

# Exploring The Professional Development Needs of Early-Career EFL Teachers in Uzbekistan: Implications for University-Based Teacher Training Programs

## ABSTRACT

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The research aims to investigate the professional development (PD) needs of early-career English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers in public schools of Olmazor District, Tashkent, Uzbekistan. An exploratory-descriptive qualitative research approach was adopted for the study. A context-demographics questionnaire and five focus group discussions with 25 randomly selected teachers meeting the criteria of CEFR B2+ and less than five years of teaching experience were conducted. Five areas of professional development need of early-career EFL teachers were identified: managing large mixed-ability classes, teaching under technology constraints, teachers' speaking confidence and communicative classroom practice, the practical and context-relevance of PD, and follow-up support for teachers after PD. These findings were then translated into a five-module needs-based PD prototype with a focus on differentiation, minimum viable technology, microteaching, communicative lesson redesign, and transfer support through peer observation and professional learning community engagement. This study can inform ministry stakeholders, university-based PD units, and development partners seeking to improve EFL teacher capacity in Uzbekistan

**Keywords:** Teacher Professional Development, Needs Analysis, EFL Teachers, Early-Career Teachers, Focus Group Discussion, Uzbekistan.

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, Uzbekistan has made significant strides in education reform, particularly in foreign language education (Abdullaev, 2021; Eshchanova et al., 2020; Presidential Decree PQ-5117, 2021; Presidential Decree PF-79, 2023). As the global standing of English has gone up, the Uzbekistan government has given special focus to developing the capability of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers of the country's public schools (Presidential Decree PQ-4963, 2021). In this context, there has been a significant shift in educational agendas, with an emphasis on equipping learners with the language competencies necessary to thrive in the modern, globalized world (Abdullaev, 2021; Eshchanova et al., 2020). However, despite these developments, in-service EFL teachers continue to face a myriad of challenges that compromise their ability to deliver quality language teaching (Ibragimov & Muradov, 2022; Alkhateeb et al., 2022).

Most pressing, probably, is the very large size of most classes, well beyond the optimum for interactive and personalized instruction. In addition, the lack of modern instructional equipment and technology is part of the circumstance in which instructors cannot adequately motivate students and are limited in how they might use innovative approaches to instruction. On top of these are the often inadequate supports teachers have in the way of professional development (Mamadaminova & Madalińska-Michalak, 2025). While there is growing awareness of the requirement of ongoing professional education for teachers, many teachers still report that professional development activities provided to them are not addressed to their individual situations or are incompatible with the needs of their classrooms (Mamadaminova & Khadjikhanova, 2023).

The in-service EFL teachers' professional development requirements in Uzbekistan are important in the sense that there is an urgent call for high school teacher development programs with precise addresses to the overall educational objectives and specific concerns of teachers in their daily practice (Mamadaminova & Madalińska-Michalak, 2025). This study is specifically concerned with the professional development needs of the in-service EFL teachers in Uzbekistan by using a holistic needs analysis of the teachers of the Olmazor District of Tashkent, Uzbekistan. The study adopts a qualitative research design with the aim of discovering areas of priority concern and determining the nature of support the teachers require to improve their pedagogical competence and teaching practice. The findings of this study will provide valuable information on the most important teacher professional development needs, for example, additional classroom management, additional confidence in speaking, teaching with technology, and additional communication with students.

Furthermore, this study seeks to highlight the necessity of going beyond traditional, generic training programs and into more contextualized efforts that directly address teachers' real needs in Uzbekistan classrooms. By offering recommendations for creating teacher development programs that are efficient, significant, and pertinent to the needs of teachers, this study aims to play a part in the improved study of EFL in Uzbekistan and the professional growth of in-service teachers. This study is intended to inform ministry officials, university-based professional development (PD) units, and donor/partner organizations involved in strengthening EFL teacher capacity in Uzbekistan.

Although enhancing instruction depends on teachers developing professionally, the in-service EFL teachers at many public schools make complaints about the inadequacy of practicality,

misalignment with everyday classroom realities, and a lack of follow-up in many PD options. In Uzbekistan, such concerns have had more influence on early-career teachers struggling to handle mixed proficiency levels, large classes, and a general imbalance in the distribution of materials, technologies, and other forms of teaching support. The situation calls for a grounded and context-sensitive needs analysis that determines what teachers report the most challenges with, what types of PD formats feel genuinely useful to them, and what design decisions can help the teacher apply knowledge in the classroom. The current study, therefore, adopts an exploratory-descriptive approach to investigate the professional development needs of early-career in-service EFL teachers. It seeks to establish a well-evidenced basis for a workable professional development framework suited to the local context. Its findings are expected to help the officials of the Ministry, University Professional Development Units, and donor partners working towards teacher professional development and enhancement of classroom practice in Uzbekistan.

Against this background, the present study investigates the professional development needs of early-career in-service EFL teachers in public schools in Olmazor District, Tashkent, Uzbekistan. Using a context-demographics questionnaire and semi-structured focus group discussions, the study identifies teachers' priority professional development needs, examines perceived gaps in existing PD provision, and translates these findings into a context-sensitive PD prototype. By focusing on early-career teachers working in resource-constrained classrooms, the study offers an empirically grounded basis for designing more relevant university-based teacher training and support initiatives. The findings are intended to inform ministry stakeholders, university-based PD units, and development partners working to strengthen EFL teacher capacity in Uzbekistan.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. EFL Teacher Development in the Uzbek Reform Context

The educational system in Uzbekistan has undergone a significant transformation over the past two decades, with a concerted effort being made to improve the quality of language learning, particularly English (Abdullaev, 2021; Eshchanova et al., 2020; Ibragimov & Muradov, 2022). English language proficiency is viewed as one of the major instruments for facilitating students to compete in the global employment sector and avail themselves of global opportunities. The Uzbekistan government has also made learning the English language a priority, as it has included it in the national curriculum at various levels of schooling (Presidential Decree *PQ-4963*, 2021; Presidential Decree *PQ-5117*, 2021; Presidential Decree *PF-79*, 2023). The Ministry of Public Education has taken steps for improvement in teaching methodologies, textbook revision, and teachers' capacity building to teach English (Education Sector Plan of Uzbekistan, 2019–2023). However, despite these endeavors, there remains a huge gap between policy intentions and classroom realities, particularly in the area of teacher development. According to the Ministry of Education of Uzbekistan (2020), although there have been educational reforms purporting to improve the quality of teaching, there is still an absence of coherence between such reforms and the daily realities faced by EFL teachers in the classroom.

One of the most important determinants of educational quality is teacher professional development, yet a vast majority of EFL teachers in Uzbekistan are faced with serious problems. These problems are manifold and include oversized classrooms, limited access to modern technology, a lack of instructional materials, and a lack of opportunities for specialized

training. In accordance with the British Council report (Dunn & Iwaniec, 2023), the majority of teachers in Uzbekistan still apply traditional methods of teaching, e.g., the grammar-translation method, which prevents them from being able to engage students in communicative and interactive language learning. Moreover, there is a considerable shortage of regular, systematic professional development programs that address the evolving needs of teachers within the framework of a quickly changing educational sector. Although there have been some governmental and international attempts at offering training to teachers, there is no solid evidence that these types of programs are sufficiently tailored to the particular needs of the EFL teachers in the context of Uzbekistan's public schools. A study carried out by Tashkent State University of Pedagogy (2021) informs that professional development courses for teachers are too broad and do not cover specific issues, such as the integration of technology or classroom management, that are key to the success of EFL instruction.

Research in teacher professional development all over the world has focused on needs-based and context-specific training. A research work by Cavendish et al. (2021) concluded that effective professional development programs must be very closely connected to the actual classroom experience and issues of the teachers. This includes offering training in classroom management, student motivation, and integration of technology, all of which are essential in today's world of education (Cavendish et al., 2021). Similarly, the report of the Asian Development Bank (2022) highlighted the need for continuous professional development beyond teachers' initial education and targeted at assisting in the development of teachers' competencies throughout their professional lives. In Uzbekistan, however, it is quite obvious that such programs need to be more specifically designed to address the specific needs of those educators who teach in Uzbekistan's particular educational settings. As the needs of English language teaching evolve, so do professional development opportunities for in-service teachers (Adey, 2004). This study is an effort to fill this gap by revealing Uzbekistan EFL teachers' specific professional development needs, i.e., the challenges they face in developing their teaching practice and students' performance.

## **2.2. Needs Analysis in EFL Education**

Needs analysis is a tradition well established in applied linguistics and language education, a tradition which was developed to ensure that the provision made meets the real needs, constraints, and objectives of the learners or professional groups concerned. The foundational work of Richterich & Chancerel (1978) stressed the systematic identification of needs in language teaching as a basis for more relevant approaches to curriculum and program design. This foundation was extended by Hutchinson & Waters (1987), who proposed a distinction between target needs and learning needs. Target needs, as defined by Hutchinson & Waters, are what the learners or the professional participants concerned need to be able to do in the target situation, while learning needs are what the learners concerned need to be able to learn. The distinction is particularly relevant to the present study, as the needs of EFL teachers as professionals can only be seen as a function of what teachers want to achieve as teachers but also as a function of the circumstances in which teachers learn, practice, and apply what they have learned as teachers.

Subsequent studies have extended the scope of needs analysis beyond the basic deficit approach. West (1994), for instance, has produced a comprehensive typology of needs analysis approaches and has demonstrated that needs can be analyzed using a variety of perspectives, including present situation analysis, target situation analysis, deficiency analysis, strategy

analysis, means analysis, and language audits. Long (2005), for example, has further emphasized that in order to conduct a quality needs analysis, it is important to collect multiple forms of data rather than relying solely on a single instrument based on participants' self-reports. This is because different forms of data can highlight different aspects of need. In this way, needs analysis is not just about asking participants to report their needs; rather, it is a systematic approach to understanding participants' perceived needs, contextual constraints, and task-related demands in order to develop more valid and useful educational interventions (Long, 2005; West, 1994). This understanding of needs analysis is highly relevant to teacher professional development because what teachers report as important needs, what classrooms objectively require, and what training systems can support do not always coincide.

In the field of English language education, needs analysis has had a particularly significant influence on English for Specific Purposes and teacher learning situations. This is because needs analysis can offer a rationale for tailoring language instruction and support to local needs. According to Hyland & Hyland (2006), effective needs analysis involves close attention to the social, institutional, and communicative contexts of language use and language learning. In the field of EFL teacher education, this suggests that teacher education should not be developed as a generic entity separate from the teachers' own working environment. Rather, it should be shaped by the actual instructional needs of the teachers, including factors like class sizes, learner diversity, materials availability, language proficiency, institutional requirements, and technological circumstances. In the field of teacher development, this approach also corresponds with the perspective that teacher professional growth can be most productive when contextual, application-centered, and responsive to teachers' immediate instructional needs (Richards & Farrell, 2005; Farrell & Jacobs, 2020).

This framework is particularly pertinent in Uzbekistan because existing research suggests that teacher PD is still largely top-down in nature and is not sufficiently connected to teachers' real-world realities. Research in Uzbekistan suggests that EFL teachers often report a disconnection between PD content offered and teachers' real-world realities in terms of managing classrooms, using technology, communicative language teaching, and supporting mixed-ability classrooms (Akhadaliyevich & Nozimakhon, 2022; Kosimov, 2021; Kosimov & Latipov, 2022; Tashkent State University of Pedagogy, 2021). More recent research suggests that teachers need PD that is even more sensitive to context, practical in nature, and connected to teachers' daily realities rather than generalized PD approaches that assume all teachers need the same thing (Mamadaminova & Khadjikhanova, 2023; Dunn & Iwaniec, 2023). From the needs analysis perspective, this implies that the development of the PD plan in Uzbekistan should take into account not only the needs of the teachers, as perceived by them, but also the objective conditions of the classrooms, and the pedagogical needs of EFL teaching as an integral part of the needs analysis.

In the present research, the needs analysis was not considered simply as an initial step for administrative purposes, but as the very basis for the development of an appropriate PD plan. The research aims to examine the needs of early career in-service EFL teachers in public schools, as perceived by the teachers, and its relation to the objective conditions of the classrooms, with the ultimate aim of informing an appropriate PD plan. In this manner, this study makes use of the established needs analysis tradition to inform not only the methodological design but also to legitimate the pragmatic goal of developing a more relevant and context-specific model of teacher professional development (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Long, 2005; Hyland & Hyland, 2006).

### 2.3. Existing PD Models, Limitations, and Design Implications

Teacher professional development in Uzbekistan has witnessed significant growth in recent times, as part of the larger efforts aimed at improving the quality of teaching in the country, as well as responding to the changing needs of the nation. There has been an expansion in the opportunities for teachers to access professional development programs, including those initiated by the government, institutions, and even online learning, as acknowledged in the recent report by the Ministry of Education (2022). There are also indications that internationally supported programs have helped introduce modern pedagogies, including communicative language teaching and task-based learning, and that teachers are also being exposed to new teaching practices and professional standards, as acknowledged in the studies by Cavendish et al. (2021) and Dunn & Iwaniec (2023). It is, therefore, an indication that professional development has come to be recognized as an essential aspect in the development of the education sector in the country, as acknowledged in the study by Mamadaminova & Madalińska-Michalak (2025).

However, it has also been indicated in the literature that the effectiveness of the available professional development programs is also hindered by the continued gap between the available professional development programs and the actual classroom situation. According to all the local and international literature, the common pattern observed is that the available professional development programs are too general, too theoretical, and too lacking in terms of support for the actual classroom situation in which EFL teachers are required to work (Nazirova et al., 2023; Mamadaminova & Madalińska-Michalak, 2025). In the Uzbek context, this has been particularly observed in terms of dealing with large classes, technology, classroom support, and teachers' own language confidence (Dunn & Iwaniec, 2023; Tashkent State University of Pedagogy, 2021). Even in those contexts in which teachers are given short-term exposure to new ideas in teaching through international or donor agency programs, it has been observed that the sustainability of these programs is hindered in the actual classroom situation (Cavendish et al., 2021; Sadeghi & Richards, 2021).

Another limitation, in this regard, relates to the general tendency of PD models to follow the 'one-size-fits-all' approach in terms of structure. As indicated by the findings of the studies carried out in Uzbekistan, there are still ample training opportunities that remain too generic in nature, failing to adequately address the daily problems that EFL teachers face in the classrooms, such as dealing with learner diversity, coping with the lack of technological tools, and keeping communicative interactions in the classrooms (Mamadaminova & Khadjikhanova, 2023; Kosimov & Latipov, 2022). This concern may be particularly relevant in the case of early-career teachers, as they may need not only theoretical but also practical support as they start to build their professional routines and identities in the classrooms (Richards & Farrell, 2005; Sadeghi & Richards, 2021).

Collectively, the studies indicate that there are several design implications for PD in Uzbekistan that can lead to greater effectiveness in EFL teaching. Firstly, PD for EFL teachers should be contextualized in the reality of overcrowded classrooms, resource scarcity, and mixed-level classrooms rather than in the idealized teaching situation (Dunn & Iwaniec, 2023; Mukhiddinova & Agzamkhodjaeva, 2025). Secondly, PD programs should go beyond the lecture method and incorporate demonstration, rehearsal, guided practice, and opportunities for immediate application (Richards & Farrell, 2005; Cavendish et al., 2021). Thirdly, support for

transfer is as important as the content of PD, and thus mentoring, observation, and follow-up are necessary for teachers after the PD program (Sadeghi & Richards, 2021; Mamadaminova & Madalińska-Michalak, 2025). Finally, while international frameworks and models are useful for PD, they should be contextualized for Uzbekistan in order for them to be relevant and sustainable in the Uzbek school context (Kosimov, 2021; Tashkent State University of Pedagogy, 2021).

#### **2.4. Research Gap / Conceptual Justification for the Present Study**

Overall, the literature examined here indicates that despite the growing policy importance of teacher professional development in Uzbekistan, the level of relevance of the available teacher professional development to the professional needs of EFL teachers, especially young ones, still leaves much to be desired. Indeed, all the literature examined here highlights similar issues such as the need to deal with large mixed-ability classes, technological difficulties, students' speaking skills, and the general impracticality of teacher professional development courses (Mamadaminova & Khadjikhanova, 2023; Dunn & Iwaniec, 2023; Tashkent State University of Pedagogy, 2021). At the same time, the literature examined here indicates that the available teacher professional development models and frameworks may still be too general to deal with these issues in a detailed and sensitive manner (Kosimov, 2021; Cavendish et al., 2021). What seems to be lacking here is the empirical basis for understanding what teachers perceive as their urgent professional development needs and how these needs could be turned into a feasible and sensitive model of teacher professional development.

The other significant gap relates to the lack of a comprehensive needs assessment as an essential element of planning for PD. Several research findings indicate that, in Uzbekistan, professional development planning and provision seem to be top-down and policy-oriented, with insufficient attention given to teachers' actual classroom constraints and perceived priorities (Akhadaliyevich & Nozimakhon, 2022; Kosimov & Latipov, 2022; Mamadaminova & Khadjikhanova, 2023). This implies that professional development provision may not be aligned with actual teachers' needs for enhancing their practice. This is particularly critical for EFL instruction, as it does not rely simply on general pedagogy but also incorporates English language instruction and other elements (Farrell & Jacobs, 2020; Richards & Farrell, 2005).

The current study fills this information gap by carrying out a specific needs analysis among in-service EFL teachers in the initial stages of their teaching career in public schools within the Olmazor district of Tashkent city. Instead of taking the existing models of PD as the best possible ones, the current study examines the lived experiences of the teachers' constraints in the classroom setting, as well as the teachers' perception of the existing PD support as effective or not effective in addressing the teachers' needs, and the nature of support that the teachers find the most relevant to the teaching context. By moving from the level of needs analysis to the level of design implications, the current study can provide a practical contribution to the existing literature on the PD of EFL teachers in public schools in Uzbekistan (Mamadaminova & Madalińska-Michalak, 2025; Sadeghi & Richards, 2021).

#### **2.5. International Collaboration and Training Programs**

Global partnership has an important part to play in the professional development of Uzbekistan EFL teachers, positioning global best practice and creative approaches to teaching at the fore. Projects such as the English Speaking Nation: Secondary Teacher Training (ESN: STT) (American Council, 2021-2023), Teaching for Success (British Council, 2017-2023), and the

English for Teachers (British Council, 2017-2019) programs have placed innovative approaches to teaching, such as task-based learning and communicative language teaching, into the teaching practice of Uzbekistan EFL teachers. These international initiatives sponsored by bodies such as the American Councils and the British Council provide opportunities for teachers to expand their pedagogic skills and pedagogy. However, according to Avalos (2021), even though such collaborations have brought immediate benefits, they have little impact on long-term classroom quality because of insufficient sponsorship by successive follow-up training. These foreign programs that are funded by bodies such as the American Councils and the British Council become channels through which teachers' teaching expertise and skills in pedagogy are enhanced (ESN-Teachers, 2023). Even though, as averred by Cavendish et al. (2021), such partnerships are making short-term achievements, they do little to impact long-term teaching quality since they are not funded by ongoing follow-up training (Cavendish et al., 2021). The majority of teacher's report that while they acquire new techniques through these courses, they do not properly implement them once they return to their classrooms, mainly due to the fact that training is poorly adjusted to their own particular local contexts of teaching.

Furthermore, foreign training courses tend to focus primarily on language abilities and practice in the classroom but overlook the larger issues Uzbek teachers must contend with, such as managing gigantic classes or adapting to the lack of teaching materials. Based on a British Council (2023) report, while these courses have introduced positive pedagogies, these tend to be disconnected from Uzbek classroom realities. The inability to implement theoretically what is acquired in programs in real teaching settings means that the effective work of such programs cannot be continued in the long term. The remedy for this deficiency is to have more context-based models of training that take into account the particular limitations of EFL teachers of Uzbekistan. This would include continuous support through mentorship, classroom visits, and peer working to ensure that the teachers are effectively able to adopt new practices into their classrooms.

### 3. Aims, Purpose and Objectives

This exploratory-descriptive study aims to generate an evidence-based foundation for a context-sensitive PD framework for early-career EFL teachers in Uzbekistan. Specifically, it pursues the following objectives:

- Objective 1 (Context profiling): Describe the eligible teacher population's key background characteristics relevant to PD planning. Data source/method: Context-demographics questionnaire.
- Objective 2 (Needs identification): Identify teachers' most urgent PD needs and constraints. Data source/method: FGDs (5 groups of 5) analyzed via thematic analysis.
- Objective 3 (Perceived gaps in current PD): Examine teachers' perceptions of usefulness and gaps in existing PD provision. Data source/method: FGDs (same dataset; thematic analysis).
- Objective 4 (Design implications): Translate identified needs into a feasible PD prototype (modules, delivery modes, monitoring indicators). Data source/method: Synthesis of Objectives 1–3 into a PD prototype table (Appendix G).

### 4. Methodology

The approach taken in this study was exploratory-descriptive, characterized by a focus on ensuring the study is qualitatively oriented. A short context-demographics questionnaire was employed for the purpose of briefly characterizing the eligible participants and finding background information to situate the findings from the focus group. The dominant source for data, however, came from the conduct of a series of semi-structured focus group discussions (FGDs) to explore perceived professional development needs, constraints, and preferences.

#### 4.1. Sampling and Participants

Olmazor District currently has around 340 in-service EFL teachers. To make the results of the analysis of learning needs useful for formulating a relevant development program for in-service EFL teachers in this research study, a series of eligibility criteria has been employed in gathering a relevant sampling of EFL teachers in Olmazor District. The two conditions for being eligible for this study are:

- (1) The teacher possesses a B2 or higher English proficiency certification.
- (2) The EFL teacher has no more than five years of experience in EFL instruction.

Based on the official list provided under the Olmazor District Department of Education, a total of 72 EFL in-service teachers were eligible participants; 25 teachers were randomly selected using a fishbowl method to participate in the study. These 25 teachers formed the final study pool (n=25) and were divided into five focus group discussions, with five participants per discussion. All instruments of data collection, such as questionnaires and focus group discussions, were only carried out with this pool of 25 participants.

Table 1. Recruitment Flow Table

Stage	n
Estimated EFL teacher population in Olmazor District	340
Eligible teachers meeting inclusion criteria (B2+; ≤ 5 years' experience)	72
Randomly selected via fishbowl method for participation	25
Completed demographics/context questionnaire	25
Participated in FGDs (5 groups × 5)	25

Because participants were selected randomly from the eligible list (N = 72), the sample reduces selection bias within the defined early-career B2+ subgroup, although findings are not intended to represent all EFL teachers in Olmazor District.

#### 4.2. Instruments and Data Collection

At the needs analysis stage, two significant tools were employed: a questionnaire to collect demographic data and contextual data from the participants and semi-structured interviews with a smaller segment of the participants. This was done to hold FGDs to explore their professional development needs in greater depth. Questionnaire: The questionnaire was used as the first instrument in a sample of 25 teachers from public schools, with each holding a B2+ language certificate and a maximum of five years of teaching experience. The questionnaire

provided baseline demographic data and contextual information regarding education, experience as a teacher, classroom structure, access to instructional tools, and prior involvement in professional development activities. This tool gave important information on the teachers' credentials and work environment, which are important determinants of their professional development requirements.

**Focus Group Discussions:** FGD was used to identify the professional needs of in-service EFL teachers. The researcher stratified the 25 participants into five groups with five members each. The researcher interviewed each of the groups separately in June 2025 at a school that was convenient for each FGD participant, and their responses were recorded using a smartphone recorder to ensure accuracy for future thematic analysis. The objective was to gather different insights and opinions regarding the perceived needs and training issues/challenges of the in-service EFL teachers. In these FGDs, a researcher acted as the interviewer/moderator, assisted by a guide consisting of semi-structured format questions. These FGDs took approximately 30-45 minutes to conduct. A brief introduction about the study and the procedures involved preceded the actual study for all the teachers before they provided their consent. The rules were established from the start to promote teacher honesty in the study. These guidelines included the fact that the discussion would be voluntary, the responding should be respectful, and the participant could always choose to bypass the discussion at any point. It was stressed that there were no right or wrong answers and that the data would be collected and presented anonymously (using group codes or pseudonyms instead of names or institutions). The recordings of the audio files were all saved to facilitate research.

As FGDs were conducted in English, no translation/back-translation was required. All sessions were audio-recorded (smartphone recorder) and transcribed for analysis. Each of the participants had a B2+ level of English-speaking proficiency, which aided in their effective presentation of their personal opinions in English. The transcripts of these discussions were typed by the researcher using an intelligent verbatim transcription style, whereby the actual meanings of the statements made by the participants remained intact, omitting filler statements and repetitive statements with unaltered meanings. Member checking. To further enhance the credibility of our work, we conducted member checking. The participants were asked to review the quotes extracted (and the short summary interpretations we use in the reporting) for accuracy and to check that no intended meaning has been lost. Appendix F displays a sample documentation of the member-check process from one participant.

### **4.3. Data Analysis**

The data from the focus group discussions was analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis in six steps outlined by Braun and Clarke: becoming familiar through repeated listening and reading of the data, generating initial codes, considering potential themes, reviewing the themes in terms of the coded extracts and the data set as a whole, defining and labeling the themes, and finally preparing the report with quotes from the data. The method was exploratory and descriptive in essence to determine teachers' professional development needs, what shortcomings exist in the professional development services that teachers are exposed to currently, and how the design of a professional development framework would be informed.

Coding was done through three intensive cycles: open → axial → selective coding. In Cycle 1—open coding—codes were applied to each segment of the transcripts to identify meaningful units representing challenges, limitations, and preferences of teachers for PD. In Cycle 2—

axial coding, codes were grouped into categories according to their underlying dimensions (mentor teacher support categories), like transfer barriers, facilitators, and PD preferences. In Cycle 3—selective/development coding of themes—categories were developed further to produce the final themes to organize the findings of this study and to provide a basis for the structure of the PD framework proposal. A codebook was developed through cycles to keep track of code labels/characteristics, code definitions, criteria for inclusion & exclusion, and exemplar quotes.

The handling of the coding and text excerpt searches was done using the software program, Quirkos. Microsoft Excel software was used to track changes in the codebook and to create a summary matrix of information for transparent reporting. The transcripts underwent coding by the principal researcher. In the absence of multiple coders, percent agreement or Cohen's Kappa statistics on inter-coder reliability could not be calculated. To enhance reliability and ensure transparency, the construction of the codebook is documented in an appendix (Appendix E), and an audit trail of research decisions is maintained. This process is further supported by the validation method of 'member checking' the results through an appendix submission (Appendix F). Additionally, 'triangulation' of the coded results is achieved by incorporating backdrop information from the candidate population obtained through a questionnaire.

#### **4.4. Trustworthiness**

There were five focus group discussion sessions conducted, consisting of five participants in each session. This was done in order to ensure manageable discussion and gather as many perspectives as possible from the pool of interested participants. Our target for the analysis was 25 participants. This was because it seemed the largest viable number for the impending PD program and represented a fair representation of the district-level volunteers. Informal assessment of code saturation in the analysis stages indicated when new incident codes began ceasing to emerge in the groups. By the fourth and fifth FGDs, there was no landmark of new incident code generation, and all of the remaining sessions were for filling gaps in the theme generation. Hence, five FGDs were sufficient for our analysis.

Multiple strategies were employed to enhance the trust and trustworthiness of the results. The first method used was member checking; this entailed encouraging the participants to validate the collected quotations (and associated shortened explanation interpretations as used in the reporting) for the sake of authenticity and ensuring the correct message had been conveyed; see Appendix F. Triangulation entailed utilizing the contextual elements provided in the questionnaires by the eligible population to validate the results of the focus group themes using the concerns in the background. The audit trail was maintained throughout the analysis in order for it to meet the criteria of dependability and confirmability. This involved maintaining dated copies of the development of the codebook, analysis memos, and alterations related to themes/code revisions (managed in Microsoft Quirkos & Microsoft Excel).

Figure E of the appendix E contains a sampling of what the completed codebook contains (coding titles, definitions, and cut-offs for coding themes, including exemplar quotes). Peer debriefing was not formally done, since the analysis process was carried out by only one researcher, without auditing by an external qualitative analyst. This is counted as one of its limitations. As a follow-through, whether in resubmitting or in pursuing other lines, peer debriefing or auditing by an external party for theme definition and their supporting texts will be done.

Researcher Reflexivity and Positionality. FGD discussions, as well as the analysis, were facilitated by the researcher (affiliated with Tashkent Metropolitan University). She is trained in TEFL/TESOL and pursuing her doctorate in Curriculum and Instruction, thereby providing expertise in leading English-medium teaching and learning, as well as in understanding professional development needs. To ensure bias was not present, she emphasized volunteer participation, protected confidentiality, and made sure no one's employment or performance evaluations were impacted by their participation. To analyze the data, she maintained reflective logs of all assumptions she made, decisions she undertook, and readings she made, and these were all linked to direct quotes she obtained from respondents. Member checking was conducted for these quotes and the resultant overall findings in order to ensure the original meaning was captured.

#### **4.5. Ethical Considerations**

The study targeted adult in-service teachers, investigated professional development needs, and presented minimal risk. Each participant of the study signed a written consent form (Appendix A) prior to data collection. Participation was completely voluntary, with clear assurances that they might prefer not to answer a question or withdraw at any time without penalty. The researcher established no abuse of power; there was respectful dialogue where there would be no judgment as to right or wrong answers, and shared experiences were to remain confidential. All information transcribed and reported was anonymized: participants obtained codes that were non-identifying; school names were not provided; and when quotes were used, all identifying details had been removed. Audio files and transcripts were stored securely and used only for research purposes.

Ethical review was provided by an exemption/waiver of ethics from Tashkent Metropolitan University management and confirmations in writing that the research project presented a minimal risk and would be performed under usual precautions: informed consent, confidentiality, anonymization, and data protection. The signed Exemption/Waiver Letter is attached in Appendix B. Data availability. Audio files and transcripts will not be shared or deposited due to confidentiality and the risk of possible identification. The excerpts in the manuscript and the respective codebook excerpt will only be deposited in the appendices.

### **5. Findings**

#### **5.1. Demographic Data and Contextual Information**

*Breakdown by Age:* Most English language teachers who participated in the study were relatively young. Approximately 64.0% were between 22-30 years old, which made up the highest number, represented by  $n = 16$ . The group that was between 31-35 years old represented 28.0% ( $n = 7$ ), while those that were between 36-40 years old comprised 8.0% ( $n = 2$ ). The sample represented in the study reflects early-career teachers, offering a wide age range comprising young and more senior teachers to ground the study regardless of the stages involved.

*Language Ability Certificates:* The questionnaire also inquired about the teachers' certificates of language ability. The one that most teachers named was CEFR-based, since 41.4% of the

teachers referred to this certificate. IELTS was indicated by 24.1% of the respondents, and 13.8% referred to APTIS. Interestingly, some teachers also added that they have taken other language ability tests, such as Duolingo or local ones, and each of these represented 13.8%. A minority of respondents reported never having taken a formal language proficiency exam. This finding is evidence that there is a varied set of English certification backgrounds among participants and that while a large majority might be accustomed to standardized language test structures, there are others who have minimal formal records to verify language abilities. These findings can have design implications for designing differentiated professional development resources that are able to respond to variation in the language proficiency of teachers.

*Teaching Experience:* All participants in the focus group belong to the early-career group, with 1 to 5 years of working experience. Based on Table 2, almost equal numbers belong to the 3-year experience level (n = 12, 48%). The 4-year level was comprised of 5 participants (20%), while 3 participants each belong to the 1-year (12%) and 2-year (12%) experience levels. Another smaller sector reported 5 years of working experience (n = 2, 8%). Overall, this data indicates the early-career professionals who took part in this research study remain relatively new to their crafts, which include establishing the day-to-day methodologies in their line of work.

Table 2. Teaching experience of FGD participants (n = 25)

Years of teaching experience	n	%
1 year	3	12
2 years	3	12
3 years	12	48
4 years	5	20
5 years	2	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>100</b>

## 5.2. Focus Group Discussion Results

### 5.2.1. Findings of the Focus Group Discussions (FGD)

The Focus Group Discussions (FGD) with 25 in-service EFL teachers yielded valuable insights into the requirements of their professional development, which were subsequently used to inform decisions regarding the design of the professional development (PD) program. The thematic content analysis of the FGD responses also revealed some salient recurring themes that indicate the key issues and concerns of the teachers. The principal themes invoked, with reflective quotes extracted from the FGDs, are listed below.

#### 5.2.1.1. Large Mixed-Ability Classes

The overall problem at the FGDs was managing huge classes with varying levels of ability of the students in them. Teachers seemed to worry about whether they would manage to provide varying students with individualized attention in one class, particularly individualized care and discipline within the classroom.

Sample excerpt:

*"It is difficult to make all of them participative if you have 35 students in a class." You have students who are advanced, and others do not even know how to speak English. I do not know how to manage differences this way effectively."*

– Teacher 3, FGD Group 1

This finding affirms previous research conducted by Mamadaminova & Khadjikhanova (2023), wherein the researchers proved that large, mixed-ability classes are one of the most common challenges facing EFL teachers in Uzbekistan. The FGD members said that they did not possess ways of teaching all students at the same time, which is also one of the essential requirements of professional development.

### **5.2.1.2. Technology in Teaching**

There was also a prevalent theme that we could find in the FGDs, i.e., no use of technology in the classroom. Though many of the instructors wished to use online materials and technology tools, they complained of not having access to technological facilities and of receiving training in how to use technology well in teaching.

Sample Excerpt:

*"I would like to use more web resources, but we just do not have the equipment. Even if we had computers, I would not know how to use them in a proper way while teaching."*

– Teacher 7, FGD Group 2

The experts referred to a lack of digital materials and professional education to utilize them efficiently as an issue. This statement validates the need for PD courses that provide both pedagogical and technological support to incorporate digital material into language teaching. Shaturaev (2021) also found similar limitations in his study on Uzbekistan EFL teachers.

### **5.2.1.3 Speaking Confidence and Communicative Practice**

The majority of teachers were worried about their own proficiency in the language, specifically their speaking ability. This was felt to be personally impacting their ability to teach communicative language skills well. The teachers also pointed out that they employed a lot of non-communicative teaching methods, such as the grammar-translation method, since they were not sure of adopting more communicative and interactive methods of teaching.

Sample Excerpt:

*"I am confident in grammar, but if I have to speak English fluently in front of students, I feel nervous. It's hard to teach speaking if you're not confident yourself."*

– Teacher 10, FGD Group 3

FGDs indicated that building speaking confidence should be an area of emphasis for PD programs since the majority of teachers are not confident when communicating orally in English with their students. This aligns with the focus of Tashkent State University of Pedagogy (2021), which underscored building teachers' language capabilities to improve their teaching effectiveness.

#### **5.2.1.4. Practical, Context-Specific PD**

One of the most frequent themes throughout the FGDs was that teachers indicated that they wanted PD courses that are not only theoretical but also immensely practical and applicable in their very own classroom realities. Teachers required professional development that would provide them with concrete techniques that they could apply immediately in their very own classrooms.

Sample Excerpt:

*"I've attended numerous workshops, but they don't really instruct me on how to manage my classroom or integrate technology in practice. I need training that is more realistic and context-specific in our situation."*

– Teacher 12, FGD Group 4

This criticism underscores the need for the creation of PD programs directly from the day-to-day life of teachers in the classrooms. Teachers, according to Shavkatova & Mirzaahmedov (2025), believe that PD programs are not practical enough and are not relevant to their daily classroom issues.

#### **5.2.1.5. Lack of Support for Continuous Professional Development**

The FGDs also suggested that the majority of the teachers feel that they do not receive sustained support after professional development activities. Teachers called for ongoing mentoring and follow-up support to facilitate their applying what they have learned in training to teaching practice.

Sample Excerpt

*"We attend these workshops, yet when they're over, there's no follow-up. You can't do everything without someone checking on you or reminding you where you stand."*

– Teacher 15, FGD Group 5

This finding calls for PD programs offering long-term support, for instance, in the form of mentoring or peer support, which can help teachers reinforce and implement the skills and information acquired during initial training. A lack of this type of long-term support is a common issue for PD programs globally (Cavendish et al., 2021).

Results of the FGD illuminate what professional growth EFL teachers in Uzbekistan require. Classroom management, integration of technology, and mastery of languages are concerns for teachers, which impact their success as instructors. Further, there is a high demand for PD

programs that are contextual, applied, and offer sustained support. These findings hold tremendous implications for designing a professional development program that can effectively target such matters and assist teachers in their professional growth. The next phase of this study will be to use these findings to inform the design of a targeted PD program for improving the quality of English language instruction and teaching practices in Uzbekistan.

Table 3. Theme suggestions for the PD development

FGD Theme	Key need expressed by teachers	Implications for PD design
Large, mixed-ability classes	Differentiation and discipline strategies feasible in large classes	Low-prep differentiation routines, mixed-level task design, behavior-support systems, rehearsals via micro-teaching
Technology constraints	Lack of equipment and limited know-how	“Minimum viable tech” using phones/offline tools; no-tech alternatives; ready-to-use digital/printable templates
Speaking confidence & communicative practice	Anxiety about speaking + reliance on grammar-translation	Classroom English bank; coaching and micro-teaching; speaking-task facilitation practice; feedback cycles
Practical, context-specific PD	PD perceived as too theoretical	Demo lessons, rehearsal, problem-based tasks, materials adapted to local textbooks, and immediate classroom transfer focus
Lack of follow-up support	No sustained post-training support	PLC circles; peer observation cycles; mentoring/coaching check-ins; structured follow-up tasks

## 6. A Need-Based PD Framework Prototype

Building on the findings of the context-demographics questionnaire and the five themes identified through the FGDs, this study developed a needs-based professional development framework prototype for early-career CEFR B2+ EFL teachers in Olmazor District. The prototype was designed as a practical response to the most consistently reported challenges in participants’ professional lives: managing large mixed-ability classes, teaching under technological constraints, low confidence in speaking and facilitating communicative practice, dissatisfaction with theoretical and insufficiently contextualized PD, and the absence of sustained post-training support. Rather than proposing a generic training package, the framework translates identified needs into five focused modules with corresponding learning outcomes, delivery modes, and monitoring indicators. In this sense, the prototype functions as the study’s applied output, showing how a qualitative needs analysis can be converted into a feasible and context-sensitive teacher development design (Richards & Farrell, 2005; Sadeghi & Richards, 2021).

### 6.1. Managing Large, Mixed-Ability Classes

The first module deals with the challenge of teaching in large classes with significant variations in students' language proficiency, which was one of the most prominent issues that emerged during the FGDs. In this regard, the participants reported that it is hard to ensure students' active engagement, differentiate instruction in such large and heterogeneous classes, and discipline students. This is in line with previous research that indicated that large and heterogeneous classes are one of the most persistent issues faced by EFL teachers in Uzbekistan (Mamadaminova & Khadjikhanova, 2023; Mukhiddinova & Agzamkhodjaeva, 2025). Therefore, the module on teaching in large classes with significant variations in students' language proficiency is designed with low preparation differentiation routines, flexible groupings, scaffolding, and classroom management routines that are feasible in large classes. In addition, the module is designed with a focus on demonstration lessons, guided deconstruction of teaching actions, microteaching, and peer feedback, followed by the generation of lesson plans that are ready for the classroom. This is in line with the general argument in PD research that emphasizes that teachers benefit most from learning opportunities that are closely linked with their immediate classroom realities (Richards & Farrell, 2005; Cavendish et al., 2021).

## **6.2. Low/No-Tech Teaching**

The second module is a direct response to participants' interest in technology, as well as their repeated reports of poor infrastructure and insufficient pedagogical support in technology tool utilization. Indeed, previous studies on Uzbek EFL teachers have pointed out that these teachers often work in environments characterized by poor access to modern technological tools, as well as insufficient support in technology tool utilization for teaching EFL (Dunn & Iwaniec, 2023; Shaturaev, 2022). The results of the current study indicate that a realistic PD program response to participants' concerns should not be premised on the assumption of teachers' access to high-tech tools, but rather on teachers' productivity in such environments. Thus, the second module in the proposed PD program has been developed on a minimum viable tech philosophy, aiming to train teachers in adapting textbook materials into interactive no-tech and low-tech activities, as well as in utilizing realistic tools such as telephone audio, offline tools, and printable templates, for example. This is a direct response to participants' call for strategies that take into account teachers' and schools' limitations, as well as those that expand pedagogical possibilities (Farrell & Jacobs, 2020; Sadeghi & Richards, 2021).

## **6.3. Teaching Speaking and Teacher Speaking Confidence**

The third module is based on the premise that teachers own speaking anxiety and limited classroom English confidence are factors that influence their ability to implement communicative learning environments. Participants were asked to report their nervous feelings about speaking English in front of students and their tendency to overuse grammatical approaches in their teaching. This is also supported by previous research that indicated limited speaking confidence in teachers may influence their ability to model language use and implement communicative approaches (Tashkent State University of Pedagogy, 2021; Farrell & Jacobs, 2020). In response to this, the module is designed with two main purposes: increasing teachers' confidence in using classroom English and increasing their ability to implement structured speaking activities such as pair work, information gap activities, and role-plays. The proposed model is based on coached microteaching approaches and scripted classroom English. The rationale behind this module is that communicative approaches cannot be implemented without increasing teachers' confidence in using classroom English and

providing them with opportunities to practice and develop routine language use in their instruction (Richards & Farrell, 2005; Sadeghi & Richards, 2021).

#### **6.4. Teaching Speaking and Teacher Speaking Confidence**

The third module is informed by the idea that teachers' own speaking anxieties and low levels of English confidence in the classroom influence their capacity to promote communicative learning environments. The participants expressed concerns about speaking English in front of learners and suggested that this may have contributed to a reliance on grammar-focused practice over more speaking-focused practice. This is similar to previous studies that suggested teachers' low levels of speaking confidence can influence teachers' capacity to promote speaking and communication in the classroom (Tashkent State University of Pedagogy, 2021; Farrell & Jacobs, 2020). As such, this module addresses two related needs: teacher confidence in using English in the classroom and teacher competence in supporting structured speaking activities such as pair work, information gap tasks, and role-plays. The intended mode of delivery is coached microteaching cycles, scripting of English in the classroom, rehearsing, and providing feedback. The rationale of this module is that communicative approaches in language teaching cannot be divorced from teacher confidence; teachers are likely to adopt methods that emphasize speaking when they are given opportunities to rehearse these methods and develop routine language for teaching (Richards & Farrell, 2005; Sadeghi & Richards, 2021).

#### **6.5. Communicative Methods Under Constraints**

The fourth module deals with the general concern that much of what is offered in terms of professional development is considered too theoretical and not well adapted to the realities of the local classrooms. The participants emphasized the need for professional development that is realistic, applicable, and immediately useful in relation to the problems of the classroom. This is also in line with the research on PD in Uzbekistan, where the experience was considered too general and not well adapted to the actual conditions of the teachers (Mamadaminova & Madalińska-Michalak, 2025; Kosimov & Latipov, 2022). The module will deal with the redesign of grammar- or textbook-bound lessons into more communicative sequences of lessons, keeping in view the actual constraints of the classrooms, such as large numbers of students, mixed proficiency, and low student motivation. The rationale for the module is based on the understanding that teachers do not only need to be exposed to modern methodologies such as communicative language teaching, but they also need support in how to apply these methodologies in the classroom, keeping in view the actual conditions of the schools (Farrell & Jacobs, 2020; Cavendish et al., 2021).

#### **6.6. Transfer Support: Follow-Up and Community of Practice**

The fifth module addresses the recurring problem of professional development workshops ending with the workshop itself, without any further support or encouragement for teachers to continue with implementation. Participants indicated that they need mentoring support, as well as opportunities to discuss problems faced after attending the workshop. This is another recurring problem in professional development, as indicated in other literature as well. The PD effect is considered to be reduced if teachers go back to school without reinforcement, coaching, or collaborative follow-up structures in place (Cavendish et al., 2021; Mamadaminova & Madalińska-Michalak, 2025). In order to resolve this issue that has

continued to plague teachers during their professional development, the final module discusses the need to offer support during the transfer of what has been learned by providing teachers with peer observations, PLC circles, discussions for reflection, and problem clinics. This is especially important since the findings of this study have shown that even effective training may not be sustained if teachers return to school without feedback, reinforcement, and support structures (Sadeghi & Richards, 2021; Richards & Farrell, 2005).

### **6.7. Feasibility**

This prototype should be seen as a context-sensitive design proposal informed by the FGD findings from early career CEFR B2+ EFL teachers in a single urban district of Tashkent, as opposed to a final product for national-level adaptation. The minimum requirements for the framework to be implemented in the future might include a trained facilitator for a manageable number of teachers, access to a space for demonstration lessons and micro-teaching, some basic printable materials, teachers' own phones for some activities, and a short-term follow-up phase like a three-month PLC or peer observation schedule. The design of the prototype was intended to be resource-sensitive enough to be implemented in low-resource contexts by prioritizing low-prep approaches, no-tech or low-tech solutions, and school-based approaches over infrastructure needs. However, for the framework to be adapted for use in other, possibly more dissimilar school contexts, including those in the countryside, some level of adaptation might be required (Dunn & Iwaniec, 2023; Mamadaminova & Madalińska-Michalak, 2025).

## **7. Discussion**

The present study aimed to reveal the professional development needs of in-service early-career EFL teachers in public schools in Olmazor District and to transform these needs into a feasible professional development prototype. The results indicate that the needs of the teachers are not limited to the development of specific skills but rather indicate a broader misfit between the current professional development opportunities and the actual context in which these teachers are teaching. In all the themes, the teachers' professional reality has been characterized by the teaching of large classes with mixed-ability students, the variable access to technology in the classroom, the low level of confidence in using English in the classroom, the teachers' dissatisfaction with the overly theoretical nature of the training courses, and the lack of follow-up support after the courses. Collectively, these findings imply that PD for this group should be conceptualized not merely as the delivery of content but as the promotion of adaptation to challenging classroom contexts. This conception of PD aligns with literature that emphasizes the need for teacher professional development to be "practice-oriented, context-responsive, and connected to teachers' daily instructional challenges" (Richards & Farrell, 2005; Cavendish et al., 2021; Sadeghi & Richards, 2021).

A significant contribution of this study is that it does not merely describe the problem but begins to illuminate the logic of what constitutes an appropriate PD response. That is, the findings do not merely imply that teachers need "more training." Rather, they imply that teachers need "different training." For example, the problem of managing large mixed-ability classes is not merely a classroom management issue in a behavioural sense. It also points to the challenge of differentiation, sustaining engagement, and maintaining communicative interactions in overcrowded classes with differing levels of proficiency among the students. This, in turn, helps to explain why the generic workshops might be seen as inadequate, as the teachers are not simply in need of a better level of theory but also a more concrete level of

practice that can be sustained in the face of overcrowding, resource scarcity, and time constraints. This interpretation of the results is consistent with earlier research indicating that large class pedagogy requires rehearsal-based support, as opposed to abstract methodological advice (Mukhiddinova & Agzamkhodjaeva, 2025; Richards & Farrell, 2005). The emphasis on demonstration lessons, low-preparation differentiation, and microteaching, therefore, is a design intervention directly responsive to the form of the identified need, as expressed in the data.

A similar phenomenon can be observed in terms of technology as well. In this case, the participants were not seen to be dismissing the idea of digital pedagogy. Rather, they showed interest in using technology for teaching but also mentioned their current environment in terms of technology. This implies that the main problem here is not the lack of technology. Rather, it is the lack of alignment between the ideal scenario of using technology for teaching and the actual scenario in terms of the availability of resources. This is also the reason for the prototype to be based on the idea of minimum viable tech and not high tech. This is because the main purpose of providing PD in terms of technology should be to enable teachers to make the best use of the available resources, including the lack of resources. This is also in line with the studies that have suggested that the main issue in terms of using technology for EFL settings is not the lack of technology but the ability of teachers to make the best use of the available resources (Kosimov, 2021; Dunn & Iwaniec, 2023; Farrell & Jacobs, 2020).

The results regarding speaking confidence are especially noteworthy, however, since all participants qualified for the study based on this language-related criterion, yet some still evidenced nervousness about speaking English in front of students. Clearly, therefore, formal qualification is not necessarily sufficient to guarantee communicative security in practice. What is important, it seems, is not only language knowledge, as qualified and certified through formal processes, but also communicative confidence in using English publicly and spontaneously as a medium for classroom interaction. In this way, therefore, the problem is not only pedagogical but also professional, since teachers may be less likely to promote communicative activities and more likely to rely on grammar instruction and teacher-centered methods if they lack confidence in their own classroom English. Accordingly, the problem is not simply one of proficiency but also one related to the interrelated concepts of teacher confidence, classroom performance, and communicative pedagogy. Hence, again, the importance of prototype features such as classroom English scripting, rehearsal, micro-teaching, and feedback. The idea here is to support not only linguistic competence per se, but also communicative confidence per se (Tashkent State University of Pedagogy, 2021; Farrell & Jacobs, 2020; Richards & Farrell, 2005).

The theme of practical, context-specific PD serves to further reinforce this interpretation. This is because the participants continually expressed their perception of the current PD opportunities as being too theoretical and not applicable enough to the problems they are facing in the schools. This should not be taken to mean that theory is not important, but rather that theory is important to these teachers in ways that are not yet apparent in the current opportunities. In the Uzbek context, this theme could also be exacerbated by the current prevalence of broad, standardized, or top-down approaches to PD that do not adequately differentiate between subjects, schools, or stages of the teaching career (Mamadaminova & Madalińska-Michalak, 2025; Shavkatova & Mirzaahmedov, 2025). This is to suggest that the quality of PD should not be seen in the volume of content delivered, but rather in the degree to which the teacher can see, try, and apply what is being taught. This is why the prototype has

focused on model lessons, problem-based activities, lesson redesign, and materials that are aligned with local textbooks. This is in direct alignment with the finding that teachers value this over breadth of concepts.

The final theme, lack of follow-up support, is theoretically relevant as it changes the focus from training programs to the transfer of training. The implication of the findings is that the major problem with the current PD system is the lack of support after the training program. The findings of the current study, however, indicate that the problem is actually in the implementation, especially for early career teachers who are still learning to adapt to the demands of the classroom. Therefore, the fact that the prototype included peer observation, PLC circles, coaching check-ins, and tasks is central to the design, as it addresses the social dimension of teacher learning by recognizing the fact that teachers are more likely to change over time with reinforcement, feedback, and support (Cavendish et al., 2021; Kosimov, 2021; Sadeghi & Richards, 2021).

If all five themes are taken into consideration, a coherent picture of the proposed prototype emerges. The framework should not be seen as a supplementary entity added to the results; instead, it can be viewed as a synthesis of the study's findings. The modules on mixed-ability teaching, minimum viable technology, speaking confidence and communicative practice, practical lesson redesign, and follow-up support can be seen as all stemming from a single underlying concept: that any professional development for early career EFL teachers in this setting must be based on what is viable under constraint. This concept can be seen as entirely consistent with the needs analysis approach that underpins the study, where teachers' perceived needs, classroom realities, and implementation realities are seen as interconnected rather than separate domains. In this way, the prototype can be seen as a context-sensitive design proposal based on identified need, rather than as a universal prescription for all schools or all EFL teachers.

It should be noted, however, that this discussion should be contextualized within the boundaries of the study. This is because the participants of this study are early career CEFR B2+ EFL teachers based on one urban district of Tashkent. Therefore, the results are more relevant to this group of teachers than the entire teaching staff of the nation. This is important because, although urban schools based in the capital may be different from those based in other areas, especially rural and remote schools, the results should be used but adapted before application. This qualification of the study is important to ensure that its value is maintained without overgeneralizing the results.

The overall implication of the discussion, therefore, seems to be that the real question is not whether PD is available, but whether it is usable, practice-related, and sustained enough to influence practice in real-life contexts. By linking the identified needs to a prototype that focuses on rehearsal, practice-relatedness, resource-constraint pedagogy, communicative confidence, and post-training support, the study makes a specific but substantial contribution to the design logic of what context-sensitive PD might look like for young EFL teachers in Uzbekistan.

## 8. Implications and Recommendations

### 8.1. Implications

The implications of the findings of this study for the design of professional development (PD) for early career EFL teachers in public school settings such as those in Olmazor District, Tashkent, are significant. The limitations of the study, in that it was conducted in only one district of the capital city, mean that the implications of the findings should be thought of in relation to settings such as this, rather than assuming they can be generalized to all settings in Uzbekistan. Second, the continuous shortage of practice PD content is an indication of the need for training modules that can bridge theory to practice in the classroom. Trainers and developers must prioritize experiential learning approaches such as lesson simulation, peer teaching, and case-based problem-solving that enhance pedagogical creativity and self-efficacy.

Third, the technology and access skill deficit reveals a double issue: infrastructural inequality and digital illiteracy. The PD planners should consider including digital skill training in every element as an integral part, not an afterthought. That would make the teachers prepared to utilize the available technology under even restrictive conditions. Fourth, the need for methodological assistance implies a gap between current classroom practices among teachers and contemporary communicative and learner-centered methodologies. PD initiatives in similar contexts should therefore offer prolonged mentoring and follow-up workshops where teachers can internalize and experiment with methodologies such as TBLT, CLT, and differentiated instruction in their respective classrooms.

Fifth, assessment and feedback challenges identify the necessity to revisit teacher assessment literacy. Incorporating applied modules on formative assessment, providing feedback, and performance-based assessment can prepare teachers to more effectively track pupil progress and decrease reliance on summative, exam-based practice. Sixth, the confidence and motivation issues evidenced show that PD programs not only need to augment teachers' skills and knowledge but also their professional identity and confidence. Reflective assignments, systems of recognition, and networks of peers operating through collaboration could be a component of more lasting motivation and a sense of professional belonging.

### 8.2. Recommendations

On the basis of these implications, some recommendations can be proposed for those concerned with the improvement of professional development of EFL educators in similar contexts to that investigated in this study. These recommendations are based on data collected from CEFR B2+ public school EFL educators in their early career in Olmazor District, Tashkent, and therefore should be considered context-specific, not applicable in other regions of Uzbekistan without further modification.

It is also recommended that mentorship and peer-coaching systems are included in all professional development schemes. Ongoing guidance by experienced teachers and academic mentors would allow teachers to change over time to new pedagogic approaches and adapt them for their own classrooms. This mentoring element is imperative in making short-term training a long-term professional development. Besides, PD sessions must incorporate digital pedagogy training as a core and not an addendum. Enhancing teachers' digital skills and literacy

in using technology in teaching will promote more balanced access to quality education and enhance the technology gap between resourced and under-resourced schools.

The second most important recommendation involves literacy in assessment. Continuing professional development material needs to provide definite potential for teachers to craft formative assessments, design rubrics, and provide constructive feedback in harmony with communicative teaching goals. Acquiring this skill would also allow teachers to monitor learning accomplishments more effectively and move beyond exam-driven assessment practice. Professional development should also address, in particular, teacher motivation and incentives. The implementation of certification levels, micro-credentials, or local award systems could serve as an incentive and keep the subject of continuous learning of interest. Recognition not only motivates based on effort but also generates the feeling of belonging to a professional community of practice.

Greater collaboration between schools and universities is also essential. Greater institutional interrelation can ensure PD material remains connected to ongoing research while being responsive to schoolteachers' lived practice. Collaborative arrangements between schools and universities can also illustrate the co-production of training resources and the exchange of knowledge and expertise among academic researchers and teachers in classrooms. Although these implications and recommendations may provide valuable advice for PD planning in Uzbekistan in general, it is crucial that they are used cautiously beyond the specific context in which they are applied. This is due to the fact that schools in other areas, especially rural areas, may be different in terms of infrastructure, teachers available, class sizes, and access to technology and mentoring support. Therefore, it is imperative that the PD prototype be recognized as a contextual model that requires adaptation and, preferably, piloting in specific contexts before it is adopted at national levels.

## 9. Conclusion

This study provides an in-depth investigation of the needs of in-service EFL teachers' professional development in Uzbekistan. The findings indicate some of the fields where the teachers require support, and these include classroom management in very large, mixed-ability classes; application of technology in instruction; language skills, particularly confidence in speaking; and having the chance to access more practice-based, context-focused PD courses. The teachers also desired ongoing support and follow-up after PD courses, thus indicating the necessity for continuous professional development.

These findings have important design and implementation implications for PD programs for the EFL teachers of Uzbekistan. Based on these problems identified, PD programs must tackle teacher provision with concrete strategies on various classroom management techniques and the use of technology, as well as increasing language proficiency. Furthermore, PD programs need to be crafted to address the specific needs of Uzbekistani EFL teachers in order to ensure that the professional development they receive will have immediate relevance to their classroom settings. Follow-up support, either mentoring or peer collaboration, is also crucial to facilitate the sustainability of professional development.

Lastly, this study contributes to a better understanding of EFL teacher professional development needs in Uzbekistan and provides valuable insights for developing more effective, context-based PD programs. By addressing the distinctive needs of teachers and

aligning PD programs with professional development needs, it is possible to enhance English language teaching quality in Uzbekistan alongside in-service teachers' continuous professional development.

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Appendix A - Participant Consent Form (Sample from one P.)



## Informed Consent Form

**Study title:** Designing and Evaluating the Effectiveness of a Need-Based Professional Development Program (PDP) for In-Service EFL Teachers in Uzbekistan

**Researcher:** Munisa G. Muhtarova

**Contact:** [munisismile1@gmail.com](mailto:munisismile1@gmail.com), [m.muhtarova@tmuni.org](mailto:m.muhtarova@tmuni.org), [gs70000@upm.edu.my](mailto:gs70000@upm.edu.my)

### 1) Purpose of the study

You are invited to participate in a research study that explores (a) teachers' professional development needs, (b) the design and implementation of a need-based PDP, and (c) the PDP's impact on teaching practice.

### 2) What participation involves

If you agree, you may be asked to take part in the following activities:

- Complete a short demographics form
- Participate in a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and/or interview (audio-recorded)
- Implement PDP activities and submit teaching artifacts (e.g., lesson plans/materials you create)
- For a small subgroup: one classroom lesson will be observed, followed by a short one-on-one interview (audio-recorded)

**Estimated time:** FGD/interview: 45 minutes; observation: one lesson; post-observation interview: 30 minutes.

### 3) Audio recording

FGDs and interviews will be audio-recorded only to ensure accurate transcription and analysis. Recordings will not be shared outside the research team.

### 4) Classroom observation



Observation focuses on teaching practices and classroom routines (not evaluating you as an employee). No video will be taken, but one or two snapshots of the lesson will be taken. Student names will not be recorded.

### 5) Voluntary participation and right to withdraw

Your participation is voluntary. You may refuse any question or activity and may withdraw at any time without penalty. If you withdraw, your data will be removed from the study where feasible (unless it has already been fully anonymized and integrated into the analysis).

### 6) Confidentiality

Your identity will be protected using codes (e.g., P1, P2). Reports will not include your name or school name. Any quotations used will be anonymized. Data will be stored securely (password-protected digital storage) and accessed only by the researcher/supervisory team.

### 7) Risks and benefits

Risks are minimal (possible discomfort when discussing challenges). You may benefit from reflecting on your practice and receiving PD support through the PDP.

### 8) Consent (please tick)

I confirm that I have read and understood the information above and agree to participate.

I consent to participate in the study.

I consent to audio recording of FGDs/interviews.

I consent to classroom observation (one lesson) if selected.

I consent to the use of my teacher-created materials (lesson plans/artifacts) for research purposes (anonymized).

Participant Code:

Signature:

Date:

30.05.25

Researcher name: Munisa G. Muhtarova

Signature:

Date:

30.05.25

## Appendix B - Ethics Exemption Letter



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116, Usta Shirin St., Tashkent, Uzbekistan  
Tel: +998 712000123, [info@tmuni.org](mailto:info@tmuni.org)

Tashkent Metropolitan University  
School of Arts and Humanities

Reg #: 19/25  
Date: 10th April, 2025

### ETHICS EXEMPTION / WAIVER LETTER

To Whom It May Concern,

This letter confirms that the research project titled

**“Designing and Evaluating the Effectiveness of a Need-Based Professional Development Program for In-Service English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Teachers in Uzbekistan”**

Conducted by Munisa Muhtarova, Associate Professor, School of Arts and Humanities, TMU, it was reviewed at the institutional level for ethical considerations.

Based on the information provided, the project is classified as minimal-risk educational research involving adult participants (in-service teachers) and does not include medical interventions or vulnerable groups. Therefore, the project qualifies for an ethics review exemption/waiver under institutional practice, provided that the following conditions are met:

1. Participation is voluntary and based on written informed consent.
2. Participant confidentiality is protected through anonymization (no names, no identifying school information in publications).
3. Data (audio recordings, transcripts, and questionnaires) are stored securely and used solely for research purposes.
4. Participants may decline to answer any question or withdraw without penalty.

This exemption/waiver is granted for data collection activities conducted in the Olmazor District, Tashkent.

If the research design changes significantly (e.g., inclusion of minors, collection of sensitive personal data, medical procedures, or experimental interventions), additional ethics review will be required.

Sincerely,

**Bekhzod Djalilov**  
TMU President

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_



## Appendix C - Open-ended questionnaire Protocol

### Stage 1: Collecting a demographic data

#### OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONNAIRE

Please answer the following questions to the best of your knowledge and ability. Responses will be evaluated for correctness, comprehensiveness, and clarity.

1. What's your nationality

\_\_\_\_\_

2. Marital Status

- Married
- not married

3. Teaching experience:

- 1-5 years
- 6-10 years
- 11 years and above

4. Age

- 21-25
- 26-30
- 31-35
- 36-40
- Over 40

5. What is the highest level of education and field of study?

- Bachelor's Degree
- Master's Degree

6. Majoring in a program?

\_\_\_\_\_

7. Year of graduation?

\_\_\_\_\_

8. What grades do you teach?

\_\_\_\_\_

9. Have you taken any of the following language proficiency tests? What was your score?

- ELTS \_\_\_\_\_

- CEFR \_\_\_\_\_
- Duolingo \_\_\_\_\_
- APTIS for teachers \_\_\_\_\_
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
- Never taken a test \_\_\_\_\_

10. Have you attended any teacher training workshops, seminars, or webinars related to teaching English before? Please specify.

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11. Your position at school (example: senior teacher) \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix D - FGD Interview Protocol

### Instrument #2- 14 questions

#### 5 FGD groups with 5 members in each.

Purpose: to identify in-service EFL teachers' priority professional development needs, barriers to transferring PD into classroom practice, and preferred features of an effective, need-based PDP, informing RQ1 and guiding RQ2 design decisions.

**Note:** Probes were used only when needed to encourage concrete examples from the participants.

1. What was the most recent PD program you attended like?  
*Probes:* lecture vs practice, relevance, what felt useful.
2. After PD ends, what happens—do you apply it in class? Why or why not?  
*Probes:* workload, time, leadership expectations, confidence, lack of follow-up.
3. Describe a time you tried to apply PD learning and it didn't work. What blocked the transfer?  
*Probes:* class size, discipline, mixed levels, materials, unclear steps, no coaching.
4. What PD format helps you transfer learning into practice quickly?  
*Probes:* demo lessons, rehearsal/micro-teaching, ready-to-use routines, peer support.
5. What are your top three daily challenges in your English classes?  
*Probes:* mixed proficiency, motivation, discipline, exam pressure, and L1 reliance.
6. What limits your lesson planning and teaching quality in a typical week?  
*Probes:* paperwork, teaching load, admin tasks, resources, stress.
7. How mixed are student levels in one class, and how do you currently handle it?  
*Probes:* who gets left behind, current strategies, and what support is missing.
8. If you could choose only three PDP topics that would make the greatest difference, what would they be and why?  
*Probes:* management routines, differentiation, speaking, assessment/feedback, listening, and writing.
9. Which teaching tasks do you feel least confident about right now?  
*Probes:* group work control, speaking facilitation, monitoring, feedback, and pacing.

10. In your context, what works better—communicative activities or traditional grammar-focused teaching? Why?

*Probes:* student response, control, time, exams, and teacher language confidence.

11. What worries you most when you try pair/group speaking activities?

*Probes:* noise, losing control, students using Uzbek, weak students, time.

12. What technology do you realistically have access to at school, and what barriers exist?

*Probes:* internet, projector/TV, printing, phone policy, electricity.

13. If PD used an LMS/online platform, what would make it feasible for you?

*Probes:* mobile-friendly, low data use, short tutorials, printable alternatives, optional use.

14. What must an “ideal PDP” include so you keep using it after the program ends?

*Probes:* follow-up, coaching, peer triads, evidence/reflection tools, and ready-to-print packs.

**Appendix E - Codebook excerpt (FGDs thematic analysis)**

Dataset: 5 FGDs (25 participants), 5 June 2025 (English)

Software: Quirkos (coding/retrieval) + Microsoft Excel (codebook/audit trail)

Coder: Researcher (single-coder)

**Theme mapping:**

- Theme 1 (Large/mixed-ability classes): CM1–CM3
- Theme 2 (Technology constraints): TECH1–TECH3
- Theme 3 (Speaking confidence & communicative teaching): LANG1–LANG2, PED1
- Theme 4 (Practical/context-specific PD): PD1–PD3
- Theme 5 (Continuous support): SUP1–SUP3

Code ID	Code label	Definition	Include when...	Exclude when...	Exemplar quotation
CM1	Large class size constraint	Limits created by high student numbers for participation/monitoring	Teacher links difficulty to class size	Mentions mixed levels but no size reference	“It is difficult to make all of them active if you have 35 students in a class.” — P3, FGD Group 1
CM2	Mixed-ability challenge	Difficulty teaching students with different proficiency levels in one class	Teacher contrasts advanced vs low-level learners	Only discipline/behavior without level differences	“I have students who are advanced, and others who are elementary level.” — P3, FGD Group 1
CM3	Need for differentiation strategies	Expressed need for practical ways to handle differences simultaneously	Teacher states inability to manage differences effectively	Pure complaint without need/strategy gap	“I do not know how to manage differences effectively.” — P3, FGD Group 1
TECH 1	Lack of equipment/infrastructure	Absence of devices/ICT facilities needed for tech use	Mentions no equipment, computers, internet, etc.	Skill/confidence only without resources	“We just do not have the equipment.” — P7, FGD Group 2
TECH 2	Low tech-integration capacity	Limited know-how to use tech pedagogically even if available	Says they wouldn’t know how to use tools while teaching	Only resource constraints	“Even if we had computers, we would need some training on teaching tools/applications.” — P7, FGD Group 2

TECH 3	Desire for web/digital resources	Interest in using online resources/tools	Expresses a wish to use web resources	Complaints only, with no expressed desire	“I would like to use more web resources...” — P7, FGD Group 2
LAN G1	Speaking anxiety / low confidence	Nervousness about speaking English in front of learners	Mentions nervousness/ anxiety about speaking	Grammar confidence only	“If I have to speak English fluently in front of students, I feel nervous.” — P10, FGD Group 3
LAN G2	Grammar–speaking imbalance	Perceived strength in grammar but weakness in speaking	Contrasts grammar confidence with speaking difficulty	Speaking difficulty without grammar comparison	“I am confident in grammar, but...” — P10, FGD Group 3
PED1	Difficulty teaching speaking	Difficulty facilitating communicative speaking instruction due to teacher's confidence	Links teacher confidence to teaching speaking	Student speaking difficulty only	“It’s hard to teach speaking if you’re not confident yourself.” — P10, FGD Group 3
PD1	PD not practical / too theoretical	PD was described as not providing actionable classroom steps	Says workshops don’t teach “how to” in practice	Critiques unrelated to practicality	“They don’t really instruct me on how to manage my classroom or integrate technology in practice.” — P12, FGD Group 4
PD2	Need for realistic, context-specific PD	PD should match teachers’ real constraints and context	Mentions “realistic,” “context-specific,” “our situation.”	Generic desire for PD without context	“I need training that is more realistic and context-specific in our situation.” — P12, FGD Group 4
PD3	PD should address core classroom problems	PD should target classroom management and tech integration as priority needs	Mentions classroom management and tech integration as PD needs	Needs that are purely language proficiency only	“Manage my classroom or integrate technology in practice.” — P12, FGD Group 4
SUP1	No follow-up after PD	PD ends with no continuing support	Mentions no follow-up after workshops	Mentions follow-up exists	“When they’re over, there’s no follow-up.” — P15, FGD Group 5

SUP2	Need for mentoring/coaching	Desire for accountability/support (mentor, checking, guidance)	Mentions someone checking/reminding/supporting implementation	General “support” without a mechanism	“You can’t do everything without someone checking on you or reminding you where you stand.” — P15, FGD Group 5
SUP3	Transfer support (implementation help)	Need for help applying PD into practice	Links follow-up to classroom transfer	Complaints about PD content only	“We attend these workshops, yet... there’s no follow-up.” — P15, FGD Group 5

## Appendix F - Member check

### Member Checking Validation

#### Instructions:

Please read each theme summary. For each theme, tick the option that best reflects your view and add comments if needed. You may write in English or Uzbek.

Participant code: FGD 3 ; P 4

Date: June 10

#### Theme 1: Large Mixed-Ability Classes

Does this reflect your experience?  Yes  Mostly  Partly  No

Comments: It is very hard to teach and control large classes.

#### Theme 2: Technology in Teaching

Does this reflect your experience?  Yes  Mostly  Partly  No

Comments: We often have limited or broken technology and weak internet, it is hard to use videos or online tools in our lessons.

#### Theme 3: Speaking confidence & communicative practice

Does this reflect your experience?  Yes  Mostly  Partly  No

Comments: Many students are shy to make mistakes, so they need more speaking practice to build confidence.

#### Theme 4: Practical, context- specific PD

Does this reflect your experience?  Yes  Mostly  Partly  No

Comments: We need trainings that are practical, and match our classroom situation. We need simple activities which we can use right away.

#### Theme 5: Lack of Support for Continuous Professional Development

Does this reflect your experience?  Yes  Mostly  Partly  No

Comments: After trainings there is little time, guidance or support to continue learning. It is hard to improve step by step.

#### Overall question:

Are there any significant needs, challenges, or experiences that are missing from these themes?

No  Yes (please explain): Everything seems to be covered.

### Appendix G - Prototype Needs-Based PDP Model

Facilitator/Trainer: The researcher—being an expert in EFL pedagogy and teacher development—led each and every session of professional development by offering the program in a practicing format adjusted to local classroom realities.

Module (linked to needs/themes)	Learning outcomes (participants will be able to...)	Delivery mode & core activities	Monitoring & evaluation indicators (examples)
<b>1. Managing large, mixed-ability classes</b>	Apply low-prep differentiation routines (tiered tasks, flexible grouping, scaffolding) and implement practical classroom-management routines that support participation and discipline in large classes.	Demonstration lesson—guided deconstruction - micro-teaching rehearsal - peer feedback using checklist - classroom-ready lesson plan.	Pre/post self-efficacy (classroom management); observation checklist (use of routines); teacher reflection log (what was applied).
<b>2. Low/no-tech teaching (“minimum viable tech”)</b>	Adapt textbook tasks into interactive no-tech activities and use realistic low-tech options (e.g., phone audio/offline tools) where feasible.	Task-adaptation workshop—creation of activity bank—try-out and troubleshooting—sharing of printable templates.	Review of produced artifacts (activity bank/templates); implementation log; short follow-up check-in survey on feasibility.
<b>3. Teaching speaking + teacher speaking confidence</b>	Use classroom-English routines confidently and facilitate structured speaking activities (pair work, information gap, role-play) with clear steps and monitoring.	Micro-teaching cycles—coached feedback - classroom-English scripting - rehearsal of speaking-task facilitation.	Pre/post confidence rating; micro-teaching rubric; observation checklist for speaking-task implementation.
<b>4. Communicative methods under constraints</b>	Convert grammar-heavy lessons into communicative practice sequences and apply strategies to engage low-motivation learners in mixed-level classrooms.	Model lesson—lesson redesign sprint—peer review—implementation planning (“next-week plan”).	Lesson plan quality rubric; teacher implementation log; student engagement proxy (participation tally).

<p><b>5. Transfer support: follow-up and community of practice</b></p>	<p>Complete one peer observation and feedback cycle and participate in a PLC circle to troubleshoot implementation barriers.</p>	<p>PLC circles—peer observation protocol—reflection discussion—problem solving clinic.</p>	<p>PLC attendance; completed observation forms; reflection notes; follow-up survey on transfer barriers/support needs.</p>
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