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Zhibek Ichshanova<sup>1\*</sup>, Gulnara Kassymova<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>SDU University, Kaskelen, Kazakhstan

\*e-mail: [221302023@stu.sdu.edu.kz](mailto:221302023@stu.sdu.edu.kz)

## EFL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF LESSON STUDY IMPLEMENTATION IN SECONDARY RURAL SCHOOLS THROUGH THE INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH

**Abstract.** Lesson study approach is widely used in various countries to develop teachers' pedagogical and instructional knowledge. The purpose of this study is to explore how Kazakhstani EFL teachers perceive the effectiveness of Lesson Study implemented through an interdisciplinary approach. Five EFL teachers from a secondary rural school who were the members of the interdisciplinary group of the Lesson Study participated in semi-structured interviews. The respondents indicated that the Lesson Study through the interdisciplinary approach had significantly improved their pedagogical and instructional knowledge. However, they also indicated that they experienced some challenges in the process, such as time consumption, observation of case students, and support from the administration of school.

**Keywords:** lesson study, EFL teachers, interdisciplinary approach, rural schools, professional development, instructional knowledge, challenges.

### Introduction

Lesson study is the Japanese form of collaboratively researching and delivering the lessons and it is regarded to be beneficial for teacher's both instructional and professional development. One of the goals of Lesson Study is to develop teachers' professionalism through ongoing critical-reflection and peer-collaboration. Thus, Rahim et al. stated that 'the primary goal of the teacher professional development is to bring about changes and subsequent improvement in the teachers' performances and professionalism, which in turn would lead to the improvement in students' learning performances' [1]. The Lesson Study process probably does not provide strategies and techniques for improving students' learning, but it can provide factors that can influence students' success in learning. Kazakhstani mainstream secondary school teachers are advised to collaborate with Dudley's (2014) version of the lesson study. There are four stages in one lesson study cycle: (1) setting specific goals, (2) collaboratively planning the lesson, (3) researching and delivering the real classroom lesson, and (4) the last stage is reflection [2]. So, Dudley's (2014) version of lesson study is an ongoing and continued process, and it is required to set an objective or problem question, then based on those objectives or problem questions, to start one Lesson Study cycle to search and find the answers of the set objectives or questions [2]. In world practice, the tendency to focus on only one disciplinary/subject area in one Lesson Study phase is more observed and less on the use of an interdisciplinary approach. There is an assumption that establishing one certain problem tends to be difficult, since each participant of a Lesson Study group has different problems. On the other hand, focusing on one class of students is more convenient in setting certain problem questions, and resolving them from a different perspective through interdisciplinary approach, where teachers of different subjects teach and observe the problems of one class, since one certain class has got certain problems. This paper aims to explore how Kazakhstani EFL teachers perceive the effectiveness of Lesson Study implemented through the interdisciplinary approach.

In recent years, there has been an increasing interest in Lesson Study as a way of developing EFL teachers' professional development. However, there has been little agreement on the number of participants in the Lesson Study group, characters of collaboration between them, number and types of Lesson Studycycles.

So, according to Lesson Study, group teachers are required to meet and design the lesson plan together, however, designing a lesson plan tends to be suitable and convenient if a teacher of a certain

subject designs his/her own lesson plan and then asks for some inputs from his/her peer teachers. On one hand, Nashruddin and Nurachman claim that the power of Lesson Study is to provide richer and better preparation by working and designing a lesson plan together in a team [3]. On the other hand, Purwanti and Hatmando counterclaimed that ‘teachers should design their own lesson plan as they know the characteristics of both the students and the class’ [4].

The Lesson Study process requires teachers to continuously work collaboratively in order to develop the teaching process. Sharing reflection constantly, critical opinion from knowledgeable others, and reflection skills are beneficial and crucial stages of Lesson Study in terms of both increasing teachers’ instructional knowledge and improving the learners’ performance. Bayram and Canaran agree that ‘through reflection and critical discussion, teachers received gains in content knowledge, which later, was associated with the improvement of their classroom teaching’ [5]. Also, Bayram and Bikmaz agree that ‘the model requires teachers to work together, question their actions and critique their lessons from students’ perspective’ [6]. Kager et al. also stated that ‘advancement of reflection skills has to be an integral part of Lesson Study’ [7] and then Uffen indicated ‘participants need to understand that they can build on one another’s knowledge and that they can challenge their own assumptions on student learning and teaching by making use of one another’s perspectives and gained expertise’ [8].

In order to yield the best picture of the students’ performance during the lesson, Dudley (2014) advised focusing on three case students while observing the lesson [2], Bayram and Bikmaz, Kager at al, and Atamturk observed three case students according to their academic performance (high, average and low) [6; 7; 9]. They analyzed the data collected from case students, in order to make some modifications for the next lesson. Atamturk conducted a research in 2022 and indicated that ‘the success of the Lesson Study practice is due to the research lessons taught repeatedly in a cycle of three, each time improving the lesson design, based on the observation of case students’ [9].

Since the Lesson Study requires teachers’ collaboration, the number of participants in one group is also a crucial point. According to Dudley (2014) there should be at least 3 participants in one group, which means 3 cycles should be implemented in one Lesson Study process [2]. Bayram and Bikmaz also agree that the number of teachers should be no more than four, since a larger number of teachers can be difficult to implement the Lesson Study in an efficient way [6]. However, the participation of more than four teachers was noticed in Purwanti and Hatmanto’s research [4].

Lesson study phases require a lot of time and some support from the school authorities in order to be fully completed. Thus, Rahim et al. claimed that if the teachers spend so much time in Lesson Study process, they will not have enough time to cover all their classroom lessons and pointed out that ‘the teachers really need a lot of support from school in timetabling, obtaining substitute teachers, and providing staff-development time’ [1]. Bayram and Canaran also agree that ‘the teachers needed support from the administration to cover for their classes for meetings and observations’ [5]. Moreover, Nashruddin and Nurachman believe that Lesson Study should be understood as both a regular process and as practice since the problems will not be resolved after single sessions [3].

The literature review shows that Lesson study helps teachers to develop significantly their pedagogical and instructional knowledge in spite of challenges regarding time, support, and lesson planning so far. However, all previous studies of Lesson Study have only focused on the homogeneous LessonStudy group, teachers of one discipline ‘English language’ and have not dealt with interdisciplinary groups, comprising teachers of different subjects. This indicated a need to explore the perceptions of EFL teachers of Lesson Study as participants of an interdisciplinary group. In addition, no research has been found that surveyed the teachers of rural schools regarding this issue in Kazakhstan.

## **Methods and materials**

The paper is going to answer the following research question: What are the EFL teachers’ perceptions of the Lesson Study based on the interdisciplinary approach? In order to answer the research question and reveal the advantages and disadvantages of Lesson Study based on an interdisciplinary approach from EFL teachers’ perceptions, the qualitative research design was

chosen. A semi-structured interview with EFL secondary rural school teachers was chosen as a data collection tool to comprehensively describe what was happening in the Lesson Study group. The interview questions were aimed to find answers whether the EFL teachers could improve their professional knowledge through participating in LS cycles, and whether they had any challenges and misunderstandings in the process. The questions of the interview were asked in English and Kazakh according to the participants' preference in order to avoid any kind of difficulties on their part and get in-depth insight into the investigated issue. The interviews with five EFL teachers were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The data were analyzed through thematic analysis, using an inductive approach. The collected data gave a chance to find out the teachers' professional development through lesson study in secondary rural schools. Five EFL teachers from a secondary rural school participated voluntarily in an interview. The participants were provided with information about their confidentiality, and privacy, they were aware of the purpose of the study, the data collection procedures, and how these data would be handled. In order to protect the participants' rights and confidentiality, their names stayed anonymous within the article.

Demographic information about EFL teachers was presented below (see Table 1). The ages of the participants and their teaching experiences are different, and all of the participants are non-native English speakers.

**Table 1**

***Information about the participants***

	Teache r 1	Teache r 2	Teache r 3	Teache r 4	Teache r 5
Ages	40	41	35	25	55
Gender	F	F	M	F	F
Teaching experience (years)	16	16	2	2	32
Workload (hours per week)	26	27	23	25	27
Prior Lesson Study knowledge	+	+	-	-	+
Prior Lesson Study experience	-	-	-	-	-

*N=5*

## Findings and Discussions

The data collected from the semi-structured interviews' questions revealed three themes emerging from the participants. They were listed under the participants' perceptions of professional development, instructional knowledge and challenges experienced.

### ***Lesson study, based on an interdisciplinary approach, develops EFL teachers' pedagogical knowledge and skills.***

While participating in one Lesson study cycle based on an interdisciplinary approach, i.e. Kazakh language, English language, Mathematics and Physics, the EFL teachers could learn about their students' thinking, and learning styles and hear the voice of the students.

A comment by Teacher 1:

*'My simple English classes were conducted by using different approaches,*

*however individual and group work tasks were dominant. But, after I participated in one Lesson Study cycle through an interdisciplinary approach, we realized that the students of 8 "A" grade worked well when they were divided into several subgroups for science subjects, whereas pair and individual work did well for humanitarian subjects'.*

Another participant, Teacher 2, added some more information to our study: *'Before participating in one lesson study cycle, I didn't even know that division into subgroups, pair or individual work may influence students' learning the different subjects'.*

One of the requirements of secondary school teachers is to write and design the lesson plan appropriately, which tends to be challenging for some teachers. Teacher 3 comments on writing and designing the lesson plan:

*'As I am a novice teacher, the template and the stages of the lesson plan caused me some problems, that is why I struggled writing the lesson plans correctly. While participating in one lesson study cycle, we had to meet and write the lesson plans together, that was the time when the experienced teachers taught me how to write the lesson plans appropriately.'*

As stated by some participants, their pedagogical knowledge and skills developed after participating in Lesson Study cycles through an interdisciplinary approach, in a group of 4 participants. Moreover, constructing and writing collaboratively the lesson plans had a positive impact on novice teachers. **Lesson study, based on an interdisciplinary approach, develops EFL teachers' instructional knowledge and teaching skills.**

Besides improving pedagogical knowledge, the EFL teachers could develop their instructional knowledge and skills as well.

As Teacher 2 commented:

*'Since I started my teaching career, I went on maternity leave for four times, which means I could not attend top-down seminars and master classes, that is why I ended up with the lack of modern approaches and techniques which can be used in my practice. However, while participating in different research lessons, I could improve my both instructional and pedagogical knowledge such as using different methods, approaches and techniques in the lessons. I learned about different forms of formative assessments from my colleagues, also'.* Another participant, Teacher 5, shared some information regarding the use of ICT in the teaching practice:

*'I had struggled with modern technology before participating in research lessons. With the help of the novice teachers, I learned how to effectively work with a white board. Besides white boards, I learned different Information Technology tools, also, which helped me to conduct my lessons more interestingly and more modern'.*

According to the answers of respondents, the participants improved their pedagogical and instructional knowledge through critical and peer-reflection. As stated by some participants, the experienced teachers also learned a lot from both novice teachers and lesson study phases.

**Misunderstandings and challenges during implementing the lesson study.** Delivering and conducting the research lessons caused some challenges for the participants of lesson study phases. Even though there were several positive sides from joining in one lesson study cycle, there were also some challenges. As Teacher 4 commented:

*'Before and while participating in research lessons, I had some problematic questions in my mind: Why should we focus on three case students? How can we draw conclusions for the whole class, after interviewing and researching only three case students, when all students have different learning and thinking styles? The teachers, who attended lectures, seminars and courses about the theory of Lesson Study phases, tried to explain to me, but it was not enough for me to fully understand the topic'.*

As stated by teacher 4, the case students were implemented in this Lesson Study research and the next lesson's plan was constructed and written based on the observation of these three case students. However, according to the respondent's answer not all teachers were aware of the peculiarities of these students. It seems to be that not all the school staff attended the lectures, seminars and courses about Lesson Study cycles, before embedding it in their school, which leads to some teachers' misunderstanding and misinterpreting Dudley's (2014) version appropriately.

Teacher 3 commented about time constraints:

*'As we were having the lesson study phases with the teachers of different subjects, we could not meet and come at the appointed time, because each of us has at least 22-23 lessons per week. It would be better, if the school administration gave some support, such as timetabling, for the teachers who were researching the lessons. There were four teachers in my lesson study group, including me. They were teachers of Physics, Mathematics, Kazakh and English languages. For one lesson study cycle we had to meet at least nine times: (1) to find out the problem question, and write the lesson plan for*

the physics lesson;

(2) to deliver / research the physics lesson, and interviewing the students directly after the lesson; (3) to meet with colleagues for refinement, and write the next lesson plan for the Kazakh language lesson; (4) to conduct / research the Kazakh language lesson, and interviewing the students directly after the lesson; (5) to meet with colleagues for refinement, and write the next lesson plan for the lesson of Mathematics; (6) to conduct / research the lesson of Mathematics, and interviewing the students directly after the lesson; (7) to meet with colleagues for refinement, and write the next lesson plan for the lesson of English language;

(8) to conduct / research the English language lesson, and interviewing the students directly after the lesson; (9) to gather information about the researched lesson study cycle, and make some reports to the school administration and colleagues'.

As stated by teacher 3, not all the teachers had opportunities to join in the research process on time. During the Lesson Study phase, one of the main requirements is the unity of the group participants, since the power of the lesson study is in working together and collaborating. However, teachers indicated that the process of Lesson Study is much more time-consuming, thus stating they needed help in timetabling, from the school administration.

## Conclusion

This study explored teachers' perceptions of Lesson Study through the interdisciplinary approach: advantages and disadvantages, as well as challenges in its implementation. The results of the given study indicate that Lesson Study has a meaningful positive effect on secondary rural school teachers' professional development: such as getting acquainted with students' learning and thinking styles, writing a short-term plan correctly, using different methods and approaches in lessons, applying different forms of formative assessment in lessons, and etc. Besides the positive factors, the results also indicate that rural school teachers faced some challenges concerning time and training programs. Teachers need some support to be shown by the school administration, since completing all Lesson Study cycles and numerous meetings take a lot of time, and some training programs are also required before embedding the implementation of Lesson Study in secondary rural schools. Despite the negative factors, it tends to be worthwhile in implementation, since from rural school EFL teachers' perception, received through semi-structured interviews, it helps to significantly develop their both pedagogical and instructional knowledge.

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Жібек Ичшанова<sup>1</sup>, Гулнара Қасымова<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>SDU University, Қаскелең, Қазақстан

\*e-mail: [221302023@stu.sdu.edu.kz](mailto:221302023@stu.sdu.edu.kz)

### АҒЫЛШЫН ТІЛІ ШЕТ ТІЛІ РЕТІНДЕ (EFL) МҰҒАЛІМДЕРІНІҢ АУЫЛ ОРТА МЕКТЕПТЕРІНДЕ САБАҚТЫ ОҚЫТУДЫ ПӘНАРАЛЫҚ ТӘСІЛ АРҚЫЛЫ ЖҮЗЕГЕ АСЫРУ ТУРАЛЫ ТҮСІНІКТЕРІ

**Аңдатпа.** Lesson Study тәсілі әр түрлі елдерде мұғалімдердің педагогикалық білімін дамыту үшін кеңінен қолданылады. Бұл зерттеудің мақсаты қазақстандық ағылшын тілі пәні оқытушылары пәнаралық тәсіл арқылы жүзеге асырылатын сабақты зерттеудің тиімділігін қалай қабылдайтынын зерттеу болып табылады. Пәнаралық сабақты зерттеу тобының мүшелері болған Орта ауыл мектебінің бес ағылшын тілі мұғалімі жартылай құрылымды сұхбаттарға қатысты. Қатысушылар сабақты пәнаралық тәсілді қолдана отырып зерттеу, олардың педагогикалық білімін едәуір жақсартқанын атап өтті. Дегенмен, олар сонымен қатар уақытты тұтыну, студенттерді бақылау және мектеп әкімшілігінің қолдауы сияқты кейбір қиындықтарға тап болғанын көрсетті.

**Түйін сөздер:** Lesson study, ағылшын тілі пәні мұғалімдері, пәнаралық көзқарас, ауыл мектептері, кәсіби даму, әдістемелік білім, қиындықтар.

Жібек Ичшанова<sup>1</sup>, Гулнара Қасымова<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>SDU University, Қаскелең, Қазақстан

\*e-mail: [221302023@stu.sdu.edu.kz](mailto:221302023@stu.sdu.edu.kz)

### ВОСПРИЯТИЕ УЧИТЕЛЕЙ АНГЛИЙСКОГО ЯЗЫКА КАК ИНОСТРАННОГО (EFL) ВНЕДРЕНИЯ УРОКОВОГО ИССЛЕДОВАНИЯ В СЕЛЬСКИХ СРЕДНИХ ШКОЛАХ ЧЕРЕЗ МЕЖДИСЦИПЛИНАРНЫЙ ПОДХОД

**Аннотация.** Подход Lesson Study широко используется в различных странах для развития педагогических знаний учителей. Целью данного исследования является изучение того, как казахстанские преподаватели английского языка воспринимают эффективность Lesson Study, реализуемого с помощью междисциплинарного подхода. Пять учителей английского языка из средней сельской школы, которые были членами междисциплинарной группы по изучению урока, приняли участие в полуструктурированном интервью. Респонденты указали, что Lesson Study с использованием междисциплинарного подхода значительно улучшило их педагогические знания. Однако они также указали, что столкнулись с некоторыми проблемами в этом процессе, такими как затраты времени, наблюдение за учениками и поддержка со стороны администрации школы.

**Ключевые слова:** изучение урока, учителя английского языка, междисциплинарный подход, сельские школы, профессиональное развитие, методические знания, вызовы.

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