

## English Language Teachers' Professional Development Needs in Ethiopia

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The purpose of this study was to investigate the ongoing professional development needs of English language teachers in primary school. A mixed methods design was employed in the study. The participants were sixty-four primary school English language teachers. They were selected randomly from six elementary schools. A survey and an interview were used to collect data. All the teachers took part in the survey. Additionally, eight of them were observed while teaching in the classroom. Furthermore, six trainers participated in key informant interviews and focus group discussions. The results of the survey show that the majority of teachers estimate their speaking and reading skills at an intermediate level, and there is a moderate significant correlation between teachers' evaluations of speaking and reading skills. Based on the interview results, qualitative data were collected and analyzed to corroborate the survey findings. The themes were categorized and interpreted. It was revealed that the teachers have severe needs for English language proficiency and must continuously develop their pedagogical and subject-matter knowledge. On the basis of the findings, suggestions were made to the ministry of education to prepare professional development activities based on the teachers' needs.

**Key words:** the English language, needs, teachers, professional development, teaching methods.

**For citation:** Abrar M.K. English Language Teachers' Professional Development Needs in Ethiopia. *Psikhologo-pedagogicheskie issledovaniya = Psychological-Educational Studies*, 2023. Vol. 15, no. 1, pp. 73–84. DOI: [10.17759/psyedu.2023150105](https://doi.org/10.17759/psyedu.2023150105).

## Потребности в профессиональном развитии учителей английского языка в Эфиопии

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В настоящем исследовании изучались текущие потребности в профессиональном развитии учителей английского языка в начальной школе. В исследовании применялся комплекс методик. Участниками стали шестьдесят четыре учителя английского языка начальных классов. Они были выбраны случайным образом из шести начальных школ. Для сбора данных использовались опрос и интервью. В опросе приняли участие все учителя. Кроме того, восемь из них находились под наблюдением во время обучения в классе. Кроме того, шесть инструкторов приняли участие в интервью и обсуждениях в фокус-группах. Результаты опроса показывают, что большинство учителей оценивают свои навыки говорения и чтения на среднем уровне, при этом между оценками учителями навыков говорения и чтения наблюдается умеренная значимая корреляция. По завершении интервью были собраны и проанализированы качественные данные для подтверждения результатов исследования, что позволило установить, что учителя имеют острые потребности в овладении английским языком и должны постоянно развивать свои педагогические и предметные знания. На основе полученных данных в министерство образования были внесены предложения по подготовке мероприятий по повышению квалификации с учетом потребностей учителей.

**Ключевые слова:** английский язык, потребности, учителя, профессиональное развитие, методы обучения.

**Для цитаты:** *Абрар М.К.* Потребности в профессиональном развитии учителей английского языка в Эфиопии // Психолого-педагогические исследования. 2023. Том 15. № 1. С. 73–84. DOI:10.17759/psyedu.2023150105

### **Introduction**

Effective instruction is crucial to the success of the English language. It includes a range of instructional techniques that adapt to the learning styles, interests, and skill levels of the pupils. With specific reference to EFL (English as a foreign language) teachers, A.Safaie, et.al [30] argued that the only choice English language teachers have if they want to be really qualified and professional for the great task of teaching English is to equip themselves with subject and pedagogic knowledge. Similarly, G. Maggioli [10] explains that ongoing professional development is needed for second language teachers to help their students develop proficiency in the target language and an understanding of the cultures associated with that language. However, in Ethiopia, research findings indicate tremendous achievement has materialized in terms of quantitative expansion, while poor quality of education and low student achievement remain the main challenges of the Ethiopian education system (MoE [21]; K.Tessema [33]). The Ministry also mentioned the weaknesses in teacher performance as a principal factor, such as lack of content knowledge, poor implementation of active learning, a lack of professional commitment, and lack of interest (A. Eyasu et.al. [12]; A.Workneh and W.Tassew,[36]). Thus, the Teacher Development Program (TDP) was developed to curb this flaw. The Ministry also launched the General Education Quality Improvement Package with similar aims to the TDP (MoE [22]). English as a Foreign Language Education is very important in the GEQIP. Many English teachers are provided with training (ELIP) to improve their English language proficiency in a tailor-made process known by the MoE as the 'Cascade Model'. The guidelines for continuous professional development (MoE [24]) were also introduced to the schools by central reform planners, following a top-down approach. Hence, this research intends to examine primary EFL teachers' in-service training needs.

The objectives of this study were:

- to assess the continuous professional development needs of primary EFL teachers in their teaching-learning context,
- to assess teachers' self-perceived English language proficiency in speaking and reading.

## Review of Literature

### *Continuous professional development*

Academics talk about professional development, which is any effort to advance teachers' knowledge both during and beyond the early stages of preparation (A.Craft [7]; K. Johnson & P.Golombek [17]). But it's generally accepted that professional development comprises initiatives taken by practitioners after they finish their teacher preparation (S.Shawer, [31]). Because it guarantees that teachers continue to be competent in their field, ongoing professional development is crucial. It is a continuous process that lasts during the whole aprofessional career. According to P. Kelly [18], these actions are meant to lead to an ongoing teacher learning process that would help teachers become experts. Professional development is now viewed in the field of the English language teaching as a highly critical process, rather than as the idea of a collection of skills. J. Richard & T. Farrell [29] developments in the profession might cause teachers' knowledge, skills, and credentials to become antiquated. Thus, it appears that teachers frequently engage in a range of activities to advance their careers.

### *Professional development components*

In-service training can be placed into two categories. One is updating. It focuses on subject knowledge and pedagogy to improve classroom practice. The other is upgrading, which is the process by which teachers can choose to participate in additional study outside their regular work as teachers at appropriate times in their career (MoE [23]). EFL teachers have distinct characteristics in terms of the nature of the subject, the content of teaching, the teaching methodology, teacher–learner relationships, and contrasts between native and non-native speakers (S. Borg, [5]). According to J. Richards and T. Farewell [29], professional development can take place at the individual, collegial, group, and institutional levels, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

**Activities for teacher development**

<b>Individual</b>	<b>One-to-one</b>	<b>Group-based</b>	<b>Institutional</b>
Self-monitoring Journal writing Critical incidents Teaching portfolios Action research	Peer-coaching Peer observation Critical friendships Action researches Critical incidents Team teaching	Case studies Action research Journal writing Teacher support groups	Workshops Action research Teacher support groups

Authors such as D. Sparks & S. Loucks-Horsley [32] present five models of staff development: individually-guided staff development, observation, involvement in a development process, training, and inquiry. Individually-guided staff development refers to a process through which teachers plan for and pursue activities they believe will promote their own learning. The observation model provides teachers with objective data and feedback regarding their classroom performance. This process may in itself produce growth, or it can provide information that may be used to select areas for growth. Involvement in a development process engages teachers in developing curriculum, designing programs, or engaging in a school improvement process to solve general or particular problems. The inquiry model requires that teachers identify an area of instructional interest, collect data, and make changes in their instruction based on an interpretation of those data. Furthermore, the teacher training model entails teachers acquiring knowledge or skills through appropriate individual or group instruction. It is also recommended that 'teachers' professional development must be systematically planned, supported, funded, and researched to guarantee the effectiveness of this process' (E. Reimers [35]).

### **Method**

A mixed-methods design was employed in the study to get a complete picture of the teachers' experiences under investigation. Thus, primary school the English language teachers participated in the survey and interview, eight of them were observed while delivering lessons in the classroom. Additionally, the English language trainers participated in key informant interviews and focus group discussions.

The focus group participants were tape-recorded during the discussion. The recordings of the focus groups and interviews were transcribed and subjected to various stages of analysis. A preliminary analysis was carried out to acquire a general understanding of the data and consider its significance (open codes). After that, a further in-depth analysis was conducted, and the data was separated into units or segments that indicated certain participant thoughts, attitudes, and experiences (axial codes). After the analysis was complete, a list of subjects was created, and the subjects were organized into major finding categories. Then these categories were analyzed to determine the interconnectedness of the issues and conditions that may have given rise to them.

Eight primary school English language teachers were randomly observed while teaching English in the classroom. The purpose of the observation was to corroborate the survey, focus group discussion, and interview results by looking at the real-life situations of the teachers' practices. Each session was taped and transcribed. The transcriptions of the lesson were rated by two raters (ELT experts) using rubrics developed from the relevant literature. Finally, based on the themes, the quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed.

### **Results**

The present study employed Butler survey instruments (Appendix B) to get answers for the participant teachers' (primary schools EFL teachers) self-perceived English language proficiency in speaking and reading skills. The results are presented in Table 2. As can be seen from Table 2, 34.37 % of the

respondents rated their perceived speaking proficiency level as 4. This means that the teachers represent themselves as being able to express themselves using simple language, but they make mistakes and express themselves at a normal speed. Some participants (20.3%) rated their perceived speaking proficiency as level 5, which denotes that they generally perceive themselves as fluent, but occasionally have minor pauses when they search for the correct manner of expression.

Table 2

**Frequency and pearson correlation statistics of self-perceived speaking and reading skills  
 (N=64)**

Levels	Speaking Frequency (%)	Reading Frequency (%)
1.0	1 (1.56)	1 (1.56)
1.5	0 (0)	3 (4.68)
2.0	5 (7.8)	3 (4.68)
2.5	3 (4.68)	2 (3.12)
3.0	8 (12.49)	11 (17.18)
3.5	2 (3.12)	16 (25)
4.0	22 (34.37)	14 (21.87)
4.5	6 (9.37)	6 (9.37)
5.0	13 (20.3)	0 (0)
5.5	4 (6.25)	2 (3.12)
6.0	0 (0)	6 (9.37)
Total	64 (100.0)	64 (100.0)

Only 12.49% of the participants leveled their proficiency at 3, which denotes that they observed themselves as being able to express themselves using simple expressions even though they made mistakes and paused to express complex ideas. 6.25 percent leveled themselves as they were fluent, but occasionally had minor pauses in search of the correct manner of expression (level 5.5). However, some teachers (14.04%) rated their proficiency in speaking less than level 3.

Regarding reading, 25% of the teachers rated their proficiency level between levels 3 and 4; this implies that the participants see themselves as able to understand the main point(s) of a short passage written in ordinary English with some assistance from a dictionary and grammar book. 17.18% of the participants saw their reading skills as level 3. The teachers represent themselves as being able to understand the main points of a short passage written in ordinary English if they can have some assistance, such as the use of a dictionary and a grammar book, although there are usually some parts that remain unclear to them.

21.87 percent of the respondents perceived that they read and understood most of what is written in regular English texts, depending on the genre of the texts; they may encounter some unclear words and may need to consult a dictionary in order to comprehend the texts (level 4). 9.37 percent of the teachers leveled themselves between levels 4 and 5, which means the respondents saw themselves as being able to read nearly everything with ease. However, some (14.04%) respondents rated their levels below 3.

Pearson correlation coefficient was also calculated to observe the relationship between perceived English language proficiency skills. Statistical analysis shows that there is a significant relationship between teachers' evaluations of speaking and reading skills ( $r=0.48$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ).

### **Focus group discussion and interviews**

The results of the focus group discussions and key informant interviews suggested that continuing professional development has a wide range of effects on the teachers' pedagogic and subject knowledge.

#### *Teaching Methodology*

The participants affirm the necessity for teaching methods for Ethiopian English teachers, who are the most crucial stakeholders in helping students meet their needs. These feelings are summed up in the words of one participant: "ELT professional development gives advantages for trainees to enhance their quality of education beyond their pre-service training." (P1). The interviewees also discuss the importance of professional development, which is consistent with the viewpoints expressed by the participants in the previous section. "The other one that is very crucial to professional development is the methodology; "It highly affects their pedagogical skills" [R3]. Thus, enrolling teachers full-time will offer them the chance to concentrate all of their time on introducing their students to language theory and the theory of language instruction, so they can arm themselves with the most recent instructional techniques.

#### *Improve students' achievement*

One of the statements sums up the effect of professional development on students' achievement in such a way that it is reflected in classroom teaching. " Having a proper training, especially in ELT, will affect what we actually do or what we make our students do in the classroom" (FGP2).

Similarly, another interviewee stated, "Of course; for example, it can affect people both positively and negatively." "If the teachers receive good education, in return they are going to teach the students in a way that enables their students to learn" [R2].

English teachers need to participate in vertical and horizontal trainings. One of the interviewees' statements can be used to sum up the participants' worries. "If you do that at the elementary level, it is very important to have training to teach the language effectively and to promote students' achievement" (R1).

#### *Teaching skills*

As one participant, echoing the necessity of teaching skills shared by the participants, states, "We know teaching is both an art and science. Therefore, a teacher is expected to have good communication skills, for example, having a good rapport with his/her students, etc. (P3).

It is also discussed that teaching is an art that is endowed by nature and developed through experience, as: "It is very important for teachers to have professional development that is related to students and how they deal with them in the classroom" (R1). It reflected that the English language professional development is intended to benefit teachers in resolving ongoing issues in the teaching-learning process. Teachers become aware of the language that is used in the classroom, which encourages students to actively engage in the learning process.

#### *Materials' contents*

The participants agreed that professional development allows English teachers to contextualize the contents of their teaching materials. The participants' statements can be summarized as follows: "It is critical to have teachers who can make adjustments to adapt your knowledge of teaching material

locally...(R1). This indicates that the training that teachers receive allows them to prepare materials considering the realities and observing the contexts; this motivates students to learn effectively and acquire the subject knowledge and language skills needed.

#### *Subject knowledge*

The participants noted that these teachers are teaching in a situation where they lack context and adequate content knowledge. For instance, one of the discussants expresses his views as follows: "Teachers need basically subject area knowledge. "We need to be effective and competent in the subject that we teach" (R2). It is clear that our English teachers have deficiencies in the language and professional skills, it will be mandatory to get continuous professional development. Teachers must, without a doubt, be proficient in the language. It is not possible to send all teachers abroad because the country's economy does not allow it, but some professionals can come and provide training and life experiences in various centers.

#### **Classroom observation results**

The observed teachers conducted English classes in accordance with the contents provided in the students' texts, though there was a disparity in implementing the activities. The teachers used both English and Amharic in different proportions depending on their efficiency. While teachers 01, 03, and 05 used more English than Amharic, teachers 02 and 06 hardly used English except to read the expressions in the text. Teachers 04, 07, and 08 were using limited target languages during the lesson. What was common for all the teachers was their overdependence on the students' text books.

Although literature supports the use of textbooks as they provide teachers and learners with a structure for teaching and learning, methodological support, and opportunities for revision and preparation (I. McGrath [18]), the obsessive use of textbooks deskills teachers. If teachers primarily use textbooks as their primary source of material, and if they rigorously follow the pages and activities in order, they become technicians whose sole role is to teach things created by others (Richards, J. [19]). Such kinds of approaches do not promote students' learning because each student's attention, interest, motivation, pace, and physiological and psychological needs are unique. To meet their requirements, they must be treated as individuals. Teachers should always consider their differences while organizing lessons, and teachers are expected to compensate for the mismatch (C. Angeliki [2]). The teachers were reading and writing about every activity using the material. The teachers' English language abilities seem to show a lack of exposure to and experience with specific (tailored) ongoing professional development activities. As a result, the observed teachers faced difficulties in implementing teaching methods that best suited the skills they taught students in order to improve their performance.

The teachers also observed difficulties in using the target language. For instance, according to D. Nunan [34], the measurement of the success of language learning is based on the learners' ability to carry out a conversation. Speaking is seen as the benchmark of students' success in their language learning. This success refers to someone's ability to use English accurately and fluently to communicate with other speakers and to achieve practical goals in communication

#### **Discussion**

As can be seen from Table 2, the teachers perceive themselves as being able to smoothly express themselves at near normal speed but may have to slow down when expressing complex ideas and less common small expressions. When compared to reading proficiency level, it shows that more teachers

believe their speaking proficiency level is lower than expected. However, in the classroom, the teachers were seen as more dependent on the textbooks and using more Amharic expressions.

The findings depict that the teachers have a high intermediate level of language proficiency, which means they perceive themselves to have a good command of English, which contradicts the trainers' and principals' interview results. On the whole, the findings support A. Wulyani's [37] finding that Indonesian EFL teachers tended to overestimate their own overall English language proficiency. However, the result contrasts with W. Getachew. M. Eba and T. Zeleke's [14] study shows that primary school EFL teachers did not perform the minimum requirements that were expected of them as English language teachers. Similarly, N. Dereje's [9] findings reveal that primary EFL teachers' English language proficiency and English teaching skills are weak. Thus, research findings in Ethiopia about primary EFL teachers' language proficiency and teaching skills do not also verify the results of the teachers' rated self-perceived English language proficiency levels (N. Dereje [9]; K. Huege et.al [16]; and T. Negash [26]). The results of classroom observations depicted that the teachers were highly dependent on the textbooks, which seemed to show their limited ability to use the target language when delivering lessons in the classroom. The findings confirm J. Miller's [20] argument that teachers with low levels of proficiency are more dependent on teaching resources like textbooks and less likely to be creative.

Teachers attend professional development events for a variety of reasons, including expanding their knowledge and acquiring new skills (K. Bailey et.al. [3]). According to A. Murray [25], both experienced and novice teachers find encouragement and motivation in learning about new strategies and methodologies to empower them when it comes to teaching English as a second language. English language teachers are more likely to experiment with the most recent advancements in educational technology and language teaching theories with their students (D. Allwright [1]), allowing them to continue to develop in the adaptation and application of their art and craft, which is crucial for their professional development. Teachers need to deepen their understanding of the theories underpinning learning and teaching practices. This is achieved through continuous professional development. Freeman's definition explains that "professional development is a strategy of influence and indirect intervention that works on complex, integrated aspects of teaching; these aspects are idiosyncratic and individual. The purpose of development is for the teacher to generate change through increasing or shifting awareness. Similarly, P. Ur [34] describes teacher development as the means through which teachers learn about their profession by reflecting on their own classroom experiences. The more teachers develop their teaching ability, the more confident they will become in their teaching.

When teachers are professionally developed, they are always aspiring to different ways of teaching strategies, assessing students, and managing classroom activities that produce fruitful learning. For instance, J. Richards [28] argues that teacher performance can be influenced by student learning and that exemplary teachers familiarize themselves with student behavior, devise teaching practices based on this knowledge, and keep students engaged during lessons. A. Craft [8] asserts that if schools are about promoting the learning of pupils in a changing world, then education professionals' continuing learning throughout their career is essential. Trying out new ideas in the classroom has the additional benefit of making the activity of teaching much more interesting. Having an exploratory attitude towards teaching helps prevent the feeling of being stuck in a rut, that is, working on the same teaching points in the same way year after year. Scholars (P. Earley and V. Porritt [11]) have argued

that improving student outcomes and students' needs is the primary purpose of continuous professional development. Teachers' training has a direct impact on students because teaching is a reflection of behaviors learned through training. The teacher must believe that the change will improve teaching, ease some teaching tasks, and improve student learning, as well as consider the school culture in addition to the curriculum (G. Fekede [13]). Therefore, professional development paves ways for teachers to localize and adapt materials to suit the targeted classroom context. It also helps teachers develop their own teaching materials.

The participants pointed out that professional development creates the opportunity to develop and sustain a positive attitude towards the activity of teaching. J. Richard & T. Farrell [29] discuss how teachers' knowledge, skills, and qualifications sometimes become outdated as a result of changes in the field. Teaching is both an art and a science; the art is endowed by nature and developed through experience, but the science is what teachers learn, and it changes over time, so teachers are expected to be competent and up to date with the dynamism of science.

### Conclusions

Professional development includes teaching strategies, styles, and identifying what students lack and have so that it benefits both the teachers and students. It is understood as improving skills in related contexts and as lifelong development or growth because context-related continuous professional development (CPD) is perceived to be developing skills that are applicable to the teaching context and that help teachers perform effectively within the working environment (R. Bolam [4]). CPD, on the other hand, is thought to last throughout a teacher's career, from beginning to end (M. Gravani & P. John [15]). Continuous professional development is an important tool for the English language teachers to learn for interest, staying current, and profession. It ensures that teachers maintain and enhance the knowledge and skills they need to deliver a professional service to the students and improve their achievement. Thus, the government should restructure predesigned trainings for the English language teachers in accordance with the different and specific needs of teachers in terms of knowledge of subject and teaching strategies, methods, and skills, as well as students' needs. Attention should be paid to activating effective methods and instruments for evaluating current and future programs before, during, and after their implementation. Finally, further research is recommended to find out the further impacts of professional development in the teaching and learning of English.

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## Appendix A

The level descriptions to each macro skill domain are:

Level 1 = extremely limited ability	Level 1.5 = low beginner
Level 2 = mid beginner	Level 2.5 = high beginner
Level 3 = low intermediate	Level 3.5 = mid intermediate
Level 4 = high intermediate	Level 4.5 = low advanced
Level 5 = mid advanced	Level 5.5 = high advanced
Level 6 = native like proficiency	

### Speaking

- Level 1: I can speak using only short question-and-answer patterns, such as “How are you?” “I am fine, thank you.”
- Level 2: I can participate in a simple conversation on familiar everyday topics at slower than normal speed. I must frequently pause during conversation.
- Level 3: I can express myself using simple language but make mistakes and pause a lot when I try to express complex ideas.
- Level 4: I can effortlessly express myself at near normal speed. Occasionally, I have to slow down when expressing complex ideas and less common expressions.
- Level 5: I am generally fluent, but occasionally have minor pauses when I search for the correct manner of expression.
- Level 6: I have native-like fluency.

### Reading

- Level 1: I can recognize a limited number of high frequency written words and understand English signs used on the street.
- Level 2: I can understand simple directions and statements in short passages if they are written in simple sentences.
- Level 3: I can understand the main point(s) of a short passage written in ordinary English if I can have some assistance, such as the use of a dictionary and a grammar book, although there are usually some parts that remain unclear to me.
- Level 4: I can read and understand most of what is written in regular English texts, although depending on the genre of the texts, I may encounter some unclear words and may need to consult a dictionary in order to comprehend the texts.
- Level 5: I can read nearly everything with ease, although it is still slower for me to read in English than in Amharic. I occasionally may encounter some unfamiliar words and expressions.
- Level 6: I can read various kinds of English texts at a normal speed and with ease, just like I read in Amharic.

Получена 29.12.2022

Принята в печать 21.03.2023

Received 29.12.2022

Accepted 21.03.2023