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How Can I Become the Best Teacher? ELT Instructors' Professional Development Preferences

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Abstract: It is well acknowledged that one of the most significant things contributing to a successful career in language teaching is ongoing professional development. It is difficult to determine which tool is the most effective for the development of teachers because of the variety of current strategies that are still being debated in terms of their usefulness and practicability as professional development practices. Furthermore, the perspectives that teachers hold regarding professional development practices vary widely. In this work, various strategies for aiding the professional growth of ELT teachers at a foundation university in Istanbul are presented and discussed. Additionally, their preferences for varied practices that enhance teacher development were identified through a survey investigation. The data were collected through a survey questionnaire, and then they were analyzed to demonstrate both the similarities and differences in the approaches to teaching. The findings revealed that the degree to which teachers valued and made use of the activities differed significantly based on several factors, including their gender, age, years of teaching experience, the undergraduate field of study, and level of qualification. The findings could serve as the foundation for a proposal made to educators who are interested in developing their approach to teaching more professionally.

Keywords: Professional Development, Teacher Training, Teacher Preferences.

Introduction

For many years, most instructors and teacher-trainers have been trying to find an answer to the question of being the best teacher. Many people have tried to identify the best ways that make a teacher at least “better” professionally. Language teachers, according to Wallace (1991), “can and even must, take on the responsibility for their development” as the necessity in language learning and teaching has become a sine qua non in such a globalized world. Teachers of foreign languages often find themselves in the unusual situation of “becoming trainers of language instructors, or in some way accountable for the professional development of language teachers,” because of this need (Wallace, 1991, p. 2). Additionally, it was recognized, particularly following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic that advancements in knowledge and abilities in professional and daily life compelled language instructors to update their knowledge in terms of technology, online learning, curriculum trends, second language acquisition research, or different ways of evaluation and assessment (Richards & Farrell, 2005). Because of this, the focus of teacher training extended from a narrow approach in training models towards a more extensive methodology in which developmental experiences are gained not only inside but also outside the classroom.

As Borko (2004) points out, educators can improve their skills in a variety of contexts, including in-class instruction, extracurricular activities, and continuing education. As a result, we need to examine teacher learning in a variety of settings, including interactions with peers and students, as well as the larger social systems in which teachers are embedded. Almost all teachers need different things at different times throughout their careers. Besides, the institutions they work in ask teachers to update their knowledge accordingly as the needs of institutions also change over time. Similarly, Jackson (1992) tries to define change and adds that many modifications are inevitable, and indeed all those having to do with aging are. He believed that some changes happen to some teachers but not to others; not all teachers grow increasingly cynical, for example, but some do; we may want to include some of these changes under the rubric of “development”, but surely not all of them (Jackson, 1992, p. 63). This is why, regardless of specialization, many teachers are required to participate in a certain number of hours of in-service training (Neel, 2007). In this sense, it is clear that the help provided by the classroom experiences and the basis for practice provided by schools are invaluable in adapting to the changes in language education, as professional development is not only considered important for the well-being of the schooling but also the “quality improvement in teaching” (Daloglu, 2004, p. 677).

According to Lange (1990), the word *teacher development* is used in the literature to refer to the ongoing process of educators expanding their knowledge, skills, and perspectives through professional development opportunities. In addition, Head and Taylor (1997) state that a key component of teacher development is increasing educators' self-awareness of their potential for change and the factors that contribute to that change. They also note that this is a reflective procedure since new patterns of thought and action may only arise from examining and challenging established ones (Head & Taylor, 1997). To understand how effective teacher education and development can take place, James (2001) suggests that we should be aware of certain background issues namely, teachers' identities, professional knowledge, skills, attitudes, and feelings, and change and learning. These issues help practicing teachers develop their professional knowledge, skills, and attitudes to have a more efficient teaching process (James, 2001).

Teacher Identities

As is claimed by Gebhard and Oprandy (1999), the links between who we are as people and as teachers are rarely dealt with in teacher education programs. Still, it is important to

remember that instructors can draw on any aspect of their lives while discussing their profession, which promotes inquiry outside the confines of traditional classroom practice (Gebhard & Oprandy, 1999). Additionally, James (2001) supports the idea that teachers are "unique individuals, with their personalities, idiosyncrasies, hopes, and concerns". At this point, the importance of dealing with professional development tools becomes more visible to the teachers. Therefore, for effective teacher education, we must take into consideration that teachers have different personal and educational backgrounds, skills, or amounts of experience as well as professional knowledge about the subjects (James, 2001).

According to James (2001), teachers should also be considered social beings, who interact not only with their students but also with their colleagues. Besides, there is an ongoing interaction at every phase of instruction between curricula, syllabi, teaching materials, and classroom activities, which constitutes a three-way process. Classrooms and schools, and nowadays, online sessions as a means of distance education are the basic settings teachers have to interact with their learners. We can extend this context and get beyond "the school gates, consisting of layers including the school community, region, and international community (James, 2001). This is crucial because teachers' understandings and the ways they create meaning are shaped by the situations they work for. For this reason, this should also be taken into consideration while planning INSET courses or pedagogical adjustments in schools.

Teachers' professional knowledge and skills

When teachers join a training course, they already have professional knowledge in their subject area. They bring their own unique sets of values, perspectives, and preconceptions about the profession of education to the classroom (James, 2001). After each training session, all of these are reworked in light of the instructors' current knowledge and expertise (James, 2001). In this way, educators can reflect on their improvement as both teachers and educator-developers throughout their careers (James, 2001). For this reason, while preparing INSET courses for teachers, generalizations teachers make, their interpretations, principles, feelings, and priorities are of vital importance (James, 2001).

As their careers progress, most teachers realize they need to develop their expertise, and they begin doing so early on (Richards, 1990). Although prospective teachers may feel overwhelmed at first, they eventually develop a toolbox of techniques that they can use effectively in all their lessons (Richards, 1990). Teachers' preferences for professional development activities should be based on a wide range of skills, not just those directly related to language competence or the use of the target language in the classroom, but also on methodological skills like lesson planning or correcting mistakes, or decision-making skills, social skills, or presentation skills (James, 2001). Finally, in a study conducted by Uştu, et. al. (2016) professional development training that teachers need most turns out to be improving their communication skills, technological issues, teaching methods and techniques, student psychology, and body language.

Practices of professional development

Teachers may consider or evaluate their current practice by identifying those aspects which they are satisfied with; identifying other aspects which they feel the need of improving, exploring, and investigating alternative solutions and methods (James, 2001). As professionals, however, we grow only if we choose to, and the reasons for doing so can vary widely from one educator to the next (Bailey, et.al, 2001). Therefore, professional growth for educators is centred on teachers' unique requirements, which can take on a variety of shapes and sizes based on context and goal (Head & Taylor, 1997). In doing so, we might need to trust other teachers who will be helping us to develop as peers, mentors, teacher educators, or maybe as administrators.

Apart from individuals or institutions, there can even be publishers, educational manufacturers, and distributors who offer schools and teachers INSET sessions (Gough & James, 1990). Since the overall climate of education is changing and education is being exhorted to cooperate with industry and commerce, commercial organizations, as well, start to offer some forms of INSET sessions in which materials are provided and presentations are made (Gough & James, 1990). Considering this idea, we can conclude that there is a wide range of professional development practices, and we, as teachers, would like to take an opportunity to go further in our development.

Having said this, it becomes a more significant issue to find the best practices to learn and develop professionally. Lieberman (1995) argues that educators can get knowledge in one of two ways: through exposure to exemplary models or by participation in the creation of authentic difficulties of practice. Reflective analysis of teaching practices; examination of beliefs, values, and principles; conversation with peers on fundamental topics; and collaboration with peers on classroom projects are all suggested by Richards and Farrell (2005) as strategies for teacher development. They argue that this means professional development should involve more than just introspection. There are plenty of alternatives. Figure 1 illustrates how a subset of the opportunities for teacher development can be broken down into four distinct categories such as “individual”, “one-to-one”, “group-based” and “institutional” activities which teachers can choose from. Some activities can be found in more than one group because of their nature.



Figure 1. Activities for teacher development (Adapted from Richards & Farrell (2005, p. 14))

In addition to the activities listed in Figure 1, some other professional development activities such as seminars, national or international conferences, and workshops can be added to this list. University courses, M.A. degrees, and certificate programs such as CELTA and DELTA also offer many opportunities to teachers who want to develop more professionally. Finally, teachers can also make use of technology and join online networks, follow online bulletin boards, and can even take online courses or training. It is up to the teachers to choose the one that best fits them for their progress.

Research questions

This research investigates what kinds of professional development opportunities Turkish ELT teachers value most, as well as what factors contribute to the need for such options. The following are the research questions that guided this investigation:

1. What are Turkish ELT teachers' preferences for professional development?
2. How do background factors such as gender, age, teaching experience, undergraduate area of study, and qualification level affect ELT teachers' preferences for professional development activities?

Method

This research relied on a quantitative survey design that employed a questionnaire with 14 items about professional development activities. The study's goal necessitated a research strategy that would be aware of the significance of the meanings being constructed by the teachers in the context of their professional development as they participated.

Study Group and Setting

The participants in this study were chosen to employ convenience sampling from an accessible population of language teachers. Out of 67 instructors, 41 volunteered to participate in the research. 30 of the participants were female (73%) while 27% of teachers were male (N=11). Teachers had varying levels of teaching experience. The largest group of responders (68,3%) are instructors who have been in the profession for 0 to 10 years. The remaining teachers (N=12) have been in the field for over ten years.

This study was carried out at a private university in Istanbul, where the Department of Foreign Languages offers two distinct curricula: the English Preparatory Programme (PREP) and the Degree English Unit. PREP offers intense language classes with a teaching burden of 26 hours per week. Instructors in English degree courses instruct students ranging from freshmen to seniors. Some instructors work in units such as curriculum, assessment, and teacher training in addition to teaching.

Data Collection Procedure

Before a staff meeting, the questionnaires were distributed to instructors and collected within a week. The data were analyzed to understand the general perceptions of the instructors as well as differences among them in terms of professional development practices in an ELT context.

Data Collection Tool

A survey questionnaire on the preferences of ELT instructors for different professional development tools was utilized as the main data collection tool. It was drafted from the surveys conducted by Neel (2005), Richards and Farrell (2005), and Gough and James (1990), as well as the sources in the literature as a starting point and piloted with five instructors from the same department after the expert opinion was received from two faculty members of Faculty of Education in the same university. These respondents and their responses were not included in the main study but were used for testing. The questionnaire was then amended based on the suggestions of the responders, and unnecessary items were eliminated. In addition, unclear or complex terminology was simplified to facilitate comprehension.

The internal reliability of the research questionnaire was calculated through Cronbach alpha which was found to be 0.923 for 14 items. After receiving permission from the institution, the questionnaires were distributed to the instructors. The confidentiality of the participants was ensured by not disclosing their names or personal information in the research. The data were collected and then analyzed in the fall semester of the 2019-2020 academic year.

Data Analysis

Statistical Software for the social sciences (SPSS) Version 22.0 was used to conduct descriptive statistics, reliability estimates, and correlation analyses on the questionnaire data. All replies to closed-ended questions were analyzed descriptively. The data's percentages, means,

and frequencies were computed. Teachers' perceptions of their professional development were compared with independent variables such as age, gender, teaching experience, and educational background through inferential analyses. In addition, comments from a total of 25 respondents expressing their thoughts or offering advice on various aspects of professional development are included.

Findings

The questionnaires were distributed to 67 teachers, and a total of 41 usable questionnaires were returned, yielding a 61% response rate. Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the respondents based on independent variables such as gender, age, teaching experience, undergraduate area of study, and qualification level of the ELT teachers.

Table 1
Distribution of teachers according to independent variables

Independent Variables		<i>f</i>	%
Gender	male	11	26,8
	female	30	73,2
Age	22-30	19	46,3
	31-40	15	36,6
	41-more	7	17,1
Experience	0-10	28	68,3
	11- 20	8	19,5
	21- more	4	11,8
Undergraduate area of study	other	9	22
	teaching	17	41,5
	English lit.	12	29,3
	American lit.	3	7,3
The qualification level	Ph.D.	1	2,4
	B.A.	27	65,9
	M.A.	13	31,7

Professional Development Preferences of ELT Teachers

When the results obtained from the questionnaire were analyzed regarding the first research question, attending workshops or training seemed to be at the top of the list of preferences of the ELT instructors with a mean score of 4,12. This is followed by attending seminars and conferences ($\bar{X}=3,98$) and attending master's programs and peer observations with the same mean score of 3,95 as can be seen in Table 2 provided below.

Table 2
Descriptive statistics for professional development activities

Professional Development Activities	<i>n</i>	Mean	SD
Attending workshops or training	41	4,12	0,98
Attending seminars/ conferences	41	3,98	0,96
Attending master's programs	41	3,95	1,14
Observing peers	41	3,95	1,00

Having group discussions	41	3,90	1,00
Attending certificate programs	41	3,85	1,09
Reading ELT Journals, publications, or books	41	3,76	0,99
Requesting training from the institution	40	3,73	0,99
Receiving personal mentoring	41	3,56	1,07
Joining online teachers' networks to share info	41	3,56	1,12
Doing action research	40	3,35	0,98
Following online bulletin boards	41	3,24	1,07
Keeping diaries/portfolios	40	3,13	1,11
Taking online courses/training	41	3,05	1,09

When examining Table 2, it is observed that although taking online courses/training receives average scores ($\bar{X}=3,05$), it is the least preferred activity in the list of professional development activities. Considering the distance learning circumstances which have been experienced globally, it seems that instructors are still in favor of traditional face-to-face training settings for their progress. The other activities that receive less attention from the teachers are keeping diaries or portfolios ($\bar{X}=3,13$) and following online bulletin boards ($\bar{X}=3,24$). It might be concluded that because of the struggles instructors are experiencing nowadays, activities related to online environments might not be preferred as expected.

Preferences of Practices of ELT Teachers for Professional Development by Independent Variables

Using the independent samples t-test and One-Way ANOVA, it was determined whether there was a statistically significant difference between the preferences of teachers and the independent variables of the study, namely, gender, age, teaching experience, undergraduate area of study, and qualification level. Using the independent samples t-test and One-Way ANOVA, it was determined whether there was a statistically significant difference between the preferences of teachers and the independent factors. Here are given only the significant differences. The results obtained provide an answer to the second research question.

As shown in Table 3, gender appears to be strongly associated with teachers' responses to nine variables regarding their perceptions. According to the data, female teachers' choices for "attending seminars and conferences," "attending master's programs," "attending certificate programs such as CELTA", "attending workshops or training", "taking online courses/training", "receiving personal mentoring", "following online bulletin boards", "reading ELT journals", and "requesting training from the institution" differ significantly from those of male instructors at the .05 level.

Table 3
Preferences of professional development by gender

Professional Development Activities	Gender	n	Mean	SD	Sig.
Attending seminars/ conferences	male	11	3,09	1,30	0,00*
	female	30	4,30	0,53	
Attending master's programs	male	11	3,18	1,33	0,02*
	female	30	4,23	0,94	
Attending certificate programs	male	11	2,82	1,08	0,00*
	female	30	4,23	0,82	
Attending workshops or training	male	11	3,18	1,25	0,00*

	female	30	4,47	0,57	
Taking online courses/training	male	11	2,36	1,03	0,02*
	female	30	3,30	1,02	
Keeping diaries/portfolios	male	11	2,91	1,38	0,46
	female	29	3,21	1,01	
Observing peers	male	11	3,45	1,44	0,05
	female	30	4,13	0,73	
Having group discussions	male	11	3,64	1,50	0,31
	female	30	4,00	0,74	
Receiving personal mentoring	male	11	3,00	1,41	0,04*
	female	30	3,77	0,86	
Following online bulletin boards	male	11	2,64	1,12	0,04*
	female	30	3,47	0,97	
Joining online teachers' networks to share info	male	11	3,27	1,27	0,32
	female	30	3,67	1,06	
Reading ELT Journals, publications, or books	male	11	3,09	1,22	0,02*
	female	30	4,00	0,79	
Requesting training from the institution	male	11	2,64	1,03	0,00*
	female	29	4,14	0,58	
Doing action research	male	11	3,18	1,17	0,51
	female	29	3,41	0,91	

* p<.05

As indicated in the table by the results obtained, female teachers agree with these statements while male teachers mostly stay uncertain. This means that female teachers prefer seminars/conferences, training, and certificate programs more when compared to male teachers. We can also say that in general, female teachers like to work on following publications about their field. These findings may imply that female teachers prefer learning out of school or at least requesting training from their institutions. They also like learning individually by doing field-related readings, if they cannot attend any courses or seminars. In addition to these findings, it is also worth it because female teachers tend to give higher points to the overall professional development activities when compared to male teachers according to the mean scores for each variable. In other words, it appears to be more important for female teachers to deal with developmental issues while male teachers tend to agree less with the professional development practices most of the time.

Unlike gender, *age* does not have any significant relation with teachers' preferences for professional development practices at the .05 level. Table 4 below reveals the results for professional development preferences of instructors by age.

Table 4

Preferences of professional development by age

Professional Development Activities	Age	n	Mean	SD	Sig.
Attending seminars/ conferences	22-30 years	22	4	1,07	0,89
	31-more	19	3,95	0,85	
Attending master's programs	22-30 years	22	3,82	1,26	0,12
	31-more	19	4,11	0,99	
Attending certificate programs	22-30 years	22	3,77	1,15	0,32
	31-more	19	3,95	1,03	
Attending workshops or training	22-30 years	22	4,09	1,11	0,94

	31-more	19	4,16	0,83	
Taking online courses/training	22-30 years	22	3	1,20	0,45
	31-more	19	3,11	0,99	
Keeping diaries/portfolios	22-30 years	21	3,10	1,04	0,54
	31-more	19	3,16	1,21	
Observing peers	22-30 years	22	3,91	1,11	0,95
	31-more	19	4	0,88	
Having group discussions	22-30 years	22	3,91	1,11	0,83
	31-more	19	3,89	0,88	
Receiving personal mentoring	22-30 years	22	3,5	1,14	0,76
	31-more	19	3,63	1,01	
Following online bulletin boards	22-30 years	22	3,36	1,18	0,42
	31-more	19	3,11	0,94	
Joining online teachers' networks to share info	22-30 years	22	3,5	1,22	0,34
	31-more	19	3,63	1,01	
Reading ELT Journals, publications or books	22-30 years	22	3,77	1,11	0,13
	31-more	19	3,74	0,87	
Requesting training from the institution	22-30 years	22	3,64	1,09	0,44
	31-more	18	3,83	0,86	
Doing action research	22-30 years	22	3,36	1,05	0,50
	31-more	18	3,33	0,91	

* p<.05

As can be seen in Table 4, statistical analysis shows that teachers at different ages have almost the same tendencies of agreeing with the variables. However, it is worth considering that teachers aged between 22-30 tend to agree more strongly with the variables such as “attend seminars/ conferences”, “have group discussions”, “follow online bulletin boards”, “read ELT Journals, publications or books”, and “do action research” when compared to older teachers who are 31 or over. As novice teachers are still climbing up the stairs in their careers, they are possibly more enthusiastic and feel more compelled to contribute to group conversations or online bulletin boards. In addition, they may feel excited to read publications and attend seminars as might have a bit freer time compared to older teachers who possibly have more responsibilities not only as a teacher but also as an individual with heavier duties in their lives. On the other hand, "attending an M.A. program", for example, seems to be more important for older teachers. Throughout the years, they might have realized what they lack in their teaching career and might have felt the need to fulfill this gap and develop professionally in their way of teaching.

In contrast, teaching experience is one of the independent variables that exhibit no significant correlations with the other variables. As revealed by Table 4 teachers with varying years of experience have nearly identical professional development choices. Even if the background variables of age and teaching experience are expected to be similar, there are disparities in the preferences of teachers, according to the data supplied.

Table 5
Preferences for professional development by experience

Professional Development Activities	Experience	n	Mean	SD	Sig.
Attending seminars/ conferences	1-10 years	28	4,00	0,86	0,95
	11-more years	12	3,92	1,24	
Attending master's programs	1-10 years	28	4,18	0,91	0,16
	11-more years	12	3,42	1,51	
Attending certificate programs	1-10 years	28	4,04	0,92	0,37

Attending workshops or training	11-more years	12	3,50	1,38	0,88
	1-10 years	28	4,18	0,86	
Taking online courses	11-more years	12	4,00	1,28	0,14
	1-10 years	28	3,25	1,04	
Keeping diaries/portfolios	11-more years	12	2,58	1,16	0,29
	1-10 years	28	3,32	1,12	
Observing peers	11-more years	11	2,73	1,01	0,35
	1-10 years	28	4,04	0,84	
Having group discussions	11-more years	12	3,75	1,36	0,83
	1-10 years	28	3,96	0,79	
Receiving personal mentoring	11-more years	12	3,75	1,42	0,26
	1-10 years	28	3,71	0,94	
Following online bulletin boards	11-more years	12	3,17	1,34	0,59
	1-10 years	28	3,33	1,37	
Joining online teachers' networks to share info	11-more years	12	3,18	0,94	0,69
	1-10 years	28	3,64	0,99	
Reading ELT Journals, publications or books	11-more years	12	3,33	1,44	0,29
	1-10 years	28	3,89	0,79	
Requesting training from the institution	11-more years	12	3,42	1,38	0,46
	1-10 years	27	3,85	0,86	
Doing action research	11-more years	12	3,42	1,24	0,72
	1-10 years	27	3,44	0,89	
	11-more years	12	3,17	1,19	

* p<.05

Table 5 shows that as for attending M.A. courses, the mean for younger teachers ($\bar{X} = 3,82$) is less than older teachers' ($\bar{X} = 4,11$), here, while the mean for less experienced teachers ($\bar{X} = 4,18$) is higher compared to more experienced teachers' ($\bar{X} = 3,42$). Another example could be that older teachers ($\bar{X} = 3,16$) prefer keeping diaries more when compared to younger teachers ($\bar{X} = 3,10$) however, as the experience increases, the interest shown by older teachers ($\bar{X} = 2,73$) decreases and less experienced teachers ($\bar{X} = 3,32$) show more interest in keeping diaries than more experienced ones. This might be because the age groups and degree of experience may not overlap, or older teachers might have a shorter teaching career whereas a younger teacher might have worked as a teacher since the very beginning of his/her entire career.

Table 6 reveals that teachers' *undergraduate area of study* is not significantly related to any of the background variables at the .05 level. The results obtained from the questionnaire show that teachers who studied English Literature and English Language Teaching as their undergraduate areas of study have the same tendency to agree with the items in the questionnaire.

Table 6
Preferences of professional development by undergraduate area of study

Professional Development Activities	Area of Study	n	Mean	SD	Sig.
Attending seminars/ conferences	Teaching	17	4,12	0,93	0,49
	English Literature	12	4,00	0,85	
Attending master's programs	Teaching	17	3,88	1,32	0,53
	English Literature	12	4,25	0,87	
Attending certificate	Teaching	17	3,82	1,29	0,31
	English Literature	12	4,17	0,94	
Attending workshops or training	Teaching	17	4,29	0,99	0,47

Taking online courses	English Literature	12	4,17	0,94	0,72
	Teaching	17	2,88	1,11	
Keeping diaries/portfolios	English Literature	12	3,08	1,16	0,71
	Teaching	16	3,00	1,10	
Observing my peers	English Literature	12	3,17	1,19	0,35
	Teaching	17	4,06	1,09	
Having group discussions	English Literature	12	3,58	1,08	0,12
	Teaching	17	4,06	1,03	
Receiving personal mentoring	English Literature	12	3,58	1,31	0,53
	Teaching	17	3,35	1,00	
Following online bulletin boards	English Literature	12	3,41	1,00	0,71
	Teaching	17	3,41	1,00	
Joining online teachers' networks to share info	English Literature	12	3,25	1,22	0,63
	Teaching	17	3,47	1,12	
Reading ELT Journals, publications, or books	English Literature	12	3,42	1,24	0,78
	Teaching	17	3,71	0,99	
Requesting training from the institution	English Literature	12	3,75	1,14	0,58
	Teaching	16	3,69	0,95	
Doing action research	English Literature	12	3,83	1,03	0,52
	Teaching	16	3,25	0,86	
	English Literature	12	3,17	1,19	

* $p < .05$

According to the table, instructors who studied English Literature endorse the statement "attending an M.A. degree" more strongly when compared to the instructors from the ELT department. This may stem from the fact that they would like to learn about the theories of teaching rather than practices when compared to ELT graduates who are more knowledgeable in terms of theories of ELT. On the other hand, having group discussions is preferred more by ELT graduates.

According to the results shown in Table 7, the teachers' *qualification level* that they completed is significantly related to three of the variables at the .05 level. There is a statistically significant difference between the teachers with an M.A. and the teachers with a B.A. degree concerning the practices of keeping diaries/portfolios, joining online networks to share information, and doing action research.

Table 7
Preferences for professional development by the qualification level completed

Professional Development Activities	Degree	n	Mean	SD.	Sig.
Attending seminars/ conferences	B.A.	27	3,85	0,91	0,37
	M.A.	13	4,15	1,07	
Attending master's programs	B.A.	27	3,70	1,17	0,14
	M.A.	13	4,38	0,96	
Attending certificate	B.A.	27	3,67	1,14	0,24
	M.A.	13	4,15	0,90	
Attending workshops or training	B.A.	27	4,07	0,96	0,66
	M.A.	13	4,15	1,07	
Taking online courses	B.A.	27	2,96	0,98	0,41
	M.A.	13	3,31	1,32	
Keeping diaries/portfolios	B.A.	26	2,85	1,12	0,03*
	M.A.	13	3,77	0,83	
Observing my peers	B.A.	27	3,78	1,12	0,30

Having group discussions	M.A.	13	4,31	0,63	0,16
	B.A.	27	3,70	1,07	
Receiving personal mentoring	M.A.	13	4,23	0,73	0,21
	B.A.	27	3,48	1,12	
Following online bulletin boards	B.A.	27	3,00	1,04	0,12
	M.A.	13	3,69	1,03	
Joining online teachers' networks to share info	B.A.	27	3,19	1,14	0,00*
	M.A.	13	4,31	0,63	
Reading ELT Journals, publications, or books	B.A.	27	3,56	1,05	0,20
	M.A.	13	4,15	0,80	
Requesting training from the institution	B.A.	26	3,58	0,99	0,44
	M.A.	13	4,00	1,00	
Doing action research	B.A.	27	3,00	0,96	0,00*
	M.A.	12	4,08	0,51	

* p<.05

As shown in Table 7, these findings may indicate that the more academic studies teachers do, the more interested they might get in doing research and expressing ideas –in diaries or online networks. It should also be noted that teachers with M.A. degrees (n=13) are more interested in action research whereas 28 teachers with B.A. degrees are uncertain about the issue. Another important point about this variable is that instructors with M.A. degrees agree more strongly with all the professional development activities listed in the questionnaire when compared to instructors with B.A. degrees. This might be because they might believe in professional development more and their M.A. degree already proves that they have completed at least one of the practices, which is their M.A. study, for their professional development. Given this context, it is not surprising that this questionnaire item yields such results.

Results of open-ended questionnaires

Out of 41 surveys distributed to the instructors, twenty-five of them were received having been completed.

The first question “What kinds of organized staff-development activities have you found most useful?” received a range of responses including “training sessions –from trainers who come from different institutions”, “peer observation”, “activities that add to our teaching in classroom”, “presentations that were more practical rather than theoretical”, “useful technology”, “group discussions”, “teacher training conferences-seminars especially given by British council trainers”, and “practical activities that appeal to the learners, not something utopic”. Seen in this light, some teachers are more in favor of doing activities that can be used in real teaching environments, rather than theory-based activities. The most frequently given answer to the same question, therefore, is the “workshops”. Seven teachers believe the importance of workshops “instead of theory sessions” (17,8%). As one of the closed-ended items, attending workshops or training is the top-rated item with the highest mean score (\bar{X} =4,12) among the professional development activities stated in the second section of the questionnaire. This means that teachers' ideas are parallel to each other in both parts of the survey. However, even though “action research” comes as the second activity that was believed to be the most useful by four teachers (9,8%), as this practice allows the teacher “reflect more on teaching”, we cannot say that the percentage this activity has is enough to generalize the findings to whole teachers at the institutions. Besides doing action research is among the bottom five activities with an average of 3,35 that teachers mostly feel uncertain about their preferences for professional development.

Question two required teachers to state their plans for their professional development in

the next few years. Taking a course on different subjects is one of the plans teachers have for their future careers. One of the teachers stated that he/she aims to equip him/herself "*as a teacher who is skillful in teaching Advanced English*". In addition to taking courses, eleven teachers plan to attend DELTA courses and nine of them have plans for receiving an M.A. degree, even though one of the teachers prefers to do an M.A. degree in a different subject! Responds to this question of the survey show that 25% of the teachers plan to have a DELTA certificate and this may explain why the item "attending certificate programs such as CELTA" is the 6th most preferred item. This also means that the rest of the teachers are not interested in the programs as such. However, although teachers rated "attending a master's degree" as the top third item, in the open-ended section of the questionnaire it does not receive so many responses. The reason might be that teachers might believe in the efficacy of having an M.A. degree but may not have an opportunity to achieve that, or that they already have an M.A. degree so do not include it as a plan, although they agree with it in the second section of the questionnaire.

Question three focused on what teachers personally understand by the term "teacher development". Here are the definitions of the respondents:

- Learn more, reflect more, share more.
- Be a better teacher and contribute more to the students.
- To improve one's teaching to be more open-minded.
- Teacher development is the self-development of a teacher's knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors to perform his/her tasks more effectively in class or school.
- an ongoing/lifelong experience you learn from the students, they learn it from you.
- If a teacher doesn't develop, he can get bored. How can he/she become successful then?
- Being more experienced with the effects of certain behaviors and approaches.
- Adapting to changes and following them to catch up with the others and our students.
- Keep learning and updating yourself, keeping up with the trends, and exchanging ideas; and find new ways to facilitate students' learning.
- Self-improvement by learning new approaches, new techniques, and ideas that can be used in the class.
- Enjoying your job, thus enjoying your life. If you are bored, this means that you need to develop yourself and catch up with the developments in the area.
- It goes hand in hand with teacher training, becoming aware of the new approaches, and techniques; practicing them, assessing, evaluating them, and trying to go beyond your limits as a teacher.
- There is no end to learning and teaching. Considering this fact teachers should develop themselves to adapt to the latest changes & advances in the teaching field.
- Never-ending process including every single detail supporting my teaching style such as articles, visuals, conferences, discussions, feedback, etc.
- Increasing skills and competence NOT proving how much you've read/studied on paper.
- Ways to improve yourself professionally, reflect on your practice, develop new ideas, to renew yourself & your teaching skills.
- Learning while teaching and developing teaching skills to make the students acquire things we teach better.
- Seeking a solution for better classroom management, learning various techniques for different skills, updating, and following innovations in ELT.
- It is a self-reflective process, centered on personal awareness of the possibilities.

Looking at these comments, we can infer that most of the teachers take teacher development as a concept directly related to learning. It has been suggested by Richards and

Farrell (2005) that classrooms are not just venues for students to learn, but also for educators to gain new insights. According to Neel (2007), too, that learning exists at many levels, and in every situation for everyone including teachers. In addition to this aspect of teacher development, respondents seem to believe in the importance of self-improvement, seeking solutions, and reflecting on your teaching when they are asked their definition of teacher development. One of the teachers thinks that teacher development is becoming successful, and another says that it is becoming more experienced. All things considered, in terms of comments, maybe the statement which says teacher development is "increasing skills and competence, not proving how much you have read/studied on paper" could be the most realistic definition made by the respondents when we consider the results of the survey.

Concerning the final open-ended question that asked respondents to describe their best teacher development experience, the majority of the respondents gave different answers related to different professional development practices. Below are the answers:

Last year, when I attended teacher training sessions, I learned that the- er suffix (like the teacher, doer, or trainer) isn't important, the process/mutual understanding, and self-reflection is the most important thing.

I attended a testing course and I had the opportunity to questions. If you start questioning, the answers always come.

Taking up the classes and being have to organize everything by myself.

During my CELTA course, I had to teach a multilingual class and that was a great experience for me as I only teach monolingual Turkish classes in Turkey.

DELTA, the teaching practice aspect of it was helpful.

CELTA, because it involved both practice and Input sessions. Input sessions were great because each time I learned something. I can take it with me. And the feedback sessions after a teaching practice were very useful. I believe I learned to reflect on my teaching as well as get others' opinions on my lessons.

I've found Delta sessions most useful, but there is no end to teacher development.

Listening to Action Research presentations EVEN THOUGH (emphasized by intonation) the meetings for the presentations weren't organized well.

My MA contributed a lot in terms of my development as a professional teacher.

Active teaching. Real classroom environment.

MA course; presenting my research findings and experiences at an international conference.

Even though most of the answers differ from each other significantly, many teachers describe courses such as CELTA and DELTA as their best experiences. This constitutes only one item "attending certificate programs such as CELTA" ($\bar{X} = 3,85$) in the questionnaire. In addition to this M.A. courses also offer teachers good developmental practices as was suggested. However, teaching itself in real situations, not conferences or courses, is also considered to be of paramount importance for some teachers. As a result, it would not be wrong to think that the best activity is teaching itself. With some support, it is even better than the "best"!

Discussion

The findings show that there is a significant relationship between gender and several forms of professional development. Some professional development activities are more important for female instructors than for their male colleagues. It seems that male instructors are more inactive in utilizing such activities and investing energy in them. Another major finding of this study is that contrary to the literature reviewed, action research does not receive much attention from teachers. Of course, there are other activities such as taking online courses,

keeping diaries, and following online bulletin boards that are rated lower than action research. Nevertheless, action research receiving less agreement from the teachers is contradictory as was also found in the literature. One possible explanation is action research, a sort of self-reflection in which educators assess their practice, identify areas for improvement, and put these ideas to the test in their classrooms (Korkmaz, 2015). Parallel to the literature, this might mean that instructors are not knowledgeable about the meaning of action research, the ways to conduct it, and its benefits. In addition, contrary to the general belief, taking online training courses is another activity that received unexpected scores considering the conditions under which distance education methods are applied. The reason why teachers did not prefer it could be an interesting topic to conduct further research. In brief, the administrators may provide instructors with a wide range of voluntary activities and necessary resources as well as flexibility in their working hours or conditions for institution-wise progress.

Furthermore, novice instructors place more significance on some professional development activities than experienced instructors. It could be inferred that experienced instructors might have lost their interest in these exercises when contrasted with the young. Another study could be conducted to see why this is the case, yet in any case, it tends to be gathered that youthful and beginner instructors need to team up additional since they might be more needing finding support from experienced educators to improve their abilities. Therefore, it follows that teachers and their mentors should be considerate of teachers' needs and preferences throughout the various stages of their careers. To help proceed with these, the needs, abilities, and interests of teachers should be identified by the administration in the school. Particularly experienced educators could be urged to partake enthusiastically in a portion of exercises as such.

Conclusion and Suggestions

The study's key findings provide a foundation for making recommendations about how to improve education for teachers and the conditions in which they work. Teachers' levels of participation in professional development activities vary widely depending on demographic variables such as age, nationality, qualification level completed, or undergraduate area of study. However, we might need further investigation into why there are such differences might to understand the reasons, and if possible, to eliminate those differences. The extent to which self-development is achieved and the obstacles to progress could be the subject of additional research. Exploring, for instance, the challenges teachers confront throughout their professional development and their causes could be advantageous not just for the teachers but also for administrators and teacher trainers. Thus, it is suggested that educational institutions should adopt more practical INSET approaches. In addition, by gathering data from administrators and teacher trainers through observations, surveys, and interviews, it would be possible to gain a deeper understanding of how teachers value these activities and the extent to which they implement them.

Overall, the study's findings have implications for future research and practice in the profession, particularly because they highlight the perspectives educators take on the ever-evolving world. The study's findings could aid professional development for educators by illuminating ELT educators' choices for continuing education. Hence, administrators, curriculum developers, and teacher trainers can take more realistic steps while offering in-service training courses. It is unlikely that INSET courses will increase teachers' capacity for competent commitment over the long term if it does not take into account the growth phases of teachers and their intellectual and emotional development demands, as Day (1999) claims.

Through the results of this survey, teacher trainers may be able to find better ways to help teachers' professional development by communicating with them more efficiently. In this way, they would be able to come up with improved classroom results through professional development opportunities for teachers at the institution. Consequently, it is believed that this study may help teachers increase their awareness of professional development activities, and help them engage more with the professional aspect of their careers. Yet, as was also recommended by Korkmazgil (2015), there is still a significant dearth of studies that examine professional growth strategies used by Turkish EFL educators in classrooms serving students in grades K 12.

Limitations

The use of a convenient sampling technique to acquire the data is one of the study's weaknesses. It is important to note that this survey only collected data from 41 out of a total of 67 English language teachers at this university to prevent sampling bias and maintain the study's external validity. Therefore, it cannot be assumed to apply to all teachers of English as a foreign language in Istanbul or Turkey.

In addition, a questionnaire was used to collect the information. To help alleviate some of the questionnaire's restrictions, a free-form comments section was included. However, there may not be many people willing to fill out this survey section. The study would have benefited from including interviews with all of the faculty members, but that was impossible given the time commitment involved for the interviewers.

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