practice repertoire (Moore, 2008). The role of reflection in enhancing teacher change has been extensively researched and reported to be of utmost importance. In fact, teachers cannot develop themselves unless they are able to reflect critically upon what they do in their classrooms (Liu & Fisher, 2006). As Brandt (2008: 42) argues, "learning and reflection are interrelated" as it encourages them to take greater responsibility for their own professional growth and inspires autonomy.

Therefore, in order to enhance the effectiveness, a number of general principles are put forward for the design, organization and implementation of teacher education courses (Kourkouli, 2015). Under the prism of adult learning principles such as the exploration of teachers' personal practical theories and beliefs (Levin & He, 2008) at the pre-training stage, relevance of topics, restricted use of the lecture mode for presenting new information, emphasis on reflection, experiential elements such as micro-teaching, self and peer-observation, demonstration techniques, collaborative learning in pairs or groups, exploratory learning in workshops and provision of continuous follow-up support to equip trainees with the knowledge and confidence required to implement new theories in their everyday teaching practice are among the predominant ones (Kourkouli, 2018).

Research therefore suggests that effective professional development courses should benefit from alternative, trainee – centred models of teacher education, which provide them with the opportunity for exploration and production of a common negotiated cognition in a community of peers (Johnson, 2009). In this new perspective, "professional development is not something you receive, but something in which you participate as part of your everyday activities" (Moore & Barab, 2002: 44) and teacher learning is a participatory involvement in "doing, becoming and belonging, not simply acquiring" (Ng & Hung, 2003: 62). The common denominator of such alternatives is that effective professional development often takes place within a unique individualized context and that we should move towards new models of education which make use of professional networks and social interaction.

Online Communities of Practice – a new approach in teacher education

The idea of a Community of Practice originated in the 1980s at the Institute for Research on Learning funded by the Xerox Corporation (O'Brien & Sarkar, 2004) but the term was coined by Etienne Wenger who is now considered to be the most prominent theorist in the field of CoPs. According to Wenger et al. (2002: 4), a CoP can be defined as "a group of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis". Its three main components are a) domain, the common ground on which participants share information and ideas, b) community, the result of belonging and mutual commitment shared by a group of people who establish positive relationships among themselves and c) practice, the materials, tools and knowledge that the community develops and possesses.

Based on Mezirow's transformative learning (1991), according to which, critical reflection emerges as a precondition for learning through a persistent process of ongoing revision and restructuring of experiences and knowledge base and on the social constructivist theory which views the educational experience as a dynamic process "constructed" by the participants in the social context in which it takes place (Kimble et al., 2008), Wenger's concept of a CoP is based on the theory of situated learning. Influenced by Vygotsky's cognitive theory (1978), this concept views

learning as a process of meaning making and identity formation within a network of social relationships. More specifically, learning is embedded within an activity, context and culture and is inseparable from practice. It is a social process of acculturation into an established community and therefore situated professional learning in authentic environments such as the workplace has been the prominent tenet of this approach. A shift of focus is therefore required, from formal training to learning in practice and to ongoing learning.

In CoPs, teachers share experiences and expertise, provide continuous support to each other and develop new insights by collaborating with their colleagues and working alongside more experienced members (Barab et al., 2003). They are also able to focus on specific work – related problems through ongoing collaboration and negotiation in order to gain "knowledge of practice" instead of "knowledge for practice" conveyed to them in training workshops (Cochran – Smith & Lytle, 1999). As Katz et al. (2005) suggest, fostering discussions on the theory and practice of teaching can support teachers in changing their practice through a culture of critical colleagueship and reflective inquiry. This model also dismisses the idea of the visiting expert to disseminate their wisdom and recognizes the need for collegiality and co-creation of knowledge. In this way, CoPs facilitate knowledge sharing and knowledge creation and celebrate the role of trainees as co-learners and co-producers of knowledge (Lai et al., 2006: 24-26).

Contrary to the constraints of a co-located CoP, online CoPs offer participants the facilitative synchronous and asynchronous technolology to share information and collaborate online, to practically reach out to everybody even in geographically isolated areas and can draw on powerful resources to provide work – embedded support for teachers' ongoing learning (Karavas & Papadopoulou, 2014).

The vital role of leadership

The issue of effective leadership is identified and discussed in various studies but still continuous to portray as a relatively uncharted area, particularly as to the specific characteristics, beliefs, attitudes, knowledge base, activities, tools and presence attributes leaders should exhibit during their involvement in online CoPs teacher education programs. The crucial role of leadership for the sustaining/maturing phase is identified in both Cothrel & Williams' (1999) and Stuckey & Smith's (2004) studies. They argue that leaders should participate actively in the life of the CoP and identify ways to keep members involved. It also falls within their job description to foster community building, decide on the implementation of social and facilitation issues to support the group become a community, implement strategies to build traffic, increase participation and continually assess community progress and value among a plethora of other all -important duties. Different authors propose different frameworks for roles in CoPs but the underlying idea is that there is ample field to be occupied by leadership roles such as sponsors, community organizers, project managers, moderators/facilitators, coordinators, subject matter experts, knowledge

managers and content coordinators (Lai et al., 2006). It becomes clear that it lies in the major stakeholders' initiative to decide on the framework that would best serve their vision and objectives. In the light of the above, it should be within this and future papers' scope to cast more light into this vital role.

Method

Methodological approach

The purpose of this study is to investigate whether the Coordinators' involvement in the ELTeachers online CoPs constitutes a meaningful professional development source for them by delineating the extent of their "reformed" training practice compared with the traditional models they implemented "before" their online CoP training experience. Secondly, it is our objective to highlight the impact of their involvement in terms of their report on their trainees' and their own perceived benefit. Thirdly, we intend to showcase the role of the Coordinators' attitude towards the innovative model of teacher education for its feasibility and viability in Greece. In this light, we selected the most suitable methodological approach to address the following research questions:

1) To what extent do the Coordinators display "reformed" training practice in terms of professional development activities (Franke et al., 2001) provided to the teachers "during" their participation in the CoPs compared with the ones "before" their participation?

2) To what extent is there reported perceived benefit in relation to the Coordinatots' and the teachers' practice as a result of this involvement?

3) What is the Coordinators' attitude towards the innovative model of teacher education for its feasibility and viability in Greece?

Study context

In order to respond to the research questions stated above, we[1] made a difficult decision in the direction of reliability to gather the necessary data by developing our own authentic online CoPs, not with a focus group of the English Department National Kapodistrian University acquaintances, but with the actual appointed volunteers Instructional Coordinators for the English language, operating in different geographical jurisdictions all over Greece. They are responsible for training all state – school appointed teachers working in their jurisdiction and the assessment of the state school teachers' performance fell within the exclusive competence of these Coordinators as established by the Presidential Decree of 5 November 2013, No. 152 published in the Government Gazette Vol. 1, No. 240/2013.[2] Coordinators

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[1] The project and research were realized thanks to my PhD supervisor, Dr. Kia Karavas, Professor at the English Department, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, who initiated and supported me with feedback throughout this endeavor.

[2] It should be noted that at the time, November 2014 – January 2015, due to austerity measures and reforms enforced in Greece in the context of its fiscal adjustment, the competent Ministers had issued Presidential Decree No 152/5 November 2013 published in the

communicated our invitations and announcements through the competent Directorates of Primary Education in order to recruit appointed volunteers EFL teachers working in the state primary education in Greece with real needs and everyday problems. For the online ELTeachers CoPs formation, we used the 2gather platform developed by the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens. Through open source technologies, it combined features of Learning and Content Management Systems with those of Social Networking Services. The platform integrated the following facilities useful to a CoP: a) homepage b) discussion spaces to foster discussions through a closed forum for every CoP, c) private and public messages), d) member directory with a profile – avatar and a short bionote for every participant as well as their online status), e) chatrooms, f) media library, g) activity streams) and h) groups and sub-groups (Karavas & Papadopoulou, 2014).

The whole project amounted to a monumental effort of setting up, publicising, piloting, organizing launching as well as kick-off events, face and skype meetings, tutorial workshops as well as informing and training the Coordinators (the teacher trainers) on the innovative teacher education method, the specific platform and available tools. The investigation lasted from April 2014 – June 2015. Each online CoP was composed of one Coordinator and as many teachers - volunteers as they could find, working in the broader geographical area of the Coordinators' jurisdiction, sometimes a whole Prefecture. The CoP training schedule and material was based on reported teachers' needs and was given to the Coordinators as a "guidebook" for further development or, as it mostly happened, a step-by-step implementation procedure, which practically meant that it was fully adopted by the Coordinators and implemented with very little content and structure variation. Coordinators posted one monthly activity in each CoP's forum divided in two fortnight sections with strict deadlines and specific ground rules designed to multiply interaction. The first section was designed to foster reflection and practice-related integration with posts and accompanying studying or viewing material. The second section was meant to foster the development of open discussion and the connection with teachers' everyday practice through new posts, continuous provision of feedback and open interaction among the participants. The following topics were created and posted as monthly activities: 1. Introductions; 2. Teaching Context; 3. Multiple Intelligences and Learning Styles; 4. Classroom Management; 5. Increasing student motivation/Developing positive student-teacher relationships; 6. Differentiated instruction; 7. Project work on lesson planning (Kourkouli, 2018).

Govenrment Gazette Vol I, No. 240/2013, pp. 4107-4132 assigning School Advisors (currently Instructional Coordinators) to conduct teachers' evaluations for the first time in years with the aim to create a potential tank for future state school teachers' dismissals. They were signed as prior actions of the Second Economic Adjustment Programme for Greece in March 2012. The total number of online CoPs under my supervision amounted to 10 CoPs for the school years of 2014-15 and 2015-16 and the total number of participants amounted to 147. Despite repeated reassurance and affirmation on the part of the researcher and the School Advisors that teachers' participation in the CoPs training program would not be used for their evaluation reports, the final research participants were much fewer.

In other words, the whole project amounted to the first ever attempt in the EFL state education greek context to implement an innovatory model of teacher education with actual appointed Coordinators training actual appointed volunteers - teachers. This participation plan was meant to increase the validity and reliability of the research findings.

Participants

The research was conducted by the author of this paper, Katerina Kourkouli. Following Cambridge et al.'s example (2005), we assigned the roles as follows:

Administrator–Leader: Katerina Kourkouli, researcher at the English Department of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, responsible for the setting up of the 4 online CoPs under investigation, registration procedures, training modules, Coordinators' training, support, contact, organizing face-to-face, Skype and kick-off meetings with Coordinators and participating teachers, explaining the philosophy, publicizing the training innovation and addressing every technical or other issue that might arise. A lot of the decision – making was the result of fruitful deliberations with my supervisor, Dr. Kia Karavas, Professor at the English Department, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens.

Coordinators: 4 state EFL Instructional Coordinators assigned their own online CoP (A' CoP, K' CoP, C' CoP and I'CoP named like this for anonymity reasons) who consented to answer the "before" the CoP involvement questionnaire (they were informed that it was meant to serve as a research tool and baseline investigation), volunteered to participate in all Coordinators' seminars, meetings, skype, phonecall communications and problem – solving deliberations with the Administrator of the project, managed to initiate and keep their CoPs active and lively throughout the training period, fulfilled the criteria in terms of implementation specified by the CoP literature (Lai et. al, 2006), consented to answer the "after" the CoP involvement questionnaire and provide all necessary information, data and clarification requested by the researcher. All four (4) Coordinators received certificates of the ELTeachers online CoPs Coordination. At this point, it is important to disclose that A' CoP constisted of teachers working in schools of a major urban centre of Athens, the capital of Greece, whereas the remaining three consisted of teachers working in urban, exurban and rural schools scattered all around the corresponding prefectures of different regions in Greece. The allocation of online CoPs was based on the Coordinators' administrative jurisdiction, as they were responsible for training, supporting, encouraging the participants and providing feedback. In fact, one of them, C' CoP's Coordinator opted to acting as a Coordinator along with a chosen teacher of her jurisdiction acting as a Deputy Coordinator.

Participants: 50 EFL state school teachers working in the primary education (16 teachers/trainees for A' CoP, 16 for C' CoP, 6 for I' CoP and 12 for K' CoP) who consented to answer the "before" the CoP participation questionnaire anonymously

and registered to participate in their Instructional Coordinators' CoPs. They were informed that it was meant to serve as a research tool and baseline investigation resulting finally in 49 EFL state school teachers working in the primary education who participated voluntarily and actively throughout the training period, in their authentic contexts, fulfilled the criteria in terms of workload and projects submitted specified by the CoP program and answered the "after" questionnaire (16 teachers for A' CoP, 15 for C' CoP, 12 for K' CoP and 6 for I' CoP). All 49 participants received a certificate of participation. Anonymity was guaranteed by their Coordinators and the researcher herself.

Data sources

In order to address the research questions, two questionnaires were constructed as tools for data collection and analysis administered "before" and "after" the Coordinators' CoP involvement. The questionnaire administered "before" the CoP involvement is meant to serve as a baseline investigation of the Coordinators' profiles, beliefs and training practices before their involvement in the CoPs program while the questionnaire administered "after" their CoP involvement is considered a tool for detecting "reformed" beliefs, attitudes and training practices. The "after" questionnaire is also meant to detect reported perceived benefit in relation to the Coordinators' and their teachers' practice as a result of this involvement as well as the Coordinators' attitude towards the innovative model of teacher education for its feasibility and viability in Greece.

Both questionnaires were constructed based on the study of variables that capture common experiences of people. In particular, the use of the Microsoft Excel 2007 Data processing programme accounted for the descriptive nature of this research and qualitative crosstabulation for the establishment of associations between variables (Dornyei, 2007: 228).

The sampling plan for this project involved two stages and yielded a total of 4 questionnaires from November-January 2014 (the "before" phase) and another 4 questionnaires in July 2015 (the "after" phase).[1]

Instrument

Information was elicited through mainly clozed-ended item types using factual, behavioural and attitudinal questions. In effect, Part I aims to build a profile of the respondents who participate in this research, especially in the areas of formal training concerning the area of training teachers to teach English to young learners. Part II focuses on the teacher education courses themselves, both the traditional ones Coordinators used to provide "before" their CoP involvement and the online CoP course itself. This is achieved firstly by exploring the topics covered, the presence of

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[1] The "after" questionnaires were collected in a period of widespread financial and political turmoil in Greece with banks closed and capital controls imposed.

training practices used which are regarded conducive to teacher development as well as the specific professional development activities Coordinators provided their trainees with "before" and "during" their CoP training. Secondly, it seeks to investigate the impact of both the traditional courses as well as the online CoP course itself. This is done through the tracing of reported perceived benefit in relation to the Coordinators' and their teachers' needs and practice as a result of this involvement. Finally, focusing exclusively on the "after" instrument, we will also highlight specific tools that have supported teachers' reflection and the Coordinators' attitude towards the innovative model of teacher education for its feasibility and viability in Greece.

Presentation and discussion of results

In this section, we will present the results and discuss them critically based on the research method described and the theoretical framework delineated above.

Personal and professional data

All the four Coordinators participating in this research are female, three of them have 2-5 years of experience as School Advisors/Instructional Coordinators and one of them 0-1 year. Half of them report having received formal training concerning the area of teaching English to young learners, whereas the other half report no such training. Most of them (75%) have not been involved in an organized Community of Practice but are motivated into familiarizing themselves with it.

Description of results

The second part of this presentation will focus on the online CoP teacher education course itself, in terms of the implementation of strategies, activities and training procedures considered to be conducive to teacher development. We will explore the extent of the Coordinators' "reformed" training practice by comparing the professional development activities they provided to the teachers - trainees "before", in the traditional seminars, with the ones "during" their involvement in the ELTeachers online Communities of Practice as well as the impact of their involvement in terms of their report on their trainees' and their own perceived benefit. Finally, focusing on the "after" instrument, we will also highlight specific tools that have supported teachers' reflection and the Coordinators' attitude towards the innovative model of teacher education for its feasibility and viability in Greece.
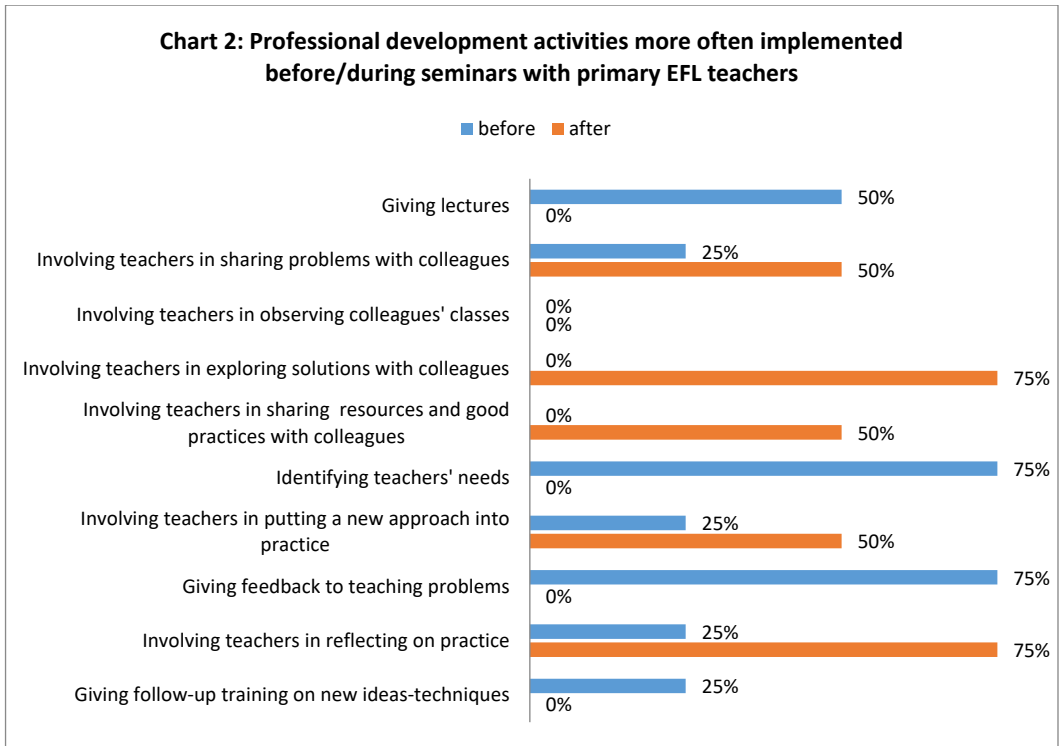
In response to the first research question,

To what extent do the Coordinators display "reformed" training practice in terms of professional development activities (Franke et al., 2001) provided to the teachers "during" their participation in the CoPs compared with the ones "before" their participation?

as can be seen in Chart 1 below, in terms of topic coverage, there is the introduction of new topics for discussion and exploration for the first time "during" the online CoP

course such as the issues of multiple intelligences, collaborative and individual lesson designing and the all - important factor of reflection. Topic selection based on teachers' needs also dictated the coverage of the all too popular and practical issue of classroom management at a rate of 100% "during" the CoP course, which is obviously more compatible with learner – centred approaches.

Chart 1 : Topics covered before/after your CoP involvement with primary school EFL teachers
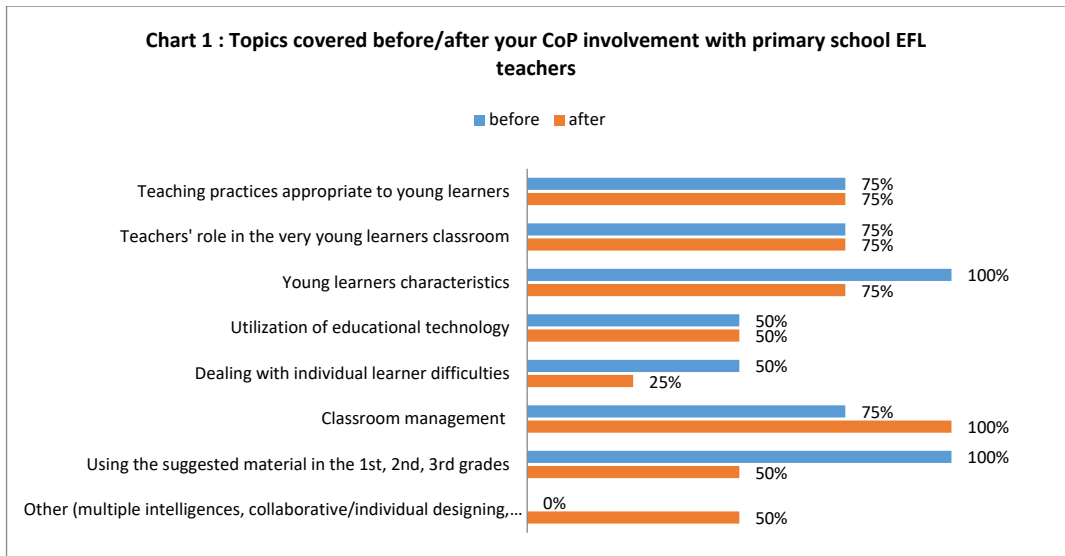
Concerning the professional development activities implemented, that is the methods the trainers employed to provide new input as well as the presence of training elements augmenting the effectiveness of training courses, the situation looks by far more improved "during" the CoP course. More specifically, findings show that (see Chart 2) 50% of the Coordinators report regularly involving teachers in sharing problems with colleagues "during" the CoP course compared with only 25% of them reporting the same in the "before" / traditional courses. In the same vein, an astonishing 75% of Coordinators engaged their teachers in exploring solutions with their colleagues while no one of them (0%) implemented such an activity in the "before" traditional seminars. Similarly, 75% of the Coordinators report often involving teachers in reflecting on practice compared with only 25% of them in the "before" phase and there is also an increase in the number of Coordinators engaging teachers in putting a new approach into practice (50%). Since learning is a participatory process where knowledge is "constructed" by the participants, then collaborative and exploratory learning constitute effective professional development activities. Coordinators seem to perceive the notions of "social and situated learning" through interaction and collaboration at greater percentages than "before" the CoP course.

Chart 2: Professional development activities more often implemented before/during seminars with primary EFL teachers

■ before ■ after

| Activity	before	after
Giving lectures	50%	0%
Involving teachers in sharing problems with colleagues	25%	50%
Involving teachers in observing colleagues' classes	0%	0%
Involving teachers in exploring solutions with colleagues	0%	75%
Involving teachers in sharing resources and good practices with colleagues	0%	50%
Identifying teachers' needs	75%	0%
Involving teachers in putting a new approach into practice	25%	50%
Giving feedback to teaching problems	75%	0%
Involving teachers in reflecting on practice	25%	75%
Giving follow-up training on new ideas-techniques	25%	0%

Findings also exhibit evidence of the Coordinators' "reformed" attitudes (see Chart 3) when asked about the professional development activities they consider more effective for their teachers' professional development. As can be seen below, there is a far greater appreciation of the "sharing problems with colleagues" and "exploring solutions with colleagues" activities (75%) compared with only 25% in the "before" phase. Giving lectures fell to 0% while identifying teachers' needs and involving teachers in reflecting on practice are considered more effective for the professional development of teachers "during" the CoP course (75%).

Chart 3 : Most effective professional development activities for EFL teachers
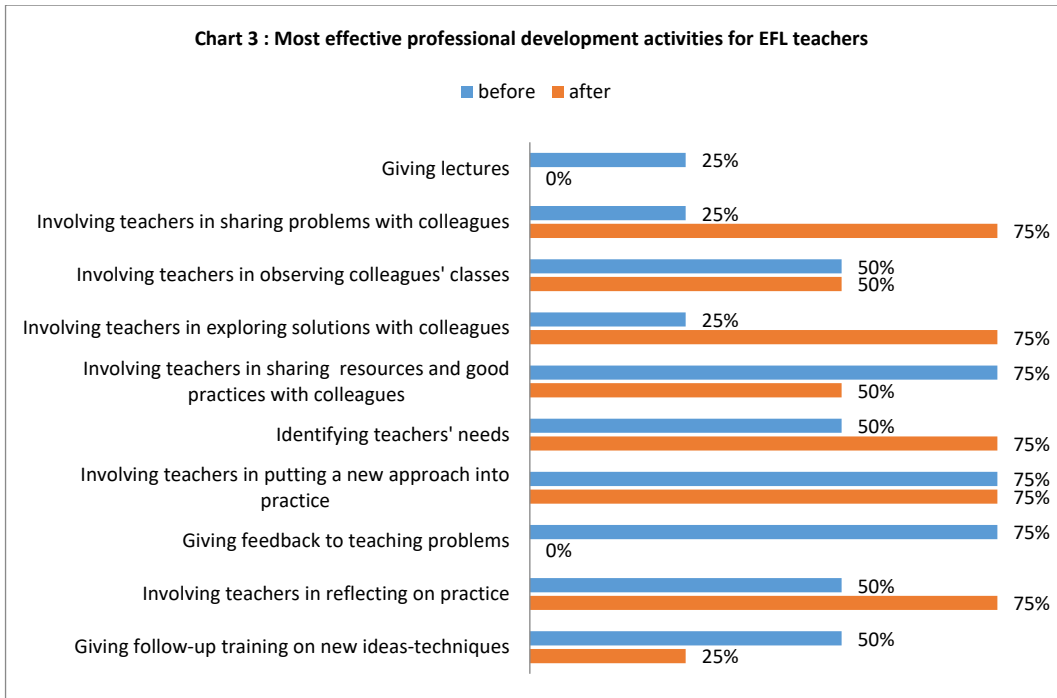
In accordance with the above, findings also show a striking shift of the Coordinators' focus on the provision of activities that foster teachers' reflection on their teaching practice, experimenting and innovating in their work and sharing their professional eperiences and successes at rates of 100% "during" the CoP. In addition, Coordinators seem more determined "during" the CoP course to engage teachers systematically in social learning, working in teams and discussing their teaching methods at percentages of 75% (see Chart 4).

Chart 4 : Activities primary school EFL teachers systematically engage in before/during CoP involvement
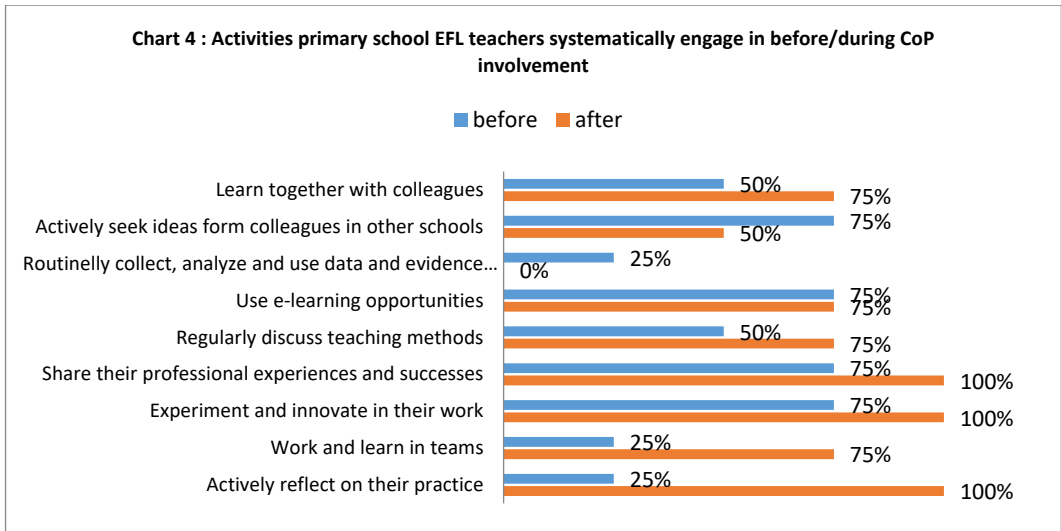
They also report employing more effective reflection practices with teachers "during" the CoP, such as fostering discussions with colleagues in a collaborative environment (100%), writing reflective lesson plans (75%) and the introduction of peer evaluation for the first time (25%) (see Chart 5).


Chart 5 : Tools teachers employed to guide themselves towards reflection before/during CoP
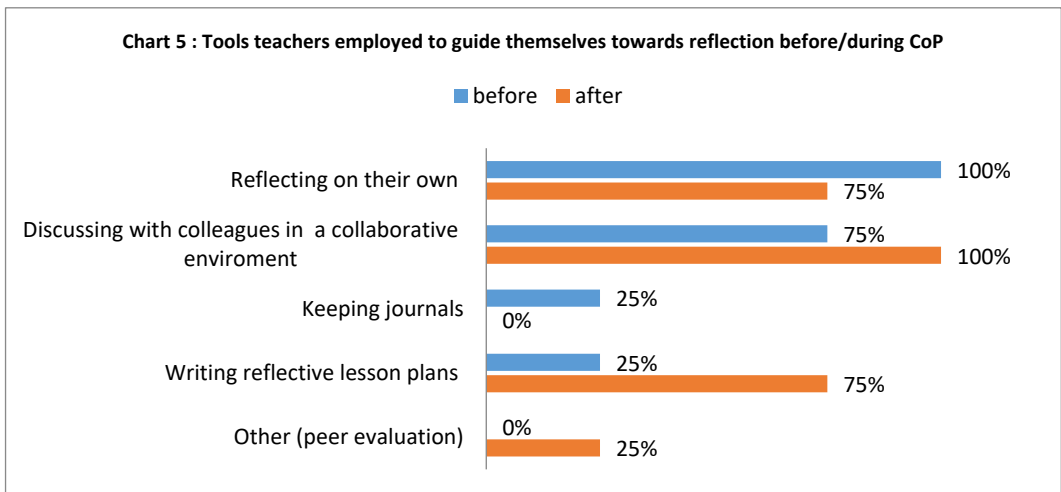
Base on Coordinators' reports of teachers' increased involvement in reflective strategies, exposure to collaborative and cooperative environments, provision of opportunities to stand critically towards the process experienced and practical application of new approaches, it could be suggested here that the online CoP courses incite Coordinators to engage teachers in more meaningful professional development activities than the traditional courses. Therefore, findings corroborate the hypothesis for the restructuring of both Coordinators' and teachers' attitudes and training practices as a result of their involvement in the online CoPs.
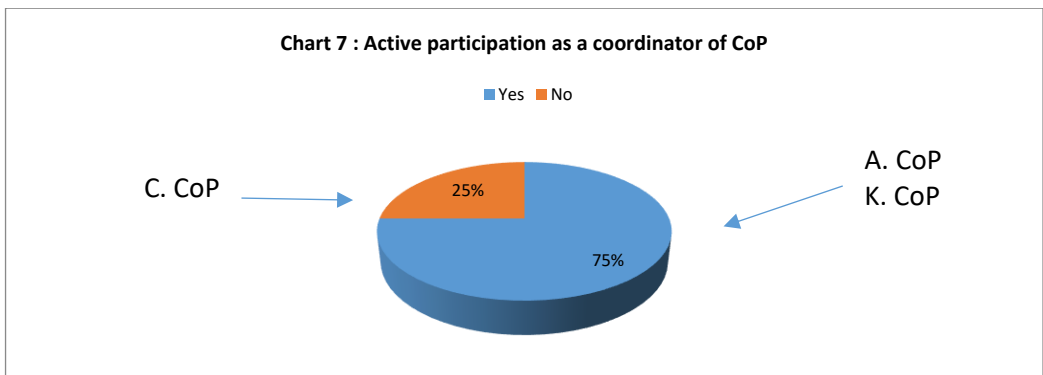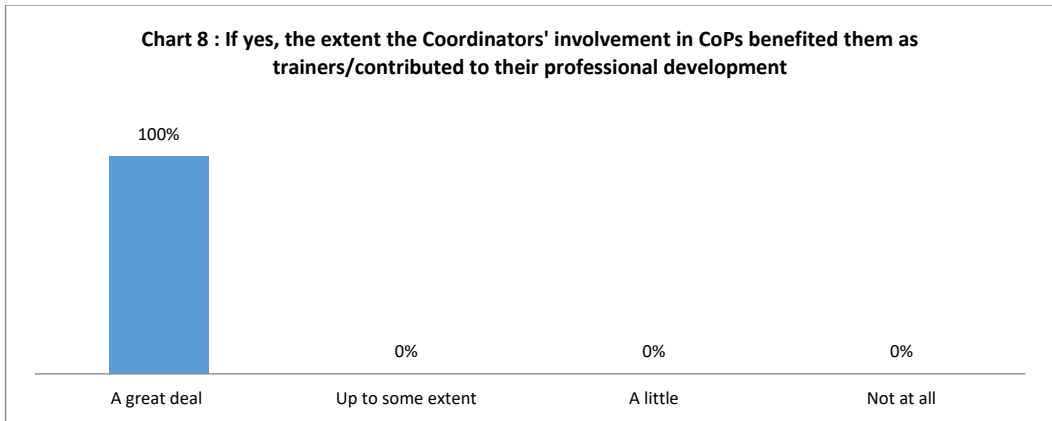
Addressing the second research question,

To what extent is there reported perceived benefit in relation to the Coordinators' and the teachers' practice as a result of this involvement?

Findings show (see Chart 6) a striking rate of satisfaction concerning the extent to which Coordinators report that teachers' development needs have been met "during" the CoP course. In particular, 75% of the Coordinators report a great deal of satisfaction with the CoP course whereas only 25% of them took the same stance for the traditional courses.

Chart 6 : Extent to which teacher development needs have been met before/after CoP involvement
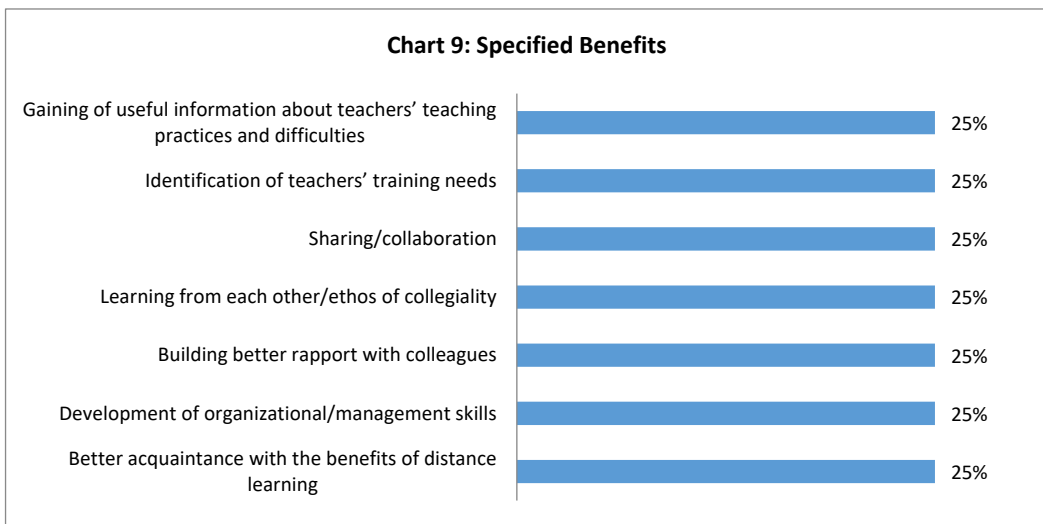(regarding everyday teaching practice)
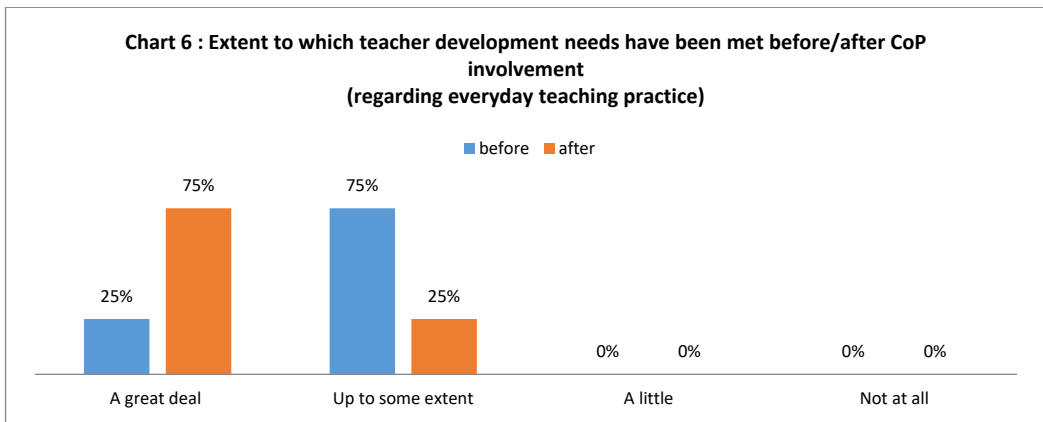
Concerning the effectiveness of the CoP training course as a means of professional development both for the Coordinators and the teachers/trainees, the whole analysis and discussion of results below refers to the "after" questionnaire. In this light, in terms of the Coordinators' perception of the impact and usefulness of the CoP training course for their own professional development, all of the respondents (100%) who participated actively as Coordinators in their CoPs are totally positive in their appraisal (see Charts 7 & 8).

Chart 7 : Active participation as a coordinator of CoP

Chart 8 : If yes, the extent the Coordinators' involvement in CoPs benefited them as trainers/contributed to their professional development

100%

0%   0%   0%

A great deal   Up to some extent   A little   Not at all

When asked to specify the benefits received, there is a wide distribution (25% for each one of the responses) of the Coordinators report on a plethora of teacher training aspects, from gaining useful information about their own teachers' teaching practices and difficulties, identification of teachers' training needs, sharing, collaborating and learning from each other an ethos of collegiality, to building better rapport with their colleagues, developing their organizational and management skills as well as getting better acquainted with the benefits of distance learning (Chart 9).

Chart 9: Specified Benefits

Gaining of useful information about teachers' teaching practices and difficulties	25%
Identification of teachers' training needs	25%
Sharing/collaboration	25%
Learning from each other/ethos of collegiality	25%
Building better rapport with colleagues	25%
Development of organizational/management skills	25%
Better acquaintance with the benefits of distance learning	25%

Results, display a perfect case of the most positive impact of the ELTeachers online CoPs training course. To corroborate this statement, all (100%) of the Coordinators who participated actively in their CoPs, report that the CoP training course responded to teachers' everyday practice to a great extent (see Chart 10).

Chart 10: If yes, the extent it responded to the teachers' everyday teaching practice
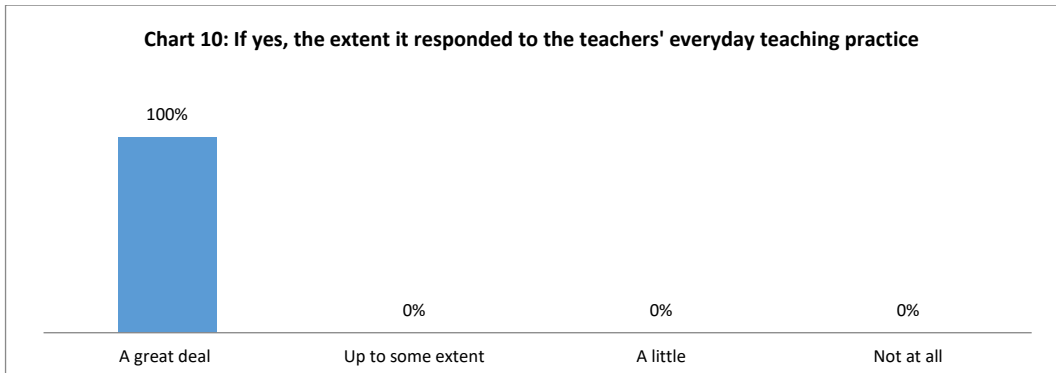

Answering the 3rd research question,

What is the Coordinators' attitude towards the innovative model of teacher education for its feasibility and viability in Greece?

Coordinators' responses concerning the effectiveness of their online CoP course involvement on their own training practice will provide us with useful insights for more effective teacher training implementation in the future. They also provide evidence on the role that online CoPs can play in the teacher education field in Greece as an effective catalyst for more meaningful professional development and the potential for this model's wider implementation as well.

As can be seen, all (100%) of the Coordinators report overcoming problems and difficulties as a result of this involvement (see Chart 11).

Chart 11: Did this teacher education help you overcome problems/difficulites
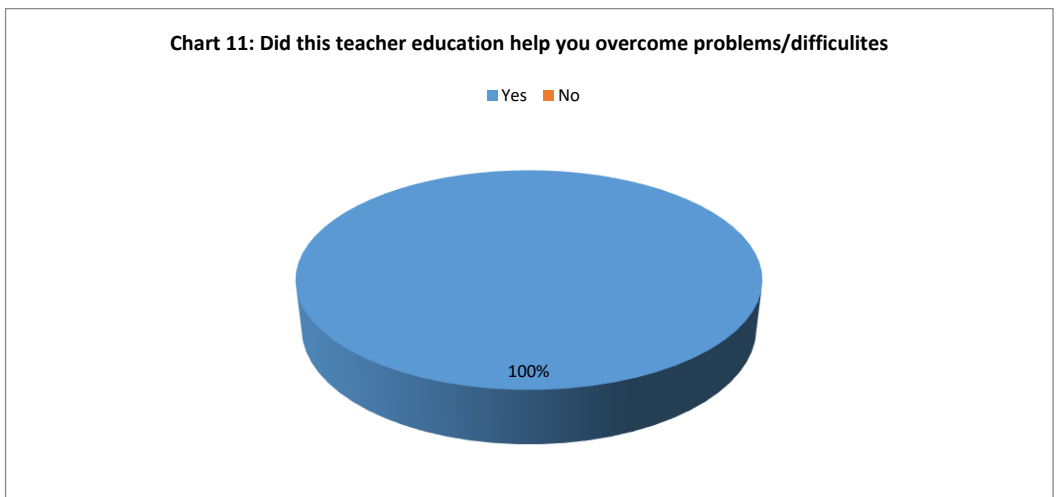

Time and geographical constraints constitute the most often reported problems overcome (75%), followed by the difficulty of sharing (50%) as the second most popular issue dealt with. The problems of instilling motivation, encouraging collaboration and communication as well as the empowerment of designing a

coherent teacher training course and giving solutions to teachers' problems have all been reported as overcome at a rate of 25% (Chart 12).

Chart 12: If yes, problems/difficulties overcome
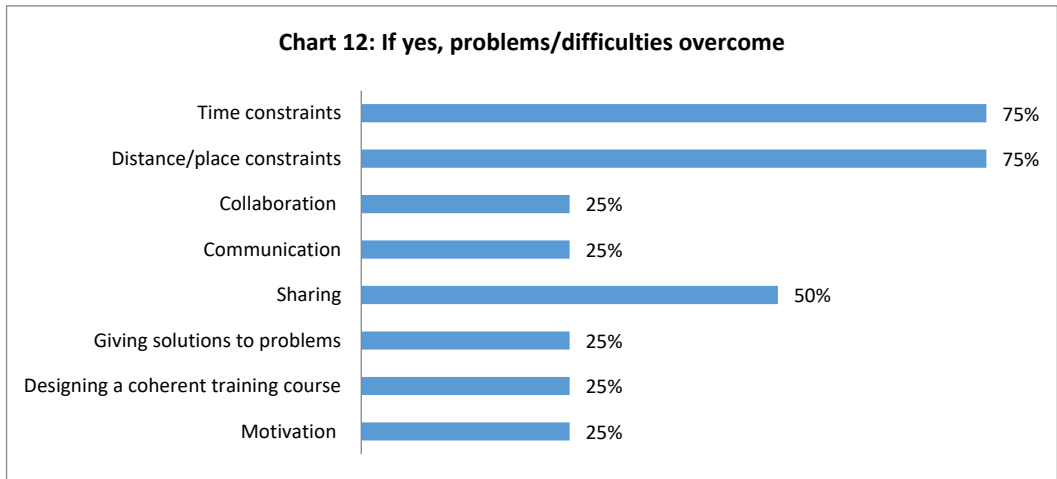
Among the main constraints mentioned to be addressed in future implementation endeavours are the issues of motivating teachers to participate and convincing them about the importance of this participation for their professional development (50%), building trust among them and reducing their fear of exposure (50%). In addition, the time – consuming nature of the CoP involvement was mentioned, as it makes demands on the Coordinators' time schedule (50%) (Chart 13).

Chart 13: Constraints pertaining to this teacher education model
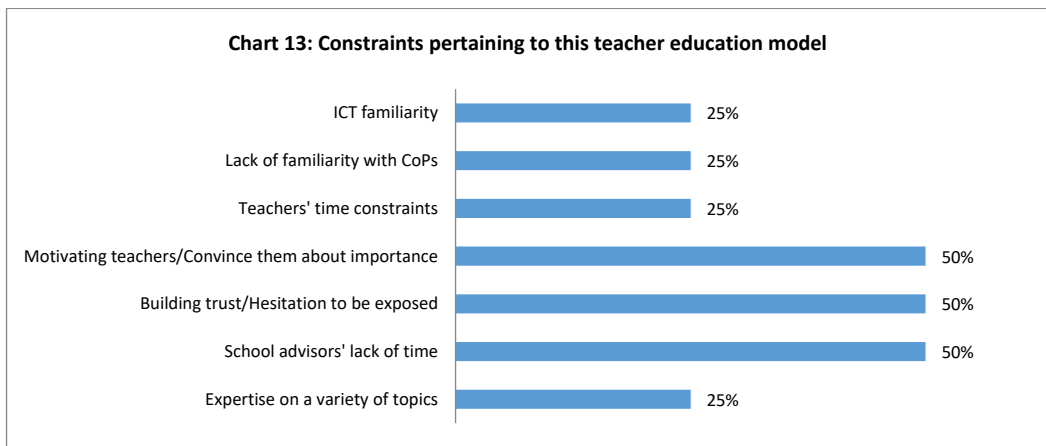
Finally, assessing the Coordinators' attitude towards the innovative model of teacher education "after" their involvement in it, 75% of them are greatly positive in their appraisal for its feasibility and viability as a teacher education model in Greece accounting for the 100% of the Coordinators who participated actively. The one Coordinator who acted in parallel with a Deputy Coordinator is also fairly positive (see Chart 14).

Chart 14: Feasibility and viability of CoPs as a teacher education model in Greece

	A great deal	Up to some extent	A little	Not at all
	75%	25%	0%	0%
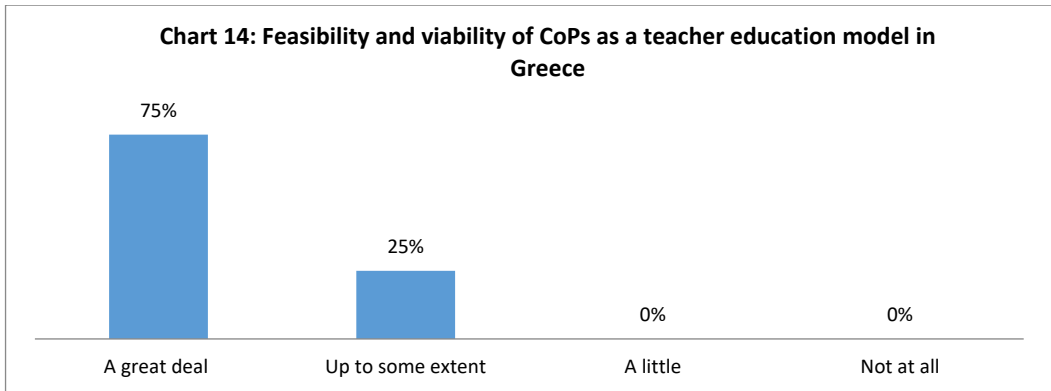
In order to better showcase the role of the Coordinators' attitude towards the innovative model of teacher education for its feasibility and viability in Greece, the crosstabulation of data below depicts an association between the Coordinators' opinion on feasibility and viability of online CoPs with their reported effectiveness of the CoP course on the teachers' professional development. As table 1 shows, the 3 Coordinators who reported a great deal of effectiveness of the CoP course, were equally greatly positive in their opinion on the feasibility and viability of CoPs as a teacher education model in Greece.

Coordinators' opinion on feasibility and viability of CoPs –

Reported effectiveness on the teachers' professional development needs

Table 1	Question 10					
		A great deal	Up to some extent	A little	Not at all	Total
Question 15	A great deal	3	0	0	0	3
	Up to Some extent	0	1	0	0	1
	A little	0	0	0	0	0
	Not at all	1	0	0	0	0
	Total	3	1	0	0	4

Conclusion

As the international educational policy increases expectations for improved educational outcomes, a more comprehensive understanding of teacher professional development experiences that can enhance their knowledge and can support teacher growth and change proves indispensable to policy decision makers and training course designers. Since traditional teacher professional development policies have

been largely found to be ineffective, recent research findings confirm that online CoPs with their technological affordances and properly designed implementation schedules have a real potential to be an effective model for the professional development of teachers (Kourkouli, 2018). The present paper provides evidence in the direction of evaluating the effectiveness of this innovative teacher education model and highlighting this perspective in terms of the Coordinators' reports while recognizing their key role. The findings therefore contribute to furthering our understanding of effective implementation of online CoPs in the context of continuing professional development

In particular, the study found that ELTeachers online CoPs constitute a teacher training model that empowers Coordinators to engage in "reformed" training practice themselves as they are facilitated to provide teachers/trainees with more meaningful professional development activities than the traditional models of in-service teacher education usually implemented in Greece. The Coordinator has an essential role to play and through this model they engaged their trainees in the discussion of more meaningful topics, through more meaningful professional development activities than ever before. In addition, the ELTeachers CoP training was found to be very useful in terms of the Coordinators' reports on their trainees' and their own perceived benefit. Trainees are reported to have met their development needs regarding their everyday teaching practice to a much greater extent and Coordinators have reaped a number of benefits specified above. Finally, the study highlights the key role of the Coordinators' attitude towards the innovative model of teacher education. In effect, very positive Coordinators' feedback, attitudes and reported impact, given the prominent role of the Coordinators, can make a significant contribution to the feasibility and viability of this teacher education model in Greece. Further research on reform initiatives involving online CoPs can shed more light on more and different factors associated with increased teacher learning and effectiveness in this context, as well as with appropriate design principles that can potentially pave the way for an improved teacher education paradigm in Greece.

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