



## Critical Friends Group (CFG): Inquiry-Based Professional Development Model for Turkish EFL Teachers

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### ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** This study investigated the impact of a Critical Friends Group (CFG), an inquiry-based professional development model, on Turkish EFL teachers. It was acknowledged that short-term workshops did not provide opportunities for teachers to make connections between the theory presented and the implications that it had for classroom teaching. CFG model accompanied with protocols was thought to be a practical and efficient way of professional development.

**Method:** The research study was designed as a qualitative case study conducted at a Turkish state university and was aimed at exploring the impact of CFG as a tool to support professional teacher development. The methodology used was an inductive process using grounded theory. Data came from the journals, meeting transcripts, interviews and questionnaires, and from the researcher's notes.

**Findings:** The results of the study showed that teachers who worked in a CFG felt better prepared to continue engaging in their profession. CFG provided the opportunity to work collaboratively, to delve into classroom-based dilemmas, to focus on the teaching and learning of specific academic content, and build strong working relationships among teachers.

**Implications for Research and Practice:** CFGs are proved to be a valuable professional development model as teachers are given opportunities to take the time to inquire into areas of their teaching that they believe need attention. The collaboration should be formalized by school administrations by providing time and space for these processes to take place. Further studies should be implemented to observe the effects and impacts of CFG on students' learning.

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## Introduction

The ideas of alternative professional development structures that allow for self-directed, collaborative and inquiry-based learning that is directly relevant to teachers' classrooms have gained currency in recent years. As Evans (2019) points out professional development as an outcome is often understood in the narrow sense, as relating simply to practitioners' physical action, which is possibly visible. However, in her point of view, 'New' ideas or ways of thinking that have been embedded within people's consciousness may take time to become gradually integrated into their practice; and these ideas augment through interactions with countless other influences on practice (p.7). In professional practice, teachers are social beings that must interact in a broad spectrum of social context. The classroom, the school, the local community, the country, and the international community practitioners are working in are all layers of the social context teachers are a part of. That might be one of the reasons that over the past two decades, research on professional learning communities (PLCs) has flourished in the international literature on teacher development and school improvement. Although the concept of professional community has been difficult to define and measure because of the different theoretical perspectives on this notion and the complexity of its applications in the context of day-to-day practice (Stoll & Louis, 2007), studies on PLCs have a common ground. PLCs are believed to highlight teachers' collective efforts toward student learning and teacher development, and they encourage all professionals in schools to share and critically examine their practice in an ongoing, reflective, and growth-prompting way (Lomos, Hofman, & Bosker, 2011; Wang, 2015; Yin & Zhang, 2018). There are diverse types and means of implementing learning communities, and there is a whole spectrum of different terms used in connection with the concept. Critical Friends Group (CFG) will be the learning community referred in this study.

### *Professional Learning Communities*

Although there is no universal definition of a professional learning community (PLC), it is commonly described as a group of teachers who are sharing and critically interrogating their practice in an on-going, reflective, collaborative, inclusive, learning-oriented and growth-promoting way (Stoll & Louis, 2007). According to Stoll et al. (2006), a professional learning community is a group of people, motivated by a shared learning vision, who support and work with each other, finding ways, inside and outside their community to explore their practice that in the end will enhance all pupils' learning (p.5). The most recent definition is that a PLC is a group of professionals working as a cohesive team to address specific learner needs arising from an analysis of data and evidence (Harris, 2014).

According to Clausen et. al (2009), the desire for a learning community format in schools is not a new one. For almost a hundred years, researcher/theorists from Dewey (1916) and Parsons (1959) to Fullan and Hargreaves (1991) have advocated that schools should look at themselves as social organizations (cited in Clausen et.al, 2009, p.444). During the eighties, Rosenholtz (1989) brought teachers' workplace factors into the discussion of teaching quality, maintaining that teachers who felt supported in

their own learning and classroom practice were more devoted and effective than those who did not receive such endorsement. McLaughlin and Talbert (2006) confirmed Rosenholtz's findings, suggesting that when teachers had opportunities for collaborative inquiry and learning related to it, they were able to develop and share a body of wisdom gathered from their experience. The team-teaching movement, from the late 1950s and through the 1960s, makes a good starting point for a learning community. There have been many initiatives since then. As Crandall (personal communication, July 11, 2012) has noted recently, referencing the recent research, educational institutions that align their performance goals to teachers' professional development through professional learning communities, i.e. groups of teachers who meet regularly to plan, problem-solve, and learn together- will achieve positive outcomes.

The professional learning community model comes out of the assumption that the principal mission of formal education is not simply to ensure that students are taught but to guarantee that they learn (DuFour, 2004). However, it is not easy in so many cases. The scenario DuFour represents is true for most of the schools: "A teacher teaches a subject to the best of his or her ability, but at the end of the instruction some students have not truly achieved the necessary outcomes. On one hand, the teacher would like to assist those students. On the other hand, the teacher feels obliged to move forward to "cover" the course content. If the teacher uses classroom time to help students who have not learned, the progress of students who have mastered the content will suffer; if the teacher continues with new units, struggling students will fall behind" (DuFour, 2004, p.2). In such situations, the teacher is left at her/his discretion. However, when educators work together in a professional learning community, they can move beyond 'What are we expected to teach?' to 'How will we know when each student has learned?'. They work collaboratively to analyse and improve their classroom practice. Teachers working in teams or groups, engaging in an on-going cycle of questions, can accomplish higher levels of student achievement. DuFour, Eaker and Dufour (2005) state:

The use of PLCs is the best, least expensive, most professionally rewarding way to improve schools. Such communities hold out immense, unprecedented hope for schools and the improvement of teaching (p.136).

The collaborative inquiry model presented by CFG is grounded in the belief that teachers of all levels can mentor and support one another. Research examining pre-service teachers, novice teachers, and veteran teachers indicates that CFGs stimulate the development of the professional self (Key, 2006). Moreover, research into CFG work has demonstrated that teachers seem to grow both individually and collectively (Little, Gearhart, Curry, & Kafta 2003; Curry 2008; Nefstead, 2009). A CFG is a professional learning community that is guided by socio-cultural learning theories that an individual's role in shaping the community is just as important as the community's role in shaping the individual (Van Lare & Brazer, 2013). Additionally, Dunne, Nave and Lewis (2000) discovered that teachers involved in CFGs were more reflective about 'the connections among curriculum, assessment and pedagogy', which led to a 'shift from teacher-centred to student-centred instruction,' (p.10).

The theoretical foundation for CFG is that teachers learn to collaborate by participating in professional development activities, and this participation leads to greater reflection on teaching techniques supporting a change in practice aimed at improving student achievement (Vo & Nguyen, 2010). Consistent with a socio-cultural perspective, the CFG model seeks to create a contemplative space for teachers to engage in ongoing, in-depth, systematic, and reflective examination of teaching practices and student learning (Johnson, 2009). The CFG process recognizes the complex art of teaching while providing structures for teachers to improve skills by giving and receiving feedback (Bambino, 2002) and allowing members to examine each other's work and offer suggestions for change (Bloom, 1999). According to socio-cultural theory, enhanced teaching skills are best acquired through social interaction rather than mere transmission of knowledge. When a colleague in a CFG offers a critique of another teacher's work as a friend, the colleague acquires an important role in the group and improves the overall quality of the group.

#### *A Sociocultural Perspective on L2 Teacher Education*

From a sociocultural perspective, a teacher's skill in educating a class depends on the teacher's knowledge, understanding, and ability to participate in the sociocultural aspects surrounding the class and school situation. Additionally, Johnson (2009) notes that teacher learning and activities of teaching are born out of knowledge acquired through participation in the social practices in classrooms, and execution of the knowledge can be greatly subjective when knowledge of self, setting, students, curriculum, and community are considered.

Sociocultural theory (SCT) shifts the nature of L2 teacher education in three dramatic ways. First, it places emphasis on the development of education for L2 teachers as opposed to education of students. Proven methods and techniques are shared amongst colleagues in educational process. Next, sociocultural theory highlights the essential role of L2 teachers in the broader social context of the community (Johnson, 2009). Last, the theory incorporates benefits of group and professional interaction for the development of beneficial alternatives to traditional L2 teaching methodology. Sociocultural theory not only shapes how teachers think and act but also provides a medium for change. To be certain, socio-cultural theory is not the sole methodology or way to approach L2 teacher development, but instead is a way to focus and encourage current and future development of L2 teachers.

The Sociocultural Theory of mind is an appropriate theoretical lens for studying teacher development through CFG because it emphasizes the importance of mediated learning (Poehner, 2009). In other words, both SCT and CFG assume that learning is mediated by participation in social practices and therefore a good theoretical match.

#### *Critical Friend Group (CFG) and Protocols*

The critical friend group idea was developed in 1994 by the National School Reform Faculty (NSRF), a professional development program supported by the Annenberg Institute in the USA. They were originated in PreK-12 schools, but studies in higher education (Aktekin, 2013; Andreu et al. 2003; Bernaccio et al. 2007;

Constantino, 2010; Gunbay & Mede, 2017) have also been conducted. According to NSRF, CFGs are “communities that consist of 5-12 members who commit to improving their practice through collaborative learning and structured interactions (protocols), and meet at least once a month for about two hours” (NSRF, 2014). Protocols are used to guide teacher discussions to be meaningful, constructive, and helpful for their development. Consistent with NSRF (2014), all of the following features need to exist so that a CFG can be effective: (1) openness to improvement, (2) trust and respect, (3) a foundation in the knowledge and skills of teaching, (4) supportive leadership, and (5) socialization and school structures that prolong the school’s mission (<https://nsrfharmony.org/>).

CFGs are designed to build a professional learning community, make teaching practice explicit by “talking about teaching”, and help people involved in schools to work collaboratively in democratic, reflective communities. Additionally, they can establish a ground for sustained professional development based on a spirit of inquiry; provide a context to understand our work with students, our relationships with peers, and our assumptions and beliefs about teaching and learning. CFG participants bring to the table their students’ work, lesson plans, case studies of students, classroom dilemmas, peer observation feedback, and prospective texts. Using structures called protocols to guide their discussion, CFG members help each other “tune” their teaching by analysing and critiquing observations and issues pertaining to their practice (CES, 2008). As “critical” in the name refers, the group exhibits the fact that others are critical or vital in their own learning.

CFGs use various protocols to look at adult work, dilemmas, student work, and materials, academic articles four of which were used in this study. The first type comprises looking at students’ work, where a teacher comes with a sample and introduces it with a focusing question. The second type, problem-solving protocol, begins with the teacher asking a question about a specific dilemma. Other teachers then ask exploratory questions and discuss the problem among themselves. The presenter takes notes until the discussion is finished, at which point he/she shares the notes that might be of help for the dilemma. In another protocol, the group can explore an academic article, clarify their thinking, and have their assumptions and beliefs questioned in order to gain a deeper understanding of the issue (Smith, 2016). The last type of CFG protocol involves two teachers using a preset guideline and focus on observing each other’s teaching (Franzak, 2002, p. 261).

In this study, CFG was used as a professional learning community model for teacher professional development at a university context for the first time in Turkey. This study aimed at understanding what teachers can learn and improve, and whether this transformation can be done effectively through CFG model. Understanding the learning processes going on in and around PLCs is vital because they exist, apparently, to facilitate learning (Horn & Little, 2010; Van Lare & Brazer, 2013). To this end, the study was designed and implemented in a Turkish context, taking experiences and reflections of NSRF into consideration.

The study presented here was conducted at a state university in Turkey with 6 EFL teachers working in a School of Foreign Languages. The research study was designed as a qualitative case study, aiming to explore the impact of CFG model on teachers' professional development. For the purpose of the study, two questions were asked:

1. In their own view, has participating in CFG functioned as a powerful site for the teachers' professional learning?
2. In what areas do teachers think they have improved after participating in CFG?

## Method

### *Overall Research Design*

This study consisted of two phases. In the first phase, an INSET (Inservice Teacher Training) programme was designed for all school instructors considering their needs. Needs analysis was conducted by the Professional Development Unit of the School, which was initiated by the researcher, and the Head of the School decided on the scholars to invite for the workshops. In the second phase, 6 volunteer instructors joined and collaborated in the CFG. This article aimed at reflecting the second phase of the study.

Mentioning briefly, at the first phase, the instructors were asked whether they needed any INSET programme designed for the school, and 82% of the participants wanted to join an INSET programme especially designed in accordance with their needs. Main issues raised in the written survey were about improving foreign language skills, mainly speaking; supporting student motivation for learning, promoting the use of computer and informative techniques, and introducing new methods and forms of teaching. Testing language skills and supporting teacher motivation were two other points that were raised. Participants believed that improving quality of education would be possible by supporting teacher development and motivation. Introducing new forms of teaching and techniques suitable for the needs of current students were highly welcomed. As for the expectations of the participants, they believed that the INSET could improve and renovate their existing knowledge, inform them about educational innovations, help them reflect on their teaching practices, and provide opportunities to exchange experience and views. Consequently, instructors believed that students' motivation and knowledge would improve. Six seminars were organized through two academic terms majored on motivation, classroom management, improving language skills, and using technology in language classes. After each seminar, all participants of the school were asked to evaluate the sessions by the institution through a questionnaire. It was a traditional professional development program done by others for or to teachers, and it was general rather than specific. Teachers listened, participated in the activities; however; the program did not have any provision for feedback or follow-up process. The researcher interviewed 10 instructors, volunteer teachers who did not participate in the CFG, after the programme was over to elicit their impressions of and reflections on the INSET.

In the second phase, the researcher organized the CFG meetings. The meetings took place as the INSET programme continued. 6 volunteer teachers joined the group

for about 8 months, participating one meeting in each month for about an hour. All the data driven from the needs analysis survey and interviews helped the researcher to organize the content of CFG meetings. Some of the meetings were planned just after INSET sessions, which also allowed the group to evaluate the session and exchange views before CFG discussions. The purpose of CFG meetings, however, was not to assess the INSET sessions but to take the most out of them as much as possible through discussion in the group and by applications in the class.

### *Research Sample*

The 6 instructors in the group ranged in teaching experience from novice teachers with three-year experience to veteran teachers with over 15 years of experience. Two instructors had a master's degree. All instructors were female. They were new to CFG process. The group coach was the researcher herself for each meeting; however, the teachers directed and created their own learning as they brought issues to be discussed collaboratively. The group members, therefore, were provided with opportunities to reflect beyond surface classroom issues to deep dilemmas that were at the root of their practice. Protocols were used to guide the conversations.

### *Research Instrument and Procedure*

One of the central purposes of CFG is to "make teaching practice explicit and public by 'talking about teaching' and providing a context to understand our work with students." Protocols are the tools that serve for this purpose. According to NSRF, a protocol consists of agreed upon guidelines for a conversation. This type of structure permits much focused conversations to occur. Protocols set rules for who speaks, when, and about what, in essence framing the discourse. To this end, four types of protocols were used, the first being the 'Tuning Protocol'. It was developed primarily for the use of looking closely at student exhibitions. It was often used to keep the group meeting focused and within a specific time limit in two meetings. The second protocol was the 'Charrette Protocol'. The Charrette is a term and process borrowed from the architectural community. According to Juarez (2017), individuals or teams call for a Charrette when they are stuck. They bring their current ideas, or the actual work in progress, to the Charrette, and then ask the group to "work on the work" for them. The other protocol was the observation protocol. 'Classroom Observation Protocol' was used before and after the observations; and classroom observation checklist was also developed. In our last meeting, the 'Final Word Protocol' was used after reading an article about multiple intelligences. The purpose of this discussion format was to give each participant in the group a chance to shape their ideas, understandings, and perspectives enhanced by reading the article and hearing from others.

The data came from two sources, the participating teachers and the researcher. From the participating teachers, the first type of data was collected through CFG meeting interviews conducted by the researcher. The second type of data came from the journal the participants were asked to keep during the study, and their journals were collected with their approval and consent that they had given in the beginning

of the study as the study and ethical procedures were explained. The data that came from the researcher included field notes that she took during CFG meetings and after CFG meetings. Data concerning during-CFG-meetings included documentation of attendance, non-verbal behavior that the researcher found significant to explain, the comments the participants made. The data concerning after-CFG-meetings included reflections of the researcher and included records of impressions from the interviews, conversations and documents.

### *Data Analysis*

All types of qualitative data collected during the study were analyzed according to the principles of "data theming" (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; DeSantis & Ugarriza, 2000; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). DeSantis and Ugarriza (2000) propose, "A theme is an abstract entity that brings meaning and identity to a recurrent [patterned] experience and its variant manifestations. As such, a theme captures and unifies the nature or basis of the experience into a meaningful whole" (p. 362). In this way, through themes, we categorize a set of data into "an implicit topic that organizes a group of repeating ideas" (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003, p. 38) and reach higher-level theoretical constructs when similar themes are observed. To Rubin and Rubin (2012), themes are statements qua (in the role of) ideas presented by participants during interviews that summarize what is going on, explain what is happening, or suggest why something is done the way it is (p. 118). These themes were then identified through a coding scheme. First, CFG meetings were transcribed and the transcripts were solo-coded for themes. They were read for several times by the researcher and by another independent researcher to understand the nuances of the language and patterns. Researcher's notes, as well as journals were also analysed and coded. Participants were asked to keep their journals under two predetermined headings, which were 'Interpretation' and 'Application'. These two headings were mainly about participants' self-reflection after classrooms. To evaluate the journals and the researcher's notes, meaning units were formed including the words and sentences related to each other in terms of content. Then, they were conceptualized and given a code. Once the codes were identified, they were grouped under specific categories. Finally, the categories were compared to one another and the related 'themes' and 'sub-themes' were introduced. The two researchers associated the main themes and sub-themes with the research questions with an attempt to seek answers and evidence from the data. Finally, to identify the degree of agreement between the two researchers regarding the development of themes, inter-rater reliability was calculated. As a result, inter-rater reliability was found to be .83 indicated close agreement between the two raters.

## **Results**

In-service teacher education programmes, seminars, workshops, traditionally, have involved a relatively passive participation by teachers, while they listen to an "expert" pass on new ideas (Sparks, 1994). In the INSET programme organized and implemented by the institution, the teachers did not have the chance to evaluate seminars thoroughly, in other words no follow-up was facilitated. They were given a

short evaluation questionnaire just after each session was over, but the results of these forms were not shared. As the data from first phase of the study indicated, INSET helped teachers to reconsider the issues mentioned, look at them from different perspectives, and keep them on their agenda. However, since there was not any follow-up after each seminar, they believed that the INSET would not lead to any change in their practice. They did not have the chance to reflect on the topics discussed, or try out the suggested strategies and observe. One of the interviewees stated that the INSET seminars excited her, but they were like a 'flash in the pan'. After the seminar, she said she found herself back into usual classroom issues. Another comment was that during the seminars, the school functioned as a community of professionals, but it lasted when teachers walked out of the seminar room.

When we look at the second phase, similar to the findings (Aktekin, 2013; Constantino, 2010; Dunne & Honts, 1998; Gunbay & Mede, 2017; Moore & Carter-Higgs, 2014; Nave, 1998, 2000; Nefstead, 2009; Vo & Nguyen, 2010) in the literature, teachers were positive about the experience and attributed personal and professional growth to their involvement in the CFG. From the transcripts of the meetings, the journals kept and the researcher's notes, it can be inferred that participants found CFG process effective because it was an adaptable process where teachers decided what they wanted to focus on. The CFG work was on-going, not a one-shot experience which enabled teachers to concentrate more on what they were doing. They stated that CFG contributed to a change in their thinking and classroom practices; collaboration increased with support in a small group of trusted-colleagues within their own school. Voluntary participation to the study may have had an impact on this overall positive attitude, as in the studies of Guceri (2005) and Seker (2007). According to the participants, CFG model created a safe and comfortable environment to talk and share their classroom practices. The responses to reflective questions before and after the study and critical friends' journals indicated that CFG was regarded as an effective professional learning community to support and foster teaching and learning. As Snow-Gerono (2005) states professional learning communities created opportunities for dialogue which made it safe to ask questions and work in a community. She indicates that "good conversations" require "safety, trust, and care" as well as "common ground," "good content," and a sense of being voluntary (p.242). Participants of the study often mentioned the terms constructive, effective, reflective, democratic, comfortable environment for the CFG process. Teachers were content to join these meetings where they shared problems, searched for solutions, suggested and learned activities and tactics. Therefore, CFG created a culture of collaboration and collegiality within the participants and hopefully within the school in the future. Ultimately, participating in CFG functioned as a powerful site for the teachers' professional learning.

One other important point mentioned in one of the meeting was that CFG was like a therapy for teachers. This is in line with the theoretical framework underpinning CFGs, which is sociocultural learning theory. From a sociocultural perspective, the individual and the group context cannot be separated because learning does not occur in isolation. Rather, learning is socially constructed, dependent upon interactions, and

socially mediated (Moll, 2001; Vygotsky, 1986). When asked about the effects of CFG on their teaching performance, the teachers reported some affirmative results. After discussing reasons for students' demotivation and their lack of participation in classroom tasks, the participants offered some suggestions. Each participant in the group shared their favourite warm-up activities. In the following sessions, it was noticed that all participants experienced the instructional idea and had positive feedback from students.

*"Students found the drama activities fun and we all enjoyed during the lesson. After playing the dictation game, they now look for more games. As long as the syllabus allows, I will add such varieties in my lesson"* (a participant's comment from the researcher's note).

One of the participants indicated in her journal that applying variety of activities with her students after CFG meetings changed the atmosphere of her classroom. To her, students noticed that they could use the language they learned.

*"My experiences and the outcomes from these meetings have led me believe in more student-centred learning. The curriculum we follow is teacher-centred and test-oriented. We should give more responsibility to our students."* (Ece, pseudonym)

The participants also mentioned that being part of CFG heightened their motivation for teaching and helped them pay greater attention to students and to themselves, as in the study of Vo and Nguyen (2010).

*"Each time I meet with colleagues in the CFG, I get so inspired and motivated to try new things or approach something in a different way."* (Canan, pseudonym)

When the data from the CFG meetings and journals were coded, and after researcher's notes were evaluated, four themes were detected. These were motivation, institutional constraints, classroom atmosphere and examining students' progress. These topics were determined after in-depth exploration of each case. Table 1 shows the themes and relevant comments.

**Table 1**  
*Main Themes from the Meetings, Journals and Researcher's Notes*

	<i>Institutional Constraints</i>	<i>Motivation</i>	<i>Classroom Atmosphere</i>	<i>Examining Student Progress</i>
<i>Comments</i>	Lack of support, understanding, no one listening	Demotivation, frustration, unwillingness	More integrated - skill courses	Portfolios, projects being part of the instruction
	Lack of encouragement	Students not taking active part in their learning	Interactive classrooms	Autonomous students
	Lack of teacher autonomy	Dense syllabus, only course book as a teaching source	Less teacher talking, more student participation	More productive activities, assignments
	Not taking part in decision making process (e.g. curriculum, books)	Lack of technological devices, programs	Target setting	Progress reports are essential

Participants in the CFG were primarily concerned about the motivation problem of both students and teachers. When the contents of meetings and journals were analysed, motivation was the first and the most significant subject bothering teachers. Participants agreed on the fact that when students are demotivated, it is inevitable for the teachers to be so. *Demotivation, lack of motivation, frustrating, unwilling, reluctant* were the phrases mostly encountered. One of the most important reasons for demotivation was said to be the stress to follow the syllabus for teachers and the impact of this on students, teaching for the exams, monotonous lessons, quality of the students, no level determination exams, and teachers teaching the same classroom for the whole academic year. The biggest challenge for teachers was that most of them shared similar thoughts, but they could not discuss the issue on a democratic, supportive environment except for the first time they did it in CFG meetings.

The atmosphere the CFG created enabled teachers to reveal their thoughts and concerns freely, which was the outstanding feature of this study. The friends supported each other, listened attentively, and provided constructive feedback whenever necessary. As mentioned in the literature, when teachers are provided professional support and guidance, they raise awareness on their professional applications, build confidence; and as a result, they are empowered and they may change (Christison & Stoller, 1997; Curry, 2008; Kelley, 2007). However, these cannot be achieved without the administrative support. Institutional impediments made its mark on most of the meetings. Teachers constantly indicated need of support from the institution. They mentioned that the management should consider arranging meetings like CFGs, and consult teachers' opinions about the curriculum, textbooks, syllabus, and exams. Teachers' motivation needs to be taken into consideration. Nave (1998) noted that CFGs did not thrive when a professional culture that supported teacher collaboration and collegiality was absent; therefore, this professional culture must be supported by the leaderships of the school. They believed that CFG has an impact of motivating participants by mutual respect and support.

Participants seemed to share similar feelings that they put too much emphasis on grammar. Teachers agreed that the course-book followed was satisfying and encouraged multi-skill instruction. However, they admitted that they liked teaching grammar and students were more content when they were taught so. Gamification of activities for all skills was discussed, and teachers indicated that they improved noteworthy on interactive classroom activities after participating in CFG. Final issues raised were about examining student progress. It was agreed on that the curriculum could be designed according to students' potential and background knowledge. From the outcome of the meetings, participants approved that assessment standards needed to be reconsidered. What assessment methods best enable students to demonstrate their achievement was thoroughly discussed. The discussions led participants to enrich their knowledge of assessment strategies and methods.

Being observed has always been stressful because teachers do not want to invite anyone into their classrooms where they feel comfortable and secure. Therefore, any intervention, even goodwill, can be regarded as an intrusion. So, when critical friends were asked to observe each other, they were uncommitted at first. Most of them had

never been observed by their colleagues. They got paired and scheduled their programs for the observation. The observation protocol was used by the participants along with the observation checklist. Pre and post observation sessions were held by the pairs. In the CFG meeting, overall observation process was evaluated. Reflections were also noted down in the journals. Critical friends' common thought about the observations was that it was difficult at first, but totally helpful experience at the end. Participants found the post observation feedback sessions constructive as well.

### **Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations**

Numerous professional development programmes currently provided focus on simply exposing teachers to the latest theories and initiatives without providing the conditions (e.g., opportunities to practice, available time, constructive feedback, etc.) required for them, which is actually the very heart of professional development. When teachers are to follow an intense program in the school or, when they worry about to keep up with the syllabus, they cannot benefit from these programmes thoroughly. Teachers generally consider that in-service training activities are planned with insufficient relevance to their particular classroom practices and realities of their classrooms (Atay, 2008; Bayrakci, 2009; Seker, 2007). Therefore, in-service training needs of teachers should be considered, and they should have opportunity to have a word in their own professional development. According to Clark (2001), some institutions are moving towards initiatives that provide a more dialogic and meaning-making view of teaching and learning, whereby teachers take a more active role in their own development, collaborating with others in their profession to address various pedagogical problems (p.172). CFG can provide an effective model by promoting teacher collaboration, which leads to continuous professional development.

In this study, a learning community modeled after the CFG framework was implemented at a state university in Turkey. It focused on CFGs as an opportunity for professional development by examining teacher collaboration and its influence on reflective practice and teaching. As Johnson (2009) stated, consistent with a socio-cultural perspective, CFG model seeks to create a mediational space for teachers to engage in on-going, in-depth, systematic, and reflective examinations of their teaching practices and their students' learning. The results showed that CFG model created a reflective and collaborative form of teachers' professional development.

The concept of professional development is moving away from the practice of attending courses and training days to the concept of lifelong learning and continuing learning today (Fraser et al., 2007). Therefore, in-service courses should be no longer perceived as short-term or one-shot programmes, given by a "professional" outside. These courses should be seen as a part of continuing education. We acknowledge that short-term workshops do not provide opportunities for teachers to make connections between the theory presented and the implications that it has for classroom teaching. These connections cannot be made without teachers taking direct role in structuring and investigating their practice. CFGs are, therefore, a valuable professional

development model as teachers are given opportunities to take the time to inquire into areas of their teaching that they believe needs attention.

Teachers are more likely to seek assistance and advice from other teachers than from resources in developing and enhancing their classroom practice (Poehner, 2009). As Bayrakci (2009) stated, giving teachers opportunities to guide their own professional development in a flexible system will enhance their professional approach and willingness to participate in in-service training activities. Voluntary participation should be encouraged. Similar to the 'Portfolio Group' study of Curtis et.al. (2013), the benefit of shared stories of individual and collaborative experiences in CFG is that teachers come to know from each other's successes and challenges. Hearing the stories of success from the colleagues in the group can help teachers to grow, and hearing the steps taken to overcome the challenges can help them to be courageous towards their own concerns. CFGs provide the opportunity to work collaboratively, to delve into classroom-based dilemmas, to focus on the teaching and learning of specific academic content, and build strong working relationships among teachers. Students are the beneficiaries of this model.

Impacts of the teachers' CFG participation on students can be also examined in future studies. According to Little et. al. (2003), teachers are usually alone when they examine student work and think about student performance. CFGs have enabled teachers to leave the isolation of their own classrooms and think together about student work in the broader contexts of school improvement and professional development. So, as for future studies, how examining student work by a group of teachers in a CFG affects students' performance could be investigated.

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### **Kritik (Eleştirel) Arkadaş Grubu (CFG): İngilizce Öğretmenlerine Yönelik Sorgulamaya Dayalı Mesleki Gelişim Modeli**

#### **Atf:**

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#### **Özet**

Bu çalışma sorgulamaya dayalı mesleki gelişim modeli olan "Kritik (Eleştirel) Arkadaş Grubu (Critical Friends Group-CFG)" uygulamasının Türk İngilizce öğretim görevlilerinin mesleki gelişimi üzerindeki etkisini araştırmaktadır.

*Problem Durumu:* Kısa dönemli yapılan eğitimlerin öğretmenlerin teorik bilgi ile sınıf içi uygulaması arasında ilişki kurmalarına yeterince olanak sağlamadığı bilinmektedir. Evans (2019) yeni fikirlerin ya da düşünme şekillerinin insanların uygulamalarına yansımalarının yavaş yavaş olduğunu ve bu fikir ve bakış açılarının uygulama sırasında meydana gelen etkileşimlerle ve diğer etkenlerle geliştiğini söylemektedir. CFG modeli son zamanlarda sıkça uygulanan mesleki öğrenme topluluklarından birisidir ve bu çalışmada etkinliği araştırılmıştır. Mesleki öğrenme topluluğunun en güncel tanımlarından birini Harris (2014) şöyle yapmıştır: Veri ve kanıtları analiz ederek ortaya çıkan öğrenici ihtiyaçlarını dikkate alarak bir grup profesyonelin uyumlu bir şekilde çalışmasıdır. Grup içinde bulunan öğretmenler arasında ast-üst ilişkisi yoktur, tüm öğretmenler birbirlerine destek olur, mentörlük yapar. Dolayısıyla kısa süreli gerçekleştirilen ve bir eğitici tarafından bilgilerin aktarıldığı tek yönlü eğitimler yerine öğretmenlerin işbirliği içinde çalıştıkları ve kendilerini rahat hissettikleri, birbirlerinden öğrendikleri mesleki gelişim modellerinin daha faydalı olduğu savunulmaktadır. Bu çalışmada uygulanan CFG modelinin teorik temeli sosyo-kültürel teoriye dayanmaktadır. Bu teoriyle uyumlu olarak CFG öğretmenlere devam eden, derinlemesine inceleme sağlayan ve yansıtıcı teknikler kullanabilmelerine olanak vermektedir ve sonuç olarak öğrenci başarısını arttırmayı hedeflemektedir.

*Araştırmanın Amacı:* Araştırma CFG modelinin öğretmenlerin mesleki gelişimi üzerindeki etkisini ölçmek amacıyla planlanmıştır. Öğretmenlerin bir grup halinde, hiyerarşik bir yapı olmaksızın çalışmalarını, beraber öğrenmelerini ve gelişmelerini amaçlamaktadır. Sınıfiçi zorlukları, kullanılan öğretme tekniklerinin etkinliğini, farklı yöntem ve fikirlerin paylaşımını sağlayan CFG modelinin etkinliği bu çalışmayla araştırılmıştır. Bu doğrultuda iki araştırma sorusu sorulmuştur:

1. Kendi fikirleri dikkate alındığında, Kritik Arkadaş Grubu (CFG) modeli içerisinde yer almak öğretmenlerin mesleki gelişimi için güçlü bir yöntem midir?
2. Öğretmenler bu model içinde yer aldıktan sonra hangi açılardan geliştiklerini düşünmektedirler?

*Araştırma Yöntemi:* Araştırma bir Türk devlet üniversitesinde uygulanmış nitel vaka çalışmasıdır. Brown Üniversitesi Annenberg Enstitüsü tarafından Okul Reformu kapsamında kurulmuş NSRF (National School Reform Faculty) tarafından geliştirilen CFG modeli uygulanmıştır. Grup aralarında ast-üst ilişkisi olmayan 6 öğretmenden oluşmuştur. Gruba bir öğretmen koçluk yapmıştır (bu çalışmada araştırmacı bu görevi üstlenmiştir). Belli konularda hazırlanmış protokoller toplantılarda kullanılmıştır. Bu protokoller sadece kılavuz görevi görmektedir, toplantıların planlı bir şekilde geçmesini sağlamaktadır. Grup modeli bir eğitim öğretim dönemi boyunca uygulanmıştır. Verilerin analizinde tümevarım analiz tekniği uygulanmıştır. Nitel araştırma deseni olarak gömülü teori, araştırma ve veri analiz yöntemi şeklinde kullanılmıştır. Verilerin kaynağı öğretmenlerin tutukları günlükler, yüz yüze görüşmeler, toplantı kayıtları ve araştırmacının notlarıdır. Öğretmenlerden olur formu alınmıştır. İsimler gizli tutulmuştur. Toplantı kayıtları ve yüz yüze görüşmeler yazıya

dökülmüştür; tüm verilerle beraber kodlama yöntemi ile incelenmiştir. İki araştırmacı tarafından kodlar belirlendikten sonra kategoriler oluşturulmuş ve bu kategoriler karşılaştırılmıştır. İlgili temalara ve alt-temalara karar verilmiştir. Son olarak değerbiçicilerarası güvenilirlik hesaplanmıştır; bu sonuç .83 olarak bulunmuştur.

*Araştırma Bulguları:* Çalışmanın sonucu bu grupta çalışan öğretmenlerin mesleklerine devam ederken daha iyi hissettiklerini ve işlerine daha çok bağlandıklarını göstermiştir. Grup çalışması öğretmenlere işbirlikçi bir ortamda çalışma şansı sunmuş, sınıf içinde yaşanan çıkmazların üstesinden gelme ve belirli akademik içeriklerin öğrenilmesi ve öğretilmesi üzerinde yoğunlaşmayı sağlamıştır. Öğretmenler arasında güçlü bir mesleki bağ kurulmasına yardımcı olmuştur. CFG güvenli ve rahat hissedilen bir ortam yaratmıştır. Bu açıdan sonuçlar diğer çalışmalarla benzerlik göstermektedir ((Dunne & Honts, 1998; Nave, 1998, 2000; Nefstead, 2009; Vo & Nguyen, 2010; Constantino, 2010; Moore & Carter-Higgs, 2014; Gunbay & Mede, 2017). Yapıcı, etkili, yansımacı, demokratik, rahat terimleri sık sık kullanılmıştır. CFG toplantıları ve tutulan günlüklerden gelen verilere göre katılımcılar 4 temada fikirlerini dile getirmişlerdir. Bunlar motivasyon, kurumsal kısıtlar, bütünlük beceri öğretimi ve sınıfcı atmosfer, ve öğrencilerin gelişiminin takip edilmesidir. Hem öğrenci hem de öğretmenlerin motivasyonlarının arttırılmasına yönelik ortak düşünce üzerinde durulmuş ve paylaşılan fikirler grupta tartışılmıştır. Öğretmenlerin fikir alışverişi sonucunda ortaya çıkan uygulamaya yönelik yaklaşımların olması katılımcıların özgüvenleri arttırmıştır. Bu uygulamaların yönetimle paylaşılması ve tüm okula yayılması düşüncesi benimsenmiştir.

*Araştırma Sonuçları ve Önerileri:* CFG modeli öğretmenlerin öğretim yöntemlerinde karşılaştıkları sorunların üzerine gitme ve iyileştirme açısından faydalı bir uygulama olmuştur. Çalışmanın gerçekleştirildiği kurumda süregelen mesleki gelişimin önemi farkedilmiş, bu ve benzer uygulamaların daha geniş çapta devam etmesinin önemi yönetimle paylaşılmıştır. Bu gibi gelişim modellerinin uygulanabilmesi için okul yönetimlerinin desteği ve işbirliği önemlidir ve gerçekleştirilmelidir. Bu grup çalışmasının öğrenci öğrenimine etkisi ilerleyen çalışmalarda araştırılmalıdır.

*Anahtar Kavramlar:* Öğretmenlerin mesleki gelişimi, Kritik Arkadaş Grubu modeli, Sosyokültürel teori, Mesleki öğrenme toplulukları, protokol

