ARAŞTIRMA MAKALESİ / RESEARCH ARTICLE

EFL Teachers' Experiences about eTwinning and its Effects on Professional Development

İngilizce Öğretmenlerinin eTwinning Deneyimleri ve Mesleki Gelişimlerine Etkisi

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Abstract

Task-based learning through Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) has become more important for English as a foreign language (EFL) learners and teachers these days. Therefore, national and international projects have been facilitated by the integration of technology. This study aims to investigate the perceptions of EFL teachers on eTwinning. A qualitative research design was used to explore the experiences of EFL teachers who have already completed eTwinning projects and are currently carrying out them with EFL learners and gain in-depth understanding about the advantages and disadvantages of eTwinning projects in terms of their professional development. A total of ten EFL teachers working at secondary and high schools in Turkey participated in the study. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed with inductive analysis. The results showed that EFL teachers had positive attitudes towards participating in eTwinning projects. They reported that eTwinning projects contributed to their professional development since they created an international network of EFL teachers, providing an opportunity to share their teaching experiences, and the international network developed their technological and pedagogical content knowledge and organizational skills. Moreover, it was stated that these projects motivated the teachers to plan and organize similar projects and helped them gain recognition among their colleagues and appreciation in their workplace.

Keywords: eTwinning, task-based learning, English as a foreign language (EFL), in-service EFL teachers, professional development

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Öz

Bilgi ve İletişim Teknolojileri (BİT) yoluyla görev tabanlı öğrenme, günümüzde yabancı dil olarak İngilizce öğrenen öğrenciler ve öğretmenleri için daha önemli hâle gelmiştir. Teknolojinin entegrasyonu ulusal ve uluslararası çevrimiçi projelerin yürütülmesine olanak sağlamıştır. Bu çalışma ile İngilizce öğretmenlerinin eTwinning hakkındaki algılarının araştırılması amaçlanmıştır. Çalışmada, öğrencileri ile halihazırda eTwinning projeleri yapmış ve yapmakta olan İngilizce öğretmenlerinin deneyimlerini araştırmak ve profesyonel gelişimleri açısından eTwinning projelerinin avantajları ve dezavantajlarını derinlemesine incelemek üzere nitel bir araştırma tasarımı kullanılmıştır. Araştırmaya Türkiye'de ortaokul ve lise düzeyindeki okullarda görev yapan toplam on İngilizce öğretmeni katılmıştır. Veriler, yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler yoluyla toplanmış ve tümevarım yaklaşımı ile analiz edilmiştir. Çalışmada elde edilen sonuçlar, İngilizce öğretmenlerinin eTwinning projelerine katılmaya yönelik olumlu tutumlara sahip olduğunu göstermiştir. Katılımcılar, eTwinning projelerinin, İngilizce'yi yabancı dil olarak öğreten öğretmenler açısından uluslararası bir iş ağı oluşturduğu, öğretim deneyimlerini paylaşma fırsatı sağladığı ve teknolojik ve pedagojik içerik bilgilerini ve organizasyon becerilerini geliştirdiği için mesleki gelişimlerine katkıda bulunduğunu bildirdiler. Ayrıca, bu projelerin öğretmenleri benzer projeler planlamak ve yürütmek üzere motive ettiği, meslektaşları arasında tanınırlık ve işyerinde takdir kazanmalarına yardımcı olduğu belirtilmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: eTwinning, görev tabanlı öğrenme, yabancı dil olarak İngilizce, hizmetiçi İngilizce öğretmenleri, mesleki gelişim

Geniş Özet

Giriş

Son zamanlarda Bilgi ve İletişim Teknolojileri (BİT) (Information and Communication Technologies – ICT) İngilizce'yi yabancı dil olarak öğrenen öğrenciler ve öğreten öğretmenler için son derece önemli bir konuma gelmiştir. BİT'in entegre edildiği ulusal ve uluslararası projeler oluşturulmakta ve bu oluşumlar hem Avrupa Komisyonu hem de Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı (MEB) tarafından desteklenmektedir. eTwinning bu proje türlerinden biridir. eTwining'in amacı en az iki farklı Avrupa ülkesindeki en az iki ilk ve orta dereceli okulun BİT kullanarak pedagojik bakımdan anlamlı herhangi bir eğitsel etkinliği uzun vadede yürütmektir. Avrupa Komisyonu eTwinning'i 2005'te e-öğrenme programının ana hareketi olarak başlatmıştır ve Türkiye eTwinning'e 2009'da dahil olmuştur.

Okullarda BİT kullanımına yönelik yenilikçi yöntemleri teşvik etmek amacıyla kurulan eTwinning bir sanal tele-işbirliği platformudur. Platform, Avrupa'daki ve bazı komşu ülkelerdeki okullara en iyi uygulamaları ve paha biçilmez deneyimleri paylaşarak çevrimiçi projeler yürütme fırsatı sunmaktadır. Ulusal ve Avrupa eTwinning Kalite Etiketleri gibi belirli kriterlerle değerlendirilen başarılı projeler, Ulusal Destek Servisi (National Support Service – NSS) ve Merkezi Destek Servisi (Central Support Service – CSS) tarafından ödüllendirilir. Katılımcılara çeşitli ödüllerin verilmesi, hem öğrencilerin hem de öğretmenlerin ortaya koyduğu çabaların takdir edilmesi ve akademik ve profesyonel gelişim fırsatlarının sunulması anlamına gelmektedir. Türkiye bağlamında 2009 yılında başlatılan ve MEB

Yenilik ve Eğitim Teknolojileri Genel Müdürlüğü tarafından denetlenen platformda, Türkiye'den 308.900 öğretmen bulunmaktadır (Aralık 2021 itibarıyla 55.975 proje ile katılan 54.509 okul vardır).

Avrupa Komisyonu'nun (2018) belirttiği Hayat Boyu Öğrenme modeline göre, yabancı dilde iletişim (çok dillilik), dijital ve teknoloji tabanlı yeterlikler, yeni yeterlikleri benimseme yeteneği ve kültürel farkındalık, öğretmenlerin sahip olması veya edinmesi gereken sekiz temel yeterlilik arasındadır. Özellikle öğretmenlerin düzenli aralıklarla sürekli olarak katıldıkları sosyal ve işbirlikçi etkinlikler ile öğretmenlerin sınıf içi öğretmenlik uygulamaları arasında güçlü bir ilişki vardır. Ayrıca, öğretmenler arasındaki işbirliği, profesyonelliklerini ve öz yeterliklerini geliştirmeleri için onlara belirli fırsatlar sunar.

Literatürdeki çalışmalar çoğunlukla branş öğretmenlerinin eTwinning projelerine ilişkin bakış açılarına odaklanmıştır. Bununla birlikte, özellikle İngilizce'yi yabancı dil olarak öğreten İngilizce öğretmenleri ile yapılan çalışma sayısı sınırlıdır. Bu nedenle, İngilizce öğretmenlerinin eTwinning projelerine ilişkin bakış açılarını derinlemesine öğrenmenin, görev veya daha kapsamı genişletilmiş haliye proje tamamlamanın uygulanma şekline ilişkin geniş bir perspektif ortaya çıkaracağına inanılmaktadır. Dahası, proje tabanlı öğrenmeye odaklanan Göreve dayalı Dil Öğretimi (Task-based Language Teaching – TBLT) yöntemi aracılığıyla dil öğretimi ve öğreniminin nasıl geliştirileceğine dair de kapsamlı bir veri elde edileceği düşünülmektedir. Daha spesifik olarak, eTwinning projelerinin öğretmenlerin mesleki gelişimi üzerindeki etkileri, eğitimcilerin ve diğer paydaşların, bu tür tele-işbirliği projelerini planlarken ve yürütürken süreci çok yönlü bir şekilde gözlemlemelerini ve buna göre harekete geçmelerini sağlayabilir. Bu amaçla, bu çalışma, eTwinning projelerini tamamlamış ve bu projeleri halen yürütmekte olan yabancı dil olarak İngilizce öğretmenlerinin deneyimlerini keşfetmeyi ve eTwinning projelerinin öğretmenlerin mesleki yani profesyonel gelişimleri üzerindeki etkilerini derinlemesine ortaya çıkarmayı hedeflemiştir.

Yöntem

Bu çalışmanın temel amacı Türkiye'deki İngilizce öğretmenlerinin eTwinning'e ilişkin deneyimlerini ortaya çıkarmaktır. Bu nedenle de, bu çalışma için kendi öğretme ortamlarında öğrencileriyle en az bir adet eTwinning projesi yürütmüş veya yürütmekte olan ve bu süreci deneyimlemiş İngilizce öğretmenleri amaçlı örnekleme yoluyla seçilmiştir. Bu çalışmada İngilizce öğretmenlerinin eTwinning projelerinin avantajları ve dezavantajları, ve eTwinning projelerinin kendi mesleki gelişimlerine etkileri hakkındaki düşüncelerine ilişkin derin bir anlayışa sahip olmak hedeflenmiştir. Ele alınan araştırma soruları şunlardır:

1. İngilizce öğretmenlerinin eTwinning projelerine ilişkin deneyimleri nelerdir?

2. İngilizce öğretmenlerinin bakış açısına göre eTwinning projelerinin kendi mesleki gelişimlerine etkileri nelerdir?

Bu çalışmada nitel bir araştırma deseni kullanılmıştır. Katılımcılar beşi ortaöğretim ve beşi lise düzeyinde olmak üzere 10 İngilizce öğretmenidir. Veri toplamak için yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme soruları kullanılmıştır. Görüşme sorularının ilk bölümü, katılımcılar hakkında demografik bilgi

toplama amaçlı olup, ikinci bölümü katılımcıların eTwinning projeleri ile ilgili deneyimleri ve bu projelerin mesleki gelişimlerine etkileri hakkında bilgi edinmeye yönelik açık uçlu sorular içermektedir. Bireysel görüşmeler Zoom üzerinden yürütülmüştür, ses ve görüntü kaydı yapılmıştır. Veriler yazıya dökülüp (transkripsiyon), tematik içerik analizi (thematic content analysis) kullanılarak analiz edilmiştir. Diğer bir deyişle veriler kodlanıp, ortak temalar halinde birleştirilmiş ve ortaya çıkan temalar sunulmuştur.

Bulgular ve Tartışma

eTwinning projesi yürütmüş veya yürütmekte olan ve bu süreci deneyimlemiş İngilizce öğretmenlerine projeye ilişkin deneyimleri ve kendi bakış açılarına göre projelerin mesleki gelişimlerine etkileri yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmelerde sorulmuştur.

Katılımcılara deneyimleri sorulduğunda, ağırlıklı olarak eTwinning projelerine katılma nedenlerinden ve eTwinning projelerini yürütmenin sunmuş olduğu büyük avantajlardan ve bazı dezavantajlardan bahsetmişlerdir.

Projeye katılma nedenleri olarak katılımcıların çoğu kişisel gelişim, öğretmenlik uygulamalarına değer ve farklılık katma, öğretmenlik mesleğinde geliştirdikleri rekabetçi yaklaşım gibi çeşitli gerekçeler öne sürmüştür. Katılımcılar ayrıca, eTwinning'in çoğunlukla öğrencilerinin dil öğrenimine ve genel olarak iletişim ve BİT becerilerine ve sınıftaki öğretim uygulamalarına sağladığı faydalara odaklanmıştır.

eTwinning projelerinin kendilerine sağladığı avantajlar söz konusu olduğunda katılımcılar, platformda yer alan kişisel gelişim derslerinin destek olduğunu ve faydasını vurgulamışlardır. Ayrıca yurtdışındaki meslektaşlarla çalışma ve onlardan öğrenme ve kendi öğrencileriyle sürekli etkileşim halinde olma ve mesleki yeterliliklerini geliştirme fırsatının eTwinning projelerinin avantajları arasında olduğunu söylenmektedir. Partner ülkeler arasındaki zaman farkı, partner okul bulmaktaki zorluklar, proje süresinin uzun olması ise sadece birkaç katılımcı öğretmenin bahsettiği dezavantajlar arasında yer almaktadır.

Katılımcı İngilizce öğretmenlerinin kendi bakış açılarına göre projelerin mesleki gelişimlerine etkileri sorulduğunda ise katılımcıların eTwinning projelerini sosyal, bilişsel ve duyuşsal boyutlarda mesleki gelişimleri üzerinde çeşitli etkileri olan bir gelişim süreci olarak kabul ettiği bulunmuştur. Mesleki ağ ve akran öğrenimi (sosyal boyut), teknolojik pedagojik alan bilgisinin ve organizasyon becerilerinin gelişimi (bilişsel boyut), motivasyon ve tanınma (duygusal boyut) en göze çarpan etkiler arasında yer almaktadır.

Sonuç olarak, katılımcıların çoğu değişen rollerin farkında olduklarını, dijital çağa uyum sağlamaları gerektiğini ve teknolojik ve sosyal uyumu eTwinning projeleri sayesinde gerçekleştirdiklerini göstermiştir. Ayrıca, BİT entegrasyonu ile öğrencilerinin dil edinimini ve sosyal-duygusal becerilerini geliştirmeyi hedefleyen İngilizce öğretmenlerinin, eTwinning projeleriyle öğrencilerini yabancı akranlarıyla zamana ve mekâna dayalı sınırları aşarak buluşturdukları sonucu, söz konusu öğretmenlerin aynı zamanda öğrencilerin 21. Yüzyıl becerilerinin ve yeterliliklerinin

geliştirilmesi gibi Avrupa Komisyonu'nun hedeflediği amaçların gerçekleştirilmesi ile doğru orantılıdır.

eTwinning projelerinin İngilizce öğretmenlerinin mesleki gelişimi üzerindeki etkilerine ilişkin bu çalışmanın sonuçları, ilgili projelerin İngilizce öğretmenleri tarafından öğretim deneyimlerini paylaşabilecekleri ve karşılıklı kültürel aktarım yapabilecekleri uluslararası bir İngilizce öğretmenliği ağının kurulması için bir araç olarak görüldüğünü göstermiştir. Türkiye ve Avrupa'da dil öğretimi amacıyla yürütülen bu projelerin sayısı hızla arttığından, konuyu derinlemesine anlamanın araştırmacıları daha geniş pedagojik çıkarımları kavramaya yönlendirdiği düşünülmektedir. Ayrıca bu çalışmanın sonuçlarının hem eğitimcilere hem de paydaşlara dil öğretimi ve mesleki gelişim için eTwinning platformunun daha etkin ve verimli bir şekilde kullanılmasını sağlama konusunda yardımcı olacağı düşünülmektedir.

Introduction

With the integration of ICT into the classroom, teaching and learning a language has become independent of space and time, providing qualifications for both EFL teachers and language learners such as using new Web 2.0. tools, fostering cultural awareness and language skills. Joint projects carried out by different member countries through the eTwinning portal, which has been serving in 31 languages since May 2021, are remarkable and concrete examples of project-based learning. The portal promotes efficient and effective collaboration among schools in Europe through the use of ICT by providing services and support such as continuing online professional development for educators (Carpenter & Tanner, 2013). Since the eTwinning projects integrate Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) practices with 21st-century skills, they help teachers put their students in the center of the learning process developing their digital literacy skills, and social and cultural tolerance.

In Turkey, eTwinning project activities have been carried out since 2009 under the supervision of the General Directorate of Innovation and Educational Technologies within the Republic of Turkey, Ministry of National Education (MoNE). Approximately 320.000 teachers from more than 55.000 schools are registered to the eTwinning portal. Compared to the previous years, the number of teachers and students participating in eTwinning projects has increased considerably, which might be attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic. Within the context of EFL teaching, the literature review showed that eTwinning has not been studied comprehensively with regard to its effects on EFL teachers' professional development either in Turkey or in foreign countries around the world.

The integration of many different technological devices and methods into language teaching practices has become a necessity for EFL teachers to accommodate themselves to their changing roles to support the second language acquisition of today's digital native students. The adoption of traditional, digital and horizontal skills, which are the key ones determined by the European Commission on language teaching and included in the scope of the English Language Teaching Program by MoNE (2017), and their inclusion in language teaching activities with various projects is only possible by training innovative teachers who adapt to the requirements of the age. Therefore,

it is important to follow the professional development process of language teachers to enable them to be aware of innovative educational activities, especially in European countries, and to use web technologies for educational purposes. Moreover, addressing EFL teachers' experiences and views on eTwinning projects would enable them to reflect on the projects from their own perspective and to develop professionally by self-learning from experience in natural settings. Because of the lack of qualitative studies on this topic in the literature, it is believed that conducting such a study would shed light on all kinds of pre – or in-service teacher training programs to be planned in the future.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to gain deep insights regarding the effects of eTwinning projects on EFL teachers' professional development based on their experiences. It was intended to grasp some valuable pedagogical implications which would help pre-and in-service teachers' search for more professional development opportunities on the eTwinning platform and enhance their changing language teacher roles by planning and organizing target-specific projects.

The present study aims at exploring the following research questions.

1. What are EFL teachers' experiences about eTwinning?

2. What are the effects of eTwinning on EFL teachers' professional development?

Conducting joint projects with foreign partners using Web 2.0. tools under the supervision of an authorized organization has become a common practice, especially among language teachers' practices. Examining the opinions of language teachers on eTwinning, a specific kind of project-based teaching practice, to ensure the active and effective use of the eTwinning platform, which has more than one million participants across Europe, will point up the necessity of conducting further studies and illuminate arrangements to be amended by educational stakeholders on the procedures of planning and participating in these projects.

Project-based Language Teaching with ICT

Along with the familiar approaches such as Present, Practice, Produce (PPP) or Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Task-based language teaching (TBLT) is an approach which provides language learners an opportunity to use a second language for communicative purposes through projects (Douglas & Kim, 2014). As pointed out by Pham and Nguyen (2018), TBLT occurs as a developmental process which stimulates learners' interaction, enabling them to master their knowledge through the practice of language items, and to use the target language effectively when they are exposed to several task-based or project-based learning activities. TBLT offers language learners an opportunity to focus on meaning and real-life language use while improving their four skills with communicative-oriented activities.

Due to the recent developments in technology and duFe to the COVID-19 pandemic, the integration of ICT into teaching has become inevitable. Therefore, the use of ICT in TBLT has become a widely researched topic in the last three decades. While some studies reported that several factors affect the implementation of TBLT such as teachers' lack of knowledge, class size and management, different levels of language proficiency and difficulty in assessing students (Lin & Wu, 2012; Pham

& Nguyen, 2018; Pohan, et al., 2016), certain problems were also identified in terms of using ICT-based tasks such as narrow interpretation of learners' input and limitations in providing language learners appropriate feedback (Schrooten, 2006). As stated by Schrooten (2006), the role of teachers as supportive mediators has remained crucial, which points out the necessity of doing research on language teachers' experiences related to TBLT and the use of ICT. For instance, Delfino et al. (2009) reported the positive effect of task-based activities created with ICT tools on the language learning process of students and the creativity used by language teachers in the instructional planning process and the experiences they shared to learn from each other within the context of a Comenius 2.1 project. In terms of EFL teachers' perceptions of TBLT, a study conducted by East (2019) showed that the participants found TBLT goal-oriented, motivating and offering authentic communicative experiences. Similarly, a mixed-method study conducted by Liu et al. (2018) on 66 EFL Chinese teachers' perceptions of TBLT in a Chinese tertiary context showed that most of the participants implemented it in a positive manner, eager to receive training.

eTwinning and Language Learning and Teaching

As in all various areas, the development of ICT has caused many innovations at all levels of educational institutions, enabling educators and other stakeholders to convey their own ideas and culture to the ones that are kilometers away from them in the comfort of their own home or workplace (Acar & Peker, 2021). It can be observed that the roles of both teachers and students have become varied. In fact, different types of learning and teaching practices have been emerging since the introduction of the Internet in 1991. Within the scope of its 10-year strategy called 'Europe 2020', the European Union acknowledges that a profound transformation in education and training is inevitable for the member states so that they can cope with the 21st-century skills and competencies which are required by the digital age as the prerequisites of being an information society (European Commission, 2011). As stated in the Informal Meeting of European Union Education Ministers (2015), the principal purpose of education includes not only developing competencies, knowledge, skills and perspective of children, but also helping them grow up as responsible, open-minded and active adult members of their society. In parallel with these statements, the European Union took a considerable step supporting the integration of ICT in education and launched the eTwinning action within the scope of the European Commission e-Learning Program, which has been integrated into the Erasmus+, the European Program for Education, Training, Youth and Sport since 2014 (Papadakis, 2016).

With the aim of promoting innovative ways for ICT use at schools, eTwinning is a virtual telecollaboration platform, which was founded in 2005 under the supervision of the European Commission. The platform provides schools in Europe and some contiguous countries an opportunity to carry out online projects by exchanging best practices and invaluable experiences. Through offering several awards given by National Support Service (NSS) and Central Support Service (CSS) for participants and successful projects evaluated with certain criteria such as national and European eTwinning Quality Labels, it recognizes the efforts put by both students and teachers, ultimately offering academic and professional development opportunities (Demir & Kayaoğlu, 2021). Initiated

in 2009 within the Turkish context and supervised by the General Directorate of Innovation and Educational Technologies of MoNE, the platform includes 308.900 teachers from Turkey (54.509 schools with 55.975 projects as of December 2021) (http://etwinning.meb.gov.tr).

According to Howell (2010), online learning environments offer valuable opportunities for authentic and personalized learning for the professional development of teachers. In the literature, there are several research studies regarding the benefits of participating in an eTwinning project for teachers (Crisan, 2013), the effectiveness and impact of the eTwinning platform for the improvement of teachers' ICT skills and competencies and changes in teaching practices, continuous professional development through an eTwinning learning event (Holmes, 2013; Başaran et al., 2020). However, the number of recent studies focusing on the overall experience of EFL teachers about eTwinning project participation and its effects on professional development is limited (Akdemir, 2017; Akıncı, 2018; Demir & Kayaoğlu, 2021).

EFL Teachers' Perceptions of eTwinning Projects and Professional Development

According to the Lifelong Learning model stated by the European Commission (2018), communication in foreign languages (multilingualism), digital and technology-based competencies, the ability to adopt new competencies and cultural awareness and expression are among the eight key competencies that teachers are expected to have or acquire. In particular, social and collaborative activities in which teachers engage consistently at regular intervals have a strong relationship with their teaching practices (Ulutan, 2019). Moreover, cooperation among teachers affords certain opportunities for them to enhance their professionalism and self-efficacy (Vuorikari, 2013). Although its participants were not solely English teachers, a recent qualitative case study conducted by Acar and Peker (2021) in order to explore the purposes of 15 teachers working in various branches at elementary, secondary and high schools for using the eTwinning platform and the effects of this platform on teachers showed that the platform helped them improve their technological and pedagogical knowledge, acquire different teaching methods and new approaches, and positively affected their foreign language skills in terms of acculturation. A similar study, which was conducted by Başaran et al. (2020) with the participation of 24 teachers from various branches, including 13 English teachers working with different levels of students, focused on the opinions of participants regarding the eTwinning project activities. The study reported that the participants mostly expressed the concepts such as cooperation, sharing, technological development, innovation, communication, friendship, creativity, and productivity. Unlike the above-mentioned studies, the study (Başaran et al., 2020) found that the teachers also expressed their opinions about the difficulties they faced while carrying out the projects on the eTwinning platform such as inability to get along with the project partners, insufficient use of technology and Web 2.0 tools, lack of the Internet and related infrastructure, and procedural difficulties.

Within the context of language teaching, one of the studies conducted by Akdemir (2017) to explore the perspectives and experiences of language teachers who have completed at least three or four eTwinning projects successfully with two or three Quality Labels in different cities of Turkey found that nearly all participants stated both the advantages and disadvantages of taking

part in eTwinning projects. The advantages were listed as opportunities of intercultural exchange, enhancing learning and teaching, raising student involvement, and development of language skills while the disadvantages were inadequate ICT literacy of both teachers and students, infrastructural inconveniences at schools, difficulty in finding like-minded colleagues, and the necessity of following the curriculum. Similarly, another study was conducted by Akıncı (2018) through an action research methodology on the contribution of eTwinning projects to the professional development of language teachers and elementary school students' language learning skills. The results showed that the effects of eTwinning projects on EFL teachers were categorized as cooperation, motivation, and the use of Web 2.0. tools. According to the study findings, the term 'cooperation' was not limited to the one among the English teachers who were the project partners, but also signified the cooperation with other English teachers on social media. These teachers were found to support each other sharing beneficial information regarding the projects and ICT use. The study also reported that the use of new and different Web 2.0 tools allowed English teachers to make their teaching practices more effective and efficient processes, which emphasized the importance of integrating technology into instructional practices in terms of attracting the attention of students and preparing them emotionally for learning. Another study conducted by Demir and Kayaoğlu (2021) emphasized the necessity of pre-service and in-service teacher training regarding media literacy, how to cope with misunderstandings regarding intercultural interactions, and how to improve the intercultural communicative competence of students.

As seen, the studies in the literature mostly focused on the subject matter teachers' perspectives regarding eTwinning projects. However, it is believed that gaining a deep understanding, especially about the EFL teachers' perspectives on eTwinning projects will provide a broader picture of how to enhance language teaching and learning through TBLT focusing on task completion and project-based learning, an extended process of focusing on project completion. More specifically, the effects of eTwinning projects on the teachers' professional development might enable the educators and other stakeholders to observe the process sophisticatedly and take action accordingly while planning and carrying out these kinds of telecollaboration projects. To this end, this study aimed at exploring the experiences of EFL teachers who have completed eTwinning projects and are currently carrying them out and gaining an in-depth understanding of the perceived effects of the projects on their professional development.

Methodology

Rationale for the Research Design

A qualitative research design is employed in this research study since the main aim of the researchers is to gain an in-depth understanding of new and emerging theories exploring participants' perceptions and experiences (Creswell, 2013).

Adapting a qualitative research design in this study enabled the researchers to find out about the EFL teachers' experiences of using eTwinning projects for language teaching and their perspectives

on its effects on their professional development. Semi-structured interviews showed what the participants thought about how eTwinning projects influenced their professional development and helped the researchers identify the circumstances and conditions that the participants have experienced.

Setting and Participants

A total of ten EFL teachers (eight females, two males) participated in the study on a voluntary basis. Out of ten participants, four worked at state and six at private K-12 schools in seven different cities in Turkey. One of the participants was Russian working as a native English teacher at a private secondary school and nine of them were Turkish EFL teachers. Half of the participants were teaching secondary school students while the rest of them were teaching high school students. The participants were purposefully selected among the volunteering ones since they had one to four years of experience carrying out at least one eTwinning project with their students. Almost all of the participants heard about eTwinning projects from their colleagues before they conducted one themselves, and one participant had already carried out similar projects abroad. Only one participant was conducting his/her first project. Six participants were awarded Quality Labels for their projects. The demographic characteristics of participants were shown in Table 1.

Table 1:
Demographic characteristics of participants

Participants	City	Age	Year of Experience	Grades of students taught	Number of eTwinning projects completed	National and European Quality Labels
T1	İstanbul	31	9	Secondary	2	2
T2	İstanbul	32	10	Secondary	1	1
T3	İstanbul	38	15	Secondary	5	3
T4	İzmir	35	9	High School	5	None
T5	İzmit	25	3	High School	Ongoing	None
T6	Gaziantep	28	4	High School	2	None
T7	Gaziantep	38	12	Secondary	1	None
T8	Bursa	37	12	High School	3	1
T9	Adana	46	21	High School	5	4
T10	Ankara	44	20	Secondary	4	3

Data Collection Instrument

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participants individually at different times online via Zoom. Before the interviews, participants were given a chance to choose which language they wanted to use while answering the questions. With three of the participants, the semi-structured interviews were held in Turkish, the shared first language between the researchers and the participants, to ensure that they expressed themselves better. The interviews lasted approximately fifteen to twenty minutes and sought for the participants' experiences about eTwinning and its perceived effects on

professional development. The researcher asked several questions such as "What are the reasons to carry out or participate in such projects?", "How do you define the role of these projects in your professional development?" and "Could you please tell me about the advantages and disadvantages of eTwinning projects?".

Data Analysis Procedure

Collected responses from the participants via Zoom were transcribed. The answers given in Turkish were translated into English. Data were analyzed through a thematic content analysis process. Based on the inductive analysis approach in which common themes were identified through coding, common patterns were found across the data set. The information received during the data collection process was categorized in order to find out the effects of eTwinning projects on the EFL teachers' professional developments based on their perspectives. After the obtained data were evaluated by the researchers, three of the participants were interviewed again to shed light upon the unclear answers.

Both researchers coded the data separately and compared their categories to ensure the trustworthiness of the research. After the codes and the interpretations were checked, a final version of the analysis was prepared. The researchers also talked to the participants about their interpretation of the results to increase trustworthiness preventing misunderstandings by using the member check strategy.

Results

Results are now presented with quotes from EFL teachers.

Experiences about eTwinning

The participants, when their experiences were asked, predominantly mentioned reasons for participating in eTwinning projects, and vast advantages and few disadvantages of carrying out eTwinning projects.

Most of the participants set a variety of reasons regarding personal development, adding value and difference to their teaching practice, and a competitive approach that they developed in the teaching profession.

> "I like eTwinning projects because I can follow the developing and constantly updated educational technologies and create a more authentic classroom environment for my students in the classroom." (T3)

> "I am continuing these projects because at first it is a great opportunity for our own personal development, and then for our students" (T4)

> "Because I want to be one step beyond my colleagues. I should be different from them." (T10)

Participants also focused on eTwinning's benefits to mostly their students' language learning as well as communication and ICT skills in general, and to their teaching practices in the classroom.

More than half of the participants strongly emphasized how eTwinning projects helped them turn their classroom practices into more active learning environments with entertaining and engaging activities during the online eTwinning sessions. They also reported that their students' use and knowledge of ICT tools for their language learning practices increased. Besides, the participants stated that eTwinning projects increased the students' levels of willingness to learn about different cultures and to talk to their foreign partners, which caused them to show greater tolerance and respect towards people from other cultures and their own friends at school.

> "Students are able to meet their peers from different countries on online seminars, they see them at arm length, actually they don't need to travel anywhere, and they also get new experiences" (T2)

> "There are many advantages of eTwinning projects for students. Their conversations with students abroad develop foreign language skills and increase their tolerance, as well because they actually experience different things and meet different people by working on the project with students from different cultures. (T4)

> "Students' ICT competency has also improved because they use new Web 2.0 tools in the projects. Their use of ICT tools increased since they met with other students online, prepared presentations, made videos, and so on. As their use increased, they started to express themselves better and to create more visually appealing materials." (T8)

When it comes to the advantages of eTwinning projects for themselves, the participants highlighted that eTwinning projects offered support to them with the personal development courses included in the platform. In addition, the opportunity to work with colleagues abroad and learn from them and be in constant interaction with their own students and to flourish their professional competencies were found to be among the advantages of eTwinning projects.

> "These personal development courses provided by eTwinning platform are a great support for us. Aside from them, I also work with different colleagues abroad. They are also a huge advantage for me." (T4)

> "The advantage of this project is to be in constant interaction with my students and support them to develop their own competencies" (T5)

> "With the help of eTwinning platform and projects, you can have a lot of foreign colleagues from different countries. As an English teacher, it is luck for me. I have a chance to meet foreign colleagues and keep in touch with them in our social life." (T7)

Out of ten participants, only four mentioned the disadvantages of eTwinning projects. Since the projects were conducted with partner teachers from European countries, time differences between the countries were found as a disadvantage by one of the participants. Another participant highlighted that the official acknowledgment of teachers' performances in the projects with European Quality Labels affected their participation in these projects since some teachers did not prefer taking part in a project if they were not able to find a foreign partner. The long duration of some projects, the vast size of projects including a substantial number of participant students and teachers, the unwillingness of

some foreign partners to work hard and efficiently in order to engage their students in the projects, and the necessity of providing students with motivation and encouragement to perform well in their language learning practices were also regarded as disadvantages by the participants:

> "As a disadvantage, when you have online meetings with partners, time differences sometimes pose a problem." (T1)

> "Some projects can last through the whole year and some teachers have loads of work and some of them cannot carry out the project until the end." (T6)

> "The disadvantages are that I cannot control the students outside my own school when the size of some projects is too large. Sometimes our external partners may not want to work too much, we don't know about it at first, so they can't involve their own students in the project too much. Therefore, we have to pair up the students with each other again" (T4)

Effects of eTwinning professional development

Data also showed that eTwinning projects were considered a developmental process, which had several effects on EFL teachers' professional development in social, cognitive, and affective dimensions. Network and peer learning (social dimension), development of technological pedagogical content knowledge and organizational skills (cognitive dimension), and motivation and recognition (affective dimension) were the most outstanding effects.

Out of ten participants, three emphasized that eTwinning projects enabled them to meet both Turkish and foreign colleagues and share their teaching experiences, which can be interpreted as that these kinds of projects offer teachers an opportunity to experience peer observation or mentoring practices.

> "Like students, I am involved in the teaching process of teachers in many European countries. For example, a colleague I met from Croatia thanks to these projects will visit our school for a week for 'Job Shadowing' and thus we will also be involved in an Erasmus+ project to improve our teaching practices by giving feedback to each other." (T4)

> "We work with other teachers from time to time. This also helped us to create our own group, and we have incredibly nice communication processes." (T5)

The second effect that emerged from the data was the development of technological pedagogical content knowledge and organizational skills of the participants. Most of them pointed out that they learned about various web tools thanks to the seminars and training programs offered on eTwinning platform, and they found a great way to embellish their teaching practices in the classroom, which could be regarded as an implicit means to contribute to their own professional development:

> "Thanks to eTwinning I learned lots of web tools. I aim to enrich English lessons with Web 2.0 tools." (T1)

> "You have different workshops so you can learn lots of things about Web 2.0 tools and eTwinning. You have different groups for communication, so you learn every kind of workshop easily." (T8)

"Since there are lots of courses on the platform, we can register for the course we want and do what we want. For example, I saw an application form yesterday for turning our school into a pilot school, I filled it out. I don't know if we'll be elected or not, but it's still a great thing to be able to get involved in these kinds of things, to be able to be in these kinds of training programs or control groups." (T6)

One of the participants also highlighted the importance and necessity of staying up to date with the recent advancements in technology and innovation in order to accommodate both themselves and their students to the conditions of the 21st century and the teachers' changing roles. Not to lag behind the digital age that their students were born into and to keep up with their changing professional and personal interests were of importance for the participants.

"It is obvious that it adds a lot to a teacher both in terms of mission and vision, as in the middle years program I received while working at the IB school; it is our primary duty as teachers to keep up with the innovations in the constantly developing and changing world." (T5)

"If I do a project about web tools I have to learn web tools and I have to operate them well. If I do photography or writing I have to be good at that or I have to refresh my knowledge." (T8)

Similarly, nearly half of the participants stated that they had to improve their general world knowledge related to innovations around the constantly evolving world and organizational skills thanks to eTwinning projects, in conjunction with their pedagogical knowledge about foreign language teaching.

"At first I learned how to participate in big projects and how to organize my students for something besides the school program." (T2)

"I've been managing people, not only my students, but also the partner teachers. For example, in my second project, I managed different teachers with different backgrounds and helped them technically. I think being supportive helps me to facilitate my professional development." (T3)

The contribution of eTwinning projects to the professional development of the participants in terms of motivation and recognition was the last group of effects derived from the analysis. In this regard, it was found that the Quality Label awards given to teachers not only made their efforts and practices more noticeable in their workplaces but also motivated them to improve themselves professionally and participate in more projects, which contributed to their efforts to be noticed and recognized in their profession:

"When you complete and get quality labels, you feel so happy, and you think that you can get more quality labels and be more successful in your job. eTwinning always motivates you and you always want to do your best in your career." (T1)

"Since I already work at a well-known chain private school, this is also seen by its headquarters. I help the headquarters as much as I can with the eTwinning projects, even

though I have never considered myself a professional in this respect. Therefore, my effort is recognized and appreciated. The headquarters and my school are all extremely supportive to me in this regard." (T4)

Discussion and Conclusion

The aim of this study was to scrutinize the effects of eTwinning projects on EFL teachers' professional development according to their perspectives. Within the scope of its aim, two research questions were asked to collect the data. To this end, semi-structured interviews were held with ten EFL teachers via Zoom sessions.

As a result of the study, it was found that for EFL teachers, eTwinning projects were a part of the professional and personal development process of teachers and the academic and social development of students. Since most of the participants emphasized that eTwinning projects provide an opportunity for English teachers to create a learning environment for their students where they communicate and interact with other students and teachers from different countries by using the target language for task completion, it can be stated that their teaching practices were in line with the definition of TBLT suggested by Pham and Nguyen (2018) as a developmental process stimulating learners' communication and interaction, enabling them to master their language through practicing the target language. The results also showed that all participants generally took positive attitudes toward participating in eTwinning projects, which is in line with the result obtained by Liu et al. (2018), stating that most of the Chinese ELT teachers were likely to implement TBLT in a positive manner. Furthermore, the results indicated that most of the participants were aware of their changing roles, requiring them to adapt to the digital age, and accomplished the technological and social adaptation thanks to eTwinning projects. Moreover, the result that the EFL teachers who aim to improve their students' language acquisition and social-emotional skills with the integration of ICT brought their students together with their foreign peers crossing the temporal and spatial boundaries with eTwinning projects showed that these teachers also make a contribution to the fulfillment of the purposes targeted by the European Commission (2011) such as the development of 21st-century skills and competencies of students.

Although the general attitude of participants in this study towards eTwinning projects was positive, some of them expressed their opinions regarding the challenges of eTwinning projects such as time differences between the countries, unwillingness shown by the foreign partners to work hard, and long duration of some projects. Previous studies conducted by Akdemir (2017) and Başaran et al. (2020) also found similar results regarding the difficulty in finding like-minded project partners and the inability to get along with the partners.

The results of the study concerning the effects of eTwinning projects on EFL teachers' professional development showed that these projects are considered by the EFL teachers as a means for the establishment of an international EFL teacher network where they can share their teaching experiences and exchange their cultures by observing each other. Moreover, the participants

highlighted the importance of online courses and training programs offered on the platform for their pedagogical and technological development. In this respect, the results were found to be in line with those of Başaran et al. (2020), Ulutan (2019) and Vuorikari (2013). As stated by the participants in this study, eTwinning projects provided EFL teachers with both a source of motivation and an opportunity to make their instructional practices more interactive and effective with the integration of ICT tools, which was also found by Akıncı (2018).

Conducted with the participation of only EFL teachers, this qualitative study focuses on teachers' views on the use of eTwinning projects. Since the number of these projects carried out for language teaching purposes is rapidly increasing in Turkey and Europe, it is believed that gaining an in-depth understanding of the topic led the researchers to grasp broader pedagogical implications. It is also thought that the results of this study will help both educators and stakeholders to ensure more effective and efficient use of the eTwinning platform for language teaching and professional development.

Suggestions for Further Research and Limitations of the Study

Data for this study were collected only through semi-structured interviews with the EFL teachers. Further studies might address this limitation with the inclusion of different data collection tools such as classroom observations and teacher journals. One other suggestion is to collect data from the language learners and investigate their viewpoints about eTwinning. A final suggestion for further research is to explore the teachers' opinions about their students' language learning performances due to the eTwinning projects.

One of the limitations of the study is that the participants were limited to ten EFL teachers working at secondary and high schools located in different regions of Turkey, which may not reflect the overall picture. Although the type of school (private vs. state) and nationality differences among the teachers might be considered as a limitation, it is believed that the results will contribute to the literature related to the studies conducted in the Turkish context.

Pedagogical Implications

This qualitative study has crucial pedagogical implications for teachers, language learners and other stakeholders in education. First of all, the eTwinning platform should offer more training programs and online courses not only for the effective integration of ICT tools but also the application of content knowledge besides English language teaching. The criteria and procedures determined for participation in eTwinning projects can be updated in order to enable teachers to make joint efforts and strengthen knowledge sharing by finding a common ground and operating effectively on the platform. Lastly, promotional activities such as the introductory events like conferences that would encourage the teachers to use the eTwinning platform should be organized. This may ensure that more teachers are encouraged to participate in eTwinning projects for their professional development and the development of intercultural communication skills and intercultural tolerance, as well.

Ethics Committee Approval

This research was carried out with the approval obtained from the ethics committee of Institute of Educational Sciences. The ethical approval obtained on the 19/12/2022 and the Decision No is 10-1.

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