

A Case Study of Two EFL Teachers' Reflections on Their Professional Development Journeys: Teacher-Researcher Collaboration

CEYHUN YUKSELIR^{1*}

OMER OZER²

¹Department of English Language and Literature, Osmaniye Korkut Ata University, Türkiye

²Department of Translation and Interpreting, Adana Alparslan Turkes Science and Technology University, Türkiye

*Corresponding author email: ceyhunyukselir@gmail.com

Article information	Abstract
Article history:	<i>This study examines two English language teachers' professional development (PD) journeys, facilitated by two researchers in Turkey. To this end, each teacher participated in classroom observations and provided weekly written and oral reflections on their PD practices over a period of 10 weeks. Weekly follow-up interviews and group discussions were conducted to encourage collaborative reflection on their PD experiences. The aim was to empower participants to make informed decisions through critical self- and co-reflection. The underlying aim of this dialogic and evidence-based approach was to enhance the teachers' understanding of their professional growth, thereby informing their decision-making process. The data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis. The findings indicate two themes, each with two subthemes. The first theme, 'collaboration', comprises 'engaging a critical friend for feedback and support' and 'teacher-researcher collaboration to develop a more systematic approach to self-observation'. The second theme, 'complementary components of PD', includes 'critical self-reflection as a means to identify areas of improvement' and 'taking ownership of lifelong professional development'. More specifically, the findings of the study indicate that teachers have meaningful PD experiences facilitated by researchers. Notably, these researchers maintain a non-hierarchical relationship, actively encourage dialogue, foster reflection, and participate in collaborative discussions. Furthermore, the findings show that the bottom-up PD model contributes to fostering critical self-reflection, as well as nurturing a sense of ownership and autonomy among teachers as they shape their professional growth.</i>
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INTRODUCTION

Professional development (PD) plays a core role in the careers of all successful language education practitioners. Teachers are expected to develop their knowledge and understanding of pedagogy thereby enhancing their practical classroom skills and acquiring new skills through

workplace learning and insights from research (Farrell, 2020). The success of education largely hinges on teacher quality. Consequently, the key role of PD is widely recognized and is intertwined with the shifting needs of students in an increasing diverse range of learning settings and teachers' adaptability (McChesney & Aldridge, 2018; Sadeghi & Richards, 2021). Even though teachers have traditionally been regarded as objects of study rather than as agents of change, today it is widely acknowledged that at the essence of teachers' PD lies the process of building awareness of their own beliefs, knowledge, and practices to self-evaluate for improved teaching (Cirocki & Widodo, 2019). In this context, it is worth noting that when practitioners initiate their own PD, it is likely that the learning will be autonomous, not prescribed by others (Stefani & Elton, 2002). Over time, this self-driven approach may foster the development of a growth mindset in their teaching practices (Ozer & Popp, 2022). When teachers engage with evidence-based reflective practice, then they become even better teachers (Cirocki & Farrell, 2019; Farrell, 2020).

It is also safe to say that there is a bandwagon effect in the field of English language teaching with more and more teachers across the globe engaging in some reflection today (Cirocki & Widodo, 2019; Houde, 2022; Karakaş & Yükselir, 2021; Nguyen, 2017; Yükselir & Korucu-Kış, 2023). Given the fact that not all forms of reflection lead to improved teaching, the teachers and researchers in this study did not solely rely on their perceptions and memory when deciding what to focus on to improve their teaching. Instead, they based their reflections largely on data they had systematically collected, using this evidence to make informed decisions about their teaching. By engaging in evidence-based critical self-reflection and collaborative reflection, the participants attempted to form an opinion as to how they believed they could provide the best learning experience for their students. Indeed, teachers should be reflective practitioners (Rutten, 2021).

This systematic and intentional study was conducted using the teachers' practice as a research site, based on their self-reflection and co-reflection. Using collaborative inquiry as a means of enhancing knowledge creation and sharing within the group of practitioners, this study aims to contribute to the discussions centered around both the collaborative and individual development of EFL teachers (Cochran-Smith & Donnell, 2006). The aim of this study is to explore how two EFL teachers' collaborative engagement with researchers contributes to their reflective practice and professional growth over a ten-week period. In other words, through a dialogic approach to reflection (Walsh & Mann, 2015), and evidence-based decision-making, it examines how the teachers' perceptions of their professional growth evolve over the course of their self-initiated PD journeys.

Language teachers' PD

While the literature on language teachers' PD has shown that it can significantly enhance teacher effectiveness and student learning, the extent to which PD arises from teachers' own initiative is not abundantly clear. It is worth noting that PD is likely to be more relevant and effective when teachers initiate it based on evidence collected from their actual classroom practice and when they share their reflections with peers and mentors through group discussions.

There is a growing interest in language teachers' PD, as evidenced by the literature on teachers' PD practices. Numerous studies indicate that PD is typically initiated by school administrations, with teachers often regarded as passive recipients of training (Ozer, 2020; Ozer & Popp, 2022; Sadeghi & Richards, 2021). Regarding this, a considerable number of studies regard PD as a top-down process and portray it as an undesirable obligation imposed by school administrations and delivered by experts from outside the school with little knowledge of the school's specific teacher profile (Cirocki & Farrell, 2019; Farrell, 2019b; Ozer & Popp, 2022). Moreover, PD may even be unresponsive to teachers' needs or to the special requirements of the context, thus overly prescriptive (Cirocki & Farrell, 2019; Macias, 2017; McChesney & Aldridge, 2018). Many language schools are now more cognizant of the pivotal role that teacher-led PD plays in fostering a positive school culture. However, many schools still limit it to in-service training events and workshops prescribed by the administration (Cirocki & Farrell, 2019; Macias, 2017; Ozer & Popp, 2022). Contrary to this practice, teachers should indeed be afforded more opportunities to take charge of their own PD (McChesney & Aldridge, 2018). To address this, a collegial setting is necessary, where teachers can exchange best practices and expertise with their peers, thereby improving their teaching skills (Clement & Vandenberghe, 2000; Murray, 2021).

Collaborative PD is another constructive form that has been echoed by many researchers recently (Houde, 2022). For example, Aslan et al. (2022) investigated the collaborative engagement of in-service English language teachers in PD through video-enhanced observation of a sample of eight secondary school teachers. They found that collaborative engagement in reflexive practice significantly contributed to the PD of EFL teachers, as evidenced by noticeable changes in their beliefs about reflexivity and attitudes towards collaboration. Particularly when informed by evidence from the classroom, PD assists teachers in creating and expanding new professional knowledge through group discussion and joint practice development (Mann et al., 2020). Similarly, Diery et al. (2020) emphasized the relationship between changes in teachers' perceptions of their own teaching and their engagement in systematic reflective inquiry. Their findings indicate that teachers are more motivated to learn from evidence-based practices, discussions, and collaborations and to identify directions for their future teaching.

Language teachers' reflective practice

Reflective practice requires language teachers to commit to the role of a reflective practitioner, making informed decisions to improve professionally based on systematically gathered evidence (Farrell, 2015, 2019a; Walsh & Mann, 2015). Therefore, Farrell and Macapinlac (2021) assert that a teacher should equip themselves with reflection, reflective practice, and critical reflection as a lifelong endeavor.

A considerable number of studies appertaining to reflective practice have focused on issues such as how it should be implemented and methods to encourage reflective practice (Korucu-Kış & Yükselir, 2021; Walsh & Mann, 2015). Some of these studies have explored teacher roles and beliefs (Farrell, 2011; Farrell & Kennedy, 2019; Yoshihara et al., 2020), while others have investigated the impact of reflective practice on teaching improvement (Nguyen, 2017; Rahimi & Weisi, 2018) and student learning (Marden & Herrington, 2022).

The literature increasingly shows a trend towards collaborative communities (Godínez Martínez, 2022; Marden & Herrington, 2022), a practice that involves reflective practitioners coming together through joint engagement with the purpose of achieving some sort of transformation for the common good of the group at the school (Cirocki & Farrell, 2019). Mede (2010) conducted a study to explore the effects of collaborative reflection on two English language teachers, using observers' field notes, electronic journals, and notes from the teachers' dialogues to collect data. She found that collaborative reflection helped the participants improve their teaching. Similarly, Godínez Martínez (2022) reports on language education practitioners' journeys in advancing their understanding of their own teaching through self- and co-reflection over a period of 22 months. The study found that collaborative reflective practice provides early-, mid- and late-career teachers with opportunities to work together and address common problems. Thus, it involves a critical and systematic inquiry as a group into shared experiences and meanings.

Although a large number of benefits are attributed to reflective practice, a review of the literature has revealed that in the English language teaching field, few studies have investigated the impact of EFL teachers' systematic reflection on practice based on evidence-based inquiry (Farrell & Kennedy, 2019; Walsh & Mann, 2015). Yuan et al. (2022) drew attention to the use of video-based reflective practice amongst pre-service EFL teachers, which provided a collective context for the participants to critically evaluate their practice. Mann et al. (2020) found that language choice matters, as teachers were more willing to engage in reflection in their first language. Therefore, in the current study, the researchers encouraged teachers to reflect in Turkish. Moreover, it was found that teachers who engaged in evidence-based reflective practice were more likely to align their classroom practices with their beliefs about teaching. Tien (2020) compared 18 early-career and 8 mid-career EFL teachers to examine the efficacy of reflective practices, which included lesson plan evaluation, peer observation, peer feedback and self-reflection. The study concluded both groups of teachers viewed peer observation and peer feedback as beneficial to their professional growth. In this context, the rationale for this study is rooted in the dialogic reflection between teachers and researchers. This reflection aims to enhance the professional growth journey of teachers through mentorship provided by the researchers, and through evidence gathered from classroom teaching by the teachers themselves.

Conceptual framework

An underlying motive for using a self-initiated approach to teachers' PD was the understanding that reflective practice fosters a bottom-up form of PD and thereby empowers teachers by creating opportunities for identifying areas for their own development (Farrell, 2019a). We therefore hypothesized that when PD is initiated by the teachers themselves, as this would give them the main responsibility, they would delve into their beliefs and compare them to their actual classroom practices.

Farrell (2019a) offers six principles to indicate the depth of reflection, and in this study, two in particular were utilized to provide a conceptual basis for the study. That is, reflective practice should be evidence-based and should involve dialogue. Farrell (2019a), Mann and Walsh (2017)

and Walsh and Mann (2015) argue that teachers should perpetually reshape their understanding of teaching and learning and they are more motivated to do so when they utilize the evidence from their own context and experiences. Like Farrell (2019a), Walsh and Mann (2015) suggest that teaching is difficult in nature and teachers need some kind of evidence to be able to reflect successfully because evidence-based decision-making is key to good practice.

The second principle of Farrell (2019a) on which this study relies is the inclusion of dialogue for reflection. Despite the importance of collaborative aspects in reflective practice, it is often mistakenly viewed solely an individual process (Walsh & Mann, 2015). Engaging in dialogue for reflection enables clarification and questioning that may not be possible for teachers who only engage in self-reflection (Mann & Walsh, 2017). The collaborative process of dialogic inquiry assists teachers in critically reflecting on their practice. This process bridges the gap between theory and practice, and helps teachers shape their future teaching practice (Hennessy et al., 2011; Kumaravadivelu, 2012). Walsh and Mann (2015) also emphasize one main strength of teachers' dialogue: gaining experience from others in addition to their own. With teacher-teacher and teacher-researcher collaboration in transformative professional learning, as Bugra and Wyatt (2021) suggest, there is a potential for practitioners to facilitate self- and collaborative reflection on their own teaching.

Considering the limited number of evidence-based PD studies conducted in the field of language teaching, the present study adopts a collaborative view towards EFL teachers' PD experiences through reflection and dialogue with the self, peers, and researchers. To this end, this case study poses the following research question:

How do the teachers describe their PD experiences through reflection and dialogue mediated by teacher-researcher collaboration?

METHODOLOGY

Undertaken in a private school context, this case study provides in-depth insights into two language teachers' PD journeys. The primary reason for using a qualitative case study was to offer a detailed description and analysis of a relatively bounded system, namely, two private school EFL teachers' inquiry into their self-initiated, bottom-up PD journeys. Yin (2009) aptly defines a case study as 'an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context' (p. 28). In keeping with this definition, the researchers in the present study conducted a meticulous investigation of the case of the two teachers through an in-depth analysis that utilized multiple sources of data within the real-life context of their school setting. Therefore, a qualitative single-case study design was employed to delve into the insights in-service EFL teachers have about the nature of their self-initiated PD through evidence-based reflective practice. The study enabled the researchers to collect as much information as possible through regular engagement with the participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). More specifically, this study investigates and analyzes the PD of EFL teachers over a 10-week period, focusing on the phenomenon within its real-life context. As case studies typically utilize multiple data sources to provide a comprehensive analysis, the authors

collected data through various means, including classroom observations, oral and written interviews, and weekly group meetings. The teachers adopted a bottom-up approach to enhance their professional growth, an approach driven by their own needs and interests. This meant they typically engaged in voluntary PD that was relevant to their needs. The study participants also engaged in weekly collaborative discussions facilitated by two researchers. These discussions aimed to reflect upon and refine their teaching practices. The phenomenon under investigation centers around these teachers' efforts to make meaning of their case and the impact of their collaborative approach on their teaching practices.

Participant characteristics

The participants of this study were purposefully selected because they had previously participated in multiple-session PD seminars as part of the Teachers' Academy. This program allowed English language teachers to voluntarily engage in PD seminars and online discussions. The Academy followed a top-down and trainer-led approach, offering one-shot activities delivered by teacher trainers. The Teachers' Academy, which ran from 2019 to 2022, comprised five modules. Each module lasted anywhere from four to twelve weeks. The Academy, which served as the participant pool for the current study, had previously provided one-size-fits-all trainer-led PD sessions. Therefore, the primary reason for mentioning the Academy in the context of this study was to document the participants' prior involvement in PD and their voluntary recruitment for the current study. In doing so, the aim was to provide a more comprehensive portrayal of the participants, as this is a qualitative study. Participation in the Academy was on a voluntary basis, and it was open to teachers from all school levels. In the Academy, quite a few teachers who were teaching English at private and state schools showed a willingness to better themselves as teachers. The Teachers' Academy was not designed as part of this research. Instead, it was initiated and organized by the Ministry of National Education in a small city in southern Turkey. The authors of this study conducted some training sessions within the Academy. Therefore, the research team thought that the participants of the Academy would provide a suitable pool from which to recruit English language teachers. These teachers were willing to pursue their PD independently following their involvement with the Academy. Apart from serving as the participant pool prior to the commencement of the current research, the Teachers' Academy did not play any role in the implementation of this study. Two female English teachers at a private school from a small city in southern Turkey volunteered for the study. Both teachers were graduates of English language teaching programs and were teaching several groups at the same school, which provides primary education. In order to ensure anonymity, pseudonyms have been used. Ceylan, a mid-career teacher with 15 years of teaching experience, was teaching students from grades 5 through 8. In contrast, Oya, an early-career teacher with two years of teaching experience, was teaching grades 4 and 5. In addition to the participating teachers, the authors of this study, both educators and researchers, also participated in the study as critical colleagues. They engaged in the teachers' reflections as mentors.

Data collection

Ethics approval to conduct the study was obtained from the Scientific Research Ethics Committee at a state university in the city where the study was undertaken (E-signed Number: E-59754799-050.99-83485). The participants provided written informed consent to participate in this study. The data collection was conducted during the 2022–2023 academic year.

The present study spanned a period of ten weeks, constituting prolonged engagement. The technique of triangulation was also utilized to ensure the credibility of the findings. During data triangulation, the evidence collected through written and oral reflections, self- and peer observations, and weekly group meetings was cross-checked.

Each week, the teachers carefully planned their lessons, and then monitored and analyzed their teaching by breaking down each class. As a result of deep reflection, they tried to identify any weaknesses they felt they had in their teaching performance. During or after each week's assignment they reflected on their practice using the evidence-based approach (Farrell, 2019a, 2019b). To make informed decisions, the teachers systematically obtained data. While any form of data can be useful (Farrell, 2019b), Walsh and Mann (2015) put emphasis on the merit of practitioners' use of recorded data and transcripts for the purposes of PD and learning. This sort of systematically collected data can take the form of feedback from a colleague, recording of a teaching session, and peer observation among others (Mann & Walsh, 2017; Walsh & Mann, 2015). Farrell (2019a) recommends the use of classroom observation with video and audio evidence and group discussion. Accordingly, the teachers recorded their classes and listened to them repeatedly to observe any progress they made. For example, they sometimes calculated teacher talking time and student talking time and evaluated how much time in a single class is allocated to support students who do not want to communicate verbally. They continuously asked themselves how their previous lesson went, but it was not their assumptions and beliefs they only relied on; it was instead a sort of informed decision preceded by systematically gathered data about their classroom practices. The teachers met every week in online video-conference meetings, where they reflected on their practices and later planned the actions they would take, while the researchers acted as mentors and did not intervene in the teachers' self-exploration.

The researchers collaborated with the teachers, guiding them to focus on specific aspects of their teaching beliefs and practices. In doing so, they helped the teachers discover their reflexive self within the teaching profession. More specifically, whenever the conversation deviated from the subject during the weekly group meetings, the researchers directed it back to focus on the specific aspects of the reflected experience of practice. The teacher-led PD plan, which spanned ten weeks was as follows:

Table 1
Teachers' ten-week self-initiated PD structure, 2022–2023 academic year

Week	PD content	Data collection
1	Introduction to research, getting to know each other	Online warm-up meeting
2	Teacher-talking time and student-talking time	Written reflection, weekly group meeting
3	Encouraging student participation	Written reflection, weekly group meeting
4	Fostering a high level of enthusiasm in the classroom learning environment	Self-observation, written reflection, weekly group meeting
5	Using face-to-face and online peer correction	Peer observation, oral reflection, weekly group meeting
6	Using face-to-face and online peer correction	Peer observation, oral reflection, weekly group meeting
7	Supporting students who do not want to communicate verbally	Oral reflection, weekly group meeting
8	Game-based learning and group work in the classroom	Oral reflection, weekly group meeting
9	Game-based learning and group work in the classroom	Oral reflection, weekly group meeting
10	Overall evaluation	Written reflection, weekly group meeting

All in all, data were collected through reflective practice over a ten-week period mostly in the form of written and oral reflections, weekly group meetings, peer to peer observations with audio evidence and online group meeting recordings. Table 2 gives information about the data collection methods and data in numbers.

Table 2
Summary of the data

Data collection method	Data in numbers (Ceylan)	Data in numbers (Oya)
Weekly group meeting	10 sessions, 386 minutes	10 sessions, 386 minutes
Written reflection	3 submissions	3 submissions
Oral reflection	5 submissions, 28 minutes	5 submissions, 24 minutes
Self-observation	1 recording, 29 minutes	1 recording, 38 minutes
Peer observation	2 recordings, 35 minutes	2 recordings, 25 minutes

Written and oral reflections

Each week, both teachers used written and/or oral reflection-on-action to examine the success of their teaching performance and subsequently improve it (Farrell, 2019a). For written reflections, they wrote a reflection in Turkish either on word-processing software or via email right after their classes had ended.

Oral reflections emerged right after their classes or during video conference meetings. As in the case of video conference meetings, the teachers expressed their thoughts orally in real-time as the sessions were recorded and in other cases, they audio recorded their post-teaching reflections and shared them with the research team. A total of 10 video conference meetings were conducted, one of which took place before any teaching began with the purpose of collecting basic information about the participants, and the rest of the interviews were post-assignment reflection interviews. These semi-structured interviews enabled inquiry into

questions such as “What do teachers know and not know about their teaching?”, “What do they value and feel about the roles of their learners and of their own?” “What evidence do the participants have about their perceptions and teaching practice?”, “How do their actions match up with their goals?”, “What evidence should they systematically gather to be able to make informed decisions about their teaching?”, and “What areas should they focus on to improve their teaching?”. The final online interview aimed at participants’ overall reflections on the progress they achieved throughout their PD journeys. Each interview lasted from 15 to 38 minutes.

While written and oral reflections often took the form of self-reflection, the participants sometimes used collaborative reflection, that is, they helped each other reflect on her teaching in the form of teacher reflection group (Farrell, 2019b). The format for both types of reflections was open-ended and semi-structured regarding what they could focus on and state. The research team did not provide specific questions to the teachers but routinely encouraged them to share their thoughts freely based on evidence they had gathered about their practice.

Classroom observation

The teachers wanted to engage in peer observation to pave the way for conscious reflection to identify what changes their teaching had undergone and what actions typified their teaching. Classroom observation took two different forms. First, each teacher recorded her own voice during class time and reviewed the recording multiple times to reflect on critical incidents and to identify areas for improvement. She documented these reflections either by recording her voice or writing in a Word document, which was then shared with the researchers. Second, each teacher observed her peer’s entire lesson in the classroom, taking real-time notes on paper. the two teachers met after classes to exchange feedback on their teaching. Prior to the peer observation, the teachers discussed what would be observed, and during the session they took notes to support their evaluations. They shared feedback through dialogue and discussion, and this allowed them to experience mutual understanding, emotional support, new ways of thinking, problem-solving skills, a sense of community and ultimately improved teaching skills (Farrell, 2019a).

The researchers welcomed teachers’ suggestions for observing their peers as this practice usually acts as a catalyst for building collective efficacy, which is a term indicating the constructive role of a group’s shared beliefs and actions in generating the desired results (Bandura, 2000).

Data analysis

We adopted Braun and Clarke’s (2021, 2022) approach to reflexive thematic analysis. To enhance the trustworthiness of the interpreted data, it underwent collaborative reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013) by both researchers. Reflexive thematic analysis bases the data analysis on the researchers’ ‘reflexive engagement with theory, data and interpretation’ (Braun & Clarke, 2021, p. 3), which the authors believed was suitable for the scope of this study. Uştuk and Çomoğlu (2021) mention about the concept of reflexivity as “the state of becoming and constant change in the process of teacher development referring

to the bidirectional relationship between the reflecting teacher and the reflected experience or practice" (p. 261).

The findings are distinctive in that the researchers' positionality, which is embracing researchers' subjectivity for setting up trustworthiness (Saldaña & Omasta, 2016), is integral to how informed decisions were made reflexively through interaction with the teachers. According to Saldaña and Omasta (2016), a researcher's subjectivity is 'virtually unavoidable' in qualitative research (p. 66). Drawing on Braun and Clarke's (2022) approach to thematic analysis, the researchers' subjectivity in this study is reflexively engaged with and therefore considered an asset in interpreting the meanings stemming from the qualitative data. That is to say, the researchers interacted with the teachers for an extended period throughout the study, so it is not an easy task to avoid subjectivity while interpreting the data. However, the researchers spent a significant amount of time with the teachers, getting to know them very well. Therefore, subjectivity is also believed to positively influence the researchers' understanding and interpretation of the data. Taking all of these into consideration, attempts were made to control the researcher's subjectivity through participant validation of the analysis and reflexivity. Regarding this, Braun and Clarke (2021) stated that "your subjectivity is essential to processes of reflexive thematic analysis (TA); it is the fuel that drives the engine, and reflexive TA doesn't happen without it" (p. 56).

The researchers worked collectively with the teachers, mentoring them over a period of ten weeks, in an attempt to help them focus on selective aspects of their teaching beliefs and practices to empower them. While analyzing the data, the researchers' reflexivity played an important role in producing insightful revelations. Scaffolded mentoring by the researchers was the theoretical orientation of this study, recognizing the importance of reflection and contextualized support in fostering teacher growth.

In our data analysis, we adopted a hybrid approach. Initially, the researchers coded and recoded the data to generate the initial themes and attempted to familiarize it to understand and interpret the data rather than reaching a consensus (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Each researcher independently read and re-read the data to identify emerging themes. Dual processes to find the themes and sub-themes, immersion and in-depth engagement and giving some break made the analysis processes possible (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Subsequently, the researchers discussed the overarching themes with the participant teachers and collaboratively identified the sub-themes emerging from the data through inductive coding. Additionally, we sought feedback on the themes and sub-themes from an external auditor, a senior professor in teacher education with expertise in reflective practice and qualitative research.

In addition, member-checking was used for clarification and confirmability, allowing the respondents to validate their responses, where 'participants are asked to input on whether an analysis faithfully or fairly represents their experience' and 'to reflect on the analysis to offer additional insights and generate further data on the topic at hand (Braun & Clarke, 2023, p. 4). The teachers were free to revise or remove any part of their oral or written reflection content from the study. Through participant validation of analysis, we also intended to give the participant teachers right and power to provide supplementary insights into their responses (Braun & Clarke, 2023).

RESULTS

The researchers took on the role of a facilitator who assisted the teachers in transforming their teaching based on the classroom evidence they have collected. The findings indicate two main themes together with the sub-themes: *collaboration* and *complementary components of PD*.

Collaboration

The teachers indicated that they benefited a lot from the collaborative aspects of the current PD project, that is, engaging a critical friend for feedback and support and teacher-researcher collaboration to develop a more systematic approach to self-observation.

Engaging a critical friend for feedback and support. Over the course of ten weeks, the participants and researchers developed a close relationship, collaborating on nearly all issues in the classes and their PD journey. The teachers in the study viewed having a critical colleague as a valuable tool for their PD, as it provides them with personalized feedback and the opportunity to share expertise and good practices. Ceylan stated, *“It is not always easy to reflect on your teaching, having a peer to work with has made it more targeted and critical.”* (Oral reflection on Week 6). The teachers monitored the number of students in their classes, who willingly participated or chose not to participate and noted how often they collaborated. Then, at the end of the week, a virtual meeting with the teachers was held to discuss reflexively what happened in their classrooms. The participants reflected on their practices and stated that peer collaboration was an effective tool to encourage class participation. This is clearly seen in their reflections. For example, Ceylan stated:

Although I have been teaching for almost 14 years, I learned a lot from Oya’s classes. Her attitude towards the students is rewarding and nice, and her teaching style in the class is remarkable. However, it is also worth mentioning that Oya sometimes struggled with classroom management. [...]. Some students were quite impatient and often interrupted their classmates. [Oral reflection on Week 5]

Frankly, peer understanding and relationship especially in the same school is of vital importance in supporting the PD journey. The schools should also give great emphasis to this issue. [Oral reflection on Week 6]

The content of the weekly group meetings was created using the evidence that the teachers had collected throughout each week. By doing so, it was ensured that teachers' reflections and the decisions they made were based on evidence rather than merely their perceived beliefs. For example, the teachers and researchers interpreted the data teachers had collected on how their students worked collectively. Ceylan's remarks implied that through collective reflection with their peers, they might influence each other, a result stemming from collaboration with the critical friend. On this specific issue, Oya expressed similar opinions. She also believes that peer collaboration is important in facilitating the exchange of expertise and made the following remarks:

I believe that building a sound relationship with your peers helps teachers attain new objectives and deal with challenges. In this PD journey, under the guidance of researchers, I had the opportunity to observe Ceylan's classes, her students and her teaching style and learned a lot from her classes. I compared myself with her and her teaching attitude. In fact, I would like to thank her in this reflection for her endless help to my teaching career. [Oral reflection on Week 6]

In the same vein, Oya mentioned peer collaboration in a positive way, which reportedly enhances her teaching style and resilience.

Teacher-researcher collaboration to develop a more systematic approach to self-observation. The findings of the current study also show that the teachers benefited from the researchers as they worked with the teachers in a non-hierarchical way. This also shows that providing constructive feedback had a good effect on the teachers' career and style. For instance, regarding a self-monitoring task following a weekly online group meeting, Ceylan stated:

Under your [researchers'] guidance, I tried to use peer correction in my vocabulary class. I wrote the word 'FUTURE' on the board and asked the students to write sentences using this specific word. Subsequently, I wrote the students' words and sentences on the board. Initially, only the self-confident students were so eager to use peer correction. However, after a few minutes, almost all students began to help their classmates. I observed that when I am patient, my students start to help each other, so they use peer correction naturally. [Weekly group meeting on Week 8]

These remarks show that giving providing students with timely opportunities during class can simplify the learning process and enhance student motivation. This is evident in Ceylan's class, where peer correction was employed. Similarly, Oya found that she could better understand her students, especially after using the peer correction technique to encourage self-observation, a strategy that the teachers and researchers collectively and purposefully decided:

This two-hour class time greatly enhanced my understanding of my students. I also want to express that the feedback from the researchers has improved my ability to understand and empathize with my students. As we jointly decided to observe and encourage peer correction in class, I noticed that most students seemed to enjoy the class more. I had not anticipated that the peer correction activity would unite all the students. More surprisingly, even typically quiet students were eager to participate in the class activity. This realization was significant to me. [Oral reflection on Week 9]

In her overall evaluation of this PD project, Oya highlighted the supportive role of collaboration between teachers and researchers in making teachers' self-observation more systematic. She said:

Participating in this study and providing my honest opinions has been a unique experience. I looked forward to meeting online with the researchers and Ceylan, whose feedback, I believe, enhanced my understanding of my classes. This journey helped me

get to know myself as well. I can say that collaboration in general has been beneficial and supportive in every aspect of my professional growth. [Written reflection on Week 10]

During weekly group meetings, we provided guidance and feedback to the teachers in a fashion in which they reflected on their practices with foresight to be able to make informed rather than routine decisions.

Complementary components of PD

The findings from two English teachers' reflections indicated that teachers are open to each training task for their PD in their own teaching career. Our analysis of the data yielded two sub-themes about the second main theme.

Critical self-reflection as a means to identify areas of improvement. One of the sub-themes that emerged from the data is teachers' critical self-reflection. The activities and monitoring methods that the teachers and researchers decided upon together assisted the teachers in collecting evidence regarding their teaching practices and in critically evaluating themselves. In the present study, Ceylan noted, "the activities and reflections for each meeting, which enable us to observe our own teaching style, contribute to knowing ourselves better and add to the quality of our PD journey" [Weekly group meeting on Week 8]. This statement clearly shows that the participant monitors weaknesses and strengths in the classroom and deduces the right lessons for her future teaching activities. During one of the online meetings, it was decided that teachers would observe each other's classes and take notes where their peer and/or she herself was struggling. In one such recording of oral reflection, Ceylan, the mid-career teacher, spoke about what she observed in Oya's classes:

During my observation of my peer's classroom, I noticed that my colleague is struggling to engage students in tasks. [...] Unfortunately, some students intentionally or unintentionally disrupt the class and exhibit unruly attitudes towards their classmates. They [these behaviors] should not be ignored. I sometimes encounter similar issues in my own classes and know how difficult those might be. I believe there are alternative ways for us to approach this situation. [Written reflection on the peer observation on Week 5]

Upon this remark, Oya also developed a pedagogical lesson from observation of her own teaching, "It is indeed true that I experience challenges in managing such situations from time to time" and she continued: "through this feedback, I can see myself objectively and more critically, [...] I can try to give those students more responsibility in group work, for example [Written reflection on the peer observation on Week 5].

The researchers encouraged teachers to keep a record of their classes to assess the balance between teacher-talking time and student-talking time. They hoped this would enable the teachers to evaluate student participation and, if necessary, find ways to encourage it. In line with this, other excerpts taken from teacher participants indicate that teachers are often well

aware of their classroom attitudes towards students, meaning they are critical of their teaching practices. For instance, Ceylan, using a critical lens, stated in her written reflections, "*I wish I could call on Ahmet [her student] and gave him the chance to answer the questions in the target activity.* Talking about not noticing her student's raised hand to answer during the class, she said, "*I think he is discouraged a little bit in front of his classmates*". [Written reflection on Week 3]. Oya also made the following critical remarks:

Throughout our meetings, I realized that while teaching, I sometimes rush past the students. Although I make eye contact and listen to them carefully, I need to better convey my interest and attentiveness to their feelings and responses. Sometimes, I overlook this aspect. I need to be more mindful of this, as I believe this affects my students' confidence in my classes. [Written reflection on Week 4]

The participant felt herself not sufficiently capable of enabling shy students to interact with their peers and the teacher for fear of keeping up with the syllabus.

Taking ownership of lifelong professional development. The participants viewed PD as a component of lifelong learning. They emphasized the need for teachers to strengthen their sense of ownership and autonomy in pursuing their professional growth. This perspective aligns with Ceylan's criticism, who did not approve the belief held by some teachers that PD should be provided solely by the school:

Some teachers wrongly believe that they have reached their full potential, they have been teaching for a long time and thus they know everything. [They think that] there is no need to get training or do any other thing for my teaching career. I, on the other hand, consider that as the technology is getting more advanced, teachers are supposed to improve themselves constantly and adapt to new and changing technology. In parallel with this, learners' needs are also changing, so teachers are expected to be initiative and grasp any potential to improve themselves. [Written reflection on Week 10]

In relation to this, Oya stated, "*being a teacher is different from any other profession, in that it goes on until the end of life. Thus, the teaching profession is like mankind; it is born, raised and dies at the end*". [Written reflection on Week 10]. She also highlighted the connection between teachers taking charge of their PD and the effectiveness of their teaching. She stated, "*For effective teachers, the need for professional development typically comes from within themselves*". [Oral reflection on peer observation on Week 6]. The participants implicitly express their evolving perspective on PD. They believe that teachers should play an active role in their professional growth, consistently identifying areas for improvement. Additionally, they advocate for teachers to be autonomous in decision-making, acknowledging that PD is a lifelong journey.

DISCUSSION

This case study explored two English language teachers' engagement in self-initiated PD journey, which is facilitated by self- and collaborative reflective practices. Moreover, the teachers, in collaboration with the academics, tried actively and systematically to identify and respond to the problems of teaching practices. Given the importance of lifelong PD and transformative practices in teachers' careers, the present study reports on two main themes and additional sub-themes that are potentially useful in teachers' successful pursuit of their careers. These two themes are *collaboration* and *complementary components of PD*.

The potential use of dialogic reflection is known to be effective in teacher education (Walsh & Mann, 2015). From this perspective, the value of dialogue with peers in teacher education, as both Ceylan and Oya stated in their oral reflection on Week 5 and 6 respectively, draws the researchers' attention. This forms one of the main themes of the current study. The findings reveal that the participant teachers expected to have successful PD experiences with the help of researchers who were not in a hierarchical position. This seems important for teachers to give their true feelings and create a supportive environment, promoting mutual understanding in the PD journey (Godínez Martínez, 2022). As previously stated, one of the main purposes of this current study is to provide a comprehensive view of teachers' PD experiences and draw attention to the teacher-researcher mediated PD journey. In this journey, the teachers were constantly encouraged to reflect on a specific aspect of their practices based on evidence rather than their usual reflection on their teaching. For example, Oya made a comment on this through a written reflection on Week 4. By examining the data, she collected in her classes, she gradually realized the difference between how she taught and how she perceived she was teaching.

The findings notably indicate that the teachers' collaboration with their peers and the researchers created space for their PD journey. In her written reflection on Week 10, Oya suggested that the shared experiences with her colleague and the researchers contributed to her professional motivation and self-understanding as a teacher. This is also supported by the findings of Banegas et al. (2013) and similar research to the present study (Werler et al., 2021). This collaboration opens an important window for teacher education, that is, that collaborative reflection and self-reflection with the support of researchers enhance lifelong learning (Godínez Martínez, 2022). It also enables teachers to become critical thinkers (Dikilitaş & Comoglu, 2022; Marden & Herrington, 2022) and reflective practitioners (Farrell, 2015, 2019a) through building an intimate relationship for student interaction as well.

Based on the findings of the study, the second main theme is the complementary components of PD, with critical self-reflection to identify areas of improvement and taking ownership of lifelong professional development as sub-themes. Our findings affirm previous studies regarding the supportive role of self-reflection in PD (Fox et al., 2019; Mann & Walsh, 2013). This study also extends the findings of previous studies in that teacher-researcher collaboration reportedly helps teachers seek evidence of what works and does not work in their classes, which can be considered a form of reflective teaching. This collaboration has been perceived by teachers as effective in developing a more systematic approach to their self-observation. Based on the

findings, this point was effective for PD activities, as reported in weekly group meetings. The findings also show that self-reflection tools might help teachers become critically reflective practitioners, aiding in self-monitoring and their professional growth (Farrell, 2015, 2019a). Fox et al. (2019) argue that reflection enables teachers to self-monitor their professional growth. As stated, the research team guided the teachers with activities that the teachers and the researchers designed together during online group meetings, and asked the teachers to reflect critically. These tasks also indicate that teachers develop their cognitive stance on their PD journey and self-monitor their attitudes towards their students, peers, and teaching materials. Similarly, self-monitoring is a key component of promoting critical self-reflection in order to lead to positive outcomes in language education practitioners' PD (Cattaneo & Motta, 2021). Once again, it is safe to say that academic support fosters an atmosphere in which teachers feel confident in a non-judgmental environment. This environment encourages teachers to engage in critical self-reflection and express their self-awareness regarding their beliefs, identities, and teaching practices, as suggested by Farrell (2019a).

There is a huge body of studies on lifelong learning in European countries within the framework of teacher education, which also directs teachers to benefit from reflective tools in teacher education (Schleicher, 2012). In this current study, the teachers had the opportunity to reflect critically, which made them evaluate their classes objectively. During the weekly group meeting on Week 8, Ceylan emphasized the positive impact of critical self-reflection and systematic evaluation of her own teaching on her professional growth and knowing herself better. What is essential here is to create space for teachers' reflections (Dikilitaş & Comoglu, 2022) to have a critical stance and meaningful knowledge. Considered as lifelong learners on their journey, the teachers realized that collaboration both with their peers and academics (Godínez Martínez, 2022) made a huge contribution to their PD journey. In line with the findings in the literature, teachers who participate in meaningful collaboration and maintain collegial relationships for sustainable development tend to have a stronger sense of ownership over their professional growth (Bendtsen et al., 2022; Cirocki & Widodo, 2019; Ozer & Popp, 2022). This underscores the significance of being reflective practitioners.

CONCLUSION

There is no single answer to how teachers can motivate themselves to pursue their professional growth throughout their careers, but one thing is abundantly clear: critical self-reflection and collaborative reflective practice matter a great deal. Reflection that is not accompanied by modified practice, however, leads to minor changes. The present study yielded some notable findings about how foreign language teachers' self-initiated, teacher-researcher mediated reflective practices impacted their professional beliefs and practices.

First, four main sub-themes were common in both teachers' PD journeys, namely, engaging a critical friend for feedback and support, teacher-researcher collaboration to develop a more systematic approach to self-observation, critical self-reflection as a means to identify areas of improvement, and taking ownership of lifelong professional development. Even though these themes largely concurred with the findings of previous studies, it was interesting to see how

motivating collaborative reflective practice was for both early-career and mid-career EFL teachers. This evidence-based approach to reflective practice seemed to help EFL teachers better compare their stated beliefs and attitudes to their actual classroom practices and that ultimately facilitates the development of informed decision-making skills. Meanwhile, both participants reported that group discussion in a non-judgmental environment helps teachers work together by responding to a shared problem collectively to achieve a common goal and helps ward off teachers' feeling of isolation. As a result of this study, we hope PD is regarded by school administrations and teachers less as a necessary evil and more as a collegial and collaborative developmental process the benefits of which can be easily noticed by the teachers in the specific local context.

THE AUTHORS

Ceyhun Yukselir is a professor of English language teaching (ELT) at the Department of English language and literature, Osmaniye Korkut Ata University, Türkiye. His research interests include teacher education, reflective teaching, learner autonomy, technology integration in EFL classes and applied linguistics with a focus on ELT.
ceyhunyukselir@gmail.com

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

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