

Professionalism in teaching: A survey study on Afghan EFL educators' professional development needs

Khalid Ahmad Samim

Badghis Institute of Higher Education, Badghis, Afghanistan

khalidsamim786@gmail.com



Article History

Received on 23 January 2025

1st Revision on 28 June 2025

2nd Revision on 17 July 2025

Accepted on 11 August 2025

Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this study was to explore the perceived professional development needs of Afghan EFL educators and identify the areas of teaching in which they prioritize to be developed professionally.

Methodology/approach: A quantitative survey design was employed to discover EFL teachers' PD needs. 25 English educators majoring in the TESOL graduate program at Kabul Education University were selected purposively. The data were collected through a questionnaire, and was analyzed using SPSS for more comprehensive results.

Results/findings: The overall results regarding PD needs of Afghan EFL educators indicate that they are generally in need of lesson planning and curriculum development, up-to-date methodologies and differentiated instructions, technology-integrated instruction, reflective practices, and assessment and evaluation techniques.

Conclusion: The study concludes that designing PD programs based on teachers' actual needs is crucial to improving teaching competence. Context-specific and needs-based PD programs can enhance instructional quality and student learning outcomes in Afghanistan's EFL context.

Limitations: Limited sample size, absence of female participants, and randomization could be listed as limitation of the study.

Contribution: By identifying the PD needs of Afghan EFL educators, the study can contribute the designers of targeted training programs that aim to enhance teaching quality and effectiveness.

Keywords: *English Language Teaching (ELT), Professional Development (PD) Needs, Teaching Practice And Competence, Afghan EFL Educators, Teacher Training, Afghanistan Education, TESOL*

How to Cite: Samim, K. A. (2025). Professionalism in teaching: A survey study on Afghan EFL educators' professional development needs. *Journal of Social, Humanity, and Education*, 6(1), 37-54.

1. Introduction

The quality of Teacher Professional Development (TPD) has become an increasingly significant educational issue as teachers encounter growing scrutiny and pressure to help students achieve higher levels of learning. While debates and tensions over the scope, form, and focus of TPD continue, teachers are expected to perform according to new and changing standards, and school districts are calling on teachers to reform practices through teacher-learning activities ranging from workshops to seminars to classroom modeling (Margolis, Durbin, & Doring, 2017). As access to technology and the knowledge of its use become more established and universal, its application within the curriculum and pedagogical practicality

become remarkably important to educators. Additionally, the implications of how technology is employed in EFL teacher professional development initiatives are significantly compelling (Nazari, Nafissi, Estaji, & Marandi, 2019).

Language proficiency is an unavoidable basic professional development need for EFL teachers. As language teachers, they need to regularly upgrade and maintain their language proficiency. It is true that their workload, pedagogical and administrative, at school and the unavailability of a specific professional development, such as language proficiency professional development, have driven and forced many EFL teachers to neglect or forget the importance of their language proficiency as part of their professional competence in their teaching and learning activities. Therefore, it will take all related parties, the government (the Ministry of Education and Culture), the institutions (e.g., universities and language centers), and the teachers themselves need to work together to make their voices heard concerning their need for regular language proficiency professional development (Nugroho, 2018).

EFL teachers, while teaching in a remote area, face challenges like large classes, diverse learning attitudes of the learners, lack of teaching materials, improper use of CAS, and lack of support from institutions in professional development. Regarding strategies to tackle these challenges, EFL teachers rely on reading material, the Internet and digital devices, reflection, action research, and collaboration for their professional development. These strategies are self-directed, with minimal or no institutional support. These strategies are used to improve their teaching skills and deal with everyday problems. They were all aware of professional development and chose this profession because of their passion. As English language teachers are eager to engage in professional development practices, the concerned authority should manage different conferences, seminars, need-based training, and ICT skills development (Bhatt, 2021).

1.1 Research Problem

One of the basic requirements of the Afghan educational community is the lack of professional educators, especially in the language teaching context. Students are in great need of professional teaching. Despite the growing demand for effective English language instruction in Afghanistan, many EFL teachers lack access to quality professional development opportunities that enhance their teaching practices and professionalism in the field. The problem arises due to the absence of a comprehensive needs assessment of teachers to acquire their real professional development needs. Despite the extensive research conducted on professionalism in teaching worldwide, the lack of inclusive studies related to Afghan English educators' professional development needs leaves a total blank space in the body of this research. This gap in training can lead to teachers' weak teaching practices, low student engagement, and ultimately poor learning outcomes.

1.2 Justification

"An education system is only as good as its teachers" (UNESCO, 2014). Providing quality professional development opportunities can significantly affect English language instruction competence among EFL educators in Afghanistan. By investigating this research problem, we can identify teachers' specific needs, contributing to their professional development, enhancing teaching practices, improving student engagement, and leading to better learning outcomes. Addressing these issues is vital to accessing quality professional development opportunities that are crucial for enhancing EFL teachers' practices and professionalism.

The active involvement of EFL teachers in professional development practices provides the necessary foundation through which they can mediate their teaching activity and constructively respond to their students' needs and the challenges of the teaching context. EFL teachers perceive contentious professional development in terms of school-based learning, academic undertakings, professional pursuits outside school, self-directed learning, and government schemes. It is important to stress that while teachers engage in various such activities, a positive impact on their professional lives is guaranteed (Cirocki and Farrel,

2019). Afghan EFL educators are in great need of professional development activities to enhance their teaching practices and competence. The nonexistence of a reliable PD assessment of English teachers in Afghanistan negatively affects their teaching practices and other aspects of professionalism in educational contexts. Therefore, the scope of professional development needs to cover the target population remains unidentified.

1.3 Significance of the study

The process of professional development has a significant positive impact on teachers' beliefs, practices, and students' learning. Successful professional development experiences have a noticeable impact on teachers' work, both in and out of the classroom (Alruqi & Alharbi, 2022; Tatto, 2021). Although the vitality of PD is gradually being felt in various educational contexts in many developing countries, including Afghanistan, Soodmand Afshar and Hosseini Yar (2019) state that successful PD depends on the identification of teachers' current PD needs through careful need analysis. By identifying the professional development needs of Afghan EFL educators, this study can contribute to the design of targeted training programs that aim to enhance teaching quality and effectiveness. Furthermore, this investigation will contribute to Afghan educational communities by highlighting specific areas where PD programs can be improved or adapted to better serve the needs of English teachers in Afghanistan.

1.4 Purpose Statement

The main purpose of This study aimed to investigate the perceived professional development needs of Afghan English as a Foreign Language (EFL) educators related to their teaching competence. It attempts to identify and specify the areas of teaching in which Afghan English teachers need to be developed professionally.

1.5 Research Question

What are the areas in which Afghan EFL (English as a Foreign Language) educators require professional development regarding their teaching practices and competence?

2. Literature Review

Various approaches are more likely to be conducive to the success of teacher PD and students' academic achievement, such as interaction, collaboration, and collegiality among teachers and experts. Thus, it is deemed necessary that foreign language education policy-makers provide the kind of PD which not only addresses the current needs of the teachers, but also encourages interaction, collaboration, and collegiality among them. However, this goal will not be realized unless schools and other educational institutions start changing school culture and transforming the content and structure of TPDPs commonly presented to teachers to suit their needs and preferences (Soodmand Afshar & Hosseini Yar, 2019).

Despite the universal paradigm shift in general teacher PD and in-service teacher training programs, it seems that EFL education policymakers and teacher PD program designers in many developing countries still follow more traditional and individualized approaches to PD (e.g., workshops and self-study), keeping the teachers in isolation from the language teaching community and their peers and colleagues, which would not allow the exchange of ideas to take place among them. One reason for this negligence might be the less attention and investment in foreign language education in the community than in the teaching of other subjects (Soodmand Afshar & Hosseini Yar, 2019). Another reason might be that conducting such interactive workshops supported by follow-up strategies, programs, and evaluations is costly and time-consuming (Tabatabaee-Yazdi, Motallebzadeh, Ashraf, & Baghaei, 2018).

Instructors' Professional Development (PD) concepts emphasize that teachers are people with immense potential and long-term development. It encourages instructors to become learners, analysts, and collaborators, as well as to think more critically about their performance rehearsals, raise professional standards, demonstrate practical expert excellence, and acknowledge professional ideals (Jiang, 2016).

Several factors have been identified as having an impact on teachers' PD, including teachers' willingness to be responsible for their own learning and take active part in it (Ellis, 2009), the extent to which PD is supported by the educational leaders and administrators in the local context, and teachers' particular beliefs about PD (Al Asmari, 2016). This study also explored EFL teachers' beliefs about the usefulness of PD activities, their engagement in different PD activities, and what might promote or hinder them from participating in these activities. Carballo and Chaves (2018) believe that professional development empowers teachers to engage in the rebuilding of their faculty goals and the implementation of innovative teaching practices. As Hardy (2011) expressed, "The roles of teachers and schools are changing, and so are expectations about them: teachers are asked to teach in increasingly multicultural classrooms, integrate students with special needs, use ICT for teaching effectively, engage in evaluation and accountability.

Assalahi (2021) outlined teachers' perceptions of their PD needs, including their level of interest in PD activities and reasons for engaging and disengaging in PD activities as follows:

2.1 Level of interest in PD activities

The findings indicate the overall mean of teachers' agreement to the statements about their interest in PD, which is equivalent to (very interested) in the response ranking criteria. This means that teachers were "very interested to interested" in PD activities ranging from formal to informal PD (Assalahi, 2021) as follows:

- a) Attending conferences.
- b) Presenting posters/research papers at conferences.
- c) Peer observation.
- d) Reading in your area of interest.
- e) Researching your own practice.
- f) Lesson study
- g) Enrolling in a professional diploma or certificate.
- h) Participating in formal training
- i) Participating in online forums/blogs about English language teaching.
- j) Being a member of informal teachers' community to discuss educational issues
- k) Actively participating in educational hashtags in social media

2.2 Reasons for engaging in PD activities

Teachers' perceptions of the reasons for engaging in PD activities were measured using separate items. For these reasons, the mean showed participants' agreement as follows (Assalahi, 2021).

- a) Participation in professional development activities is a part of the professional development agenda.
- b) Participating in professional development activities motivates and maintains enthusiasm in teaching
- c) We attend/participate in professional development activities because they provide social networking opportunities.
- d) Attending/participating in professional development activities would improve our teaching and students' learning.
- e) Attending/ participating in professional development activities would keep us informed of up-to-date learning/teaching theories

2.3 Reasons for disengaging in PD activities

Teachers were asked to rate their agreement with the reasons for their disengagement in PD. The teachers agreed that the following items represent the reasons that hinder their pursuit of engaging in PD activities. Rated as the top reason for teachers' disengagement in PD, which is equivalent to 'strongly agree, is lack of time (Assalahi, 2021). The other items fell under the 'agree' category.

- a) Lack of time.

- b) Workload.
- c) lack of enthusiasm due to exhaustion
- d) Lack of motivation.
- e) Lack of facilities
- f) Lack of collaborative teacher groups
- g) Lack of awareness of informal professional development in school culture.
- h) Lack of financial support.

2.4 Teachers' beliefs about professionalism

Al-Bakri and Troudi (2020), highlighted three major categories in relation to the meaning of professionalism emerged from the data. (1) qualification and PD, (2) external versus intrinsic accountability, and (3) attitude and behavior (moral values). They considered professionalism to be related to the qualification of teachers, reflecting the traditional view of professionalism. The discussion revealed that teachers associated professionalism with different aspects. However, they share the core belief that professionalism is mainly a form of moral behavior and attitude that is socially and culturally sensitive to the context.

2.5 External factors affecting professionalism

Based on the findings of Al-Bakri and Troudi (2020), external factors beyond the control of the individual could affect professionalism. Job security was considered the main factor. In addition, they found that feedback based on classroom observations was mostly negative. Furthermore, all participants believed that a reward system was needed to enhance professionalism. This could be in the form of money or just a 'thank you.' The responsibility of the management is also highlighted in this section stating: "If the top management insists their teachers to grow professionally they would by all". This means facilitating things that help teachers grow professionally.

Since professionalism is linked to continuous learning, management is also seen as responsible for enhancing PD. The findings revealed that the teachers were aware that professionalism is not only the responsibility of the individual, but that the institution also plays an important role in enhancing professionalism. In conclusion, by providing job security, fair treatment, recognition, and equal opportunities for all teachers, we can ensure their professional growth.

2.6 The importance of PD

The major finding in this aspect was that PD is necessary for all teachers to improve their teaching. The results indicated that most teachers related PD to training courses and workshops provided at the workplace, in addition to attending conferences, seminars, and workshops outside the institution. Nevertheless, the usefulness of workshops depends on their relevance to the participants' work area. Since the topics for workshops at the college are usually chosen by the administration; it might be that they don't meet all teachers' needs. In this context, they suggest that a questionnaire could be sent to teachers to identify the areas that need development, and workshops can be designed accordingly.

Sharing teaching experiences with colleagues and supporting each other was seen as the most useful way to enhance PD by all the participants. Peer observation may be the best way to enhance their PD. In addition, the classroom and the learners were identified as useful sources of PD. The findings indicate that the participants were aware that PD involves formal and informal activities that can be pursued individually or collectively. However, the activities that were seen as most useful were those that could help them acquire skills to operate effectively in their own teaching context to overcome some problems related to the classroom (Al-Bakri & Troudi, 2020).

2.7 Responsibility of PD

The results of Al-Bakri and Troudi (2020) emphasized that PD is the responsibility of the individual. “You are responsible for your PD. If you have no desire, you are not motivated, then you are not going to change”. It was also acknowledged that PD is ‘an ongoing process’ Nevertheless, the institution plays an important role in the professional development of its staff. For example, when the staff management team finds some weaknesses, they should conduct workshops to address them so that we can meet the expectations they set. The finding stressed that PD that is initiated by the institution is more effective because ‘they know exactly what is needed and what is required.’ Overall, it seems that it is the teachers’ responsibility regarding PD, but at the same time they feel that the institution they work for is responsible for their PD. Their beliefs could impact their choice of PD activities.

2.8 Teachers’ engagement in PD activities

Although teachers are aware of several useful PD activities, their engagement in PD is mostly restricted to compulsory top-down PD activities. For teachers, self-initiated PD activities consisted mainly of attending off-site workshops and regional conferences, collaborating with colleagues, and keeping a teaching journal to reflect on their practice. Peer observation was not practiced by any of the participants in this context, although some participants found it useful based on their previous teaching experience in other institutions. Likewise, conducting research, publishing, reading academic literature, and using the college library were not reported to be practiced. This shows that teachers’ engagement in self-initiated PD activities is rather limited (Al-Bakri & Troudi, 2020).

2.9 Factors affecting teachers’ PD

According to Al-Bakri and Troudi (2020), teachers’ choice to participate in PD activities is influenced by several factors, which can be classified into (1) beliefs, (2) contextual factors, and (3) personal factors. In general, PD activities that could enhance teachers’ contextual and problem-solving skills were the most useful. This might be why the teachers mostly engaged in activities such as attending pedagogically relevant workshops or collaborating with colleagues, but did not engage in activities such as upgrading their qualifications or reading academic literature.

The top-down approach to PD was also valued because they believed that it would help teachers satisfy the college’s needs. This belief could also explain teachers’ low engagement in self-initiated PD activities. More specifically, the findings provided some evidence that individual beliefs about the effectiveness of a certain activity could encourage or discourage teachers from engaging in a particular activity. Contextual factors that influenced the participants’ engagement in PD included workload, release time, lack of encouragement, lack of recognition, and lack of financial support. All the teachers in this study complained about their heavy workload, but in our case, how can we devote our time to this [PD] if we are involved in so many things that are peripheral to the teaching field? For example, quality assurance requires us to spend many hours on attendance. Is this as important as the teaching process? Why? Why do I have to spend so many hours on this instead of developing myself?

The results revealed that the participants also felt that the institution did not have a reward system for teachers who present at conferences, publish papers, or assist in preparing textbooks. Lack of acknowledgement can discourage teachers from making efforts to grow professionally. In addition, the physical conditions of the classrooms were not up to date. For example, classrooms do not even have proper boards, let alone projectors. If the institution does not update itself in terms of equipment and resources, the teachers might not feel encouraged to develop professionally. Personal factors can also affect teachers’ PD. For example, some conferences are held on weekends, which may cause the absence of teachers (Al-Bakri & Troudi, 2020).

Based on the findings of Aljassar and Altammar's (2020) study on the professional development of in-service teachers, a list of comprehensive recommendations necessary to improve teachers' professional development initiatives has been revealed.

1. Teachers' professional development initiatives should be reviewed in light of global professional development trends,
 - Combining the knowledge of policymakers, practitioners, academics, and administrators, to develop a comprehensive vision and action plans for expanding and strengthening teachers' professional development initiatives,
 - Maintaining initiatives such as model lessons, workshops, and seminars presented by distinguished teachers, supervisors, and experienced university faculty members,
 - Requiring all teachers to attend training programs on a yearly basis,
 - Revisiting the government budget allocated to the training and development of in-service teachers, in accordance with global expenditure standards.
2. Training programs' content should be developed after an assessment of teachers' developmental goals and weakness areas,
 - Ensuring that training programs are delivered by qualified trainers,
 - Developing terms and conditions to guide the selection of trainers and achieve a network of high-caliber professionals.
3. Expanding teachers' and supervisors' knowledge, skills, and experiences through the use of modern teaching strategies, educational tools, and cutting-edge educational technology to deliver effective training and development initiatives.
4. Training centers should be equipped with a variety of learning tools and facilities that warrant a comfortable, healthy, and interactive environment,
 - Using schools as training centers to ensure higher attendance rates,
 - Diversifying learning methods to provide attractive and effective learning outcomes,
 - Multiplicity of training centers, training hours, and learning methods, so as to expand the percentage of in-service teachers benefiting from professional development initiatives from the current yearly average of 5% to 100%.
5. Developing teachers' interpersonal traits, in addition to their professional skills,
 - Increasing the number of teachers' classroom exchange visits to benefit from one other,
 - Encouraging teachers to attend seminars, conferences, and workshops.
6. Offering teachers financial and moral incentives to successfully pass the training programs,
 - Rewarding teachers nationally for professional excellence,
 - Rewards could include certificates, scholarships for Master's degrees, job promotions, salary bonuses/increases, and financial sponsorships to attend development opportunities abroad.
7. Benefitting from the suggested framework for teachers' professional development training programs,
 - Feedback from supervisors, teachers, and trainers must serve as the foundational content of the training programs,
 - Program's content must also be based on practical applications, field experiences and applied research,
 - Teachers participating in the training programs must be divided into groups of similar weaknesses and strength areas, to ensure that the program delivered is specifically catered to the respective group's needs,
 - Understanding teachers' cultural, interpersonal, and professional needs when designing

training programs.

8. Rehabilitating a supervisor's role and ensuring each candidate's competencies and awareness of what his/her role entails,
 - Allocating one education stage per supervisor, arranging his/her school visitations that are within close proximities, and ensuring that each supervisor's duties align with his/her area of specialty,
 - Developing a clear strategy and action plan for supervisors to implement when evaluating teachers' performances, addressing their weaknesses, and expanding on their strengths,
 - Reducing the number of teachers that each supervisor manages, in order to provide supervisors with sufficient time to attend to teachers' individual needs by increasing classroom visits to at least 5-6 times per academic year (Aljassar & Altammar, 2020).

2.10 Review related studies

A study by Derakhshan, Coombe, Zhaleh, and Tabatabaeian (2020). This study aimed to examine the roles of continuing professional development (CPD) needs and views of research in English language teachers' success among a group of 177 Iranian EFL teachers. To achieve this aim, the participants responded to three questionnaires. Based on the results of the present study, it can be concluded that for EFL teachers to perform successfully, they need to hold positive attitudes toward research and attend to their CPD needs. Teachers can also hold more positive views toward research and become research literate by doing research in graduate and post-graduate programs, receiving research training within their workplace, attending online research courses, and participating in conferences and workshops. Furthermore, teacher educators are encouraged to re-plan their professional development programs to meet the real needs of the teachers in their specific educational context instead of presenting teachers with theory-based universal programs if they are to prepare successful teachers who can deal effectively with the daily realities of the classroom (Derakhshan et al., 2020).

Ekawati, Mulyono, Arrummaiza, Zulaiha, and Ningsih (2021), conducted a research on evaluating EFL teachers' self-efficacy and attitude towards web-based professional development practices. This study aimed to address this gap by measuring self-efficacy and attitudes towards online-based professional development among EFL teachers at three different school levels. A total of 101 EFL teachers from three levels of education (i.e. primary, lower-secondary, and upper-secondary schools) completed Kao, Tsai, and Shih's (2014) self-efficacy and attitude questionnaire. The findings of the current study showed that most Indonesian EFL teachers possessed a high level of self-efficacy and attitude towards web-based professional development. The findings of the study also revealed that teachers were very positive about the usefulness and ease of use of web-based technology for professional development, reflecting their acceptance of web-based professional development. The findings emphasize that a high level of teachers' self-efficacy and positive attitude should be carefully considered in the design and application of web-based teacher training programs (Afshar & Doosti, 2022; Ekawati et al., 2021).

Assalahi (2021) investigated EFL teachers' perceptions of their professional development needs assessment in light of the professional standards for English Language teachers in Saudi Arabia. The participants consisted of 65 teachers of English as a foreign language in public education schools in Saudi Arabia. An online self-administered questionnaire was employed to explore English language teachers' perceptions of professional development, their awareness of the standards, and their professional development needs in light of the standards. The results showed that teachers were very interested in formal and informal professional development activities and strongly agreed that professional development improves teaching and students' learning outcomes. They identified lack of time, among other factors, as a constraint to engaging in professional development. Teachers also strongly agreed that the professional standards for teachers provide a framework for planning their own professional development to improve their competencies.

A study was conducted by Korkmazgil (2015) to explore English language teachers' professional development needs, practices and challenges that they experience in their professional growth. Data were collected from 41 English language teachers working in public schools in 14 different cities in Turkey through semi-structured interviews. The findings of his study suggested that the highest level of needs were indicated with regard to developing teachers' English language proficiency and speaking skills, improving knowledge and skills in English language teaching methodology, incorporating technology into language teaching, and materials development and adaptation. The perceived challenges were identified under five categories: (1) teacher-related problems, (2) student-related difficulties, (3) contextual factors, (4) challenges related to the educational system, and (5) the social status of the teaching profession. This study suggests that professional development practices that might best contribute to teachers' professional growth need to be based on their immediate needs and designed and directed with their involvement (Korkmazgil, 2015).

According to Al-Bakri and Troudi (2020), PD activities that could enhance teachers' context and problem-solving skills were the most useful. This might be why the teachers mostly engaged in activities such as attending pedagogically relevant workshops or collaborating with colleagues, but did not engage in activities such as upgrading their qualifications or reading academic literature. Contextual factors that influenced the participants' engagement in PD included workload, release time, lack of encouragement, lack of recognition, and lack of financial support. The teachers also valued the top-down approach to PD because they believed that it would help them satisfy the college's needs for effective teaching.

Yuan, Lee, De Costa, Yang, and Liu (2022) conducted a collaborative revision study to recognition of language teacher educators' contributions in the field of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). This article provides a systematic and critical review of 69 empirical studies on university-based TESOL teacher educators from 2010 and 2020. A methodological review was conducted to analyze the different research approaches employed by previous researchers. A synthesis of the identified research led to four major themes: (1) a general professional state (including responsibilities, challenges, and quality), (2) professional engagement (including teaching, practicum supervision, and research and publishing), (3) cognition (including beliefs, knowledge, and expertise), and (4) continuous learning and identity development. Through a critical discussion of the themes, the review argues against the implicit yet powerful discourse that characterizes language teacher educators as 'supermen/superwomen' and emphasizes the need to humanize them as whole people by recognizing their unique strengths and struggles as well as diverse learning needs.

Alruqi and Alharbi (2022) argued that professional development has a considerable impact on teacher performance, beliefs, and behaviors, as well as on students' learning. Generally, the teachers in this survey stated that the professional development programs they had attended had a substantial impact on their professional development and classroom practices. The findings also revealed that EFL teachers require professional development to address a variety of demands resulting from changes and new findings in the field of ELT. The data also demonstrated that language school evaluations had a significant impact on how EFL teachers continued their professional development. Consequently, there is a clear need for new approaches to professional learning that regard teachers as change agents in their own development. In particular, the survey responses revealed that the teachers had improved their skill practice and classroom performance. Furthermore, a link was discovered between teachers' professional development and their teaching practices.

According to Aljassar and Altammar (2020), teachers differ in their motivation for professional development, whether intrinsic or extrinsic, and the type of development they want, whether lateral, that is, within the realm of teaching, or vertical, that is, with the goal of obtaining leadership positions. These two factors combine to provide four developmental patterns that help us better understand how teachers view professional development and what motivates them to pursue it. Professional development patterns also

demonstrate the importance of professional development processes in the growth of a teacher's desired position, motives, and aspirations, whether they are geared toward learning more knowledge or progressing up the hierarchy. Aljassar and Altammar (2020) also summarized the weaknesses of the PD program based on the research data results, literary findings, and country experiences as follows:

- 1) Margins in the costs spent on teachers' professional development and shortages in the
- 2) numbers of existing training programs and/or hours,
- 3) Appropriateness and accessibility of professional development initiatives,
- 4) Relatively weak supervisor's role,
- 5) Irrelevance of training programs' content,
- 6) Lack of use for modern education technology and a limited variety of professional
- 7) development initiatives,
- 8) Lack of motivational incentives, rewards, and teachers' recognition.

Amin and Saukah (2015) investigated the factors contributing to English as a Foreign Language teachers' professional development and how these factors shaped their professionalism. The study's subjects included six English teachers at senior high schools under the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Religious Affairs in three different regions in Indonesia. The findings of the study revealed that both personal and environmental factors identified as having contributed to the professionalism of the participant teachers, both prior to and after their induction into EFL teaching. Prior to the induction, two personal factors were identified: an early interest in English and a high aptitude, although early exposure to English may also be considered an environmental factor. After induction, their professional development is affected by the following personal factors: the level of job satisfaction, commitment to their own learning and student learning, communication skills, and resilience, and the following environmental factors: students, school facilities, teacher colleagues, curriculum change, school leadership, and the supervisory system.

Abu-Tineh and Sadiq (2018) argue that despite the emphasis on educational reform and the large sums invested in improving the quality of teacher professional development in Qatar over recent years, the PD activities seem to have little impact on the quality of teaching since the programs still include traditional activities such as one-shot workshops which are mainly theoretical in nature and do not, in fact, address teachers' needs. Therefore, they investigated the characteristics of effective PD and effective models of PD as perceived by school teachers in Qatar. They found that regarding TPDs, the enhancement of content and pedagogic knowledge and the promotion of collegiality and collaboration received the highest priority from the teachers participating in their study. The teachers rated the mentoring model, school workshops, and teacher study groups as the most effective PD models. Thus, they recommended that PD providers in Qatar consider the characteristics of effective models of PD as perceived by school teachers to improve the performance of school teachers, which, in turn, would improve students' learning and achievement.

A study conducted by Alibakhshi (2019) claimed that it was unknown how Iranian EFL teachers perceived continuing PD. They indicated that Iranian EFL teachers perceived PD as skills development, continuous learning, keeping up-to-date, learning for pleasure, and revitalizing through engagement with PD activities. They also found that the most common PD activities that teachers engaged in included development through work, engaging in formal higher education, membership in professional associations, attending PD activities, and participating in PD events.

2.11 Research Hypothesis

Afghan EFL educators may professionally need to develop updated teaching methodologies, classroom management techniques, and technology-integrated teaching guidelines.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Design of the Study

As this study aims to identify the professional development needs of English educators in Afghanistan, a quantitative survey design was implemented to collect data. The quantitative method was found to be more suitable for this study because the participants' feelings and attitudes could best be elicited through pre-defined statements regarding their professional development needs.

3.2 Participants

The sampling strategy was applied non-randomly because all the target participants were required to participate in the study. All participants were teachers and lecturers in Afghan EFL educational communities majoring in the TESOL graduate program at Kabul Education University; therefore, the questionnaires were distributed to 29 freshman TESOL students. As the paper's objective was to determine educators' PD needs, only 25 questionnaires were selected for analysis, and the other four were dismissed as they did not hold a teacher position in the Afghan context. Of the 24 participants from 14 different provinces of Afghanistan, 13 were university lecturers in different public universities, six were school teachers, and six were teaching in language institutions, with teaching experiences ranging from 1-6 years. All participants were male, and their ages ranged between 25-35 years old. The lack of female participants due to the absence of female educators in Afghanistan's educational communities is a potential limitation of this study.

3.3 Instruments

A survey questionnaire was designed to determine the perceived professional development needs of Afghan English educators. The instrument was developed according to the Likert Scale format, which contained five scales aimed at measuring the participants' agreement/disagreement level regarding their PD needs concerning their teaching competence and practices. This survey questionnaire contained 11 statements with limited pre-defined responses ranging from "Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree", and one open-ended question at the end of the paper seeking for further PD needs of the EFL teachers that may have remained from the list. The questionnaire also contained some close-ended questions at the top of the paper looking for demographic information of the participants. The questionnaire was developed based on Carballo and Chaves (2018) study entitled "Professionalism in Foreign Language Teaching: An Everlasting Challenge," which ensured the validity and reliability of the instrumentation in advance.

3.4 Data Collection Procedure

The data collection procedure continued by obtaining the participants' informed consent regarding their participation in the study. The questionnaires were distributed to the target group of Afghan EFL educators in a freshman TESOL graduate class, and they were asked to take the papers home and bring them back the next day. I believe that this may allow teachers to think more deeply about the statements and select their major PD needs according to their attitudes. Despite the clear instructions written inside the questionnaire, I also verbally explained the topic, objective, and ethical issues of the study to the participants for further clarification. As the participants were all my classmates, they returned the questionnaires to the classroom fully and accurately.

3.5 Data Analysis

After data collection, the raw data were coded and analyzed using the IBM SPSS statistical package version 21 to determine the mean of the data. First, the questionnaires were analyzed concerning each statement, which referred to the specific professional development needs of teachers. Second, the preferences of the 13 university lecturers were analyzed in a separate phase, and the six school teachers and language institute teachers together in a separate phase for a deeper analysis of their professional development needs. Finally, the overall perceptions of all participants (Afghan EFL educators) were analyzed to gain a general understanding of their PD needs. The last open-ended question was ignored if it was left blank or filled with repeated and irrelevant responses.

4. Results and Discussion

The results of the study are presented in the form of graphs and tables to visualize the quantitative figures and statistics in a more comprehensive way.

Clarification: In the following graphs, the closer the numbers are to zero, the more they indicate the respondents' tendency toward their PD needs. (As they were coded from strongly agree to strongly disagree).

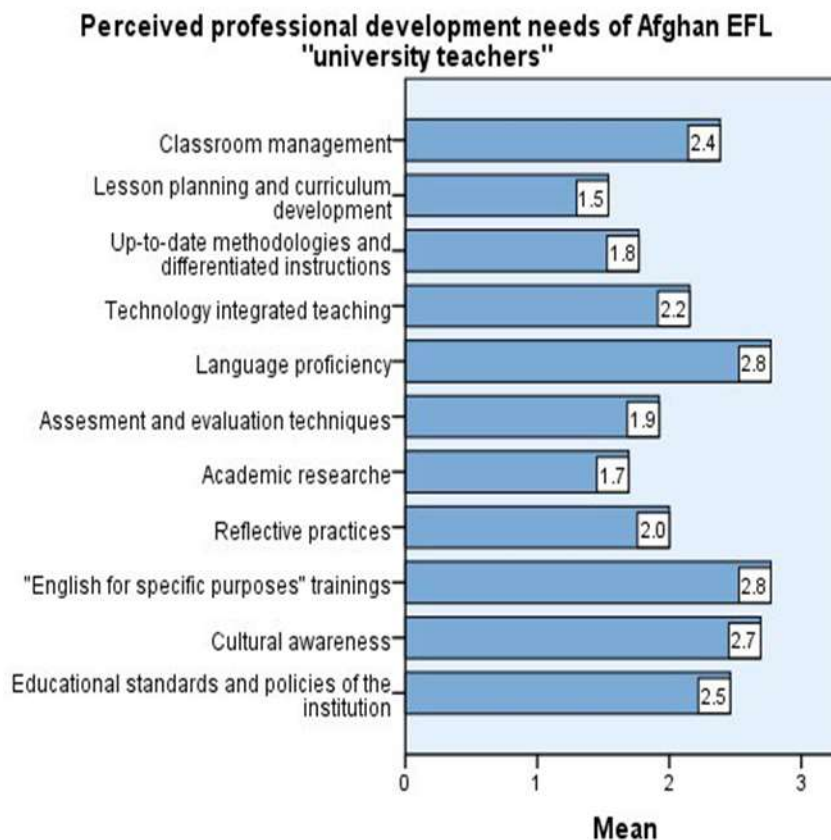


Figure 1. Perceived professional development needs of Afghan EFL university lecturers

Source: Processed data by SPSS 21

The above graph refers to the PD needs of university lecturers. The graph shows attitudes more in favor of “lesson planning and curriculum development (1.5), academic research (1.7), up-to-date methodologies and differentiated instructions (1.8), assessment and evaluation techniques (1.9), moderately reflective practices (2.0), and technology-integrated teaching (2.2)”. On the other hand, the means of the data show that Afghan university lecturers did not perceive the following PD needs as necessary for them. These included language proficiency (2.8), ESP training (2.8), cultural awareness (2.7), educational policies (2.5), and classroom management (2.4). Overall, the average data in this graph indicate that university lecturers in Afghanistan’s EFL communities are in greater need of lesson planning and curriculum development, academic research, updated methodologies, and assessment and evaluation techniques.

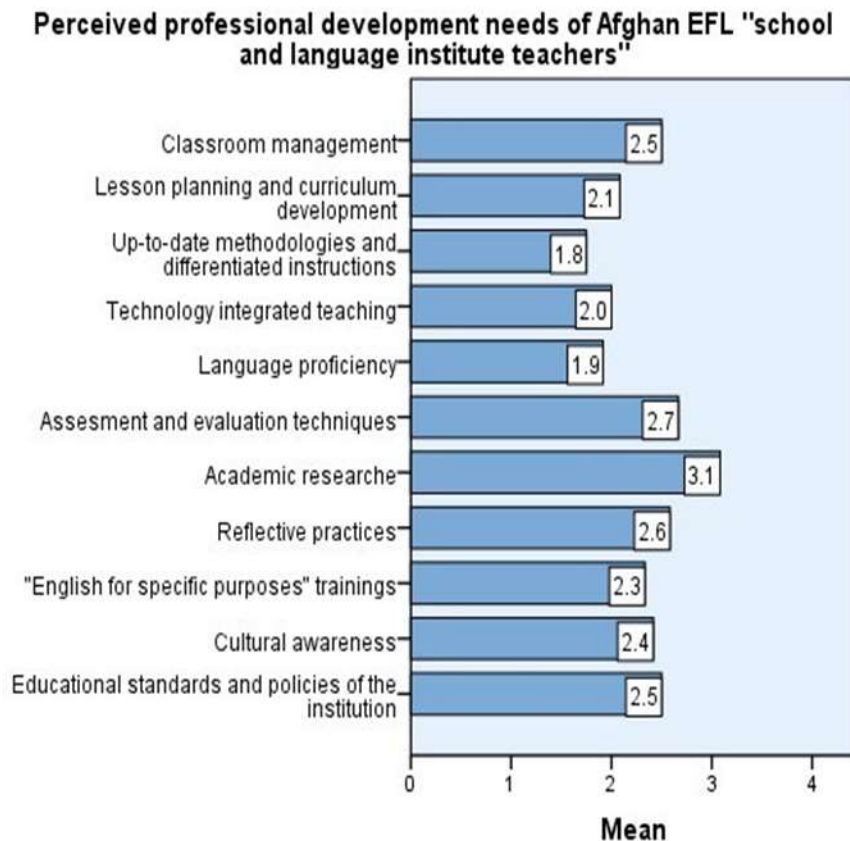


Figure 2. Perceived professional development needs of Afghan EFL school and language institutes
Source: Processed data by SPSS 21

The above graph shows the PD needs of school and language institute teachers. This graph shows that teachers are more in need of “up-to-date methodologies (1.8), language proficiency (1.9), technology-based instruction (2.0), and lesson planning (2.1). Moderately, these teachers’ attitudes were toward ESP training (2.3), cultural awareness (2.4), classroom management (2.5), and educational policies (2.5). In contrast, the mean of the data shows that Afghan school and language institute teachers did not perceive the following PD needs necessary for them. Such as academic research (3.1), assessment and evaluation techniques (2.7), and reflective practices (2.6). Overall the average data of this graph indicate that school and language institute teachers in Afghanistan EFL contexts need more PD in language proficiency, technology-integrated instruction, and lesson planning.

Overall perceived professional development needs of Afghan EFL Educators



Figure 3. Overall perceived professional development needs of Afghan EFL educators

Source: Processed data by SPSS 21

The above graph indicates the overall mean of the data analyzed. It clarifies that Afghan EFL educators' (university lecturers, school teachers, and language institute instructors) agreements regarding their PD needs refer to lesson planning and curriculum development (1.8), up-to-date methodologies and differentiated instructions (1.8), and technology-integrated teaching. Moderately, Afghan EFL educators' attitudes toward assessment and evaluation (2.3), reflective practices (2.3), academic research (2.4), and classroom management (2.4). In contrast, educators did not find the PD need regarding ESP training (2.6), cultural awareness, and educational standards and policies of the institutions. Overall, the findings reveal that Afghan EFL educators need professional development in terms of lesson planning and curriculum development, up-to-date methodologies and differentiated instructions, and technology-integrated teaching.

Table 1. perceived professional development needs of Afghan EFL educators

Respondents PD needs	Afghan EFL university lecturers' perceived PD needs	Afghan EFL school and language teachers' perceived PD needs	Overall perceived PD needs of Afghan EFL educators
1	Lesson planning and curriculum development	Up-to-date methodologies and differentiated instructions	Lesson planning and curriculum development

2	Academic research	Language proficiency	Up-to-date methodologies and differentiated instructions
3	Up-to-date methodologies and differentiated instructions	Technology-integrated instructions	Technology-integrated teaching
4	Reflective practices, assessment and evaluation techniques	Lesson planning and curriculum development	Reflective practices, assessment and evaluation techniques

Source: Elicited data from SPSS 21

The above table shows the preferences of Afghan EFL educators (university lecturers, school teachers, and language institute instructors) regarding their professional development needs, as well as the overall PD needs of Afghan EFL educators. Professional development may help teachers to improve their abilities. According to Knapp (2003), professional development is a critical component of improving teaching. As a result, teachers must maintain consistent classroom practices to maintain their experience, knowledge, and talents. Consequently, there is a constant need to study, analyze, discuss, and ponder teachers' perspectives on professional development, as well as the educational needs of their student populations and the learning options available to them, when managing teachers' professional development (Alruqi & Alharbi, 2022).

The findings of Ekawati et al. 's (2021) study showed that most Indonesian EFL teachers possessed sufficient levels of self-efficacy and attitude towards web-based professional development. Statistical analyses using the Rasch model revealed that most teachers were able to interact with instructors or other colleagues in particular web-based professional activities. Teachers also exhibited a high level of self-confidence in applying what they had learned to improve their future teaching performance. Furthermore, the findings of the study revealed that teachers were very positive about the usefulness and ease of use of web-based technology for professional development, reflecting their acceptance of web-based professional development.

Derakhshan et al. (2020) found that teachers held relatively high perceptions of all three variables in this study. As noted earlier, the teachers in these private language institutes are not permanently employed and are required to prove their capabilities in dealing with the daily challenges of teaching if they are to survive professionally. Second, compared to the centralized system of public schools, the decentralized nature of educational policies in private language institutes in Iran empowers teachers and gives them more agency and freedom regarding their choice of content and methodology. In some institutes, teachers' voices are heard and reflected in curriculum and syllabus design. Third, two generations of teachers emerged as a by-product of the flawed and ineffective one-shot, short-term teacher education and preparation programs in Iran. Teachers in the first group are those who assume that their teaching needs are completely satisfied with the education program they passed and make no further effort to update themselves on teaching methods.

Based on the results of this research, teachers' professional development requirements differ depending on the institutions they work in. For example, university lecturers prioritize specific PD needs, while school teachers and language institute instructors prioritize other requirements for their professional development. The results of the research show that Afghan university lecturers are most in need of (1) lesson planning and curriculum development (material design), (2) academic research, (3) up-to-date methodologies and differentiated instructions, (4) reflective practices, and (5) assessment and evaluation techniques.

On the other hand, school and language institute teachers' PD needs were perceived as (1) up-to-date methodologies and differentiated instructions, (2) language proficiency, (3) technology-integrated instruction, and (4) lesson planning. Overall, this needs assessment provides four developmental patterns

that help us better understand how teachers view their needs in professional development. (1) lesson planning and curriculum development, (2) up-to-date methodologies and differentiated instructions, (3) assessment and evaluation techniques, (4) technology-integrated instructions and (5) reflective practices.

5. Conclusion

The biggest problem in designing and conducting successful professional development programs in educational contexts is conducting a needs assessment to determine the professional development needs of educators. Although some general principles can be reached through research, the uniqueness of institutional or individual situations is always a critical factor in determining the characteristics of successful professional development programs. Activities led by teachers might be needed in one context, while an organizational structure may be needed in another. In other words, instead of one correct answer or one right way, there is a collection of answers depending on the context of the question. The aim should be to determine the most suitable blend and to be aware that this blend may also change over time (Guskey, 2002). This study aimed to compose a collection of answers regarding the professional development needs of teachers using the richness of priorities.

This study aimed to determine teachers' most important professional development needs in the Afghanistan EFL context. The participants of the study were 25 teachers majoring in the TESOL graduate program. The participants were university lecturers, language institute instructors, and school teachers from 14 different provinces in Afghanistan. Data were collected using a Likert Scale Questionnaire seeking perceived professional development needs. The data were analyzed using the SPSS statistical package. When the findings obtained from the teachers' opinions regarding their professional development needs were evaluated in general. It can be concluded that teachers generally perceive their professional development as sufficient. According to the findings of this study, teachers felt the most need for lesson planning, updated methodologies, technology-integrated teaching, reflective practices, and assessment and evaluation techniques.

In-depth findings revealed that the perceived professional development needs of Afghan educators are categorized as the PD needs of university lecturers and those of language institute and school teachers. The results clarify that university EFL lecturers in Afghanistan prioritize their PD needs as lesson planning, curriculum, and academic research training and do not mark language proficiency as their PD need, while language institute and school teachers feel mostly in need of updated methodologies and English language proficiency and do not feel academic research training as their professional development need. In addition, university lecturers selected reflective practices, assessment, and evaluation techniques, whereas language institute and school teachers did not perceive these issues as their PD requirements. According to the results of this research, we can conclude that (1) lesson planning and curriculum development, (2) up-to-date methodologies and differentiated instructions, and (3) assessment and evaluation techniques should be prioritized as PD training for Afghan EFL educators. There is also a need for training programs on (4) instructional technologies and (5) reflective practice.

5.1 Limitations

The limitations of this study include the limited sample size, absence of female participants, and randomization.

5.2 Recommendations

The current study focuses on determining the professional development needs of Afghan EFL educators. Further research can be conducted to explore other dimensions of teachers' professional development, such as the effects of PD activities on teaching performance, challenges faced by EFL teachers, teachers' willingness and motivation toward PD training, and means of PD training prioritized by teachers.

5.3 Suggestions

Considering the results of this study, educators and policymakers in Afghanistan (higher) education can aim to design the required PD training based on the needs of teachers and lecturers.

Acknowledgment

As this study was conducted as a requirement of the Research subject in the TESOL graduate program at KEU, I express my sincere gratitude to my honorable professor Noor Mohammad Ahmadzai for his valuable contributions to conducting this research. Furthermore, I Thank Afghan EFL educators for their participation in this study. Finally, no financial support was provided for this study.

References

- Abu-Tineh, A. M., & Sadiq, H. M. (2018). Characteristics and models of effective professional development: The case of school teachers in Qatar. *Professional Development in Education*, 44(2), 311-322. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2017.1306788>
- Afshar, H. S., & Doosti, M. (2022). Implementing and evaluating a peer-coached EFL teacher professional development program. *Evaluation and program planning*, 92. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.evalprogplan.2022.102096>
- Al-Bakri, S., & Troudi, S. (2020). EFL Teachers' Beliefs About Professionalism And Professional Development. *Journal of Applied Linguistics and Professional Practice*, 15(1), 1-23. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1558/jalpp.34885>
- Al Asmari, A. (2016). Continuous Professional Development of English Language Teachers: Perception and Practices. *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, 7(3), 117-124. doi:<https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.all.v.7n.3p.117>
- Alibakhshi, G. (2019). In-service training professional development needs of Iranian teachers of English as foreign language: A qualitative research study. *Teaching English Language*, 13(2), 95-115. doi:<https://doi.org/10.22132/tel.2019.93339>
- Aljassar, S., & Altammar, J. (2020). A Framework for the Professional Development of In-Service Teachers in Kuwait. *Journal of turkish science education*, 17(3), 364-386. doi:<https://doi.org/10.36681/tused.2020.33>
- Alruqi, S. M., & Alharbi, M. S. (2022). Teachers' Perceptions Towards Professional Development Training Courses: Exploring The Effects On Teachers' Performance In The Saudi Context. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 12(9), 1723-1735. doi:<https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.1209.04>
- Amin, M., & Saukah, A. (2015). Factors Contributing To EFL Teachers' Professional Development In Indonesia. *Excellence in Higher Education*, 6(2015), 12-20. doi:<https://doi.org/10.5195/ehe.2015.138>
- Assalahi, H. (2021). The Professional Standards For Teachers In Saudi Arabia As A Framework For EFL Teachers' Professional Development Needs Assessment. *TESOL International Journal*, 16(6), 161-186.
- Bhatt, S. P. (2021). Self-Directed Professional Development: EFL Teachers' Understanding. *International Journal of Language and Literary Studies*, 3(4), 196-208. doi:<https://doi.org/10.36892/ijlls.v3i4.737>
- Carballo, O. C., & Chaves, J. D. R. (2018). Professionalism in Foreign Language Teaching: An Everlasting Challenge. *Revista de Lenguas Modernas*(28), 373-386. doi:<https://doi.org/10.15517/rlm.v0i28.34844>
- Derakhshan, A., Coombe, C., Zhaleh, K., & Tabatabaieian, M. (2020). Examining the Roles of Continuing Professional Development Needs and Views of Research in English Language Teachers' Success. *Tesl-Ej*, 24(3), n3.
- Ekawati, A. D., Mulyono, H., Arrummaiza, V. S., Zulaiha, S., & Ningsih, S. K. (2021). Evaluating EFL Teachers' Self-Efficacy And Attitude Towards Web-Based Professional Development Practices: A Rasch Analysis. *TESOL International Journal*, 16(6.1), 124-141.

- Ellis, E. M. (2009). Teacher cognition and language education: research and practice. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 12, 607-611. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050802277076>
- Guskey, T. R. (2002). Professional Development And Teacher Change. *Teachers and teaching*, 8(3), 381-391. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/135406002100000512>
- Hardy, J. E. (2011). Professionalism In Language Teaching? *Revista de Linguas Modernas*, 14, 245-261.
- Jiang, Y. (2016). *A Study On Professional Development Of Teachers Of English As A Foreign Language In Institutions Of Higher Education In Western China*: Springer.
- Knapp, M. S. (2003). Chapter 4: Professional Development As A Policy Pathway. *Review of research in education*, 27(1), 109-157. doi:<https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732x027001109>
- Korkmazgil, S. (2015). *An Investigation Into Turkish English Language Teachers' Perceived Professional Development Needs, Practices And Challenges*. Middle East Technical University (Turkey).
- Margolis, J., Durbin, R., & Doring, A. (2017). The Missing Link In Teacher Professional Development: Student Presence. *Professional Development in Education*, 43(1), 23-35. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2016.1146995>
- Nazari, N., Nafissi, Z., Estaji, M., & Marandi, S. S. (2019). Evaluating Novice And Experienced EFL Teachers' Perceived TPACK For Their Professional Development. *Cogent education*, 6(1), 1632010. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186x.2019.1632010>
- Nugroho, H. m. A. (2018). EFL Teachers' Need of Language Proficiency Professional Development: When Policy and Practice Collide. *International Journal of Language Education*, 2(2), 74-82. doi:<https://doi.org/10.26858/ijole.v2i2.6373>
- Soodmand Afshar, H., & Hosseini Yar, S. (2019). Investigating the relationship between attitude towards professional development, reflective teaching, self-efficacy, and job performance of Iranian English as a foreign language teachers. *Teaching English Language*, 13(2), 147-179. doi:<https://doi.org/10.22132/tel.2019.96070>
- Tabatabaee-Yazdi, M., Motallebzadeh, K., Ashraf, H., & Baghaei, P. (2018). Continuing professional development strategies: A model for the Iranian EFL teachers' success. *Sage Open*, 8(1). doi:<https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244018764234>
- Tatto, M. T. (2021). Professionalism in teaching and the role of teacher education. *European journal of teacher education*, 44(1), 20-44. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2020.1849130>
- UNESCO. (2014). *Teaching and Learning: Achieving Equality for All*. Retrieved from Paris: <http://www.uis.unesco.org/Library/Documents/gmr-2013-14-teaching-and-learning-education-for-all-2014-en.pdf>
- Yuan, R., Lee, I., De Costa, P. I., Yang, M., & Liu, S. (2022). TESOL Teacher Educators In Higher Education: A Review Of Studies From 2010 To 2020. *Language Teaching*, 55(4), 434-469. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1017/s0261444822000209>