

IN-SERVICE TRAINING OF TEACHERS OF ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN ESTONIA: MAPPING OF TRENDS AND OPPORTUNITIES

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Abstract

In-service training of teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL) is as a core instrument of continuous professional development of EFL teachers. Within the context of nowadays education policies, the issue of in-service training has become of topical importance. It requires systematic approach based on the analysis of individual EFL teachers' needs and receptive practices in developing in-service teacher-training programmes. In view of that, a survey was conducted among EFL teachers in Estonia to discover the areas of in-service training they are interested in. Based on the survey results, a model of an in-service training module to implement in order to meet the needs of EFL teachers in Estonia is proposed, and it is placed against the background of in-service teacher training provided in Estonia. The module could be included into in-service teaching training programmes not only in Estonia, but in a wider European context.

Keywords: *in-service teacher training, continuous professional development (CPD), English language teaching.*

Introduction

Teaching has now arguably become more demanding and challenging than ever before, as classrooms have to respond to the changes and developments of the today's world. The teaching and learning paradigm has shifted towards learner's autonomy and teacher being a facilitator and manager of the learning process. Teaching and learning is ever more learner-centred and flexible, being empowered by new technologies. In this new rapidly changing educational reality, in-service teacher training is the main tool to assist teachers in sustaining their professionalism.

In Estonia, teacher's professional development is based on international and state policies and frameworks. These documents outline the aims and objectives of CPD (continuous professional development) of Estonian teachers. The *Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020*, adopted by the Government of the Republic of Estonia in 2014, was developed by the Estonian Cooperation Assembly, Estonian Education Forum and the Ministry of Education and Research to define main strategic goals for education in general and teacher education in particular. Strategic goal 3 "Concordance of lifelong learning opportunities with the needs of labour market" stresses the importance of quality, flexible and diverse career services, increasing the number of specialists with "professional <...> qualifications in different age groups, and an increase in overall participation in lifelong learning across Estonia" (2014, p.5). Section 1.3 of the Strategy considers in detail the system of in-service training for teachers and places the main focus on reconsidering the role of teachers in creating a supportive learning environment where learner's development, potential and differences are valued and prioritised. Furthermore, a reasonable balance should be maintained between the in-service training offered

by the State, a school profile and teachers' CPD needs. To implement the system of in-service teacher training, "teacher education institutions will develop initial and in-service education curricula that support the objectives of the strategy and that are closely integrated with practical work" (ibid. p.9). The quality of such system of training and re-training shall be guaranteed by quality standards and only those CPD courses that comply with the requirements shall be funded by the State. Flexibility, innovative competence areas (e.g. educational technology, special needs, etc.), and alternative solutions for CPD (e.g. digital or work-based training) are the direction for teachers' retraining.

This strategy has served as the basis for the Estonian-wide programme *Competent and Motivated Teachers and Heads of Educational Institutions (Pädevad ja motiveeritud õpetajad ning haridusasutuste juhid*, 2015). The programme includes two key measures: 1) development of in-service teacher training system and opening of university-based teacher training competence centres; 2) increasing the attractiveness and valuing of teacher and school leader's profession. To realise the measures, corresponding activities shall be conducted in the following areas: development of teachers' methodological and subject competences, cooperation of education stakeholders, research and analysis of in-service training, updating quality assurance standards of CPD, etc.

The *Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020* is in line with the European Strategic Framework – *Education & Training 2020* (2009), which is the key EU document to define strategic goals of education, including teacher education and CPD. The key priorities for education and training by the year 2020 include lifelong learning, mobility, quality and efficiency of education and training, equity, social cohesion, active citizenship, creativity and innovation, entrepreneurship at all education stages.

The annual ET 2020 report composed by the Education and Training Monitor of the European Commission for Estonia in 2016 underlines the strategic vision of teachers and heads of schools working in Estonian schools in 2020 as "self-respecting, dignified, motivated and professional" (2016, p.17). The report also confirms that active enrolment in CPD courses is vital to all teachers and heads of schools.

The above-mentioned principles of teacher education have also been earlier formulated in *The European Profile for Language Teacher Education – A Frame of Reference* (2004), devised by the University of Southampton and supported by the European Commission, and are based on the expertise and experience of a range of European experts in language teacher education and European teacher education institutions. The report proposes a European Profile for language teacher pre- and in-service education in the 21st century, and among its guidelines for foreign language teacher education programmes, a particular focus is placed on integration of academic studies and practical experience, flexibility and modular delivery of training, quality assurance and ongoing systematic in-service training.

In-service Teacher Training Background Studies

Recently conducted studies into EFL in-service teacher training issues (e.g. Nicolaidis & Mattheoudakis, 2008; Çelik, 2016; Howard et al., 2016) highlight the importance of top-down and bottom-up cooperation among stakeholders in developing in-service training programmes to provide effective CPD for EFL teachers. One of the studies (Nicolaidis & Mattheoudakis, 2008) analyses three aspects of CPD courses: relevance of training to teachers' needs, the quality of materials offered to support trainings, and the efficacy of the subject matter of the courses. The researchers propose a "cascade model" for in-service EFL teacher training, i.e. the model which promotes active collaboration of all parties involved in the educational process (learners, teachers, administrators and policy-makers). The study also points out a relative neglect of EFL teacher continuous education in the European context. Çelik (2016) also underlines that CPD programmes for EFL teachers have to follow a new format that should allow for consideration of teachers' needs and concerns. This new format is based on two-way interaction among teachers

and in-service training providers and is receptive to individual teaching contexts and teachers' needs. Both studies agree that in-service teacher training has to be responsive to teachers' expectations and demands. EFL teacher training has also been monitored by the British Council, one of the key providers of in-service EFL teacher training worldwide. *A Comparative Study of English Language Teacher Recruitment, In-service Education and Retention in Latin America and the Middle East* (2016, p.50), produced by the British Council, reveals that there is no unanimous approach to CPD of EFL teachers in the monitored countries: "in some countries PD is a key part of ELT daily life, while in others it features rarely, often requiring the individuals themselves to pay to attend a local or international conference". This all makes a strong case for uniting efforts of educators in developing competitive systems of CPD courses.

In the Estonian context, the study *Teachers' In-service Training Needs (Õpetajate täiendusõppe vajadused, 2015)*, ordered by the Ministry of Education and Research, has examined the following issues of CPD in Estonia among others:

- reasons and needs for offering in-service training;
- obstacles and challenges of CPD;
- effectiveness of CPD courses;
- models, duration, time and organization;
- feedback from different parties involved in CPD;
- centralisation, networks and partnerships;
- long-term and practice-based training;
- competences and skills to be further developed.

The research has also revealed priority topics suggested by teachers to be addressed while organising CPD in Estonia: innovative teaching methods, information and communication technology (ICT), e-learning, active learning, special needs education, communication skills, conflict and classroom management. As confirmed by a previous Estonian research into teachers' CPD needs (Raik, Kostyukevich, Rootamm-Valter, 2013, p.121), "the priority should be given to specific study programmes aimed at the development of a particular component of the teachers' professional competence instead of offering programmes of a wide area profile". Hence, the needs of teachers have to be heard and addressed to develop quality subject- and competence-based CPD programmes for EFL teachers.

Research into EFL Teachers' CPD Needs in Estonia

In Estonia, there are two universities that provide pre-service EFL teacher training: Tallinn University and the University of Tartu. They also offer in-service teacher education in the areas of general pedagogy, psychology, ICT skills, assessment, inclusive education, etc. In spring term 2017, Tallinn University's in-service training schedule includes 13 CPD courses in the field of education, which cover such topics as special needs, supervision and coaching, reflection, inclusive education, and general pedagogy (*TLÜ Koolituskalender, 2017*). Likewise, the University of Tartu, in the academic year 2016/2017, offers 106 CPD courses in the field of educational sciences that focus on similar topics (e.g. inclusive education, ICT, general pedagogy, etc.) (*Täiendusõpperprogrammide Haridusteadused, 2017*). However, despite the impressive number of courses annually offered for in-service teacher training, none of them targets the needs of EFL teachers specifically (e.g. English language mastery, ELT didactics, culture and literature), with the exception of Narva College of the University of Tartu.

Due to its special geographical location in a multilingual border region of the EU, Narva College offers pre- and in-service EFL teacher training for multilingual schools. Each year, Narva College organises EFL teacher-training seminars on a variety of topics, such as authenticity in the EFL class (2016), student-centred methods of EFL instruction (2016), interactive strategies for teaching English (2015), English learning strategies (2015), English for the environment (2014), CLIL in English literature studies (2013). Another traditional biannual CPD event is an international ELT/CLIL conference organised since 2006 with the

support of the US Embassy in Tallinn and the British Council. The latest one held in spring 2017, “Frontiers in CLIL and ELT”, attracted more than 100 EFL teachers from schools in Estonia and neighbouring countries.

To further develop Narva College’s system of EFL in-service teacher training and to achieve a positive washback effect on EFL teacher education in Narva College, a research was conducted into EFL teachers’ needs in and expectations from CPD courses in the area of English language teaching and learning. Such research has never been conducted before; hence, in-service teacher training has been offered sporadically, without any particular system in place. While the need for such system based on teachers’ actual needs and expectations exists on policy-making level, there have been no solutions yet. The comparatively insignificant number of EFL teachers in Estonia ((1781 EFL teachers / 14581 total number of teachers in general secondary schools) (*Õpetajate arv ja ametikohtade arv kokku*, 2017)) may influence the interest of providers of CPD courses to target this specific group. That is why providers of CPD courses for teachers mainly target larger groups of participants and offer training in areas of general pedagogy and methodology. Therefore, subject-specific needs of teachers are not covered by such courses. The outcomes of the present research shall serve as a basis for mapping the needs and opportunities to create in-service training modules for EFL teachers.

Methodology of Research

The research, conducted in the academic year 2016/2017, had the following aims: to reveal CPD needs of EFL teachers in Estonia, to compare them against the CPD courses offered by leading teacher training universities in Estonia (Tallinn University and the University of Tartu), and to map the opportunities for further development of EFL in-service training programmes. However, the research does not aim to be representative and the results may not be generalizable, as the primary concern of the research is to acquire in-depth information from those who are authorised and willing to share information and reflect upon their needs in in-service EFL teacher training as part of CPD.

To collect the data, a survey among Estonian EFL teachers was conducted. The research used a non-probability purposive sampling, as the task was to access “knowledgeable” people (EFL teachers in Estonia) to acquire information about areas of EFL in-service teacher training as part of CPD. The maximum expected size of the sample was 1781 teachers (the total number of EFL teachers in Estonia, as of 2017) (*Õpetajate arv ja ametikohtade arv kokku*, 2017).

The survey was based on a semi-structured online questionnaire with closed-open questions. The questionnaire, which included seven questions to define EFL teachers’ professional background and in-service training needs, falls under three sections. The first section included closed-ended questions regarding EFL teachers’ professional profile: seniority, school level, school location, qualifications, country of origin of their pre-service education. The second and the third sections of the questionnaire to assess in-service training needs of the respondents consisted of multiple and open-ended questions, where EFL teachers were asked to rate how interested (*not interested, rather interested, very interested*) they were in certain areas of in-service training and to contribute their own suggestions for potential CPD courses. The areas of in-service training offered for teachers to rate included the following:

- English language studies (pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, speaking, listening, writing, reading)
- English language level/proficiency examinations (training for/about English level exams)
- Didactics of English language teaching (methods and techniques of ELT, resources, classroom management, etc.)
- Practical training (collegial feedback, individual and group reflection and supervision of one’s teaching, etc.)
- CLIL (content and language integrated learning to teach other subjects in English).

The choice of the above in-service training areas stems from the EFL teachers' professional profile (*The European Profile for Language Teacher Education – A Frame of Reference*, 2004; *European Framework for CLIL Teacher Education*, 2011; *Teacher's Occupational Standards*, 2013), which includes such fundamental teacher's competences as the target language competence (subject knowledge and skills) and methodological competence (subject didactics, assessment, reflection, materials design, classroom management, self-development, collaboration, etc.). The general pedagogical competence has been excluded on purpose as the survey targeted specially EFL teachers' needs, assuming that general pedagogical skills and knowledge are traditionally supported and developed by general pedagogical in-service courses, as shown above.

An invitation to participate in the survey was sent by e-mail to primary and secondary school headmasters and school head-teachers in Estonia, in total 540 schools. The questionnaire was also distributed electronically among the members of the Estonian Association of Teachers of English (EATE), and hard copies of the questionnaire were distributed during in-service training of EFL teachers in Narva College (October 2016). The objective factors limiting the real size of the sample resulted from "gatekeepers" – school masters and head teachers, who are in the position to decide what information should be forwarded to school staff.

Results of Research

The questionnaire was answered by 218 Estonian EFL teachers (12% of the total number of EFL teachers) from 111 schools (20% of the total number of schools). Teachers from all 15 counties of Estonia and all school levels (primary, secondary, upper-secondary schools) have contributed their responses. Teacher's professional background is defined on the basis of the length of their teaching experience (i.e. seniority), the nature and country of origin of their pre-service education. As for respondents' work experience, more than a third (35,8 %, n=218) have worked in schools longer than 20 years; another third (36.7%, n=218) have 1-10 years of teaching experience; teachers with 10-20 years of work experience make up a fifth of the sample (21.1%, n=218), and the smallest group of the respondents (6,4%, n=218) is represented by novice teachers (less than one year of teaching experience). The majority of EFL teachers (81%, n=218) have received their pre-service teacher education in Estonia and 19% have received their teaching qualifications in other countries (e.g. Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, UK). The qualifications held by the respondents are in the proportion of almost 50/50 with Master's degree against other qualifications (Bachelor's, professional higher education, vocational education).

The results of respondents' rating of these areas reveal that the respondents are interested in all the areas of professional development of EFL teachers, with ELT didactics being the most favoured by the respondents (122 – *very interested* respondents) and other areas being more or less equally valued (within the range of 74-96 *very interested* respondents). The following table demonstrates the distribution of respondents' ratings of the suggested in-service training areas.

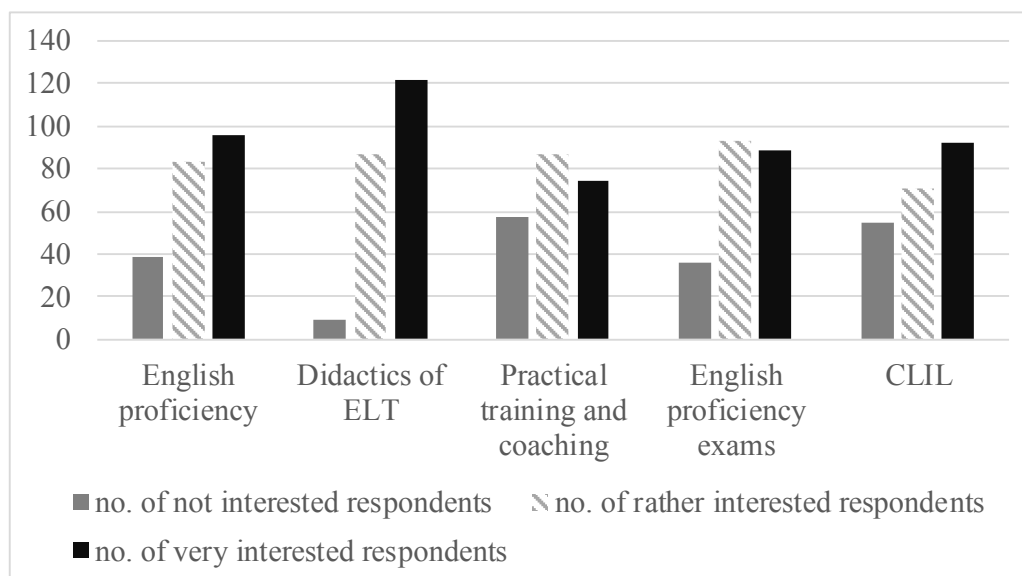


Figure 1: Number of respondents interested in suggested in-service training areas.

To the request to share their additional ideas on other potential in-service training topics not represented in the previous question, 75% or 163 respondents (n=218) have suggested a variety of ideas, which have been grouped under thematic areas. The following table summarises teachers' ideas as grouped in thematic areas and shows the number of mentions of each area.

Table 1. Proposed areas of interest in EFL in-service teacher training.

Proposed areas	Number of mentions
Teaching English with the help of ICT resources	32
Didactics and ELT methodology (e.g. drama, communicative approach and collaborative learning, project-based learning, flipped classroom, student-focused teaching)	22
British and American literature and British and American culture (e.g. historical background and political situation of the UK, culture, youth culture today)	18
English language mastery (e.g. recent changes and development in the English language, public speaking)	16
Teaching students with special needs (e.g. dyslexia, ADHD, emotional and behavioural difficulties)	10
Motivating learners	9
Working with mixed-ability groups	8
Classroom management	7
International and state exams	6
Using authentic materials in the EFL classroom (videos, newspapers, magazines, music, etc).	6
Syllabus design and development of study materials	6
Theory of testing (how to make tests, exams, quizzes) student assessment and the development of tests	6
Teaching young learners	5
Collaboration	3
Coaching and supervision	2
CLIL and immersion	2
Teaching a multi-cultural and multi-lingual class	1
Developing learner's autonomy	1
Business English	1
Psychology	1
Translation/interpretation	1

Not surprisingly, the use of modern technology tops the list of the proposed areas, with the biggest number of mentions (32). Though both teacher training universities in Estonia offer ICT skills development courses, EFL teachers apparently still require specific knowledge and skills of how to support their language classes with ICT. Teachers' interest in ELT didactics and language proficiency is once again confirmed by a considerable number of the respondents (18 and 16 correspondingly) who suggested these areas for CPD. One more top area of interest, mentioned by 22 respondents, relates to literature and British and American studies, which highlights the importance of the inclusion of content-based teaching into EFL programmes. The diversity of opinions has to be considered to target individual needs of teachers while planning CPD programmes for EFL teachers.

Discussion

While previous researches have highlighted the importance of considering teachers' needs in planning and offering in-service training (Nicolaidis & Mattheoudakis, 2008; Çelik, 2016; Howard et al., 2016; Raik, Kostyukevich, Rootamm-Valter, 2013; *Õpetajate täiendusõppe vajadused*, 2015), subject-specific in-service training needs of teachers of English and the impact of their professional profile on their needs and interests have not been analysed neither in Europe nor in Estonia.

The present research has revealed that teachers' background, if influences, then insignificantly teachers' interest in in-service teacher training. It may be assumed that neither the seniority of EFL teachers nor their professional qualification (Master's, Bachelor's, professional higher education), the region where their schools are located (centre or periphery of Estonia, town or village school) nor their school level (primary, secondary, upper-secondary) play a considerable role in teachers' interest to participate in CPD courses aimed at EFL teachers.

As the results of the survey demonstrate, ELT didactics remains one of the most topical areas of EFL teachers' professional development to meet the requirements of the new teaching and learning paradigm, i.e. learner-centred teaching (*Estonian National Curricula*, 2011, *Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020*, 2014), as well as to learn about new technology-based teaching and learning. Estonian educational world is rather competitive and teachers are required to update their knowledge and skills on a regular basis. Therefore, practical training, coaching and supervision, collaboration and collegial feedback are also attractive for EFL teachers as instruments of their CPD.

English language mastery as such is also an important area of EFL teachers' development, especially if they are not native speakers of English (e.g. in Narva, the third largest city in Estonia and the location of Narva College, there are no native speakers of English working as EFL teachers in schools). The importance of language proficiency improvement is also supported with teachers' interest in receiving additional training (with relevant certification) of how to prepare for, administer and assess English language level exams (e.g. IELTS, FCE, CAE, etc.).

And finally, teachers' interest to learn more about CLIL methodology and its implementation in the EFL class is on the same level with other CPD areas suggested in the survey, which reflects a general trend in Estonia and the EU to transfer language learning into content and language integrated learning. Estonia has an extensive and resultative experience in offering language immersion classes, though mostly in Estonian, since 1998. With the gained experience and expertise, the focus is now also being gradually placed on CLIL in English, and this requires new skills and knowledge from EFL teachers.

Teachers' impressive willingness to contribute to the list of potential CPD topics for EFL teachers confirms their enthusiasm to develop professionally (75% of the respondents (n=218) answered the optional question to propose other areas of CPD). The diversity of the topics suggested proves that an individual, contextualised and needs-based approach should be employed while devising CPD courses, modules and programmes for EFL teachers.

The research results allow to propose a module for EFL in-service teacher training in Estonia, which might be included into the system of in-service EFL teacher education. This module shall be based on three key pillars (i.e. ELT didactics and practical training, English language mastery, and content and language integrated learning). As general issues of pedagogy and psychology (e.g. students with special needs, gifted students, multilingual and multicultural classes, etc.) are universal for all teachers and have been already extensively covered by in-service training courses offered by two teacher education universities in Estonia, they are not included in the module presented below.

Table 2. An in-service training module for EFL teachers.

An in-service training module for EFL teachers	
<p>Aim: to update teachers' knowledge and skills of ELT methodology; to develop English language mastery; to introduce CLIL methodology for content teaching in English.</p> <p>Learning outcomes: upon completion of the module, participants</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> are aware of new trends in ELT methodology and can use them in the classroom are aware of changes and varieties in today English and English language testing standards are able to implement CLIL methodology in ELT classes 	
ELT Didactics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New trends in ELT methodology (e.g. flipped classroom, learners' autonomy, project-based learning, enterprising education) Integrating ICT in the EFL classroom (e.g. language learning apps, web-based classroom, etc.) Classroom management and motivation (e.g. teaching mixed-ability classes, collaborative learning, experiential learning, etc.) Materials design and student assessment (e.g. using authentic materials, authentic assessment, formative assessment, self and peer-assessment, test design, etc.)
English proficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development of English skills (e.g. vocabulary and pronunciation, recent changes in the English language) Varieties of English International and state language examinations (e.g. preparation, administration, assessment, certification).
CLIL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Core features of CLIL CLIL methodology Content teaching in English: Literature in English History, society and culture of English-speaking countries Subject teaching in English

The above evidence-based module can be used as a basis for tailor-made CPD courses for EFL teachers on condition that a preliminary study into the teaching context of a particular school/target audience's needs has been conducted. The module answers the requirements of the systematic approach to in-service teacher training defined in Estonian education policy documents.

Conclusions

In-service EFL teacher education, being the main tool of professional development of EFL teachers, has to be addressed and developed on evidence basis and in cooperation with all stakeholders. Nowadays education policies aimed at developing systematic and sustainable in-service teacher training, which answers needs and demands of the rapidly changing 21st century educational context, require from teacher education providers (both pre-service and

in-service) to face the challenges and devise corresponding courses / modules / programmes. Teacher education universities offer a wide range of in-service teacher training courses, but as the Estonian evidence shows, these tend to be of general nature to involve all teachers' groups. Thus, there is a particular need to target subject-specific competences, including English language teaching. Previous researches highlight the importance of a receptive bottom-up approach while devising tailor-made EFL in-service teacher training programmes on the basis of EFL teachers' needs. The present research suggests a sample module in such a programme based on the results of a survey into Estonian EFL teachers' needs and includes, alongside with traditional EFL teachers' CPD areas (i.e. methodology and language mastery), an additional area of content and language integrated learning, which is in line with international educational trends. The results of the research can be further applied within the context of pre-service EFL teacher training.

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