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## Reflection and Collaboration: Barriers to Turkish ELT Teachers' Professional Learning \*\*\*

### Yansıtıcı Öğretim ve İşbirliği: Türkiye'deki İngilizce Öğretmenlerinin Mesleki Öğrenmesinin Önündeki Engeller

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#### ABSTRACT

*This pilot study explores the professional learning (PL) of English Language teaching (ELT) teachers in Turkey, how reflection and collaborative activity play a role in implementing change, and the factors affecting ELT teachers' pursuit of PL. Three ELT teachers were interviewed through narrative interviews, critical incidents and semi structured interviews. Two phrases stood out which encapsulate the different attitudes towards PL - 'I try no matter what' and 'I try if'. While one teacher seems to belong to the first category by showing a high level of motivation to pursue PL regardless of the circumstances, the other two teachers appear to belong to the second category by lacking motivation and feeling motivated only in certain circumstances. As the contexts the teachers were working in were found to affect the power they felt in themselves to bring change, providing individual and collective learning opportunities seems to be very critical for all teachers.*

**Keywords:** English language teachers, Professional learning, Reflective practice, Collaborative working

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**ÖZ**

*Bu pilot çalışma, Türkiye'deki İngiliz dili öğretmenlerinin (ELT) mesleki öğrenimini (PL) araştırmaktadır. Bu çalışmada özellikle de yansıtıcı öğretim ve işbirlikçi aktivitenin öğretmenlerin sınıf içi öğretimlerinin değişiminde nasıl bir rol oynadığına ve ELT öğretmenlerinin PL'lerini etkileyen faktörlere bakılmıştır. Üç İngilizce öğretmeni ile anlatı röportajı, kritik olaylar ve yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler yoluyla görüşülmüş ve PL'ye karşı farklı tutumlarını özetleyen iki ifade göze çarpmıştır; "ne olursa olsun denerim" ve "eğer olursa denersem". Bir öğretmen, koşullar ne olursa olsun PL'yi sürdürmek için yüksek düzeyde motivasyon göstererek birinci kategorideyken, diğer iki öğretmen motivasyon eksikliğinden ötürü ve yalnızca belirli durumlarda motive hissederek ikinci kategoriye oluşturmuştur. Öğretmenlerin çalıştıkları okul bağlarının, sınıf içi öğretimlerini değiştirebilmek için kendilerinde hissettikleri gücü etkilediği tespit edildiğinden, bireysel ve toplu öğrenme fırsatlarının sağlanması tüm öğretmenler için çok kritik görünmektedir.*

***Anahtar Sözcükler:** İngilizce öğretmenleri, Profesyonel öğrenme, Yansıtıcı uygulama, İşbirliği*

**INTRODUCTION**

This paper explores the professional learning (PL) of English Language teaching (ELT) teachers in Turkey. Specifically, it looks at how reflection and collaboration affect ELT teachers' motivation to implement change in their practice, and the factors affecting their engagement in those activities.

The quality of teachers reflects on the quality of an education system (McKinsey & Company, 2007). Therefore, nowadays, teachers are expected to become life-long learners by improving their practice and modelling the process of continuous learning for students (Burn, Mutton & Hagger, 2010). By prioritising steps to improve teachers' performance, countries expect to see improvements in students' learning outcomes as well (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2005).

The quality of teaching force in Turkey has been noted to be weak (Odabasi Cimer & Cimer, 2012). This could be remedied by a higher bar of entry requirements, a rigorous pre-service teacher education programme, and improved in-service teacher support (Gömlüksiz, 1998). However, as in Eret Orhan (2017), little attention is paid to teacher candidates' aptitude for teaching in Turkey, and entry requirements for programmes such as ELT, tend to be lower than other degree courses. Although, theoretical and

practical components are integrated to an extent (143 hours-32 hours respectively) in ELT departments, reflective and collaborative activities are not prioritised (Odabasi Cimer & Cimer, 2012). Tezgiden Cakcak (2015), for example, found that there was little attempt on ELT pre-service programmes to foster reflective practitioners. And Coskun and Daloglu (2010), carrying out a study to understand what fourth-year ELT students and university lecturers think about the ELT programme, reported that the teacher candidates did not believe they were provided with reflective opportunities, for example, to talk about their practicum experiences, or collaborative opportunities, for example, to receive from and give feedback to their peers. This may inhibit teacher candidates from gaining the habit of questioning the quality of their teaching, and learning from others (Hagger & McIntyre, 2006).

Additionally, because of the lack of feedback loop between universities and practice schools, although student teachers can practise teaching, their progress is not really tracked (Gungor, 2016). The quality of the vital relationship between trainee teachers and school-based mentors can be jeopardised, and, as in Eret Orhan (2017), student teachers can encounter negative attitudes and limited feedback, rather than the support they need. Moreover, the fact that student teachers often obtain little feedback may limit their ability to develop reflective skills including critical thinking, problem-solving and self-awareness (Gungor, 2016). As such, student teachers may fail to learn how to link the theories with their practices (Odabasi Cimer & Cimer, 2012), and how to develop their practice (Hagger & McIntyre, 2006). This may lead to feelings of being overloaded and exhausted, with teachers seeing themselves as technicians doing whatever they are told rather than professionals pursuing PL (Tokoz Goktepe, 2015). To avoid this and to compensate for the possible weaknesses in the selection process and training regimes in Turkiye, teachers should be encouraged to engage in in-service activities that promote effective reflection and collaboration (Tokoz Goktepe, 2015). However, the available PL opportunities for teachers in Turkiye tend to be more `traditional` in style and focus (Nergis, 2011), and teachers are not held accountable for pursuing PL, which results in engagement in PL being largely voluntary (Ozdemir, Bulbul & Acar, 2010). As such,

novice teachers may end up replicating the techniques they previously learnt at the pre-service stage, while more experienced teachers may plateau in their teaching career (Farrell, 2014).

Given that there are issues at the pre-service stage regarding the lack of collaboration among the stakeholders and the absence of the integration of reflection into pre-service programmes, and these affect the quality of the practicum, this paper focuses on in-service ELT teachers to explore the issues around reflection and collaboration, and the factors affecting ELT teachers' engagement in these activities within their PL. Although there is research highlighting the problems regarding the reflective and collaborative components at the pre-service stage (e.g. Eret Orhan, 2007; Gungor, 2016), less seems to be known about the in-service stage. In this paper, the authors show how in-service ELT teachers experience reflection and collaboration in relation to their PL, and whether or not these activities help them grow professionally, and why. Doing so will help to understand if there is a relationship between these two concepts in terms of how ELT teachers develop professionally, which seems not to have been researched previously. A thorough review of the relevant Turkish literature yielded no empirical research examining in-service teachers' engagement in reflective practice and collaborative working; therefore, this study will help to pioneer a new way of looking at teachers' PL in Turkiye. With this in mind, this paper addresses the following research questions:

1. How do ELT teachers in Turkiye experience reflective practice in their PL?
2. How do ELT teachers in Turkiye experience collaboration with their colleagues in their PL?
3. What are the factors that affect Turkish ELT teachers' engagement in reflective and collaborative PL activities?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Teacher Learning**

Schools can provide rich opportunities for teachers to engage in meaningful learning (Hagger & McIntyre, 2006), by creating an `expansive` learning environment and offering `wide-ranging and diverse opportunities to learn, in a culture that values and supports learning` (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2005, p.123). As learning occurs collectively through collaboration and individually through reflection, teachers need opportunities to benefit from both (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2005). Maximising learning opportunities, incentives and external support and building a climate where teachers feel encouraged for learning, valued and congruent seem, therefore, crucial for PL (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2005). Once this is established, teachers can pool their experiences, ideas and resources and feel encouraged to take risks and/or handle complicated issues (Hargreaves, 1997).

### *Teachers` Individual Learning*

Reflection receives considerable attention in the literature as it is a core element for learning and teaching. Dewey (1933) defines reflective thinking as `the kind of thinking that consists in turning a subject over in the mind and giving it serious and consecutive consideration` (p.3). As is suggested, reflection is a purposeful act starting with a problem, defining the problem, seeking and implementing solutions, and evaluating the results (Dewey, 1933). Since reflection includes going back and forth to shape future actions, it has an iterative structure with loopbacks (Prilla, Degeling & Hermann, 2012).

Reflection can be initiated at the individual level through teachers` trial and error and learning from their experiences (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2005), or at the multiple level through asking for feedback, sharing their knowledge and experimentation and opening their beliefs to critique (Prilla et al., 2012). Collaborative reflection, which requires engaging in making sense of the collective work through communication and coordination, helps teachers to learn more about themselves through other people, to

craft new knowledge from shared experiences (Prilla et al., 2012), and to cultivate reflection as a skill (Fazio, 2009). Regardless, reflection is a cognitive activity linked to the human capacity regarding individuals' ability to derive meanings from their experiences (Denton, 2011).

Schön's (1983) distinction between reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action helps to understand when reflection occurs; the former during an action and the latter after an action. And, Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle, encompassing reflection-on-action, explains how reflective learning occurs; through experiencing, reflecting, thinking and acting. Developing reflective teaching, however, is difficult as it is influenced by factors such as a lack of skills and experience, teachers' characteristics, limitations of the profession (time constraint, little autonomy, pressure), and school climate (Bishop, Brownell, Klingner, Leko & Galman, 2010). Moreover, it can cause tension by opening teachers to vulnerability; therefore, individual factors determine how to deal with such issues, either by embracing reflection or by avoiding it (Jaeger, 2013).

#### *Teachers' Collective Learning*

Reflective teaching might be an individual activity, yet others' involvement can facilitate reflection as in Fazio's (2009) study which shows that collaborative and communal reflection can help teachers to develop problem-solving and dialogical thinking skills, and to make change, when it happens in a supportive learning community.

Given that collaboration plays an important role in learning, learning to teach is no longer seen as an individual pursuit (Murugaiah, Azman, Thang & Krish, 2012). This draws attention to collaborative learning models, where teachers come together regularly to engage in planning, curriculum study and learning assessment (Servage, 2008) by eventually gaining the habit of 'sharing their work and critically examining practice with others as trusted members of the school community and always against the standards of excellence defined by the shared vision' (Zmuda, Kuklis & Klein, 2003, p.179).

The idea of situated learning seems important for effective and productive collaboration, as sharing the same workplace with familiar people helps teachers to gain a sense of belonging to a group where they feel comfortable to share and develop ideas (Murugaiah et al., 2012). Establishing a relationship grounded in mutual respect and trust (personal trust and professional trust) determines whether individuals depend on each other's ability and they speak truthfully and how much they contribute to the group (Wenger, 2000). The nature of work relations, therefore, affects the relationship among teachers, as, for example, teachers may feel discouraged to collaborate in competitive workplaces, or they may avoid interaction due to tension and anxiety in hierarchically grounded contexts (Roberts, 2006), all of which may result in insufficient learning levels. Therefore, the context within which collaborative models are embedded plays a major role in determining its success and effectiveness regarding PL (Roberts, 2006).

### **Professional Learning and Change**

PL adopts a bottom-up approach starting with teachers to decide what and how to learn, which makes their learning process more relevant to their needs and beliefs (Easton, 2008). For this, teachers need to move from being trained or developed to becoming change agents who continuously construct their knowledge and skills, and own their learning process (Easton, 2008). Teacher change and PL seem interrelated, and effective PL is expected to bring change to teachers' beliefs and practices and eventually to education systems (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002). Yet, change is difficult and complex. It is impacted by both contextual factors and individual factors, and the interplay between these two dimensions determines the efficacy of teacher learning (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2005).

There is a great deal of empirical research that explores how individual and contextual factors affect change. For example, King's (2016) study highlights the importance of providing teachers with a supportive environment to enable them to implement and sustain change. And, Smith (2012) draws attention to the importance of how teachers utilize the context they work in, rather than the characteristics of those contexts, as

teachers may still not change in educative school environments. This highlights the equally important role of individual dispositions in change (Smith, 2012), as there is a dynamic interplay between individual capacities and educational settings (Biesta & Tedder, 2007).

Self-efficacy, i.e. individuals' beliefs in their power to bring change, helps to explain individuals' engagement in change, their motivation throughout the change process and how they react when faced difficulties (Bandura, 2006). Low self-efficacy is associated with a lack of motivation therefore individuals give up easily in the face of obstacles, while high self-efficacy is associated with high level of motivation, where difficulties are seen as surmountable (Bandura, 2006).

Given that the limitations of the entry requirements (Eret Orhan, 2017) and pre-service training (Odabasi Cimer & Cimer, 2012) have been researched in Turkiye, this study focuses on in-service PL and the role reflection and collaboration in it, about which it seems less is known. As the literature shows, reflection and collaborative activity can help teachers to increase the quality of instruction yet occur only when required individual traits are in place together with a supportive environment. Therefore, this study aims to explore how ELT teachers experience these activities, and how much control they feel they have over their PL. The data will provide insights into how the interplay between contextual and individual factors influence ELT teachers' PL experiences, and how reflection and collaborative activity are interrelated regarding ELT teachers' growth, all of which will shed light on the existing problems and give ideas about how things can be developed.

## **METHOD**

This study adopts a qualitative approach, more specifically a multiple case study design, to understand ELT teachers' subjective experiences of PL and this paper presents the findings from a pilot study. Convenience sampling was used for the participants and three ELT teachers who were available at the time and willing to participate formed the

sample. The first case, which in this case was the first teacher interviewed, could provide initial ideas about what was going on, and the following cases, i.e. the other two teachers, were investigated to understand if they confirmed the ideas about the first teacher (Robson, 2011). The teachers had different backgrounds (see Table 1).

Teachers	Gender	Age	Experience	Educational background	Current school & location	Age groups
Ayla	Female	34	8 years	Bachelors: Linguistics Masters: Educational Administration and Supervision PhD: Educational Administration and Supervision	Working as the only ELT Primary School – Rural Area	7-10 years old
Cenk	Male	34	12 years	Bachelors: ELT	Working with a substitute ELT Secondary School – Rural Area	12-14 years old
Banu	Female	38	15 years	Bachelors: Biology Masters: Biology	Working as the only ELT Primary School – Urban Area	7-10 years old

Data collection instruments were triangulated by employing three different interview types to explore ELT teachers' PL from different aspects and gather as many details as possible (Thomas, 2013). To cover the totality of the teachers' lives and to understand how they became their current selves, narrative interviews were employed first where they were asked to present the history of their PL with all relevant events from the beginning to the end. Then, to pinpoint specific learning incidents and to capture more details regarding their learning experiences, critical incident interviews were conducted where the teachers talked about an example of learning something and explained why they chose those particular ways through 'Wh' questions. Lastly, semi-structured

interviews were used to learn more about their perspectives of PL and their motivations and aspirations to bring change in the future (see Appendix A for the interview questions). Using each of these interview methods, each teacher was interviewed three times.

These sessions provided rich and thick data about the general overview for each teacher regarding their pursuit of PL, the way they were engaged in reflection and collaborative activity, and the constraints they felt existed and stopped them from further pursuing PL. The data helped to identify different forms of agency as well. Narrative interviews helped to understand the iterational elements of agency by showing how past experiences had built on the teachers' agency and how they transformed over time. Critical incidents helped with the practical-evaluative form of agency by showing how they responded to the present elements, and what initiated change. And semi-structured interviews helped to understand the projective form of agency through their future plans.

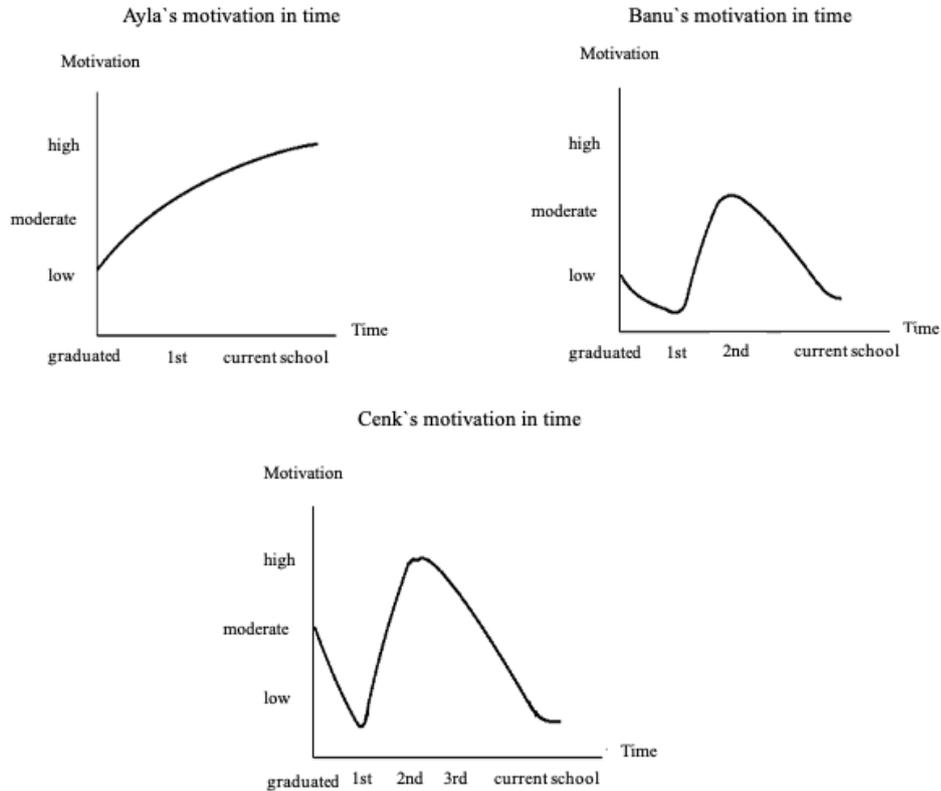
The interviews were conducted face-to-face and lasted around 45 minutes. Cenk and Banu were interviewed in their schools, while Ayla preferred a meeting point. Ethical approval was gained for the study following the procedures of the British Educational Research Association (BERA) (2018) (The University of Reading, approval number 1303181). Pseudonyms were used for all names to avoid compromising the teachers' confidentiality and anonymity.

Three ELT teachers were interviewed three times leading to a total of nine interview transcripts. All interviews were fully transcribed into Turkish and translated into English. A mixture of inductive and deductive analysis was used by the authors for nine transcripts. The first order of codes from each interview was used to create chronological life histories for the teachers in question. This initial coding provided a starting point to explore the data in an open-ended way and helped to remain open to all possible ideas emerging from the data (Saldaña, 2016). Then, the second order of codes was created based on the concepts in the literature; namely, reflective practice, collaborative activity and PL. Each interview transcript was recoded to see what

activities brought change, and a series of individual and contextual factors were identified to explain the teachers' PL. Biesta and Tedder's (2007) framework was used to see the relationship between teachers' backgrounds, their current practices and their future orientations and to understand how their sense of agency changed according to their ecological environments. Lastly, a constant comparative method was used. For this, after coding all three sets of interviews for the first teacher, for example, the data set for the second teacher was coded with codes in mind, to see if they fitted well and in the cases they did not, the codes were amended or new codes were created which worked on both data sets (Hewitt-Taylor, 2001). This was repeated for each data set until the codes worked on all of them (Hewitt-Taylor, 2001). As can be inferred here, coding was not a 'one-off' exercise, but rather it was a cyclical process which required to go back and forth by reading and re-reading, analysing and re-analysing, placing and replacing, and refining codes (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). Given that the study adopted a multiple case study design, a cross-case synthesis was applicable to the analysis of the data. Although each individual was taken separately at the initial stage, an overall cross-case analysis was carried out at the reporting stage which helped to generate theoretical generalisations (Yin, 2014).

## **RESULTS**

Analysis of the narrative interviews showed different patterns of motivation, across different stages of these teachers' experiences (see Figure 1). Two phrases stood out, which encapsulate different attitudes towards PL - 'I try no matter what' and 'I try if'. While Ayla belongs to the first category with a high level of motivation to pursue PL regardless of the circumstances, Cenk and Banu belong to the second category by lacking motivation and feeling motivated only in certain circumstances.

**Figure 1.** The Teachers` Level of Motivation Across Time

## Collaborative Activities

### *Individual Factors*

*Being open to others in theory.* The teachers felt positively regarding learning with/from others. When asked how working with other ELT teachers would help them, they all mentioned seeing others as a source of knowledge. Cenk and Banu defined others as a source of motivation as well, as making joint decisions and feeling responsible for others would enable them to stay motivated to achieve their goals. They all engaged in formal and informal, face-to-face and online collaborative activities. However, while

Ayla talked about a wide range of activities including seminars, lectures, courses, discussion groups and workshops with ELT teachers, and talks with all teachers, Cenk and Banu only mentioned courses and informal talks.

*Being open to others in reality.* The teachers valued collaborative activities; however, Ayla differed from Cenk and Banu by not limiting herself to any particular activity. She mentioned several explicit collaborative opportunities, which might have influenced her teaching as well. For example, she reported travelling abroad previously through European Union projects, where she could interact with colleagues from various countries. In addition to engaging in discussions regarding ELT at the international level, she could observe herself and other Turkish people as the speakers of English, all of which led her to question the Turkish education system and ultimately moved her from a form-focused teaching to a more skills-focused (speaking, listening, reading, writing) approach. Neither Cenk nor Banu appeared to have changed much as a result of collaborative activity.

While Ayla's engagement in collaborative activities influenced her teaching and beliefs, the limited collaboration Cenk and Banu were engaged in had little impact on their teaching or beliefs. This might be because Cenk and Banu were less open to ideas compared to Ayla. For example, Banu, while talking about an ELT seminar she attended, stated;

*There were some techniques we found as not applicable to classes. ... We were a bit prejudiced I guess. ... There were moments that I believe we limited ourselves. (2nd session)*

#### *Contextual Factors*

The teachers differed regarding how they perceived external factors. Ayla showed an inner motivation for PL, so external factors would not constrain her. Cenk and Banu; however, explained how the existence (or lack) of external support affected their motivation for PL. Both felt their practice in previous schools was more effective because of the positive school environment. The commonalities among those schools were local authorities' attention to the quality of education, characteristics of

headteachers, caring parents, friendly and supportive colleagues and high-achieving students, all of which motivated Banu and Cenk to strive for better learning outcomes. This might have influenced their self-efficacy as well.

*I can say I felt happier, ..., I felt like I was useful, like someone who does his job well. (Cenk, 2nd session)*

*School environment.* The school environment seemed very important in the teachers' interaction with others, and head teachers appeared to have a crucial role. For example, having head teachers previously who were supportive and cared about the quality of education seemed to have positively affected Cenk and Banu's practice.

The colleagues' characteristics were a commonality among the teachers. Being surrounded by like-minded peers seemed very important for Ayla, which was not the case previously where her colleagues were not open to change. The knowledgebase of his colleagues appeared to be important for Cenk; as most of his ELT colleagues were graduates of finance and economy-related departments, or college graduates, he felt he could learn little from them about ELT. Banu emphasised the importance of having supportive colleagues, the lack of which added to the difficulties she experienced previously as a substitute teacher.

Additionally, in-school collaborative opportunities seemed limited. Although two meetings should be held annually to make decisions for the coming year, the teachers indicated that those meetings did not go beyond formality. Therefore, there were very few opportunities to interact, which may have also limited collaboration.

### **Reflective Activities**

The teachers appeared to engage in reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. By reflecting in action, they could handle immediate problems and find temporary solutions; yet, when they reflected on action and completed the reflective cycle, they could find better-thought solutions. That is because completing the reflective cycle was a more planned activity involving experiencing, thinking, planning and taking actions. However, Ayla differed from Cenk and Banu as she mostly followed the steps of the

reflective cycle while the others rarely did that.

### *Individual Factors*

*The depth of self-evaluation.* The teachers showed a tendency to critique themselves regarding their teaching and PL; however, they differed regarding the depth of their self-evaluation. Ayla tended to think about her qualities as an ELT teacher and undertake relevant actions, which might be linked to her beliefs about herself. Although she was confident with her subject knowledge, she felt inadequate in teaching due to her background, which might have led her to search for new ideas to compensate for her weaknesses.

*While teaching, I noticed that I did not teach in a way that kids could understand. ... So, I decided that I had the content knowledge of English as a foreign language, but I could not teach what I knew. So, I had to find a solution to that since the classes could not go like that. (2nd session)*

However, Cenk and Banu's self-criticism rarely resulted in further plans. Banu, for example, criticised herself for not trying different ideas yet did not mention solutions or future plans.

*An example from my last class, the topic was foods and drinks. ... There were a lot of vocabularies, so I had to prepare a worksheet for students. ... Then I asked students to write those vocabularies on their notebooks so that they would get familiar with them. But there is something wrong here, something wrong with my mind-set. We should not do this like this. (1st session)*

This might be because Cenk and Banu were less reflective compared to Ayla, and they attributed failure to the students. Therefore, while they were able to teach successful and motivated students, they felt demotivated by low-achieving students. This may have led them to feeling powerless to improve the situation and therefore lower their expectations. Ayla, however, seemed to attribute any outcome to herself and did not settle for lower expectations.

*If you ... write things on the board and ask students to write those things on their notebooks, this is not a very effective teaching. This is related to what teachers want to achieve. ... I become happy when they use the spoken language appropriately during the class. (3rd session)*

This might be because of their backgrounds as well. Ayla seemed to feel continuously inadequate in ELT as she did not study ELT; also she was conscious that teaching was never her preferred career path, making her feel as if she had to work harder to be successful. In comparison, Cenk felt that his pre-service training was successful, therefore appeared to feel that problems derived from other factors not his teaching. Banu, who studied in a non-English-related subject and experienced difficulties through her internship, seemed to have ended up with a narrow repertoire of teaching methods.

*The extent of commitment.* Whether to complete the reflective cycle seemed to be directly related to the extent to which the teachers stay committed to achieve their goals. They all talked about the problem regarding students' negative attitudes towards English, and all mentioned examples of immediate solutions. However, as Cenk and Banu stated, that did not go beyond saving the moment. While Cenk and Banu did not mention further plans to overcome that problem, Ayla explained how her students' attitudes towards learning English changed after implementing techniques from her readings. This suggests Ayla differed from the others in being willing to invest time into finding better solutions to issues.

Although Cenk and Banu could, occasionally, both detect the problem and undertake further actions, their commitment to achieve their goals seemed mostly limited, which according to them was because of their characteristics.

*When I say to myself 'I should do this', I cannot proceed till the end. That is how it is for me. (Cenk, 3rd session)*

Ayla, however, looked committed and spared no effort to achieve her goals, which seemed to have reflected on students as well. After participating in trainings to learn how to use Smartboards to enrich her classes, she observed an increase in learning outcomes and students' motivation.

#### *Contextual Factors*

*Workplace flexibility.* How free the teachers felt in their workplace seemed to affect

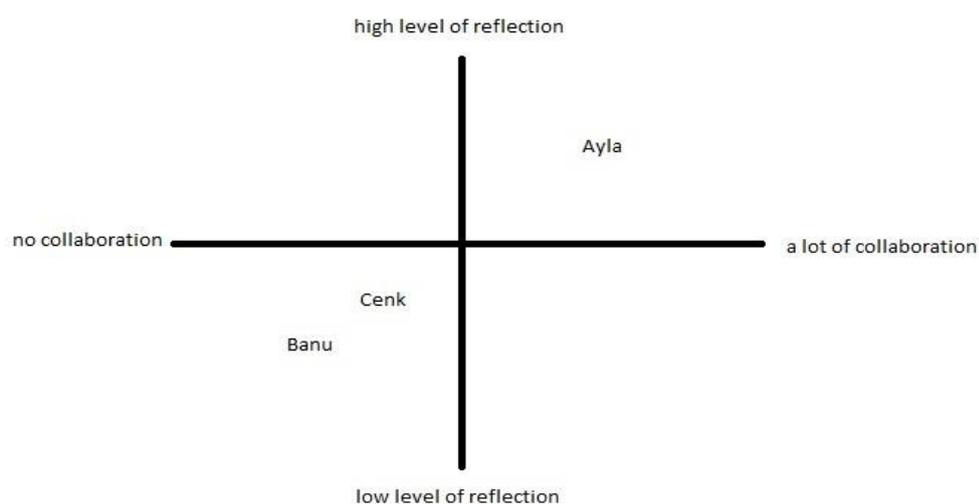
whether they took initiatives. An imbalance between the content and the class hours appeared to be a common problem stopping them from trying different ideas.

The teachers all commented on the pressure to complete the syllabus, which might limit reflection as the syllabus left little space for flexibility. Banu, for example, reported prioritising completing the syllabus as she felt obliged to do so. As the textbook focused on the academic language rather than the spoken language, Banu felt compelled to emphasise this. Additionally, how English language is assessed in national exams (multiple-choice exams focusing on grammar and vocabulary) seemed to be another factor preventing teachers from taking initiatives to teach in line with their beliefs.

The current ELT system in Turkiye, as is implied, is exam-oriented, which may have limited reflection as the teachers might see no use in searching for alternative ways to teach, suggesting they might feel little autonomy and power to make changes. It seemed that teachers only with particular characteristics, such as Ayla, had the self-efficacy to go beyond the curricular restrictions.

*Available Resources.* In-school available teaching resources seemed to affect how able they felt to implement different teaching approaches. Not having the technological equipment previously, for example, had restricted Ayla from using a computer-based programme to improve students' listening and speaking skills. And, the availability of a Smartboard seemed to help Banu to try different teaching ways and integrate skills more easily into her classes. Therefore, in cases when the teachers detected a problem and wanted to solve that, they might have felt restricted by the availability of resources. This seemed to apply to Cenk and Banu mostly who felt their power over their teaching was quite limited, while Ayla seemed to continuously try to further improve her teaching. Figure 2 shows where each teacher stands regarding their engagement in reflection and collaboration.

**Figure 2.** The Teachers' Engagement in Reflective and Collaborative Activities



### **Their Control Over Their PL**

#### *The Kind of Drive for Learning*

The teachers' attitudes towards PL were as follows:

*I love the idea of knowing something. Or, the feeling of knowing it better than others makes me happy. (Ayla, 3rd session)*

*How possible is it for teachers to motivate themselves, to what extent can they motivate themselves? ... If there is an external encouragement, then I believe it would be more helpful. (Cenk, 3rd session)*

*If they (authorities) oblige teachers to do things and make us work, I mean if they take this seriously, then teachers will take it seriously as well. (Banu, 3rd session)*

Ayla, internally driven for PL, seemed to be less affected by external factors compared to Cenk and Banu who needed an external drive, which might explain how Ayla transformed her teaching regardless the circumstances. While talking about their previous schools, Cenk mentioned improving his teaching 'out of obligation' because of the pressure he felt from external factors and Banu said their head teacher 'made' them work hard. While the existence of a 'pushy' environment reflected on their teaching positively, the lack of that might have resulted in little effort.

*Honestly, no one is asking me if I speak in English in my classes. If they ask that, maybe I will push myself. So ... I always go back to Turkish somehow. (Banu, 3rd session)*

#### *The Level of Proactivity*

Ayla seemed to differ from the others regarding the level of proactivity as well. She explicitly discussed her plans to improve her teaching. For example, she mentioned planning spelling activities as her students were having difficulty in differentiating between the written and spoken English. Cenk and Banu, however, although having ideas to better the current situation, did not have explicit plans, suggesting they would favour ready-made solutions to address those issues. While Ayla appeared to take full responsibility for her PL by creating and pursuing opportunities to improve what she

believed she lacked in competency, Cenk and Banu seemed to attribute that responsibility to authorities.

## **DISCUSSION**

The findings showed that the teachers were engaged in both informal and formal, structured and unstructured collaborative activities, and reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. Aligning with the literature, some of the collaborative and reflective activities could facilitate learning and impacted on the teachers' current teaching practices. Ayla, particularly, mentioned engaging in collaborative activities, such as discussion groups and workshops, which led to further reflection, leading her to change her beliefs and practice. This finding is in line with Fazio (2009), in which the researcher found collaborative working could trigger reflection and bring change.

However, in this study, the findings in general did not indicate an explicit link between collaborative activity and reflective practice, which contradicts with Fazio (2009). This might be because, while in Fazio (2009), collaborative activities were specifically designed to facilitate reflection, in this study, most of the collaborative examples from Cenk and Banu seemed limited and ineffective. This might be linked to the nature of the school settings the teachers were working at the time of the interview. The schools did not seem to have established collaborative working models, which would otherwise provide the teachers with the opportunity of meeting on regular basis and sharing their expertise and knowledge (Servage, 2008). This finding aligns with Murugaiah et al. (2012) where the researchers found that teachers could lack a sense of belonging to a group, or lack trust and respect for their colleagues in the absence of a situated collaborative model within their school settings.

In this study, both individual and contextual factors were found to influence the teachers' agency, which aligns with Biesta and Tedder's (2007) ecological model, where the researchers argue that both work environments and personal capacities impact on teacher agency. And the sense of agency the teachers exerted seemed to vary across

time, which according to Biesta and Tedder (2007), derives from how individual beliefs and capacities interact with surrounding contextual factors. Yet, the teachers differed regarding the extent to which the contextual factors affected their sense of power over their PL; while Cenk and Banu felt restricted by the contextual factors, Ayla seemed able to ignore these and free herself from constraints. This might imply, Biesta and Tedder's (2007) model which looks at the interplay between the individual capacities and contextual factors, explains Can and Banu; however, it does not help to understand Ayla. For Ayla, it seemed that her individual dispositions might have a bigger role than the characteristics of the context itself, which aligns with the findings of Smith (2012). Smith (2012), in order to understand how teachers use school contexts they work in, conducted a case study with three teachers and collected the data through classroom observations, videotapes and interviews. The findings showed that the way teachers used their contexts was more important than the characteristics of those contexts (Smith, 2012). This, according to Smith (2012), suggests that teachers' dispositions towards learning and change determine whether to initiate and sustain change. Similar to Smith (2012), Ayla's sense of efficacy and her level of motivation seemed to help her free herself from contextual constraints and transform her teaching practice.

The findings showed a relationship between self-efficacy and motivation in relation to the teachers' sense of agency. Ayla differed from Cenk and Banu by having a high level of motivation for learning, which might have helped her to compensate for her low self-efficacy. Although she felt inadequate at teaching English, she seemed to have an ideal vision of herself which was different from her past and current selves, and she tried to live up to that ideal image. In her case, low self-efficacy seemed to have been channelled into continuous effort, resulting in a high level of motivation, which might have played a role in the development of more positive self-efficacy beliefs. This relationship between self-efficacy and motivation seems to be different from what Bandura (2006) proposes. According to Bandura (2006), self-efficacy operates as a motivator. Bandura (2006) sees self-efficacy as an important set of proximal determinants of human agency, according to which low self-efficacy is expected to

result in a low level of motivation. In contrast to that, Ayla's low self-efficacy did not lead to low motivation when faced by contextual constraints, instead this led her to stay optimistic to achieve the goals she set for herself, and her reflective and collaborative learning activities helped her to improve her teaching practice. This might be because her reflection on her qualities led her to become internally motivated to achieve better, or because the collaborative activities she engaged in served as an external motivation for her to revise her teaching.

The findings suggest that motivation, rather than self-efficacy as earlier defined as individuals' beliefs in their power to bring change, might be the key requisite to personal growth and change. Regarding self-efficacy, whether the teachers felt satisfied with their teaching, and if they were disposed towards growth seemed to determine their actions. This differs from Bandura (2006), and the reason may be because of the nature of Bandura's studies, but may also reflect the importance of cultural context, educational values and ethos, and how teachers are perceived. This seems to be an interesting issue to follow up in the main study as well.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study looked at how ELT teachers in Turkiye experience reflective practice and collaborative working in relation to their PL and what factors affect their engagement in these PL activities. The findings suggested that the teachers were engaged in both formal and informal, structured and unstructured collaborative activities, reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. While the teachers' engagement in collaborative activities were influenced by school environment and the teachers' openness to others, their engagement in reflective activities was shaped by the depth of their self-evaluation, the extent of their commitment, their workplace flexibility and available resources.

Given that this study is small in scale and adopted a qualitative approach, the findings of this study cannot be generalised to a wider population. The sample of this study had a teaching experience between 8 and 15 years, therefore ELT teachers who are more or less experiences may have different experiences of reflective practice and collaborative

activity in their PL. This study did not adopt a purposive sampling for the schools the teachers were situated in with regards to whether they had a collaborative culture established, and it reflected on the findings as the data did not show many examples of collaborative learning. Therefore, it may not be known, for certain, the extent to which the existence of such collaborative opportunities would impact on the findings. Yet, the findings of this study may still be educative.

This study offers a new look at the role of motivation in relation to teacher agency. In contrast to the literature, the evidence from this study suggests that motivation is not guided by self-efficacy, and high levels of motivation, regardless of self-efficacy, may lead to growth. Additionally, this study proposes a new way of looking at teacher development in Turkiye through reflective practice and collaborative working. It also helps to better understand teacher agency. While external factors may hinder PL, teachers with strong dispositions (comprising of motivation and self-efficacy) can detach themselves from the constraining surroundings and exert more agency.

Based on the findings, this study suggests that pre-service student teachers should be provided with opportunities to become more reflective and collaborative. Pre-service programmes should promote reflective assignments as well as discussion groups, group work, peer observation, microteachings to challenge student teachers' thinking, to provide systematic feedback for them, and to encourage them to analyse their experiences and link them with theories.

As the study provides insights into the contextual factors affecting the teachers' engagement in reflection and collaborative activity, authorities need to provide support systems for in-service teachers and acknowledge that change takes time. A school culture which is grounded in collaboration, trust and respect should be promoted, and schools should offer in-school initiatives for reflection and collaboration. A monitoring system should be set up to evaluate the efficacy of the already existing out-of-school collaborative activities for in-service teachers.

Teacher educators in Turkiye need to change their perspective of professional

development, from training teachers to seeing them as life-long learners, and therefore should provide them with the freedom and flexibility to take responsibility of their own PL. They should also provide in- and out-of school support, and offer incentives and rewards for teachers as a result of their time and involvement in PL. And, teachers should understand the importance of improving their practice, and engage more with PL to adapt themselves to the new trends in teaching.

This study was not initially planned to look at the link between teachers` motivation and PL, or it was not expected to find a reverse link between self-efficacy and motivation. Therefore, future research can be carried out by explicitly looking at the link between teachers` motivation and self-efficacy, and the relationship between teachers` motivation and agency in PL.

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## GENİŞ ÖZET

### Amaç

Literatürde öğretmenlerin niteliğinin direk olarak ülkelerin eğitim sisteminin kalitesini belirlediğinden sıkça bahsedilmektedir. Bunu sağlamak lisans programlarına öğretmen adaylarını seçerken gösterilecek özenle, titiz bir lisans eğitimiyle ve çalışmakta olan öğretmenlere verilecek hizmet içi eğitimle sağlanabilir. Ayrıca, öğretmenlerin de hayat boyu öğrenme modelini benimseyerek kendi profesyonel gelişimlerinin sorumluluğunu almaları beklenmektedir. Fakat Türkiye'deki çalışmalar bu alanlarda sıkıntı olduğunu göstermektedir. Örneğin, öğretmenlik programlarına öğrenci seçiminde öğrencilerin öğretmenlik mesleğine karşı tutumları dikkate alınmamakta, gelişmiş ülkelerde olduğu gibi yansıtıcı düşünce ve işbirliğine dayalı etkinliklere lisans programlarında çok fazla yer verilmemektedir. Fakat, bu alanlardan doğabilecek eksikliklerin hizmet içi olanaklarla giderilmesi mümkündür. Öğretmenler çalışmakta oldukları okullarda yansıtıcı düşünce ve öğretim uygulayarak bireysel boyutta, çalışma arkadaşları ile paylaşım ve işbirliği yaparak da kolektif boyutta öğrenme gerçekleştirip mesleki gelişim sağlayabilirler. Fakat literatür bu durum üzerinde etkisi bulunabilecek bireysel ve çevresel etkenlere de dikkat çekmektedir. Bu çalışma devlet okullarında çalışmakta olan İngilizce öğretmenlerinin yapmakta olduğu yansıtıcı düşünce ve işbirliğine yönelik etkinliklerinin onların profesyonel gelişimlerini nasıl etkilediğini anlamayı amaçlamaktadır.

### Yöntem

Bu çalışma nitel bir çalışma olup Türkiye'de devlet okullarında çalışmakta olan İngilizce öğretmenlerinin nasıl profesyonel gelişimde bulduklarına odaklanmaktadır. Pilot çalışma olması sebebiyle üç İngilizce öğretmeni ile üçer ayrı görüşme yapılmış ve dolayısıyla veri tabanını dokuz nitel görüşme oluşturmuştur. İlk olarak yaşam öyküleri kullanılarak öğretmenlerin yaşamlarının tamamını anlamak amaçlandı ve onlardan profesyonel gelişimleri ile ilgili bütün olayları anlatmaları istendi. Bunu, öğretmenlere bir öğrenme örneğinin sorulduğu ve bu özel öğrenme örneği hakkında ayrıntılar vermelerinin istendiği kritik olaylar izledi. Son olarak, profesyonel gelişime bakış açıları ve geleceğe dair motivasyonları hakkında daha fazla bilgi edinmek için yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler kullanıldı. Görüşmelerin analizi için tümevarım ve tümdengelim birlikte kullanılmıştır. İlk kodlama, verileri keşfetmek için açık uçlu bir şekilde gerçekleştirildi, ardından yansıtıcı uygulama, işbirlikçi etkinlik ve PL gibi literatürden gelen fikirler kullanılarak ikinci kodlama yapıldı. Son olarak, üç öğretmeni de açıklayacak şekilde tema ve alt temaların değiştirilmesini içeren sürekli bir karşılaştırma yöntemi kullanılmıştır.

### Bulgular ve Tartışma

Bulgular, öğretmenlerin deneyimlerinin farklı aşamalarında farklı motivasyon kalıpları gösterdi ve PL'ye yönelik farklı tutumları özetleyen iki cümle öne çıktı - "Ne olursa olsun deniyorum" ve "Eğer olursa denerim". Ayla, koşullar ne olursa olsun PL'ye devam etme motivasyonu yüksek olan birinci kategoriye girerken, Cenk ve Banu motivasyonsuz ve sadece belirli durumlarda motive hisseden ikinci kategoriye girmektedir. Bulgular ayrıca öğretmenlerin hem gayri resmi hem de resmi, yapılandırılmış ve yapılandırılmamış işbirlikçi etkinliklere ve eylem içinde yansıtma ve eylem üzerine yansıtmaya katıldıklarını gösterdi. Literatüre uygun olarak, bazı işbirlikçi ve yansıtıcı etkinliklerin öğrenmeyi kolaylaştırabildiği ve öğretmenlerin mevcut öğretim uygulamalarını etkileyebildiği görülmüştür.

*Çalışma, öğretmenlerin yansıtma ve işbirlikçi faaliyetlere katılımını etkileyen bağlamsal ve bireysel faktörlere ilişkin içgörüler sağladığından, yetkililerin öğretmenler için destek sistemleri sağlaması ve değişimin zaman aldığı kabul etmesi ve okulların yansıtma ve işbirliği için okul içi girişimler sunması gerekir. Ek olarak, öğretmenlerin geçmişlerinin uygulamalarını etkilediği tespit edildiğinden, öğretim programları öğretmen adaylarına derinlemesine düşünme ve işbirliği yapma becerilerini geliştirmelerine yardımcı olacak fırsatlar sağlamalıdır. Ve öğretmenler, uygulamalarını geliştirmenin önemini anlamalı ve kendilerini öğretimdeki yeni trendlere uyarlamak için PL ile daha fazla ilgilenmelidir.*

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We would like to thank all the teachers who took part in this study during the data collection process.

## Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest related to this study.

## Ethics Committee Declaration

This study involved ELT teachers as the participants, therefore required ethical approval. The ethical approval was gained from the UK, the University of Reading Ethics Committee, dated 13.03.2018 and numbered 1303181. All information in this article has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical concerns. The literature used throughout the paper has been cited appropriately and duly given place in References.

## APPENDIX A

### **Interview Session 1 (narrative interviews)**

- 1- Please tell me your experiences of pre-service training starting from how you decided to become an ELT teacher?
- 2- Please tell me what you have done after your graduation?
- 3- Can you tell me what kind of activities you have been engaged in for further learning? In or out of school.
- 4- Can you tell me about the schools that you have worked so far? About your colleagues, head teachers, student profiles, families, the location of schools, resources at those schools, etc.
- 5- Can you tell me your experiences when you felt encouraged for or discouraged from learning?
- 6- Can you tell me some examples when you felt a need to change something in your teaching? How and why did you want to change? Did you attend some courses, read some articles, ask others, through trial and error, etc. for that?

### **Interview Session 2 (critical incidents)**

- 1- Can you tell me about a good example when you learnt something?
  - What were you trying to achieve?
  - What happened?
  - When and where did it happen?
  - Was anybody else involved in the event?
  - How did you feel when it happened?
  - What led to that?
  - What happened after that?
  - Did anything happen to motivate you?
  - Did you encounter any obstacles?
  - What has changed since it happened?

**Interview Session 3 (semi-structured interviews)**

- 1- How important and necessary is professional learning for ELT teachers? Why?
- 2- When you think of your experiences related to professional learning so far, do you think the inclusion or exclusion of something would make you learn more?
- 3- If you designed your own professional learning activities/programme, what would it look like? How would you run the programme?
- 4- What do you think is the key factor for ELT teachers to pursue their professional learning?
- 5- What do you think is the best way to stay updated in teaching?