Developing an Inventory to Investigate Current Professional Development Needs of Iranian EFL Teachers

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Abstract
As part of a large-scale study, the study investigated the current professional development (PD) needs of Iranian English teachers through a validated questionnaire and semistructured interviews. The results showed that such traditional approaches as one-shot workshops and self-study are the dominant PD methods through which inservice courses are presented to Iranian English teachers. The results of the needs analysis indicated there was a discrepancy between the content of the inservice PD programs presented to the teachers and their actual PD needs because the content of the courses is often selected by those other than the teachers themselves. Furthermore, the results showed that whereas inservice PD programs presented to the teachers mainly followed traditional methods, the teachers preferred such interactive and collaborative PD methods as interactive workshops, teacher study group, online teacher learning, peer observation, and supervised teaching practice. Based on the results of the needs analysis, a combination of interactive PD activities was designed and implemented in various schools throughout a large city in the west of Iran. Finally, the findings bear some implications for foreign language education policymakers in general, and English teacher trainers and supervisors, in particular, which might be generalized to other similar contexts.

***Keywords*:** Iranian English Teachers, Needs Analysis, Professional Development, Professional Development Methods

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1. Introduction
1.1 Teacher Professional Development

Teachers are regarded to be at the crux of educational systems upon whom the success of the system depends. As a result of their central role in fulfilling the goals of educational systems, teachers' continuing professional development (CPD) is seen as vital for educational growth and development (Adey, Hewitt, Hewitt, & Landau, 2004; Day, 1999). This implies that teachers need to remain current in educational theory and practice (Good & Weaver, 2003) in order to realize the goals of institutions as well as their personal goals (Craft, 2000; Richards & Farrell, 2005). Corroborating this line of reasoning, Diaz-Maggioli (2004) argues that professional development (PD) programs, if correctly implemented, can result in learning improvement in all members of the teaching community by not only improving the performance of teachers but also benefiting the institution as a whole. That is, CPD gives teachers the opportunity to examine their theoretical frameworks and the way theory affects their actual classroom practice (Powel, Terrel, Furey, & Scott-Evans, 2003). Accordingly, as Ozer (2004) maintains, the inservice training of teachers is as important as their preservice training and thus teachers are required to participate in inservice training programs either at home or abroad.

The concept of teachers' PD has, however, been elusive and has thus been understood and described in different ways. Some have associated it with short-term inservice courses and workshops, while others have considered it as life-long learning and reflective practices (Lindberg & Olofsson, 2010). As Day (1997) puts it, PD involves "all natural learning experiences and those conscious and planned activities which are intended to be of direct or indirect benefit to the individual, group or school and which contribute, through these, to the quality of education in the classroom" (p. 4). Day and Sachs

(2004) consider CPD as "a term used to describe all the activities in which teachers engage during the course of a career which are designed to enhance their work" (p. 3).

PD has been emphasized and considered as a necessity for language teachers as well. According to Richards and Farrell (2005), language teachers are expected to stay current with the developments in the field of language teaching, reflect on and assess their teaching skills and practices, and be prepared to adopt new teaching styles and methodologies as the need arises. Emphasizing the distinction between subject matter knowledge (what to teach) and pedagogical knowledge (how to teach), Johnson and Golombek (2011) argue that (language) teachers, particularly novice ones, tend to know much about the subject matter, but they are not sufficiently equipped with the procedural knowledge required to deal adequately with the actualities of the classroom. As Richards and Farrell (2005) maintain, a wide variety of PD activities can be used with language teachers including those reflecting cognitive views of teacher learning (e.g., self-monitoring & journal writing) and those addressing reflective views of teacher professional development (e.g., self-monitoring, peer observation, peer coaching, supervised teaching practice, & teacher study (support) group).

1.2 Theoretical Background and Previous Research Findings

Various models have been proposed for the implementation of PD programs. Traditionally, teachers are not given choices in their PD activities and, regardless of their personal needs, interests, and desires, they are required to participate in their district-sponsored PD programs (Flint, Zisook, & Fisher, 2011). Traditional PD programs deemphasize interaction among participants and are usually in the form of one or more sessions in which the strategies and approaches are presented to teachers by an identified expert and the teachers are required to implement them unquestioningly in their classrooms

(Hadar & Brody, 2010). As a matter of fact, traditional approaches to PD often included short-term events such as one-shot workshops and conferences centering on instructing teachers as professionals regardless of their identities and without giving them the opportunity to question or debate (Flint et al., 2011).

However, Craft (2000) argues that effective development and fruitful PD planning depend on identifying school and individual development needs and analyzing the starting points for development (e.g., the area and kind of development). Craft adds that there should generally be a match between the purpose and methods of PD and highlights a kind of PD which is based upon careful needs analysis associated with the evidence of existing practice. He also maintains that recent PD programs address school and individual needs simultaneously, incorporate evaluation into PD, and investigate the effects of PD on practice. Reviewing recent themes and trends in teacher PD, Grundy and Robison (2004) argue that successful PD depends on the identification of needs at the school level and the control of the PD program by teachers themselves.

According to Richards and Farrell (2005), PD can be viewed from various perspectives including cognitive and social constructivist aspects. Individual PD activities, which are generally based upon the cognitive approach to teacher learning, encourages teachers to explore their own thinking processes and beliefs and investigate the effect of all these on their teaching practice (Richards & Farrell, 2005). The most common activities characterizing individual methods of PD include journal writing and self-monitoring. As Richards and Farrell put it, the aim of these activities is "to arrive at a level of self-awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of individual teachers in an organisation" (p. 47). However, as Akbari (2007) argues, in case of language teachers, "too much emphasis on reflective practices and teachers' practical

knowledge might result in isolation from the language teaching discourse community" (pp. 193-194). On the other hand, according to Hadar and Brody (2010), social constructivism views learning as an individual endeavor that is socially and culturally situated. Constructivist-based PD, as they maintain, occurs within a group of teachers collaborating in their work setting rather than within solitary practitioners seeking development individually outside their workplace. Regarding method of presentation of PD programs, interactive methods of PD have been emphasized as being more useful and valuable in addressing the PD needs of the teachers (Johnson & Golombek, 2011; Sivan & Chan, 2009). These methods include peer coaching, teacher study group, supervised teaching practice, and teacher online learning among others.

A fruitful interactive method of PD which ensures the quality of instructional programs and enhances teachers' PD by providing them with constructive feedback (Bailey, 2006) is believed to be supervised teaching practices although supervision is still being practiced in its traditional form in many developing countries including Iran. However, as Sivan and Chan (2009) argue, supervision can give teachers a chance to "interact with their supervisors in a postobservation conference and receive both verbal and written feedback from the latter on various aspects of their performance in classroom teaching" (p. 253). Employing questionnaires and semistructured interviews, Sivan and Chan (2009) evaluated the effectiveness of onsite peer observation and supervised teaching practice from the viewpoint of student teachers in Hong Kong. The results indicated that although a number of student teachers declared that they had benefited from both procedures and emphasized the complementary nature of both mechanisms, the majority regarded supervised teaching practice as more beneficial and contributing more to their PD. Nevertheless, the majority of the teachers enjoyed the

relaxing and friendly atmosphere of onsite peer observation as compared to the huge amount of pressure exerted on them in supervised teaching practice.

Teacher study group, which is considered as a recent learner-centered constructivist-based method of PD (Hung & Yeh, 2013), involves participants in an active, interactive, and authentic learning process. Hung and Yeh (2013) investigated Taiwanese EFL (English-as-a-Foreign-Language) teachers' collaborative construction of knowledge of their practices and their participation in a teacher study group to design a classroom-level English curriculum for their own students. The group was led by a university professor who acted as content expert, information provider, and facilitator of group discussion motivating teachers' reflection rather than directing their thinking. The results of the study indicated that three common enactive and reflective practices were manifested across the group meetings including "sharing practical knowledge, codesigning teaching activities, and self-appraising of classroom teaching" (p. 159). The most prevalent practice in the inquiry group was found to be sharing practical knowledge. Finally, analyzing the findings, Hung and Yeh concluded that the teachers showed preferences for PD activities that were mainly concerned with their own teaching experiences in the classroom which eventually resulted in their development and brought about changes in their beliefs and practices.

More recent studies concerning PD of teachers focus on programs developed based on careful needs analysis projects conducted with the teachers themselves. Daloglu (2004), for instance, investigated the features of a specific inservice teacher development program in Turkey that focused on establishing a materials bank (effective materials for the specific instructional context) for English language teachers at a private primary school in Ankara. The results of the needs analysis indicated that all of the teachers appreciated

the program and regarded it as relevant and useful because the program enabled them to transfer the knowledge and skills they had acquired to their teaching situation by developing their own materials or using those of their colleagues. The teachers also found participating in the inservice program more useful than attending one-shot workshops on a variety of topics mainly because it was developed based on their specific needs.

Employing a validated questionnaire and some semistructured interviews, Walsh and Gamage (2003) evaluated the PD needs of teachers in Australia with the aim of satisfying their needs through the development of a PD program and improving the pedagogical practices of teachers. Based on the results of the survey, it was found that the majority of the participants had already attended traditional forms of PD such as one-shot workshops and expert-driven lectures in which the teachers were passive participants receiving information which did not focus on the development of teaching skills for classroom improvement. However, the results of the interviews indicated that the teachers were of the opinion that the main purpose of PD programs should be enhancing current pedagogical techniques or learning new teaching strategies to improve teacher performance in the classroom by means of practically oriented activities such as mentoring, teamwork, and teaching strategy activities. The teachers also emphasized that they could contribute to the success of PD programs by being empowered to make decisions on the content and the structure of the programs and being given a role in coordinating school-based PD programs.

He, Prater, and Steed (2011) also developed a PD program to address the needs of the teachers in one school district in the US. The program was a part of a five-year PD project designed to focus on the language and achievement differences between ESL (English as a Second Language) students and non-ESL students. The aim of the study was to provide teacher educators and

inservice teachers with comprehensive PD activities and to prepare preservice ESL teachers. As He et al., argued, good teaching is not sufficient to be dealt with and stressed in PD programs designed for ESL teachers, but specific knowledge of English language, linguistics, second language acquisition, and cultural implications also needs to be emphasized. As a result, in order to move teachers' instruction beyond 'just good teaching', they conducted a needs analysis to make sure the PD content was consistent with the local needs of the ESL teachers. The results of the needs analysis, based on which they developed a year-long PD program, indicated that the participants rated themselves relatively low in items focusing on current trends in ESL instruction, research and theories related to language learning, and the assessment issue. The results of the feedback collected after each session indicated that participants rated all training sessions as good or excellent and asserted that the objectives of the PD program had been met for each session in terms of its content, delivery method, organization, and impact.

1.3 Significance of the Study and Research Questions

A review of the literature reveals the scarcity of systematic inservice PD programs in Iran directed at teachers in general and English teachers in particular and that teachers mostly attend the PD courses only to receive certificates which affect their promotion and salary (Razi & Kargar, 2014). Also, because the courses are too short, insufficient, and superficial, teachers scarcely get the chance to update their subject and pedagogical knowledge and knowledge of the new trends and changes in teaching methodology (Authors, 2016). Thus, to the best of the researchers' knowledge, no systematic teacher PD programs have been developed and implemented based on the results of a comprehensive PD needs analysis project to address the current needs of Iranian EFL teachers (IETs). This study is thus significant in that, for the first time in Iran, as a developing country with

increasingly growing attention to foreign language education, a needs analysis is conducted and the required data for the implementation of a systematic PD program in which a combination of various teacher PD activities are designed are collected from IETs throughout the country.

In fact, the first aim of conducting this study is to identify IETs' previous experiences with PD activities and how they evaluate these activities. The second purpose is to conduct a systematic needs analysis by selecting a relatively large sample from the population and employing various methods of data collection and analysis to identify the current needs of IETs in terms of their PD. The third purpose is to identify teachers' preferences regarding which PD activities are most appropriate and able to meet their current PD needs. Thus, to fill the research gap and to meet the purposes of the study, a multimethod approach was employed wherein the data were collected through a researcher-constructed and validated Likert-scale questionnaire (containing a number of open-ended questions as well), focus-group discussions conducted with IETs, semistructured interviews, and focus-group discussions conducted with onsite supervisors and senior EFL teachers. The study thus sought to find answers to the following research questions:

1) What are the common professional development activities directed at IETs?
2) How do IETs evaluate the professional development activities they have participated in?
3) What are the current needs of IETs in terms of their PD?
4) Which professional development activities are more appropriate and able to meet IETs' current needs?

2. Methodology

There were two stages of data collection and analysis in this study: the pilot study to construct and validate the instruments and the study to collect the data needed to answer the research questions. The procedures adopted in both stages are explained in the following sections.

2.1 The Pilot Study

In the first place, a questionnaire was designed based on the Teachers' Professional Development Needs Questionnaire developed by Walsh and Gamage (2003) as well as a focus-group discussion conducted by one of the authors. As a point of departure, those items which applied to PD of EFL teachers in Iran were selected from Walsh and Gamage's (2003) questionnaire. Then, a focus-group discussion was conducted by one of the researchers with 35 English teachers serving in public junior secondary schools in Kermanshah (a large city located in the west of Iran) to investigate their general attitude toward the purpose of PD activities and their current PD needs. The results of the focus-group discussion contributed to the construction of more items for the Iranian EFL Teacher Professional Development Needs Questionnaire (IETPDNQ). The content and structure of the questionnaire was later reviewed by four internationally recognized experts in the field of English teacher education, based on which modifications were made to the questionnaire. Next, it was pretested twice to achieve a high degree of validity and reliability before the study was conducted. The questionnaire, which was created using Google Docs, was completed online by 234 (133 female & 101 male) junior secondary school EFL teachers in the first distribution and 163 (91 female & 72 male) teachers in the second one. Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient was run on the data collected through sections three and four of the IETPDNQ (i.e., the Likert scale items) to estimate the reliability of the two scales. The results of reliability analysis run on the data collected through section three (i.e., the section inquiring about participants' PD needs) indicated that the scale enjoyed a very high reliability index ($\alpha = .96$). Also, the results of reliability analysis run on the data collected through section four (i.e., the section inquiring about teachers' preferences regarding PD activities) indicated that the scale enjoyed a good internal consistency index ($\alpha = .88$).

Furthermore, the data were submitted to factor analysis (i.e., principal components with varimax rotation) to ensure the construct validity of the questionnaire (Field, 2009; Landau & Everitt, 2004). The results of the factor

analysis run on section three of the questionnaire indicated that the 23 items in this section had factors loadings ranging from .54 to .86, yielding three factors. Based on the content of the items loaded on the factors, they were labeled as *teachers' classroom-related knowledge and skills* (Factor 1), *teachers' personal and interpersonal qualities* (Factor 2), and *teachers' pedagogical knowledge* (Factor 3). The results of the factor analysis run on section four of the questionnaire showed that the 11 items in section four yielded two factors with factor loadings ranging from .63 to .84. The items loaded on Factor 1 associated with more individualized methods of PD (e.g., self-monitoring & action research), whereas items loaded on Factor 2 related to more interactive methods of PD (e.g., interactive workshop & peer observation). Thus, based on the content of the items loaded on the factors, they were labeled *individualized PD activities* (Factor 1) and *interactive PD activities* (Factor 2).

2.2 The Study

The data obtained through IETPDNQ in the study were collected from 112 junior high school EFL teachers (49 male & 63 female teachers) serving in Kermanshah and the towns nearby. Eighty-four teachers (75%) had majored in TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language), seventeen (about 15%) in English Translation, eight (about 7%) in English Literature, and three (about 3%) in General Linguistics. Nearly, 7% of the participants held an associate degree, 70% a Bachelor's degree, 18% held a Master's degree, and the rest (around 4%) were Ph.D. candidates in English Language. The age of the participants ranged from 22 to 51. Furthermore, face-to-face semistructured interviews were conducted by one of the authors with 42 of the participants to obtain more in-depth insights on the participants' attitudes and thoughts regarding the issue under question. Also, to ensure the dependability of the results and to get a fuller understanding of the data, two onsite supervisors and four experienced senior teachers were consulted in a series of focus-group discussions. The supervisors both held a PhD in TEFL and had already experienced teaching English at Iranian junior secondary

schools for more than twelve years. The four senior teachers who were introduced by the supervisors had 16-25 years of teaching experience in Iranian junior secondary schools and were known to be experts in teaching English and able to train inexperienced teachers.

After the participants completed IETPDNQ, frequency analysis was employed to analyze their responses. The interviews and the focus-group discussion sessions were all audio-recorded for later transcription and content analysis. The results of the data obtained through the IETPDNQ, the semistructured interviews, and the focus group discussions employed in the study are presented in the following section.

3. Results

3.1 The Results of the Data Collected through the IETPDNQ

Section two of the IETPDNQ inquired about teachers' previous experiences with PD practices and required them to evaluate those activities. The results of the frequency analysis of section two, which helped us answer the first research question, are indicated in Table 1. However, it is necessary to mention that 22 out of the 112 teachers surveyed (19.6%) reported that they had had no previous experience with PD activities. Thus, the table shows the responses provided by the rest (i.e., 90 participants).

Table 1
Frequency Analysis of Teachers' Previous Experiences with PD Practices and their Evaluations of the Activities

PD Type	F (%) Out of 90	The extent to which the activity enhanced their content knowledge			The extent to which the activity enhanced their pedagogical knowledge		
		To a great extent F (%)	To some extent F (%)	Not at all F (%)	To a great extent F (%)	To some extent F (%)	Not at all F (%)
One-shot workshops	74(82.2)	3(4.0)	8(10.8)	63(85.2)	5(6.8)	8(10.8)	61(82.4)
Self-study followed by online tests	33(36.6)	1(3.0)	3(9.0)	29(87.8)	3(9.0)	8(24.2)	22(66.6)

As indicated in Table 1, the most common PD activity experienced by the participants proved to be one-shot workshops (reported by 82.2% of the teachers), the duration of which ranged from two hours to one week. The second most common PD activity experienced by thirty-three of the teachers (36.6%) was found to be active participation in self-study programs followed by online tests. Section two of the IETPDNQ also inquired about the effectiveness of the PD activities as evaluated by the participants themselves. The results of the frequency analysis (Table 1), which helped answer the second research question, indicated that only about 15% of those who had attended workshops evaluated the activity as effective in enhancing their content (i.e. subject matter) knowledge. Also, about only 17% of them evaluated workshops as effective in enhancing their pedagogical knowledge. Likewise, 87.8% of the participants who had actively participated in self-study programs followed by online tests rated the programs as ineffective in enhancing their content knowledge and 66.6% of them in improving their pedagogical knowledge.

Section three of the IETPDNQ, which assisted us in providing answers to the third research question, seeks to identify teachers' current PD needs based on a Likert scale ranging from 'Not at all= 1' to 'Perfectly well= 4'. The results of reliability analysis run on the data collected from the participants confirmed that section three enjoyed a high index of reliability (α= .95). Table 2 displays the results of the descriptive statistics of the responses to the items indicating the most urgent PD needs as specified by the participants.

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Table 2
Descriptive Statistics of the Responses to the Items Indicating the Participants' Current PD Needs

Items	Mean	SD	Not at all (%)	To some extent (%)	To a great extent (%)	Perfectly well (%)
Dealing with listening activities effectively	3.57	.91	7.1	41.1	28.6	23.2
Improving formative assessment skills	3.38	.80	3.6	50.0	30.4	16.0
Creating an enjoyable and stress-free learning environment	3.14	.82	7.1	41.1	37.5	14.3
Promoting students' speaking skills	2.89	.89	10.7	44.6	28.6	16.1
Improving assessment skills in general	2.78	.89	10.7	44.6	28.6	16.1

As shown in Table 2, the current PD needs of the participants were found to be 'dealing with listening activities effectively' (M = 3.57), improving formative assessment skills (M = 3.38), and creating an enjoyable and stress-free learning environment (M = 3.14), respectively. Other PD needs were found to be promoting students speaking skills' (M = 2.89) and improving assessment skills in general (M=2.78). This indicates that the participants were mostly concerned about their pedagogical knowledge or their knowledge of teaching methodology (Factor 3) rather than their classroom-related knowledge and their personal qualities as a teacher.

As mentioned previously, section four of the IETPDNQ explores teachers' preferences regarding PD activities and inquires about which activities are more appropriate in terms of meeting their current PD needs, which was the subject of the fourth research question of the study. The result of reliability analysis run on the data collected from the participants of the study confirmed that section four enjoyed a good internal consistency index (α= .80). Table 3 summarizes the results of the descriptive statistics of the

responses to items indicating the most preferred PD activities as rated by the participants.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics of the Participants' Responses Indicating Their Most Preferred PD Activities

Items	Mean	SD	Not at all (%)	To some extent (%)	To a great extent (%)	Perfectly well (%)
Interactive workshop	3.35	.93	8.9	19.6	41.1	30.4
Online teacher learning	3.11	.87	8.9	25.0	46.4	19.6
Peer observation	2.91	.93	10.7	32.1	35.7	21.4
Teacher study group	2.64	.96	12.5	33.9	32.1	21.4

As displayed in Table 3, the most preferred PD activities mentioned by the participants were interactive PD methods (Factor 2) including 'interactive workshop' (M=3.35), 'online teacher learning' (M=3.11), 'peer observation' (M = 2.91), and 'teacher study group' (M=2.64). On the other hand, the least preferred activities were found to be 'self-monitoring' (M = 1.96) and 'one-shot workshop' (M=1.88).

3.2. The Results of the Data Collected through the Semistructured Interviews

As mentioned earlier, face-to-face semistructured interviews were conducted by one of the authors with 42 of the participants to obtain more in-depth insights on their attitudes and thoughts regarding the issue under question. The interviews were guided by 5 questions with additional probe questions depending on their responses and the need for clarification or elaboration. The interview sessions were all audio-recorded for later transcription and analysis. To analyze the data, content analysis was adopted through which the participants' responses were scrutinized, the recurring themes and common patterns of the responses were identified, coded, subjected to

frequency analysis, and finally tabulated, the results of which are presented in Table 4.

Table 4
The Results of the Content Analysis of the Interviews Conducted With 42 Participants

Question 1	**Content areas previously addressed by inservice courses offered by the Ministry of Education**						
	Teaching the new textbook	Reviewing the teaching methodology	Reviewing learning theories	Creating learning materials	Integrating technology in the classroom	Education in Iran	Information technology
N(%)	39(92.8)	38(90.4)	38(90.4)	37(88)	37(88)	36(85.7)	35(83.3)
Question 2	**The methods through which inservice courses are commonly presented**						
	One-shot workshops		Self-study followed by online tests			Online courses	
N(%)	42(100)		36(85.7)			4(9.5)	
Question 3	**The extent to which the inservice courses are able to satisfy teachers' current PD needs**						
	Perfectly well		To a great extent		To some extent		Not at all
N(%)	0(0)		0(0)		4(9.5)		38(90.5)
Question 4	**The Teachers' most urgent pedagogical and classroom-related needs**						
	Dealing with listening activities	Promoting students' speaking skills	Improving assessment skills	Developing strategies to make learning fun	Integrating technology into classroom instruction		
N(%)	34(80.9)	33(78.5)	32(76.1)	28(66.6)	21(50.0)		
Question 5	**The teachers' most preferred PD activities**						
	Interactive workshops	Online courses	Peer observation	Teacher study group	Supervised teaching practice		
N(%)	37(88)	35(83.3)	34(80.9)	18(42.8)	12(28.5)		

As shown in Table 4, the content areas previously addressed by inservice courses offered by the Ministry of Education, as reported by the interview participants, included courses on teaching methodology, learning theories, material development, and information technology. Regarding PD methods, all participants mentioned 'one-shot workshops' as the most commonly used method through which inservice courses are presented by the Ministry. 'Self-study followed by online tests' was the second method of presentation, which was mentioned by 85.7% of the participants. Also, 9.5% of the participants

referred to 'online courses' as another PD activity which is sometimes offered to English teachers.

Concerning Question 3, only 9.5% of the participants rated the inservice courses offered by the Ministry as being partly effective in satisfying their current PD needs; however, over 90% of the participants perceived them as not being effective at all. One of the participants asserted that workshops were mostly noninteractive in nature and that the teachers were basically passive participants who received information from an expert who discussed issues not of current concern to teachers which did not address their current PD needs. One of the teachers argued that he had attended traditional workshop-based inservice courses for over 20 years and he thought he had gained too little because the nature of the workshops was noninteractive giving the teachers no voice and choice. In fact, most teachers emphasized the need for interaction and technology in teacher education; however, in recent years, in an attempt to reduce the costs of holding workshops or probably to eliminate its shortcomings, *the Ministry of Education* in Iran has offered some self-study courses followed by online tests. In these courses, teachers are provided with some materials to study on their own after which they are needed to take an online test, the results of which affects their promotion. Nevertheless, these courses were rated by the interviewees as even less effective than traditional workshops. As one of the teachers asserted, the methods through which the inservice courses were presented kept teachers in isolation and did not allow the exchange of ideas to take place among them. Besides, regarding the content of the inservice courses, most of the participants maintained that there was usually no chance for teachers to decide on the content of the programs since it was often selected by those other than the teachers themselves. One of the participants argued that English teachers do not show much interest in attending inservice

courses offered by the Ministry mainly because the content is usually not in accordance with what they really need to learn or improve and not much relevant to what they are actually faced with in the classroom.

Regarding Question 4, the English teachers' most urgent pedagogical and classroom-related needs were found to be dealing with listening activities (80.9%), promoting students speaking skills' (78.5%), and improving assessment skills (76.1%), respectively. Other areas needed to be enhanced included developing strategies to make learning fun' (66.6%) and 'integrating technology in the classroom' (50%). Many of the interviewees considered 'listening' as one of the most challenging language skills to deal with since it requires focusing on many components simultaneously (e.g., focusing on new words and expressions, emphasizing new grammatical structures, checking students' comprehension, & encouraging & monitoring the follow-up speaking activity). The majority (over 85%) were dissatisfied with their students' speaking skills and asserted that teachers needed assistance in how to encourage their students to use the language communicatively. As one of the teachers argued, they had been teaching English for many years using techniques taken from Grammar-Transition and Audio-Lingual methods. However, he maintained, because the textbooks had gone through basic revisions in 2012 and the teaching of the four basic language skills (i.e., listening, speaking, reading & writing) through a localized version of the Communicative approach had been emphasized, teachers found it almost impossible to implement the goals considering the limited time (less than one hours & a half per week) allocated to EFL teaching in Iranian public schools. Other teachers emphasized the urgent need for teachers to be trained in how to assess the language communicatively based on the content of the revised textbooks. Some teachers argued that EFL learning must be fun, but most teachers did not appreciate the value of fun and its surprising effect on

students' learning. One of them asserted that PD programs should focus on training teachers to use more fascinating methods of EFL teaching. Furthermore, several teachers emphasized the need for integrating technology into classroom instruction since it not only created a better and more effective way of presenting the materials but it was also fun and popular with students. As one of the senior teachers argued, technology, if used effectively, could create an enjoyable atmosphere for language learning and almost removed the centrality and authority of the teacher in the classroom. She maintained that although technology was available in some schools, teachers did not tend to use it because, firstly, they were not simply used to it and, secondly, they had to create materials, which required special skills and was time-consuming.

Finally, regarding Question 5, the most preferred activities mentioned by the participants were found to be 'interactive workshops' (88%), 'online courses' (83.3%), and 'peer observation' (80.9%), respectively. Other preferred PD activities included 'teacher study group' (42.8%) and 'supervised teaching practice' (28.5%). As most of the participants argued, workshops are to be participatory in nature and the participants should be engaged in activities such as cooperative group problem-solving, group discussion of classroom-related issues, and role plays. As one of the teachers argued, interactive workshops provide the opportunity for the participants to discuss issues of current concern to teachers and to share their experiences and learn from each other. In relation to online courses, most teachers emphasized the facilitative role of the Web in presenting PD courses to inservice teachers. According to one of the senior teachers, online PD courses can be presented to teachers irrespective of time and place eliminating temporal and special limitations. He maintained that online courses bring teachers from various districts and schools in a virtual environment in which they are able to share

experiences, find solutions to their problems, receive feedback from experts without having to worry about attending a specific location at a specified time. In relation to peer observation, most teachers stated that it is an effective approach to PD in that it gives teachers a chance to work together and evaluate each other in order to improve their teaching performance. They also maintained that they might benefit from a peer more than a supervisor whose presence in the classroom is usually threatening to teachers' ego. As one of the teachers argued, peer observation is a reciprocal process in which both colleagues monitor and learn from each other and that teachers feel more comfortable to work with and receive feedback from a colleague than a supervisor. Regarding 'teacher study group', one of the teachers asserted that a teacher study group provides teachers with an opportunity to share their problems and concerns with colleagues serving at the same institution, who are already familiar with the issues related to the students, teachers, textbooks, methodologies, and the Ministry's policies. Another teacher argued that in a teacher study group, teachers can meet regularly to work in groups and focus on and discuss problems that they would not be able to solve in isolation. Regarding *supervision*, participants did not approve of the prescriptive approach to supervision. One of the teachers asserted that the purpose of supervision must be collaboration and sharing of knowledge rather than making decisions on teachers' promotion/demotion based on a single performance. Likewise, several other participants (over 76%) asserted that supervision must be an interactive process in which the supervisor and the teacher are considered as colleagues sharing knowledge and experiences and learning from each other.

3.3 The Results of the Focus-group Discussions Conducted with the Onsite Supervisors

As mentioned earlier, a focus-group discussion was also conducted with the onsite supervisors, who were required to discuss the results of the PD needs analysis in detail in order to develop, implement, and evaluate a systematic PD program for practicing teachers teaching English at secondary schools affiliated with *the Ministry of Education* in Kermanshah. The supervisors corroborated the dependability of the results and expressed their willingness to cooperate with *the Inservice Training Department of the Ministry* which is responsible for developing, implementing, and evaluating systematic PD programs for teachers teaching English at junior secondary schools affiliated with the Ministry. Accordingly, they were required to help us design a semilongitudinal PD program (lasting for about six months) based on the results of this study to be presented to EFL teachers based on their needs. We did so through a number of focus-group discussions conducted with two supervisors and four experienced senior English teachers. The results of the discussions, the implementation of the PD program, and its evaluation are, in fact, out of the scope of this paper and will be reported later to the journal in the form of a separate paper as soon as they are prepared for publication.

4. Discussion

This study was conducted with IETs and aimed to identify their current needs in terms of their PD and their preferred PD activities. The results indicated that one-shot workshops, which are considered the most traditional forms of PD, are the dominant inservice PD programs provided to Iranian English teachers. Another commonly used method of PD presented by *the Ministry of Education* was found to be self-study followed by online tests which was rated by the teachers as ineffective since it was a noninteractive method that kept teachers in isolation and did not allow the exchange of ideas to take

place among them. However, the results of the survey indicated that the most effective PD methods preferred by IETs included interactive methods such as 'interactive workshops', 'online courses', 'peer observation', 'teacher study groups', and 'supervised teaching practice'. The results also showed that teachers were hardly ever given the chance to decide on the content of the inservice programs which was often selected by those other than the teachers themselves and which was usually not in accordance with what they really needed and not much relevant to what they were actually faced within the classroom. Finally, the results indicated that IET's most urgent pedagogical and classroom-related needs include *dealing with listening activities*, *promoting students' speaking skills*, *improving assessment skills*, *developing strategies to make learning fun*, and *integrating technology in the classroom*.

As mentioned above, one-shot workshop was found to be the most commonly used PD activity offered to IETs. This finding is consistent with that obtained by Daloglu (2004) regarding the PD of English teachers in Turkey. Daloglu also found that inservice teacher development programs in countries like Turkey are commonly in the form of one-shot workshops introduced to teachers in the course of an academic year. Daloglu maintains that attending these workshops is compulsory for teachers in some schools, and that the participants do not benefit much from them because the topics of the programs are normally selected by those other than the teachers themselves and are not thus in accordance with their actual needs. Consequently, individual teachers' needs and concerns are not adequately addressed in such inservice programs. Likewise, in the study, most participants who had attended workshops emphasized that the activity had almost no influence on their content and pedagogical knowledge, an idea which is in line with Diaz-Maggioli's (2004) argument that workshops are usually one-shot single sessions which leave little room for the issues to be

explored in depth. These shortcomings were also all emphasized by the teachers interviewed in the study who asserted that one-shot workshops are noninteractive in nature and the issues discussed are usually not of current concern to teachers and not able to address their PD needs. Similarly, the Australian teachers studied by Walsh and Gamage (2003) declared that most of their PD practices had been traditional including one-shot workshops and expert-driven lectures in which teachers were passive participants receiving information which did not focus on the development of teaching skills for classroom improvement.

Discrepancies were also found between the content of the inservice PD programs and the teachers' actual PD needs. That is, the results of the semistructured interviews indicated that IETs were commonly offered courses which included such theoretical issues as one-shot workshops on teaching methodology, learning theories, and technology. However, the participants were found to be mostly concerned about such practical teaching issues as dealing with listening activities, promoting students' speaking skills, improving assessment skills, developing strategies to make learning fun, and integrating technology into classroom instruction. Supporting our findings in this respect, the Turkish English language teachers studied by Daloglu (2004) asserted that they had to attend inservice programs which were not sufficiently effective in enhancing their content and pedagogical knowledge because the topics of the programs were selected by those other than the teachers themselves and thus were not in accordance with their actual needs. The Australian teachers studied by Walsh and Gamage (2003) also emphasized that they could have contributed to the success of PD programs by being empowered to make decisions on the content and the structure of the programs and being given a role in coordinating school-based PD programs. They maintained that their current PD practices did not seem

to meet the desired purpose of PD such as learning new teaching strategies. Thus, Walsh and Gamage concluded that there was a discrepancy between the participants' current PD practices and their actual PD needs. The results of the present study and the ones conducted by Daloglu (2004) and Walsh and Gamage (2003) all provide support for Guskey's (2000) argument that intentionality is one of the important defining features of PD. As Guskey maintains, PD is a purposeful and intentional process and conscious effort believed to bring about positive change and improvement. When PD is purposeful and goal-oriented, he adds, it is easier to verify whether the goals have been met and to evaluate progress.

Finally, it was found that there was a sharp contrast between common PD activities presented to IETs and their preferred ones. As mentioned earlier, the common PD activities directed at IETs is one-shot workshops which is among the most traditional and the least interactive methods of PD. However, we found that the participants of the study preferred to be involved in more interactive methods of PD (e.g., *teacher study group*, *peer observation/coaching*, & *supervised teaching practice*) in which they worked with their peers or supervisors and discussed their goals, concerns, problems, and experiences collaboratively. This finding is in line with social constructivists' argument that knowledge is constructed through interaction with others. Also, sociocultural theory considers teaching and learning as social activities involving more competent individuals working with novices and providing assistance to help them perform tasks which they are not able to accomplish by themselves. According to Hadar and Brody (2010), recent PD programs focus on social interaction which enhances learning and intellectual functioning. Collaboration is, in fact, an integral part of learning and is essential for a teacher to develop professionally (Smith & Averis, 1998). As Hadar and Brody (2010) emphasized, PD occurs within a group of

teachers collaborating in their work setting rather than solitary practitioners seeking development individually outside their workplace. Corroborating this line of reasoning, Harris and Anthony (2001) argue that because such traditional approaches to PD as workshops do not considerably contribute to teacher learning, schools are required to create opportunities for teachers to become more collegial by encouraging and supporting mentoring programs, team teaching, and teacher study groups.

As mentioned earlier, the English teachers participating in the study considered supervised teaching practice and peer observation as two of their most preferred PD activities. Similarly, Sivan and Chan (2009) found that supervised teaching practice and peer observation were among the most preferred activities which contributed significantly to teachers' PD. The results of the interviews conducted with the teachers in our study showed that they preferred peer observation to supervised teaching practice because they believed that they were able to learn better in a stress-free environment from their peers than from a supervisor whose presence in the classroom might be threatening to their ego. However, Thijs and den Berg (2002) asserted that "for more lasting forms of collaboration among teachers, changes in school organisation and school culture are of crucial importance" (p. 67). Thus, we argue that, regarding the PD of IETs, education policy makers need to start from schools and other educational institutions to change school culture and to transform the content and structure of PD programs commonly presented to teachers to suit their needs and preferences.

Another PD method preferred by the majority of the participants in the study was 'online teacher learning'. In this regard, Utecht (2010) argues that by joining online communities and creating learning networks as effective professional learning environments, teachers can benefit from a huge amount of information on the web and that they can use this new source of

knowledge for their own PD and impart the knowledge to their students. Also, Carpenter and Krutka (2015) emphasized the importance of online teacher learning and the ineffectiveness of top-down PD activities which disregard teachers' active participation in the construction of knowledge. The teachers studied by Carpenter and Krutka asserted that the rise of social media (e.g., Twitter & Facebook) over the last decade had apparently facilitated more participatory PD that is supportive of teachers' roles as professionals and intellectuals. In fact, online PD gives educators an opportunity to actively engage in PD activities and gradually become autonomous professionals taking responsibility for their own professional learning and growth by enabling them to build a community among themselves and across groups (Carpenter & Krutka, 2015; National Council of Research, 2007).

Another PD method preferred by the majority of the participants in our study was found to be 'teacher study group'. As emphasized by the teachers interviewed, collaboration with colleagues, particularly the more experienced ones, might enable them to solve their practical problems more easily and effectively. They asserted that such activities as one-shot workshops and self-study programs often centered around presenting theories which might not address the actualities of the classroom. However, as they argued, sharing and discussing their problems and concerns in a teacher study group might better satisfy both the teachers' individual PD needs and the needs of the institution. This argument is in line with that of Lambson (2010) who suggested that novice teachers could benefit greatly from opportunities to participate in practices alongside veteran teachers. Corroborating this argument, Hung and Yeh (2013) found that forming a teacher study group engaged teachers in the professional learning process and was likely to bring about improvements and changes in their beliefs and practices. Hadar and

Brody (2010) also highlighted the importance of creating a community of learning among teachers and argued that development was only possible when the teachers were prepared to break through their personal and professional isolation and participate in the PD community. The breaking of isolation, as they maintain, includes creating a safe environment wherein sharing, daring, and support become a routine; the arguments which are all in line with the findings of the study.

4.1 Implications for Policy and Practice

The results suggested that PD has not yet been considered essential by Iranian foreign language education policy makers and the teachers themselves although the vitality of educational growth and development is emphasized by many scholars and researchers in the field of education. Thus, based on the results of the needs analysis conducted with IETs in the study, a number of recommendations are made to be used by *the Ministry of Education* policy makers, supervisors, and teacher trainers. It is first suggested that more attention be paid by policy makers to inservice teachers' PD needs and the systematic provision of inservice PD programs which help teachers update their pedagogical knowledge and skills which might, in turn, result in better student learning. It is also recommended that, in addition to considering institutional needs, the development of PD programs for IETs be based on the results of a comprehensive needs analysis to address their actual needs which are directly relevant to their teaching responsibilities. This actually makes sense because when the teachers feel they are seen and heard and that their individual needs are being met by their institutions, they are more likely to be committed to their profession in general and to the goals of their institution in particular. The third recommendation concerns the structure of PD programs. It is recommended that when deciding on the structure of the PD programs, a variety of activities be presented to teachers

so that their various individual PD needs and their learning differences and preferences be addressed. Furthermore, EFL teachers are more or less equipped with a variety of theories about successful second language learning and teaching, but they might have little sense of how to apply them in the classroom context. It is thus recommended that the various programs introduced to teachers include both theoretical considerations and practically oriented activities because bridging the gap between theory and practice has proved to result in more effective teaching and strengthened learning experience of students (Lattimer, 2015) and is considered to be one of the basic and essential components of reflective practice (Thompson & Pascal, 2012). Another recommendation concerns the evaluation of the PD programs offered to teachers. It is also recommended that teacher PD programs be evaluated through a multimethod approach using various methods of data collection (e.g., questionnaires, interviews, focus group discussions, observations, etc.) and through a multiinformant approach considering various perspectives (e.g., teachers, supervisors, teacher trainers, etc.) if they are to yield more fruitful outcome. The effectiveness of the programs might also be evaluated in terms of student learning and achievement.

4.2 Future Research Directions

The results of the needs analysis conducted in the study were shared with *the Ministry of Education* policy and decision makers and discussed with onsite supervisors and senior teachers in the context where the study was conducted. The study was, in fact, part of a large-scale project which aimed at implementing a systematic six-month-long teacher PD program in Iranian junior secondary schools. Based on the results of the needs analysis conducted with the teachers, a combination of interactive teacher PD activities (i.e. interactive workshops, online teacher learning, teacher study groups, & peer observation) were designed and implemented. At the end of

the program, its effectiveness was evaluated through mixed-method and multi-informant approaches. A full report of the implementation and evaluation stages will be presented in another paper as soon as it is ready for publication.

4.3 Conclusion

The vitality of professional growth and development is gradually being felt in Iranian education contexts. However, effective and successful PD depends on the identification of teachers' current PD needs through a careful needs analysis. Also, it should be noted that EFL teachers belong to a large community and that they must be connected to each other like the links in a chain exchanging ideas and discussing teaching-related issues. The traditional methods (e.g., one-shot workshops) through which the inservice courses are presented keeps teachers in isolation and does not allow the exchange of ideas to take place among them. Therefore, the role of interaction and technology in teacher education should not be ignored by foreign language education policy makers. These two elements must be incorporated into inservice programs offered to teachers if they are intended to be effective and satisfy the needs of both teachers as individuals and schools as systems. Thus, due to the introduction and application of information and communication technology in education which has resulted in educational reform and change, it is imperative that the structure of inservice courses be modified as well to fit the requirements of today's world. In order to keep pace with the changing world in general and educational change in particular, teachers are, in turn, required to change and seek CPD opportunities as a part of their teaching responsibilities.

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Appendix A. Iranian English Teacher Professional Development Needs Questionnaire

Section 1

Gender: Male Female	Age:	Years of teaching experience:	
Teaching qualification	Diploma Bachelor's degree Master's degree	PhD candidate	Associate degree PhD

Section 2

Have you ever participated in professional development activities (e.g., workshops, self-monitoring, action research, teacher study groups, teacher online learning, team teaching, supervised teaching practice, etc.)?   Yes   No

1) If yes, please determine the type, location, duration, and purpose (4 of them at the most):

	Type of activity?	**The location?**	**Its duration?**	**Purpose?**
1				
2				
3				
4				

2) Did the activities provide adequate opportunities for enhancing your knowledge of the subject you teach and/or knowledge of teaching issues (i.e. content knowledge and/or pedagogical knowledge)?

	Type of activity	**Enhancing your content knowledge**			**Enhancing your pedagogical knowledge**		
		Yes	To some extent	No	Yes	To some extent	No
1							
2							
3							
4							

3) What do you think the purpose of professional development activities should be?

Section 3

To what extent will the following professional development purposes satisfy your present needs?

| Not at all= 1 | To some extent= 2 | To a great extent= 3 | Perfectly well= 4 |

I need to participate in Professional development activities to ...	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
improve my classroom management skills				
improve my lesson planning skills				
improve my command of English				
improve my personal qualities as a teacher				
improve my interpersonal relationships with students				
enhance my skills in integrating language skills and subskills				
enhance my vocabulary teaching strategies				
improve my skills in contextualized grammar teaching				
improve my ability in focusing on both form and meaning while teaching grammar				
improve my skills in teaching pronunciation				
enhance my skills in how to deal with reading activities effectively				
improve my skills in how to deal with listening activities effectively				
improve my skills in designing and implementing activities that promote my students' speaking skills				
improve my skills in designing and monitoring pair-work and group-work activities				
improve my skills in providing corrective feedback to students				
improve my knowledge of reflective teaching to improve my teaching practice				
improve my knowledge of critical pedagogy				
improve my skills in creating a more learner-centered environment in the classroom				
enhance my knowledge of how to improve my students' thinking skills				
enhance my skills in recognizing and addressing individual differences in the classroom				
improve my assessment skills in general				
improve my formative assessment skills				
enhance my skills in creating an enjoyable and stress-free learning environment in the classroom				

Please specify any other needs regarding your professional development not listed above:

Developing Inventory …

<u>**Section 4**</u>
To what extent do you think the following activities are able to meet your current professional development needs?

| Not At all= 1 | To some extent= 2 | To a great extent= 3 | Perfectly well= 4 |

Type of professional development activity	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Teacher support (study) group				
Self-monitoring				
Supervised teaching practice				
Peer observation				
Peer coaching				
One-shot workshop				
Interactive workshop				
Action research				
Journal writing				
Team teaching				
Online teacher learning				

Please specify any other professional development activities that you deem appropriate to your current needs?