

# **A General Investigation of the In-Service Training of English Language Teachers at Elementary Schools in Turkey**

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## **Abstract**

This study presents a critical diagnosis of in-service teacher-training activities offered to English-language teachers in Turkey and aims to investigate whether those teachers are satisfied with the activities. Thirty-two English-language teachers participated in this study. Data were collected from 32 elementary-school teachers of English as a foreign language, using a general evaluation form prepared by the researcher. The results indicate that the teachers are not satisfied with their in-service teacher-training activities and that in-service training does not fulfil their needs. The study also proposes an in-service teacher training model in distance format.

**Keywords:** In-service teacher training, English language teachers, Elementary school education.

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## **Introduction**

'Continuousness' is the basic concept underlying 'lifelong education.' High-quality education is based on teacher quality, and 'continuousness' is one of the most important factors in teacher training. 'Continuous Professional Development—CPD' consists of four similar parts: 1) pre-service or initial teacher education; 2) in-service teacher training (INSET); 3) further education; and 4) vocational training/education, which is the underlying principle of 'lifelong education' (ECA, 2006, p.7). The constant vocational training that takes place during teacher training is categorized as either pre-service or after-service. Studies indicate that the pre-service teacher-training programs are inadequate to provide a sufficient set of skills (Can, 2005; Lucas & Unwin, 2009). Thus, teachers need INSET to fill in the gaps from pre-service training and for continuous professional development, which keep teachers up-to-date throughout their careers with respect to the skills required in a contemporary knowledge-based society.

Ryan (1987) mentions that INSET refers to any type of activities such as courses, and seminars related to the job. In this sense, any kind of teacher training activities such as short courses, seminars, workshops, certificate/diploma programs and postgraduate

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programs, which result in professional development of teachers, are regarded as a part of INSET.

#### *INSET in Turkey*

INSET varies significantly from one country to another because each country has its own policies. In Turkey, the first organized INSET began in 1960 with the establishment of the 'Office of Training Teachers on the Job' in the Ministry of Education (ME). This office became the 'Department of In-Service Training' in 1975, but the centre was only able to provide training to a limited number of teachers because of financial difficulties and inadequate office space. The Ministry of Education has combined the approaches of the local and central administrations and since 1993, it has continued to provide a practical in-service teacher-training program for large groups of people. Since 1993, central in-service trainings in Turkey have been conducted by the Ministry of Education's Department of In-Service Teacher Training, and local trainings have been conducted by the Provincial Directorates for National Education (PDNE). The training activities are arranged cooperatively by the ME and the PDNE and are conducted face-to-face, either centrally or locally. A current list of the INSET courses (in Turkish) is presented on the official page of ME ([edb.meb.gov.tr/net/\\_standart\\_program/index.php?dir=Standart+Programlar%2F](http://edb.meb.gov.tr/net/_standart_program/index.php?dir=Standart+Programlar%2F)). In-service training seminars are arranged by taking the location of the teachers into consideration. The duration of the courses can vary, but they generally last for approximately 25 to 120 hours. The courses are led by instructors at the ME or PDNE; instructors from nearby universities occasionally deliver the lectures. The content of each course is determined by the instructor. At the end of the activity, the participants are asked to fill an evaluation or feedback form.

It is important to note that INSET refers to any in-service teacher training activities organized by ME and PDNE.

#### *INSET for English language teachers*

Turkey, has been implementing educational reforms for years. Recently, a radical change called 4+4+4 was introduced to the Turkish education system. This new system, aims to divide the educational system into three main periods (primary/secondary/high school), increase the compulsory education period to the average established in EU and OECD countries and provide higher quality education. This new system has also been accompanied by new reforms in the teaching of foreign languages, such as starting foreign language learning at an early age, specifically, at the primary school level. This change has increased the importance of not only 'teaching English as a foreign language' but also the 'quality of English-language teachers.' To teach effectively, an English teacher must possess both adequate subject-matter knowledge and the required skills. However, elementary-school English teachers have been found to have difficulties teaching young learners (Haznedar; 2003; Hüttner, Mehlmauer-Larcher, Reich & Schiftner, 2012; İspınar, 2005; Khandehrou, 2011; Lamie, 2002; Nicolaidis & Mattheoudakis, 2008; Sali, 2008). Teaching English to elementary-school students requires special knowledge and pedagogical skills related to the new curriculum: language acquisition and development among young learners; teaching methods and techniques; the effective use of audiovisual materials; understanding individual differences and collaborative learning; and classroom management (Akyel, 2003; Güven, 2005; İspınar, 2005; Olivia, 1968; Öztürk, 2006). The needs of English teachers who instruct young learners are different from those of teachers who instruct older learners (Akyel, 2003; Güven, 2005; Özdemir, 1998). Therefore, INSET's content for elementary-school English teachers should be unique (Reilly & Haworth, 2001). The literature also supports the idea that elementary-school teachers of English as a foreign language require training in a variety of subjects (Al-Mutava, 1997;

Chacon, 2005; Eslami & Fatihi, 2008; Hazneder, 2002; Krol et al., 2004; Özbay, 2009; Özdemir, 2007; Polat, 2010; Salı, 2008; Sevinç, 2006; Symeonidou & Phtiaka, 2009).

That notwithstanding, Turkey's INSET programs primarily cater to general classroom teachers (Çiftçi, 2008; Demirtaş, 2008; Maral, 2009; Şahin, 1996), science teachers (Kanlı, 2001; Kaya et al., 2004; Tekin & Ayas, 2006), and preschool teachers (Kıldan & Temel, 2008; Uşu & Cömert, 2003). English teachers are offered very few opportunities to participate in INSET. Indeed, teachers' subject areas are ignored when organizing INSET programs. Therefore, current INSET practices are ineffective and fail to meet all teachers' needs (Coşkun, 2014; Division of Research & Development in Education (EARGED), 2006; Önen et al., 2009).

To develop their subject knowledge, gain the required skills, and become knowledgeable about current technological developments, elementary English-language teachers must be trained sufficiently to achieve effective foreign language teaching and learning in the classroom. Little research has been conducted to evaluate the professional training programmes offered to ELT teachers (Cooper & Keefe, 2001; Owsten et al., 2008; Young & Lewis, 2008). This study aims to investigate the experiences of elementary-school English-language teachers' experiences who have participated in INSET activities offered by ME and PDNE. The underlying research question is:

What are the perceptions of English language teachers at elementary school about INSET activities offered by ME and PDNE?

## **Methodology**

### *Participants*

The participants in the study are 32 elementary-school teachers of English as a foreign language who have participated in various INSET activities organized by ME and PDNE. The teacher's amount of teaching experience differs from two years to 22 years. 25 of them are female and 7 of them are male.

### *Data collection tools and procedures*

Aminudin (2012) mentions five features of effective professional development: content focus, active learning, collective participation, duration and coherence. These features were taken as core concepts when constructing the items of the present questionnaire. Besides, the items of the INSET Evaluation Scale developed by Tekin and Yaman (2008) for science teachers were adapted.

To obtain a general view of English-language teachers' perceptions of INSET activities, the researcher prepared an evaluation form consisting of three main parts. The first part included questions about the teachers' demographic information, such as their gender and level of teaching experience. Research has confirmed that there is not a significant difference between the impact of professional development in classroom practices and years of experience (Robinson, 2011), and that there is no significant correlation between satisfaction with professional development and age of the teachers (Hustler et al., 2003). Therefore, further statistical analysis regarding these variables was not conducted.

The second part included eleven statements related to the INSET activity's content, instructor, and evaluation. In the last part, the participants were asked to write a detailed account of their experience related to their participation in the INSET activity.

### *Data analysis and data collection*

The questionnaire data were analysed descriptively using a statistics program. Item analysis was applied, which means the frequencies and percentage scores of each item were calculated. The scores for 'strongly agree' and 'agree' were merged and defined as 'agree.' Similarly, 'strongly disagree' and 'disagree' were merged and scored uniquely as 'disagree.'

The evaluation and intent forms were attached to an email sent to state elementary-school English-language teachers, soliciting them to volunteer to participate in this study. Out of 102 teachers, thirty-two of them responded positively.

### **Results and discussion**

A very significant finding of this study is that more than half of the teachers (62.2%) indicated that the INSET activities were not relevant to their needs. Many studies have come to the same conclusion: teachers' real needs have not been met by INSET activities (Çiftçi, 2008; Çimer et al., 2010; Gökdere & Çepni, 2004; Karagöz, 2006; Önen et al, 2009; Özer, 2001; Öztürk & Akar, 2005). Content-focus is one of the most important features of an effective INSET activity (Aminudin, 2012; Birman, Desimone & Garet, 2000). In the same line, content-specific INSET activities are reported to be their most beneficial professional development experience by teachers in a variety of studies (Aminudin, 2012; Robinson, 2011)

Similarly, research by Education, Research and Development (EARGED, 2006), which was conducted in 14 provinces and gathered data from 1067 teachers, revealed that INSET is neither efficient nor effective at fulfilling teachers' educational needs. One possible reason for this dissatisfaction is that in-service training activities have not taken into consideration teachers' various ranks (Gökdere & Çepni, 2004).

Most of the teachers (65.1%) indicated that the content covered in the INSET activities was clear and comprehensive. However, most reported that the INSET activities were not motivating (67.9%) and did not allow for active participation (79.6%). These findings are supported by similar research, which has found that the methods applied during in-service training are neither efficient nor proper (Çalgan, 2008; Çimer et al., 2010; Öztürk & Akar, 2005), nor are they motivating (Çimer et al., 2010). The reason that the INSET activities are not motivating and interactive could be related to the lecturers' teaching approaches and teaching abilities in the field. This assumption is supported by research that finds that INSET instructors are not necessarily leading experts in the field (EARGED, 2006; Çimer et al, 2010; Özer, 2001). In this line, Harland (2014) suggests that INSET based on constructivist approaches is more effective. Similarly, related literature reveals that the tools and materials used at INSET training have not been updated to meet recent scientific and technological developments (Taymaz et al., 1997) this could provide another reason that INSET is not motivating.

Another finding of this study is related to the evaluation of INSET activities. The findings of the present study revealed that only 39.3% of the teachers think that the evaluation process for INSET activities is satisfactory. This could be due to the fact that out of the four evaluation steps, only the 'Reaction' step is achieved through disturbing an evaluation form to the teacher participants, which is the cheapest way. On a related note, the teachers stated that they could not apply the knowledge from their INSET activities in their classrooms. This finding is supported by Kanlı (2001), who finds that teachers were not able to actualize the knowledge that they gained. Similar studies have also found that the end-of-training assessments are inefficient and not scientific (EARGED, 2006; Çimer et al., 2010; Taymaz et al., 1997). Taken together, these findings indicate that the

'Assessment' period constitutes another deficiency of MEB and PNDE's in-service trainings. The teachers' success is not evaluated at the end of the training; instead, they are asked to evaluate the INSET activity in which they have participated. According to Kirk Patrick (1959) there are four steps for evaluating a learning process. : Reaction (How well did the learners like the learning process?), Learning (the extent to which the learners gain knowledge and skills), Behaviour (capability to perform the newly learned skills) and Results (investigation of the noticeable results of the learning process in terms of reduced cost, improved quality, efficiency, etc). The purpose of an in-service teacher-training program is to enable teachers to develop their knowledge, apply this knowledge in the classroom, and achieve the projected behavioural changes. To effectively measure the program's success, the teachers' behaviours and knowledge levels both before and after the in-service teacher-training program should be compared. If the teachers' knowledge level has increased, if they display the projected behaviours, and if they can apply the acquired knowledge in the classroom, then the in-service teacher-training program is successful. However, in the training activities conducted by the ME and PDNE, no assessments of the teachers are made either during or at the end of the course.

In addition to their responses to the statements on the second part of the evaluation form, the teachers were asked to write about a personal experience in an INSET activity on the third part of the form. One example of a response (from a female teacher) is stated below. She indicated that although she did not find the INSET experience useful, it was interesting to meet different teachers around Turkey and share ideas. She also suggested that the group size during training should be small.

*'A few years ago, I participated in an INSET activity titled 'English Teaching Methods and Techniques.' It was a weeklong seminar, and I found it partially useful. I do not think that the content was different from the training I received during my undergraduate education at the university. In that sense, the INSET program did not add to my current knowledge. One thing I liked about the seminar was that I had the opportunity to meet other English-language teachers from other schools and other cities, and we were able to exchange ideas. However, the group was very crowded. I think it would be more effective if the group size was smaller.'*

Similarly, another teacher mentioned her negative INSET experience in regards to the course instructor.

*'I have been teaching for 14 years. So far I have participated in three INSET activities. However, I do not think that these either have added to my current subject knowledge or have helped to develop my teaching skills. One of the courses I participated in was 'Methods and Techniques in Practical Speaking' organized by PDNE in Balıkesir. It was a five-day seminar. The course instructor was a friend of mine. She participated in the same seminar organized by ME in Ankara, and she was tasked to be instructor of this seminar in Balıkesir. It is a well-known fact that most of the English language teachers are not very good at practical English. So, how could such a course instructed by my friend can be effective? Such courses should be instructed by native speakers of English. What is more, English language teachers should be provided with opportunities to participate in INSET courses abroad.'*

## **Conclusion**

This study aimed to investigate English-language teachers' perceptions of the INSET activities offered by the ME and the PDNE, which have played a very important role because they are the only government agencies in Turkey to offer in-service teacher-training programs. Significantly, this study's findings are consistent with the findings of similar studies in related areas and reveal that the in-service teacher-training programs run by the ME and PDNE are ineffective and do not fulfil the needs of elementary-school English-language teachers.

In this line, the findings of the present research could be used for the continued development of in-service English language teacher training, and in turn for increasing the quality in foreign language teaching at primary schools in Turkey. Another importance of the findings of the present research for the continued development of language teaching in Turkey is that the present study could provide a database for future research in Turkey, which could provide Turkish authorities and stakeholders such as Ministry of Education Department of In-service Teacher Training and the Provincial Directorates for National Education (PDNE) with the information to understand the underlying reasons for such needs, and in turn create possible solutions for language teachers' professional development.

The present study is significant in that it has confirmed that the INSET model used by ME and PDNE is not effective for professional development of English language teachers.

Taking the two facts into consideration; that INSET plays a vital role in teachers' professional development, and that the in-service training offered by the ME is not effective, this study suggests an urgent call for developing new INSET activities based on the needs of English language teachers in Turkey and proposes a new INSET Model.

The proposed new model is based upon the characteristics of what makes a high quality of INSET programme and distance education. It will both provide a more effective training for English Language teachers and also set a good example model for in-service training programs implemented in other subjects. The components of the newly proposed in-service teacher training model are:

- 1) Needs Analysis: Identification of needs is the most important issue for the success of a programme (Daloğlu, 2004; O'Sullivan, 2001; Ruba, 1985). So, needs analysis, which is the basic part of developing a programme, is very significant in that the results of it will provide INSET programme developers with the necessary information to design a course specific to English language teachers' needs.
- 2) Distance learning mode: The main reason why INSET should be offered by distance is that distance learning is flexible in terms of time and place, therefore enables a wide range of English language teachers to be trained. In Turkey, many state universities have postgraduate programmes in ELT, which are offered face-to-face. However, when teachers in rural areas are considered, face-to-face format does not seem to provide every teacher with the opportunity to be trained professionally. INSET by distance education could minimize this limitation.
- 3) Cost of free online INSET: INSET (offered by higher education institutes and accredited private language schools) in most countries require a course fee, which all teachers may not afford. In order to provide professional development opportunities for a wide range of English language teachers, online and cost of free in-service teacher training should be offered.

- 4) Collaboration between The council of Higher Education and the Ministry of Education (MEB): Designing an online programme has 'educational' and 'Organisational' aspects. The educational aspect requires collaboration of a variety of subject experts in the field of English language teaching, educational technology, programme development, and distance education, which could be achieved under the responsibility of the council of Higher Education. The Ministry of Education could participate in collaborate by implementing the programme, and acting as a liaison between the teachers' and the council of Higher Education.
- 5) Active participation: According to 'Interactive learning' and 'social-constructivist' theories, the more interaction occurs among the components of the programme (student-materials-instructor), the more efficient the learning will be. Richness of the social environment of the individual is an important factor and it is very significant for the individual to learn effectively to be involved in an interaction with this environment. Designing education contexts involving different types of interactive treatments, which allow students to communicate more among their peers and the course materials may lead to effective teaching, and thus increase the effectiveness of distance education (Beldarrain, 2006; Moore, 1989). In line with this approach, teachers should be provided with opportunities for maximum interaction, and therefore learn actively in an interactive environment Online-mentor support: Another important factor for effective learning is the concept of 'scaffolding' (Vygotsky, 1978). It refers to learning with the help of someone who has more information and is more experienced. It is very important that the experts at the English language teacher training departments of the universities take the role 'mentors' in the proposed INSET program. In the proposed model the mentors are responsible to provide online constant and configured consultancy service for the teachers attending the distant in-service training program by giving feedback on teachers' lesson plans, and their teaching performances in the classroom, making explanations to the questions about the points of the content of the subject. Besides giving feedback, the mentors are also responsible for continuous assessment of teachers via e-portfolios, which include sample lesson plans and video recording of teacher classroom performances. In this sense, it has been hypothesized that continual online mentor support during the in-service training could result in effective learning.
- 6) Assessing the impact of INSET: The purpose of the in-service teacher training is to develop the subject knowledge of the teachers and also to change their teaching behaviours positively. The proposed model accepts Kirk Patrick's four-level evaluation model. For short term assessment (Reaction), which is also considered as the general evaluation of the programme, interviews and evaluation questionnaires can be used to evaluate INSET from a general aspect. The new model uses pre and post assessments to investigate the extent to which teachers gain new knowledge (Learning). That is teachers' subject knowledge and teaching skills should be assessed prior and then after the INSET. To determine whether any changes in the teaching behaviours have occurred (Behaviour), teachers are observed for an extended period of time after the INSET activity. Such assessment could give information about the 'long-term impact' of teachers, which is an aspect ignored by programme developers.

This study also suggests that further research studies should be conducted through a collaboration between the ME, PDNE, and related departments of the universities to develop and implement new in-service teacher-training models. The application of more

effective models for in-service English-language teacher training will both improve the quality of the teachers and increase the achievements of foreign language students.

This study investigated the perceptions of English-language teachers at the elementary-school level. A future study could also examine English-language teachers at the secondary and high-school levels and investigate whether the three groups of teachers differ significantly in relation to their perceptions about INSET activities. A second suggestion should be proposed for a research that gathers qualitative data that provides a deeper understanding of the weaknesses of current INSET programs.



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## APPENDIX 1

### General Evaluation Form for INSET Activities (English-Language Teachers)

**Part A. Demographic Information**

**1. Gender:**  Female  Male

**2. How much teaching experience do you have?**

1-3 years  3 - 5 years  5-10 years  10+ years

**3. Which age group of students do you teach? (You may select more than one option.)**

Elementary  Secondary  High school

**PART B. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement below.**

		<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
<b>No.</b>	<b>Statement</b>					
<b>1</b>	The INSET activities (seminars/workshops, etc.) were relevant to my needs.					
<b>2</b>	The lecturer was well prepared and an expert in the field.					
<b>3</b>	The INSET activities were engaging and interactive.					
<b>4</b>	The INSET activities allowed for active participation.					
<b>5</b>	The INSET content was well organized.					
<b>6</b>	The INSET content was clear and comprehensive.					
<b>7</b>	The INSET activities (seminars/workshops, etc.) added new content to my current knowledge base.					
<b>8</b>	The INSET activities (seminars/workshops, etc.) provided me with new skills to add to my current language teaching skills.					
<b>9</b>	I can apply the knowledge and skills I have gained in the INSET activities in the classroom.					
<b>10</b>	The overall evaluation of the INSET program was satisfactory.					
<b>11</b>	The organization of the INSET program was satisfactory.					

**PART C. Please comment on your personal experience with the INSET activities.**