

## The Tensions Between EFL Teacher Identities and INSET in the Turkish Context

Tensiones entre las identidades de los profesores de inglés  
y los programas de desarrollo profesional en Turquía

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Due to the insufficiency of current in-service training courses which are far from the collaboration and the reflection of teachers, the current study scrutinizes the incongruities between teacher identities and in-service training programs offered by the Ministry of National Education in Turkey based upon the use of the activity theory. In this narrative study, two English as a foreign language teachers reflected on their environment, behaviors, beliefs, competencies, and missions under the heading of teacher identity concept. The results suggest that teachers need a supportive community of practice and a well-tailored mentoring system to be able to reflect on themselves and the context in which they are teaching.

*Key words:* Activity theory, INSET, teacher identity, the onion model, Turkey.

Debido a la poca oferta de programas de desarrollo profesional donde los profesores puedan reflexionar o colaborar, el presente estudio analiza, con base en la teoría de la actividad, las incongruencias entre las identidades de los docentes y los programas de formación permanente ofrecidos por el Ministerio de Educación de Turquía. En este estudio narrativo, dos profesores de inglés reflexionaron sobre su entorno, comportamiento, creencias, habilidades y misión bajo la noción de identidad docente. Los resultados apuntan a que los profesores necesitan el apoyo de una comunidad de práctica y un sistema de *mentoría* bien diseñado que les permita reflexionar sobre sí mismos y sobre el contexto en el que enseñan.

*Palabras clave:* el modelo cebolla, identidad docente, programas de desarrollo profesional, teoría de la actividad, Turquía.

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## Introduction

Recently, a growing body of research has been investigating the significance of teacher identity in the teacher education field (see the reviews of Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004; Izadinia, 2013). This activity has aroused the hope that the stakeholders would find a remedy to the problems of in-service teachers for traditional in-service training (INSET). The preceding theories have shifted to new ones to understand teacher identity better from different perspectives; however, the sociocultural standpoints of Vygotsky (1978, 1986) prevail to interpret how individuals become aware of “self” and, at the same time, feel the need to belong to a society (Kozulin, Gindis, Ageyev, & Miller, 2003). From the sociocultural viewpoint, a combination of personal and professional social contexts of a teacher clearly affects the development of the teacher identity as a part of social learning (Law, Meijers, & Wijers, 2002), and researchers have attempted to figure out this effect through the *onion model*. Clearly, many factors including competencies and personal characteristics were involved in the identity formation of teachers (Korthagen, 2004), and these factors were connected with the six layers of the onion model considering “the assumption that professional behavior becomes more effective and also more fulfilling if connected with the deeper layers within a person” (Meijer, Korthagen, & Vasalos, 2009, p. 78). Although the onion model seems to be helpful for teachers to reflect on their own teacher identity, theoretically at least, little work has taken a holistic stance by following this model as criticized in the two seminal review studies of Beijaard et al. (2004), and Izadinia (2013). Furthermore, most teacher identity studies have been carried out in the USA, the UK, and Australia (Atay & Ece, 2009; Izadinia, 2013), and this inspired me to study the teacher identity concept in a developing country such as Turkey.

In Turkey, English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers often face an identity conflict as a result of the incongruities between ideals and realities (Cakiroglu &

Cakiroglu, 2003). After getting the bachelor’s degree, they are exposed to never-ending high-stakes tests to become a teacher (Basturk, 2007; Sağıroğlu, 2013); however, they do not have any well-planned explicit mentor or advisor support in their teaching career (Akcan, 2016). Therefore, it is of importance to shed light on their teacher identities, and to be familiar with their ideas concerning INSET.

## Literature Review

### Big Picture: The Onion Model

Based on Dewey’s (1933) ideas about reflection, Schön (1983, 1987) developed a reflective model for the professions, and Korthagen (2004) suggested the onion model to demonstrate how teacher learning takes place (for a review, see Korthagen, 2004; Meijer et al., 2009). In contrast to the traditional views which narrow teacher identity into cognitive issues, competencies, and personal skills (Korthagen, 2004), there was an emerging need for a critical language teacher engaged in education to raise the awareness of teachers, to encourage them to self-reflect on their identities, and to review the classroom activities as learning opportunities (Burns & Richards, 2009), so Korthagen (2004) adapted “the onion model” or “a model of levels of change”. The basic philosophy behind the onion model is the assumption that the professionals, being aware of their identity, missions, and core qualities, do their jobs by considering risks, chances, and exigencies in a situation (Meijer et al., 2009). The model consists of six levels (environment, behavior, competencies, beliefs, identity, and mission), and there is a symbiotic relationship between the levels. While the outer levels affect the inner levels, the reverse effect can also be seen.

Environment is the outmost layer in the onion model. Teachers shape their identity through the engagement with class, students, school (Beijaard et al., 2004; Korthagen, 2004), colleagues and administrators (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). For instance, Flores and

Day (2006) found that classroom practice and school culture reconstructed teachers' professional identities, and had both incentive and disincentive effects on their motivation to continue the professional development. In another study (Smagorinsky, Cook, Moore, Jackson, & Fry, 2004), how the interactions of a teacher with others at the school were effective as regards the emergence of the identity were emphasized.

The second layer of the onion is behavior. In the current study, teachers are expected to reflect on themselves in line with the layers so the behavior layer is the one which provides the harmony between the inner layers and the outer layers (Meijer et al., 2009). Considering that the beliefs teachers have about themselves have an effect on their decisions, choices, and behaviors (Borg, 2001; Pajares, 1992), they are expected to guide teachers' practices, namely competencies (Korthagen, 2004), in the classroom or vice versa (Kuzborska, 2011). Considering the resistance of beliefs to change (Richardson, 1996), Özmen (2012) carried out a four-year longitudinal study to examine the effect of pre-service education concerning the change of beliefs, and found a significant difference concerning beliefs between the first year and the last year of the student teachers. Grasping that it takes a long time to change beliefs based on this study, second/foreign language teacher education programs and inset should help student teachers and experienced teachers to develop their skills for making meanings and decisions, in other words, exploring their teaching and forming their teacher identities through reflecting on their personal biographies (Bullough, 1997).

The change of trends from the competency-based models of behaviorist teacher education to the humanistic-based one which focuses on individuals has given rise to the studies on teacher identity, and this study will also try to help the participants unearth their values, beliefs, and attitudes by bearing in mind that identity is a concept which develops throughout one's life (Beijaard et al., 2004).

### In-Service Training Programs and Turkish Context

In the changing world of teaching, INSET programs are among the core solutions to heighten and sustain the quality levels of teachers, schools, and student learning (Day, 1999; Guskey, 2002). To be successful, teachers are expected to update their knowledge and skills (Sachs, 2007), reflect on their teaching practices (Calderhead & Gates, 1993), and collaborate with colleagues (Grossman, Wineburg, & Woolworth, 2001). Although the western cultures have succeeded relatively better in employing reflective practices in INSET since the middle of the 1980s (Hatton & Smith, 1995), the researchers in developing countries have started to address this concern recently (O'Sullivan, 2002). For instance, teachers should renew their teaching license at certain periods in the USA, and, according to the web site of the US Department of Education, the government planned to invest around 10 billion dollars for the professional development of teachers in the fiscal year 2015.

The professional development policies in Europe differ in some aspects. While some countries such as Germany and the United Kingdom compel teachers to participate in INSET, the support given to professional development stands out with the promotions and salary enhancements in Poland and Spain. There are also some countries where teachers are not obliged to attend programs of INSET; for example, teachers are responsible for their own professional development in France, Iceland, the Netherlands, and Sweden as participation is not compulsory (European Commission, 2009).

In Turkey, following the nation-wide educational reform in 2013, English started to be taught starting with 2<sup>nd</sup> graders and this abrupt change and the goals of the new curriculum were introduced to English teachers through a webinar. Although Turkish EFL teachers have already been equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge owing to the integration of a course named Teaching English to Young Learners into the curriculum of education faculties after the 1997

curriculum innovation (Kırkgöz, 2008), to what extent this new curriculum can be implemented in schools is still questionable due to the concerns about “one-shot” (Daloğlu, 2004), top-down, and transmission-based INSET courses (Uysal, 2012).

Underestimating the significant role of mentoring might be one of the reasons behind these traditional INSET methods because mentoring applied within the Turkish context means doing teaching practice with the help of an experienced teacher. However, this basic definition does not match with the following well-grounded definitions: mentoring as supervision, which means “assisting newly qualified teachers to pass through the formal juridical requirements for probation” (Kemmis, Heikkinen, Fransson, Aspfors, & Edwards-Groves, 2014, p. 155) or mentoring as support, which means “supporting new teachers in the development of their professional practices” (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 155). Unfortunately, although the latter seems better than the first one, none of the answers would be satisfying because INSET of the 21<sup>st</sup> century should provide a collaborative environment for teachers to develop their teacher identities collectively and sustain their ongoing self-development with the help of mentoring. For this very reason, the present study attempts to present the current situation of INSET courses in Turkey.

### Implementation of the Activity Theory

Activity theory, initiated by Vygotsky (1978) in the early 1920s and developed by Leontyev (1978), is “a broad approach that takes a new perspective on and develops novel conceptual tools for tackling many of the theoretical and methodological questions” (Engeström & Miettinen, 1999, p. 8) in social sciences and aims to overcome the dichotomies between micro-level processes and macro-structures (Engeström, 2000). As a powerful analytical tool, activity theory has five principles (Engeström, 2001). First, “object oriented, collective, and culturally mediated human activity,

or activity system” (Engeström & Miettinen, 1999, p. 9) is the main focus of analysis. Secondly, an activity system incorporates different viewpoints, interests, and conventions of a community (Engeström, 2001). The third principle is the historicity which refers to the formation of activity systems over time. The fourth principle is the role of contradictions in an activity system or between the activity systems, and the fifth principle is the expansive transformations through “a collective journey” (Engeström, 2001, p. 137) due to the contradictions. Considering these principles in the current case study of two EFL teachers, I will examine the link between teacher identities and INSET based on the pillars of the activity system which consists of subject, community, rules, division of labor, and mediational means and object (Engeström, 1987).

In this context, *the subjects* of the activity system are two EFL teachers who work in *the community* of the Ministry of National Education (MONE) in a macro-context and the community of their school in a micro-context. According to *the division of labor*, they prepare annual and hourly lesson plans and teach English. In addition to these, teachers are responsible for all kinds of educational and instructional tasks at the schools. The subjects and the community are mediated by *the rules* promulgated by the MONE. *The subjects* aim to achieve *the objectives* (basically to teach English) of the activity system through *the mediating artifacts*, namely INSET.

Given the theoretical framework and the analysis guidelines, the current study aimed to scrutinize the tension between teacher identities and inset offerings based on the reflections of the participants.

## Method

### Setting

In Turkey, there are two ways of becoming an English teacher: to graduate from education faculties or to attend a one-year pedagogical formation program

along with graduation from an English-related field. At the education faculties, student teachers are required to take courses such as English skill courses, second language acquisition, teaching methods, testing, material design, and pedagogy throughout four years. At the start of the fourth year of the undergraduate program, they observe the classroom atmosphere in the first semester, and start to teach in the second semester. Otherwise, for the second option, they have to attend a pedagogical formation program including participation in a practicum if they study in the related programs.

After these programs, to be appointed to state schools, they have to take an examination which is comprised of a general culture and skills test battery, educational sciences test battery, and a subject matter knowledge test battery for English language teaching.

Starting from 2016, teachers are exposed to a six-month induction program including a 300-hour training program as assistant teachers. Officially, the administrators have the right to approve the success or failure of the teacher candidates in the induction program. After this induction, they start to work and sit one more exam at the end of the academic year to be officially a teacher. In other words, it takes one and a half year to become a teacher at the state schools of Turkey. On a voluntary basis, they can also participate in the inset courses which are announced yearly and offered by MONE on more general issues related to teaching.

### Participants

To get more detailed information about participants and learn about the veritable experiences in their career for in-depth analysis, I chose one male and one female with whom I had the opportunity to contact frequently. In other words, these two participants were conveniently selected. Although the participants followed distinct paths to become EFL teachers, both were exposed to the conventionalized nation-wide INSET programs.

To ensure confidentiality of the participants, I used the pseudonyms, Ali and Ela (a male and a

female). Ali was 22 years of age, and in the first year of teaching practice. Ela was 25 with two years of teaching practice. Although both graduated from two highly competitive universities of Turkey in teacher education, the participants were quite different from each other. Ali was born in a little town near the capital as the second son of a nuclear family. He graduated from a boarding teacher training high school. A personal problem with his mathematics teacher caused him to take a quick decision to go to the foreign language department. Although Ali could not become a fluent English speaker, he developed his pedagogical knowledge substantially at the College of Education.

Ela also graduated from a teacher training high school. However, Ela always aimed to become a teacher from the beginning, and decided to major in English thanks to the personal and professional attitudes and behaviors of her English teachers in high school. She maintained her success at the university and during teaching practices, and became persevering English teacher.

### Research Design and Data Collection

The current study adopted a narrative research design to address and analyze the research questions. Although narrative research is able to capture the professional setting of teachers (Anderson, 1997), the relationship between teachers' personal and professional lives (Clandinin et al., 2006), and contextual and social aspects of classrooms (Gudmundsdottir, 1997), has mostly been neglected in identity research (Vásquez, 2011). Considering this gap, I scrutinized in the current study the identities of foreign language teachers through their autobiographies because personal experience stories have an inextricable effect on the personal and professional identities of teachers (Coldron & Smith, 1999; Goodson, 1992). The participants were asked to write autobiographies and were then interviewed based on their autobiographies. In these semi-structured interviews, Ali and Ela were

asked five to seven questions in order to elaborate upon their autobiographies. After intertwining the autobiographies and the interviews, a second interview was conducted for the participants to reflect on their teaching. The data were collected through their native language, Turkish, to make the participants feel secure. The multiple instruments helped to triangulate and validate the data (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2011). Also, the participants were asked to make sure that their autobiographies (re-written by the researcher) and the translated excerpts from their interviews reflected their experiences (Creswell, 2012). For ethical considerations, the participants signed a consent form to state that they read the terms and conditions and participated in the study voluntarily.

### Data Analysis

For the data analysis, the flow model of Miles and Huberman (1994), consisting of the steps of data collection, data reduction, data displays, and conclusion drawing/verification, was utilized. The data were analyzed relating the five layers of the onion model under the teacher identity concept with the mediating artifact, INSET. Knowing the nature of narrative studies, I closely collaborated with the participants to check the development of the autobiographies and to examine their final form (Creswell, 2012). The quotes of the participants were translated into English as much as possible; however, some words were given in parentheses to make the quotes more comprehensible. After evaluating the data from a holistic perspective, codes were also provided, and these codes were verified by another researcher to avoid researcher bias (Fraenkel et al., 2011).

### Results and Discussion

Data were first presented according to how teachers reflected in their autobiographies with the five layers of the onion model: environment, behavior, competencies, beliefs, and mission. After reviewing how the participants

reflected their identities, their views about INSET were portrayed.

#### Teacher Identity

Based upon the layers of the onion model, teacher identity can be defined as an integration of personal and professional selves of the teachers (Beijard et al., 2004; Flores & Day, 2006; Korthagen, 2004). Reflecting on their environment, behaviors, competencies, beliefs, and missions, teachers amalgamate their personal identity with the professional one (Friesen & Besley, 2013). The current study also aims to recognize teacher identities through the help of the related reflections.

#### Influence of Environment

**Past experiences as a student.** Early role model teachers seemed to play a negative or positive pivotal role in the identity formation of teachers (Clarke, 2008; Flores & Day, 2006; Knowles, 1992; Nettle, 1998; Samuel & Stephens, 2000). When the participants looked back on their school days, Ela referred to the teachers she admired, and Ali denoted the negative influence of his mathematics teacher. Dedication, attitudes toward students, and pedagogical applications were the noteworthy features of the teachers pointed out in the autobiographies.

The reason behind choosing to become a language teacher is my English teachers who I admired because of their personalities and the behaviors as educators because they performed better than I expected of a teacher. I guess I learned from my teachers... that teaching is a great dedication. (Ela, Autobiography)

Due to the personal problems I had with some teachers at the school, it became difficult to major in the field that I wanted. . . . I realized the relationship between the sympathy to a teacher and (motivation towards) a course. (Ali, Autobiography)

To sum up, the participants highlighted how their previous experiences serve as a *de facto* guideline for their teaching philosophies and practices as in the study by

Bailey et al. (1996). In another study, Johnson (1994) also mentions that how pre-service teachers teach might be related to their language learning experiences as pupils. Teachers are likely to be affected by their past experiences as students (Eisenstein-Ebsworth & Schweers, 1997; Woods, 1996) owing to the approximately 17,000-hour observation and exposure activities including the initial teacher training. In other words, teachers' learning is a developmental process by which they construct based upon their previous experiences from the constructivist viewpoint of Piaget (Kaufman, 2004).

**Pre-service teacher training and working environment.** The participants had different reasons for becoming teachers. While Ela entered the teaching profession with a strong commitment, Ali avowed that he became a teacher by a last-minute decision. Obviously, there were other factors such as the encouragement of Ela's family, and the influence of Ali's elder brother, an English teacher. A common characteristic of the participants was their graduation from teacher training high schools.

Although Ali and Ela mentioned how the pre-service teacher training contributed to their teaching, Ela also referred to the tensions between theory and practice, which are repeated frequently in the literature (see Day, 2000; Flores & Day, 2006; Hauge, 2000; McCulloch, 2000).

My pre-service education contributed to develop myself in terms of professional and personal aspects. Although I couldn't improve my English to speak fluently, I think I am better...in terms of pedagogical knowledge. (Ali, Autobiography)

The undergraduate education contributed to me so much that I applied them in the lessons . . . however, it is not possible to apply these now due to the current student profile and the lack of technological equipment. I wish we had taught at the schools where the settings and student levels were better. (Ela, Autobiography)

Reflecting on their experiences, the participants referred to the disparity between theory learned throughout pre-service training and the highly

demanding atmosphere of classrooms, and this disparity frustrates teachers as confirmed by earlier studies (Findlay, 2006; Sabar, 2004).

### Teacher Behaviors

As an observable level of the onion model, teacher behaviors reflect the teachers' beliefs and competencies. In this study, as a drawback, I did not have a chance to observe the participants so the comments will be based on the data collection instruments.

Contrary to common belief, teachers do not always learn from good teaching experiences when they are students (Hammerness et al., 2005). In addition to their positive experiences mentioned previously, the participants took advantage of moving from "apprenticeship of observation" (Lortie, 1975) to the position of expert teachers as suggested by Golombek (2011).

To make students feel motivated towards the course, I always tried to be...positive. Although I do not feel good, I haven't revealed this to my students. (Ali, Autobiography)

I will love my students without any discrimination. . . . Now, I... give (free supplementary) courses (for high-stake exams), and this is happiness for me. (Ela, Autobiography)

In the first year of their teaching experience, both teachers were disappointed due to the physical conditions of the schools and the students' motivation problems. The school settings and their personal conditions affected their in-class behaviors. Furthermore, the shift from being a student to being a teacher multiplied the effect.

My lack of experience resulted in discipline problems in the classroom...I think students were so unmotivated that other teachers and I lost our motivation. (Ali, Autobiography)

My attributes as a patient and understanding person reflect in my teaching. They have both positive and negative effects. . . . They know that I will forgive them (students) because I love them. . . . As I forgive their negative behaviors, they insist on showing negative behaviors. (Ela, Autobiography)

Classroom management is one of the main concerns for novice teachers (Akcan, 2016), but teachers who are aware of their behaviors move one step forward to make their teaching better (Hamachek, 1999). Ali and Ela seemed to understand their behaviors and the reasons behind them and were on the way to developing their own teacher identity.

### Teacher Competencies

Although some other concerns in the assessment of teachers such as personal characteristics emerged with humanistic-based education after the 1980s, competencies, which hold the potential for interpreting teacher behaviors (Korthagen, 2004), are still significant in teacher education. Giving great significance to competencies shows the preeminence of performance-based education in developing countries such as Turkey. Based on interviews with the participants, how the country's policy affects teachers is apparent.

In our schools (Turkish context), focusing on grammar and underestimating the objectives can be classified as the deficiencies of the system (policy). (Ali, Interview-II)

In the lessons of 8<sup>th</sup> graders, unfortunately, we prepare (students) for the (high-stake) exams. (Ela, Interview-II)

The two participants confirmed the tension between university education and the teaching settings at state schools, which pushed them to give grammar-based instruction at schools because students are evaluated based on their marks on high-stakes exams. Even the MONE evaluates schools and teachers with the average marks of the schools and the students at these schools. On the other hand, addressing just the negative aspects would be unfair to the education system and the EFL teachers. For instance, Kırkgöz (2007) indicates the great effort of Turkish EFL teachers to follow the trends in the constructivist approach, the sociocultural theory, and the communicative language teaching due to the Turkey's candidate status for the EU and further innovations. In spite of many educational and curricular

reforms with the European Union accession process since 1997, continuous support is necessary for the stakeholders to sustain this success by balancing theory and practice, and the real and the ideal (Aksit, 2007).

### Teacher Beliefs

As beliefs affect the decisions, choices, and behaviors of teachers (Borg, 2001; Pajares, 1992), I tried to find out how the participants reflected on their beliefs in their autobiographies and interviews. Apart from their reflections, which were reported on the positive effect of their pre-service training in the previous parts, they expressed how they are hopeful for the coming years.

I hope that the conditions (physical settings of the schools) will become better (day by day). (Ali, Autobiography)

Eighth graders have prejudices (about learning English) and it is difficult to overcome them. My aim is to motivate lower grades (such as 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> graders) for learning English. (Ela, Interview-II)

Based on the effect of their teachers from the school years, the participants also believe good teachers will help students learn better, and they define the qualities of good teachers as solid, tactful, and open-minded.

Although there were not too many data on the beliefs of the participants, the match between the behavior and beliefs of the participants could be noticed from their statements. They try to behave the way they think, and how they think has an impact on their behaviors.

### Teacher Missions

Identity focuses on the layers of the onion model such as environment, behavior, competencies, and beliefs; however, the mission of teachers is interwoven with the personal factors and all the other individuals around them (Korthagen, 2004). While adopting missions, teachers consider their students, school, country, and even the world, and they know that the change starts with just one student. The participants in the current study agree with this idea.



I will be pleased individually if I become a person whom students value as a sophisticated and equipped individual to give advice.

Professionally, it is enough to be proud of my numerous successful students. (Ali, Interview-II)

I regard myself successful when I realize that I develop myself continuously and I am beneficial (for my students) from both instructional and educational perspective. (Ela, Interview-II)

They told me that it is enough to see the shining eyes of even one student. If I broaden the horizon of one (student), this happiness is enough for me. (Ela, Autobiography)

Contributing to the classroom environment, the teachers begin to be a symbol of good teacher relationships with the other members of the community such as students, parents, and administrators because teacher identities with the mission they have adopted have a noteworthy effect on their jobs, the city where they live, and the people they interact with (Wenger, 1998).

### Views of the Teachers on INSET

Being used interchangeably with the concept of “communities of practice,” professional learning communities emerged as one of the main blocks of the social learning system. While Wenger (1998) summarized the communities of practice in three key notions: enterprise (the level of learning energy), mutuality (the depth of social capital), and repertoire (the degree of self-awareness); Louis, Marks, and Kruse (1996) focus on the five elements of professional learning communities: shared norms and values, collective focus on student learning, collaboration, de-privatized practice, and reflective dialogue. This approach for in-service or pre-service education (e.g., Lee, Zhang, & Yin, 2011; Rigelman & Ruben, 2012) was implied by the participants in the current study.

The timing of in-service trainings should be arranged well. It should be on a voluntary basis rather than an obligation... I think the seminars through the distance education (programs) do not work... the trainings should be based on the specific problems of each

school. At least, one week (of the 2-week INSET) can be tailored to (the needs of) the schools. (Ela-Interview-I)

As there is not a single truth or a single method, we have to adapt ourselves for the (conditions of) the developing world. Therefore, the significance of in-service trainings is apparent. However, this shouldn't consist of just paper work which bore the teachers. Instead of giving theoretical information, the training which helps teachers gain experiences through a range of activities and learning by doing should be provided for teachers. (Ali, Interview-I)

Having attended many INSET sessions in her two-year teaching experience, Ela draws attention to the fact that professional learning cannot be realized through traditional methods as Hogan and Gopinathan (2008) emphasized.

In my 2-year teaching career, I attended (some) seminars at the beginning and at the end of the semesters such as the Fatih Project seminars (which aim to enhance opportunities and to improve technology) and e-twinning seminars. Excluding the e-twinning seminars, others were not beneficial...we got the training for the smart boards which will be provided (for the schools in rural areas) years later. (Ela, Autobiography)

The limited scope of these seminars hinders participants' engaging in professional learning and collaborating with the other members of the professional learning community (Elmore, 2004). As a way out, the participants suggest school principals should encourage the collaboration of teachers and, in turn, the establishment of professional learning communities. Furthermore, Atay (2008) highlights the role of academics in teacher education in establishing such professional learning communities due to the lack of expertise of school administrators in Turkey on the current teacher education approaches.

My friends and I can work harder. This is just possible with such great commitment that this (movement) should be started by the directors. (Ela, Autobiography)

First, there should be the idealist directors who commit themselves to the education, and they should encourage teachers without

forcing (them). In a school which most (of the teachers) endeavor, the other teachers will participate in this process. (Ela, Interview-1)

I think that the collaboration among teachers is weak. . . . Encouraging them to participate in the social activities will help them to work in their schools more happily. (Ali, Interview-11)

The views of the participants indicate that the current INSET in Turkey has not been arranged considering the layers of the onion model, and the lack of suitable training hinders the identity formation of teachers. Clearly, there is tension between the objects and mediating artifacts of activity theory. In other words, the subjects of the activity system, EFL teachers, have difficulty in achieving the objectives (basically teaching English) through the mediating artifacts, namely INSET.

## Conclusions

What is concluded regarding the disparity between inset and the highly demanding nature of the classrooms the participants of our study highlighted is that teaching and learning are context-specific and dynamic issues which reported the active involvement of teachers in the specific planning, teaching, and evaluation processes of INSET for each context (Kırkgöz, 2009; Sandholtz, 2002; Uysal, 2012). Therefore, INSET should play a substantial role for nations to establish harmony between macro-policies and its micro-level practices as the mediating artifacts of the activity theory (Kırkgöz, 2009).

In a highly populous country like Turkey, the government is spending substantial amounts for the integration of technology into the INSET considering the fact that the teachers who have an idealistic view of teaching are shaped by the identity assigned to them by the stakeholders and the market (Abednia, 2012). However, traditional methods such as “one-shot” (Daloğlu, 2004), top-down, and transmission-based INSET courses (Uysal, 2012), or allegedly modern methods such as video conferences do not seem to help over 50,000 EFL teachers from different backgrounds and geographical regions. The considerable differences

between the rural and urban parts of Turkey are another factor (Cakiroglu & Cakiroglu, 2003). Also, studies on EFL teacher education (e.g., Akcan, 2016; Daloğlu, 2004; Kırkgöz, 2009; Uysal, 2012) indicate the lack of a thorough needs analysis in the preparation and implementation processes of INSET. Considering the fact that the existing centralized system being responsible for the administration of INSET falls short of providing training courses regarding the specific local needs of teachers (Kırkgöz, 2009), there is an urgent need to establish professional learning communities instead of giving one-off or distance INSET to teachers because that kind of training cannot be as successful as the ones given *in situ*. Therefore, the focus should be on developing teacher identities (Thomas & Beauchamp, 2011) because teachers can be active members of and contribute to “communities of practice” owing to their attributes such as critical reflection, self-awareness, collaboration with stakeholders, and their aspirations to further professional development (Flores & Day, 2006; Kostogriz & Peeler, 2007). Establishing an effective rapport without the support of school managers, mentors, experienced teachers (Akcan, 2016; Langdon, Alexander, Ryde, & Baggetta, 2014; Norton & Toohey, 2011), and higher education institutions or universities (Akcan, 2016; Flores & Day, 2006) may not be the reality for many countries. The concept of communities of practice becomes even more important for these countries because the participation in communities of practice culminates in socialization through the help of mentoring and highlights continuing support and empathy. The positive effect of continuous support has already been emphasized in many other studies (e.g., Brannan & Bleistein, 2012; Villani, 2002). Vygotsky’s concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) also considers collaboration a mediating tool (Kuusisaari, 2014), and asserts that collaboration with peers or mentors leads to the construction of new knowledge. This seems possible with a supportive community of

practice or study groups (see Cárdenas, 2002) and a well-tailored mentoring system for teachers to reflect on themselves and the context they are teaching. Given that teachers are able to shape the identities of future generations, teacher training policy should be the first priority for developing countries like Turkey.

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