



Perceptions of EFL teachers from Turkey, Germany and Spain on professional development and their professional development activities

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Abstract

In our global world, governments have focused on the professional development of teachers since teachers are seen as key elements of educational settings to increase students' achievements and the overall quality of education. Thus, EFL teachers are required to equip themselves with up-to-date theoretical and pedagogical knowledge in line with the advancements of the globalized world and students' increasing needs. Therefore, this qualitative study aims to compare and investigate Turkish, German and Spanish EFL teachers' perceptions of and activities in professional development. The participants of this study were 45 EFL teachers working at public schools in the capital cities of Turkey, Germany and Spain. The implementation of the study lasted 5 months. The data was collected through structured interviews and analyzed qualitatively. The findings of the study showed that EFL teachers in this study perceived professional development as an ongoing process. Besides, the most frequently mentioned professional development activities were seminars, training courses, conferences and workshops although there was an important difference in regards to the participation of the EFL teachers. That is, conference and workshops were highlighted only by German and Spanish participants. The current study also unveiled that the most common need areas stressed by the participants were integration of technology into class, classroom management and 21st century language teaching approaches. Moreover, the study also showed that difficulty in taking official permission was a major restriction for Turkish participants unlike their colleagues from Germany and Spain. In conclusion, the study suggests that EFL teachers in Turkey should be given autonomy and choice of selection regarding the professional development activities to attend like their colleagues in Germany and Spain, and also the content of the professional development activities should be reanalyzed and reorganized based on the professional needs of EFL teachers.

Keywords: English language teacher, professional development, professional development activity

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1. Introduction

Globalization has influenced not only all aspects of human life but also educational settings in every aspect. Therefore, educational reforms have become necessary to equip the learners with more advanced problem-solving, communication and reflective thinking skills to respond to the rising demands of the future (Devecioglu & Kurt, 2013). This requirement puts much pressure on the teachers, who are one of the linchpins of the educational settings, to develop themselves with high levels of professional knowledge and skill, but also to keep themselves updated, which makes their jobs more complex and demanding (Alfaki, 2014). In this regard, especially, English as a Foreign Language teachers (EFL) are expected to acquire new theoretical and pedagogical knowledge in line with the advancements of the globalized world since the English language as a global language is not learnt just for the traditional purposes, such as the academic advancements, anymore but for exchanging ideas, collaboration in international platform (Craft, 2000; Goh, 2013; Rohmah, 2005).

Professional Development (PD) is considered as a crucial element for both improving teaching and increasing the students' learning and achievements. Thus, PD is considered as a fundamental factor of the professional development and quality of the teacher (Al Asmari, 2016; Canaran & Mirici, 2020). Therefore, it has been understood that teacher PD in turn boosts both the quality of the schools and students' learning as well as the whole education system both in developed and developing countries (Dayoub & Bashiruddin, 2012). To this end, Turkey has also centered on teacher PD. In this sense, this study is significant given the fact that it deeply investigates not only the perceptions of EFL teachers in a developing country but also those of EFL teachers in developed countries. Hence, the current study reveals the similarities and differences by comparing the perceptions of the EFL teachers in developing and developed countries on PD and their PD activities. The results obtained from this qualitative study also sheds light on the policy makers while arranging the PD programs since it provides opportunity to deeply investigate the perceptions of the EFL teachers from three different countries by giving voice to their feelings and opinions. It also provides the policy makers an opportunity to review what they are currently doing, and to give insights into how to develop more effective PD programs regarding the needs of the EFL teachers. In addition, this study contributes to the body of knowledge on language teacher PD in Turkey, Germany and Spain. That being so, this current study sets out to explore PD perceptions and activities of EFL teachers working at public schools in the capital cities of three countries in order to answer the following research questions:

1. How do Turkish, German and Spanish EFL teachers perceive PD?
2. What do Turkish, German and Spanish EFL teachers think about the participation PD activities (obligatory, voluntary based, or criteria)?
3. What kind of PD activities have Turkish, German and Spanish EFL teachers joined so far? And is there a difference in their involvement in PD activities they joined according to their countries?
4. How do Turkish, German and Spanish EFL teachers describe the most effective PD activity they have participated so far?

5. What do Turkish, German and Spanish EFL teachers think about the benefits of PD activities in terms of their teaching practice, their students' achievement and overall quality of their school?
6. What challenges do Turkish, German and Spanish EFL teachers face while applying those knowledge and skills in the classroom?
7. What restrictions do Turkish, German and Spanish EFL Teachers encounter when they want to attend any PD activities?

2. Literature Review

In this section, the results of the pioneering studies on the perceptions of EFL teachers on PD and PD activities have been discussed chronologically.

Richter et al (2011) investigated the PD activities the teachers with different professional experience levels attended formally and informally. The data were collected from 1939 German secondary teachers in 198 schools. The findings demonstrated that the teachers with 7-18 years of professional experience mostly preferred INSETs as a formal PD activity. There was an inverse relationship between the age and the collaboration among the teachers. Namely, the more experienced teachers preferred engaging in the self-initiated PD activities such as following scholarly publications while the less experienced teachers tended to collaborate with their colleagues. The results also revealed that INSETs were mainly preferred by the teachers with administrative duties while the other teachers preferred informal PD activities for their PD.

Wermke (2011) investigated the perspective of teachers from Germany and Sweden related to their PD and the effect of the workplaces on their PD. 418 teachers from Germany and Sweden took part in the research. The findings revealed that the teachers in both countries believed in the importance of the PD. The most common PD activities among the teachers in both countries were; collaborating with the colleagues, following the scientific publications and online sources regarding their professions. Nevertheless, there was a considerable difference between the attitudes of the teachers towards their continuous PD. While the teachers in Germany took the traditional stance in PD which means that they just relied on themselves and their colleagues in their own institutions, and the sources in their immediate surroundings, the teachers in Sweden took more modern stance in their PD such as participating courses organized by the different institutions such as universities in addition to the courses in their own workplaces. The teachers in Germany had more autonomy in their teaching practices, compared with the teachers in Sweden where the national curriculum tests and curricula dependent on competence were influential.

In their qualitative research, Dayoub and Bashiruddin (2012) examined the professional development of EFL teachers working at secondary schools in Syria and Pakistan in which the PD of teachers was not well arranged. The self-study and case-study methods were utilized to gather data. The first researcher (Dayoub) used self-study to figure out her own PD as an EFL teacher in Syria. The second participant of the study was an EFL teacher in Pakistan. The researchers employed the cross-case analysis to understand the situations of the professional development of EFL teachers in developing

country settings. According to the findings of the research, the PD of the participants depended on their self-initiated learning. Besides, their schools and families supported them. However, there was a lack of building CPD programs within the schools and support the EFL teacher both within their pre-service and in-service periods.

Czerniawski (2013) inquired into the PD experiences of the EFL teachers from Germany, Norway, and England. Ten EFL teachers from Norway, nine from Germany and eight from England participated in the research. The results revealed that the mostly rated CPD activity was the peer learning communities. The participants stated that the intensive and sustained CPD activities influence their teaching practices.

In their qualitative study, Masuda, Ebersole and Barrett (2013) investigated the attitudes and enthusiasm of EFL teachers towards professional development. The study revealed that PD should meet the needs of the teachers and be applicable in their actual teaching practices. The timing, accountability and financial issues affected the attitudes of the teachers towards the PD activities.

Alibakhshi and Dehvari (2015) analyzed the EFL teachers' understanding of PD and the PD activities mainly engaged in. 20 EFL teachers in Iran took part in the interview. According to the research results, the participants identified PD as ongoing learning, improving the teaching skills, learning in the work, gaining knowledge to teach more effectively and keeping oneself refreshed professionally. Workshops, conferences organized by different institutions, engaging a higher education, presenting own experiences at PD events were the most common PD activities.

In a study by Agbayahoun (2016), the perceptions of EFL teachers on PD and PD models they engaged in and their PD experiences were examined. 157 EFL teachers working at secondary schools in the Republic of Benin attended the research. According to the results of the study, all the participants engaged in the compulsory weekly school-based teacher development workshops. The majority of the participants participated in the one-shot teacher training seminars organized by the state yearly. None of the participants was familiar with the PD activities such as conferences, peer observation, coaching, monitoring, action-research, portfolio construction, teacher networking, and teacher professional learning communities. The study also revealed that the PD activities engaged in had no or a little impact on their actual teaching practices and their students' achievements.

With the aim of understanding the EFL teachers' beliefs on PD, PD activities, and the factors that may inhibit their PD, Al Asmari (2016) employed a questionnaire in the form of Likert scale to 121 EFL teachers from various countries in Saudi Arabia. The results of the research showed that PD was viewed as a necessary ongoing learning, a tool for improving reflective teaching. The participants believed that PD activities should include the instructional knowledge, follow-up activities, give a chance them to apply them in their classrooms. They stressed that the PD activities should be organized suitable for their policy of their workplaces to get a support from their administrators.

Özbilgin et al. (2016), in their study, aimed to understand the visions of EFL teachers in Northern Cyprus on PD, their PD experiences and their needs regarding their PD. The findings revealed that the workplaces, experiences, of the teachers, their personal

perspectives and the authorities had impact on their professional developments. The PD activities organized based on top-down approach did not address the needs and interests of the teachers. As they were aware of the inadequacy of the PD activities organized by the authorities, the teachers struggled for attending the additional European programs for their PD.

Zehir Topkaya and Çelik (2016) investigated the PD and PD activities from the perspective of 6 EFL teachers with different teaching experiences. The results of the study indicated that the PD was conceived as updating one's instructional knowledge in line with the latest advances in their field, application of different teaching materials, skills and knowledge into their actual classrooms. The PD activities mostly engaged in were, INSEts, courses, seminars, following scientific researches regarding their professions, reflecting on the teaching practices and working together with the colleagues. However, INSEts were perceived as PD which meant that the participants had a conventional PD understanding.

In their descriptive case study, Şener and Çokçalışkan (2017) examined the beliefs of EFL teachers on PD and what PD strategies they used for their professional development. This study was comprised of 9 EFL teachers working at different high school in Mugla. According to the study results, PD was considered crucial and the participants mostly described PD as an continuous learning to equip themselves with the latest instructional knowledge, new teaching skills to pursue their career more effectively. The most preferred PD activities by the teachers were courses, workshops, seminars, and webinars which were the most common PD activities organized in Turkish educational context. The participants stressed that attending PD activities provided them to feel more motivated and confident in their professions.

Joshi, Gnawali and Dixon (2018) conducted a qualitative research to explore the PD strategies used by the EFL teachers in Nepal and their PD experiences.. 45 EFL teachers working at public and private higher secondary schools and colleges in the districts of Kathmandu and Lalitpur. The findings of the study demonstrated that the Nepalese EFL teachers perceived PD as an ongoing learning throughout their profession. As for the PD strategies, the EFL teachers mostly employed profession-related (e.g. attending conferences, workshops, seminars), peer supported, self-initiated (e.g. learning from own teaching experience and self-monitoring) and study-(research) focused (e.g. analysing the critical incidents and case methods) PD activities.

Biqiche, Chnani, and Messouab (2019) examined the reasons influencing the participation of 30 EFL teachers working at state high schools in Morocco in PD programs. The results of the study showed that the oft-mentioned obstacles were financial problems and the effectiveness of the PD programs. In this respect, the teachers attempted to build on their own learning settings for their professional growth.

Girma, Wubshet and Menuta (2019) aimed to explore the choices of EFL teachers regarding PD activities. The researchers applied the descriptive survey design including both quantitative and qualitative approach. The sampling of the study consisted of 31 EFL teachers, 4 CPD facilitators, 4 school administrators and 4 supervisors from four secondary schools. The findings showed that the mostly preferred CPD activities by the EFL teachers were short-term trainings and workshops. The study also revealed that

there was no follow-up activities and assessment on the active teacher participation in PD activities and the impact of PD activities on their actual teaching practices.

Yücedağ and Karakaş (2019) aimed to uncover the perceptions of in-service EFL teachers on PD and PD activities. The data were collected by a questionnaire including 5 open-ended questions responded by 18 EFL teachers working at different public schools. The results of the research indicated that the majority of the EFL teachers defined the PD as a continuous process of improving and increasing skills through their professions. The oft-stated PD activities were INSETs, international and national projects such as eTwinning, Erasmus, following scholarly publications. The financial problems, poor technological infrastructures in their institution and problems posed by the administrators were the challenges the teachers mainly mentioned.

3. Method

3.1. The context and participants

In the current study, purposeful sampling was employed. The participants were EFL teachers working in state schools in the capital cities of Turkey, Germany and Spain. The researchers asked the participants whether they voluntarily participated in their study. And 5 primary school EFL teachers from Turkey, Germany and Spain; 5 secondary school EFL teachers from Turkey, Germany and Spain; and 5 high school EFL teachers from Turkey, Germany and Spain voluntarily attended the current study. Thus, a total of 15 primary school EFL teachers, 15 secondary school EFL teachers, 15 high school EFL teachers participated in the study, making a total of 45 EFL teacher participants. The demographic information of the participants by country is given in the following table.

Table 1. Characteristics of EFL teachers by country

Characteristics		Country		
		Turkey	Germany	Spain
Gender	Female	11	12	11
	Male	4	3	4
Age	20-30	6	0	1
	31-50	9	11	12
	Over 51	0	4	2
Academic Degree	BA	12	2	1
	MA	3	12	12
	PhD	0	1	2
Teaching Experience	0-10	7	8	3
	11-20	6	4	8
	21-30	2	3	3

Over 31 0 0 1

Besides, out of 15 participants with BA degrees, 12 participants are female and 3 participants are male. Out of 27 participants with MA degrees, 20 participants are female 7 participants are male. Out of 3 participants with PhD degrees, 2 participants are female and 1 participant is male. The participants were coded with their countries in order for the confidentiality of the personal information as the excerpts in the findings section in the current study were given using these codes.

3.2. Data collection instruments

In this study, the researchers utilized a structured interview with 15 open-ended questions as data collection tool instrument to uncover the perceptions of the EFL teachers on PD and their PD activities. The interview form included 2 sections. The first section consisted of the questions related to the demographic information about the respondents' age, gender, teaching experience, school type they work, academic degree and teaching experience. The second section comprised of nine open-ended questions to unveil their beliefs on PD and their PD activities and the challenges they faced. The researchers highly regarded the fact that the participants felt sincere, correct and expressed their opinions freely during the interviews.

3.3. Data collection procedure

The study was conducted in 3 basic phases with the EFL teachers working in the capital cities of Turkey, Germany and Spain during the period between August and December, 2019. Before the implementation of the data collection process, the previous Erasmus + and eTwinning projects partners from Germany and Spain were contacted and requested to help the researchers to access the research sites in Germany and Spain. Besides, previous colleagues who were working in Ankara were requested to help them to gain access to the schools in Ankara. By this means, the first phase of the data collection process started with the implementation of the interview with 15 open-ended questions to the volunteer EFL teachers in their schools in Madrid during August and September, 2019. In the second phase of the data collection process, the interview was implemented to the EFL teachers at their workplaces in Berlin during the period October and November, 2019. The last phase of the data collection process was completed with the implementation of the interview to the EFL teachers in their schools in Ankara in December, 2019. The researchers and the participants agreed on the arranged day of the interview and the participants were interviewed accordingly. All the interviews were conducted face to face. The researchers were aiming to make audio recordings of participants, nevertheless; the participants did not agree on being recorded during the interview. Thus, the replies of the participants were written down by the researchers. Each interview took approximately half an hour. The implementation of the study lasted approximately 5 months.

3.4. Data analysis

In the study, conventional content analysis was employed for the analysis of the data collected to gain insights into the perceptions of EFL teachers from Turkey, Germany

and Spain on PD and their PD activities. The purpose of this analysis technique was to organize and elicit meaning from the data collected and to draw realistic conclusions from it (Bengtsson, 2016). Coding categories were derived directly from manageable chunks in the text. Codes were formed inductively. The specific characteristics obtained from each of the nine questions were next classified by focusing on the similarities across the replies of all the participants. In order to increase the content validity, two investigators completed the analysis individually and then discussed their results and arrived at a consensus. Data were analysed using frequency analysis, the form of content analysis technique. A cross tabulation analysis was applied to find out whether the value of one variable is associated with, or contingent upon, that of another. The results of the cross-tabulation analysis were shown through bar graphs for each question. Cross tabulation analysis and bar graphs were generated using the computer software SPSS version 22 and Microsoft Excel.

4. Findings

The findings of the study based on the order of interview questions are presented in figures and supported with the quotations from the interviews to draw a clearer picture of the replies of the participants to the interview questions.

4.1. How do you define professional development?

As seen in Figure 1, the participants from three countries pointed out various aspects of the notion of PD. And the vast majority of the participants from three countries described the PD as “A lifelong/an ongoing process” and “Being up to date and keeping up with the current changes in the field”. On the other hand, several participants from Germany and Spain stated that PD is gained with the participation in trainings and to self-question and reflect on teaching practices. Few participants from Spain pointed out PD is gained with pursuing a post graduate, gained with experience and gained with the collaboration with the colleagues in their definitions.

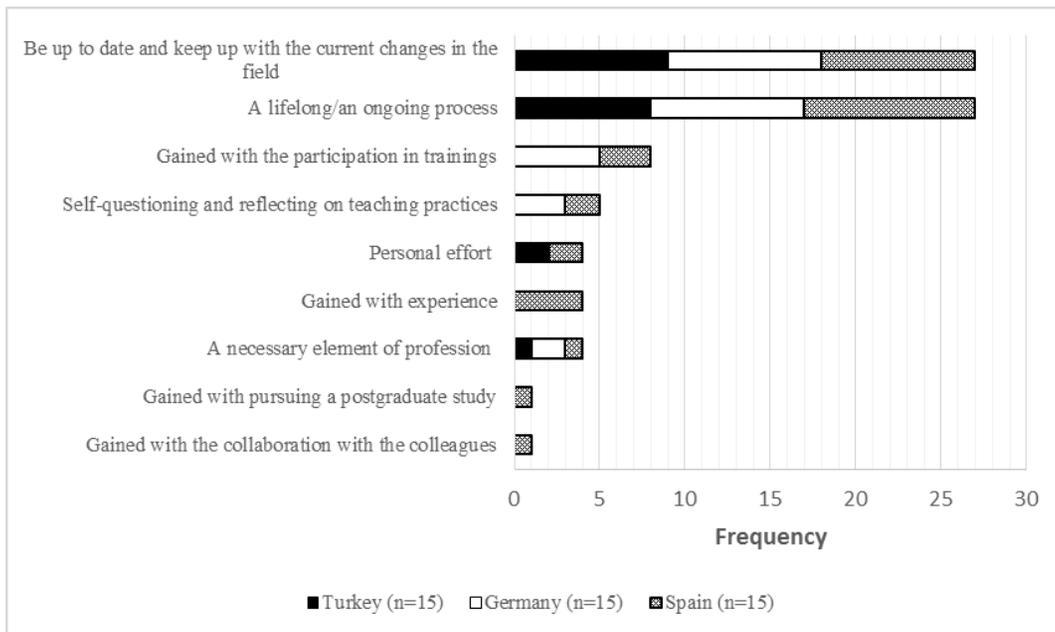


Figure 1. Frequencies for the perceptions of the EFL teachers on PD by country

The following quotations from the interviews clearly represent the participants' views on this issue:

"I think PD is a lifelong learning for teachers to shape their existing knowledge while acquiring new teaching methods and skills in their field" (DE-1).

"As a teacher, I believe we should keep ourselves up to date constantly. I can define PD as being up to date my teaching knowledge and skills by following the recent changes in my teaching branch" (TR-2).

"I would define PD as attending activities such as seminars, workshops, online webinars or even a simple session of colleagues sitting down and discussing challenges to be encountered" (DE-15).

"PD is an ongoing evaluation and reflecting of a teacher's teaching practices to reveal her strengths and weaknesses in the profession and thus she can develop herself professionally" (ES-13).

4.2. Are there any criteria or obligation to attend PD activities?

As seen in Figure 2, regarding their participation in PD activities, all Turkish participants reported that there were no criteria or obligation while attending PD activities, and all Spanish participants stated that their participation in PD activities was obligatory based on their desire for the promotion on their salaries every 6 years. Besides, German participants gave several replies. In other words, more than half of German participants pointed out that they needed to attend at least one PD activity per year. Some German participants stated that they were required to attend at least two PD

activities per year. Some of them stated that they were required to attend any PD activity based on the suggestion of their school managers and the organization of Ministry of Education.

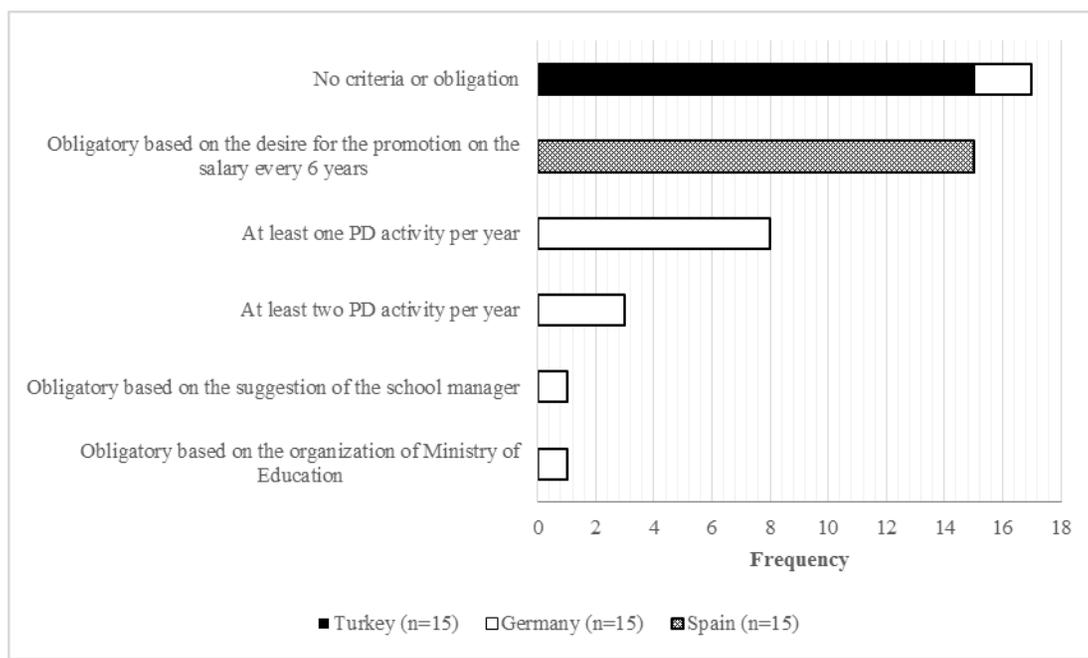


Figure 2. Frequencies for the participation of the EFL teachers in PD activities by country.

The following quotations from the interviews clearly represent the participants' views on this issue:

“Obligatory. We have to join at least two PD activities per year. The others are based on our volunteering” (DE-2).

“There are no formal criteria or obligatory to attend PD activity but I always choose the PD activities with clear schedule and topic, reliable coordinator” (TR-3).

“No obligatory for attending all PD activities but we are required to attend the PD activities organized by ministry of education” (DE-11).

“I can say that it is obligatory to take part in PD (completing 90 hours of training) if I want to get an extra promotion every six years” (ES-13).

“In our school, most PD activities are not compulsory. They only become if the school manager feels that we need to work on a certain skill that could help us improve the quality of the lesson” (DE-15).

4.3. Do you attend the PD activities? If yes, what should the content of the PD activities include?

As can be seen in Figure 3, the majority of the participants from Turkey, Germany and Spain indicated that the content of PD activities should include integration of technology

into class, classroom management and 21st century language teaching approaches. Moreover, as considered the replies of the participants from three countries regarding the content of the PD activity, “Classroom management” was a remarkable reply for Turkish participants while “Integration of technology into class” was the leading reply for German and Spanish ones (Figure 3). Besides, knowledge of English, communication skills, implementing successful and effective group works and knowing the psychological needs of students were highlighted by several participants from three countries as the content of the PD activities that should be included. On the other hand, Stress management”, “Professional self-development” were stated by only one German participant while “Feedback and evaluation on teaching practices” was stated by 1 Turkish participant.

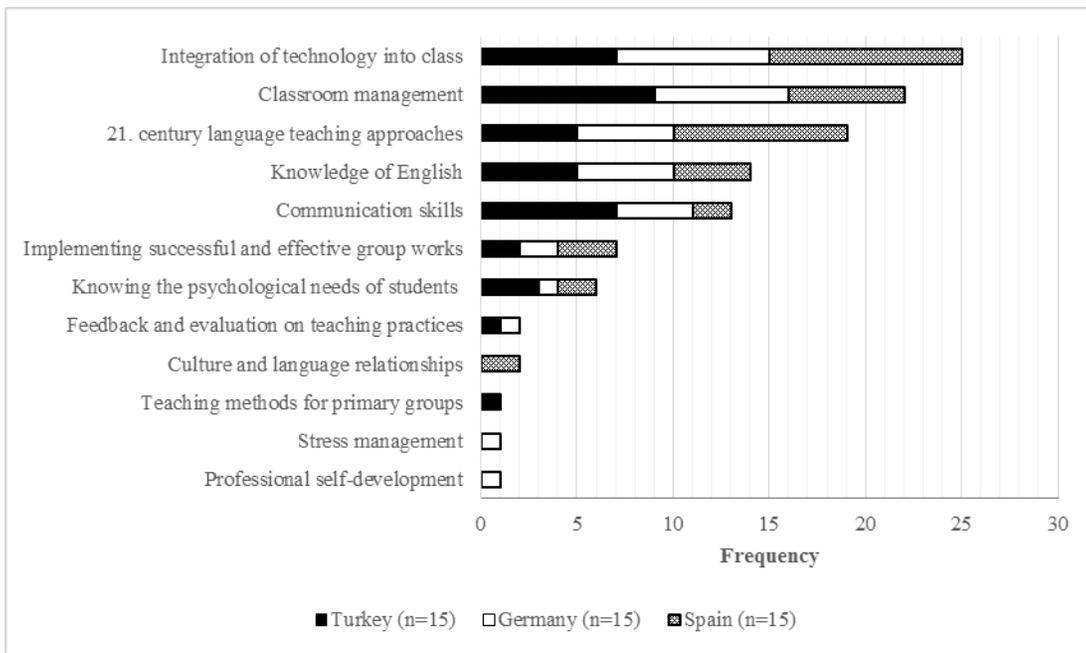


Figure 3. Frequencies for the perceptions of the EFL teachers on the content of PD activities by country

The following quotations from the interviews clearly represent the participants’ views on this issue:

“Of course, I attend PD activities. The content of PD activities should include the integration of technology into class, 21st century language teaching approaches and classroom management” (TR-7).

“Yes, I do. I think that the content of PD activities should include 21st century language teaching approaches, communication skills and integration of technology into class” (DE-6).

“Sure, there should be the psychological needs of the students in the content of PD activity” (DE-4)

“Of course, I attend. I think there should be how to apply successful and effective group works in the classrooms, knowledge of English and communication skills” (ES-12).

“Yes. In my opinion, the content of PD activities should include feedback and evaluation on teaching practices because we as teachers in Turkey do not know how to give neutral feedback and evaluate teaching practices effectively” (TR-11).

“Yes, I do. All the above mentioned and also the content of PD activities should include stress management” (DE-1).

“The content of PD activities should include the classroom management and professional self-development” (DE-12).

“Yes, I usually join the PD activities and the content of PD activities should include “knowledge of English, and culture and language relationships” (ES-6).

4.4. How would you decide the type of PD activities you attend?

Regarding this interview question, all the participants initially indicated that they participated in the PD activities voluntarily, however; they stated different basis while deciding the type of PD activities to attend. As Figure 4 shows, the majority of the participants from three countries pointed out they decided the type of PD activities they attended based on their Professional needs. Moreover, several participants from three countries stated that they decided the type of PD activities they attended based on their students’ needs, location of the PD activity while some Spanish and German participants reported their work schedule and the trainer of the PD activity as a basis. And two German participants indicated that they pointed out the expense of the PD activity as a basis.

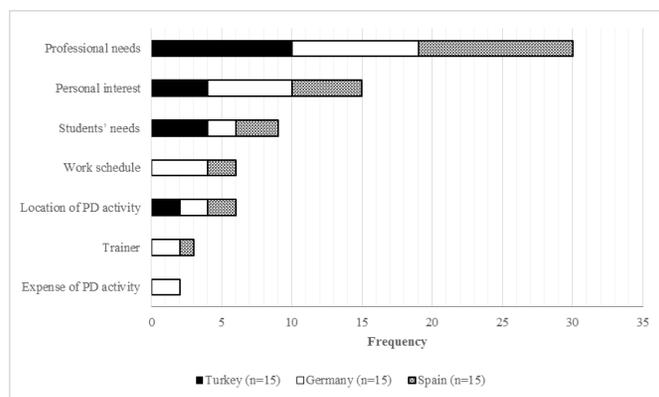


Figure 4. Frequencies for the basis of the EFL teachers’ participation in PD activities by country

The following quotations from the interviews clearly represent the participants' views on this issue:

“Voluntarily. Firstly, I assess my professional needs and personal interests and then I choose the PD activities to attend” (DE-5).

“I attend the PD activities voluntarily and choose the activities based on the needs of my students and my professional needs” (TR-6).

“Totally voluntarily. I decide to join the PD activities based on students' needs” (DE-13).

“Totally voluntarily. I choose the PD activity based on its participation fee and the location” (ES-7).

“Voluntarily. I always pick the PD activities to participate in depending on my students' needs” (ES-14).

“I voluntarily attend the PD activities based on my work schedule and the trainers at the workshop” (DE-15).

4.4. What kind of PD activities have you joined so far?

As shown in Figure 5, the most frequently stated PD activities were seminar, training course, conference and workshop. Besides, as considered the replies of the participants from three countries with regard to the type of the PD activity, it appeared that Spanish and German participants attended training course and seminar more, respectively while Turkish participants attended both of these activities more (Figure 5). On the one hand, some participants from three countries pointed out that they read articles relating to field, attended online courses and had informal dialogue with their colleagues and webinars as PD activities on the other hand, some participants from Germany and Spain stated self- monitoring and pursuing their post graduate among the PD activities they attended. PD course under Erasmus+ program was mentioned by some Turkish and Spanish participant while pursuing a postgraduate study was stated only by some German and Turkish participants. Moreover, some participants from Spain pointed out peer observation, peer coaching and observation visit to other school while several participants from Turkey stated eTwinning projects among the PD activities.

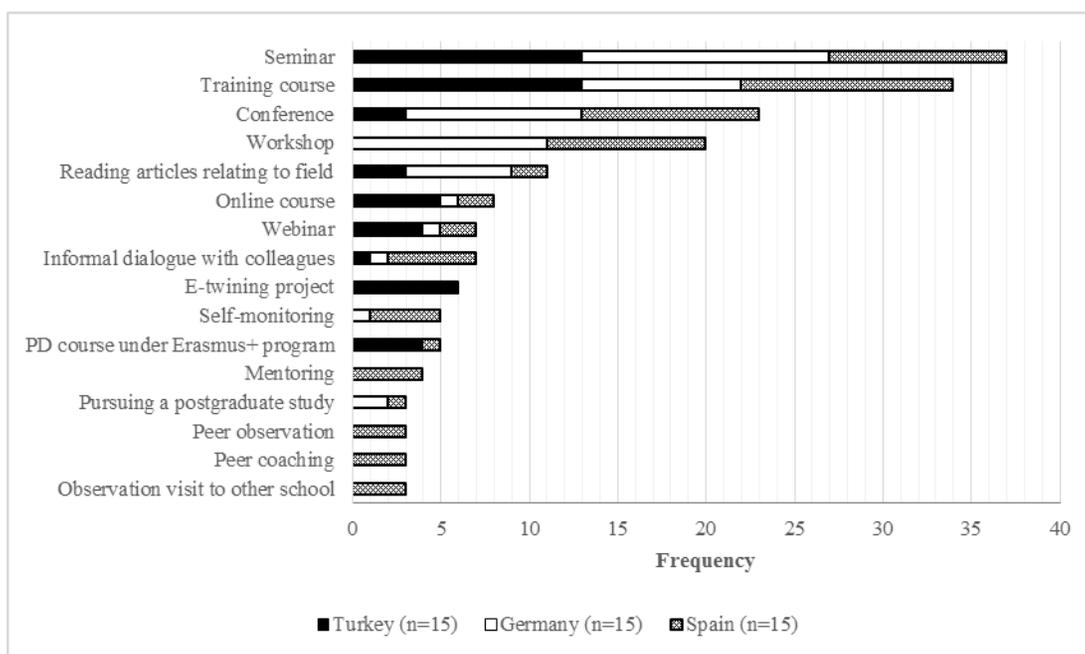


Figure 5. Frequencies for the type of PD activities EFL teachers attended by country.

The following quotations from the interviews clearly represent the participants' views on this issue:

"I normally join in service training courses, seminars. Besides, I read the articles regarding my branch and discuss on an issue with my colleagues informally" (TR-3).

"I joined various training courses, conferences, seminars and workshops so far" (ES-9).

"I always attend the seminars and training courses and I also do eTwinning and Erasmus plus projects which helped me exchange ideas with EFL teachers from different countries" (TR-7).

"I have attended many workshops, seminars, conferences and training courses about teaching methodology, recognizing students' needs, using online teaching materials and communication skills so far" (DE-13).

"I pursue my postgraduate study and read the articles which are relevant to my teaching field as well as attending various seminars, training course, teaching conferences and workshops" (DE-10).

"In my school, we usually have informal dialogue with our colleagues. Besides, I join the webinars as well as the face to face workshops and training courses" (ES-14).

"I participated in seminars, workshops. In addition to these PD activities, I monitor my own teaching practices by recording my practices" (DE-6).

"I joined peer coaching, peer observation and mentoring programs in my school as well as attending the one day courses and seminar organized by various publishing houses" (ES-8).

“I visited other schools near my workplace to visit the colleagues as well as observing my colleagues in my workplace and monitor my own teaching practices by using self-monitoring checklist” (ES-10).

“I attended the PD courses abroad under Erasmus plus program other than attending seminars and workshops in my city” (ES-12).

4.5. How would you describe the most effective PD activity you have participated so far?

As Figure 6 shows, the majority of the participants from three countries pointed out that the most effective PD activity they attended should be applicable in their actual teaching practices. In addition, the participants from three countries mentioned collaboration with colleagues, fulfilling professional needs, the increase in their students’ success, sharing their teaching experiences with the participants, receiving feedback from their colleagues and motivation and inspiration regarding the most effective PD activity they attended. On the other hand, several Spanish participants indicated that the most effective PD activity should enable the teachers to self-reflect on their teaching practices and to have enough time to direct their own learning, be organized coherently. Some German and Turkish participants mentioned that the most effective PD activity should be on voluntary basis while some German and Turkish participants stated that the most effective PD activity should increase in teacher competency.

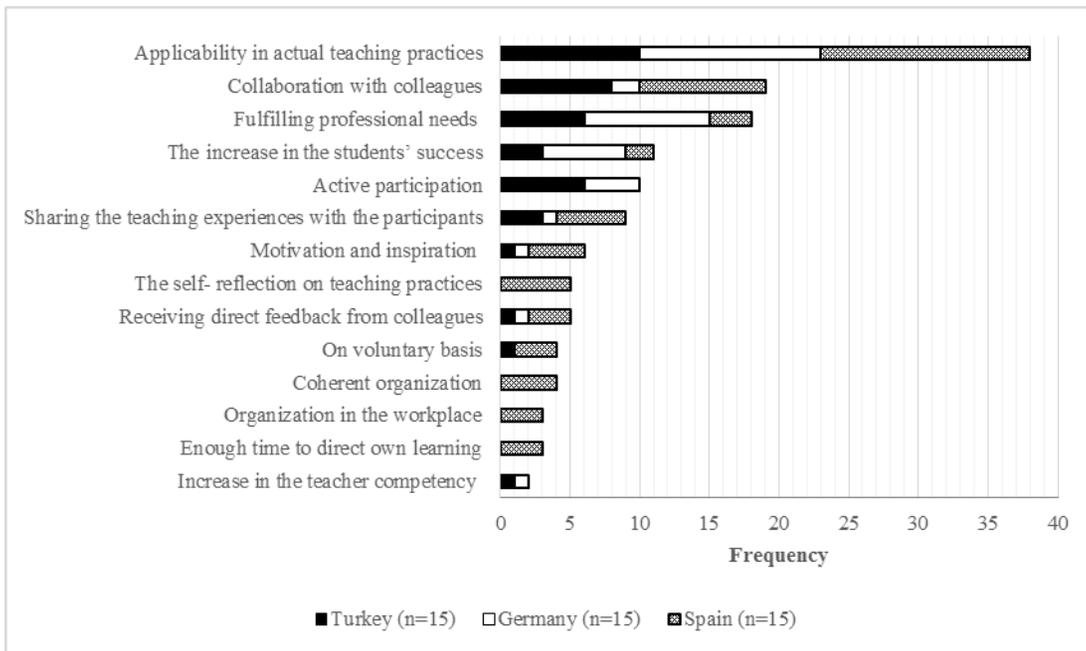


Figure 6. Frequencies for the description of effective PD activity of EFL teachers by country

The following quotations from the interviews clearly represent the participants' views on this issue:

"I can say that PD activity is effective if I can apply the knowledge I gained during the PD activity in order to motivate the students and make them involve in the lesson more actively and also effective PD activity should enable me to collaborate with my colleagues" (TR-1).

"I think that effective PD activity should be the ones where I would be able to leave with a handful of practical classroom ideas to put into practice and the ones that allow me enough time to apply it" (DE-5).

"I think that PD activity is effective if the examples of real life experiences in teaching for the participants to solve their problems encountered in their teaching practices are shared during PD activity" (TR-7).

"To me, effective PD activity should present various activities I can apply in my classroom to increase my students' success" (DE-7).

"I would say that the PD activity in which I collaborate with my colleagues on various teaching issues such as preparing a new teaching material, carrying out a new teaching skill in our school etc. is effective" (ES-4).

"I think effective PD activity should inspire me to create my teaching materials based on my students' needs and language levels" (ES-13).

"I can describe the effective PD activity as the one that is designed and organized logically and meets my professional needs" (ES-3).

"I would say that effective PD activity should enable me to collaborate with my colleagues and receive direct feedback from them about my teaching practices or new teaching application" (ES-4).

4.6. How would you describe the benefits of PD activities you have attended in terms of your teaching practice, your students' achievement and overall quality of your school?

As seen in Figure 7, all the participants pointed out the increase in the quality of education in terms of their overall quality of their schools. Besides, participants from three countries highlighted the increase in satisfaction for the parents about the school among the benefits of their participation in PD activities in terms of their overall quality of their schools. On the other hand, majority of the participants indicated that their participation in PD activities enables the increase in their students' motivation and participation in their lessons and increase in their students' grades. In this regard, some participants from Germany mentioned the increase in their students' responsibility for their own learning. In addition, the participants from three countries stressed being updated with the new teaching methods and techniques, reflecting on and reorganizing their teaching practices, encouragement for the implementation of the new teaching methods and techniques, gaining self-confidence in their teaching, increase in their desire for PD and creating new teaching perspectives as the benefits of their participation in PD activities in terms of their teaching practices.

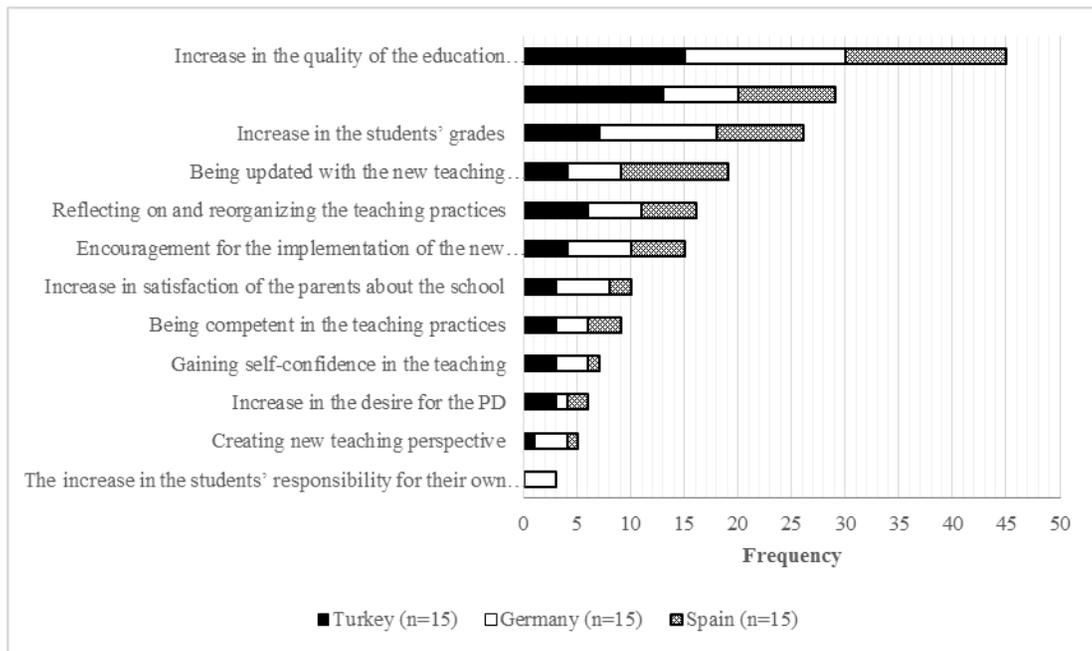


Figure 7. Frequencies for the description of benefits of PD activity of EFL teachers by country

The following quotations from the interviews clearly represent the participants' views on this issue:

“To me, attending a PD activity has many benefits such as learning the latest language teaching methods, reflection on one's teaching practices and knowledge. After attending PD activity, I always feel I can refresh and revise my educational plans, create new teaching perspectives and activities that contribute my teaching performance. So, my students' participation in activities in my lesson increases and their grades increase too. These positive changes bring about the increase in the quality of education in the school and so the school attracts more students” (DE-11).

“Attending PD activities is very effective for the teaching and learning environment in my classrooms. They help me to increase the students' learning capacities in a high quality teaching environment and they get better results from the exams. As for the benefits for the school, there will be general innovation in the teaching practices in the school and the school will turn into a school with high quality education and teaching staff (ES-11).

“After attending PD activity, I felt that I updated my teaching knowledge by learning different new teaching skills and I felt encouraged to use these in my teaching performance and I started to apply more student centered activities and my students began to have fun and engage in the lesson more so they changed their attitudes towards the lesson and became more successful in the lesson. These changes lead to the increase in the educational quality of the school” (TR-11).

“Attending PD activities enabled me to learn about more extracurricular activities, it increased my motivation regarding teaching and I gained self-confidence. These lead to change in my teaching practices and increase in the students' motivation to attend the lessons more actively and in their grades. These, in turn, brought about the quality of education in the school” (DE-12).

4.7. Have you had the opportunity to apply the skills and knowledge you gained during PD activities? If yes, what challenges have you faced while applying those knowledge and skills in the classroom?

As can be seen in Figure 8, the mostly stated challenges the participants from three countries face were the problems regarding the classroom management lack of student motivation and the students with different cultural backgrounds while applying the knowledge and skills they gained during PD activities in their classrooms. However, some participants from three countries stated that they had no challenges and some other participants from three countries stated lack of facilities and time among the challenges they faced. Some participants from Turkey and Spain pointed out technological deficiencies while some participants from Germany and Spain stated number of the students in the classroom as challenges they faced while applying the knowledge and skills during the PD activities they attended in their classrooms. Besides, some participants from Turkey mentioned the national exams (education system requires), parents, intensive subject in the curriculum and discouragement by their colleagues as challenges they faced while some German participants pointed out that the knowledge and skills they gained during the PD activities were not suitable for their school culture.

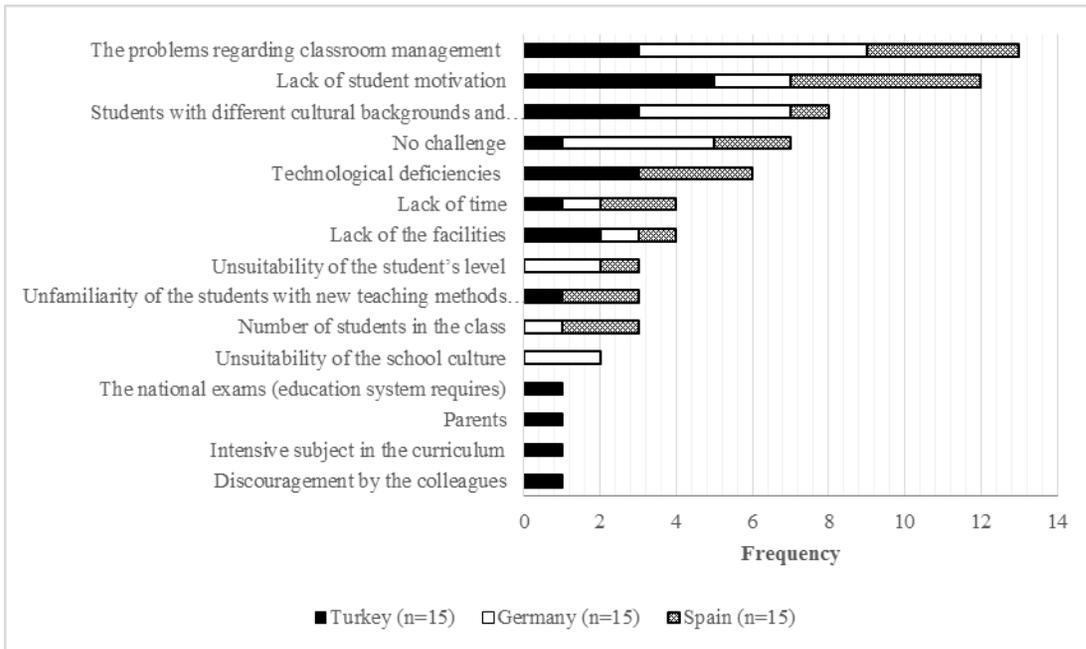


Figure 8. Frequencies for the challenges the EFL teachers encountered by country.

The following quotations from the interviews clearly represent the participants' views on this issue:

"I have difficulty in implementing the activities in the class because of the large number of the students with different levels of English. While implementing them in a class with large numbers of students, the classroom management problems occur" (ES-4).

"The biggest challenge is the students with different cultural backgrounds. While applying them in my classroom, I have to adapt them by focusing on their cultural backgrounds in order to make them attend these new activities, otherwise they do not join them" (ES-14).

"The most important challenge for me is the lack of facilities in the school like projectors, "insufficient numbers of computers for the students" (TR-15).

"When I would like to apply them in my classroom, I face some challenges such as the students' language levels. Besides, the culture of the school which determines the application of the teaching practices can sometimes be challenge" (DE-2).

"The biggest challenge is for me the lack of time to apply them in the classroom" (DE-5).

"I have not faced any challenge so far because our school management provides us rich technological teaching resources for any new teaching method and my students adapt the activities so easily" (ES-11).

"I mostly try to apply the skills and knowledge in PD activities, but sometimes my colleagues with traditional teaching practices try to discourage me to apply them with their sarcastic speeches" (TR-1).

"Yes, I tried to apply them in my class. But although I believe that they contribute my students' language development, their parents think that it is not helpful for their children's' test solving skills for the preparation for the national exams. And they complained about me to my school managers. So, I had to quit applying them" (TR-5).

4.8. Were there any restrictions when you want to attend any PD activities? Could you briefly explain?

As shown in Figure 9, the most prevalent restriction the participants from three countries stated was lack of time. However, the vast majority of the participants from Turkey maintained in their replies they had difficulty in taking official permission when they would like to attend any PD activity. In addition, participants from Germany and Spain stated that they did not face any restriction when they would like to participate in any PD activity. On the other hand, several participants from Spain mentioned about location of the PD activity and lack of cooperation between teachers as restrictions. Some participants from Germany mentioned conflict with work schedule, prerequisite for the participation in PD activity and lack of suitable PD activity among the restrictions while some participants from Turkey stated workload and dissatisfaction of the parents of their students as restriction when they would like to attend any PD activity.

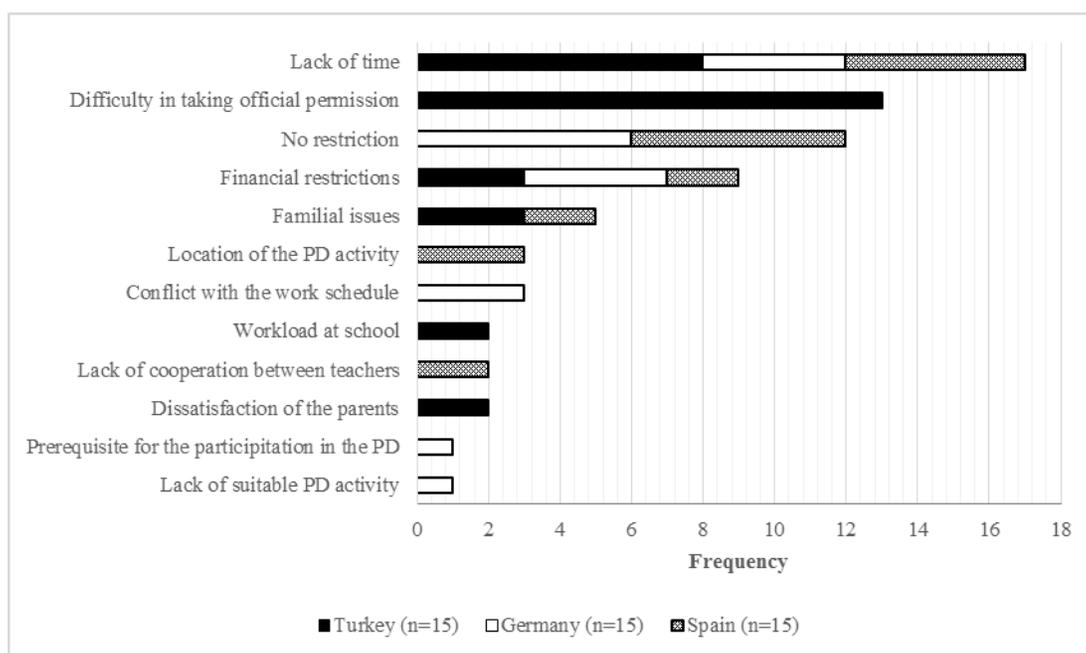


Figure 9. Frequencies for the restriction EFL teachers faced to attend PD activity by country

The following quotations from the interviews clearly represent the participants' views on this issue:

“There are two restrictions for me: negative attitudes of the school manager and familial issues. My school manager is always reluctant to give me the permission to attend a PD activity in the educational year. Besides, as I am married, it is difficult for me to attend PD activities organized in different cities” (TR-13).

“I haven't faced any restriction when I want to attend any PD activity, even I am always supported by my school managers” (DE-11).

“I could say two important restrictions for me: the PD courses conflict with my work schedule and the expense of the PD activities which are the most expected ones” (DE-8).

“Sometimes PD activities are organized in the cities far from where I live and I can’t attend them. And some PD activities are usually after school in my spare time and in my spare time I have other familial duties to do” (ES-1).

“I found a PD activity to attend and while applying for it, I saw that my academic degree was not suitable for participation. Not all the PD activities are accessible to the teachers with BA. And the most expected PD activities are mostly the most expensive ones. Sometimes I cannot afford them” (DE-2).

“The lack of cooperation between the teachers. There are PD activities which can only be carried out with the participation of several teachers and you want to join them but it is not possible if you colleagues do not join. That is frustrating” (ES-3).

5. Discussion

The current study investigated and compared the notion of PD and PD activities from the perspectives of EFL teachers from Turkey, Germany and Spain. To this end, structured interview was employed with the 45 participants from three countries at their workplaces on arranged days.

The two most-oft mentioned definitions “a lifelong/an ongoing process” and “Be up to date and keep up with the current changes in the field” emerged regarding to their perceptions of PD. Therefore, it can be concluded that the EFL teachers from three countries were aware of the fact that they should continuously improve themselves and keep themselves up- to-date to maintain their competency in their profession throughout their careers. This result of the current study is supported with the results of a number of studies carried out in different countries (Alfaki, 2014; Al Asmari, 2016; Alibakhshi & Dehviri, 2015; Atay, 2006; Babanoğlu & Yardımcı, 2017; Bharati & Chalise, 2017; Joshi, Gnawali & Dixon, 2018; Karakaş & Yücedağ, 2020; Şener & Çokcaliskan, 2017; Yılmaz, 2017; Zehir Topkaya & Çelik, 2016). Nevertheless, these results contradict those of a study conducted by Büyükyavuz (2013). Her study uncovered that although EFL teachers emphasized their PD and attended PD activities, they were not literally aware of the conceptualization of PD since they mentioned that they used the proficiency test books particularly prepared for the linguistic proficiency exams such as Foreign Language Proficiency Exam for their PD.

Another definition “gained with the participation in trainings” stressed by German and Spanish participants in this study also aligns with by earlier studies lead by Alshumaimeri and Almohaisen (2017) in Saudi Arabia and by Czerniawski (2013) in Norway, Germany and England. This difference among the participants from Turkey and those of other two countries could stem from the fact that Turkish participants found the PD activities centrally organised insufficient and ineffective due to the reasons such as obligatory and inactive participation in PD activities, lack of addressing their professional needs, unqualified trainers. In this regard, Büyükyavuz and Inal (2008) figured out that the participants stressed the ineffectiveness of the PD activities organized by MONE.

The most common responses of the participants from three countries differed as “no criteria or obligation to take part in PD activities”, “at least two PD activity per year” and “obligatory based on the desire for the promotion on the salary every 6 year” regarding to the criteria/obligation to take part in PD activities. The most frequently stressed response of Turkish participants was “no criteria or obligation to take part in PD activities”. Nonetheless, traditional PD activities in the form of seminars three times during the academic year as at the beginning of the academic year, within the academic year and at the end of the academic year arranged by MONE are compulsory for all teachers to attend (MONE, 2018). In this regard, it could be concluded that Turkish participants took the PD activities they applied to join voluntarily into consideration rather than the compulsory PD activities above while replying the interview question.

As for the responses of German participants, their responses differed as “At least one PD activity per year”, and “At least two PD activities per year”. Besides, “no criteria or obligation”, “obligatory based on the organization of Ministry of Education” and “obligatory based on the suggestion of the school manager” were their other responses. These differences in their responses could result from the autonomy given to the school managements by the Ministry of Education and Cultural Affairs in each Länder (States). In other words, the school management can also conduct PD activities for their teaching staff in their schools under the control of Land Ministries of Education (Martin, 2015; OECD, 2004) and decide on the staff to attend PD activities (Eurydice, 2018; KMK, 2011). As for Spanish participants, the most frequent response “obligatory based on the desire for the promotion on the salary every 6 year” emerged as criteria or obligation to participate in PD activities. This result of the current study corresponded to the results of TALIS report (OECD, 2010). On the other hand, Spanish participants’ most frequent response “obligatory based on the desire for the promotion on the salary every 6 year” emerged as criteria or obligation to participate in PD activities. This result of the current study aligns with the results of TALIS report (OECD, 2010).

On the other hand, all the participants highlighted their voluntary involvement in PD activities while deciding the type of PD they attend. However, it emerged that they decided on the PD activities to attend based on various key factors. “Professional needs” and “personal interest” emerged as the most frequent factors for the participants from three countries to attend any PD activity. Similarly, Kabilan and Veratharaju (2013), Mohammadi and Moradi (2017) and Priajana (2017) unveiled that participants decided to attend the PD activities based on their professional needs and personal interests. Furthermore, “students’ needs” is also taken into consideration in this current study. In this regard, many researchers (Doran, 2014; Fisherman, Marx, Best, & Tal, 2003; Garet et al., 2001; Reeves, 2010) suggested that students’ learning needs could be only determined by their teachers and the knowledge and classroom practices of the teachers had significant impact on their students’ learning.

Besides, “expense of PD activity” was a determinant for German and Spanish participants while Turkish participants did not state “expense of PD activity” as a determinant factor. Correspondingly, in a research conducted by Saberi and Amiri (2016), participants stressed the high cost of PD activities as factor in their decision on the participation in PD activities. “Work schedule” was also another factor for the German and Spanish teachers. This result was supported by TALIS report (OECD, 2009). In addition, the “Location of PD activity” was another determinant factor for few participants from three countries. Similarly, Kabadayı (2013) highlighted that the location was a decisive factor for the participants to attend PD activities, however; TALIS report indicated that location was not a determinant factor for the participants regardless of whether their workplaces are far or near to the location of PD activity (OECD, 2010).

Regarding the needs of participants for the content of professional development activity, Integration of technology into class”, “Classroom management” and “21st century language teaching approaches” emerged as the most frequent responses. Besides, “Classroom management” was highly stressed by the participants working at primary school while “Integration of technology into class” was mainly supported by the participants working at secondary and high schools. The result of the current study on “Integration of technology into class” aligns with the previous researches (Ekşi, 2010; Korkmazgil, 2015; Özen, 1997; Yagcı, 2014; Yılmaz, 2017). Similarly, importance and benefits of integration of technology into language classroom were stressed by many researchers (Akbari, et al., 2011; Biesenbach-Lucas et al, 2000; Blackstone et al, 2007; Boas, 2011; Boonmoh, 2009; Cuthell, 2003; Eaton, 2010; Kabilan et al., 2010; Keyuravong & Maneekhao, 2006; Koieczny, 2007; Lewis, 2009; Murry et al, 2007; Rezaee & Oladi, 2008; Ruhe, 2008; Schmid & Whyte, 2012; Sharma & Barrett, 2007; Son, 2008; Stevenson & Liu, 2010; Sun, 2009; Torres, 2000; Tsukamoto et al.,2009; Wang & Vasquez, 2012; Weschler & Pitts, 2000; Xu & Moloney, 2011; Yılmaz & Saglam, 2011; Zorko, 2009)

in order to facilitate the students' success in language learning in terms of improvement of four main language skills.

On the other hand, the result of the current study regarding to the need for “integration of classroom management” into the content of PD activities was supported by the previous researches (Alan, 2003; Baker, 2005; Brophy, 2006; Jones, 2006; Korkmazgil & Seferoğlu, 2013; Küçüksüleymanoğlu, 2006; Nahal, 2010; National Research Council, 2010; Stough et al., 2006). Besides, the current study indicated that “21. century language teaching approaches” should be included in the content of PD activities. This result of the study showed similarities with those of the previous studies (Black, 2009; Chang & Tung; 2009; Dupuy, 2011 Eksi, 2010; Korkmazgil, 2015). It might therefore be concluded that the participants were aware the fact that they needed to enrich their pedagogical processes and instructional practices in order to provide their students with the practices and processes centering on acquiring and improving creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, media literacy, initiative, and social and cross-cultural skills in line with the demands of 21st century.

“Knowledge of English” as the content of PD activity has also been indicated by participants from three countries. This result of the current study has been supported by previous researches (Aydoğan & Çilsal, 2007; Bailey et al, 2001; Cooper et al., 2004; Doff, 1987; Kömür, 2010; Topkaya & Yavuz, 2005). In line with the result of the current study and those of aforementioned previous researches, Fillmore and Snow (2000) concluded that even native EFL teachers were concerned about their own knowledge of grammar and lexicon thinking. It might therefore be interpreted that EFL teachers either native or non-native speakers of English believe that they feel more confident about and perform their profession more effectively and efficiently in all teaching contexts and at all levels as long as they have high level of language proficiency.

Besides, “communication skills” was stressed to be included in the content of PD activities. Similar results have been pointed out by the previous studies (Kabadayı, 2013, Korkmazgil, 2015; Lehmann & Weber, 2015). However, it might be concluded that there could be differences between their views on content of PD activities regarding “communication skills” as considered the speaking proficiency in English of the participants from Turkey, Germany and Spain. German and Spanish participants might have considered the methods how to make their students acquire communication skills in their language lessons while Turkish participants might take their speaking proficiency in English into consideration as well as the improvement of their students' communication skills. Correspondingly, in their research, Lehmann and Weber (2015) pointed out that EFL teachers from Germany gave a greater priority to the communication skill development of their students allowing them to speak freely in English in comparison with the EFL teachers from Chile. On the other hand, in the earlier researches by Kabadayı (2013) and Korkmazgil (2015), Turkish EFL teachers stressed that their communication proficiency in English decreased over time due to the lack of opportunity for sufficient practice.

All participants stated that they attended PD activities regularly. The most common PD activities engaged in were “Seminar”, “Training course” and “Conference”. As considered the distribution of the involvement of the participants by country, “Seminar”, and “Training course” were mostly used by the participants from three countries while “Conference” was mainly stated by German and Spanish participants and “Workshop” was stated as PD activities only by German and Spanish participants. Regarding to the most common PD activities involved, similar results have been pointed out by the previous studies (Alibakhshi & Dehvari, 2015; Boyle et al, 2004; Canözü Özbek, 2014; Cirocki & Farrell, 2019; Irmawati et al., 2017; Eksi, 2010; Joshi et al., 2018; Korkmazgil & Seferoglu; 2013; Mahmoudi & Özkan; 2015; Oruç Ertürk et al., 2014; Richter et al., 2011; Şener & Çokçalışkan, 2017; Yılmaz, 2017; Zehir Topkaya & Çelik, 2016). On the contrary, these results of the current study have not been consistent with the previous research conducted by Alshumaimeri and Almohaisen (2017), it

was determined that the oft-mentioned PD activities engaged in were “discussing lessons with supervisors” and “observing other teachers' lessons (peer observation)”. This difference resulted from the requirement of Ministry of Education for the Saudi EFL teachers.

As considered the PD activities involvement of the participants from three countries, German participants mostly preferred to participate in “Seminar”, “Workshop” organized by the publishing houses, and “reading articles relating to the field”. It could be implied that German participants were more autonomous and more traditional in their PD involvement, which meant that their PD was more isolated, compared to the Turkish and Spanish participants. In the same vein, Wermke (2011) found that German participants took more autonomous and traditional attitude for their professional development such as attending one-shot workshops organized by various publishing houses and reading scientific books and articles in comparison with the Swedish participants who took more modern attitudes for their professional development such as attending courses organized by universities for long periods and group works.

On the other hand, PD activities as school based and team group work such as “Observation visit to other schools”, “Mentoring”, “Peer coaching” and “Peer observation” were used only by few Spanish participants. In this sense, similar results have been indicated by the previous researches (Manzanares et al., 2012; OECD, 2009).

As for Turkish participants, they also pointed out “etwinning projects” and “PD courses under Erasmus plus for their PD” as well as the PD activities aforementioned. Similarly, in a research by Yücedağ and Karakaş (2019), it was found out that the participants mentioned “national and international projects (eTwinning, KI, Erasmus, Comenius, etc.)” as PD activities with the aim of collaborating, exchanging teaching experiences with the colleagues from different countries.

As for the views of the participants from three countries on the most effective PD activity, the expression “Applicability in actual teaching practices” was the most frequent response of the participants from three countries. Besides, the participants stated that they paid attention to whether PD activity fulfilled their professional needs and enabled them to collaborate with their peers. These results of the current study have been consistent with the previous researches (Al Asmari, 2016; Armour & Yelling, 2007; Bartleton, 2018; Birjandi & Derakhshan, 2010; Gabriel et al, 2011; Hustler et al., 2003; Mohammadi & Moradi, 2017; Powell et al., 2003). The results of the present study also indicated that “active participation and sharing teaching experiences with other participants” were important for the participants regarding to the effective PD activity. This result of the study has been echoed in the previous remarks that Armour and Yelling (2007) and Aslam and Nisa (2019) made about the effective PD activity. On the other hand, regarding their teaching practices or skills “receiving direct feedback from colleagues” was another factor for the participants in order to improve their teaching knowledge and skills and to guide themselves. This result has been supported by Daloglu (2004).

In addition, the current study showed that some participants stressed that effective PD activity should be “voluntary based”, “increase the teacher competency” and thus boost the students' achievements in the lesson. This result of the study has been in line with the previous studies (Daloglu, 2004; Guskey & Yoon, 2009; Kabilan & Veratharaju, 2013). Few participants highlighted that effective PD activity should provide them to “self- reflect on teaching practices”. This result has been congruent with that of researches by Kosmas (2017) and Zuljan (2018). In this respect, Hunzicker (2011) pointed out that PD could be effective as long as it would be ongoing, supportive, collaborative, instructionally-focused, coherent, and job-embedded.

In the light of the results of the study, it can be suggested that the participants of this study were aware of the principles of effective PD activity in spite slight differences in their views on the effective

PD activity. In addition, the current study demonstrated that some participants stressed that effective PD activity should be “voluntary based”, “increase the teacher competency” and thus boost the students’ achievements in the lesson. This result of the study has been in line with the previous studies (Daloglu, 2004; Guskey & Yoon, 2009; Kabilan & Veratharaju, 2013). Few participants highlighted that effective PD activity should provide them to “self- reflect on teaching practices”. This result has been congruent with that of researches by Kosmas (2017) and Zuljan (2018). In this respect, Hunzicker (2011) pointed out that PD could be effective as long as it would be ongoing, supportive, collaborative, instructionally-focused, coherent, and job-embedded.

In considering the benefits of attending PD activities in terms of teaching practices, “Being updated with the new teaching methods and techniques” and “Reflecting on and reorganizing the teaching practices” were the most frequent expressions by the participants from three countries. Similarly, a number of previous studies have indicated that the teachers revised and updated their teaching knowledge after attending PD activities (Bal Gezegin & Solak, 2016; Karakaş & Yücedağ, 2020; McLinden et al, 2006; McNicholl & Noone 2007; Miller & Glover 2007).

With regard to the benefits of attending PD activity for their students’ learning, “Increase in the students’ motivation and participation in the lesson” and “Increase in the students’ grades” were the most frequent expressions by the participants from three countries. This result of the current study has been supported by the earlier researches by Cordingley et al (2007), Hodge and Krumm, (2009), McCutchen et al. (2002), Opfer and Pedder (2010), Talbert and McLaughlin (1994), Vogt and Rogalla, (2009) and Yoon et al. (2007).

As for the overall quality of their schools, “Increase in the quality of the education in the school and the attraction of the school” has been the most frequent view about the benefits of participants’ involvement in PD activities. This result of the current study has been supported by suggestions of earlier researches (Bubb & Earley, 2007; Craft, 2000; Desimone, 2009; Harris, 2002; Özdemir, 2013; Vandenberghe, 2002). In this respect, Day (1999) and Hargreaves (1994) have consistently highlighted that PD of the teacher was a crucial element of success and the development of the schools.

As for the challenges the participants from three countries faced in their classrooms while applying the knowledge and skills they gained during PD activities, “The problems regarding “classroom management” and “Lack of student motivation” were the outstanding challenges faced by the participants from three countries. These results of the current study have been in congruent with the previous researches by Aydın and Bahçe (2001), Kayıkçı (2009), Korkmazgil (2015), Mumary (2017), Soleimani and Razmjoo (2016), Yagcı (2014) and Yazdanmehr and Akbari (2015). This result might stem from the hesitation of the students to get involved in the lesson, their negative attitude towards English or lack of intrinsic motivation for learning English. What is more, new PD activities the EFL teachers tried to implement in their classrooms might not have aroused their students’ interest and behavior and discipline problems might arise. Besides, the participants have also put forward “students with different cultural backgrounds and learning styles” as a challenge. This result has echoed in the previous research by Li et al. (2004).

“Lack of the facilities” has also emerged as a challenge the participants of the current study faced. This result has been in line with the previous studies (Ceylan, 2015; Fatiloro, 2015; Garton et al, 2014; Karakaş & Yücedağ,2020; Lyons, 2012; Mumary, 2017; Nurkamto, 2003). Another challenge the participants of the current study encountered was “Number of students in the class”. In congruence with this result, Akbari (2015), Atas (2018), Baker and Westrup (2000), Emery (2012) and Nurkamto (2003), in their researches listed “crowded classroom” as challenge the participants faced.

“The national exams (education system requires)” was also another challenge faced by Turkish participants. Similarly, Yagcı (2014) disclosed that the national exams that the students were to take and these were the challenges EFL teachers faced when they attempted to apply what is learnt during PD activities. Furthermore, Akbari (2015) pointed out that ELF teacher in Iran were expected to prepare their students for the examinations and to get higher scores in those examinations.

As for the views of the participants regarding the restrictions they encountered when they want to attend any PD activity, “Lack of time”, “Difficulty in taking official permission” and “No restriction” were the most frequent restrictions highlighted.

“Lack of time” was stated by the participants from three countries while “no restriction” was mentioned only by German and Spanish participants and “Difficulty in taking official permission” was stressed only by Turkish participants. In the same vein, earlier researches by Archibald et al. (2011), Canözü Özbek (2014), Ekşi (2010), Kabadayı (2013), Karaaslan (2003); Masuda et al. (2013), Oruç Ertürk et al. (2014), Taylan (2017), Tulowitzki et al. (2018); Utami (2019) stressed timing issue as the restriction.

When it comes to the expression “no restriction”, German teachers’ involvement in PD activities is intrinsically motivated (Tulowitzki et al., 2018) and they are more autonomous (Wermke, 2011) related to attending PD activities. As for the Spanish participants, their participation in PD activities is optional (Eurydice, 2019) but apparently linked to career advancement in career and increase in salary (OECD, 2010). In this respect, it might be concluded that German participants have not considered the formal obligation for attending PD activities as a duty for them but as a necessary component of their professions so they stated no restriction for their involvement in any PD activity while Spanish participants may have not encountered any restriction for attending any PD activity because of being optional to attend PD activity formally but clearly linked to salary increase and advancement in their careers.

“Difficulty in taking official permission” as restriction obtained from only the replies of Turkish participants has echoed in the results of earlier studies by Gebhard (1998), Kabadayı (2013), Karaaslan (2003), Karakaş & Yücedağ, (2020), Muyan (2013), Taylan (2017), Yagcı (2014) and Zerey (2018). This result may have stemmed from the central education system and bureaucracy in education in Turkey. And it clearly seems that all Turkish participants consider “lack of institutional support” as a vital hindrance of their participation in PD activities.

“Financial restriction” and “familial issues”, external factors, were the next restrictions faced by the participants along with the ones mentioned above. This result of the study has been consistent with those of the previous studies (Canözü Özbek, 2014; Karakaş & Yücedağ, 2020; Masuda et al., 2013; Oruç Ertürk et al., 2014; Taylan, 2017; Tunaz & Önem 2017; Utamai, 2019; Yasar, 2019). However, in the previous researches (Muyan, 2013; Zerey, 2018), “lack of self-motivation”, internal factor, was a crucial factor hindering the EFL teachers’ involvement in PD activities.

Besides, “workload”, “conflict with work schedule” and “lack of cooperation between teachers” have also emerged as restrictions in the current study. These restrictions stated in the current study have been parallel to the previous studies by Borg (2009), Muyan (2013), Taylan (2017) and Zerey (2018).

The results of the study also indicated “location of PD activity” was another factor hindering the participants’ involvement in PD activities. Similarly, in the earlier studies by Ekşi (2010) and Kabadayı (2013), it was concluded that “location” constrained the EFL teachers’ participation in PD activities.

5. Conclusions

In the current study, the majority of the participants perceived the notion of PD as a lifelong/ongoing process rather than short term process. Besides, “Seminar”, Training course”, “Conference” and “Workshop” were reported as most frequently attended PD activities. The participants also mainly stressed that PD activities which they could apply in their actual teaching practices were beneficial for their teaching. In addition, the participants highlighted that “The problems regarding classroom management”, “Lack of student’s motivation”, and “Students with different cultural backgrounds” as the challenges encountered while applying the knowledge and skills they gained during PD activities in their classrooms. As for the restrictions the participants encountered, “Lack of time”, “Difficulty in taking official permission” and “No restriction” were the most frequent restrictions the participants encountered when they want to attend any PD activity. However, “lack of time” was stated by the participants from three countries while “no restriction” was mentioned only by German and Spanish participants and “Difficulty in taking official permission” was stressed only by Turkish participants.

In conclusion, it can be suggested that the school managements in Turkey should support the teachers for their involvement in PD activities as their counterparts in developed countries: Germany and Spain. Besides, PD activities in Turkey do not address the teachers’ professional, personal needs and the problems encountered in their actual teaching practices since the organization of PD activities in Turkey are based on a top down approach, highly centralized system unlike that in developed countries: Germany and Spain. In this respect, the policymakers should give priority to identify the needs, beliefs and characteristics of the teachers who play crucial role in educational setting and quality of the education. In this respect, a comprehensive professional needs analysis should be conducted so that EFL teachers can benefit from the PD activities more effectively and efficiently. Furthermore, The PD activities in which teachers can discover their teaching practices, share their experiences with their colleagues on various topics and keep themselves updated should be offered. Turkish EFL teachers should be given the autonomy and choice of selection regarding the PD activities to attend like their colleagues in Germany and Spain. Thus, Turkish EFL teachers can take initiatives on their PD based on their professional and personal needs and the needs of their students to be an effective teacher. Additionally, obligatory participation in PD activities should be solved as these kinds of PD activities do not contribute to ongoing PD of teachers. It can be also suggested that Inset PD activities should not be restricted to traditional forms such as seminars and courses. And PD activities where teachers can apply individually and as teams such as “visits to other schools”, “peer coaching”, “peer observation”, “team teaching”, “teaching portfolios”, “pursuing postgraduate degree” and “self-monitoring” should be included as well as seminars, courses in Turkey just as those in developed countries Germany and Spain.

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