

Research Paper

# An Investigation of Male and Female ESP/EAP Teachers' Professional Development Activities

Goudarz Alibakhshi<sup>\*1</sup>, Reza Javaheri<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Assistant Professor, Allameh Tabataba'i University, Iran (Islamic Republic of)

<sup>2</sup> Ph.D. Candidate, University of Toronto, Canada



10.22080/ISELT.2022.23276.1028

**Received:**

March 11, 2022

**Accepted:**

May 16, 2022

**Available online:**

June 9, 2022

**Keywords:**

Professional Development, Continuing Professional Development (CPD), ESP/EAP, Mixed-methods research

## Abstract

EFL teachers' Continuing Professional Development (CPD) has always been of much concern to all applied linguists and EFL teachers. The present study investigates Iranian ESP/EAP teachers' kinds of CPD activities. To this end, a mixed-methods research design has been applied. In the first phase, a phenomenological research method was used. Seventeen participants were interviewed, and the main CPD activities were extracted through content analysis of the interviews. The participants argued that they developed their profession through teaching (work), continuing their education, attending CPD events such as conferences and workshops, presenting their works in CPD events, and self-study activities such as reading journals, books, and watching films and movies, etc. In the second phase, a researcher-developed instrument was administered to 60 male and female ESP teachers who were selected through convenience sampling among all those who taught ESP at the State and Azad Universities in Tehran. The data were collected and analyzed through descriptive and inferential statistics. The results showed that male and female teachers do some common CPD activities. However, male and female teachers are different in terms of some other CPD activities. The findings have several implications for administrators, higher education institutes, teacher trainers, and teachers of the other majors.

\*Corresponding Author: Goudarz Alibakhshi

Address: Allameh Tabataba'i University, Iran (Islamic Republic of) Email: [alibakhshi@atu.ac.ir](mailto:alibakhshi@atu.ac.ir)

Republic of)

Tel: +989128463473

## 1 Introduction

Teachers mostly face some common challenges worldwide under the influence of educational setting problems. They prefer to teach their students independently from their colleagues. Sometimes, they become very overwhelmed by the demands of school bureaucracy, and if they do not receive insightful feedback or regular supervision, they might become frustrated; this case is especially true for novice teachers (Murray, 2010). It has been argued that professional development activities are alternative solutions to these problematic issues (Bailey, Curtis & Nunan, 2001).

Teacher development has been defined as a consistent cycle of teacher learning which begins with initial/pre-service teacher training and lasts for as long as a teacher may remain in the profession (in-service training). Teaching as a profession persuades teachers and enhances their societal expectations to think of finding ways to improve and contribute to the students' academic outcomes (Castle, 2006; Mushayikwa & Lubben, 2009; Olson & Craig, 2001).

It has also been argued that teachers need a combination of professional knowledge and specialized skills along with their personal qualities and experiences. Moreover, acquiring new skills and adding to their understanding are primary reasons teachers endeavor to attend activities designed for professional development (Bailey, Curtis & Nunan, 2001). According to Murray (2010), learning about new techniques and ways to empower teachers in English language teaching seems to motivate and encourage both experienced and novice teachers. Like teachers in the other fields, English language teaching experts believe that

ongoing professional development is of much significance, particularly in today's rapidly, constantly, and technologically-changing world. Teachers of English as a foreign language are more likely to try the recent innovations in language teaching theories and educational technology with their students (Chisman & Crandall, 2007).

Teacher professional learning is a fairly complex process that requires teachers' emotional and cognitive involvement, both collectively and individually, and their capacity and willingness to investigate where each one stands (Reis-Jorge, 2007; Romano, 2006; Runhaar, 2008; Runhaar, Sanders, & Yang, 2010.) Teachers' professional development has been studied and presented in the relevant literature in different ways (e.g., Craft, 2000; Kelly, 2006; Mann, 2005; Roberts, 1998). However, it has always been attempted to understand that professional development is greatly related to teachers' learning, learning how to learn, and transforming their knowledge into practice so that they can contribute to their students' growth (Bolam, 2000).

As Day and Sachs (2004) argue, Continuing Professional Development (CPD) implies all the activities teachers engage in during a career to enhance their work. As Kelly (2006) believes, such activities are intended to result in a process, ongoing teacher learning, through which teachers become expertise.

Teachers' professional learning is a fairly complex process that requires teachers' emotional and cognitive collective and individual involvement, as well as their capacity and willingness to investigate where each one stands (Burbank & Kauchak, 2003; Reis-Jorge,

2007; Romano, 2006; Runhaar, 2008; Runhaar, Sanders, & Yang, 2010).

Teachers of English for Specific/Academic Purposes (ESP/EAP) seem to be no exception. Therefore, to be successful and effective in teaching ESP and EAP to graduate and postgraduate students at the tertiary level, they need to be engaged in professional development activities. It seems that teachers' perceptions of CPD and the activities which they undertake to develop professionally have been investigated in different contexts; however, it is yet to know how Iranian ESP/EAP teachers perceive CPD. The next question, which needs further exploration, deals with the activities ESP/EAP teachers in Iran to develop professionally. Furthermore, it is not known whether male and female teachers do the same professional activities or not.

More specifically, the following research questions are raised;

- 1) What kinds of CPD activities do Iranian ESP/EAP teachers engage in?
- 2) Is there any significant difference between male and female ESP / EAP teachers' CPD activities?

## 2 Research Method

### 2.1 Research Design

A mixed-method design has been used in the present research. To answer the first research question, a qualitative research design (phenomenological method) was designed. The qualitative phase was used to explore the professional development activities that ESP/EAP teachers employ to develop their teaching profession. As a complement, a quantitative research design (survey method) was used to

answer the second question aimed at validating the developed questionnaire.

### 2.2 Participants

The study participants consisted of two groups: participants for qualitative and quantitative phases. The participants for the qualitative phase included 17 male and female (9 and 8 respectively) teachers with more than ten years of experience in teaching EAP/ESP at the universities in Tehran. They were selected through purposive sampling. The data saturation point was reached when the seventieth participant was interviewed. They were male and female participants with two degrees: master's and Ph.D. in teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL). The main reason for including such a selection of full-time experienced teachers was to generate a broad range of perceptions, insights, and experiences of EFL teachers about CPD.

The participants for the quantitative study consisted of 60 male and female ESP/EAP teachers who were selected through convenience sampling among all those who have been teaching ESP/EAP courses to undergraduate and graduate students at the State and Azad Universities in Tehran. The participants were all aware of the purpose of the study. They were assured that the data would be kept confidential.

### 2.3 Data Collection

The data for the present study were collected through two phases. The first phase of the study required qualitative instruments that can deeply explore ESP teachers' perspectives about CPD and CPD activities they engaged in. Hence, semi-structured face-to-face individual

interviews with open-ended questions were conducted to collect the study's data. Semi-structured interviews helped us understand the phenomenon of CPD from the interviewees' perspectives with the assumption that the critical reality is what people perceive to be.

Moreover, open-ended questions helped the researcher develop rapport with participants, explore the research questions deeply, elicit information, and generate answers that accurately assess participants' beliefs. Also, face-to-face interviewing helps understand participants' verbal responses via their nonverbal cues. The data for the study's second phase (quantitative) were selected through a survey, i.e., the researcher's developed questionnaire was administered to 60 participants. The participants' responses were computed and transformed into an interval scale.

## 2.4 Data Analysis

Different data analysis techniques were applied. For the first phase of the study, content analysis techniques were applied. The interviewer allowed the conversation to move on smoothly in a more interactive manner to elicit teachers' in-depth perceptions. Each interview consisted of questions that addressed the main activities that the participants do to develop professionally.

Radnor's (2001) guide to qualitative data analysis was employed for analyzing the data. Interviews were first transcribed,

and multiple copies of the transcripts were printed. The transcripts were then read for topic order to draw out and list topics linked to the original research questions of the study. A second meticulous reading of transcripts helped the researcher identify the explicit and implicit categories which emerged within each topic. The categories were color-coded. In the case of more than one category in a topic, numeric coding was used. The third reading for content helped identify quotes aligned with each category within the topics. The quotes were labeled according to the categories they represent.

The data collected for the study's second phase were analyzed through descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. An independent sample t-test was used as the data analysis method.

## 3 Results

### 3.1 Qualitative Results

To explore the CPD activities of Iranian ESP/EAP teachers, 17 teachers were interviewed. Their responses were content-analyzed, and the following themes and sub-themes were extracted, which are explained in detail in the following sections:

Participants of the present study argued that they were engaged in a wide range of CPD activities to develop professionally. These are grouped under five categories and illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1 ESP/EAP teachers' professional development activities

CPD ACTIVITIES	N	P
Professional development through work	17	100
Continuing education	13	78
Attending CPD events and workshops as members	11	66
Self-studies	10	60
Attending CPD events as presenters	5	30

The interviewees were engaged in CPD activities, such as work, formal higher education, membership in professional associations, informal learning, attending CPD activities, participation in CPD events, and engaging in formal higher education as part of professional development.

### 3.2 Professional development through work

Almost all participants stated that they developed their profession through teaching, they viewed teaching and daily engagement with their students in class as a significant source of learning that helped them to gain knowledge from practical experiences in the classroom. The following quotations from the participants illustrate this theme:

*"The administrator required me to make use of computers in EFL classrooms. So my students and I are using the computer, and while working with the laptop, I learn something new about the implication of the computer and how it works (T10).*

*"I'm an active participant in the association of EFL teachers in my city in terms of planning and delivering CPD for EFL teachers. We believe in cooperative learning*

*and developing communities of practice for the sustainability of professional learning via follow up" (T9).*

*"I also attend the other teachers' classrooms sometimes as a teacher of in-service courses. I find it quite interesting that I can work with both students at school and the colleagues who attend my classes. Sometimes I learn a lot from them (T1).*

Hence, it is clear that in addition to their daily jobs, several teachers were involved in other professional roles that were either voluntarily (such as working with institutional CPD centers or teaching external programmers) or assigned by the institution (such as CELTA training) based on their professional needs.

### 3.3 Continuing higher education

Engaging in formal higher education emerged as the second most preferred type of CPD activity among the study participants. Several interviews revealed that they were either studying for a higher degree such as a Masters's or Ph.D. or getting prepared for higher education degrees. Some had also already completed their B.A. or higher degrees. The following quotations illustrate this theme:

"I completed my Masters in TEFL, and right now I am getting prepared for Ph.D." (T1).

"Ten years ago, I was a BA holder of English language literature, but now I have the Masters in TEFL" (T3).

"I registered for the Ph.D. entrance exam, and I am studying hard to get prepared for the examination" (T6).

### 3.4 Attending CPD events

The majority of participants argued that the third-most preferred CPD activity was participation in CPD events. Generally, it was shown that teachers participated in in-house events organized by the education department of their city or province. Some participants also argued that they attended off-site CPD events held by other universities and the Teaching English Language and Literature Society of Iran (TELLSI).

Among the in-house CPD events which interviewees participated in are workshops or theoretical courses perceived to be immediately applicable to their teaching. The following interviews reveal this issue:

"In the monthly PD sessions, we have the chance to learn different sorts of computer-related things" (T2).

"Recently we had an assessment workshop where teachers were trained to do sessions and last month we had a one-day workshop where we were trained up to re-think our testing skills" (T13).

Some interviewees also claimed that they had participated in the conferences that off-site institutions organized. The following quotations exemplify this theme:

"I attended TELLs annual conferences and workshops. I found some of the presentations beneficial and quite related to my job" (T13).

"We have a teaching forum where EFL teachers, particularly university lecturers, present research. For example, recently someone did some research on the implication of translation tasks in EFL classrooms" (T10).

### 3.5 Self- studies

About 50 percent of the participants argued that they could improve their profession through self-studies such as reading journals and books related to their job. One of them mentioned, "I sometimes read some interesting books such as grammar and vocabulary books" (T13).

### 3.6 Presenting at CPD events

The following preferred CPD activity by the participants had presentations at CPD events. Presenting at CPD events occurred at two levels - off-site at local professional development events organized by teaching English language and literature society of Iran (TELLS), and in-house where teachers worked. For instance, as one interviewee revealed how he assisted colleagues in searching e-materials in Google and Yahoo search engines;

"After the workshop was over, some people came to me and asked how they can search for e- materials, I taught them, and I think they all learned ." (T2)

Among the off-site events, most interviewees indicated that they presented at the TELLSI annual conference and its special interest groups significant. One of the participants argued:

*“I presented a lecture on the Iranian EFL learners’ attitudes towards the use of technology in their English language classes. The teachers came to me and commented on my presentation” (T11).*

### 3.6.1 Quantitative results

The quantitative phase of the study aimed at validating the developed questionnaire. In the following sections, the results for

the reliability and validity of the questionnaire are presented.

### 3.6.2 Internal consistency of the questionnaire

The internal consistency of the questionnaire was estimated by running Cronbach alpha, and the yielded alpha was 0.83, which was acceptable.

### 3.6.3 Construct Validity of the questionnaire

Confirmatory factor analysis was run to investigate the construct validity of the questionnaire. The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Results of exploratory factor analysis

Items	Factor Loading
I have tried to develop my profession through teaching ESP courses to students at university	0.9
I have tried to develop my profession by continuing my education at the university	0.84
I have tried to attend local conferences as a participant	0.83
I have tried to attend international conferences as a participant	0.81
I have tried to attend local conferences as a presenter	0.79
I have tried to attend international conferences as a presenter	0.78
I have tried to read books and journals on my own	0.9
I have tried to watch movies and TV programs on TV and satellite.	0.7
I have tried to attend workshops on ESP/ EAP related issues such as teaching and material development	0.7
Eigenvalue	60
The total percent of variance explained	80

As seen in Table 2, this factor consists of activities that ESP/EAP teachers do to develop their teaching profession. The Eigenvalue of this factor is 60 and explains about 80% of the total variance. It consists

of 9 items. The highest and lowest factor loadings are 0.90 and 0.7, respectively. Items 1 and 7 had the highest factor loading (.9), followed by items 2, 3, and 4. Items 8 and 9 had the lowest factor loading of 0.7.

### 3.7 Comparing male and teachers' CPD activities

To compare male and female teachers' CPD activities, 30 male and 30 female teachers of ESP were selected and invited to fill in the questionnaire. Each

participant's questionnaire was scored, and their responses were entered into SPSS. Then, the scores on each item were computed. The results, including descriptive statistics and inferential statistics (independent sample t-tests) for each item, are presented in Table 3.

Table 3 Descriptive statistics of the participants' scores on the questionnaire

	Groups	Mean	SD
I have tried to develop my profession through teaching ESP courses to students at university	males	4.4	.50
	females	4.2	.88
I have tried to develop my profession by continuing my education at the university	males	4.43	.50
	females	4.46	.50
I have tried to attend local conferences as a participant	males	3.76	.56
	females	3.50	.50
I have tried to attend international conferences as a participant	males	3.23	.43
	females	2.6	.49
I have tried to attend local conferences as a presenter	males	3.50	.93
	females	3.2	.68
I have tried to attend international conferences as a presenter	males	2.63	.66
	females	2.20	.61
I have tried to read books and journals on my own	males	3.6	.71
	females	4.6	.49
I have tried to watch movies and TV programs on TV and satellite.	males	3.63	.71
	females	4.6	.49
I have to attend workshops on ESP/ EAP related issues such as teaching and material development	males	4.2	.73
	females	4	.66

As it can be seen from Table 3, the mean scores of males and females on items 1, 2, 3, 5, and 9 were to some extent close to each other. However, the males' mean scores on items 4 and 6 exceeded the females' mean scores. On the contrary, the females' mean scores on items 7 and 8 exceeded the males' mean scores on these

items. To see whether the mean difference was statistically significant, the data were submitted to independent sample t-tests (the assumptions of t-tests such as equality of the variances were all met). The results are shown in the Table 4.



Table 4 T-tests for comparing participants' mean scores on CPD activities

	T	df	p
I have tried to develop my profession through teaching ESP courses to students at university	1.4	58	0.15
I have tried to develop my profession through continuing my education at university	0.2	58	0.93
I have tried to attend local conferences as a participant	1.9	58	0.07
I have tried to attend international conferences as a participant	5.7	58	0.001
I have tried to attend local conferences as a presenter	1.7	58	0.52
I have tried to attend international conferences as a presenter	2.6	58	0.01
I have tried to read books and journals on my own	6.1	58	0.01
I have tried to watch movies and TV programs on TV and satellite.	6.2	58	0.01
I have to attend workshops on ESP/ EAP related issues such as teaching and material development	1.3	58	0.19

As could be seen from the Table 4, the male and female groups' means on items 1,2, 3, 5, and 9 were not statistically significant ( $p>0.05$ ). The results also showed that the males' and females' mean scores on items 4 and 6 were statistically significant ( $p=0.01<0.05$ ), favoring male participants. Moreover, the male and female groups' means on items 8 and 7 were significant ( $p=0.01<0.05$ ), favoring the female group.

## 4 Discussion

This study aimed at investigating the Iranian ESP teachers' CPD activities. The study was carried out in two phases. First, 17 participants were interviewed. The interviews were content-analyzed, and the main CPD activities were extracted. The participants argued that they developed their profession through

teaching (work), continuing their education, attending CPD events such as conferences and workshops, presenting their works in CPD events, and self-study activities such as reading journals books, watching films, and movies, etc. The findings of the present study are consistent with a number of related studies (e.g., Alibakhshi & Dehviri, 2015; Hoban, 2002 ; Kennedy, 2002; Stuart et al., 2009).

The second part of the present study dealt with developing and validating the questionnaire, which measured the ESP teachers' CPD activities. The developed questionnaire consisted of 9 items. It had an acceptable level of internal consistency. It also had a good construct validity. All items had good factor loadings, indicating that the items were highly correlated with

the construct, and all the items measured the same construct.

The third phase of the study dealt with comparing the male and female participants' scores on CPD activities. The results showed that male and female participants attempted to develop their profession through attending workshops, working as ESP teachers, continuing their education, and attending local conferences as presenters and participants equally. Teachers' gender did not make a difference in the CPD activities mentioned above, i.e., both male and female teachers had the chance to teach ESP, continue their education, attend the local conferences, and attend workshops.

However, the results showed that, compared to the males, the female teachers had more chances to do self-directed CPD activities, such as reading journals and books and watching movies, films, and TV programs. This might be due to the cultural issues of the context of the study, where the female teachers spend more time at their homes compared to the males. Self-directed CPD activities are more suitable for females because of their free time at home.

Finally, the results showed that the male teachers attended internal conferences as both participants and presenters more than the females. This might be due to the fact that the married female teachers do not like to leave the country without their husbands, and they need to take care of their kids. There might be some other reasons which need to be explored by the other researchers.

## 5 Conclusions

The present study has several implications for EFL teachers, institutes, teacher-training centers, in-service training

program organizers, and professional associations, which are briefly explained as follows. First of all, EFL teachers, as a kind of discourse community, through attending conferences and workshops, can express their interests, expectations, and needs. They should also bear in mind that professional development is an essential part of the professional life of teachers. As members of the TEFL community, teachers can take the initiative to make their voices heard constructively.

Second, teacher training centers should inform teachers that teachers' learning has no end and their current knowledge may not meet the requirements of the next years. Therefore, through CPD events, they can revitalize their profession.

Third, institutes should support their employees to attend the CPD events and if possible, to continue their higher education. They can also provide them with the hardware and software instructional materials to develop through self-studies.

Finally, professional associations should analyze the members' needs and provide them with appropriate workshops CPD events through which teachers can take the courses they may need.

## Recommendations for Further Research

Through the process of the present research, male and female ESP teachers' CPD activities have been explored. However, considering the scope of this study, some aspects could not be explored and covered which are suggested here as the potential areas for further research.

One of the areas that require to be further explored is that this study was carried out in a university in Tehran (Capital of Iran);

the same studies can be carried out in other higher education centers, e.g., State and Azad Universities, to examine the EFL teachers' views toward CDP in these institutes.

Additionally, it would be interesting to investigate the role of all CPD activities on teachers' professional development as well.

Finally, because informal CPD is deemed as considerably significant in shaping teacher development and informal communities are perceived as a need, it would be worth exploring the role of informal communities of practice in teacher development and the interplay between the practices of the formal and informal communities.

## References

- Alibakhshi, G., & Dehvari, N. (2015). EFL teachers' perceptions of continuing professional development: A case of Iranian high school teachers. *PROFILE Issues in Teachers' Professional Development*, 17(2), 29-42.
- Bailey, K.M., Curtis, A. & Nunan, D. (2001). *Pursuing professional development: The self as source*. Canada: Heinle & Heinle, Thomson Learning.
- Bolam, R. (2000). Emerging policy trends: Some implications for continuing professional development. *Journal of In-service Education*, 26(2), 267-279.
- Burbank, M. D., & Kauchak, D. (2003). An alternative model for professional development: investigations into effective collaboration. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 19(5), 499- 514.
- Castle, K. (2006). Autonomy through pedagogical research. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 22(8), 1094-1103.
- Chisman, F. P., & Crandall, J. (2007). *Passing the Torch: Strategies for innovation in community college ESL*. Retrieved Mar. 7, 2010, from Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy, New York. Website: <http://www.caalusa.org/eslpassingtorch226.pdf>.
- Craft, A. (2000) *Creativity across the primary curriculum: Framing and developing practice*. London. Routledge.
- Day, C. and Sachs, J. (2004). *Professionalism, performativity, and empowerment: discourse in the politics, policies, and purposes of continuing professional development*. International Handbook on the Continuing Professional Development of Teachers, Maidenhead, Birks, Open University Press.
- Hoban, G. (2002). *Teacher Learning for Educational Change: A systematic thinking approach*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

- Kelly, P. (2006). What is teacher learning? A sociocultural perspective. *Oxford Review of Education*, 32(4), 505-519.
- Kennedy, M.M. (2002). Knowledge and teaching. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 8(1), 3-4.
- Larsen-Freeman, D. (2004). CA for SLA? It all depends. *The Modern Language Journal*, 88(4), 603-607. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3588590>.
- Malderez, A., & Wendell, M. (2007). *Teaching teachers: Processes and practices*. Continuum: London.
- Mann, S. (2005). The language teacher's development. *Language Teaching*, 38(3), 103-118.
- Murray, A. (2010). Empowering teachers through professional development. *English Teaching Forum*, 1, 2-11.
- Mushayikwa, E., & Lubben, F. (2009). Self-directed professional development: A hope for teachers working in deprived environments. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 25(3), 375-382.
- Olson, M. R., & Craig, C. J. (2001). Opportunities and challenges in the development of teachers' knowledge: The development of narrative authority through knowledge communities. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 17(6), 667- 684.
- Radnor, H. (2001). *Researching your professional practice. Doing interpretive research*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Reis-Jorge, J. (2007). Teachers' conceptions of teacher-research and self-perceptions as enquiring practitioners a longitudinal case study. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 23(4), 402-417.
- Roberts, J. (1998). *Language teacher education*. London: Arnold
- Romano, M. E. (2006). Bumpy moments in teaching: reflections from practicing teachers. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 22(8), 973-985
- Runhaar, P. (2008). *Promoting teachers' professional development*. Dissertation. Enschede : The University of Twente.
- Runhaar, P., Sanders, K., & Yang, H. (2010). Stimulating teachers' reflection and feedback asking: An interplay of self-efficacy, learning goal orientation, and transformational leadership. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 26, 1154-1161.
- Stuart, J., Akyeampong, K. & Croft, A. (2009). *Key issues in teacher education: A sourcebook for teacher educators in developing countries*. Oxford: Macmillan