

Investigating Pre-service English Language Teachers' Career Paths and Professional Needs

Melike Bekereci-Şahin¹ Reyhan Aslan²

To cite this article:

Bekereci-Şahin, M. & Aslan, R. (2025). Investigating pre-service English language teachers' career paths and professional needs. *e-Kafkas Journal of Educational Research*, 12, 92-106. doi: 10.30900/kafkasegt. 1457798

Research article

Received: 23.03.2024

Accepted: 21.02.2025

Abstract

Understanding the career decisions and professional growth goals of pre-service English Language Teachers (PELTs), it is critical to address the challenges faced by the L2 teaching field for enacting extensive reforms in policies in the second language (L2) teacher education, the allocation of resources, and curriculum development to contribute to the quality of L2 education. Thus, this study investigates the career decisions and professional needs and aspirations of PELTs studying in one of the teacher education programs at a university in Istanbul, focusing on the challenges, opportunities, and perceived gaps. Employing focus group interviews with 30 PELTs and also individual interviews with three of them, we found that there were significant challenges, including the lack of teaching materials and low income, leading to dissatisfaction, burnout, and reconsidering alternative pathways. Workload imbalances, financial security, limited professional development opportunities at state schools were also viewed among the reasons for participants to consider alternative pathways abroad. Based on these findings, for future L2 educators, it is critical to address financial challenges through incentives and offer professional development initiatives, involving international partnerships, might contribute to linguistic and intercultural competencies, creating a more culturally aware teaching workforce.

Keywords: career decision, professional needs, PELTs, career goals

¹  Corresponding author, melikebekereci@hotmail.com, Middle East Technical University.

² , Niğde Ömer Halisdemir University.

Introduction

Given a wide range of issues including socioeconomic factors, perceptions about teaching as a profession, and teacher motivation (Darling-Hammond, 2017; Zhang et al., 2020), severe teacher shortages have been a major problem in 30 countries, involving Brazil, Indonesia, Ireland, Mexico, Shanghai-China, Sweden, and Türkiye (Behrstock-Sherratt, 2016; OECD, 2018, 2019). Research shows that there are also concerns about teacher attrition for almost two decades (Noordzij & van de Grift, 2020) and there are major challenges in recruiting subject areas, including foreign language education across different grade levels (Swanson & Mason, 2018). Additionally, research has identified several issues related to the shortage of foreign language teachers, including socioeconomic factors, perceptions about teaching as a profession and teacher motivation (Zhang et al., 2020). Thus, understanding the career choices, goals, and career development needs of these individuals is important to tackle with these issues faced by the teaching profession, including teacher development, teacher quality, and retention (Eren, 2021).

English language teaching (hereafter, ELT) in Türkiye is encountered with diverse challenges that influence the career paths and professional development of PELTs (Valizadeh, 2021). These challenges involve concerns regarding resources, curriculum, over-crowded classrooms, teaching materials and student motivation (Özmat & Senemoğlu, 2020; Öztürk & Aydın, 2019). It is critical to address these challenges that highlight the need for comprehensive reforms in L2 (second language) teacher education policies, resource allocation, and curriculum development to promote the quality of L2 education in the country (Dinçer & Koç, 2020).

Literature Review

Studies has indicated that the professional needs of pre-/in-service teachers are closely linked to their career choice satisfaction and motivation (see Borg, 2015; Eren & Tezel, 2010; Eren, 2015), commitment to teaching (Fokkens-Bruinsma & Canrinus, 2014), and career choice satisfaction (An et al., 2021; Eren, 2012). This evidence shows the necessity of exploring teachers' career plans and professional needs in addressing various challenges in the teaching profession. In addition, the relevant literature has previously demonstrated that many beginning teachers quit teaching within their first five years, resulting in substantial losses in the teaching workforce (Struyven & Vanthournout, 2014). Given the impact of their undergraduate experiences on their teaching motivation and retention (Watt et al., 2014), unveiling pre-service English language teachers (hereafter, PELTs) career plans and professional needs might help address recruitment and retention challenges in the field.

The challenges perceived by PELTs in Türkiye have important implications for their career choices and professional development needs and aspirations. This section reviews previous research on these themes, focusing on the context-specific concerns experienced by PELTs in Türkiye. Previous research has revealed that English language teachers in Türkiye experience a wide range of challenges that impact their teaching practices (British Council, 2018; Valizadeh, 2021). One of these major challenges is related to the restriction on teachers' autonomy in choosing instructional materials, particularly English language teaching (ELT) books which primarily focus on grammar and lack relevant content for enhancing effective communication in the class (Admiraal et al., 2023; Larsen-Freeman, 2015). Additionally, insufficient resources, involving supporting materials and facilities, have shown to prevent effective L2 teaching (Özmat & Senemoğlu, 2020).

Uştuk and Çomoğlu (2019) has found that there are concerns in pre-service language teacher education in terms of lack of opportunities for reflective practice, peer observation, and collaboration with mentors. These challenges need to be addressed since they contribute to the struggle of adapting innovative teaching methodologies to meet the complex demands of the 21st century (Akkaş & Çöker, 2016). Furthermore, scholars have highlighted the need for policy reforms in L2 teacher education in Türkiye to address these concerns (Mahalingappa & Polat, 2013; Öztürk & Aydın, 2019). In that regard, Eken (2021) has indicated that the centralized curriculum, the mismatch between assessment practices and international standards as well as insufficient teacher training pose major problems in the Turkish foreign language education system. The imbalance between teaching and non-teaching duties, including administrative tasks and extracurricular responsibilities, might result in burn out and dissatisfaction among teachers (Solomons & Abrams, 2023). Tackling these challenges requires a holistic perspective

that involve empowering teacher autonomy, providing professional development opportunities, and aligning curriculum and assessment practices with international standards.

Prior studies have also highlighted the important influence of external factors (Chaban et al., 2023) specifically economic challenges in Türkiye, on the career decisions of PELTs. The current situation in the country is reported to result in uncertainty, which pushes many teachers to seek out alternative career paths and explore opportunities for financial security and career advancement in foreign countries (Onyefulu et al., 2023). In that regard, perceived low income in teaching in Türkiye might impact teachers' motivation and job satisfaction (Hoque et al., 2023; Karakiş, 2021). L2 teaching in diverse contexts is considered as a rewarding opportunity to have new perspectives on teaching and learning (Oldac, 2023).

To deal with the aforementioned challenges, it is critical for English language teachers in Türkiye to receive sufficient support for professional development (Akkaş & Çöker, 2016). The studies on professional development show that exploring new career opportunities, such as teaching English abroad or enrolling in a master's program in a foreign country is an attractive option among PELTs to achieve their career goals (Jackson, 2016). These studies suggest that there is a need for offering PELTs with a guidance on diverse career options to facilitate the decision-making process about their professional future (Farrell, 2015). Moreover, language teachers perceive short-terms abroad programs, such as the Fullbright Foreign Language Teaching Assistant (FLTA) program, as valuable opportunity for professional growth (Bursalı & Mısır, 2021; Mutlu & Ortaçtepe, 2016; Peker et al., 2020). Such international initiatives are prominent so that language teachers can enhance their teaching skills, cultural competence, and oral language proficiency (Ku, 2023). In response to teachers' concerns about oral proficiency and English language instruction, Chen and Goh (2014) recommended addressing these challenges by engaging in experiences within English-speaking countries.

The studies collectively emphasize that PELTs display varying interpretations of career choice and professional needs. Moreover, these studies highlight the necessity to understand the challenges of these future teachers not only to influence their job satisfaction and well-being but also to contribute to the overall quality of education they would provide to their students. By exploring the areas where PELTs experience challenges, feel less face engaged or require further support, this paper aims to offer suggestions to make policies supporting and improving their professional development. Moreover, the findings of this current study might also guide curriculum developers in providing relevant and meaningful professional development opportunities ensuring continuous improvement in the quality of language learning and teaching. Given the impact of career development on teacher motivation and job satisfaction among PELTs (Hoque et al., 2023), it is critical for teacher education programs to understand future teachers' needs, challenges, and aspirations so that they can offer career guidance and support services to make informed decisions. Thanks to this, teacher education programs could customize their curricula to address these challenges effectively, bridge the gap between theory and practice, offer supportive structures, incorporating mentorship programs, fostering professional networks or programs including short-term study abroad programs, and providing advancement opportunities, which align with the professional needs and goals of PELTs.

The existing literature on teachers' learning have primarily concentrated on what teachers should or need to learn, rather than on what teachers desire to learn (Opfer & Pedder, 2011). This research aims to contribute to the ongoing discussion on teacher learning by exploring how PELTs establish their professional learning goals and needs. In brief, studies (Solomons & Abrams, 2023; Torsney et al., 2019; Watt & Richardson, 2014) indicate a potential significant connection between teachers' aspirations for professional development and career choice satisfaction. However, this aspect has not been thoroughly investigated, and there is a noticeable absence of attention to PELTs' individual professional learning goals in Türkiye.

This paper investigates three PELTs' perceptions about their career choices and professional needs. By exploring their self-narratives obtained via in-depth semi-structured individual and focus group interviews, the study reported in this paper explores the anticipated challenges, the desired development and support opportunities available for professional engagement and growth and the perceived gaps between the expectations and realities. Understanding these PELTs' desires for their professional

engagement and career development would allow researchers to gain insights into the impacts on PELTs' future motivation and career choice satisfaction (Torsney et al., 2019).

In parallel with these research aims, the current study endeavors to find answers to the following questions:

- What do PELTs think about the challenges of being a teacher and how do these challenges impact their career decisions in Türkiye?
- What professional needs do PELTs have in Türkiye?

Method

Researchers use a case study to unveil something exists (Yin, 2009) with an in-depth examination of one or more persons, activities, events, or processes (Creswell, 2016). The main aim of a case study is understanding how the case works, what it means, and why it looks like it does within the context in which it functions (Hiebert et al., 2023). In line with the purpose of the current study, this research was designed as a qualitative case study.

Participants and Research Setting

This research study aims to investigate career decisions and professional needs of PELTs before they start school practicum since they mostly reconstruct their career plans during their training (Oruç, 2013). To this end, the current study was conducted at the end of their junior year just before they started school practicum. There were 51 junior PELTs in one of the teacher education programs at a university in Istanbul at the time of this study. While selecting participants, convenience sampling strategy was implemented to select cases that were the easiest to access in the research context (Patton, 2023). An invitation e-mail was sent to all PELTs with the necessary information of the research aims and procedure. 30 participants accepted participating in the study within two weeks. In this regard, the participants were 30 PELTs who were enrolled in elective career planning sessions at the teacher education program during 2022 Spring term. Eleven participants were male while nineteen participants were female. Their age range was 21-23.

Career planning sessions were offered to PELTs by the department on weekly basis to equip them with the necessary practices in designing career journeys. The sessions were designed weekly basis and aimed to guide PELTs for the following areas: using social media to develop a network and to follow recent updates in teaching, teacher mobility (The Erasmus+ Program) and study abroad programs (M.A. and Ph.D. opportunities), international language exams (TOEFL, IELTS), teaching certifications (CELTA, DELTA, and TESOL), teaching abroad (FLTA), teacher recruitment process in Türkiye, teaching English at tertiary level, being a rural teacher, writing a resume, and preparing for a job interview. After completing focus group interviews and gaining a general perspective on the issue, the second e-mail was sent to participants to invite them to take part in face-to-face semi-structured interviews. After waiting for two weeks, three participants were accepted to be interviewed to gain in-depth insights about the concepts extracted from focus group interviews. Participants' profile is provided below (please see Table 1).

Table 1.
Participants' Profile

Participant	Age	Gender
P1	21	Female
P2	21	Female
P3	23	Male

Data Collection Tools

In qualitative case studies, focus group and individual interviews are the main data collection tools (Yin, 2009). Semi-structured individual and focus group interviews were conducted to gather the data in the this study. In this study, the validity of the interview questions was ensured through a systematic process. Initially, all questions were developed based on the objectives of the study and a review of relevant

literature to ensure alignment with the research focus. To establish content validity, the questions were then examined by two independent experts who have extensive experience in qualitative research and teacher education programs. In order to employ focus group interviews, the participants were divided into five groups based on their availability in the same hour, which is considered as the ideal size (Krueger & Casey, 2008). All focus group interviews were conducted in three days in the last week of career planning sessions, and they lasted between 25 and 35 minutes. During focus group interviews, eight questions were asked to learn their opinions about their career goals, plans to pursue additional education, skills and training they need to make them better at teaching, ways to advance in their teaching career, being an English language teacher in Türkiye, rewards and challenges of teaching, and changes in their career plans after participating in career planning sessions at the teacher education program.

Semi-structured individual interviews facilitate empathy and tend to produce richer data (Cohen et al., 2018) and also provide opportunities for extensive follow-up responses after focus group interviews (Lambert, 2008). To this end, after completing focus group interviews, the second invitation e-mail was sent to participants to ask them to participate in semi-structured individual interviews. Three of the participants accepted to be interviewed. Preliminary data gathered from focus group interviews were read and reread several times before individual interviews to further probe details that participants have provided before. Interviews lasted between 10 and 15 minutes. Interview questions were asked to elaborate on the answers given during the focus group interviews. All interviews were audio-recorded after receiving participants' written consent.

Data Analysis

The steps suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994) and Yıldırım and Şimşek (2011) were followed to analyze the data of the study. Firstly, the researchers read transcripts of focus group and semi-structured individual interviews several times and wrote notes in the margins of transcripts for data reduction (Miles & Huberman, 1994). With this step, the mass of unconnected data was eliminated, and the most salient data was marked. After that, the data were grouped in accordance with the interview questions and research questions respectively. In this stage, the researchers reached the descriptive codes as the early labels of data with inferences made by the researchers (Yıldırım & Şimşek 2011). Then, researchers focused on how many times the same codes were used by the participants. This stage was followed to form categories by grouping codes in order to reduce the number of codes while analyzing the data (Creswell, 2016). In this study, there was 92% agreement between coders to ensure the reliability. All disagreements between coders were discussed to clarify the conflicts. Afterwards, the researchers grouped categories to generate the broader themes (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011). For instance, 'having desire to choose a different job' and 'planning to work in a different profession after graduation' were grouped into 'career shifts'.

Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

The strategies suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985) were implemented in the current study. Firstly, triangulation was provided through using multiple data collection tools in this study. The relevant data was collected via two different data collection tools at different times. The other strategy used in this study is member checking. The participants were requested to read rough drafts of findings and asked to review findings for accuracy. Finally, the data was coded by two different researchers at different times to ensure the inter-coder reliability. The codes that the researchers agreed on were accepted while the codes that they did not agree on were changed until a consensus was provided. Also, some steps were taken into consideration to address the ethical implications. The research proposal was submitted to the social sciences scientific research ethics committee of the institution where the participants were studying. After receiving the approval from the committee, the participants were given the informed consent form including aim of the study, data collection procedures, potential risks, and benefits of the study. Finally, all participants were given numbers (P1, P2 and so on) to ensure their anonymity.

Findings

This section presents the findings derived from the analysis of focus group interviews and semi-structured individual interviews conducted with PELTs. The analysis revealed three overarching themes that reflect the participants' perspectives on their professional aspirations and career planning experiences: (1) Teaching in Türkiye: Difficulties and demands, (2) Choosing a different career path, and (3) Professional needs of PELTs.

Teaching in Türkiye: Difficulties and Demands

Of the 30 PELTs ten mentioned the challenges of being an EFL teacher in Türkiye. During focus group interviews (hereafter, FGI) and semi-structured individual interviews (hereafter, SSI), PELTs pointed out the current situation of being a teacher in Türkiye. According to them, lack of well-prepared teaching materials, low income, and non-teaching duties are the main challenges of pursuing teaching as a career. One of the participants, who has been working as a part-time etude teacher in one of the private schools in Istanbul, shared his own experiences about being a teacher and his career changes with the following words:

When I saw some bad situations like having no proper materials and getting very low income, it left me puzzled if I had chosen the wrong profession for me. In the private sector, teachers are not only teachers but also serve as a kind of worker. However, this course made me think of job alternatives. (P3, FGI)

During the individual semi-structured individual interview, P3 was asked one more time to explain what kind of job alternatives he was considering for himself. He said: "Actually, I do not want to teach in Türkiye neither in a state school nor in a private institution. I am considering teaching abroad after receiving certificates." (P3, SSI)

In line with the statement of P3, another participant highlighted the hardships of being a teacher in Türkiye. She stated that teaching at state schools is a kind of vicious circle for English language teachers that limits their professional growth. She said:

My career goals have been changed to include travelling and meeting with new people. As far as I know, teaching in a state school is very stable in Türkiye because you teach the same subject with the same books and methods every year. Especially, if you are an English language teacher, you must be open to new cultures and experiences. After being guided in career planning sessions, I understood what I do not want to do in the future. (P30, FGI)

One of the participants drew the attention to the fact that PELTs might be affected by the atmosphere of the country in which they teach while making long-term career plans. She said:

From now on, I can say that being a teacher is not easy in Türkiye because of the financial conditions and the upcoming student profile. I want to change this but changing something is not easy. My career plans did not change after career planning sessions because I had already made up my mind to quit teaching in Türkiye. (P18, FGI)

Two of the participants remarked that they were unsure about their career goals; however, they clearly stated what they do not want to do in the future. One of them shared his thoughts as follows: "I am not sure if this job is suitable for me. These sessions helped me think about alternatives." (P22, FGI). Likewise, it was stated by one of the participants that both private and state schools have drawbacks for teachers in Türkiye. She shared her concerns with the following words: "Private schools scares me because of high expectations of parents and administrators. On the other hand, state schools do not contribute to teachers' professional growth. I am really confused about my profession." (P1, FGI). During semi-structured individual interviews, P1 was asked to elaborate on the previous statement. She

mentioned that she began to consider working in a prestigious private school to sustain her professional development. She said:

Thanks to the sessions we had, I feel myself more ready for my future career because we learnt AP, IB, CELTA, FLTA, and much more. I also realized that the demanding nature of private schools keeps teachers updated with educational trends and practices. So, I am close to be a teacher in a private school (P1, SSI)

Choosing a Different Career Path

Career shifts

As the data revealed, 19 participants reported re-evaluating or changing their career plans after the career planning sessions, with a majority exploring opportunities abroad due to economic conditions and low salaries in Türkiye. These findings highlight the important role of external socio-economic factors in shaping career decisions among PELTs. Participants appeared to voice concerns about the limitations and challenges of pursuing a teaching career in the Turkish context, which pushed them to explore alternative pathways. For instance, P7 shared their pragmatic approach as to navigate these challenges by prioritizing teaching opportunities abroad as follows:

Türkiye is dealing with a hard economic situation nowadays and I think it is very normal to plan working abroad. My first choice will be teaching English abroad; however, if I cannot find a teaching position, I will try to enroll in a master's program to stay in a foreign country for a period time. (P7, FGI)

This statement shows the dual motivations of financial security and professional mobility, which are considered as more attainable outside Türkiye. During her individual interview, P2 stated, revealing that her focus remained on teaching abroad as a good option and her intention to achieve this by taking the TOEFL exam to meet international qualifications. In a similar vein, P2 expressed her concerns about the economic instability, which causes uncertainty about a sustainable career in teaching. She said:

I am planning to work in a different field when I feel ready and have enough courage. Türkiye's economic situation is a big factor. I want to feel hopeful about my financial future. I believe that I need to consider other options. (P2, FGI)

During her individual interview, P2 stated, revealing that her focus remained on teaching abroad as a good option and her intention to achieve this by taking the TOEFL exam to meet international qualifications. She added, "I do not believe that I will live a good life if I teach in Türkiye. First, I will take the TOEFL exam to study abroad then try to find a teaching position." (P2, SSI).

The career aspirations of P7 and P2 demonstrate a broader trend among participants to relate their professional ambitions with global mobility. These findings show that economic difficulties in Türkiye might act as a deterrent to pursuing a traditional teaching career and also inspire participants to seek for international opportunities to achieve career growth and financial stability.

Certifications and education

In a similar vein, one of the participants started to plan his post-graduate education after attending to career planning sessions. Initially, his career goal was to apply for a master's program in Türkiye for personal development, but after learning about the opportunities abroad, his priorities shifted. As he stated:

Before career planning sessions, my aim was applying for a master's program in Türkiye for my personal development. I did not plan to study abroad because I did not know the requirements, what I mean is I did not know where to start. Now, I am planning to study abroad, and the master's program is not very important for me. I will do this to look for a job. (P10, FGI).

This shift indicates that the participant's motivation was not initially academic but instead driven by the desire for life and career opportunities in a foreign country, which shows the critical impact of the career planning sessions in broadening his perspective on education and professional development. In addition, during focus group interviews, eight students discussed their intentions to take CELTA (Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) as a pathway to teaching English abroad, particularly in European countries. For these participants, the motivation behind CELTA was predominantly extrinsic, driven by the expectation of higher salaries and the ability to travel. As shown in the data, most of them were introduced to CELTA for the first time through the career planning sessions, which informed them about the potential international teaching opportunities. To this end, after being informed about teaching English abroad opportunities, PELTs experienced a shift in their career plans. Several participants reconsidered their options in light of more favorable conditions abroad. Two participants, P22 and P15, shared their revised career goals:

At the beginning of the semester, I was planning to teach in a public school in Türkiye because I thought that I have no other option. After attending these sessions, I have changed my career plans. Now, I am planning to take CELTA to teach abroad because I want to earn more to travel and improve myself. (P22, FGI)

Similarly, P15, who initially considered academia as the most viable career path, stated how CELTA emerged as a "lifesaver" in his professional journey. He added:

I was thinking about to be an academician at the beginning of the semester because it was the best option for me after graduation. I have never planned to be a teacher. I cannot imagine myself teaching English in a public school because it is too stable and low-paid in Türkiye. So, CELTA became a lifesaver for me. (P15, FGI)

These findings show how the career planning sessions exposed participants to certification programs such as CELTA and emphasized the role of extrinsic motivation in reshaping their career goals.

Professional Needs of PELTs

Global exposure and cultural exchange

14 participants emphasized the importance of attending to short-term study abroad programs as a key element of their professional development. Many of them mentioned that they first learned about the Fulbright Foreign Language Teaching Assistant (FLTA) program through the career planning sessions. The FLTA program was regarded as a valuable opportunity for travel and cultural exchange, especially in the United States. One participant said:

As an English language teacher, it is of vital importance to spend some time in an English-speaking country because we teach language and culture at the same time. Unfortunately, it is financially impossible for me to go to the USA; that's why, FLTA program caught my attention. (FGI, P2)

The importance of adopting a global perspective in language teaching was also highlighted during the semi-structured interviews with P1 and P2. Both participants emphasized the impact of cultural awareness and respect in the classroom, revealing the importance of bridging diverse cultures in language education. As P2 noted:

The topics [we have covered this semester] provided me a global perspective for my professional career. I realized what I need to address multiculturalism. I do not plan to teach abroad; however, I want to be a role model for my students here. I am open to short-term programs to learn how I can change my students' world. (P1, SSI)

P2 echoed this sentiment, stating:

Teaching in a foreign country provides teachers with new cultures and teaching skills. This can help them develop a global understanding and improves their skills to teach English to a diverse group of students. That's why, I am interested in international programs and certificates because it will make me outstand in the job market. (P2, SSI)

Building on this, one participants drew attention to the need of cultural exchange for language professionals, describing it as a vital part of professional development that involves the sharing of ideas, traditions, and knoweldge. He shared:

I love meeting with new people, and I know that our job is very suitable for this. I perceive myself as a global citizen because I respect all people and their way of life. I do not want to limit myself as a teacher, I want to travel and use English to communicate. Before these sessions, I did not know much about how to go abroad as a teacher. Now, I am planning to apply for the FLTA program. (FGI, P19)

Participants noted the FLTA program was not only beneficial for cultural exchange but also helped improve teaching skills and increase English language proficiency.

Professional aspirations

Participants stressed that the FLTA program as a valuable opporuntunity for professional growth, offering not only the change for travel and cultural exchange but also important benefits in enhancing teaching skills and increasing proficiency in English. One participant shared:

After attending these sessions, I realized that being a teacher is more than graduating. My previous plan was being a teacher in a state school right after my graduation. However, I have always been aware of the lack of opportunities to improve myself in a state school. So, I will consider living in a foreign country because communicating in English will be compulsory for me. FLTA caught my attention because it is very prestigious and also beneficial to improve my teaching skills. (FGI, P13)

This statement reflect the participants' belief that, in the context of Türkiye's educational system, opportunities like FLTA are viewed as crucial for developing the global perspective, cultural exchange, and professional skills required in an international teaching environment. Most participants viewed such programs as a necessary step in achieving their career aspirations, which they felt could not be fully realized within the constraints of the local educational framework.

Overall, the findings reveal that the economic climate in Türkiye has a significant role in (re-)shaping the career decisions of PELTs, with many turning to international opportunities or contemplating alternative career paths altogether. As PELTs perceived the current education system as offering limited opportunities for professional growth, participants were more likely to express a strong desire for dynamic, innovative, and culturally enriching environments abroad. Career planning sessions emerged as critical moments in this process, providing participants with valuable insights into global certifications such as CELTA and programs such as FLTA.

Discussion, Conclusion, and Suggestions

The findings of this study reveal several interconnected themes, revealing the challenges, career shifts and professional aspirations of PELTs in Türkiye, driven largely by the socio-economic conditions and limited professional growth opportunities within the local educational system. This section will explore these themes, linking them to broader implications for language teaching in Türkiye and internationally. This study aimed to investigate the career decisions and career development aspirations of PELTs in Türkiye with a focus on the anticipated challenges, the desired development and support opportunities available for professional engagement and growth, and the perceived gaps between the expectations and realities. The analysis revealed that the complex difficulties experienced by PELTs in the country.

The challenges faced by PELTs in Türkiye are multifaceted, involving economic instability, limited professional development opportunities, and the pressures of non-teaching duties. The economic constraints are particularly significant, as most participants expressed frustration over the low income, lack of proper teaching materials, and non-teaching responsibilities, which hinder their professional development. One of the major challenges expressed by the participants is the lack of well-prepared teaching materials, which not only influences the quality of instruction they offer but also adds to their workload because of spending significant time and effort to create materials themselves. The absence of sufficient resources could demotivate teachers, causing them to question the feasibility of continuing in the teaching profession (Admiraal et al., 2023; Valizadeh, 2021). Another important challenge shared by the participants is the issue of low income. L2 teaching, particularly in the Turkish context, is primarily considered as a financially unrewarding choice of career. This issue influences the teachers' quality of life in addition to their professional motivation and job satisfaction (Karakış, 2021). This economic burden may be challenging for young, future teachers who are beginning their careers (Hoque et al., 2023). Given the participants' frustration with non-teaching duties, involving administrative tasks or extracurricular responsibilities, it is noteworthy to suggest that this imbalance in teacher workload could lead to burnout and ultimately make them dissatisfied and disillusioned with teaching (Solomons & Abrams, 2023).

The career planning sessions played a pivotal role in (re-)shaping PELTs' career aspirations, which 19 participants revising or re-evaluating their career goals after engaging in the sessions. Many reported an increased interest in teaching abroad, triggered by both financial motivations and the desire for professional mobility. Furthermore, the participants' perceived limitations in professional development, specifically at state schools highlight the need for providing extensive opportunities for career advancement or professional growth. Otherwise, the lack of professional development prospects might be discouraging for PELTs who are looking for a fulfilling and evolving career path (Akkaş & Çöker, 2016; Bursalı & Mısır, 2021). Therefore, there is a need for efforts to improve these areas, such as income, workload balance, instructional materials, and professional development opportunities, to contribute to the overall quality of L2 education in the country, which may, in turn, have positive impacts on the teaching motivation and satisfaction of language teachers.

The second major challenge expressed by the participants is closely related to the important impact of external factors, such as financial situation in Türkiye, on the career decisions of PELTs. The uncertainty, resulting from the current economic situation, seemed to prompt PELTs to consider alternative career paths and motivate them about the perceived contributions of financial security and career advancement in other countries. Participants such as P7 and P2 indicated that the economic situation in Türkiye and the instability of the local teaching market led them to explore opportunities outside the country, such as teaching English abroad or pursuing postgraduate education. These findings align with prior studies, which reveal that economic factors may influence individuals' career decisions (Chaban et al., 2023). Additionally, as teaching English in a foreign context was viewed as an exciting opportunity to broaden their horizons, the participants particularly emphasized the prospects of working in a different education system to have new perspectives on teaching and learning (Oldac, 2023).

These findings suggest that the Turkish educational system may be pushing PELTs to seek career alternatives due to the lack of sustainable professional development opportunities. This shift towards

international opportunities is not only about financial gain but also about seeking dynamic, culturally enriching settings where teachers can develop their teaching skills and experience new teaching methods.

The introduction of international certification programs, involving CELTA and the FLTA, emerged as significant factors influencing participants' career shifts. As several participants noted, these programs offered a pathway to teaching abroad as well as providing the necessary skills to compete in a global job market. For instance, P22 and P15, who had initially planned to teach in state schools in Türkiye, shifted their focus to taking CELTA to secure positions abroad. This transition reveals how career planning sessions provided participants with new tools to reconsider their professional trajectory. The participants attributed importance to the ongoing professional development to be updated with the current trends and different teaching methodologies and acquiring global perspectives in the teaching practice. The participants' beliefs about short-term study-abroad programs, involving the FLTA program, as valuable opportunities for professional development are consistent with the existing research (Bursalı & Mısır, 2021; Mutlu & Ortaçtepe, 2016; Peker, 2020). These international programs are crucial to foster teachers' teaching skills, help them become culturally competent educators in multicultural settings, and contribute to their English proficiency (Ku, 2023). Additionally, participants such as P10 indicated that career planning sessions helped them rethink their postgraduate education choices, motivating them to consider studying abroad to enhance their career prospects. This change shows the broader trend of PELTs seeking international qualifications to better position themselves in the global teaching workforce.

Most participants highlighted the role of global exposure and cultural exchange in their professional development. Programs like FLTA were particularly viewed as opportunities for gaining valuable teaching experience while also developing cultural awareness. Many participants expressed a desire to teach in English-speaking countries to gain firsthand experience with diverse cultures, which they considered vital for enhancing their teaching practices in multicultural classrooms. As one participant mentioned, "I want to be a role model for my students here," emphasizing the broader impact of global experiences on teaching strategies. Moreover, the cultural exchange aspect of international teaching programs was seen as essential for both personal and professional growth. Participants felt that such experiences would not only improve their teaching skills but also increase their proficiency in English, further contributing to their development as educators.

Although the small number of participants in this study may limit the generalizability of the findings to other settings, this study has several implications for policy and practice for L2 (teacher) education in Türkiye. The financial challenges faced by PELTs reflect broader systemic issues in teacher education, as supported by studies indicating that economic constraints are a critical barrier to entering and remaining in the teaching profession (Darling-Hammond, 2017). Offering economic support or incentives for prospective educators in L2 teaching might alleviate financial burdens and encourage individuals to pursue L2 teaching as a sustainable career path, as showed in successful examples from countries with strong teacher support systems (OECD, 2019).

There is a need for institutions and policymakers to address the financial challenges encountered by PELTs. Offering economic support or incentives for future educators in L2 teaching may alleviate several financial burdens and encourage individuals to enter the L2 teaching profession. In addition, through carefully designed professional development initiatives that may involve partnerships with international institutions to provide exchange programs or short-term teaching opportunities, the outcomes of such efforts can be optimized in terms of linguistic and intercultural gains as well as professional growth. In addition, professional development initiatives, particularly those involving partnerships with international institutions, have been shown to enhance linguistic proficiency, intercultural competence, and teaching skills (Larsen-Freeman, 2015). Lastly, the desire expressed by the participants for L2 teaching in a foreign context reveals a need for programs that foster international collaboration and inter-cultural exchange among (prospective) language teachers. The expressed desire by participants for L2 teaching in a foreign context aligns with findings from studies highlighting the

value of fostering international collaboration and intercultural exchanges among teachers (Borg, 2015). These efforts can enable to create a more diverse and culturally aware and responsive teaching workforce, eventually, contributing to L2 teaching in Türkiye.

This study provides valuable insights into the the career trajectories, aspirations, and challenges faced by PELTs in Türkiye, emphasizing the need for systemic changes in the educational context. The findings of this study highlights that financial stability, lack of professional development opportunities, and heavy non-teaching responsibilities might lead to important barriers, pushing most PELTs to reconsider their long-term engagement in the teaching profession. The growing tendency towards international career pathways indicates a strong desire for professional mobility, financial stability, and global teaching experiences. This trend reveals PELTs do not only seek for economic improvement but also diverse teaching methodologies, global perspectives, and intercultural competence.

Despite the small size of participants, this study makes a significant contribution to the growing body of literature on career decisions and professional aspirations in L2 teaching that has received limited attention by exploring PELTs' desires for their professional engagement and career development. Further research may investigate how short-term study abroad programs, such as the FLTA, contributes to teachers' professional development, intercultural competence, linguistic skills, views on teaching and learning as well as job satisfaction. Research can also focus on examining ways of promoting professional development opportunities for language teachers, particularly in underfunded state school settings (British Council, 2018).

Acknowledgment

Copyrights: The works published in the e-Kafkas Journal of Educational Research are licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non-commercial 4.0 International License.

Ethics statement: In this study, we declare that the rules stated in the "Higher Education Institutions Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Directive" are complied with and that we do not take any of the actions based on "Actions Against Scientific Research and Publication Ethics". At the same time, we declare that there is no conflict of interest between the authors, which all authors contribute to the study, and that all the responsibility belongs to the article authors in case of all ethical violations.

Author Contributions: The article was written by two authors. They contributed to each part of this article equally.

Funding: This research received no funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: The ethical approval was obtained from Istanbul Medipol University Social Sciences Scientific Research Ethics Committee and the decision number was 173.

Data Availability Statement: Data generated or analyzed during this study are available on request.

Conflict of Interest: There is no conflict of interest among authors.

References

- Admiraal, W., Kittelsen Røberg, K. I., Wiers-Jenssen, J., & Saab, N. (2023). Mind the gap: Early-career teachers' level of preparedness, professional development, working conditions, and feelings of distress. *Social Psychology of Education*, 26(6), 1759-1787. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11218-023-09819-6>
- Akkaş, F. and Çöker, B. (2016). The use of communicative approach in 9th grade EFL classes. *Eurasian Journal of Educational Research*, 16(65), 1-35. <https://doi.org/10.14689/ejer.2016.65.05>
- An, M., Zhang, X., & Ching, F. N. (2021). Pre-service teachers' career values as determinants of career choice satisfaction: A hierarchical regression analysis. *The Asia-Pacific Education Researcher*, 30, 431-442. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40299-020-00529-7>
- Aslan, R., & Bekereci-Şahin, M. (2021). It is not just an academic experience: preservice teachers as long-term sojourners in a study abroad program in the USA. *International Journal of Comparative Education and Development*, 23(4), 367-382. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCED-04-2021-0039>
- Behrstock-Sherratt, E. (2016). *Creating coherence in the teacher shortage debate: What policy leaders should know and do*. Education Policy Center at American Institutes for Research. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED582418.pdf>
- British Council. (2018). *The state of English in higher education in Turkey: A baseline study*. British Council Turkey. https://www.britishcouncil.org.tr/sites/default/files/he_baseline_study_book_web_-_son.pdf
- Borg, S. (2015). *Teacher cognition and language education: Research and practice*, Bloomsbury.
- Bursalı, N., & Mısır, H. (2021). Uncovering emerging identity performances of Turkish foreign language teaching assistants. *Eurasian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 7(1), 45-67. <https://doi.org/10.32601/ejal.911161>
- Canrinus, E. T., & Fokkens-Bruinsma, M. (2014). Changes in student teachers' motives and the meaning of teacher education programme quality. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 37(3), 262-278. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2013.845162>
- Chaban, V. (2023). *New research in nursing: Education and practice* (Ed.). Intechopen Limited.
- Chen, Z., & Goh, C. (2014). Teacher knowledge about oral English instruction and teacher profiles: An EFL perspective. *Teacher Development*, 18(1), 81-99. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13664530.2013.854270>
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2018). *Research methods in education* (8th ed.). Routledge.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2016). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Sage publications.
- Darling-Hammond, L. (2017). *The flat world and education: How America's commitment to equity will determine our future* (2nd ed.). Teachers College Press.
- Dinçer, A. and Koç, H. (2020). Türkiye'de yabancı dil ağırlıklı beşinci sınıf İngilizce dersi öğretim programının uygulanması: nitel bir değerlendirme. *Kuramsal Eğitimbilim*, 13(1), 25-43. <https://doi.org/10.30831/akukeg.532955>
- Eken, D. (2021). English education in Turkey: why are we 'very low level'? Rumelide Dil Ve Edebiyat Araştırmaları Dergisi, (23), 804-822. <https://doi.org/10.29000/rumelide.949700>
- Eren, A. (2012). Prospective teachers' interest in teaching, professional plans about teaching and career choice satisfaction: A relevant framework?. *Australian Journal of Education*, 56(3), 303-318. <https://doi.org/10.1177/000494411205600>
- Eren, A. (2012). Prospective teachers' interest in teaching, professional plans about teaching and career choice satisfaction: A relevant framework?. *Australian Journal of Education*, 56(3), 303-318. <https://doi.org/10.1177/000494411205600>
- Eren, A. (2015). 'Not only satisfied and responsible, but also hopeful': prospective teachers' career choice satisfaction, hope, and personal responsibility. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 45(2), 149-166. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0305764X.2014.930417>

- Eren, A., & Tezel, K. V. (2010). Factors influencing teaching choice, professional plans about teaching, and future time perspective: A mediational analysis. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 26(7), 1416-1428. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2010.05.001>
- Farrell, T. S. C. (2015). *Reflective language teaching: From research to practice*. Continuum.
- Hiebert, J., Cai, J., Hwang, S., Morris, A. K., & Hohensee, C. (2023). *Doing research: A new researcher's guide*. Springer Nature.
- Hoque, K. E., Wang, X., Qi, Y., & Norzan, N. (2023). The factors associated with teachers' job satisfaction and their impacts on students' achievement: a review (2010–2021). *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 10(1), 1-7. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-023-01645-7>
- Jackson, J. (2017). Second language teacher identity and study abroad. In G. Barkhuizen (Ed.), *Reflections on language teacher identity research* (pp. 122-127). Routledge.
- Karakış, Ö. (2021). Relationship between professional engagement, career development aspirations and motivation towards the teaching profession of prospective teachers. *Participatory Educational Research*, 8(2), 308-329. <https://doi.org/10.17275/per.21.41.8.2>
- Krueger, R.A. & Casey, M.A. (2008). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research*. (4th ed.). Sage.
- Ku, E. K. (2023). *Teachers of multiple languages: Identities, beliefs, and emotions* (Vol. 20). Channel View Publications.
- Lambert, S. D., & Loisel, C. G. (2008). Combining individual interviews and focus groups to enhance data richness. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 62(2), 228-237. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2648.2007.04559.x>
- Larsen-Freeman, D. (2015). Ten lessons from complex dynamic systems theory: What is on offer. *Chinese Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 38(4), 379–391. <https://doi.org/10.1515/cjal-2015-0020>
- Lincoln, Y. S. & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Sage.
- Mahalingappa, L. and Polat, N. (2013). English language teacher education in turkey: policy vs academic standards. *European Journal of Higher Education*, 3(4), 371-383. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21568235.2013.832348>
- Miles, M. B & Huberman A. M. (1994). Data management and analysis methods. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 428-444). Sage.
- Mutlu, S., & Ortaçtepe, D. (2016). The identity (re)construction of nonnative English teachers stepping into native Turkish teachers' shoes. *Language and Intercultural Communication*, 16(4), 552-569. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14708477.2016.1194852>
- Noordzij, T., & van de Grift, W. J. C. M. (2020). Attrition of certified teachers in secondary education during the induction phase. *Pedagogische Studiën*, 97(2), 96-107.
- OECD. (2018). Education at a glance 2018: OECD Indicators. <https://doi.org/10.1787/eag-2018-en>
- OECD. (2019). *Education at a glance 2019: OECD indicators*. OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/f8d7880d-en>
- Oldac, Y. I. (2023). The contributions of study abroad to home countries: An agential perspective. *Higher Education*, 86(6), 1471-1487. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-022-00980-z>
- Onyefulu, C., Madalinska-Michalak, J., & Bavli, B. (2023). Teachers' motivation to choose teaching and remain in the profession: A comparative mixed methods study in Jamaica, Poland and Turkey. *Power and Education*, 15(1), 37-65. <https://doi.org/10.1177/175774382211099>
- Opfer, V. D., & Pedder, D. (2011). Conceptualizing teacher professional learning. *Review of Educational Research*, 81(3), 376-407. <https://doi.org/10.3102/003465431141360>
- Oruç, N. (2013). Early teacher identity development. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 70(1), 207-212. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2013.01.056>
- Özmat, D. and Senemoğlu, N. (2020). Yabancı dil öğrenmeyi zorlaştıran faktörler üzerine nitel bir çalışma. *İnönü Üniversitesi Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi*, 21(3), 1235-1253. <https://doi.org/10.17679/inuefd.734985>
- Öztürk, G. and Aydın, B. (2019). English language teacher education in turkey: why do we fail and what policy reforms are needed?. *Anadolu Journal of Educational Sciences International*, 9(1), 181-213. <https://doi.org/10.18039/ajesi.520842>
- Patton, M. Q. (2023). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods: Integrating theory and practice*. Sage publications.

- Peker, H. Torlak, M., Toprak-Çelen, E., Eren, G., & Günsan, M. (2020). Language teacher identity construction of foreign language teaching assistants. *International Online Journal of Education and Teaching (IOJET)*, 7(1), 229-246 <http://iojet.org/index.php/IOJET/article/view/733>
- Solomons, M., & Abrams, F. (2023). *What Makes Teachers Unhappy, and What Can You Do About It? Building a Culture of Staff Wellbeing*. Taylor & Francis.
- Struyven, K., & Vanthournout, G. (2014). Teachers' exit decisions: An investigation into the reasons why newly qualified teachers fail to enter the teaching profession or why those who do enter do not continue teaching. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 43, 37-45. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2014.06.002>
- Swanson, P., & Mason, S. (2018). The world language teacher shortage: Taking a new direction. *Foreign Language Annals*, 51(1), 251-262. <https://doi.org/10.1111/flan.12321>
- Torsney, B. M., Lombardi, D., & Ponnock, A. (2019). The role of values in pre-service teachers' intentions for professional engagement. *Educational Psychology*, 39(1), 19-37. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01443410.2018.1504892>
- Uştuk, Ö. and Çomoğlu, İ. (2019). Lesson study for professional development of english language teachers: key takeaways from international practices. *Journal on Efficiency and Responsibility in Education and Science*, 12(2), 41-50. <https://doi.org/10.7160/eriesj.2019.120202>
- Valizadeh, M. (2021). The challenges facing English language teachers in Turkey. *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, 12(4), 61. <https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.all.v.12n.4.p.61>
- Watt, H. M., Richardson, P. W., & Wilkins, K. (2014). Profiles of professional engagement and career development aspirations among USA preservice teachers. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 65, 23-40. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2013.09.008>
- Yıldırım, A., & Şimşek, H. (2011). *Sosyal Bilimlerde Nitel Araştırma Yöntemleri [Qualitative Research Methods in Social Sciences]* (8th ed.). Seçkin.
- Yin, R. K. (2009). *Case study research: Design and methods* (Vol. 5). Sage.
- Zhang, H., Wu, J., & Zhu, Y. (2020). Why do you choose to teach Chinese as a second language? A study of pre-service CSL teachers' motivations. *System*, 91, 102242. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2020.102242>