

RESEARCH ARTICLE


English language teachers' insights into continuous professional development: A cross-case exploration

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Abstract

This qualitative cross-case study explores and reflects on the insights of six English language teachers working at one secondary school and one tertiary level institution in Turkey regarding the Continuous Professional Development (CPD) practices offered by their institutions respectively. It also investigates what contextual factors interact with these teachers' insights and experiences about CPD as part of teacher education regarding within-case and cross-case differences. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews, written reflections and program documents and analysed using a descriptive coding strategy. The findings reveal that the participant teachers consider CPD as a customized, practice-focused, collaborative and reflective endeavour. Implications for future continuous professional development programs are also discussed.

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Introduction

Language teachers have a crucial role in language learning and teaching processes since they are responsible for comprehending, analysing, interpreting, synthesizing, and implementing what have been theorized in accordance with the contextual needs and expectations in the field. Teachers have a complex combination

of knowledge, beliefs and thoughts about their instructional decisions and actions (Borg, 2006). They may hold some beliefs that can be reflected as consistent or inconsistent teaching practices depending on the qualities of the context where they work (Sanchez & Borg, 2014).

Professional development (PD) of teachers in this sense is not a one-dimensional process and forms the skeleton of being a professional since it refers to the acquisition of new knowledge, skills and ongoing learning opportunities to improve the learning of students and an individual's potential to do their job efficiently (Alfaki, 2014; Guskey, 2000). Since the academic qualifications acquired during pre-service education might not be enough, all language teachers need professional development throughout their careers to catch up with the dynamic needs and expectations of their era and adapt their existing skills, content knowledge, and teaching practices to meet the current requirements (Hayes & Chang, 2012).

Professional development for in-service teachers can be provided in a variety of methods including self-monitoring, support groups, journal writing, classroom observation, teaching portfolio, analysis of critical incidents, case analysis, peer coaching, team teaching, and action research (Richards & Farrell, 2005). Likewise, teachers can have an access to PD through teacher study groups (Burns, 1999), reflective journal writing (Lieberman & Friedrich, 2007), peer observation (Vermunt, Vrikki, van Halem, Warwick, & Mercer, 2019), and audio-diaries (Ustuk & De Costa, 2020). While traditional PD practices can be delivered through short-term planning as one-shot activities such as seminars and workshops, the alternative PD activities aim to equip teachers with the knowledge and skills that can enhance their teaching skills and students' learning in order to increase the quality of teaching and learning standards (Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon, & Birman, 2002). Adopting this life-long development perspective, which refers to Continuous Professional Development (CPD), does not only contribute to teachers' professional growth, but also it might pave the way for motivating students to be life-long learners (Day, 1999). Transmitting the life-long development perspective to the students through teaching practices can help students to construct their own learning paths.

Having a more comprehensive understanding of professional development makes it essential to consider many factors including needs analysis, the ways it is

delivered, target groups, modes of training, CPD models, content of the activities, role of the stakeholders, and time. In this regard, CPD activities are delivered in various ways at different levels of education in Turkey. The Ministry of National Education (MoNE) is responsible for providing CPD activities for primary and secondary school language teachers; however, at tertiary level, each university has control over its own CPD activities. While all education levels complete one another, lack of a holistic perspective towards CPD policies and practices at various levels and lack of collaboration among institutions might give rise to a fragmented view that may fail to achieve more sustainable objectives. The current study investigates the English teachers' views on the CPD practices in one secondary school and one tertiary level institution in Turkey, exploring what contextual issues interact with these teachers' insights in both education levels. To this end, the study first reviews the literature on CPD for language teachers from the perspective of sociocultural theory. Then it presents how CPD policies and activities have evolved in the literature, and how CPD for secondary and tertiary level teachers is perceived and practised in Turkey. After our research paradigm and methodology are introduced, findings are presented and discussed within the perspective of sociocultural theory.

The following generic research questions are sought throughout the study:

1. What insights do the English teachers have about the CPD practices implemented in their institutions?
2. What contextual issues interact with these teachers' insights in both institutions?

CPD for language teachers from the perspective of Sociocultural Theory

Transmission-based teacher education activities such as one-shot seminars, workshops and coursework have been the skeleton of traditional professional development approaches. However, alternative approaches to CPD highlight the role of teacher-based CPD practices (Dikilitaş, 2015), social aspect of knowledge and identity reconstruction (Johnson, 2009). This shift from trainer-based approaches to teacher-based ones stems from the changes in education and technology and teachers' need to learn actively and improve themselves in accordance with the rapid changes

in their field (Dikilitaş, 2015). From a sociocultural lens, CDP activities are designed in a socially mediated way so that teachers can collaboratively reconstruct knowledge, identity and cognition for conceptual development (Johnson, 2009). Considering the research questions exploring teachers' insights into CPD policies of their institutions and the role of contextual issues, Sociocultural Theory (SCT) provides a more holistic perspective towards CPD policies in that it promotes collaborative steps to be taken by all stakeholders of an institute (Johnson, 2009). SCT prioritizes bottom-up CPD methods that necessitate the inclusion of teachers into decision-making processes and practices related to CPD policies unlike transmission-based PD methods. SCT also highlights the gap between theory and practice in teaching, and offers a solution to bridge this gap by internalization expected to happen during social mediation (Johnson & Golombek, 2011). According to this view, while teachers have everyday concepts based on their experiential knowledge of teaching, theoretical concepts are provided through CPD activities (Johnson & Golombek, 2011). Sociocultural perspective in second language teacher education aims to link these scientific concepts to everyday concepts through an internalization process mediated by experts and peers (Johnson & Golombek, 2011). CPD models based on sociocultural perspective can pave the way for more educationally sound and contextually appropriate learning opportunities for both cognitive and practical needs of language teachers (Johnson, 2009). For this reason, drawing this study on sociocultural theory (SCT), we aim to reveal the need for CPD activities that promote collaborative work and conceptual development to compensate for what traditional approaches lack since they may not offer sustainable and life-long perspectives

Literature review

An overview at the history of PD activities suggests that miscellaneous formats have been conducted in the field. In line with the changes in education, professional development programs have been reformed as a result of a shift from product-oriented practices to process-oriented ones (Crandall, 2000). One of the professional development programs is top-down PD programs of which roots are based on traditional teacher training approach (Chang, 1998). According to this approach, the experts who may be teacher educators or researchers at university give

striking advice about how to employ existing methods (Kasi, 2010). The top-down professional development programs lack opportunities which reinforce teacher autonomy, self-confidence and collaboration (Gándara, Jolly, & Driscoll, 2005) since these programs do not offer teachers with opportunities to take part in the training process; besides, teachers are seen as passive participants getting training from the experts (Atay, 2006). As Ustuk and Comoğlu (2019) clarified, in top-down PD programs, the outcomes may not live up to expected satisfaction since teachers do not involve their PD processes.

Another format is bottom-up PD programs based on a holistic and developmental approach in which teachers' expectations are lived up to by incorporating them in the process. As Dikilitaş (2015) clarified, bottom-up PD programs are shaped grounded on the innovations in technology and developments in education including a tendency towards collaboration. Thus, in bottom-up teacher training programs, teachers are expected to examine their own teaching processes and conduct critical and reflective thinking techniques to reshape the process together with the policy-makers (Macias, 2017; Uysal, 2012; Vangrieken, Meredith, Packer, & Kyndt, 2017).

The effects and benefits of professional development programs are crucial for future programs in terms of the applicability and sustainability of the mentioned issues in teachers' professional lives (Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon, & Birman, 2002). Therefore, the institutions should provide an appropriate atmosphere for teachers to reflect their ideas and encourage them to work with their peers and head teachers to contribute to the professional development process. In other words, the PD activities should shed light to teachers' journeys and fulfil their needs, avoiding a strict and stationary schedule (Hung, 2016; Kabilan, Adlina, & Embi, 2011; Khan, 2009). In this way, the sustainability and benefits of the programs can be reached.

Teacher professional development programs in Turkey

Regarding the PD programs and activities in Turkey, there has been a growing body of research studies as a result of rapid global and national changes and needs in education. There are some studies drawing attention to PD activities held by both the MoNE (e.g. Babanoğlu & Yardımcı, 2017; Özer, 2004) and school of languages at the

tertiary level (e.g. Yılmaz, 2016; Yurtsever, 2013). These studies particularly focused on how the implementation of some PD activities such as action research and critical friends group promotes continuous improvement in teaching, how existing in-service teacher training policies of the institutions satisfy the teachers' needs, and how the teachers perceive PD activities. Hoş and Topal (2013), for instance, carried out a meta-analysis on EFL teachers' PD in Turkey. They indicated that most of the studies were conducted at English preparatory schools of universities and most of them were evaluative. Based on their analyses, they suggested that English teachers are not motivated to attend PD activities since they think they are not useful for them. This lack of motivation is attributed to time constraints, lack of needs analysis, and top-down design of the programs.

Studies conducted on the PD policies of the MoNE revealed that English language teachers are mostly dissatisfied with the activities provided for them (e.g. Balta, Arslan & Duru, 2015; Çimer, Çakır, & Çimer, 2010; Koç, 2016; Korkmazgil & Seferoğlu, 2013; Uysal, 2012). Çimer, Çakır and Çimer (2010) claim that the PD practices provided by the MoNE are ineffective because of low quality of instructors, teaching methods employed, duration of the courses and lack of support given after the activity. Similarly, Uysal (2012) states that these activities lack effective planning and evaluation phases and they do not have a remarkable impact on teaching practices even though teachers have positive attitudes towards PD. Even though teachers attend many seminars and workshops which are obligatory, they state that they need different PD activities that can help them improve their classroom management skills, use technology, apply the foreign language national standards, and raise awareness of the target culture, as indicated by Korkmazgil and Seferoğlu (2013). Another study conducted by Koç (2016) also revealed that the content of the PD activities was not relevant to what the teachers needed and that the elementary school teachers who attended the activities could not have a chance to actively participate. However, there are also a few studies revealing that some teachers are satisfied with the PD policies of the MoNE. Uztosun (2018), for instance, in his large-scale study, found out that the teachers were content with the PD activities offered by the MoNE since these activities enhanced their professional development, personal development, and cooperation among colleagues, however, the teachers also highlighted some weak

aspects of the PD activities including limited number of programs, lack of qualified trainers, insufficient practical focus, poor lecturing, inconvenient time and place, and perfunctory nature of the programs.

As for the PD activities offered by the tertiary level institutions in Turkey, the number of studies investigating the needs of EFL instructors is quite limited since most of the studies are based on the effectiveness of several PD models. For instance, Atay (2008) employed a PD program to promote the instructors' knowledge and guidance for research, reflection, critical thinking, and collaboration through Action Research and concluded that Action Research could enhance instructional practices despite the difficulties teachers might face throughout the research process. Likewise, Wyatt and Dikilitaş (2016) revealed that research engagement of instructors as a CPD tool contributed to their self-efficacy beliefs and practical knowledge. Aktekin (2019) examined the effects of Critical Friends Group on EFL instructors and revealed that this model provided opportunities for working collaboratively, delving into classroom dilemmas, and focusing on teaching and learning specific academic content. Another study comparing Turkish and Lithuanian EFL instructors' experiences of professional development found out that while Lithuanian instructors were satisfied with the PD program of their university, Turkish EFL instructors believed that their PD activities were irrelevant to their needs (Çelik, Macianskiene, & Aytın, 2013).

In this sense, it is clear that the studies conducted to investigate the effectiveness of existing and innovative PD models and teacher perceptions are not comprehensive enough to make generalizations about all the cases in Turkey, but it can be said that there are some weaknesses of the PD programs offered by the MoNE. For university instructors, the number of research studies is quite limited to have a better understanding of what they need to foster their professional development. Aforementioned studies indicate that research engagement and collaborative work can enhance CDP and instructors have positive attitudes to such PD activities, which makes it necessary to uncover what instructors need first so that all stake holders can cooperate and design their CDP programs to make them more fruitful.

Methodology

Research Design

This qualitative research was conducted in the form of a cross-case study to form a common clarification for the cases, by focusing on each case separately first (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2018). Maintaining a holistic and real-life perspective towards individual lives, small group behaviours, organizational and institutional processes and policies without controlling the behaviours taking place in the context (Yin, 2018), the present case study investigated a contemporary social phenomenon in depth within the real context where the phenomenon and context were bounded. We elaborated on two separate cases: secondary and tertiary level professional development programs to explore the consensus between them thanks to a cross-case analysis as part of multiple-case analysis. Undistinguishable boundaries between the phenomenon (case) and context in this study (Stake, 2005; Yin, 2018) and the need for in-depth exploration and explanation of CPD policies and teacher views constituted the rationale behind the implementation of a qualitative cross-case study.

Research contexts & participants

Case 1.

The English preparatory school of an English medium instruction (EMI) state university located in the west of Turkey hosts 963 students from different levels: A1, A2, and B1 based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). A1, A2, and B1 classes have 28, 24, and 20 lesson hours per week respectively. An integrated skills approach is adopted. Students are required to be successful in the end-of-year proficiency exam to be able to continue their education in EMI programs. There are 40 EFL instructors working at the preparatory school in addition to 10 instructors teaching modern languages in undergraduate departments. Lessons for each class are shared by two or three partners who are expected to catch up with each other and complete the requirements of the weekly and monthly lesson plans. The teaching load for instructors is 20 hours per week. The school has several units including testing unit, professional development unit, extra-curricular unit, curriculum unit, and support unit. Most of the teachers work in one of these units in addition to their weekly lesson hours.

CPD activities of the preparatory school have been planned and organized by the administration and conducted once or twice a year as seminar sessions or workshops whose topics are determined by the teacher trainers who are not much knowledgeable about the school or the instructors' needs. Even though the participation in CPD activities has not been mandated, the majority of the instructors prefer to join in. In May 2019, the Professional Development Unit (PDU) was officially announced and the five instructors who had M.A. degrees in ELT were appointed as the members of this unit. The PDU started preparing surveys to be administered to the instructors in the first and second semester about their views on the program and their needs for CPD.

The instructors were invited to the study considering two criteria to generate data from various profiles: different years of teaching experience and degrees from diverse undergraduate programs. In this sense, we needed both experienced and novice instructors for a broader perspective. Additionally, we needed instructors coming from various degrees in order not to confine the study to the instructors who had ELT degrees. After the invitation, four EFL instructors meeting those criteria (3 females and 1 male) volunteered to participate in the study (see Table 1).

Table 1. Information about the participants in Case 1

Name	Gender	Experience (year)	Education
Nihat	Male	20	B.A. in English Language Teaching M.A. in Education Programs and Teaching
Senem	Female	20	B.A. in Translation and Interpreting Studies
Ayşe	Female	3	B.A. in English Language Teaching M.A. in English Language Teaching
İrem	Female	3	B.A. in English Language and Literature M.A. in English Language and Literature

Case 2.

The upper secondary public school (from 9th to 12th grade) where the research was conducted is located in the eastern part of Turkey. There are 66 teachers from various branches and 941 students at school. The school has a full time education program from 8.00am to 03.10 p.m. and students take seven courses a day. The school

follows the MoNE's instructions for all courses including English, which is one of the main subjects.

The school follows the PD programs designed by the MoNE, the content of which was updated in 2019. According to the new arrangement, the PD programs are included in the academic semesters and held in September, November, April and June for a one-week period. Several social activities such as trips to museums or parks, mini concerts at schools and lunch or breakfast organizations have been included into the new programs, which could be seen as evidence of progressive teacher professional development practices. To illustrate, Teachers' Professional Training Program for September (MoNE, 2019) proposes drama activities included into the seminar program. Likewise, concerts, tournaments and workshops are offered to be arranged by the school managements as artistic, cultural and sportive activities. Yet, the CPD practices still follow the same steps for all teachers regardless of their academic branches and lack space for professional collaboration and reflection, which could foster the lifelong learning processes of teachers.

Since the study aims to explore the views of English teachers about PD programs, the six English teachers in the school were invited to participate in the study and two of them volunteered (see Table 2).

Table 2. Information about the participants in Case 2

Name	Gender	Experience (year)	Education
Gönül	Female	5	B.A. in English Language Teaching
			M.A. in English Language Teaching
Asu	Female	8	B.A. in English Language Teaching
			M.A. in Education Programs and Teaching

Data Collection Tools and Process

For this study, semi-structured interviews, written reflections, and program documents were utilised to collect data in 2019.

Semi-structured interviews

As suggested by Seidman (2006), semi-structured interviews were used to explore teachers' insights into CPD activities and how they make meaning of these insights within their context. To collect data for Case 1 (preparatory school), the four participants were interviewed within two weeks soon after the last CPD event was over. Each interview took approximately 20 minutes. The interviews were conducted based on structured questions, but the responses from the participants built on the questions and revealed new questions. The questions aimed at revealing data about the participants' views on the last CPD event, general CPD policies of the institution, their needs, and expectations. The interviews were conducted in the mother tongue of the participants, Turkish, so that they could express themselves more comfortably. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for detailed analysis. Before data analysis, the transcribed data were translated into English. The semi-structured interviews were acronymized as I in the study.

Written reflections

Written reflections providing an accessible data source for researchers at any time (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) were used to collect data about the second case. They were used to gather comprehensive data concerning the two English teachers' views about the PD programs provided. Due to the busy schedule of the participants, it was not easy to conduct interviews. Therefore, written reflections were used to collect data in this case. The participants were requested to free write about any aspect of the PD events they participated in together with their own PD experiences and expectations. The written reflections were collected at one time and each consisted of approximately 500 words. Participants preferred to write their reflections in English. The written reflections were acronymized as WR in the study.

Program documents

We also found Teachers' Professional Training Programs prepared by the MoNE as relevant and useful documents to explore the second case more fully. These documents provided valuable data and shed additional light on this case, as also supported by Merriam and Tisdell (2016).

Ethical concerns and trustworthiness

To respond to ethical challenges that are pertinent to qualitative research, we obtained informed consent of the participants and used pseudonyms in collecting, analysing and reporting the data to respect the participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Saldana & Omasta, 2018; Seidman, 2006). Even though we conducted this research as insider researchers, we paid close attention to maintaining the ethical boundaries between the participants and us by building professional rapport (Saldana & Omasta, 2018). Conducting this study as insider researchers yielded some advantages for us. For example, as we participated in the CPD events together with the participants, we took notes to be used for the interviews. This helped the participants to retrieve some information related to the details presented in the CPD events. This qualitative cross-case study relied on semi-structured interviews, written reflections and program documents to provide multiple sources of evidence and data triangulation (Yin, 2018). Besides, the thick description of the research process, contexts and participants contributed to the trustworthiness of the study.

Data Analysis

By conducting a qualitative analysis for the data collected through semi-structured interviews, and written reflections, we aimed to detect the patterns within the data and make meaning out of these patterns to encapsulate the essence of the institutional policies and experiences of the participants. In this sense, we went through a comprehensive process to analyse, pattern, code, categorize, interrelate, reason, and memo the data through our analytical processes by conducting a descriptive coding strategy (Saldana, 2014). Descriptive codes are the nouns that are used for a word, phrase or a longer part of a data set to summarize the topic, and this kind of coding is considered to be useful especially when the data set consists of different types of instruments (Saldana, 2014). By using descriptive coding, each data source was coded carefully, and a noun or noun phrase was used for each code to detect regularities and similarities among emerging patterns, which was followed by clustering the similar and comparable patterns of codes. The categories emerging out of this clustering process were analysed in terms of interaction and interplay in order to reveal how these categories are interrelated to one another (Saldana, 2014). First, each author coded the data individually and then the three authors came together six

times within six weeks to discuss the emerging themes based on a cross-case comparison, which increased the credibility of findings.

Findings

When we examined the data to explore our generic research questions concerning the English language teachers' insights into the CPD activities implemented in their institutions and the contextual issues that interact with their insights, we reached consensus on four overarching themes:

Customized PD

Analysis of data coming from interviews and written reflections revealed that relevancy of the content provided through CPD activities with teachers' needs could have a significant role on their views towards these activities in both contexts. The participants mostly agreed that they needed CPD activities that were relevant to their contextual practices and needs, as Ayşe illustrated after attending a one-shot seminar on assessment, "This kind of seminars lack practice aspect of teaching; the content is generally inappropriate considering the real context" (Case 1, I). Ayşe went on to explain, "It was mostly based on assessment and assessment techniques. I do not have an authority in assessment, we use the assessment tools prepared by Testing Unit. I do not have a say in assessment policies. So, it was not relevant to me." Similarly, Irem stated:

It was enlightening in terms of theory and knowledge, but what he presented is out of my control. I do not have an authority in assessment or curriculum. There is nothing to do with the ideas he suggested in my case. Testing unit and administration are in charge of assessment policies, so there is no change in my practices (Case 1, I).

Irem also touched upon the discrepancy between the needs analysis survey administered at the beginning of the semester and the content of the seminar by stating:

I would like to attend some seminars about different topics as I stated in the teacher survey before. I specified the topics that I would like to learn in seminars. I think this seminar was not relevant to our needs stated in the survey, I did not ask for a seminar on assessment. This seminar was not relevant to us (Case 1, I).

Regarding the relevancy of PD events, some teachers complained about the commercial concerns of the teacher educators sent by publishing houses. Nihat expressed his dissatisfaction by declaring: “I would like the seminar to be educational rather than commercial because I am not satisfied with the commercial purpose of individuals or organizations coming to the seminar” (Case 1, I). He also focused on the irrelevancy between commercial concerns and contextual needs by adding: “The book shown in the seminar was a book that we were already using for writing, so they didn't know about our institution” (Case 1, I).

The teachers working at the secondary school expressed similar concerns about how irrelevant PD events were for their needs, concerns and interests. In this sense Gönül stated, “The last seminar was not for English teachers only. First of all, it is necessary to organize the seminars regarding branches of teachers” (Case 2, WR). Asu agreed with Gönül by adding, “The last seminar was held in school with all the teachers. The topics were general, not only for English teachers” (Case 2, WR). Asu continued with her expectations for relevant and authentic PD by declaring:

I think there should be more activities for English teachers in the seminar, for example, we can meet with experts or other English teachers and we can talk about the methods or techniques preferred by other teachers. In this way we can improve us and we can help our students (Case 2, WR).

Asu and Gönül agree on a need for more customized CPD program based on their professional needs rather than a general program that targets not only language teachers but also all secondary-level teachers.

Practice-focused PD

All participants from Case 1 and Case 2 declared that they needed pedagogic knowledge as well as the application of content and pedagogy within the scope of PD practices. They stated that they expected to receive applicable and practical activity ideas to be utilized in classes, criticizing that PD events failed to touch on practical issues. For instance, Ayşe said, “I think this kind of seminars are stuck somewhere between theory and practice.” (Case 1, I). In the same way, Gönül mentioned, “The bureaucratic procedures were highlighted much, but they were not suitable for practice. Besides, there were no topics that would help teachers in terms of teacher

development and teacher practices” (Case 2, WR). Similarly, Asu expresses her ideas as follows, “We did not focus practical activities for teaching. There were no topics related to how to teach English better in the school. We did not mention the innovations and current practices about teaching English” (Case 2, WR). Irem also added: “I think he (instructor) did not focus on what to do and how to do. I expected him to make some suggestions practice-wise, but he did not” (Case 1, I).

The three participants from Case 1 and Case 2 highlighted their needs for more practice-oriented PD activities. For instance, Irem stated, “It would be more beneficial if it included in-class practices and some samples. I have difficulty in designing various activities. I am not aware of what can be done through various activities. Generally, I follow the course book” (Case 1, I). In a similar way, Ayşe specified her expectations, “It could have been better if it had been more practice-oriented rather than the theoretical explanations of assessment types” (Case 1, I). Ayşe went on to say, “A seminar that is based on concrete examples can be more permanent because we are all informed about theories; we learnt them during our undergraduate education. We need more specific and concrete examples” (Case 1, I). Similarly, Gönül reported, “In such seminars and workshops, techniques should be presented about the integration of alternative assessment and evaluation techniques into the English course (Case 2, WR)”.

Collaborative PD

The participants in both cases expressed their need for more collaboration in PD which would enable shared learning and support both between and among the administration, teachers and students and working together towards common goals. Besides, they complained that it was not always possible to make a difference to their students’ learning and their instructional practices due to several contextual constraints. The collaboration between the institutions and teachers seemed to need reconsideration. Asu, for instance, mentioned a meeting on assessment held with the English teachers and said, “Although we made new decisions about the exam processes in that meeting, we could not make them real because of the rules determined by authorities” (Case 2, WR). This excerpt demonstrated that teachers expected collaboration with the authorities to implement their decisions. Similarly,

Nihat complained about the number of exams students had to take each week and said, “We cannot go on education because of exams since we have one exam every week and the students have exams without assimilating what they have learned. I can say that students become exam freaks because of having exams every week.” (Case 1, I). Nihat drew attention the exam burden of teachers which retained them from being concentrated on education that resulted from lack of institution and teacher collaboration. Senem also criticized the way students were provided with feedback on their writing and stated, “Students write in the exams, but we can't give them the exam papers back based on the rule, but we still want the students to come and get feedback from us and find out where they made a mistake” (Case 1, I). Senem elaborated and added another outcome of missed institution-teacher collaboration.

The teachers from both cases seemed to be in need of a collaborative professional development plan that would work best in their schools. The teachers complained about lack of collaboration in decision-making processes for PD. For instance, Ayse and Irem expressed that there was a need for some change in assessment issues in their school, but they also said they did not believe the change would bring success, as Irem explained, “We aim to provide learner autonomy through journal writing component of their portfolios, but we somehow assess them too, which is contradictory. We fail to get rid of the perception that everything has to be assessed” (Case 1, I). This complaint shows that there is a discrepancy between what is believed and what is implemented because collaboration among administration and teachers is limited, which yields contradictory teaching practices. Ayşe supported her colleague by mentioning the lack of consensus among the instructors on adapting the new assessment tool –portfolio- and said, “We lack standardization among us and it results in various implementations in different classes. The main problem of us is that we do not inform the students about our practices and assessment. They are not aware of what they are doing and why they are doing the things we assign” (Case 1, I). It seems that lack of collaboration to determine school-wide PD policies and to implement these policies might turn into contextual constraints for teachers.

Reflective PD

Findings obtained from both cases show that PD activities offered in both school contexts have influence on the way the participants (re)consider and reflect on their existing knowledge, beliefs and practices as a teacher. While some teachers stated that PD activities led them to reconceptualise what they had already known, some others stated that what was provided through PD activities were consistent with their existing knowledge, beliefs and instructional practice.

For instance, while Ayşe, Irem, and Nihat, the three teachers working at the tertiary level, reported that the content of the last PD event was consistent with their existing beliefs, Senem foregrounded that the event helped her to reconstruct her beliefs for assessment. In this sense, Ayşe stated, “To be honest, I have not learnt something new, the content was already familiar to me. He did not state anything that contrasts with what I learnt during my graduate and undergraduate education” (Case 1, I). Likewise, Irem added, “It did not meet my expectations because there was not anything that I had not known before. I had already known what was mentioned in the seminar” (Case 1, I). Nihat also had a similar perspective, “It did not live up to my expectations because I did not learn anything. They repeated the things that I knew” (Case 1, I). However, Senem had a different perception of the seminar since she had different beliefs before attending the seminar. She reported that she went through a reconstruction process regarding assessment and peer assessment and said, “In this way, the students who do not write can start writing depending on their wishes and it will result in better writing. I came to this point after the seminar which is kind of evolution and revolution for me” (Case 1, I). Senem went on to explain:

The seminar brought me to a point where I'm not since I was a teacher who believed that students would never study unless they were graded. We've been doing this for years, so maybe I was thinking this because of that traditional approach. From the things stated in the seminar, I realized that it was a good idea to convince students that they would get good results when they did something good (Case 1, I).

Even though the above-mentioned three teachers stated that they did not learn anything new since they had already known what was offered through the seminar, it seemed that they had a chance to reflect on their existing beliefs and practices and compare them with what the seminar offered. These teachers seemed to have

strengthened their pedagogic knowledge and beliefs on assessment issues, as Ayşe illustrated, “We tried to make some changes in a student-oriented way, but we ignored the workload of the teachers, so we failed to implement the changes effectively. He touched upon this reality, it was useful in that sense. I agree with him in terms of the ideas” (Case 1, I). Similarly, Irem stated, “We are always marking exam papers. In this sense, the educator criticised this system and stated that the number of exams would not bring success. I agree with him because we are always collecting students’ scores through exams” (Case 1, I). In addition to the chance to elaborate on existing school-wide instructional practices, Ayşe went on to explain why it was important to have similar ideas with the teacher educator, “We already believed that traditional assessment techniques did not work. So, the content was consistent with my beliefs. It was nice to hear similar ideas from an authority” (Case 1, I). Likewise, Nihat totally agreed with the educator’s views on using peer review to help students improve their writing, “It is good that students read and respond to each other’s writing since it will increase their trust to each other by making them close to each other in the long run. So, generally yes, I agree” (Case 1, I).

Although it is hard to say that the teachers working at secondary level could go through a similar reflection and knowledge reconstruction process due to the irrelevant content of PD practices, they expressed their need for more relevant PD events which might create space for reflection on their existing instructional practices. In this sense, Gönül stated, “There were no topics that would help English teachers in terms their professional development and teacher practices” (Case 2, WR). Gönül clarified her expectation from PD activities in terms of reconsidering beliefs, ideas or techniques for teaching. Likewise, Asu touched upon the difficulty of relating the content of PD events to her instructional practices, which did not lead to any change, innovation or improvement in her teaching, “We did not talk about any pedagogic and psychological aspects of teaching English. For that reason, the seminar needs to be rearranged” (Case 2, WR).

Discussion and conclusions

In this study, we attempted to explore the insights of the six English language teachers working at one secondary level school and one tertiary level institution about

the CPD activities offered by the MoNE and their institution respectively. The results indicate that the English language teachers in both cases are partially satisfied with the learning opportunities and support provided through CPD activities and they conceptualize more customized, practice-focused, collaborative and reflective activities within the scope of CPD programs.

From a socio-cultural lens, the findings reinforce what Johnson (2009) proposed about the collaborative and reflective nature of CPD activities. Even though teachers have positive dispositions towards CPD, what is offered by their institutions fails to help teachers to reconstruct their knowledge and identities comprehensively (Johnson, 2009). Teachers in both cases prefer more customized, practice-focused, collaborative and reflective CPD. This preference for needs, practice, collaboration, and reflection makes it necessary to take SCT into consideration to determine CPD policies because what is preferred by the teachers compromises with what SCT recommends for CPD. Considering the sociocultural perspective, these shortcomings can be compensated through bottom-up CPD policies and practices that prioritize the collaborative aspect of teacher learning. Sociocultural learning promotes internalization of scientific (theoretical) and everyday (experiential) concepts through CPD activities mediated by peers and experts (Johnson & Golombek, 2011). In this sense, bottom-up CPD policies that are collaboratively determined based on teacher needs, and CPD practices that provide opportunities for teachers to connect new pedagogical concepts with existing everyday concepts might make a more sustainable difference.

The participant teachers in the study state that PD practices need to be customized to their needs. The previous research also supports the idea that PD activities lacking a teacher-led process may not be effective. For instance, Hoş and Topal's (2013) finding that CPD programs organized without identifying teachers' professional learning needs may result in demotivation in English language teachers due to the irrelevant nature of activities for them. Similarly, the current findings build on the existing evidence that a planning phase is needed before forming CPD activities to fit the situation best, as also suggested by Uysal (2012) and Koç (2016), who have pointed to the necessity of preparing CPD programs relevant to teacher

needs. This finding also resonates with the findings reported by Babanoğlu and Yardımcı (2017), who have suggested that CPD activities that should include teachers' reflections and beliefs.

Considering the insights of teachers from both levels, it is obvious that the teachers consider PD as an endeavour contributing to both their theoretical and practical knowledge. What they think in this sense considerably compromises with the objectives of CPD because CPD aims to help teachers acquire new knowledge and skills, provide ongoing learning opportunities for them to do their jobs more efficiently, improve student learning and fulfil their life-long learning objectives (Alfaki, 2014; Day, 1999; Guskey, 2000). Previous studies (e.g. Aktekin, 2019; Atay, 2008; Wyatt & Dikilitaş, 2016) focusing on the effectiveness of CPD program models demonstrate that EFL instructors need practice-based activities in addition to theory-driven ones. The current findings are also congruent with the findings of a study by Uztosun (2018), who highlighted the importance of designing CPD programs including practical activities to give ideas to the teachers about what they can do in their classes.

Including teachers into decision-making processes for CPD policies and designing a teacher-led CPD program based on teacher needs and contextual realities might contribute to professional growth of teachers and ultimately student learning and school development when it is considered in the scope of collaboration between teachers and their institutions and collaboration among teachers. In addition to that, when teachers are included in decision-making process, they may contribute to the process by reflecting on their teaching practices which was another demanded issue by the participants of the study. In parallel with this, having a top-down CPD perspective that is accompanied by the CPD activities developed by publishing houses does not completely serve what teachers need for their professional growth. Instead of such policies and practices, the participants in the study stress the need for fostering collaborative processes of PD within their schools for maximizing teacher professional learning and professional growth, as also suggested by Muijs and Harris (2006), who consider "the school as a professional community where teachers have the opportunity to learn from each other and to work together" (p.962). Similarly,

when teachers collaboratively work towards solutions, as Hunzicker (2011) proposes, they feel supported and empowered.

The discrepancy between what the participant teachers understand and what is provided by their institutions can be interpreted as a conflict in the nature of CPD policies adopted. Even though both institutions where the research was conducted adopt a top-down approach towards CPD by providing expert talks and seminars, teachers' understanding of PD seems to differ from this kind of organization. The participant teachers' emphasis on the importance of their CPD needs and expectations indicates that it is essential to adopt a CPD approach including "customized strategies" that would be effective in their own contexts (Cordingley, Bell, Rundell, & Evans, 2003). Attributing a more active role to teachers rather than making them passive recipients of expert talks through a bottom-up CPD program might foster teacher autonomy, self-confidence, and collaboration, as already suggested by the previous literature (e.g. Atay, 2006; Gándara, Jolly, & Driscoll, 2005). Revising the existing CPD programs in terms of relevancy and practice-orientation in a holistic and developmental way might empower the teachers in many ways, as also supported by Macias (2017) and Uysal (2012). In this sense, teachers can feel more autonomous and self-confident to decide on their preferences considering their professional growth. They can also have a chance to work collaboratively through practice-based CPD events, which can enhance their knowledge reconstruction processes.

Furthermore, the expected CPD activities suggested by the participant teachers also reveal that they are not completely aware of alternative CPD models. Their statements highlight their lack of opportunities to experience alternative bottom-up CPD activities such as reflective practice groups, peer mentoring, team teaching, self-learning, lesson study and teacher study groups. Introducing new models within a well-designed CPD program may lead these teachers to (re)construct their instructional practices and (re)consider whether they work for their students and for themselves.

All in all, the current study provides a new insight into the contextual factors within CPD programs at one secondary school and one tertiary level institution since even if the level of schools is different, the teachers' insights are similar in terms of

CPD. Thus, the findings of the study suggest a partnership between schools and universities, as supported by Day and Sachs (2004), who propose that teachers take more advantage when there is an effective and balanced partnership between teacher educators and stakeholders. A long-term partnership to be established between universities and secondary level schools can promote sustainable teacher and student learning, considering the fact that secondary level schools are the last station before students start a preparatory school at the tertiary level. Providing CPD activities tailored in accordance with secondary-level and tertiary-level language teachers' needs are likely to promote student learning and alignment between levels, which can lead to a more a smooth and consistent transition from secondary level to tertiary level. Having an ongoing partnership in this respect can also facilitate the decision-making process to take actions in case of any inconsistencies emerging between secondary and tertiary level CPD policies.

In line with its qualitative nature, the current study did not seek to reach generalisations. The qualitative data obtained in this study could be interpreted differently by different researchers. However, we used validation techniques such discussions between the writers to reach a consensus over the themes and avoid researcher bias. As qualitative research paradigm accounts for the multiple realities stemming from the bounded relationship between a phenomenon and its context, further research can provide a variety of perspectives for how CPD is perceived and practiced by language teachers at various education levels.

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