

Exploring The Relationship between Professional Development Attitudes, Activities and Self-Directed Learning Readiness of EFL Instructors

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Abstract

With regard to gender, the research study aims to investigate the relationship between instructors' engagement in professional development activities, their attitudes towards professional development, and their readiness for self-directed learning. The study is designed in both correlation model and descriptive comparative model. The research sample is composed of 271 instructors of the English language working at state universities in Ankara. To collect the data, three questionnaires which are the scale of continuous professional development activities developed by De Vries et al. (2013), the attitude about professional development scale developed by Torff et al. (2005), and the self-directed learning readiness scale developed by Fisher et al. (2001) are used. SPSS 22 is used to analyze data and the results indicated that the level of participation of instructors in continuous professional development activities is not high. Besides, collaborative activities are the least preferred ones while reflective activities are the most preferred ones. The analysis of results also shows that the instructors have positive attitudes towards professional development while their attitudes did not differ significantly in terms of gender. Finally, it has been found that instructors' levels of self-directedness are high and it does not differ significantly in terms of gender, the attitudes towards professional development activities, and self-directed learning readiness together exhibited a significant relationship with participation in all continuous professional development activities.

Keywords: Professional Development Attitudes, Professional Development Activities, Self-Directed Learning Readiness

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INTRODUCTION

Changes take place in all areas of human life, especially in the information society. Also, there is this change in education structures and instructors (Avalos, 2011) and teaching staff need to adjust to this change as well. The rapid transition is taking place, along with the enhancement of the professional development activities of instructors (Irgatoğlu, 2017).

Considering the rapid changes that also affect the field of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL), professional development focuses on universities all over the globe to serve the needs of instructors who pursue the latest developments in the region (Liyanage & Bartlett, 2008). This issue is particularly crucial in Turkey, especially for the preparatory schools of universities (Ünal, 2010).

Despite innovative education systems at universities, continual learning or development continue to be critical for instructors as the structure of teaching is changing (Balcioğlu, 2010). The instructors need to update their knowledge with new techniques and approaches so that they can remain up to date and competent even though it may be difficult to apply new ideas and concepts in their classrooms. Foreign language instructors in Turkey are to claim information required to adapt in addition to the changes in their field and are expected to refresh themselves continuously (Ünal, 2010).

Gaining competence is important to achieve constant learning. To remain competent, appropriate competencies must be acquired. To become capable and increase their awareness of innovations, instructors ought to pay attention to the continuous self-development because a language instructor must be apt in using the language and understand innovations within the field (Liyanage & Bartlett, 2008). It's a change in professional development that reflects these innovations. Therefore, the promotion of better techniques also seems a matter of concern to many instructors and experienced linguists in the twentieth century; (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p.11). Thus, an ongoing process of professional development is needed to make them more professional to get the benefits better (Irgatoglu, 2017).

Teaching, as a profession, is comprised of a series of personal and professional experiences. Furthermore, innovations in the field of teacher education take the expertise, skills, and behaviours necessary to provide an essential piece of teacher training and professional development are clarified individually and as a social activity, so the formation of both schools and the quality of teachers and student achievement can boost learners' development (Opfer et al., 2011). Hence, enhancing the quality of education is the key factor in the fact that an instructor should develop themselves at all stages in their professional lives (Guskey, 2000).

To improve the learning process, instructors are involved in professional development activities that play an important role. Guskey (2002) indicates in a report that instructors' professional development is a key factor contributing to enhancing the quality of education through the support of teacher competence. According to many scholars (Guskey, 2002; Putnam & Borko, 2000), systematic professional development activities, are one of the main factors for growing the quality of instructors and student achievements. The development of education needs to be able to achieve some progress in learning. If professional development is structured and responsive to the needs of teachers and students, then a real change will take place. Change is important in the concept of implementing quality. It is a key element that is needed to provide a comprehensive approach to teacher professional development.

A significant number of master's and doctoral research have been carried out over the last few decades on the needs of foreign language teachers in Turkey for professional development and its practical implementation (Baykal, 2019; Muhammad, 2019; Korkmaz, 2015; Korkmazgil, 2015; Yağcı, 2014; Muyan, 2013;). There is, however, no research exploring the relationship between professional development attitudes, activities, and self-directed learning readiness. A variety of research studies have also confirmed both the efficacy and relevance of professional development in

Turkey (Balcıoğlu, 2010; Ünal, 2010; Personn, 2014; Dikilitaş, 2013). The importance of professional development activities is crucial as some issues are considered, such as recent developments in the field, design, and assessment of the curriculum, and finally being reflective.

When the professional development practices in Turkey and the world are compared, the ones in Turkey are reported to be carried out in the form of training. Therefore, the professional development activities in Turkey are not as qualified as expected. This situation negatively affects teachers' attitudes and perceptions about professional development activities (Bozkurt et al., 2012). However, one of the most important factors in the emergence of a behavior is the attitude that leads to the emergence of that behavior. When the current situation is taken into consideration, it can be claimed that the shape and nature of the professional development activities affect the professional development attitudes negatively (Bozkurt et al., 2012).

A lot of studies have been conducted on professional development which reveals the importance of this issue (Ünal et al., 2011; Avalos, 2011; Hadar & Brody, 2010). As can be seen in the aforementioned studies, the instructors' attitudes of professional development influence their engagement in those activities which are important for improving language education quality. This research is therefore intended primarily to analyze the relation between teacher engagement in professional development, their attitudes to professional development, and their readiness to learn in terms of gender.

In general, it depends on the standard and efficiency of education to advance and survive every society. Every country needs motivated and successful instructors as a cornerstone of education, so it can educate and prepare its young people for a better future in line with its education system (Torabi et al., 2013). But the lack of effective, skilled human capital is one of the current challenges of the education system. Training on-the-job and pre-employment training have shown their inability to cause major improvements in education systems. Undoubtedly, teachers concerned with their problems and failures cannot be expected to use all their resources and understanding to learn the correct methods of teaching. Therefore, a new approach must be introduced in the process of teacher training that will eventually lead to successful lessons, which ensures that teachers do not anticipate passive learning, but take the initiative in learning and are responsible for themselves (Torabi et al., 2013). As a suggestion, it is indicated that self-directed learning refers to a phase in which the learner starts, prepares, executes, and tracks his learning at various stages. Self-directed learning has been considered as the concurrent controller of adjustments amongst teachers and students, and self-directed learning is assumed to set targets, decide on learning and assess learning (Nadi & Kazemi, 2003).

Self-directed learning requires activities where people are not beyond control and the learning processes are handled by themselves. The educational setting of the teachers is expected to help the professional development of teachers. However, in reality, teachers should take care of their learning to improve professionally (Torabi et al., 2013). Students who enter education programs without autonomous learning abilities typically face stress or failure (Williamson, 2007). Therefore, in recent decades, improving self-directed learning skills has become one of the priorities of professional development. While teaching practices associated with self-directed learning are important, little research has been carried out on this subject up to now, but such investigations have recently increased: for example, Linares (1999) carried out a study on the relationship between learning style and self-directed learning. He observed that both groups of students and faculty members tended to have the converging style and that autonomous learning in both groups was strong. Nevertheless, the faculty members were more independent than the students. Linares showed that there was a substantial relationship between the self-directed readiness to learn and learning styles.

For the individual to gain self-directed learning skills, it is necessary to be ready first. For this readiness, some cognitive, affective, and psychomotor behaviors, which are prerequisites, must be gained by the individual. These behaviors, which are necessary for individuals to learn on their own, are known as readiness to learn on their own. self-directed readiness is defined as the level of having

the tendencies, abilities, and personal characteristics necessary for an individual to acquire self-directed learning skills (Fisher, et al. 2001). Readiness for self-directed learning is also one of the most important inputs of the self-directed learning process (Kelly & Boyer, 2005). There are many variables such as personal characteristics, abilities, attitudes towards learning, cognitive and affective competence of the individual that affect self-directed learning readiness. (Fisher, et al., 2001). These variables are; education level, personal characteristics, learning style, life satisfaction, health status, self-management, critical thinking and awareness, academic achievement motivation, self-efficacy, and taking on own learning responsibilities (Reio, 2004). When evaluated, readiness for self-directed learning offers the individuals excellent opportunities to learn (Fisher et al., 2001). In terms of these features, it can be considered to be an important feature for professional development. Readiness for self-directed learning is important for instructors to take advantage of both individual and organizational learning opportunities.

Also, in Turkey in recent years, both in research as well as the National Education Council's 2017- 23 mission and vision document of the importance of professional development indicates that the subject stands out noticeably. Factors affecting instructors' participation in professional development, which is one of the cornerstones of quality in education, should be reviewed in different education systems. The participation of instructors' professional development training in Turkey is not mandatory except for some services (Bümen et al., 2012). In this respect, professional development is mostly done with individual efforts. When evaluated in this context, it is thought that teachers' attitudes towards professional development and individual characteristics such as self-directed learning readiness are important for professional development (Liu et al., 2014).

When the participation of instructors in professional development activities is evaluated in the context of the variables of this study, the significant contribution of self-directed learning to participate in professional development and individual and organizational learning has been emphasized in some studies (Ellinger, 2004; Liu, et al., 2014). It is known that the attitude towards professional development also has an important potential in ensuring participation in professional development and making professional development a priority (Ndlovu, 2014; Muzaffar & Malik, 2012). The nature of professional development and the professional development of instructors are becoming more important day by day. Since in Turkey, the professional development of instructors depends on more individual efforts than teacher training activities designed by teacher trainers. Besides, the professional development of instructors is not sufficiently supported and sufficient opportunities are not provided (Bümen et al., 2012). These systemic problems both prevent instructors from participating in professional development activities and negatively affect the quality of professional development. In this context, it is thought that evaluating these variables, which are thought to have a relationship with the participation in professional development activities, with a holistic perspective will make a significant contribution to the efforts to increase the quality of education. Also, examining some of the demographic characteristics of instructors such as gender will enable the definition of lecturer profiles regarding their professional development. Defining these profiles will provide important data in the process of developing professional development policies and practices. The fact that this research includes a large number of data collection tools and data analysis methods, emphasizing a holistic approach to participation in professional development activities, makes the study valuable. In this context, self-directed learning readiness mediation analyses, which are related to individual learning, whose relationship with participation in professional development is partially revealed, includes the current analysis technique.

This study aims to examine the relationship between instructors' participation in professional development activities, their attitude towards professional development, and self-directed learning readiness, in terms of gender. To achieve these goals, the following research questions are stated:

1. What is the level of participation of instructors in professional development activities? Does the participation of instructors in professional development activities differ in terms of gender?

2. What are the instructors' attitudes towards professional development? Do instructors' attitudes towards professional development differ significantly in terms of gender?

3. What is the self-directed learning readiness level of the instructors? Does the level of readiness of instructors for self-directed learning differ significantly in terms of gender?

4. Is there a correlation among sub-dimensions of epistemological beliefs and teaching approaches?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Regarding gender, the research study aims to investigate the relationship between teachers' engagement in professional development activities, their attitudes towards professional development, and their readiness for self-directed learning. The study is designed in both correlation model and casual comparative model.

The Participants

The research sample is composed of 271 instructors of the English language working at state universities in Ankara.

Table 1. General Characteristics of the Participants

	Age				Gender	
	20-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	Female	Male
Frequency	65	65	69	72	132	139
Percentage	24%	24%	25,4%	26,6%	49%	51%

As shown in Table 1, 65 of the participants (p.24%) were aged between 20-30, 65 of them (p.24%) were aged between 31-40, 69 of them (p.25,4%) were between 41-50 and 72 of them (p.26,6%) were 51-60. 132 (p.49%) of the participants were females, while 139 (p.51%) of them were males.

Data Collection

To collect the data, three questionnaires which are the scale of continuous professional development activities developed by De Vries et al. (2013), the attitude about professional development scale developed by Torff et al. (2005), and the self-directed learning readiness scale developed by Fisher et al. (2001) are used.

1. *Continuous Professional Development Activities Scale (CPDAS)*: This survey was developed by De Vries et al. (2013). It includes forty items and three subscales, which are updating activities (11 items), reflective activities (13 items), collaborative activities (16 items). The Cronbach's alpha value for the scale was calculated as,796, indicating an acceptable level of reliability. The results are presented in Table 2.
2. *Attitudes towards Professional Development Scale (APDS)*: It was developed by Torff et al. (2005). It is a 6-item tool. The Cronbach's alpha value for the scale was calculated as,784, indicating an acceptable level of reliability. The results are presented in Table 2.
3. *Self- Directed Learning Readiness Scale (SDLRS)*: It was developed by Fisher et al. (2001). It is a 29-item tool including three subscales which are self-management (8

items), willingness to learn (10 items), and self-regulatory abilities (11 items). The Cronbach's alpha value for the scale was calculated as,925, indicating an acceptable level of reliability.

Table 2. Reliability analysis

Variables	number of items	Cronbach's alpha value
CPDAS	40	,796
APDS	6	,784
SDLRS	29	,925
Total	75	,835

Data Analysis

SPSS 22 is used to analyze data.

RESULTS

The Participation in Continuous Professional Development Activities

Within the scope of the first research problem, it was aimed to determine the level of participation of instructors in continuous professional development activities. The arithmetic mean and standard deviation from descriptive analyses were used to determine the level of participation in professional development activities. The results are given in Table 3.

Table 3. The Level of Participation in Continuous Professional Development Activities

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Updating activities	3.00	.46	1.00	4.00
Reflective activities	3.10	.53	1.00	4.00
Collaborative activities	2.73	.60	1.00	4.00

As can be seen in Table 3, the mean of the updating activities is 3.00, the standard deviation is .46. The mean of the reflective activities, the ones that instructors participate in most frequently, is 3.10. The mean score of the collaborative activities, which are the least participated in professional development activities, is 2.73. The mean of the total scale is 2.94, and its standard deviation is .53. When the results are analyzed, it can be inferred that the level of participation of instructors in professional development activities is not high. Besides, collaborative activities are the least preferred ones while reflective activities are the most preferred ones.

Gender Differences

To see whether there are any gender differences in terms of the sub-dimensions of CPDAS, a t-test was used.

Table 4. T-Test Results regarding gender differences in CPDAS

Items	Gender	f	m	t	p
Updating activities	female	132	2,98	1,107	,138
	male	139	3,02		
Reflective activities	female	132	3,30	-2,709	,013*
	male	139	2,90		
Collaborative activities	female	132	2,75	-0,102	,214
	male	139	2,71		

As a result of the t-test conducted to test whether the participation of instructors in continuing professional development activities varies according to gender, a significant difference was found in favor of female instructors in the dimension of participation in reflective activities [$t(271) = -2.709, p < .05$] according to the gender variable. While the mean score of female instructors' participation in reflective activities is 3.30, it is 2,90 for male instructors. The findings show that female instructors participate in reflective activities more than males.

The Attitudes Towards Professional Development

Within the scope of the second research problem, it was aimed to determine the attitudes towards professional development. The arithmetic mean and standard deviation from descriptive analyses were used. The results are given in Table 5.,

Table 5. The Attitudes Towards Professional Development

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
APDS	4,19	.42	1.00	5.00

The average of instructors' attitudes towards professional development is 4.19, and the standard deviation is .42. This finding is proof of the fact that they have positive attitudes towards professional development.

Gender Differences

To see whether there are any gender differences in terms of APDS, a t-test was used. The results are given in Table 6.

Table 6. T-Test Results regarding gender differences in APDS

Items	Gender	f	m	t	p
<i>The Attitudes Towards Professional Development (APDS)</i>	female	132	4,17	0,301	,634
	male	139	4,21		

As a result of the t-test conducted, it was determined that instructors' attitudes towards professional development did not differ significantly according to gender. That shows that both male and female instructors' attitudes towards professional development are similar.

The Self-Directedness

Within the scope of the third research problem, it was aimed to determine the level of self-directed learning readiness of instructors. The arithmetic mean and standard deviation from descriptive analyses were used. The results are given in Table 7.

Table 7. The Level of Self-Directedness

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Self-management	4,32	.48	1.00	5.00
Willingness to learn	4,41	.59		
Self-regulatory abilities	3,99	.41		

As Table 7 suggests, the mean score of willingness to learn has the highest average among the other sub-dimensions while the self-regulatory habits have the least average. The findings show that instructors' levels of self-directedness are high.

Gender Differences

To see whether there are any gender differences in terms of self-directedness, a t-test was used.

Table 8. T-Test Results regarding gender differences in SDLRS

Items	Gender	f	m	t	p
Self-management	female	132	4,33	-,312	,231
	male	139	4,31		
Willingness to learn	female	132	4,40	-,098	,311
	male	139	4,42		
Self-regulatory abilities	female	132	3,98	-,431	,472
	male	139	4,01		

As Table 8 shows, it was determined that the SDLRS did not differ significantly in terms of gender.

The Correlation among Professional Development Attitudes, Self-Directed Learning Readiness, and Professional Development Activities

To see the correlation among professional development attitudes, self-directed learning readiness, and professional development activities, correlation analysis was conducted. The results are presented in Table 9.

Table 9. The correlation among Professional Development Attitudes, Self-Directed Learning Readiness, and Professional Development Activities

	<i>Self-Directed Learning Readiness</i>	<i>Attitudes towards Professional Development</i>	<i>Professional Development Activities</i>
<i>Self-Directed Learning Readiness</i>	1	,428*	,316*
<i>Attitudes towards Professional Development</i>		1	,269*
<i>Professional Development Activities</i>			1

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

As can be understood from Table 9, there is a positive correlation between attitudes towards professional development and professional development activities ($r = ,269$ $p < .01$). Also, self-directed learning readiness correlated with attitudes towards professional development ($r = ,428$ $p < .01$). and professional development activities ($r = ,316$ $p < .01$).

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to reveal how the variables of attitude towards professional development, and Self-Directed Learning Readiness predict instructors' participation in all continuous professional development activities. Analysis results are shown in Table 10.

Table 10. Regression Analysis Results Regarding Participation in Professional Development Activities

	B	St. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	,389	,281		2,318	,006
Attitudes towards Professional Development	,269	,037	,234	5,498	,000*
Self-Directed Learning Readiness	,316	,032	,397	8,414	,000*

R=,598; R2=,36; p=0,000

R = Correlation coefficient, R2 = Explained variance ratio, B = regression coefficient, Beta = standardized regression coefficient St. Error = standard error, sig = ** p <.01.

According to the results of multiple linear regression analysis, the variables of attitudes towards professional development activities, and Self-Directed Learning Readiness together exhibited a significant relationship ($R = .598$, $R^2 = .36$) with participation in all continuous professional development activities. These two variables together explain 36% of the change in instructors' views regarding participation in professional development activities. According to the standardized regression coefficients (Beta), the relative importance order of the predictor variables on participation in professional development activities is Self-Directed Learning Readiness ($\beta = .397$), and attitude towards professional development ($\beta = .234$). Considering the significance of the regression coefficients, it is seen that all of the predictive variables are significant predictors of instructors' participation in professional development activities. This finding shows that instructors' Self-Directed Learning Readiness and attitudes towards professional development are both important in their participation in professional development.

DISCUSSION

In the modern world, language instructors are inevitably expected to develop themselves professionally because everything is changing and developing. Up to now, a lot of studies have been conducted on professional development (Baykal, 2019; Muhammad, 2019; Irgatoğlu, 2017; Korkmaz, 2015; Korkmazgil, 2015; Yağcı, 2014). However, this study is believed to contribute to the field since with regards to a certain variable as gender, it aims to investigate the relationship between instructors' engagement in professional development activities, their attitudes towards professional development, and their readiness for self-directed learning.

To begin with, the present study indicated that, the level of participation of instructors in continuous professional development activities is not high. Also, collaborative activities are the least preferred ones while reflective activities are the most preferred ones. This finding is not in line with the previous studies which found out that teachers preferred to participate in updating and collaborative activities rather than in reflective activities (De Vries et al., 2013; Dijkstra, 2009). However, the findings of this study considering the level of participation in professional development activities which is not high is in line with a study conducted by Bellibaş & Gümüş (2016). Similarly, according to a study conducted by Ünlü & Sarıçoban (2019), the level of participation in PD activities was claimed to be low. The reasons for perceiving them as obstacles to their involvement were their lifestyle, busy working schedule, and inefficiency of the trainers. Concerning gender, the results of the previous studies correspond to the findings of this study (De Brabander et al., 2011; Runhaar et al., 2010). Female instructors were substantially more interested in PD activities, especially reflective ones, in comparison with male instructors. This may be clarified by variations in the priorities of female instructors and males, which may affect their involvement in PD activities, mainly based on enhancing education skills and quality in teaching. (Scott, 2002).

The secondary aim of the present study was to find out the attitudes of instructors towards professional development regarding gender, and the analysis of results showed that the instructors had positive attitudes towards professional development while their attitudes did not differ significantly in terms of gender. The findings are in line with the results of studies conducted by Ünlü & Sarıçoban (2019) and Hürsen (2012). However, Hürsen (2012) claims that women have more positive attitudes towards PD than men. Additionally, regarding the findings, the results of the previous studies correspond to the findings of this study (Baykal, 2019; Muyan, 2013).

Within the scope of the third research problem, it was aimed to determine the level of self-directed learning readiness of instructors regarding gender. The analysis of data showed that the mean score of willingness to learn has the highest average among the other sub-dimensions while the self-regulatory habits have the least average. The findings show that instructors' levels of self-directedness are high and it did not differ significantly in terms of gender. The results of the previous studies correspond to the findings of this study (Torabi et al., 2013; Shooshatzadeh et al., 2010; Gordanshekan et al., 2010; Nadi & Kazemi, 2003; Magdalena et al., 2005).

Finally, to find out the relation among professional development attitudes, self-directed learning readiness, and professional development activities, correlation analysis was conducted and a positive correlation between attitudes towards professional development and professional development activities was found. Also, self-directed learning readiness correlated with attitudes towards professional development and PD activities. Moreover, the attitudes towards professional development activities and self-directed learning readiness together exhibited a significant relationship with participation in all continuous professional development activities. These findings are in line with previous studies (Lopes & Cunha, 2017; Pekel, 2016; Liu et al, 2014).

CONCLUSION

As a result, although the participation levels of instructors in professional development activities are relatively high, it is seen that they are not at the desired level. Besides, the low average of cooperation activities that provide qualified professional development can be considered as an important deficiency in terms of both qualified professional development and professional development opportunities for teachers. Therefore, it appears that there are both quantitative and qualitative problems related to the professional development of instructors.

Although instructors' attitudes towards professional development are positive, it can be said that they are not at the desired level. The results of previous studies indicate that this is due to the instructors' previous inadequate professional development experiences. It can also be claimed that instructors' attitudes towards professional development do not differ according to their gender. It is thought that this situation is due to the confrontation of instructors with similar professional development experiences.

Instructors' high self-directed readiness levels are very valuable as they have the potential to contribute significantly to both individual and organizational learning and does not vary by gender. Therefore, it may contribute to the professional development of instructors.

All in all, instructors' readiness and perceptions play an important role in their participation in professional development activities, and it seems that instructors' participation in professional development should be supported. In this context, instructors' self-directed readiness level can be considered as a very important factor. Since their attitudes towards professional development affect their participation in professional development, the professional development experiences to be offered to instructors should have a structure that will have positive effects. So professional development should attract their attention.

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