rEFLections
Vol 29, No 1, January - April 2022

Leveraging Untapped Potential: Continuing Professional Development as a Tool for Creating Positive Culture at Schools of Foreign Languages in Turkey

OMER OZER*
Adana Alparslan Turkes Science and Technology University, Adana, Turkey
CECILE POPP
Adana Alparslan Turkes Science and Technology University, Adana, Turkey
***Corresponding author email: omer.ozer@yahoo.com**

Article information
Article history:
Received: 8 Oct 2021
Accepted: 16 Apr 2022
Available online: 22 Apr 2022

Keywords:
Professional development
School culture
Continuing professional development unit
Language teaching
Higher education

Abstract
This article reports on a series of carefully curated professional development (PD) activities with the secondary purpose of building and maintaining a positive school culture. The study took place in a school of foreign languages (SFL) at a state university in Turkey. Twenty-five Turkish and international teachers participated. The researchers collected data over a period of six months using a mixed-methods approach: a two-stage survey and semi-structured interviews. Three main themes emerged from the analysis; (1) the basic tenets of Continuing Professional Development (CPD), (2) factors that foster positive school culture, and (3) factors that undermine positive school culture. The results suggest that carefully curated PD has a positive impact on school culture; a combination of formal and informal PD offerings formed desired habits of mind among instructors. Moreover, instructors indicated a preference for peer-led PD. Thus, we suggest that other SFLs in Turkey likewise harness the untapped potential of the CPD Unit.

INTRODUCTION

A language teacher's success can be measured in many ways, but good habits of mind are arguably among her most critical characteristics. In this ever-changing and fast-paced world, having a growth mindset is perhaps the most important habit of mind. Ongoing professional development (PD) in education has become more important than ever, both for teachers as well as educational managers (Heystek & Terhoven, 2015; Main & Pendergast, 2015). Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is the widely-used term to refer to any formal or informal activity or training aimed at enhancing one's personal and professional qualities (Frost, 2012; Kennedy, 2011). In many schools worldwide, CPD is an official part of a teacher's job description and teachers are made well aware of it before they are recruited (Frost, 2012; Hwang et al., 2018; Main & Pendergast, 2015); they are accordingly expected to engage in sustained PD as long as they continue in their profession. However in some schools, expectations of teachers' ongoing PD remains notoriously uncertain; that is to say, teachers are not made aware of these expectations, yet simply expected to engage in PD activities throughout their careers (Bubb &

Earley, 2007; Peker et al., 2019). With increasing emphasis on positive school culture (Varga-Atkins et al., 2010) CPD has become more important than ever, as it is the gateway to creating teacher accountability (Hochberg & Desimone, 2010), building collegiality and teacher autonomy (Ayar & Yangın-Ekşi, 2019); thus, there is an opportunity for the CPD unit (CPDU) at a language school to play an instrumental role in the formation of desired habits of mind amongst teachers.

This study is premised on the hypothesis that through carefully curated PD and mechanisms for subsequent sharing, reflection and collaboration, a CPDU can do much more than simply deliver seminars and training events. Varga-Atkins et al. (2010) underscored the strong connection between PD and school culture; in a school where positive school culture is developed and fostered, teachers are more likely to engage in collaborative work, thereby spreading use of best practices among their colleagues. Since certain habits of mind are predicted to contribute to a positive school culture, we hypothesized that CPD activities undertaken in the course of this study would foster desired habits of mind and therefore the development of a positive school culture. The literature suggests that when ongoing PD directly supports instructors' needs, positive school culture is cultivated (Dinsdale, 2017; Hilton et al., 2015; Morris et al., 2020). In the educational context, desirable habits of mind include: questioning, metacognition, responsible risk taking and interdependent thinking. As most state universities in Turkey have a school of foreign languages (SFL), it is believed that the outcomes of this study may be used to inform a wider body of schools in Turkey and abroad to show how teachers' pursuit of CPD is intricately bound to the formation of desired habits of mind schoolwide (Frost, 2012).

The approach to this study was two-pronged. First, we explored teacher and administrator views on and experiences with building and maintaining a positive school culture. Second, we intended to contribute to the existing literature regarding CPD practices at the tertiary level in Turkey. The primary purpose of this article was to explore the potentially transformative role of the CPDU at SFLs; through intentionally designed PD that is not only relevant and applicable but is provided in a manner that is respectful of teachers' time, we hypothesized that a more positive school culture would emerge. The research questions were: (i) What constitutes positive school culture in the context of an SFL at a state university in Turkey? (ii) What role can PD play in building and maintaining a positive school culture?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Cultivating habits of mind

The provision of a quality learning experience for students depends primarily on teachers. Teacher performance, in turn, can be influenced by the aims and calibre of a school's CPD programme. Teaching methods are constantly evolving and a teacher who relies solely on what she learned in her teacher training is dangerously deluded (Bubb & Earley, 2007). In this sense, language teachers, like learners, have their own concept of how language should be taught and they shape this understanding through practical experiences in the sociocultural school environment. But this type of development potentially poses a risk to the development of instructors' expertise as it leads to misconceptions about language teaching (Johnson &

Golombek, 2011). CPDUs should, therefore, play a pivotal role in enhancing instructors' PD. CPD helps teachers refine their teaching practice and also acquire new understandings and skills based on emerging materials in the teaching-learning process (Hwang et al., 2018; Kennedy, 2011). CPD also gives teachers an opportunity to develop themselves personally. Furthermore, it is an opportunity for teachers to develop teamwork skills and exchange best practices (Bubb & Earley, 2007; Heystek & Terhoven, 2015). Simon et al. (2011) draw attention to the importance of schools creating and fostering an atmosphere of constant growth and openness towards mentoring and feedback. Such an environment is fertile ground for CPD.

Limiting CPD to orchestrating teachers' pedagogic/methodological skill development, however, causes it to fall short of its potential. If a school's administration is in alignment with its CPDU, the two can work together to foster a positive school culture ¬– one in which desired habits of mind are at the forefront (Varga-Atkins et al., 2010). The key to this excellence starts with teachers' self-awareness of their teaching skills and weaknesses; and is followed by teachers' willingness (or even enthusiasm) towards managing their own PD. If not already present in the teacher, the CPDU has the opportunity to instil in her the foundation of a growth mindset and empower instructors with the resources to cultivate a CPD habit. This is where intentional, carefully-curated PD is critical (Main & Pendergast, 2015).

As state universities typically have a tight PD budget, it is important to note that excellent PD is possible even without money. Teachers in our study repeatedly indicated a preference for peer-driven PD, as will be discussed later in this paper. Indeed, PD can and should draw on teachers' own expertise to make collaboration a habit within the school (Varga-Atkins et al., 2010).

In summary, effective CPD requires content focus, active learning, coherence, duration, and collective participation (Main & Pendergast, 2015) and brings together different methodologies to teaching and learning in the form of formal or informal, in-house or outside school training, workshops, events, online learning programmes and sharing of best practises and ideas (Bubb & Earley, 2007; Simon et al., 2011).

METHODOLOGY

We used a mixed-method, convergent design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018) methodology in this study. Generated quantitative and qualitative data were used to interpret participants' CPD experiences.

Participants

The research setting was a school of foreign languages at a state university in a southern Turkish city. A great majority of the undergraduate programmes at this university are offered in English only, and the language school provides English instruction during students' foundation year. The researchers chose this institution because this is where they are employed; they were therefore able to design a series of CPD events specifically tailored to teachers' SMART goals.

All 33 SFL teachers were invited to participate in the study, nine of which were international instructors from Canada, Czech Republic, New Zealand, Poland, Ukraine and the United States. Twenty-five instructors participated; they ranged from early to late career, with an average of 12 years' teaching experience.

This study employed a non-probability convenience sampling method, so the researchers invited all 33 SFL teachers to respond to a survey. The sample was representative of SFL teachers insofar as both Turkish national and foreign teachers with varied teaching experience participated in interviews and responded to surveys. The interviewees, on the other hand, were recruited based on three criteria: (a) being a Turkish or foreign national; (b) career stage; (c) gender. In this way the researchers tried to ensure the interviews were representative of the entire faculty of the SFL. The number of teachers included in the interviews was determined based on the 'saturation' approach (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Twenty-five surveys were returned from the pre-term survey, showing a 75.8% response rate; and twenty-four were returned from the end-of-term survey, constituting a 72.7% response rate.

Teacher interviews were also conducted at key times during the study. Two instructors (one international and one Turkish) participated in the pre-term interviews; three different instructors participated in the middle of the term (one international and two Turkish); and four more (two international and two Turkish) participated in the interviews at the end of the fall term. In addition to these nine interviews, a tenth interview was conducted with an assistant director of the language school. Teachers had previously indicated willingness to participate in interviews in the first survey; interviewees were selected from among the volunteers based on the researchers' perception of their ability to respond candidly and critically to questions.

Data collection tools

The survey mentioned above explored teacher opinions of PD and habits of mind that are desirable within the context of a school culture. The survey, which was designed by the research team, consisted of 24 items related to teacher demographics, experiences, opinions and perceptions of CPD at the SFL. The majority of the questions were open-ended, designed to help the research team better understand the participants' in-school and out-of-school CPD practices, as well as their opinions of the role of the CPDU and school culture.

Semi-structured interviews designed to address the research questions were undertaken by the researchers before, during and after the fall term with the number of participants ranging from two to four in each round. The pre-term and post-term interviews were identical; and echoed the questions on the survey. They included but were not limited to the following: 'In your opinion what constitutes a good teacher in the SFL context?'; 'What is your understanding of the phrase positive school culture?'; 'In your opinion, whose role is it to create positive school culture?'; 'Are you satisfied with your professional growth since joining this institution?'; 'Is a teacher's ongoing professional development the responsibility of the administration, the individual teacher, the CPDU or the administration?'; and 'In your opinion, what constitutes a highly effective CPD programme for building a successful school culture among instructors?'

Three teachers were interviewed in the middle of the term after an interactive PD event, a workshop on the flipped classroom. (Since the workshop topic was based on teachers' SMART goals, it was relevant and applicable to their needs and wants; the flipped classroom was a natural PD topic for remote teaching during a pandemic.) Think-aloud questions focused on habits of mind and attitude, rather than the content of the PD itself. Screen shots from the workshop, which had taken place via Zoom, were shown to the interviewees. One showed participants' smiling faces, in other words the interviewee's colleagues; another was of a presentation slide used in the workshop. Think-aloud protocols were used to understand what interviewees were thinking and feeling as they reflected on the PD event. Since Turkish culture tends to have a low trust of authority and a bias towards keeping critical thoughts to oneself (Meyer, 2014), the researchers felt this method would lead to less self-censoring and more honest insights.

Data collection and analysis

Once ethical clearance was obtained, an invitation to complete an online survey was sent out to all teachers at the SFL before the fall term started. Semi-structured interviews were designed to address the research questions and were conducted by the research team over a period of six months during the 2020-2021 academic year and were digitally recorded. Interviews took place in three phases, namely before, during and after the fall term. Midterm interviews were essentially think-aloud sessions, conducted with three teachers. The researchers also interviewed a member of the administration to gain insight into the administration's attitudes towards CPD activities and school culture. The interviews were not only for data collection purposes; they also served as a tool to help the academic staff reflect on their practices and role in the school. It was our intention to give instructors the opportunity to exercise choice and align their PD with their individual needs, interests and goals, and not require them to participate in one-size-fits-all PD.

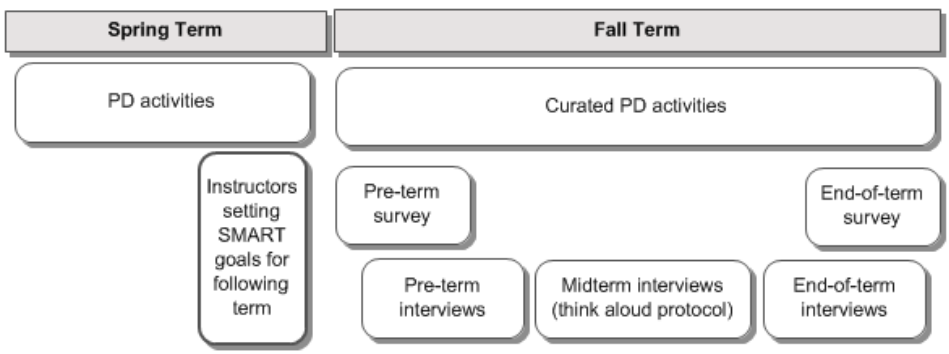

Figure 1 Timeline for PD and data collection

Interview recordings were transcribed verbatim and then the researchers read and reread the data independently to become familiar with it and to label units with relevant codes. After generating the initial codes, the researchers compared and contrasted their findings. Having completed coding of all the recordings, the researchers looked through all the codes again to search for emerging themes. After that they sorted the codes into themes and subthemes

using content analysis. The interrater reliability showed almost perfect agreement (κ = 0.83) (McHugh, 2012). Throughout the content analysis process, the researchers convened a few times to ensure dependability.

Procedure for curated PD

Since the researchers hypothesized that PD could be leveraged to build positive school culture, they approached the PD events of the semester during which data was collected as an 'instrument of change.' In other words, PD events were curated to be timely, relevant and engaging. Interviews and especially the end-of-term survey would reveal whether there had been a change in attitude towards PD, habits of mind and school culture, which could then be attributed to the PD. The first task of term asked instructors to return to the SMART goals they had set at the end of the previous term and revise them if necessary. SMART goals for the fall 2020 term had been submitted to the CPDU Coordinator the previous spring and filed in teachers' CPD portfolios on Google Drive. One commonly recurring goal was that teachers wanted to increase student talking time and reduce teacher talking time. Another recurring goal resulted directly from teachers' difficulties adapting to online teaching the previous term when the pandemic began.

Since this study does not promote any particular PD topic, but rather emphasises PD curated to meet the needs of individual schools, what follows is just one example of the PD that took place during the term that our study was conducted and the thought process behind it. Since classes would most likely continue to be online for the foreseeable future, the CPDU decided to provide PD on flipped classroom strategies. This would address both of the most frequently seen SMART goals teachers had set, and would benefit everybody. Thus the semester's PD offerings would be relevant. The PD was also delivered in such a way as to model the desired outcome, namely using flipped classroom methodology. Instructors prepared for the workshop facilitated by the CPDU Coordinator by watching a series of short videos about flipped classrooms on their own time. During the workshop itself instructors discussed how the strategies presented in the videos could be applied in their SFL context. Teachers worked on their own and in groups, with emphasis placed on the process and outcome of their learning, not the hours spent or the number of activities completed. In this way the workshop modelled the flipped classroom ideology that 'class time' is to be used doing things that can only be done when students are together. Thus, just as teachers would like their students to take a more active and participatory role in their own learning, the workshop pushed instructors to become active participants in their own PD.

Since everyone was now working from home, regular CPD events also served to bring instructors out of isolation and ensure there was interaction between colleagues. In this way, we saw an opportunity for the CPDU to contribute to a positive school culture.

Even though our data collection ended here, the semester's CPD activities did not. In March and April several TTT (teachers teaching teachers) sessions were held on different days at different times, once a week for three weeks. These were informal 45-minute sharing sessions (conducted on Google Classroom), moderated by the CPDU Coordinator but otherwise teacher-led.

Brief follow-up surveys indicated which topics teachers wanted to dive deeper into; further in-depth teacher-led workshops were scheduled accordingly. Teachers only attended workshops in which they were interested.

At the end of the semester teachers submitted self-reflections (prompts were provided as a guideline) and reviewed their SMART goals. In this way, the semester's PD was intentionally designed to be relevant, dynamic and timely.

RESULTS

Before sharing the results, the researchers would like to underscore that the PD events that took place during the semester were carefully curated to provide instructors at the SFL with meaningful, relevant PD. The different responses to the pre-term and end-of-term surveys reflect positive change in terms of mindset and attitude towards PD. Similarly, interviewees provided insight into how the term's PD affected them.

Survey findings

When asked in September before the start of the term, teachers indicated that they had spent on average 84 minutes on PD during the preceding 16-week term. They reported that 46 of those minutes, or 55%, had been sponsored or organised by the SFL. Thirty-eight minutes (or 45%) of PD took place during working hours. It can be deduced that on average 45% of PD was therefore initiated by the instructors themselves.

By contrast, when asked again at the end of the semester about time spent on PD, there was an overall increase from 84 to 94 minutes (11.9%). Interestingly only 30 minutes (32%) was organised by the institution, indicating that PD in the second term was more autonomous. Indeed, as indicated in Table 1, there was a marked increase between the two semesters in teachers considering a 'relentless learner who develops themselves professionally' as a good teacher quality. Similarly, there was a decrease in value placed on 'applying the rules set by the administration'.

Table 1

A 'good teacher' in the SFL context

	pre-term (*f*)	end-of-term (*f*)
affects positive change in a student's language skills	3	8
is him/herself a relentless learner who develops themselves professionally	2	6
communicates well with students and colleagues	3	5
applies the rules set by the administration and tries to accomplish the tasks he/she is appointed to	4	1
understands and motivates students very well	4	1
approaches teaching with motivation	3	1
is a good team member	2	2
is well-prepared for lessons; works hard	2	
provides differentiated teaching approaches to reach all students	1	1

Having described what constitutes a good teacher in the SFL context, participants next outlined what they perceived to be the administration's expectations of teachers once they begin working at the SFL. The expectations expressed by teachers are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2

Teachers' opinions of the school's expectations of newly recruited teachers

	pre-term (*f*)	end-of-term (*f*)
teaching my weekly classes, marking papers, preparing exam questions and invigilating	16	16
adapting to the new working environment (maintaining good relationships with the other members of the staff as well as the administration and the administrative assistants)	7	8
engaging in PD	1	6
advising students	1	1
attending meetings, carrying out the tasks assigned by the administration	1	2

Across the two surveys, teachers believed that facilitating students' language learning and adapting to the new working environment were the primary expectations of newly recruited teachers at an SFL. One teacher with seven years of teaching experience noted, 'My job requires continuing development of myself and helping my team to become better as well'. Another teacher put emphasis on the mission and vision of the school and the need for teacher collaboration by stating, 'The school can expect from newly recruited teachers to act properly according to its mission, vision and values and thus contribute to its collaborative community action on education'.

Table 3

Teachers' understanding of the phrase 'positive school culture'

	pre-term (*f*)	end-of-term (*f*)
a school environment where people who serve a common purpose mutually support and care for each other in order to achieve this goal	6	6
physical and mental well-being of any stakeholder in and around the school	6	4
getting along with co-workers, administration and students	7	2
a friendly environment for everyone where respect is mutual.	5	3
the set of overall positive values, beliefs and practices at a school	1	5
a school environment where teachers are willing to share ideas and practices		3
creating room for teachers' professional growth		2

In response to the question of whether there is a link between CPD and positive school culture, all but one participant in the September survey thought that there was a direct connection. Similarly, 21 of the 24 teachers participating in the February survey reportedly believed there to be a strong connection between the two. One female international teacher with 17 years of teaching experience stated, 'CPD is a good reminder of what we already know as well as a signpost showing where we are heading and how to get there. It helps to […] strengthen a

sense of belonging, encourage and facilitates [sic] teamwork.' On the other hand, three teachers believed the link to be tenuous or only somewhat strong. One teacher with eight years of teaching experience said, 'I don't think a compulsory system of CPD can create a positive culture.' She went on to say that 'If a teacher does not hold any […] professional traits (such as collaborating with a colleague/students/staff, reflecting on problems and trying to create change), I believe compulsory CPD has a low chance of creating a positive school culture.' The previous participant's word choice, 'a compulsory system of CPD,' emphasises the importance of ongoing PD being curated to teachers' needs and interests; it should by no means be perceived as being forced upon teachers.

To obtain insight into instructors' perception of the existing school culture, teachers were also asked to complete two sentences regarding their colleagues and the administration. The overall impression in both the September 2020 and February 2021 surveys was that the administration was 'supportive' and 'understanding,' with comments such as 'fair in [sic] caring and supporting not only students but also teachers'; and 'supporting our professional growth'. However, there were also a few comments suggesting a negative school culture, like 'Supportive and helpful, but sometimes it feels like they are lost [absent] or non-existent.' A great majority of participants stated that their colleagues were supportive, respectful and friendly. Some of the comments included, 'Supportive, helpful, cooperative, good company and fun to spend time with'; and 'People I work directly with are always ready to help'. Here again, though, there were two opposing views: 'Different, some are so helpful and cooperative, and with some others it is sometimes hard to work'; and 'Idealist, but not all of them. Some have little motivation to teach […] but some are hard-workers'.

According to Dinsdale (2017) collaboration among team members is a key factor in creating a positive school culture. Therefore, in addition to the participants' opinions of the administration and teaching staff, teachers were asked a specific question on whether they felt their colleagues were supportive and willing to collaborate. The general consensus among teachers was that many of their colleagues -- but not all -- were eager to collaborate. One participant, for example, stated, 'There are people who are extremely helpful and do not mind spending time on helping others, but there are also people who do not want to be bothered at all.' Another teacher also emphasised that most teachers at this school are supportive by saying, 'Most of my colleagues, yes. Though not everyone has the same level of commitment to their work, almost everyone has at least some level, and usually this is enough to work together effectively.' Clearly, there is already anecdotal evidence of the negative effect of teachers' uncollaborative attitudes on school culture.

The participants were also asked to express their opinions on whether PD should be part of their job description and 23 teachers (92% and 96% respectively) in both surveys gave answers varying from 'yes' to 'absolutely'. One teacher with 18 years of teaching experience said, 'definitely, as things are constantly changing in our profession'; and another teacher with 17 years of experience stated, 'I guess it should as I don't do anything regarding PD'. Three teachers in each survey said that they were not sure.

When asked whose responsibility it was to create a positive school culture, there was negligible

change in responses from September to February. The majority of respondents (16 before the term, 17 after the term) believed it was the responsibility of all stakeholders, i.e. administrators and instructors alike. Only four instructors said the responsibility lay exclusively with the administration in September; that number dropped to three in February. Similarly, five instructors thought teachers and administrators shared the responsibility to create a positive school culture, but that administration held the main responsibility for this. This number dropped by one to four in the February survey.

In the end-of-term survey, teachers were asked about their participation in online PD events offered by outside organisations and suggested by the school. Analysis of the responses found that voluntary online PD participation varied greatly. Even though a majority of the teachers considered PD a job requirement, there was only a low level of participation in the after-hour PD events. The responses ranged from 'never' to 'sometimes'. One international teacher stated, 'Not very often, to be honest. I find my time very valuable as I like to be prepared and early with my lesson planning and document preparation, so I tend to spend more of my time there'. By contrast, another teacher responded, 'hardly ever as I am a working mom of two, but I watch lots of videos and read interesting articles related to my work area in my free time'. The overall low participation in outside online PD events is clear. Another question was whether teachers felt that CPD offerings at their own school throughout the term were beneficial. Three quarters of the respondents felt they were, as summarised by the words of a teacher with 12 years of experience: 'Yes, they all provide us with opportunities for professional development and motivation to refresh our teaching'. Six respondents, on the other hand, consider the offerings to be only somewhat useful. A teacher who had been working at the institution for four years stated, 'I liked to learn the concepts but maybe it's because [the seminars were...] online, it was difficult for me to stay focused'.

Interview findings

By comparing the data obtained from the interviews, this study sought to identify what instructors considered to be the role of PD in the operation of the SFL. Three master themes were identified from the interview data, namely the basic tenets of CPD, factors that foster positive school culture, and factors that undermine positive school culture.

Table 4

Basic tenets of CPD

Sub-themes	*f*
Schoolwide CPD policy	17
Relevance	14
PD mindset	12
Justification for PD	7
Role of CPD Unit	2

Overall, the instructors were consistent in reporting the importance of a schoolwide CPD policy and relevant PD. The importance of the former was well articulated by a Turkish instructor: 'Most of our day is actually about our work […]. During the night, or after maybe 4 or 5 o'clock,

I think it becomes difficult for teachers to concentrate on professional growth.' As for the relevance, one international instructor talked about some training sessions provided by book publishers: 'Often we didn't feel that they were appropriate; I used to work in Vietnam and Japan, where the kids are thoroughly enthusiastic. [In Turkey], kids are not. That would work in Vietnam, but that would not work here'. This teacher also expressed frustration over the publisher's delivery: 'It was also not great because they were generally done in Turkish and this was to the English department which had Turkish teachers obviously and foreigners.' There was an overwhelming consensus that internalised PD mindset is central to lifelong teacher learning. For example, one female instructor emphasised this link stating 'Because of [… the] professional promotion process in Poland, I got used to looking for information. I got used to trying to improve my work, myself, to teach better. I have it [PD] in my blood [now].' Commenting on the justification for PD, one foreign instructor said: 'I think it makes my job easier, my life easier when I am doing it more effectively. It is like I can see that my students are learning well, I am more organised, I can save myself time.' As for the administration's view of the role of the CPDU, one member of the administration shared her opinion saying: 'The role of CPD [Unit] is to design PD activities; also maybe to encourage our teachers to attend these activities as well. At least through this CPD Unit, we are trying to create awareness of PD.'

Table 5

Factors that foster positive school culture

Sub-themes	*f*
Teachers teaching teachers	21
Growth mindset	9
Leveraging PD to determine school culture	9
Socialising	7
Reflection	8
Good communication and transparency	7
All stakeholders working towards a common goal	7
Team building	4
Teacher autonomy	2

Although understanding of what constitutes positive school culture varies, the teachers in our study had clear opinions on this matter. An overwhelming majority also believe that good PD can contribute to a positive school culture, thus supporting our hypothesis that there is a direct link between the two. Indeed, the most frequently recurring theme (see Table 5) in response to the question of how to foster positive school culture was 'teachers teaching teachers,' or TTT events. One international instructor commented: 'If you have a good idea, you should share it, you should help colleagues […]. You should be able to get together and commiserate and also celebrate.' This teacher then expanded:

> I would like to make a suggestion. I think an untapped resource that we have is each other. In terms of teacher training, I don't think we always need an outside professional doing a seminar on some particular objective. I think we have some great teachers with great ideas that we don't even know about.

Not surprisingly, the most popular PD events of the 2020-2021 academic year at our SFL were workshops hosted by teachers.

Furthermore, it was largely agreed that a growth mindset was a prerequisite for professional growth and positive school culture. One teacher demonstrated this point when she said, 'I am satisfied with my professional growth [since joining this school …] but I believe that I am responsible for a large part of that. I am one of the people who wants to be better.' This teacher inherently possesses a growth mindset; but a CPDU can nurture a growth mindset in teachers and thereby increase the number of instructors at a particular SFL who embody this trait.

Indeed, teachers also recognised this ability of a CPDU to effectively leverage PD and foster a positive school culture: 'Organisational-led PD can benefit [us] the most. To kind of push [teachers] a little bit and also guide them.' This teacher went on to say that 'the CPD Unit [can] show [how] to be more like […] the organisation wants its employees to be.' This was further exemplified as other instructors spoke of the value of reflection in the development of an SFL. Below, one such example:

> A good teacher [in the SFL context] is the one who always reflects on his or her teaching. Because […] if you are aware of what you are doing, then you can be more open to develop yourself as well, but if you just go to your class and when it is over, you forget about all the things, then it is not very effective in school culture or students. First, a good teacher should reflect on his or her teaching.

If the practice of self-reflection is instilled in teachers through the CPDU's activities, for example at the end of each semester and after PD events, this can easily be achieved.

A second group of factors identified by teachers that contribute to a positive school culture don't traditionally fall under the auspices of the CPDU; however, with the support of the administration, the CPDU can easily model the desired attitudes and behaviours and thereby instil them in teachers. The first theme is good communication and transparency, to which participants alluded several times. One respondent felt our SFL 'might need more boundaries and more clear-cut definitions by the administration.' Similarly, teachers expressed multiple times that in institutions where there is positive school culture, all stakeholders work towards a common goal. One teacher spoke of the necessity of teachers and administrators embodying the very traits and habits we expect to 'provide our students with.' The interviewees further described how team building was central to building positive school culture. Here, one such example: 'Two things are important to me. I really like the culture of the school, maybe because it is a smaller organisation and I feel like I am a bigger part of it than I was at my old school.' Fourthly, some participants related teacher autonomy to positive school culture, with one participant noting:

> The other thing that I am really happy about in my job is the autonomy. I feel like I have a lot more flexibility in what I do here which I love. We have a plan but I still can walk into my class and I can do what I want. I don't feel […] super hyper micromanaged at this school.

Again, when a school's administration and its CPDU are aligned, teacher autonomy, team building, clear communication and transparency and common goals can be modelled, encouraged and fostered to contribute towards a positive school culture.

Finally, opportunities to socialise at work were important to some participants who felt this fostered positive school culture; these respondents saw PD events as one way to facilitate this. One Turkish instructor stated that: 'With these seminars, they are sometimes […] fun as well. They [provide] valuable times when teachers socialise, teachers get to know each other.'

Table 6

Factors that undermine positive school culture

Sub-themes	*f*
Inconsistent values and work ethic	4
Teacher isolation	2
Dissatisfaction with professional growth	2
SFL lacking clarity regarding goals	2
Having to pick up the slack of other teachers	2
Not holding people accountable	1
Blanket solutions	1

Both Turkish and international instructors at the SFL pointed to the existence of factors that corrode positive school culture. The first few can be grouped together as undesirable habits of mind. Inconsistent values and work ethic among teachers was one recurring issue; a female teacher with four years of teaching experience at the university level complained about the following situation: 'when I have to work with people who don't have the same values I do in terms of work ethics and honesty.' Similarly, a few instructors emphasised that sometimes they had to pick up the slack for colleagues who had not done what they were supposed to. For example, one interviewee expressed frustration over sometimes 'working with another teacher who might not be doing their job.' They continued as follows: 'I am making up for that. […] they are just not engaged in their job and I feel like that is demotivating for me.'

A second group of factors that undermine a positive school culture involved the administration. Teachers shared the belief that the school should have clarity regarding goals and clear-cut expectations of instructors. One international instructor said: 'Because we are a public university, I don't know if there is much direction from the top saying this is what we need to do.' Similarly, a few teachers reported that positive school culture was undermined when people are not held accountable. 'Because some people don't [do their jobs], it means more work for everybody.' Another teacher expressed the need for better accountability measures, describing how because of a few people, our school has measures in place that affect everyone. Similarly, another participant pointed to efforts on the part of the administration to hold people accountable as unsuccessful, deeming them blanket solutions: 'Instructor satisfaction surveys, student surveys, but then is anything being done [with the results]?'

Further factors that undermine a positive school culture could be directly addressed through the CPDU. Two instructors repeatedly stressed teacher isolation as a problem: '[Instructors] are usually isolated, they just communicate with a few teachers during the day and [then] they leave the school.' Regular informal PD events throughout the semester, or else the implementation of collaboration (eg. co-teaching, peer observations) and teamwork, could reduce teacher isolation. Another teacher felt school culture was undermined by his dissatisfaction with his professional growth. 'In the university where I worked previously, […] all the teachers were

sent to conferences and seminars. I can't help but compare the two.' Even without the budget for external PD, we believe that teachers' positive perception of their professional growth will contribute to a positive school culture.

DISCUSSION

Although some good examples exist (Ayar & Yangın-Ekşi, 2019; Aydın & Hockley, 2019; Zerey, 2018), not all CPDUs at Turkish universities are committed to instructors' PD; and some exist only because they are required by accreditation committees. They are perfunctory at best, providing poorly-timed and often unsuitable activities. This in turn affects teachers' attitudes; they display a distinct lack of enthusiasm towards PD (Zehir Topkaya & Çelik, 2016) and regard seminars and training events as necessary evils (Yılmaz & Arıkan, 2019). Studies report that state universities have a limited PD budget; that there is often no schoolwide CPD policy (Ayar & Yangın-Ekşi, 2019; Aydın & Hockley, 2019); and that instructors are usually at best passive participants in PD activities (Peker et al., 2019). Obviously this is not conducive to a positive school culture. It is our hope that with this study we not only spread awareness of the importance of CPD, but that we inspire SFLs to leverage their CPDU to enhance school culture. The relatively high response rate (75%) to the surveys in this study could be interpreted as evidence of a positive school culture at this particular SFL. The appointment of a new CPDU Coordinator one year prior to beginning this study meant that the CPDU had already been conducting relevant, engaging and more personalised PD events for two semesters when the first survey was conducted. Our approach could easily improve the situation in other SFLs.

Our data showed that teachers understood what the basic tenets of PD should be. For one thing, teachers value a PD mindset and want to be effective teachers. However, only a few of the teachers in our study value engaging in PD, indicating an area for improvement. Since teachers indicated that they do not value simply performing perfunctory tasks assigned by the administration, including attending meetings, we see this as an opportunity for SFLs to reinvent their CPDUs. In her study conducted at seven state universities in Turkey, Zerey (2018) similarly found that instructors consider irrelevant PD and a lack of institutional support as barriers to the pursuit of their PD. Indeed, the teachers in our study agreed on the need for a schoolwide CPD policy; we argue that policy should reflect a new kind of PD. When teachers participated in PD events that were truly relevant, interesting, useful and timely, their attitudes towards PD changed.

It is important to underscore what constitutes 'positive' school culture. Some teachers indicated an outdated understanding of this concept, citing examples that suggested a culture of silence, tacit agreement, zero opposition and hierarchical structure. Others had insufficient knowledge in this area. Our study indicates that teachers viewed TTT events as a positive experience; indeed, these seem to hit the basic tenets of being relevant and worthwhile. As a side note, several TTT sessions were conducted during the term immediately following our study. Even though data collection had already been completed, the researchers were able to observe the positive impact these sessions had on school culture. Teachers further indicated that a faculty with a growth mindset, one that participates in reflection, practices good communication and

transparency, and where teachers have autonomy, would contribute to a positive school culture. This finding aligns with that of Varga-Atkins et al. (2010) who found that all stakeholders in a school should embrace opportunities to collaborate, reflect and share learning. Furthermore, they claim that such behaviour is necessary if instructors are to work towards a common goal. We suggest that SFLs come up with their own understanding of what positive culture means, and that they begin by looking at the current industry standard. From there, individual schools can adopt what is relevant. Since teachers agreed that leveraging PD to develop a positive school culture was desirable, we would like to emphasise that the CPDU can model, teach and foster this through its activities.

By the same token, a successful CPDU can eliminate many of the factors that undermine a positive school culture, some directly, some indirectly. Dissatisfaction with professional growth could be addressed if the administration and by extension the CPDU are protective over teachers' time and attention, particularly guarding it against outside parties who want 'access' to teachers. Publishers, who often provide free textbooks to schools, understandably want to introduce new books and materials to teachers. Unfortunately, it is often this type of training that teachers resent most. The timing is rarely convenient for the teachers, often coinciding with the busiest time of the term; and teachers find these presentations boring and irrelevant. They attend because they have been instructed by the administration to do so. This type of PD leaves teachers feeling tired, busy and powerless over their own time; contributes to a negative attitude towards PD; and is detrimental to positive school culture. Similarly, Morris et al. (2020) found that participative decision-making and professional growth contribute to positive school culture. Once an SFL establishes clear goals and priorities, however, any such PD opportunities that are not in alignment with these goals become a clear 'no'. This goal setting could be facilitated by the CPDU.

The issue of some teachers having to 'pick up the slack' for others and feeling that other teachers are not held accountable likewise needs discussion. In this case, the CPDU can certainly model desired attitudes and behaviours; but it is the administration that ultimately needs to be aware of how detrimental to school culture this is and work to address this problem. A study by Hochberg and Desimone (2010) sheds light on the importance of PD in building an environment of accountability where individual teachers are prevented from taking too much responsibility and subsequently burning out.

Teachers clearly possess excellent insight as to the problems existing in their institution; a more active and deliberate CPDU, working in alignment with school administrators, could likely neutralise or even reverse factors which are detrimental to a positive school culture.

It is our belief that through more teacher-centred PD, where teachers' prior knowledge and time are respected and their needs considered, a CPDU can accomplish far more than just teacher development; it will also contribute to a positive school culture.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This article has drawn on both the wider literature on PD and the perceptions and experiences of the participants in this study to demonstrate how CPDUs can be harnessed to make PD a habit amongst instructors; additionally, we aim to show how a language school in the context of a state university can in the process build a positive school culture. Drawing on our participants' responses we have identified factors that contribute to a positive school culture; as well as those that harm it. Specifically, providing carefully designed CPDU-driven or peer-driven PD that is relevant, applicable and mindful of instructors' time conveys to instructors that professional growth is prioritised at that school. Therefore, this study adds to the findings of Bubb and Earley (2007), Peker et al. (2019) and Simon et al. (2011) in that formal or informal, in-house or outside school but specifically-tailored PD is likely to play an instrumental role in the formation of desired habits of mind among language teachers. The present paper concludes that teachers who possess some or all of these positive characteristics are more likely to nurture the positive school culture in their school. Similarly, a school with a positive culture is more conducive to self-fulfilment, collegiality, professional satisfaction, and student learning.

This study has implications for SFLs at universities and we invite such institutions to reconsider the untapped potential already present within their walls. If the CPDU is harnessed successfully and leveraged to encourage team building and collaborative practices; and to create a habit of forming SMART goals and carrying out regular reflection; schools will have taken critical steps towards intentionally creating a positive school culture. These activities not only foster a growth mindset, but provide regular opportunities for informal gatherings. Finally, the CPDU should make as much use as it can of its own instructors' talent and knowledge, arranging opportunities for teachers to teach each other.

Schools where teachers or administrators consider PD a necessary evil would be well-served to replace this unhelpful view and see PD as a multi-purpose tool in the formation of desired habits of mind amongst instructors. If we agree that CPDUs possess a 'secret power' to dramatically change the atmosphere of an institution, the results of this study also indicate that it may be worthwhile to conduct future research involving cross-cultural comparisons of the role of the CPDU. We encourage educators to consider that practices such as peer coaching, co-teaching and self-reflection are part of a well-rounded PD programme. We have discussed several low to zero-cost ways to help bring teachers into alignment with a school's goals and visions, and it is our hope this will lead to the prioritising of a healthy, active CPDU that facilitates carefully curated PD for its instructors.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work was supported by the Scientific Research Projects Coordination Unit of Adana Alparslan Turkes Science and Technology University under Grant [number 20123001].

Disclosure of potential conflicts of interest

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

THE AUTHORS

Omer Ozer is an associate professor in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at Adana Alparslan Turkes Science and Technology University, Turkey. He has published extensively in the areas of multilingual policies in higher education, mobile-assisted language learning and autonomous language learning.
omer.ozer@yahoo.com

Cecile Popp is an instructor at the School of Foreign Languages at Adana Alparslan Turkes Science and Technology University, Turkey. She received her M.A. in German Literature from University of Toronto, Canada and has a background in teaching languages (English and German), language arts and literature.
cecilepopp@gmail.com

REFERENCES

Ayar, Z., & Yangın-Ekşi, G. (2019). Continuing professional development options of foreign language school directors. *International Online Journal of Education and Teaching, 6*(3). 707-721.

Aydın, B., & Hockley, A. (2019). The role of the directors in language schools. *Eğitimde Kuram ve Uygulama, 15*(4), 283-296.

Bubb, S., & Earley, P. (2007). *Leading and managing continuing professional development* (2nd ed.). Paul Chapman Publishing.

Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2018). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.

Dinsdale, R. (2017). The role of leaders in developing a positive culture. *BU Journal of Graduate Studies in Education, 9*(1), 42-45.

Frost, D. (2012). From professional development to system change: teacher leadership and innovation. *Professional Development in Education, 38*(2), 205-227.

Heystek, J., & Terhoven, R. (2015). Motivation as critical factor for teacher development in contextually challenging underperforming schools in South Africa. *Professional Development in Education, 41*(4), 624-639.

Hilton, A., Hilton, G., Dole, S., & Goos, M. (2015). School leaders as participants in teachers' professional development: The impact on teachers' and school leaders' professional growth. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education, 40*(12), 8.

Hochberg, E. D., & Desimone, L. M. (2010). Professional development in the accountability context: Building capacity to achieve standards. *Educational Psychologist, 45*(2), 89-106.

Hwang, M-Y., Hong, J-C., & Hao, Y-W. (2018). The value of CK, PK, and PCK in professional development programs predicted by the progressive beliefs of elementary school teachers. *European Journal of Teacher Education, 41*(4), 448-462.

Johnson, K. E., & Golombek, P. R. (2011). A sociocultural theoretical perspective on teacher professional development. *In Research on second language teacher education: A sociocultural perspective on professional development* (pp. 1-12). Routledge.

Kennedy, A. (2011). Collaborative continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers in Scotland: Aspirations, opportunities and barriers. *European Journal of Teacher Education, 34*(1), 25-41.

Main, K., & Pendergast, D. (2015). Core features of effective continuing professional development for the middle years: A tool for reflection. *RMLE Online, 38*(10), 1-18.

McHugh, M. L. (2012). Interrater reliability: The kappa statistic. *Biochemia Medica, 22*(3), 276–282. https://doi.org/10.11613/bm.2012.031

Meyer, E. (2014). *The culture map: Breaking through the invisible boundaries of global business*. Public Affairs.

Morris, J. E., Lummis, G. W., Lock, G., Ferguson, C., Hill, S., & Nykiel, A. (2020). The role of leadership in establishing a positive staff culture in a secondary school. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 48*(5), 802-820.

Peker, H., Özkaynak, O., Arslan, Z., & Tunç, H. (2019). A case study on the perceptions of professional development unit members at an EFL program. *International Journal of Curriculum and Instruction, 11*(2), 238-254.

Simon, S., Campbell, S., Johnson, S., & Stylianidou, F. (2011). Characteristics of effective professional development for early career science teachers. *Research in Science & Technological Education, 29*(1), 5-23.

Varga-Atkins, T., O'Brien, M., Burton, D., Campbell, A., & Qualter, A. (2010). The importance of interplay between school-based and networked professional development: School professionals' experiences of inter-school collaborations in learning networks. *Journal of Educational Change, 11*, 241-272.

Yılmaz, M., & Arıkan, A. (2019). English language teachers' evaluation of an alternative professional development program. *Başkent University Journal of Education, 6*(1), 13-27.

Zehir Topkaya, E., & Çelik, H. (2016). Non-native English language teachers' perceptions of professional development: Implications for career stages. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences, 232*, 5-11.

Zerey, Ö. G. (2018). Attitudes and perceptions of EFL instructors regarding self-directed professional development. *International Journal of Language Academy, 6*(1), 49-66.