

EFL Teachers' Individually Guided Activities to Keep their English Alive

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In this presentation, the results of a small-scale study conducted as part of a 4-year Marie Curie Career Integration Grant will be shared. The first objective of this project is to investigate foreign language teachers' professional development activities in Turkey in order to identify any needs for new professional development programs. This aim initially requires a closer look into English as foreign language (EFL) teachers' *individually guided activities* to maintain their fluency in English.

In order to find out what types of individually guided activities EFL teachers are engaged in, we conducted structured individual interviews with 11 teachers across Turkey. The selection criteria included a) twelve statistical regions determined by the Turkish Statistical Institute (2009), b) the location of the teachers (city or rural area), and c) the type of institution they work at (state school, private school or university). Among the 11 teachers, 7 of them were teachers who worked at the state schools, two were private school teachers, and 2 were instructors.

The interview protocol developed by the authors was reviewed by two field experts and pilot-tested with a teacher before it was actually used. Three interviews were conducted face-to-face; all others were conducted via Skype. The interviews were recorded. All of the participants read and signed an informed consent form. The duration of the interviews changed between 45 minutes to 2,5 hours.

The data were analyzed using the constant comparison technique using Nvivo 8 after they were transcribed verbatim. It was found that out of 11 teachers, 9 of them used English to access information on the Internet. The teachers used English when they needed to reach more reliable and comprehensive information on something and Turkish when they needed local information. One teacher said that “*I can search things in English because it is more comprehensive.*” In terms of following the news in English, 9 teachers reported that they check the news websites; however the frequency differed. While most of the teachers noted that they read international papers particularly when there is a serious political event regarding Turkey, four teachers said that they read news in English three or four times a week.

Teachers said that they use forums more often than blogs and wikis. Only two teachers mentioned that they follow blogs in English. Seven teachers said that they use Wikipedia, however none of the teachers were involved in a wiki group among EFL teachers. The teachers usually use forums to find out the correct usage of some vocabulary items, look for instructional materials as mentioned by a teacher in this sentence: “*I skim through forums to obtain lesson plans and materials*”; however, referral to forums as interactional tools among other EFL teachers for professional development was rather low. Eight teachers noted that they get e-mails in English from different e-mail lists but most of them do not usually pay attention to their content. Six of the teachers said that they used social media for interactions in English.

As for mobile applications, instructors and younger teachers tend to use applications such as TED talks. A few teachers utilized only dictionaries as mobile applications. Regarding

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the print materials, only four teachers mentioned reading them. Teachers who get their master's degrees read academic publications and some teachers prefer reading novels in their original language. Teachers who live in rural areas can hardly find magazines and books in local bookstores; however they are able to obtain them via online shopping.

One way for EFL teachers to keep their English alive is having interactions in English in both face-to-face and online environments. However, only six teachers reported that they have friends to communicate in English on social media. It was noticed that teachers who work in rural areas have very little opportunity to communicate with foreigners in English.

It was noticed that teachers who work in private schools and at universities are more versatile in terms of individually-guided activities and tend to get involved in these more often. Teachers who raise small children hardly have any opportunities for individually-guided activities outside the school. Teachers who work at state schools do not have much motivation for professional development since the conditions do not let them transfer these newly-gained experiences to the learning environment. It is very apparent that there is a pressing need for virtual platforms that can provide them the opportunity for professional development such as webinars. Awareness towards the importance of individually-guided activities needs to be raised as well. Teachers also need to get familiarized with technological tools available out there for forums, blogs, wikis, etc. This can be obtained through a website designed specifically for the needs of EFL teachers.