

## An Analysis of Postgraduate Research on EFL Teachers' Professional Development in Türkiye Türkiye'deki İngilizce Öğretmenlerinin Mesleki Gelişimi Üzerine Yapılmış Lisansüstü Araştırmaların İncelenmesi

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**Abstract:** Understanding the focus, scope, and outcomes of postgraduate theses on teacher professional development is essential for informing future research agendas and strengthening evidence-based practices in English language teaching. This study examines postgraduate theses focusing on the professional development of English teachers in Türkiye, identifies emerging trends, and offers insights for future research. Employing a qualitative document analysis approach, the study analyzed 92 theses accessed through the Turkish Council of Higher Education National Thesis Center, including 56 master's theses and 36 doctoral dissertations. The findings reveal that professional development activities reported in these theses positively influenced teachers' classroom practices, professional growth, and stakeholder awareness. In addition, such activities were found to enhance teacher motivation and foster professional collaboration. Based on the recurring patterns identified across the theses, the study highlights the importance of aligning professional development initiatives with teachers' contextual needs, promoting reflective practices, and encouraging further research to deepen understanding of effective professional development in the field.

**Keywords:** English teachers, professional development, postgraduate theses, qualitative analysis, teacher education

**Öz:** İngilizce öğretmenlerinin mesleki gelişimine yönelik lisansüstü araştırmaların odak noktalarını, kapsamını ve ortaya koyduğu sonuçları incelemek, gelecekteki araştırma gündemlerini yönlendirmek ve kanıta dayalı uygulamaları güçlendirmek açısından önem taşımaktadır. Bu araştırmanın amacı, Türkiye'de İngilizce öğretmenlerinin mesleki gelişimi üzerine yazılmış lisansüstü tezleri incelemek, alandaki eğilimleri belirlemek ve gelecekte yapılacak çalışmalara ışık tutmaktır. Nitel doküman analizi yöntemiyle yürütülen araştırmada, Yükseköğretim Kurulu Ulusal Tez Merkezi'nde erişilebilen 56'sı yüksek lisans ve 36'sı doktora tezi olmak üzere toplam 92 tez analiz edilmiştir. Bulgular, tezlerde ele alınan mesleki gelişim faaliyetlerinin öğretmenlerin sınıf içi uygulamalarına, mesleki gelişimlerine ve paydaş farkındalığına olumlu katkılar sağladığını ortaya koymaktadır. Ayrıca, bu faaliyetlerin öğretmen motivasyonunu artırdığı ve mesleki iş birliğini desteklediği belirlenmiştir. Tezlerin genelinde ortaya çıkan ortak örüntüler doğrultusunda, mesleki gelişim faaliyetlerinin öğretmenlerin bağlamsal ihtiyaçlarına uygun şekilde yapılandırılması, yansıtıcı uygulamaların teşvik edilmesi ve alanın derinlemesine anlaşılmasına katkı sağlayacak yeni araştırmaların yapılması önerilmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** İngilizce öğretmenleri, mesleki gelişim, lisansüstü tezler, nitel analiz, öğretmen eğitimi

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### Introduction

Education is evolutionary in nature, and it is shaped by societal demands that also influence teachers' roles and responsibilities. Teachers, as central figures in education, are required to update their skills regularly in areas like technology, curriculum, and teaching methods to meet the contemporary shifting needs. This makes professional development (PD) activities critical, as they help teachers improve skills that benefit students, schools, and education systems (Borg, 2018). Although PD is widely recognized as a mechanism to enhance teaching (Kennedy, 2016), there is limited agreement on how it works, its goals, and the varied forms it takes across different cultures and settings (Villegas-Reimers, 2003; Danijela, 2018). In this respect, teacher professional development encompasses diverse definitions and areas of focus, as noted by researchers. According to Darling-Hammond et al. (2017), PD is a structured learning experience that aims to upgrade teachers' practices and student learning outcomes. Avalos (2011) describes PD as developing the skills needed to connect knowledge with real-world applications, ultimately supporting students' academic achievement. Borg (2018) defines PD as any activity that positively impacts a teacher's performance, noting that these activities range from formal sessions mandated by schools to informal, self-directed learning, such as reading educational

resources. In Doğan's study (2016) many instructors claim that their teaching skills are developed mainly through hands-on experience in their classrooms, as the courses for teacher candidates in their departments emphasize theoretical content. This underscores the prominence of providing teachers with additional professional development opportunities during their careers (Doğan & Kirkgoz, 2022). Consequently, PD primarily aims to enhance teachers' instructional abilities to better student learning. For this reason, teachers have a responsibility to remain informed on recent advancements and requirements to address their students' evolving needs effectively.

Although many studies focus on the professional development of English language teachers in the Turkish context, relatively few studies examine research trends in a systematic manner. Postgraduate theses constitute a substantial yet underexplored body of research that reflects in-depth theoretical engagement, methodological diversity, and long-term research orientations in the field. Unlike peer-reviewed journal articles, which often report selected aspects of completed research, postgraduate theses provide more comprehensive accounts of research design, context, and findings. Therefore, this study aims to analyze postgraduate theses on the professional development of English teachers in Türkiye from specific perspectives to map research trends and identify prevailing patterns in graduate-level research.

## Literature

The existing literature consists of a significant number of studies on the professional development of English language teachers in Türkiye. In addition to these studies, several content analysis and descriptive research studies have been conducted in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT) and related disciplines to identify research trends. However, a comprehensive review of graduate-level research, specifically focusing on the professional development of English teachers in Türkiye, has yet to be undertaken. By examining master's and doctoral theses produced over the past two decades, this study seeks to address this gap and provide a systematic overview of research orientations, methodological tendencies, and thematic patterns in the field. When relevant research worldwide is analyzed methodological or thematic similarities with the current research in Türkiye are found. To start with, Carter (2012) conducted an in-depth content analysis of 52 master's theses in second language teaching from Canadian universities, spanning from 2008 to 2010, which aimed to examine various methodological aspects of these theses, including research designs, data collection instruments, and statistical analysis techniques. The results demonstrated a clear predominance of quantitative research methods, with interviews and surveys being the most frequently employed data collection tools. Additionally, the average length of the theses was found to be 134 pages, suggesting a standardization in the scope and structure of second language research during this period. Buendía and Macías (2019) synthesized findings from 25 empirical studies on English language teacher professional development in Colombia. Language proficiency, research skills, and reflective practices were highlighted as key factors for successful PD. They argued that PD programs should be contextually relevant, offering flexibility to meet the diverse needs of teachers in various educational settings. Furthermore, the study highlighted the effectiveness of collaborative learning, communicative approaches, and digital tools in PD, asserting that teacher-driven initiatives and innovative pedagogical strategies are essential to enhancing language education in Colombia. Tafazoli (2021) conducted a comprehensive literature review on new literacies in language teaching, focusing on 29 articles published between 2010 and 2020. Employing a five-phase synthesis method, the author applied strict inclusion criteria to studies sourced from nine major academic databases. The review revealed a growing emphasis on digital literacy, particularly in the integration of Web 2.0 technologies in language teaching. The majority of studies were conducted in Asia and Europe, employed qualitative methodologies, and focused on in-service teachers, reflecting a global shift toward prioritizing digital competence in language education.

From the Turkish context, Kırmızı (2012) analyzed 212 master's theses in English Language Teaching (ELT) from six leading Turkish universities—METU, Bilkent, Hacettepe, Gazi, Anadolu, and Çukurova—published between 2005 and 2010. The study identified dominant research themes, such as language skills, instructional methods, and curriculum design, with a particularly strong focus on language skills, especially at Gazi University. Notably, the study highlighted a lack of emphasis on computer-assisted language learning (CALL), indicating a gap in the integration of digital tools in ELT research during this period. Hoş and Topal (2013) conducted a review of 217 documents on English teacher professional development in Türkiye, analyzing 30 selected studies (8 journal articles and 22 theses and dissertations). Their findings

underscored a significant shortage of professional development opportunities for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers in Türkiye. The study called attention to the lack of evaluation regarding the effectiveness of existing PD programs and stressed the need for more extensive and structured PD initiatives that would better address teachers' needs. Solak (2014) reviewed 189 research papers on ELT published in Türkiye between 2009 and 2013, finding a notable increase in the volume of ELT studies by 2013. The majority of these studies, authored by Turkish scholars, were published in international English-language journals. The research revealed a heavy reliance on quantitative methodologies, with undergraduate students being the most common sample group, typically consisting of 31 to 100 participants. Yağız et al. (2016) conducted a content analysis of ELT research in Türkiye, focusing on studies published between 2005 and 2015. Their analysis revealed that research on language learning, teaching, and teacher education dominated the field, with quantitative methodologies, particularly descriptive approaches, being most common. The primary participants in these studies were undergraduate students and teachers, and Likert-scale surveys were the predominant data collection method. Sample sizes ranged from 101 to 300 participants in most studies. Özmen et al. (2016) analyzed doctoral research trends in ELT in Türkiye from 2010 to 2014, reviewing 137 dissertations. The study highlighted several challenges in doctoral research, including limited funding, concerns about validity and reliability, and insufficient institutional support. The findings also provided a comprehensive overview of the main research themes in ELT doctoral studies and the challenges faced by doctoral candidates in this field. Yurtseven and Bademcioğlu (2016) examined 60 studies on teacher professional development between 2005 and 2015, focusing on research conducted both within Türkiye and internationally. The study found that doctoral dissertations in the field were predominantly written in English and that quantitative research methodologies were the norm. The authors called for more personalized PD initiatives and suggested that future research should explore the role of school administrators in fostering teachers' professional development. Cesur et al. (2018) conducted a content analysis of 234 abstracts from ELT articles, examining recurring research themes, sample populations, and methodologies. The analysis identified key themes such as teacher education, curriculum development, and language instruction. Undergraduate students were the most common sample group, and data collection methods included both purposive and random sampling. Descriptive methodologies were the most frequently employed. Demir (2020) reviewed 302 postgraduate studies on foreign language education in Türkiye between 1987 and 2017, including 58 doctoral dissertations and 244 master's theses. The study examined the research questions, methodologies, and data sources utilized in these studies. The findings revealed a preference for qualitative, survey-based, and mixed-methods approaches, with most participants being students and teachers. Doruk (2021) analyzed 94 theses from Gazi University on the social and historical foundations of education produced between 2002 and 2019. The study found that significant research activity occurred in 2010 and 2019, with the survey model and purposive sampling being the most frequently employed methodologies. Research focused on the social foundations of education was the dominant theme, followed by studies on historical and philosophical aspects. Gürsoy and Özcan (2021) analyzed 252 Turkish doctoral dissertations in ELT produced

between 2010 and 2020. The study revealed a strong emphasis on teacher professional development, with less attention given to the roles of culture, society, and gender in language teaching. The authors called for more research on these underexplored areas to expand the scope of ELT scholarship. Yurtseven-Yılmaz and Sever (2021) conducted a phenomenological study to explore the professional development experiences of 38 Turkish language teachers in Bursa. The findings revealed a general enthusiasm for PD activities organized by the Ministry of Education, although many teachers expressed dissatisfaction with the relevance and quality of past PD experiences. The study provided recommendations for improving PD programs by better aligning them with teachers' specific needs. Öcel (2022) conducted a systematic review of 806 master's theses and 128 doctoral dissertations in ELT from 2019 to 2021. This study analyzed the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on research methodologies, noting significant shifts in research design, data collection methods, and analysis techniques. The study illustrated how the pandemic has reshaped research practices in the field of language education. Öcel and Bergil (2022) examined methodological trends in Turkish ELT research from 2019 to 2021. The study identified a scarcity of experimental and innovative research, noting that most studies continued to rely on descriptive analysis. The authors emphasized the need for more flexible and adaptive research methodologies, particularly in response to unforeseen challenges such as those brought on by the pandemic. Karadeniz (2022) conducted a meta-analysis of Turkish ELT master's theses from 2010 to 2020, highlighting the prevalence of descriptive and mixed-methods research designs. The study identified commonly used data collection tools, such as questionnaires and interviews, and highlighted significant gaps in research concerning teacher attitudes, perceptions, and training practices. Taşdemir and Karaman (2022) reviewed research on in-service teacher professional development from 2006 to 2020. Their findings emphasized the importance of context-specific PD programs that support teachers' professional identities and job security. The authors advocated active learning and sustainable, collaborative learning strategies to enhance the effectiveness of PD initiatives. Atmaca and Ekşi (2023) analyzed Turkish ELT master's and doctoral theses produced between 2001 and 2020. The study found that teaching methodology was the dominant theme, while research on language testing and assessment was relatively scarce. The authors recommended that future research explore cross-cultural perspectives to deepen the understanding of ELT practices. Behbudova (2023) conducted a review of 142 Turkish theses on the integration of smart technologies in language education from 2012 to 2022. The study revealed a focus on digital tools, mobile applications, and artificial intelligence in university settings. However, the author suggested that early education should also be prioritized for the integration of such technologies. İskender and Atar (2023) conducted a meta-synthesis of research on in-service English teacher training needs in Türkiye from 2010 to 2021. Their findings underscored the inadequacy of current training programs in addressing teachers' specific needs. The authors called for enhanced collaboration between the Ministry of Education and teacher educators to design more targeted and effective professional development programs.

Taken together, the reviewed studies provide valuable insights into research trends, methodological preferences, and thematic emphases in English Language Teaching and teacher professional development in Türkiye. However, despite the

growing number of content analyses and review studies, there remains a notable gap in the literature regarding a comprehensive and systematic examination of postgraduate theses specifically focusing on the professional development of English language teachers. Existing reviews tend to address broader ELT topics or limited time spans, leaving graduate-level research on teacher professional development underexplored as a distinct body of knowledge. Addressing this gap, the present study aims to analyze master's and doctoral theses on the professional development of English language teachers in Türkiye to map research trends, methodological tendencies, and thematic patterns over an extended period.

## Methodology

### The Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

This study seeks to identify research trends by analyzing postgraduate theses on the professional development of English language teachers in Türkiye published between 2003 and 2022 and available through the Council of Higher Education (CoHE) National Thesis Center. To achieve this aim, the study addresses the following main research questions and sub-questions:

1. What are the general characteristics of the postgraduate theses on English language teachers' professional development in Türkiye?
  - 1.1. How are the degrees distributed in these studies?
  - 1.2. What is the distribution of universities?
  - 1.3. How are the studies distributed across years?
2. What research methodologies and designs are employed in these theses?
  - 2.1. What methodologies are used, and how are they distributed?
  - 2.2. What sampling methods are employed?
  - 2.3. How are sample groups and sample sizes distributed?
3. What data collection and analysis practices are adopted in these studies?
  - 3.1. How many data sources are used, and what is their distribution?
  - 3.2. What data collection tools are utilized?
  - 3.3. What are the research settings and their statuses?
4. What are the thematic and contextual focuses of the theses?
  - 4.1. What topics are covered, and how are they distributed?
  - 4.2. What types of findings are reported?
  - 4.3. What recommendations are provided in the studies?

### Eligibility Criteria

This study included postgraduate theses focusing on the professional development of in-service English teachers in Türkiye, published between 2003 and 2022 and accessible through the Council of Higher Education (CoHE) National Thesis Center. These addressing pre-service teacher education or those that were inaccessible online were excluded.

### Information Sources and Search Strategy

A systematic search was conducted in the CoHE National Thesis Center database using keywords such as "Professional Development," "ELT," "EFL," "Teacher Training," "In-service Education," and related terms. The search

encompassed theses published during the period from 2003 to 2022.

**Selection Process**

Initially, 103 theses were identified. After removing theses that were inaccessible, 92 were retained for full-text assessment. The study selection process is illustrated in Figure 1 (PRISMA flow diagram).

**Data Collection Process**

Relevant data were extracted from the included theses, including degree type, university affiliation, publication year, research methodology, sampling method, sample group and size, data sources, data collection instruments, research settings, research topics, findings, and recommendations. To ensure systematic extraction, a structured data extraction form (coding sheet) was developed based on the research questions and the variables targeted in this review. Each thesis was examined in full text and recorded in the coding sheet accordingly.

**Data Items**

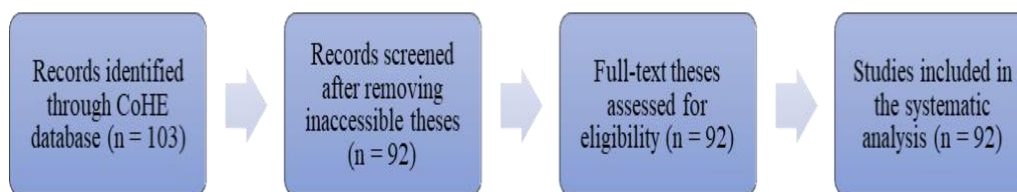
Variables were defined according to the research questions. All included theses were systematically coded based on these variables to ensure consistency and transparency in data extraction. The coding procedure was carried out in multiple stages. First, an initial coding framework was established in line with the research questions and the predefined variables (e.g., methodology, sample characteristics, data collection tools, research focus, and outcomes). Second, all theses were coded using this framework to generate a comprehensive

dataset. Third, the coded entries were reviewed to identify unclear or overlapping cases, and necessary refinements were made to ensure consistent category use across the dataset. To increase reliability and transparency, the coding decisions were cross-checked through repeated review, and any ambiguous cases were re-examined and resolved through a consensus-oriented evaluation process.

**Prisma Checklist**

To ensure adherence to international reporting standards, the PRISMA 2020 checklist was employed. Each item on the checklist was reviewed, and the extent to which the study satisfied the criteria is presented in Table 1 (PRISMA checklist for the current study).

Risk of bias assessment was marked as not applicable in this study because the review did not synthesize empirical effect sizes or evaluate intervention outcomes. Instead, it focused on the descriptive and methodological characteristics of postgraduate theses, such as research designs, participant profiles, data collection tools, themes, findings, and recommendations. As the unit of analysis was the theses themselves rather than their reported results or causal claims, traditional risk-of-bias tools developed for experimental or quasi-experimental studies (e.g., selection bias, performance bias, or outcome reporting bias) were not suitable for the purposes of this review. Similar content-analytic and trend-mapping studies in education research have likewise treated formal risk-of-bias assessment as not applicable when the primary aim is to identify research patterns rather than to evaluate study quality or effectiveness.



**Figure 1.** PRISMA flow diagram showing the selection process of theses included in the study

**Table 1.** PRISMA 2020 checklist for the current study

PRISMA Item	Description	Reported in the Study
Title	Identify the report as a systematic review	Yes
Abstract	Structured summary including background, objectives, data sources, methods, results, conclusions	Yes
Introduction – Rationale	Describe the rationale for the review	Yes
Introduction – Objectives	Explicitly state research questions	Yes
Methods – Eligibility Criteria	Specify study characteristics used as criteria	Yes
Methods – Information Sources	Name databases, search dates, keywords	Yes
Methods – Search	Describe search strategy	Yes
Methods – Selection Process	How studies were selected	Yes
Methods – Data Collection Process	How data were extracted	Yes
Methods – Data Items	List of variables collected	Yes
Methods – Risk of Bias (Justified)	Describe if applicable	N/A
Results – Study Selection	Number of records screened, excluded, included	Yes
Results – Study Characteristics	Provide characteristics of included studies	Yes
Results – Results of Individual Studies	Summarize findings per study	Partial
Discussion – Summary of Evidence	Main findings and interpretations	Yes
Discussion – Limitations	Limitations of evidence	Yes
Discussion – Conclusions	General interpretation of results	Yes
Funding	Sources of funding	No

*Note: This table presents the PRISMA 2020 checklist and indicates whether each item was addressed in the current study. It can be included in the supplementary materials or main manuscript according to journal requirements.*

**Table 2.** General distribution of theses

Category	Master's Theses (f)	Master's Theses (%)	PhD Dissertations (f)	PhD (%)
Degree	56	60.9	36	39.1
Research type	Mixed: 23 (41.1%) Qualitative: 20 (35.7%) Quantitative: 11 (19.6%)	–	15 (41.7%) 20 (55.6%) 1 (2.8%)	–
University (Top)	METU: 8 (14.3%) Gazi: 4 (7.1%)	–	11 (30.6%) 6 (16.7%)	–
Year (Recent)	2019: 9 (16.1%) 2022: 8 (14.3%)	–	6 (16.7%) 4 (11.1%)	–

**Table 3.** Sampling methods and sample groups in theses

Category	Master's Theses (f)	Master's Theses (%)	PhD Dissertations (f)	PhD Dissertations (%)
<b>Sampling method</b>				
Purposive	21	37.5	16	44.4
Convenience	22	39.3	13	36.1
Snowball	2	3.6	4	11.1
Other/Not specified	11	19.6	3	8.4
<b>Sample group</b>				
EFL teachers	48	85.7	22	61.1
Teachers + others (students, trainers, directors, etc.)	7	12.5	12	33.3
Other (students only, assistants, etc.)	1	1.8	2	5.6

**Table 4.** Sample size and number of data sources in theses

Category	Master's Theses (f)	Master's Theses (%)	PhD Dissertations (f)	PhD Dissertations (%)
<b>Sample size</b>				
1–30	24	42.8	15	41.7
31–100	13	23.2	4	11.1
101–300	17	30.4	9	25.0
301+	2	3.6	8	22.2
<b>Data sources</b>				
1	16	28.6	3	8.3
2	21	37.5	9	25.0
3 or more	19	33.9	24	66.7

## Findings

This section presents the results in line with the four main research questions. The findings are organized under four subsections and supported by descriptive tables reporting frequencies and percentages. Rather than repeating all numerical values, the narrative highlights the most salient patterns observed across master's theses and doctoral dissertations.

### General Characteristics of the Postgraduate Theses

Table 2 presents the overall distribution of postgraduate theses in terms of degree level, research type, leading universities, and publication years.

Overall, master's theses outnumber doctoral dissertations. In both degree levels, qualitative and mixed-methods designs were more common than purely quantitative approaches. A noticeable institutional concentration was also observed, particularly in public universities such as Middle East Technical University (METU) and Gazi University. In terms of publication years, the distribution indicates an increased number of theses around 2019, pointing to a growing interest in professional development research during that period.

### Research Methodologies and Designs Employed in the Theses

#### Sampling Methods and Sample Groups

Table 3 summarizes the sampling methods and participant groups reported in the theses.

Across both academic levels, purposive and convenience sampling were the most frequently used strategies. However, a substantial portion of master's theses did not clearly specify

sampling methods, suggesting variability in methodological reporting practices. Regarding participant profiles, EFL teachers constituted the dominant sample group overall, while doctoral dissertations more frequently included additional stakeholders (e.g., students, trainers, administrators), indicating a broader participant scope in doctoral-level research.

#### Sample Size Distribution

Table 4 presents the distribution of sample sizes across the reviewed theses.

Most theses relied on small to medium sample sizes, which aligns with the predominance of qualitative and mixed-methods research designs. Doctoral dissertations included a higher proportion of very large samples (301+), reflecting greater diversity in doctoral sampling practices compared to master's-level research.

### Data Collection and Analysis Practices

#### Number of Data Sources

Table 4 also reports the number of data sources used in the theses.

Doctoral dissertations more frequently relied on three or more data sources, suggesting greater use of data triangulation at the doctoral level. In contrast, master's theses are more commonly used one or two data sources, reflecting relatively simpler data collection designs.

#### Data Collection Tools

Table 5 presents the distribution of data collection tools used across both thesis types.

**Table 5.** Data collection tools and research settings in theses

Category	Master's Theses (f)	Master's Theses (%)	PhD Dissertations (f)	PhD Dissertations (%)
<b>Data collection tools</b>				
Interviews	48	36.1	32	29.1
Questionnaires	39	29.3	22	20.0
Observation	8	6.0	16	14.5
Other tools (documents, diaries, scales, etc.)	38	28.6	40	36.4
<b>Research setting</b>				
University	26	46.4	17	47.2
Primary/secondary/high school	20	35.7	16	44.4
Mixed/Other	10	17.9	3	8.4
<b>Setting status</b>				
Public	15	26.8	18	50.0
Private	21	37.5	7	19.4
Both/Not specified	20	35.7	11	30.6

Interviews and questionnaires were the most used instruments in both master's and doctoral research. However, doctoral dissertations demonstrated comparatively higher use of observations and other supplementary tools (e.g., reflective diaries, documents, scales), indicating more diversified tool use in doctoral-level studies.

### Research Settings and Setting Status

As shown in Table 5, research settings were predominantly university contexts, followed by primary/secondary/high school settings. Studies conducted in mixed or other contexts were less common, suggesting that some educational settings remain underrepresented. In addition, research conducted in public institutions was more frequent in doctoral dissertations, whereas master's theses showed a relatively higher representation of private settings and mixed/unspecified status categories.

### Thematic and Contextual Focuses of the Theses

#### Topics Covered in the Theses

Table 6 presents the key themes investigated in the reviewed theses.

**Table 6.** Themes investigated in theses

Category	Master's Theses (f)	PhD Dissertations (f)
PD activities	21	10
Teachers' perspectives	12	3
Needs and preferences	7	4
Training/development programs	5	14
Participation in PD	3	–
Teachers' learning through PD	3	1
Technology	3	1
Teacher trainers/educators	2	3
Total	56	36

Master's theses primarily focused on PD activities and teachers' perspectives, whereas doctoral dissertations placed greater emphasis on structured training and development programs. Topics such as technology integration and teacher trainers/educators were comparatively less represented in both degree levels, suggesting potential areas for further research.

### Types of Findings Reported

Table 7 summarizes the main results reported across the theses.

**Table 7.** Results reported in theses

Category	Master's Theses (f)	PhD Dissertations (f)	Key findings (examples)
Content	23	13	Needs not met, lack of practicality, outdated or overloaded content
Execution	47	35	Effective, collaboration, insufficient length, lack of reflection
Teachers	136	48	Increased awareness, communication, motivation, challenges
Teaching	24	10	Positive impact on classroom practices, limited application
Other	23	11	Collaborative PD, fostering critical thinking, autonomy
Total	253	117	

Across both academic levels, results related to the execution of PD activities and teacher-related outcomes were most frequently reported. Common patterns included positive impacts on teachers' awareness, motivation, communication, and collaboration, as well as recurring challenges such as insufficient duration, limited reflective opportunities, and perceived mismatches between PD content and teachers' needs.

### Recommendations Provided in the Studies

Table 8 presents the major suggestions and recommendations identified in the theses.

Recommendations across the theses most commonly emphasized effective PD planning and sustained teacher development support, including needs-based activities, collaboration, and continuous guidance. Suggestions for future research, such as longitudinal designs and studies conducted in diverse contexts, were also frequently highlighted. In addition, several studies stressed the importance of balancing theory and practice in PD content and strengthening institutional support mechanisms.

### Discussion

This study aimed to provide a comprehensive overview of research trends, key findings, and persistent gaps in postgraduate theses on the professional development (PD) of

EFL teachers in Türkiye by analyzing master's theses and doctoral dissertations. By comparatively examining theses across two academic levels, the study offers insights into how PD research has evolved over time and how methodological and thematic priorities differ between master's and doctoral research.

**Table 8.** Suggestions presented in theses

Category	Master's Theses (f)	PhD Dissertations (f)	Examples
Effective PD planning	91	40	Tailored activities, collaboration, needs analysis
Future research	33	9	Longitudinal studies, different contexts
PD content	21	6	Balance of theory and practice, classroom applicability
Teachers' development	123	29	Reflective activities, collaboration, continuous support
Other	18	11	Institutional support, better work conditions
Total	286	95	

The overall distribution of postgraduate theses demonstrates that research on EFL teachers' professional development in Türkiye has grown steadily, reflecting sustained scholarly interest in improving teacher learning and instructional quality. In addition, the concentration of theses in particular universities and institutional contexts suggests that postgraduate PD research may be shaped by the academic culture, research capacity, and accessibility of participants within certain higher education environments. Such clustering has also been observed in earlier ELT trend studies, which highlight the influential role of well-established institutions in shaping research trajectories in Türkiye (e.g., Özmen et al., 2016; Yağız et al., 2016; Karadeniz, 2022). However, this institutional concentration may also limit the diversity of research perspectives and contexts represented in postgraduate work, indicating a need for broader institutional participation and multi-site investigations.

A key methodological issue identified across the reviewed theses concerns sampling practices, particularly in master's theses, where sampling methods were often not explicitly defined. Although participant characteristics were generally provided, the absence of clearly articulated sampling strategies suggests room for improvement in methodological transparency. This finding is consistent with Creswell and Creswell's (2018) emphasis that clearly reported sampling procedures are critical to research validity and trustworthiness, as they enable readers to evaluate the appropriateness and rigor of research design choices.

In terms of participant profiles, most studies focused primarily on in-service EFL teachers, reflecting their central role in PD initiatives and their relative accessibility as participants. Doctoral dissertations, however, more frequently included additional stakeholders such as teacher trainers, administrators, and students, demonstrating a more inclusive and system-oriented approach. This broader inclusion aligns

with the literature suggesting that doctoral-level research often adopts more comprehensive and multi-perspective inquiry into educational processes.

Differences also emerged with respect to sample size. Master's theses commonly relied on larger participant groups, often facilitating broader quantitative analyses, whereas doctoral dissertations typically involved smaller, more focused samples. This divergence suggests that research designs may vary systematically across academic levels, with doctoral research prioritizing depth and contextual richness over breadth. Similar patterns have been documented in previous research (e.g., Yurtseven & Bademcioğlu, 2016), indicating that methodological complexity and scope may increase as research expectations expand at the doctoral level.

Findings further revealed differences in data collection practices across thesis types. Doctoral dissertations frequently used three or more sources of data—such as interviews, questionnaires, documents, reflective journals, and field notes—whereas master's theses tended to rely on one or two tools, most commonly interviews and questionnaires. This contrast suggests that doctoral research more often incorporates methodological triangulation to strengthen credibility and produce more nuanced interpretations. Previous studies emphasize that triangulation can enhance trustworthiness in qualitative inquiry and support richer analytical depth (Carter, 2012; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011).

Regarding research settings, many studies were conducted in university contexts, especially preparatory English programs. This pattern reflects similar trends reported in earlier Turkish ELT research, which consistently point to the dominance of higher education settings (Özmen et al., 2016; Yağız et al., 2016; Karadeniz, 2022). While university contexts may offer easier access and fewer administrative barriers, this imbalance restricts the generalizability of PD research findings. The limited representation of K–12, non-formal, and early childhood education settings constitute a significant gap and highlights the need for future postgraduate research to include more diverse educational contexts and teacher populations.

The analysis of research themes indicates meaningful differences in topical priorities between master's and doctoral research. Master's theses predominantly explored teacher-centered themes such as reflective practice, collaboration, mentoring, and professional needs—topics that align with practitioner-oriented and classroom-grounded PD approaches. Doctoral dissertations, on the other hand, focused more frequently on structured PD programs and specialized competencies, including assessment, intercultural communication, and technology integration. This distinction aligns with the findings of Yurtseven and Bademcioğlu (2016), who reported that master's-level research often emphasizes teacher-driven growth, whereas doctoral-level work tends to engage more systematically with programmatic and institutional dimensions of PD.

Across both academic levels, findings consistently showed that PD activities positively influenced teachers' classroom practices, professional awareness, collaboration, and motivation. These outcomes support existing evidence that meaningful PD enhances instructional quality and collegial interaction (Buendía & Macías, 2019; Yurtseven & Bademcioğlu, 2016). However, doctoral dissertations more frequently reported challenges such as misalignment between PD content and teachers' needs, limited practical applicability, and weak evaluation mechanisms, indicating that postgraduate

research increasingly attends to structural constraints and sustainability issues in PD provision.

Finally, barriers to effective PD were commonly linked to low motivation, heavy workloads, limited institutional support, and restricted opportunities for sustained collaboration. Prior literature suggests that such challenges often result from one-off, compulsory PD seminars that fail to ensure contextual relevance and teacher agency (Avalos, 2011; Taşdemir & Karaman, 2022; Yılmaz & Sever, 2021). These recurring barriers reinforce the need for future PD initiatives—both in research and practice—to prioritize continuity, responsiveness to teacher needs, and institutional structures that support long-term professional learning.

Overall, the findings suggest that postgraduate research on EFL teachers' professional development in Türkiye has expanded both thematically and methodologically, particularly at the doctoral level. Nevertheless, persistent gaps remain in methodological reporting (e.g., sampling transparency) and contextual diversity (e.g., K–12 and non-formal settings), pointing to clear directions for more inclusive and methodologically robust research agendas.

## Conclusion and Suggestions

### Conclusion

In summary, the body of postgraduate theses on EFL teachers' professional development in Türkiye presents a rich yet uneven landscape. While the positive impacts of professional development on teachers' instructional practices, collaboration, and professional awareness are well documented, persistent challenges remain regarding content relevance, participant diversity, methodological rigor, and institutional support. By systematically mapping research trends and gaps, this study provides a comprehensive overview of the current state of the field and identifies priority areas that require greater scholarly and institutional attention.

Overall, the findings indicate that research on EFL teacher professional development has gained increasing visibility and importance over time. However, the concentration of studies in limited contexts and the reliance on similar methodological approaches suggest that the field has not yet fully captured the diversity and complexity of teachers' professional learning experiences. The dominance of university-based settings and teacher-centered perspectives, alongside the limited inclusion of other stakeholders, constrains the scope and applicability of existing research. These patterns highlight the need for more inclusive, context-sensitive, and methodologically diverse approaches to studying professional development.

Consequently, the findings underscore that while professional development initiatives hold significant potential for improving teaching quality and professional growth, their effectiveness depends largely on alignment with teachers' actual needs, sustained institutional support, and systematic evaluation. This study contributes to the literature by offering a synthesized account of where postgraduate theses on EFL teacher professional development in Türkiye currently stands and by outlining directions for strengthening post graduate research.

### Suggestions

#### Practical Suggestions and Implications

At the practical level, professional development programs should be designed in ways that recognize teachers as active agents in their own learning. Programs that allow flexibility, autonomy, and contextual adaptation are more likely to

address teachers' diverse professional needs than standardized or one-size-fits-all models. Teachers should be meaningfully involved in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of professional development activities to ensure relevance, practicality, and long-term engagement. In addition, collaborative practices such as peer learning, reflective dialogue, and shared inquiry should be prioritized to support sustained professional growth.

### Implications for Institutions and Policymakers

Institutions and policymakers play a critical role in creating the conditions under which effective professional development can occur. This includes allocating sufficient time, resources, and structural support for ongoing professional learning rather than short-term or compulsory initiatives. Institutions are encouraged to foster collaborative professional cultures that value continuous learning, reflection, and innovation. At the policy level, professional development frameworks should emphasize sustainability, inclusivity, and responsiveness to contextual realities, ensuring that programs are systematically evaluated and refined based on evidence and stakeholder feedback.

### Suggestions for Future Research

Future research should expand its focus to include underrepresented educational contexts such as K–12 schools, non-formal education settings, and online or hybrid teaching environments. Longitudinal and comparative studies drawing on international datasets could provide deeper insights into evolving professional development trends and practices. Greater attention should also be given to underexplored themes, including teacher well-being, autonomy, self-efficacy, and the long-term impact of professional development initiatives. Methodologically, increased use of action research, diversified sampling strategies, and balanced mixed-method designs would enhance the depth, quality, and applicability of future studies. By addressing these directions, future research and practice can contribute to more effective, equitable, and context-responsive professional development for EFL teachers in Türkiye.

### Author Contributions

The authors contributed equally to the preparation of this manuscript. Both authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript. This study was produced from the first author's master's thesis, conducted under the supervision of the corresponding second author.

### Ethical Declaration

This study was conducted with the approval of the Necmettin Erbakan University Social Sciences Human Research Ethics Committee, as granted at the meeting held on January 01, 2024 (Protocol No. 2024/105).

### Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest with any institution or person within the scope of the study.

### Declaration of Generative AI Use

During the English language editing stage of this study, the Microsoft 365 Word translation tool was used to a limited extent and exclusively for language translation purposes. The translated text was carefully reviewed for accuracy by the authors, and all necessary revisions were made. The authors take full responsibility for the content of the manuscript.

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