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## International ELT Conferences and Professional Development

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**Abstract:** Teachers are the cornerstone of the education systems of the countries; hence teachers' continuous professional development has become vital for innovative pedagogies. Almost all countries have regulated their national level laws, policies, and procedures with little input from teachers to develop teacher education curriculum. Regardless of how carefully they have developed their new curriculum, effective teaching still depends on teachers' knowledge, skills and professional development since teachers are at centre of achieving quality education. It is therefore essential that ELT teacher candidates understand and share examples of practice in continuous professional development (CPD). Academic conferences provide excellent opportunities for teachers and teacher candidates to gain fresh insights into the world of education beyond their school walls. Thus, the aim of this study was to find out teachers' and teacher candidates' views on the activities carried out during the conference and on CPD. The results of the quantitative data revealed the overall description of the conferences as positive and encouraging events. The qualitative data supported the positive feelings about the conference and revealed teachers' and teacher candidates' positive and negative thoughts and feelings about CPD.

**Key words:** ELT Conferences, teachers, teacher candidates, continuing professional development

## Introduction

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, teachers are not only considered to be one of the stakeholders that must be changed in order to improve their education systems, but they are also key to the success of reform initiatives. This makes teachers significant change agents to enact these initiatives in and out of the classrooms, which has made teacher professional development a growing and challenging area. There has been a tremendous interest emerging especially from governments that update the programs of educational institutions towards demonstrating a significant return on the investment in teacher education in order to improve quality. The requirements of meeting the challenges of the 21st century have highlighted the need for developing the skills and competencies teachers must have to face the unknown future. Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2005), suggest that the quality of teaching depends upon the quality of teacher training which enables teachers to contribute optimally to their learners' academic achievement. However, the quality of education can be achieved with improving teachers' knowledge, skills and professional development. Teacher professional development events should start as early as it is possible, hence teacher candidates should make a habit of developing their professional and personal skills throughout their careers though they have a comprehensive quality preparation with insufficient training at their institutions. The Turkish teacher education curriculum has gone through substantial reforms in recent years.

Everything is rapidly changing, which requires teacher candidates to update their knowledge on materials and method, the syllabus, characteristics of the learners and working conditions that are not covered in the teacher training period. Richards and Farrell (2005)

define the term professional development as “the general growth aimed at reaching a longer term-goal and which often involves examining the different dimensions of the teachers’ practice in order to improve their performance in the classroom” (p. 4). Professional development could occur in many ways and be achieved through journals, action research, team teaching, portfolios, mentoring coaching and reflective teaching. These options provide teachers with opportunities to grow during their teaching careers. There seem to be a number of reasons to pursue professional development; for instance, to acquire new knowledge and skills, to keep pace with change, to increase the income or/and prestige, to add an impressive line to our curriculum vitae, to increase the power by increasing knowledge acquired, to avoid burnout, to combat negativity (Bailey, Curtis, & Nunan, 2001, pp. 6-7).

Teachers’ continuing efforts to develop and maintain efficiency in and outside the classroom are necessary to ensure a sustainable teaching quality. They also must have the opportunity to modify their existing beliefs and develop their practices by gradually incorporating new ideas and ways of working. In addition, a substantial amount of study maintains that change of attitudes and beliefs are not considered when introducing pedagogical innovations, teachers may resist, re-interpret, misinterpret, revise, refine and/or alter the new principles using their own theories (Orafi, & Borg, 2009). Hattie (2009) carried out a meta-analysis over 800 studies on factors affecting the students’ achievement reported that of the ranked 138, in the top 30 most effective factors, 19 are associated with teachers or teaching with a size above 0.5. Thus, there is a rapid change throughout the world to meet the changing needs of learners in the modern world in that teachers have to pursue professional development. It is, therefore, essential that ELT researchers and teachers, especially teacher candidates understand and share examples of practice for CPD.

## Teacher Professional Development

A substantial number of studies have reported that rapid technological changes have affected almost every area of economy, society and culture which requires people to be lifelong learners since teacher training programs are not sufficient enough to meet the challenges of the future. There is an agreement on the statement that the quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers (Barber, & Mourshed, 2007). Keeping this in mind, more and more countries are renewing their teacher education policies involving lifelong learning opportunities for their teachers as a major source to develop both teacher knowledge skills and values and student achievement (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010). A major challenge for effective training programs for teachers is the development of their dispositions toward teaching. Reiman and Johnson (2003) assume that the development of the teacher dispositional characteristics takes time and effort which is covered by attending professional development programs.

Different terms used for professional development (PD), and distinctions between these terms are not exactly marked in the literature since quality of teaching is the single most important factor which contributes not only to professional but also to personal development of the learners. In this sense, PD can be defined as the process aiming to provide teachers with innovative tools and skills as well as updating the existing ones. Mann (2005) claims that professional development is “career orientated and has a narrower, more instrumental remit” (p. 104). In line with PD, the term “sustaining professional development” is also used in teacher education since it covers both informal and formal approaches to PD. Myers and Clark (2002, p. 50) define PD as “ongoing, coherent, and continuous, rather than unrelated and episodic” and Edge (2002) called it as continuing professional development or lifelong learning. For the aim of this study the working definition of PD is given by Avalos (2011, p. 10) as

*[...] professional development is about teachers learning, learning how to learn, and transforming their knowledge into practice for the benefit of their students' growth. Teacher professional learning is a complex process, which requires cognitive and emotional involvement of teachers individually and collectively, the capacity and willingness to examine where each one stands in terms of convictions and beliefs and the perusal and enactment of appropriate alternatives for improvement or change.*

The concept of professional development especially for teachers has developed into continuing professional development (CPD) or lifelong learning rather than mere training and qualifications. The term 'continuing' is often used in the literature after the 2000s to stress professional development as being ongoing, lifelong oriented in the process of 'ongoing' change process (Curtis, & Cheng, 2001). It is suggested that teachers seek the CDP opportunities to update and develop their knowledge, skills and values to fulfil different needs and goals in their careers (Day et al., 2007; Day, & Gu, 2010). Borg (2015a) suggests that CPD be based on a model of teacher education aiming to professionally develop teachers through a "development-constructivist" (process-product), approach rather than a "training-transmission" (input-output) model. He also claims that CPD should enable teachers to become aware of their "own professional learning, although the need for the availability of expert support is acknowledged. This could be in the form of "courses led by external trainers who provide teachers with knowledge and ideas" (p. 542).

Academic conferences and seminars are likely to enhance teachers' professionalism to bring about innovative changes in their theoretical knowledge and instructional methods. When they are organized at higher education institutions, researchers and teachers and teacher candidates can obtain the opportunity to attend and listen

to others, individuals present papers and acquire understanding of various areas. The dealing and communication of the individuals with each other enable the participants to acquire immense knowledge regarding important areas. Teacher candidates can also obtain the opportunity to improve their leadership skills and organize various events and functions. Attending conferences and gaining some insights in the wider profession has been considered to be a form of the formal and centrally-managed CPD activity. Academic conferences provide excellent opportunities for participants to gain fresh insights into the world of education beyond their school walls. Borg (2015b) maintains that researchers and teachers can develop their knowledge and experiences continually by attending conferences and presenting papers since they feel a sense of achievement when they actively participate in the conference; they have the opportunity to compare their professional experience with that of other ELT professionals; they become more aware of their own potential; they develop their self-confidence and credibility in the eyes of their colleagues.

International English Language Teacher conferences provide an opportunity for participants to gain powerful and refreshing experience and to become aware of the current trends in the field (Crandall, 2001). According to Borg (2015b), there is a growing number of ELT professionals around the world, attending various conferences each year; and, by participating in such events teachers can develop positive impacts upon their careers and practice. Thus, Çukurova International ELT Teacher Conferences (CUELT) comprise a consecutive set of academic and social activities which aim to foster collaboration among academics, researcher's teacher and teacher candidates studying in various sociocultural contexts. Since 2015, the CUELT conferences have provided a communication platform for scholars, professionals, academics and graduate students, ELT teachers and teacher candidates.

CUELT Conferences have also paid considerable service to extending practical information about novel ways to handle various challenges of authentic teaching practices in the 21st century classrooms. Moreover, the conferences have given the participants ample opportunities for sharing expertise, exchanging opinions and gaining new perspectives about teaching/learning practices. Finally, the social activities (like the gala dinner, sightseeing tour etc.) enabled teachers and teacher candidates to meet ELT practitioners/academics from different parts of the world and thus, contributed to furthering collaboration among people with similar research interests. Besides, the conferences have offered four workshops, which specifically intended to inform the participating pre-service teachers about the current trends in pre-service and in-service teacher education. Thus, this study aimed to find out teachers' and teacher candidates' views on these conference events and their impact on their professional development. The three research questions guiding the study were as follows;

- 1) What are the teachers' and teacher candidates' views on International ELT Conferences?
- 2) What are their views on Continuing Professional Development (CPD)?
- 3) Do they think conferences have an impact on their teaching practices?

## Significance of the Study

This study is significant since it first broadens the focus of previous studies investigating whether attending academic conferences provides an excellent platform for professional development. It also looks more closely into both teachers' and teacher candidates' views on cognitive,

behavioural and affective outcomes of international conferences. Lastly, it strengthens the idea that academic conferences provide excellent opportunities for both ELT teachers and teacher candidates to gain fresh insights into the world of education beyond their school walls (Borg, 2015b).

## Methodology

This design of the study followed a “sequential explanatory strategy” to investigate and explain teachers’ and teacher candidates’ views on International ELT Conferences as continuing professional development using quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis procedures. Creswell and Creswell (2018) states that “the quantitative results typically inform the types of participants to be purposefully selected for the qualitative phase and the types of questions that will be asked of the participants” (p. 304). The study initially utilized quantitative data collected from the ELT teachers’ and teacher candidates’ views on the conferences. Open-ended questions were preferred for the next stage of the study to obtain qualitative data from both teachers and teacher candidates regarding professional development. Finally, some of the teachers and teacher candidates were interviewed in order to obtain a better interpretation of the results of the questionnaire and open-ended questions.

Approximately 600 participants – consisting of Academics, English Language Teachers and Teacher Candidates – participated in the conferences. Of the participants, 230 were the registered presenters, 126 were ELT teachers teaching at different levels state schools and the 144 were ELT teacher candidates.

The data were obtained from the teachers and teacher candidates attending the CUELT conferences held in 2018 and 2019 as three-day-professional development events. They were collected through an evaluation survey consisting of five point Likert scale (Strongly Agree,



Agree, Neutral, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree) and eight free response questions investigating more views on the sessions developed by Bedir (2018). In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participants to support the collected data.

## Findings

The study sought to determine teachers' and teacher candidates' views on international ELT conferences as a professional development. A total of 58 teachers and 134 teacher candidates responded to the survey and 24 of them were informally interviewed. The majority of the responses indicated a positive, enriching experience at the conference. The mean and St.Ds of the items are presented in the tables.

### Teachers' and teacher candidates' views on conferences

Statistical analysis of the data obtained from 58 teachers with a five point Likert scale evaluation survey provided valuable information about their views on the sessions. The overall description of the conferences suggested a positive and encouraging conferences though the mean (3,0698) of the satisfaction with the conferences is lower than the other means. Table 1 displays that, except for the "I am satisfied with the sessions" the teachers were commonly pleased about attending conferences. For example, "The presentations were well planned and interactive" had a mean of 4,0698, "I would recommend the session to colleagues" had a 4,3256 mean. In addition, there seemed to be a consensus among the participants on "The atmosphere was enthusiastic, interesting and conducive to a collegial professional exchange" since it had a mean of 4,000 and St.D was 1,00. In addition, "Presenter(s) spoke enthusiastically" had a mean (3,8245) lower

almost all of the items after. The informal interviews with the teachers revealed that the negative feelings about presentation resulted from some of the plenary sessions.

Table 1. Teachers' views on the conferences

Items	Mean	St. D
1. I am satisfied with the sessions.	3,0698	,9359
2. Time in the presentations was sufficient to allow learning and practicing new concepts.	4,0240	,7683
3. The presentations were well planned and interactive.	4,0698	,6689
4. The presenters delivered the ideas clearly, using brief notes.	4,2558	,5386
5. The atmosphere was enthusiastic, interesting, and conducive to a collegial professional exchange.	4,0000	1,000
6. I understood and learned several things from the presentations.	4,0698	1,142
7. The presenter(s) spoke enthusiastically.	3,8245	,7986
8. I would recommend this session to colleagues.	4,3256	,6063

Source: The data from five point Likert scale

A substantial number of teacher candidates – 134 – responded to the survey including Likert scale items and eight free response questions. Sixteen of the respondents were also informally interviewed. Survey findings indicated that the majority of teacher candidates found the conference fruitful (Table 2). For example; “I am satisfied with the session” showed a mean of 3,0698, “The presentations were well planned and interactive” had a mean of 3,9075 and “Presenter(s) spoke enthusiastically” had a mean of 4,4176. In addition, “The atmosphere was enthusiastic, interesting and conducive to a collegial professional exchange” was highly preferred (M = 4,3587) and the highest ranking item with a mean of 4,6021 was “I would recommend the conference to colleagues.”

Table 2. Teacher candidates' views on the conferences

Items	Mean	St. D
1. I am satisfied with the session	4,4501	,9027
2. Time in the presentations was sufficient to allow learning and practicing new concepts.	4,4074	,8543
3. The presentations were well planned and interactive.	3,9075	,8345
4. The presenters delivered the ideas clearly, using brief notes.	4,4188	,7712
5. The atmosphere was enthusiastic, interesting, and conducive to a collegial professional exchange	4,3587	,9471
6. I understood and learned several things from the presentations.	4,4426	,8878
7. The presenter(s) spoke enthusiastically.	4,4176	,8196
8. I would recommend the conference to colleagues.	4,6021	,8476

Source: The data from five point Likert scale

In addition, the free response questions shed lights into the strong and weak points of the presentations, thereby the conferences. The most frequently used words for the conferences were “beneficial”, “motivating”, “innovative and “engaging”. The only potentially negative words with any prominence were “time” allotted for the presentations and “crowd” for the two halls physically small for the audience. The positive comments for the sessions were derived from the words like “interesting”, “beneficial”, “interactive” “innovative”. However, there were negative perceptions of the conference; it was likely associated with sessions, time issues and two of the rooms used for presentation. Teachers used the terms “sessions” “concurrent” “small”, “size”, all of which suggested that overlapping sessions with similar content were problematic for some attendees.

The interviews, on the other hand, revealed that the majority of the participants were truly satisfied with the conference venue, as well as time of the year the conference was organized; although there

were also a few negative comments about the structure of two of the rooms where the sessions were held. The informal interviews with the teachers and teacher candidates revealed that the negative feelings about presentation were resulted from two of the plenary speeches though they wished to attend more related conferences to raise their awareness on current teaching and learning practices. This is in line with the benefits of ELT conferences, stated by Crandall (2001) in that “there is perhaps no single experience with more potential for educating and refreshing a professional than an international English language teaching conference” (p. 536).

The positive comments for the sessions were derived from the words like “interesting”, “beneficial”, “interactive” “innovative”. However, there were negative perceptions of the conference; it was likely associated with sessions, time issues and two of the rooms. The potentially negative words with any prominence were “time” – allotted for the presentations – and “crowd” for the two halls physically small for the audience. Teachers used the terms “sessions” “concurrent” “small”, “size”, suggested that overlapping sessions with similar content were problematic for some attendees. Teacher candidates who articulated negative words were observed to hold the views that attending the conferences or workshops which do not meet their needs and interests was time-consuming and irrelevant. This is in line with Richards and Farrell (2005) who suggests several professional development strategies among which attending conferences is not mentioned. In addition, Smith (2010) suggest the shift from traditional workshops and conferences to professional learning resulted from active involvement of the teachers, taking longer term and intellectually nourishing activities. However, attending academic conferences can be more rewarding for teacher candidates in order to be with experienced and expert practitioners in the field of ELT and be an effective teacher, which has already been

associated with professional development. Silverman et al. (1992) suggest that teacher candidates must have the opportunity to bridge the gap between theory and practice to become an effective teacher, so they must be equipped with the skills such as being critical and creative thinkers and problem solvers.

Attendance rates varied across sessions although an overwhelming majority of the participants were pleased about attending the presentation and workshop conducted by the plenary speakers. The teachers and teacher candidates were asked to reflect on the practicality of the conferences and their relevance to the classroom situations. The majority of the responses focused on building a bridge between theory and classroom applications. The following excerpts are examples of some of the common responses:

*I gained some insights from the sessions which I would use in my classes.*

*Academics came here from different parts of the world and shared their ideas with others, so I tried to benefit from them since they presented some practical things from the classrooms.*

*Attending professional conferences motivates me to do my best work as a teacher. When they are over, I always think over I want to do more. Why can't I make a presentation in the next conference?*

*I got bored of listening to the people telling me what to do in class in a slideshow. What I need is innovations which make us more than being more standard.*

## Teachers' and teacher candidates' views of CPD

The respondents' views about what they understood from the term "continuing professional development" was also a concern for the study, one additional free response question was asked. "What is your

understanding of the term ‘continuing professional development?’” The words and phrases both teachers and teacher candidates used showed that they were almost all aware of what professional development meant. Based on free response responses, it was interpreted that teachers’ and teacher candidates’ perceptions of CPD and participation in CDP events evolved four categories as Definition of CPD, CPD Experiences, Reasons for participating in CPD and Impact of CPD. The categories, themes and common emerging ideas are presented in Table. The themes were carefully selected because they served as “the basis upon which the argument, the data extracts and the discursive commentaries are organized” (Holliday, 2007, p. 90).

Table 3. Teachers’ and teacher candidates’ views of CPD

Categories	Themes	Common emerging ideas
Definition of CPD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participation of professional events</li> <li>• Becoming qualified teacher</li> <li>• Updating and developing pedagogical knowledge skills and practices.</li> <li>• Life-long learning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seminars, conferences, and workshops</li> <li>• Becoming aware of weaknesses and strengths</li> <li>• Becoming a better, effective and sophisticated teacher</li> <li>• Improve instructional strategies, develop teaching methods</li> <li>• Keep up passion of learning</li> </ul>
CPD Experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attending professional events</li> <li>• Professional organization</li> <li>• Pedagogical Knowledge</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seminar conferences, and workshops</li> <li>• English teacher association (INGED, TESOL Turkey)</li> <li>• Reading, finding sources, and developing methods</li> <li>• Examiner and teacher trainer</li> </ul>

Reasons for participating in CPD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers' self-awareness</li> <li>• CPD as a means to enhance teachers career</li> <li>• Exchange information and expertise among teachers</li> <li>• Becoming aware of the resources available for CPD</li> <li>• Improving confidence about innovative pedagogies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal goals for knowing more about the profession</li> <li>• Career promotion, teacher certification, better career prospects</li> <li>• Participating in CPD provide idea sharing</li> <li>• Improve collaboration and communication skills</li> <li>• Gaining ideas for improving classroom instruction</li> <li>• Improving research and presentation skills</li> <li>• Using the resources to access the necessary information</li> <li>• Feeling better prepared to teach a lesson using new technologies to further students' achievement</li> </ul>
Impact of CPD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Impact of CPD on classroom practices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Both on personal and professional development</li> <li>• Learning about new teaching methods, ideas, assessment and innovation for classroom practices.</li> <li>• Sharing CPD experiences with colleagues in the same district</li> </ul>

Source: The data from free response questions.

This study also highlights both teachers' and teacher candidates' views on CPD provided with the annually conducted international conferences. Teacher professional development is very broad and involves improving knowledge, skills and values. Table 3 displays that many of the teachers and teacher candidates voiced concerns corresponding with the definitions in the related literature. The majority of the teacher candidates expressed the term "being an effective teacher" as a response to the questions. On the other hand, several of them defined the term professional development as "developing teaching skills." It is clear that the concept of CPD is well perceived by many teachers and teacher candidates. However, some teachers seemed to perceive CPD as a programme for new teachers, whereas teacher candidates thought it was a program for all to learn technology only.

The survey data indicated that teachers mostly participated in seminars, conferences, and workshops and that some of them were the members of English Teacher Associations. Some attended in-service teacher training activities, yet the content of the activities carried out were either not interesting at all or rarely associated with CPD. In addition, teachers, during interviews, indicated that attending such events raised an awareness of their weaknesses and strengths in their profession. Interview data obtained from the teacher candidates, on the other hand, revealed that very few of them were holding the idea of experiencing CPD activities. It was also interpreted that more attention was devoted to quantity of these activities than on their impact on the quality of teaching.

Table 3 also shows the emerging issues about the purpose of attending CPD events. It was obvious that both groups share similar ideas such as professional development, sharing of good practice, more so than being a classroom observation exercise. However, further inferential analyses did reveal some differences between two groups in that teachers were observed to be more passionate about career enhancement. Professional development was believed to be something they seek and educate themselves for in the hope they would be recognised by Ministry of National Education (MoNE) so that they could work in prestigious schools. The majority of them also believed that communication with one another could enhance their professionalism. The teacher candidates, on the other hand, mostly commented that attending conferences provide them with the opportunity to improve their professional knowledge by listening to others even presenting papers and acquiring understanding of various areas.

Teachers and teacher candidates were then asked how the outcome of the conferences would contribute to the quality of their teaching. Both of the groups agreed that the conferences contributed to



their personal life with meeting and interacting with ELT researchers, as well as to their professional life with increasing motivation, enthusiasm and commitment to the teaching profession. Teacher candidates also commonly used the words and phrases as “developing new teaching and assessment methods,” “sharing ideas with the colleagues.”

## Discussion

Both teachers and teacher candidates seemed to be eager to attend conferences for certain incentives such as better career prospects, certificates, etc. Teacher candidates, especially, believed that attending CPD events provided the recognition of outstanding teachers at district, regional and inter/national levels. These observations are in line with previous studies. For example, Borg (2015b) claims that attending academic conferences participants can have the opportunity to build networks which help them increase their awareness on changes and innovations in their area of interest. In addition, OECD (2009) reports that education conferences and seminars are the most commonly attended events by 68% in Lithuania, 75% in Slovenia and 68% in Turkey (cited in Bedir, 2018). That said, attending conferences is more likely to be professionally rewarding experience and to affect teaching practices if teachers can relate the content of the presentations to their everyday work in their schools.

However, teachers complained about the workload and the attitudes of the school managers, which prevented them from attending the conferences; although the MoNE supports teachers' professional development. Teacher candidates articulated that they did not have adequate time for professional development interventions since they had to study for high stake examination to become a teacher though they seemed to be eager to attend professional development events. However,

they must seek opportunities which “help them develop their image as future teachers and conferences enable them to make connections between their knowledge base (pedagogy, methodology, classroom activities and etc.), practice (their practicum, the implementation of a pedagogical project and etc.) and develop empathy towards a social and critical way of teaching” (Castellanos, 2013, p. 202). Making a connection between theory and practice grow from transmission perspective to a mixture of the developmental and the nurturing perspective, hence the impacts of such kinds of events in early years of teachers’ careers can bring up the most significant change (Popova et al., 2016).

The majority of both the teachers and teacher candidates articulated that the knowledge, skills and values they gained during conferences would positively impact their professional development and their teaching practice. However, the implementation of knowledge skills and values should be fostered to see the impact of the CPD sessions. In line with the previous literature, which has reported that teachers should work collaboratively to trigger changing teaching practices and improving student learning (Avalos, 2011), the teachers seemed to be willing to share CPD experiences with colleagues. Teacher candidates, on the other hand, reflected on the knowledge, skills and values they gained during the three days of the conference events and their teaching experiences during their micro. Murphy et al. (2015) suggested that teachers could sustain the knowledge, skills and values they have gained when they try out new activities and methods demonstrated during the CPD programs. Teachers also talked about many obstacles they faced when they intended to implement what they experienced. Therefore, they were suggested that they become a teacher as a researcher and present the results of their classroom research in the conferences. This activity corresponds with the claim that any programme of professional learning should be self-directed and aim to make changes in teachers’

knowledge and practices, and improvements in student learning outcomes (Kennedy, 2016).

In planning for the future professional development activities, one free response question asked was: “In your opinion, what should be the purpose of professional development”? The most frequently used phrases were to become “aware of weaknesses and strengths”, and “a better, effective and sophisticated teacher.” Cochran-Smith (2003) suggests that professional development which can equip teachers with the knowledge to meet the demands of students in the twenty-first century should be included in the teacher education curriculum. In addition, individual professional development has been considered as a useful tool since it enables individuals to monitor the growth of competences on a problematic field (Zepeda, 2012; European Commission, 2013). Teachers and teacher candidates also highlighted that university level professional development event such as seminars, workshops, conferences greatly their teaching practice more than other professional development, which is in line with the findings reported by (Shiel, Perkins, & Gilleece, 2009).

CPD activities require the evaluation programme outcomes rather than extrapolate from ideals, effective CPDs; hence Guskey (2002) suggested five levels of evaluation (1) Participants' reactions: the participants' responses to survey revealed positive reactions towards the quality of presenters, materials, the context and organization; (2) Participants' learning: qualitative data obtained with open-ended questions and interviews served as reflections. As shown in Table 1 and 2, both teachers and teacher candidates gained good insights from the presentations, created a positive sense of community and shared ideas which could initiate change in knowledge or skills due to their experience during the conferences; (3) Organization support and change: The interviews with the teachers and official contact with the local office of

MoNE shed lights into the support in creating change. The majority of the teachers agreed that there was no organization's advocacy, support, facilitation, and recognition of change efforts. However, teacher candidates overwhelmingly favoured the support they received from their institutions; (4) Participants' use of new knowledge and skills: During the practicum, we had the chance to observe some of the teachers and teacher candidates participating in the conferences. We observed that they were in the tendency of implementing the experiences they gained by attending the conferences. (5) Student learning outcomes: The data we were able to use for learning outcomes were the results of high stake examinations, and the teachers' comments on how much the new teaching strategies or practices they were implementing made a difference. The data helped us interpret that teachers attending conferences were implementing the innovative pedagogies in their classrooms due to the noteworthy scores of the high stake examinations their students have taken.

## Conclusions, implications and suggestions

This study addressed some issues related to the international ELT conferences and continuing professional development among EFL teachers and teacher candidates. The research has contributed to studies expertise among teachers; conferences with regard to CPD in the context of academics presenting papers and conducting workshops with teachers and teacher candidates attending as audiences. Within this broad perspective, the study aimed to explore the views on the sessions evaluated by both the teachers and teacher candidates. The purpose of the investigation was to develop a better understanding of the relationship between International ELT Conferences and professional development. Compared to overall conference satisfaction, results

suggested that the respondents had a very positive view of the sessions and conferences as professional development events in general; although the participants' ratings varied.

In addition, the analysis of the data from the survey questionnaire, free response questions and focus group interview has let some characteristics of CPD emerge. Generally speaking, the findings showed an overall enthusiasm and commitment among teachers towards conferences. While the questionnaire data showed enthusiasm, the free response questions and interview provided an additional insight into the various factors attributed to congruence between teachers and teacher candidates. However, it was observed that teacher candidates were using positive expressions about some workshops whereas teachers, especially older ones, seemed to be bored with their topics, and vice versa. The emerging patterns in terms teachers and teachers' candidates' participants' highlighted on the impact of conferences were mostly on the implementation of and sharing the knowledge, skills and values gained. That said, both groups seemed to have gained insights which could shape the way they would be teaching resulted from their commitment, motivation and the satisfaction of attending conferences as CPD.

The results implied that some of the more experienced teachers, who spent more years in service, voiced concerns about how the older teachers in their schools. They articulated that older teachers opted to see professional development events as a burden and unnecessary intrusion, whereas the majority of novice teachers and teacher candidates were eager to participate in any CPD events available. This lack of interest might derive from the fact that CDP events do not contribute to the advancement of teachers' career in Turkey. Thus, CPD events must be more personalized as suggested by UNESCO (1990, p. 58) "teachers should be involved in the identification and articulation

of their own training needs and growth experiences for teachers should be individualized” since teachers could be at different stages of their career. Their perceptions of professional development events can be extremely different even though they may be working at the same institution. It is likely that “young teachers might find certain workshops extremely useful while more experienced teachers may feel bored with topics they already know, and vice versa” (Novozhenina, & López Pinzón, 2018, p. 126). In the current study, for instance, teacher candidates were more inclined to specifically integrate technology than many of the teachers who seemed to incorporate it into their lessons due to the pressure coming from the students.

Teacher CPD is a very broad and diverse field of knowledge. There is no single approach to develop the quality of teacher and teaching, which is fundamental to guarantee quality in student learning. However, studies have reported that a substantial number of teachers are ill-prepared (Bold et al., 2017; OECD, 2009). In this study, volunteer teachers’ and teacher candidates’ concerns were highlighted. The study also examined the possible cumulative and residual effects of the CUELT Conferences in the university context on teachers’ and teacher candidates’ professional development. A more in-depth study would be necessary for a more detailed examination of the different contexts and processes which can improve teachers’ knowledge skills and values to practice better.

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