CRITICAL FRIEND GROUP AND ITS IMPACT ON TEACHERS AND THE LEARNING PROCESS: A COLLECTIVE CASE STUDY ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

CRITICAL FRIEND GROUP AND ITS IMPACT ON TEACHERS AND THE LEARNING PROCESS: A COLLECTIVE CASE STUDY ANALYSIS

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The purpose of the research study was to gain insight on the perceptions of native and non-native EFL teachers towards in-service teacher education (INSET) through Critical Friend Group (CFG) in a language preparatory program, at a private high school in the western part of Turkey. Specifically, the study attempted to identify the specific aspects of CFG which enhanced teacher-learning and finally, better understand their perceptions towards reflective practice. The participants were four EFL teachers offering English lessons in a preparatory at a new private high school. Data were collected through interviews, video recordings, and reflective essays. The findings revealed that participating in CFG has enhanced teacher-learning through collaboration as it became the vehicle that facilitated teachers to alter their classroom practices, which in return, enhanced the learning process in their classrooms.

Keywords: Critical Friend Group (CFG), Sociocultural Theory, Professional Development, English as a Foreign Language (EFL), In-service Teacher Education (INSET), Reflective Practice

ÖZ

ELEŞTİREL ARKADAŞ GRUBU'NUN (CFG) ÖĞRETMENİN ÖĞRENME SÜRECİ ÜZERİNDEKİ ETKİSİ: KOLEKTİF VAKA İNCELEMESİ

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21. yüzyıl eğitimsel kavramlar içerisinde öğretmenlerin devamlı olarak profesyonel bir gelişime ihtiyaç duymaları önemli bir kavram olarak görülmektedir. Bununla birlikte, öğretmen eğitimi için seçilen geleneksel yöntemler her zaman problemlere değinemeyebilir ya da öğretmen-öğrenci için her zaman uygulanamayabilir. Bu düşünceyle, bu araştırmanın amacı, Türkiye'nin batısında yer alan özel bir lisenin dil hazırlık programındaki Eleştirel Arkadaş Grubu (CFG) kavramı yoluyla hizmet verilen öğretmen eğitimine (INSET) yönelik 4 EFL öğretmen algısı ile ilgili kazanımları elde etmesidir. Özellikle, Eleştirel Arkadaş Grubu (CFG)'nun belirli bakış açılarını saptamak için girişimde bulunmuş bu çalışma, öğretmen öğrenimini geliştirmiş ve son olarak öğretmenin profesyonel gelişimini engellemiş baskıları daha iyi anlamıştır. Görüşmelerle, video kayıtlarıyla ve yansıtıcı makalelerle veriler toplanmıştır. Öğretmenlerin sınıf içi uygulamalarını pozitif yönde değiştirmek için işini kolaylaştıran bir araç olmuştur. Eleştirel Arkadaş Grubu'na katılımın işbirliği sayesinde öğretmen öğrenimini geliştirmiştir ve de öğretmenlerin mesleki öğrenme sürecini ilerletmiştir.

v

Anahtar Kelimeler; Eleştirel Arkadaş Grubu (CFG), Sosyokültürel Teori, Profesyonel Gelişme, Yabancı Dil olarak İngilizce (EFL), Hizmet verilen Öğretmen Eğitimi INSET), Yansıtıcı Uygulama

To my dear wife Gülşah Bintaş and mother Ersin Bintaş

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CFG	Critical Friend Group
INSET	In-service Teacher Training
ISTE	In-service Teacher Education
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ESL	English as a Second Language
LTE	Language Teacher Education
L2	Second Language
TTT	Teacher Talking Time

Chapter 1

Introduction

Teachers are the most important asset in the development process of a society as they are the ones shaping the future generations with their knowledge and experience. There are many requisite certifications, exams, and qualifications required to become an EFL teacher. Farrell (2013) states that many experienced teachers have negative feelings about professional development courses because they are imposed on the teachers by the administration, and most of the time teachers are not consulted about the topics of these courses. Richards and Farrell (2005) emphasizes the need for a bottom-up approach to professional development where teachers decide on how and what they want to develop since different needs unfold at different stages in the teacher career cycle. Altun (2011) suggested in his article that the world has been rapidly changing, thus the need for teachers to keep up with this pace in terms of the changing requirements in teaching skills. Consequently, the subject of teaching language itself has become dynamic, ever developing, and continuous. Teachers need to develop and adapt their core skills in parallel with changing student profiles, curriculum as well as the technology and the world itself. Unfortunately, EFL teachers in Turkey do not receive adequate in-service teacher education (ISTE) unless they are intrinsically motivated and have attended ELT seminars and workshops outside of school. Furthermore, Küçüksüleymanoğlu (2006) states that teachers suffer from many insufficiencies regarding variety, sustainability, time limits, and implementation.

The responsibility falls on the shoulders of the in-service teachers to collaborate and exchange their knowledge and experiences. Thus, this can be achieved through INSET by means of Critical Friend Groups (CFG).

1.1 Statement of Problem

The aim of INSET is to always keep teachers up-to-date with developing strategies and teaching methods and to make teacher-learners benefit from their collaboration, so they can better their collective knowledge and pedagogical skills. However, we see that not many institutions offer INSET in their schools and the

authorities do not attach the required importance in implementing these programs. Moreover, teachers are unaware of the significance of how INSET program contribute to their professional development. Many high school EFL teachers do not have the motivation to participate in such programs as they do not have the time, nor the energy to work efficiently while being underpaid. Professional development is essential part of the teacher career cycles as it helps teachers who want to improve themselves in the field of education. As mentioned above by Farrell (2013) many teachers have a negative feeling about these INSET programs because they are not actively part of the process. CFG aims to provide a bottom-up process as they are not mandated, and the participants dictate the topics they wish to be discussed. Although CFG has become a popular way of professional development around the world, there needs to be more research on implementing CFG, especially in the context of K-12 schools in Turkey.

In this study, therefore, the researcher determined that CFG can serve as vehicle to enhance professional development as EFL teachers practice reflective activities while focusing on actual issues that hinder the learning process in their respected classrooms.

1.2 Purpose of Study

The present study aims to gain insight on the perceptions of teachers towards CFG to see how it could be used as a vehicle to assist teachers in resolving classroom issues while trying to understand what aspects of the CFGs, if any, could assist the learning process for EFL teachers. Finally, the researcher wanted to better understand the obstacles teachers face when these sorts of support groups are implemented.

1.3 Research Questions

The following research questions were addressed in this study:
1. What were the perceptions of teachers towards practicing reflective teaching methods through CFG?
2. What aspects of CFG assisted in the professional development of the participants?
3. What were the challenges experienced by the teachers and how were they overcome?

4. What sort of change has occurred through CFG that would not have been visible with other forms of INSET?

1.4 Significance of the Study

The present study is based on the idea put forward by Vygotsky's sociocultural theory that (1978,1981,1986; cited in Johnson & Golombek, 2013) suggested human cognition to be intrinsically social since it is acquired from social interaction which is then personalized as a psychological tool for thinking. In parallel, Roberts (2016) suggested that the nature of teacher development is closely affected by social environment. As a result, teacher learning naturally recognizes the interplay between the teacher's social environment and individual dynamics. Therefore, there is a need for teacher training programs that allow educators to interact and learn from the experiences of one another. To this end, the present study aims to use CFG as a platform where teachers reflect on classroom issues while trying to solve them collaboratively.

1.5 Definitions of Terms

Critical Friends Group (CFG): A CFG is a professional learning community consisting of approximately 8-12 educators who come together voluntarily at least once a month for about 2 hours. Group members are committed to improving their practice through collaborative learning.

INSET (In-service Teacher Training): INSET can be defined as education and training activities engaged in by teachers after their initial professional certification, and intended primarily to improve their professional knowledge, skills and attitudes to be more effective and efficient while teaching.

National School Reform Faculty (NSRF): The National School Reform Faculty (NSRF) is a professional development initiative that focuses on increasing student achievement through professional learning communities called Critical Friends Groups, or CFGs. The NSRF was developed from the programme founded by the Annenberg Institute for School Reform in 1995.

Reflective Practice: Reflective practice is a process in which participants can develop a greater level of self-awareness about the nature and impact of their performance, an awareness that creates opportunities for professional growth and development.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 Teachers as Learners

Roberts (2016) suggests that there are two basic factors intertwined when considering language teaching education (LTE) from a social learning point of view. These factors are combined to give reason for the relationships between a person's reaction to how they learn: (a) psychological portrayal of other people and (b) one's own roles in role. He adds that learning to teach is believed to engage the adoption of a social role, a course of describing oneself as a teacher in accordance with our representation of others and the conventional views of teaching. As a result, the nature of teacher development is put forward to closely be affected by social environment.

According to Roberts, although there are some perceptual differences between the state sector and the ELT private sector regarding the role and effects of schools. The teacher is regarded as a key player in social processes since they shape generations and help students build a career. In order to recognize the influences of society on teaching and its characteristics, effects of occupational, and social rules on engaging teacher development, the teacher's work should be examined from a social standpoint. Roberts suggested that individual growth is an exchange between social powers within and beyond the school. He states that it is the personal expectations, accumulation of knowledge, and values of the teacher that leads to this growth; thus, LTE naturally recognizes the interplay between the teacher's social environment and internal development.

Feiman-Nemser and Floden, (1986) put forward that teacher learning by socialization disseminates beliefs concerning the nature of the occupation and the knowledge required for teaching; therefore, occupational beliefs such as appropriate ways of teaching and rewarding aspects of teaching and socialization among teachers constitute teaching cultures. Richards and Lockhart (1994) similarly suggested that language teachers' beliefs are derived from social and individual factors i.e. experiences as a student, personality preferences, professional knowledge by means of teaching public educational theories obtained by courses or reading.

These studies and findings regarding teacher learning fundamentally relates to Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1978, 1981, 1986; as cited in Johnson & Golombek, 2013) suggesting that human cognition development is intrinsically social since it is derived from participation in social interaction which is then internalized as a psychological tool for thinking. Vygotsky's theory can further be discussed as an indirect transformation from inter-psychological into intra-psychological. When L2 teachers are considered, it is proposed that they flourish through their experiences as learners, cultural practices of teacher education, and features of teaching context. These experiences are placed within larger sociocultural histories but assigned in distinctive ways since each teacher and classroom is unique.

However, teacher education programs are discussed as lacking of longstanding effects to help teachers move beyond teaching methods they were taught when they were students or implementation of what they learnt during teacher education programs (Ball & Forzani, 2010; Cochran-Smith, Feiman-Nemser, & McIntyre 2008; Edwards & D'Archy, 2004; Kennedy, 2008; as cited in Johnson & Golombek, 2013). Although teacher training programs have mandatory lectures, seminars, panels, and workshops imposed on teachers to help them be a better teacher, developing L2 teacher/teaching expertise takes extended and continued engagement in social processes of becoming and being an L2 teacher.

Vygotsky submitted that learning in the everyday world evolves from usual, solid practices and prompt socialization resulting in everyday concepts in parallel with the idea of teacher education programs as the best environment for efficient L2 teacher learning by means of deliberate, ordered discipline. School learning is defined by Vygotsky as academic concepts that are more systematic and generalized knowledge allowing learners to think in ways beyond their everyday engagement. However, neither of the concepts were privileged by Vygotsky due to being insufficient in terms of self-regulated learning.

Vygotsky further criticizes direct teaching of concepts due to its impracticability and ineffectiveness. A teacher using a system based on rote-learning can only simulate knowledge of what should be learnt as a concept; however, the ultimate purpose of concept development is to blend academic concepts and everyday

concepts as true concepts (Vygotsky, 1986, p.150; as cited in Johnson & Golombek, 2013). When teachers internalize true concepts by means of formal schooling, a number of important outcomes unfold. Teachers' indirect knowledge achieved by a schooling background is transformed by true concepts as psychological tools. Thus, they reconsider their thoughts on teaching and student learning. Accordingly, they begin to regard classroom environment and teaching/learning from a different perspective. Karpov (2003) discussed a similar thought by stating that when teachers think in concepts, they can justify and perform their teaching productively and suitably for different pedagogical goals in several instructional situations; therefore, they can express reasonable groundings for their teaching.

Similarly, according to Kennedy (1999), expertise in teaching comes out as teachers combine expert knowledge and their own experiential knowledge. The first is discussed to be suggestive, recorded, coded in textbooks and publicly accepted as a method of understanding phenomena within a specific discourse community as in academic concepts and the latter is achieved through experiences of teachers as learners as in everyday concept.

Furthermore, when this perspective is taken into consideration, teacher learning may not be implied to directly internalize expert knowledge from the outside in. Teachers generate expert knowledge according to their own needs as well as classroom needs and thus, shape instruction suitable for their goals (Ball, 2000). By this way, teachers settle themselves as active users and generators of theory in accordance with their own ways, needs and as suitable for their own instructional scope (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993).

When it comes to LTE, the engagement in their teaching practices is believed to be an internalized psychological tool since the way teachers think is based on the agency and their own purposes as well as restrictions from within professional environment (Feryok, 2012). Social/professional environments where teachers and their educators have come from and work in should be examined to have a better understanding of teacher education comprehensively. According to Freeman and Johnson (1998), schools are defined as the tangible and sociocultural environment

where teaching, learning and learning to teach take place whereas schooling acts as the sociocultural and historical series of actions in schools over time.

When these interpretations are taken into consideration, it can be implied that the social engagement that takes place during teacher education practices is inseparable from sociocultural environments and values. In parallel with Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, teaching should be regarded as a life-long learning process fed by socialization, cultural aspects and inputs achieved during formal teacher education. Vygotsky's expression "through others, we become ourselves" is the best to conceptualize social learning of L2 teachers (Vygotsky, 1997, p.105). Johnson (1999) defines L2 teacher/teaching expertise as reasoning teaching which means the reflection of complex ways that teachers evaluate how to teach a specific subject to a specific learner group at a specific time in a specific school environment.

To broaden the subject of LTE, Johnson's (2009) theory of knowledge base of L2 teacher education can be discussed. The content of LTE programs, the pedagogies instilled in and the institutional delivery methods of both fundamentally shapes teacher thinking. He states that LTE consists of dynamic social interactions, assignments and practices where teachers are expected to show professional development by engaging in INSET. Similarly, specific activities preferred by teacher educators are found to be based on social, political, economic, and cultural background of the teachers. Thus, the development of knowledge within the framework of language teaching is ingrained in and emerges out of "located L2 teacher education" requiring engagement of practices in accordance with the setting and circumstances where they live and work (Johnson, 2006, p.245).

Furthermore, Bell and Gilbert (1994) supported Johnson's proposition by discussing that each teacher's development is affected by their social elements such as the structure of education system, school management's attitude, flexibility of the curriculum, social values, accepted teaching methods and assumptions about knowledge nature, and availability of development opportunities. Therefore, it is put forward that teacher's professional and personal lives are to be navigated in such environments since teacher settings differ along with previously acquired background knowledge.

To go into more detail, it can be suggested that relationships and social exchange are also one of the affecting elements when teacher development and work-life is considered. Since the sense of self, privately and at work, is shaped by relationships, it can be implied that teachers' sense of self as a teacher is defined by their socialization and relationships with learners, colleagues and superiors.

Kubanyiova and Feryok (2015) suggested that LTE programs are to constitute several opportunities for teacher engagement in theoretical and pedagogical practices in their own social environment since the way teachers learn to teach is fundamentally formed by participation in specific sociocultural practices and contexts. While prevalent apprenticeship activities are likely to cover teaching a class, observing other teachers, self-observation, the use of teaching journals, or micro-teaching have facilitated to develop these practices by uncovering teachers' beliefs, thoughts, feelings, concerns and own methods as they engage in the processes of learning to teach as well as promoting socialization during planning, teaching and reflecting on teaching (Johnson & Golombek, 2013).

2.2 Learning through Reflection

Teacher education has been affected greatly by discussions on reflection, progressive education and personal experience by Dewey (1978), one of the chief intellectuals of experiential learning. Dewey's thoughts have shaped schooling and teacher education by providing a basis for later progressive and person-centered learning methods since he defined reflection as methodical, intentional, definitive and critical thought feeding psychological and moral development.

According to Dewey, reflective thought emerges when a situation proposing alternative solutions is present or interrupts normal activity as a perplexity. Reflective thought has five stages as feeling of discrepancy, observation to define difficulty, cultivation of different suggestions to solve the problem, thinking through the indications of suggestions comprehensively to select the best for solution, and observation to confirm the solution and adoption as personal knowledge. It can be suggested that Dewey's reflection theory can be well adapted to LTE since it contributes to personal development by enabling problems to be reframed in various ways where a wider range of alternative solutions are present and thus, contributing to

broaden perspective. Furthermore, Schön (1987) supported reflective thought by suggesting that professional expertise means the capacity for offering a quick, appropriate and creative solution when there is perplexity.

When the theories discussed above are taken into consideration, a few teaching practices can be implied for L2 teacher education programs. Bailey (1990, p.218) suggested to benefit from journals/diaries since they are effective to keep track of self-observations and observing others to examine teaching methods and form a basis for future reference for improvement and adaptation. It is suggested that this method can be enriched if shared with and/or commented by other teachers since collaboration enables quick access to alternative perspectives.

Gebhard (2009) and Fanselow (1988) stated that self-observation in teacher education programs can enable teachers to achieve a wider understanding of their teaching by means of non-critical observation. By observing their own teaching, teachers can assess and evaluate their own performance and focus on areas to improve by identifying strong and weak points (Richards & Lockhart, 1996). Yet, it should be noted that self-observation has disadvantages as well. It may not keep teachers away enough from teaching to reflect comprehensively, they may end up with only one perspective (Fanselow, 1988).

Richards and Lockhart (1996) further suggested observation of other teachers in LTE programs. Even though being observed has disturbing effects on people, observation, taking notes, assessing and evaluating other teachers and learners in terms of their attitudes, mimics and reactions can enrich professional development since it will provide details that are missed out when teaching as well as a broader and objective perspective in teaching.

Microteaching is another practice put forward by Wallace (1991) for LTE programs in terms of developing empirical knowledge of professional action in a disciplined and dynamic way. Gathering theory with practice, microteaching consists of preparing short lessons, delivering instructions and managing class for demonstrating specific skills and receiving feedback from instructors and peers. Microteaching is believed to be beneficial for novice teachers, in particular, since it

contributes multiple perspectives by feedbacks, provides opportunity to be critically assessed and therefore, constitutes a valuable process before teaching actual learners.

In a nutshell, it could be implied from the literature above that LTE is a dynamic phenomenon that alters according to the teacher's social environment and individual dynamics. Therefore, rote-learning of concepts could be used as a foundation but should be blended with everyday concepts while using reflection as the tool for assessment. Since each teacher has an arsenal of tools to penetrate these challenges in their own unique way, it is best for teacher to collaborate and share their experiences. Vygotsky's expression "through others, we become ourselves" (1997, p.105) sums up the importance of social learning. Therefore, the learning process is best practiced in a collaborative environment where teacher learners do not feel threatened and are able to enhance each other through collaboration and collegiality with a checks and balances system of reflective teaching methods in hand.

2.3 INSET through CFGs: Ideals, Benefits, and Problems

Altun (2011) expresses that the education process does not have an endpoint in teachers' lives, especially for the EFL teachers; thus, language is constantly evolving and developing concepts, aside from the technological and sociocultural changes in the world. He adds that one of the most important supporters for EFL teachers in their career development path are their colleagues who face the same problems and who have the required background to solve these issues and take their teaching skills one step further.

INSET is deemed as an efficacious way of practice which helps teachers to enlarge their know-how, experience, teaching skills and motivation in a way that may result in a more fruitful education for student teachers. It has also been defined by The Education Information Network in the European Union (EURYDICE) as; "a variety of activities and practices in which teachers become involved in order to broaden their knowledge, improve their skills and assess and develop their professional approach" (Perron, 1991, cited in Bayrakçı, 2009).

According to the studies of Freeman (1989) and Joyce & Showers (1989), the steps taken into INSET resulted in positive changes in teachers in terms of both

professional and personal development by improving their constructive approaches and self-confidence; enhancing their insights and information about newly introduced theories and curriculum; and advancing their teaching skills.

In the past years the field of education, in parallel to Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, has been fostering the concept of teachers coming together for personal and professional growth. Such groups go by many different names, which often reflect the focus of the group. Thus, in the current study the term 'Critical Friend Group' was used as the objective was to reflect on classroom issues while trying to enhance professional development through the help of others; whereas, traditional professional development has been focusing on a more 'drive-by' approach where teacher trainers take a didactical approach to teacher training.

2.4 Guidelines of Implementing Critical Friends Group

Critical Friends Group (CFG) is a registered trademark of the NSRF® (National School Reform Faculty) organization that consists of 5-12 members whose aim is to improve their practice through collaborative learning and structured interactions. The Annenberg Institute originally developed the term CFG for School Reform at Brown University in 1994 to improve collegial dialogue amongst K-12 teachers and administrators. McKenzie & Carr-Reardon (2003) defined CFGs as the communities of peer teachers where no-one is bound by hierarchical statuses and where everyone shares their ideas and experiences in a democratic, reflective and collaborative way.

Günbay and Mede (2017) stated that CFG was an ongoing process that contained elements of collaboration, equity, questioning, feedback and most importantly reflection that will provide teachers with a platform to learn from each other. As they mentioned in their study regarding the implementation of CFGs in schools that the model was deemed to be the most effective and sustainable medium for INSET and development of practices. However, what should we take into consideration when we decide on establishing such training groups?

CFGs are constructed with the expectations of participants in mind. The main reasons for these groups to be established are commonly categorized as two basic needs of teachers: emotional support and professional support. Teachers come together

and share both personal and professional concerns with their colleagues who most probably suffer from the same issues. It is then they can come up with solutions to overcome these problems together. This sense of collegiality helps overcome the feeling of being isolated from other teachers and gives way to inclination of teacher network (Oliphant, 1997).

Another important thing when starting a teacher support group is to decide how and how many members should be selected. Member selection actually plays an essential role in the organization of these groups. According to the suggestion of Kirk & Walter (1981), the groups are formed in two types: topical groups whose members are selected if they are interested in that topic, and groups formed according to membership criteria, such as teachers of the same grades. In order to create a more functional and effective group, the group members should be chosen amongst the teachers who have similar knowledge background and competency, and yet have different interests, points of view and opinions. This would enable interactive communication in the group while avoiding a situation where one member spends his or her invaluable time educating another member rather than developing together.

It was recommended to organize these groups with a minimum of 5 and a maximum of 12 participants because; "too many members make it easy for some shy or inhibited members to blend into the background and possibly evolve into dissatisfied and/or angry group members" (Kirk & Walter, 1981). Therefore, even if the large groups may be better in terms of information diversity, some members may be ignored and stop participating in the group. To ensure that these groups accomplish their foundational goals, selecting too many members should be avoided. Moreover, if there are already too many members in a group, dividing these into subgroups with fewer participants may also be an option (Wolff & Vera, 1989).

Assembling these groups is the key aspect to success as there are many alternative ways in which these groups can be formed. In school-based groups, the meetings are generally led by the assigned teacher trainer. If the group is to be planned independently by the teachers, the principal matter to decide on is whether or not these meetings will have a leader, or will the duties be shared by the members in a democratic way. Kirk and Walter (1981) strongly argue that a democratic approach should be

adopted for teacher groups and they recommend refraining from groups where there is a self-delegated leader trying to dominate the group. Plumb (1988) suggests that her group was successful because all the responsibilities and duties were shared fairly by the group members and in her words, it was "organized by teachers for teachers". However, as there are certain tasks that should be performed by one person during the meetings, it may be difficult to share every task equally. The solution for this issue, found by The Philadelphia Teachers' Learning Cooperative (1984), may be an effective method. They elect a chairperson to manage meeting planning, notetaking, and presentation delivery. This person is rotated at certain intervals so that every participant can shoulder the group responsibilities.

After the formation of the group and the short-term or long-term goals are specified, the most important thing for a CFG to succeed is to make a solid plan on which activities will be performed around which topics and how they will be performed. There are countless activities that can be performed in CFGs, but of course, the key issue is to use time effectively and looking out for the positive outcomes of these activities; so that the group members feel productive and motivated when they leave the meeting.

The activities performed by a CFG should include sharing ideas/experiences, providing feedback, setting certain goals, putting heads together for problem-solving, introducing new techniques and information, experimentation with new methods and evaluating them, research and of course socializing with peers.

The number of activities that can be performed by INSET through development groups is countless. Below, are some effective suggestions made by the well-known researchers in the literature:

Table 1: Activities for CFG

- Recording observations of a learning and teaching activity in one's class in a "learning log" (Armour, 1985).
- Taking part in peer observation. Recording your class to a video and bringing the video to the meeting where it can be discussed by the group (Joyce & Murphy, 1989).
- Launching the meetings with refreshments and sparing time for group members to socialize (Paquette, 1987).
- Using the method of "staff review" where the teacher describes one of his/her students and brings examples of that student's work to discuss problems with the group and benefit from their recommendations (Philadelphia Teachers' Learning Cooperative, 1984).
- Using "reflection" method for brainstorming on a chosen one-word issue which is related to a problem deemed important by the group. Group members think about the chosen concept and reflect their ideas and feelings on the paper; then discuss them all together (Philadelphia Teachers' Learning Cooperative, 1984).
- Bringing in speakers to discuss selected topics (Raiser, 1987).
- Choosing related articles to be read at home by the members and then discussing this article in the meetings. Sharing a teaching technique one uses in the class so that others can try that and share feedback. Spending some time in a more casual environment like a cafe or a bar so that the teachers can have a more informal communication and socialize. (Wolf & Vera, 1989).

It may also be that many other activities may be developed depending on the creativity and proactivity of the group members. However, when trying to perform these activities in CFG meetings, following certain guidelines may smooth the practice. The essential ones were listed in the book written by Crookes (2003) and cited below:

Table 2: Strategies for CFG

- Don't spend too much time on complaints, particularly those of one person. Focus on "achievements and accomplishments" as well. Offer feedback that is supportive. Remember that the purpose of the group is not to provide therapy for personal problems for which professional assistance might be advisable (Kirk & Walter, 1981).
- Talk in the meeting should be a formal discussion, not informal teachers' lounge chat (Philadelphia Teachers' Learning Cooperative, 1984).
- Focus on the practical: Try new ideas instead of just talking about them (Plumb, 1988)
- Focus on offering support and encouragement to each other in solving problems, rather than on complaining. (Raiser, 1987).

One should also bear in mind that these groups should not be too informal, and the members should enjoy being a part of it. The teachers participating in these groups should not feel like they are in an obligatory service but should feel that they are developing themselves shoulder to shoulder as part of a strong community. If a CFG is structured around the above-mentioned guidelines, there is no reason for it not to be successful if the participants are willing to be better off together.

2.5 Benefits of INSET Programs through Critical Friends Groups

INSET and development programs are beneficial for educators especially for EFL teachers when implemented under the right conditions. Teaching a foreign language is a perplexing task to accomplish as the subject being taught has neither limitations, formulas, nor an endpoint. Thus, the educators should always keep themselves current with the latest information and techniques used to teach/learn the subject matter.

At this point, we need to make a distinction between training and development. According to Freeman (1989), while training helps novice teachers improve

themselves in the intended subjects through the medium of practices that were set as a guide whereas development requires a long-term dedication, self-evaluation, and experience in the field. Therefore, it could be said that traditional training programs provide the primary education for the novice teachers while CFGs offer long-term development for both novice and experienced teachers.

In consonance with research conducted on the topic of INSET through CFGs, teachers participating in these activities are benefiting from being on the same boat with their colleagues as they share their experiences while trying to collaboratively overcome the obstacles on this lifelong journey. The results of the surveys gained thanks to the teachers who participated in these groups clearly present the positive outcomes of supporting and sustaining these groups in or out of the school. These positive outcomes include; gaining a greater awareness, increased motivation, better teaching, benefits to students, the joy of sharing, connection to others, new ways of thinking, and empowerment (Oliphant, 1997).

In a recent study, Peterson-Veatch (2007) captures the CFG model and its effects with the following chart:
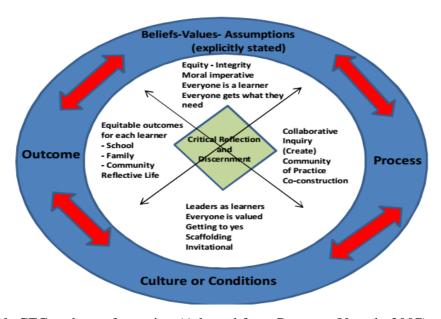

Figure 1: CFG and transformation (Adapted from Peterson-Veatch, 2007)

Perhaps, the most important harvest that an EFL teacher gets by being a member of a CFG and participating in the meetings and activities is gaining a greater

sense of professionalism and self-awareness. This is achieved through reviewing and reflecting on teaching and advising other members on problematic issues, while simultaneously asking colleagues for their opinions and suggestions. As a result of these groups, teachers look at their work from the lens of other teachers and evaluate different ideas and suggestions regarding what can be done in the classroom and how, rather than continuing theory-based education in their own patterns.

In another study, Atay (2007) stated in her paper that teachers were able to put theory into practice and provide solutions for the problems they had been facing by gaining greater awareness of the problems. They were able to find solutions through collaboration and collegiality. As a result, teachers would feel more motivated about their profession and the way they provided education for their students. Benefitting from the ideas, needs, and experience of their peer teachers would result in developing a sense of ownership and adaptation of innovative ideas by the group members (Bax, 1997; Wolter, 2000). This would allow the teachers to embrace new ways of thinking about new teaching skills and techniques, and thus help implement new practices in their classes. Therefore, it can be said that the teaching quality of the educators who are participating in CFGs and continuously developing themselves and their skills, would be much higher than the other teachers who are only following the curriculum content and providing theory-based education to their students.

Also, Richards and Farrell (2005) stated, being a member of a teacher support groups can advance the effectiveness and lead to better teaching in schools. Correspondingly, teaching would come to fruition and provide benefits for the students of those teachers. Alan (2003) reported CFGs as an effective instrument which promotes both teacher learning and student outcomes. He emphasizes that the teachers being members of a CFG directly or indirectly affects the learning process of their students.

Ellen Key (2006) cites the work of Tice (1999) in her study as Tice records that after the first full year of implementation at 23 schools in Michigan, 70% of responding teachers believed their participation in a CFG was having very positive or quite positive effects on student achievement. 54% felt they could see improvements in student work, while 18% noticed improved test scores as evidence of these positive effects. Key (2006) supported the qualitative work done by Tice (1999) with Nave's

(2002) study, which analyzed student writing samples. Nave (2002) collected actual student writing samples that demonstrate a marked improvement over the course of the two years that the elementary teachers in one CFG which focused on student writing. Similar improvements were not evident in student writing samples from classes of teachers who were not involved in a CFG.

These assessments clearly show the importance of CFG groups by illustrating how they can drastically improve the success in schools. The main goal of teachers is to educate and raise successful students who will then be successful individuals in society. Keeping this core belief in mind, it could be implied that CFGs will play a key role in the future of a nation as well.

Furthermore, these meetings may allow teachers to make connections with other teachers who they previously did not know or were aware that they had similar problems and interests. This may give them the opportunity to broaden their networks. Moreover, they experience the positive results of working together with a group who has the same ambitions and motivations. They become stronger as a unit and eliminate the feeling of seclusion. Raiser (1987) mentioned that the teachers who worked together as members of teacher development groups developed into "active advocates" for their peers as well as their students.

In addition to and as a result of the factors mentioned above, teachers participating in teachers' groups develop a feeling of personal and professional empowerment as they develop their expertise and wisdom in their profession. Consequently, this self-consciousness and self-confidence would also reflect in their studies and classes as it would give a higher sense of efficacy which would assist the learning process for both them and their students.

2.6 Lack of Motivation in Participation of INSET Programs

In a previous unpublished research done by the researcher of this study, which aimed to gain insight on why so few EFL teachers have been participating in INSET programs in private K-12 schools in Turkey, revealed that the teachers did not have adequate time to spare for occupational training due to heavy workload. Recent research shows that teachers experience an acceleration of working speed as well as

an increasing number of assignments throughout the academic year, resulting in less time for rest and recovery (Hargreaves, 2003; Lindqvist & Nordänger, 2006; as cited in Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010). Thus, having the government or school administrations ask teachers to allocate time for their professional development without offering compensation, may put more stress on in-service teachers. Therefore, teachers may feel trapped in a whirlpool where problems weigh them down and the intrinsic and extrinsic motivational lifejackets are nowhere to be found.

Bandura (1995) claims that there is a low sense of efficacy which causes teachers to feel that academic demands are stressful, which may lead to a decrease in their commitment to teaching and an avoidance of problems that results in a higher level of burnout. Moreover, since a school is an environment of social relations among students, teachers and administrators, teachers sense of efficacy might also affect their sense of collective efficacy (Goddard & Goddard, 2001; Kurz & Knight, 2004; as cited in Brouwers & Tomic, 2000). Goddard, Hoy and Woolfolk Hoy (2000) define collective teacher efficacy as the perceptions of teachers in a school which rely on the faculty to have positive effects on students. Studies on this relationship demonstrate that burnout and teacher efficacy could be related, and that a low sense of efficacy could cause burnout (Brouwers & Tomic, 2000, Evers, Brouwers & Tomic, 2002; Breso, Salanova & Schaufeli, 2007; Schwarzer & Hallum, 2008; as cited in Slaavik & Slaavik, 2010). Furthermore, time pressure and work overload have been found to correlate positively with teacher burnout (Hakanen et al., 2006; Kokkinos, 2007; Peeters & Rutte, 2005; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2008; as cited in Slaavik & Slaavik, 2010). As a result, teachers need to have a higher sense of self-efficacy, so they could cope with their problems and continue teaching without burning out through administrative support on the journey of lifelong learning.

2.7 Lack of Efficacy of INSET Programs in Turkey

Uysal (2012) stated that the first initiatives to implement INSET programs in Turkey were taken following the national education reform in 1997 when a new curriculum was introduced by the Ministry of National Education, with English being taught as a foreign language starting in the 4th grade in primary schools. As this initiative was taken into action very quickly, the required preparation to implement the newly introduced curriculum could not be made and thus it could not be implemented

effectively. As a result, the Ministry of National Education in Turkey started to organize INSET programs across the country to enlighten the related EFL teachers about the newly introduced curriculum goals, constructive and communicative education ideologies, and to equip the educators with the required skills for teaching English to young learners (Kırkgöz, 2007; Mirici, 2006; as cited in Uysal, 2012).

This movement was one of the examples of the INSET programs promoted by the government authorities in Turkey. However, the results of the studies which were carried out to evaluate the effectiveness of these programs did not reveal clear information on whether these INSET programs achieved the targeted results, nor was it clear that these activities had any positive impact on the EFL instructors who had participated in the program. Nonetheless, according to the analysis of the latest researches on this subject, most of the teachers still would like to adhere to the grammar-based transmission-oriented instruction methods (Uysal, 2012).

As for the other problems in implementing INSET programs, Küçüksüleymanoğlu (2006) suggests that one of the problems in Turkey is that the number of the INSET courses are insufficient. He adds that many institutions are not aware of the importance of these programs and do not pay the required attention to promote these courses.

Another issue that does not seem appealing about INSET programs in Turkey set forth by Bayrakçı (2009), is the fact that the topics and contents handled in the courses are selected by others and imposed upon the participants. This top-bottom approach should not be expected to be effective in the long-term as they are frequently one-shot studies like conferences, seminars, and workshops. Moreover, the delivery of these courses is also another problematic issue. In these organizations, a chosen teacher-trainer delivers a prepared presentation in front of a large number of student teachers, therefore, the information and comments shared are conveyed to the target audience in a didactic, one-way communication which does not allow the participating teachers to reflect their know-how, expertise, or participate in the learning procedures and makes them feel like a part of a united community collaborating with their peers (Bayrakçı, 2009; Özer, 2004, as cited in Uysal, 2012). Altun (2011) also asserted that teachers can easily get disinterested and tired when they participate in INSET where the communication is established one-way only without any interaction. It can be

implied that teachers are not in favor of theory-based training, but they wish to participate in more practical and interactive sessions. Therefore, Wyatt and Dikilitaş (2016) argue that inquiry-based learning is critical as teachers need self-initiated, directed and monitored professional development more than ever to be able to work as autonomous, self-efficacious life-long-learning professionals. Finally, the length and content of INSET courses are not deemed sufficient by the teachers as they do not think that the information and knowledge provided in the courses truly reflect professional skills or requirements (Altun, 2011).

According to a quantitative research that Aktekin (2013) carried out with EFL teachers at a higher education level, most of the participants believed that the implementation of traditional INSET programs in schools was difficult, and that attending the CFG was a more sustainable and effective way. She reported that the participants of the study indicated that they needed to invest in their professional development; however, the workload and the priorities of the school made the implementation of INSET programs difficult. Therefore, it could be said that CFG is the most applicable model to be implemented in the school; not only as a tool to evaluate the in-service activities but also as a form of professional development.

It is implied that teachers have many burdens on their shoulder and do not feel motivated enough to participate in INSET programs even though they have a desire to develop their professional skills. Also, it could be understood that EFL teachers do not find one-shot training conferences or courses fruitful. It is also known that many teachers participate in these programs because the attendance to such courses are made obligatory either by the Ministry of National Education or by the school authorities. It would be difficult for teachers to gain a sense of efficacy from a course that was enforcedly participated in. Therefore, the teachers expressed their need for a sustainable, long-term professional development program. As a result, the ideas converge on the theory that teacher support groups such as CFGs are actually the best medium to implement an effective INSET program.

Chapter 3

Methodology

This chapter presents the methodology of the study and provide information on the research questions, research design, setting, participants, data collection instruments and procedures, data analysis, and limitations of the study. The case study follows a qualitative approach, aiming to explore the perceptions of EFL teachers on professional development through INSET and CFG.

The following research questions were addressed in this study:

1. What were the perceptions of teachers towards practicing reflective teaching methods through CFG?
2. What aspects of CFG assisted in the professional development of the participants?
3. What were the challenges experienced by the teachers and how were they overcome?
4. What sort of change has occurred through CFG that would not have been visible with other forms of INSET?

3.1 Research Design

To develop an understanding of how CFGs in this Turkish context can be used as an INSET tool to solve issues that have emerged in the classrooms, a qualitative case study approach has been adopted (Stake, 1995). The focus was on four EFL teachers, who had established contact with the researcher at the start of the school year. Each participant was analyzed as a separate case and a narrative design was used to better understand their experience of the CFG. Creswell (2005) states that once a suitable problem is identified and the participants are chosen, the researcher can then collect stories from the participants about their lived experiences of the phenomenon and retell it to form a chronology of events. Since the researcher was also the facilitator of the group, collaboration of the participants was a crucial tool which would help compose the story of each participant in a cross-case study.

Therefore, this present study is employed as an instrumental case study (Stake, 1995) with a narrative approach, aiming to explore the impact of INSET on teachers' professional development, and the implementation of CFG as a tool both to solve classroom issues of EFL teachers and learn their perceptions on this phenomenon. Stake (1995) defines a collective case study as the exploration of multiple instrumental case studies. Furthermore, Yin (1994) states that the case study method is an observational analysis that investigates a real-life phenomenon whose evidence is not clear, therefore multiple sources of data collection are used in the research design. Qualitative data were provided through different tools including interviews, video recordings of CFG meetings, reflective essays, and researcher notes to identify the perceptions of EFL teachers towards an INSET program conducted through CFG and it is to see if it played any role on their teaching practices. Therefore, each participant was considered as a separate case when analyzed.

3.2 Setting and Participants

In the current study, data were collected from four EFL instructors currently employed at a private high school in the western part of Turkey as preparatory teachers. Specifically, three females and one male instructor participated in the study. The three female participants were between the ages 26-35 and of Turkish descendant with over five years of experience each, apart from one who was a novice teacher. The male instructor was a 58-year-old native teacher from the U.S. with 16 years of experience. They had all earned their master's in the field of English Language Teaching apart from one of them who was in the process. Detailed biographies of the participant will be found in the findings. To overcome ethical issues and increase trustworthiness, written consent forms were signed by both the participants and the administration prior to the study as pseudo names were used to conceal the participant's identity. Since the researcher was also the facilitator of the group, first-person narrative will be used in the current study from time to time.

3.3 Implementation of CFG

Before the students filled the classrooms, EFL teachers of a private high school in the western part of Turkey had a chance to come together in professional development sessions. As each teacher was given a chance to talk about a topic of their choice, I presented 'Reflective Practice in INSET' and found that none of my colleagues had participated in such an activity. Aware that being a professional teacher trainer takes lots of time and proper planning and training, could someone without any experience implement an INSET program through CFG? I thought that a teacher group that focuses on issues regarding the classroom could be beneficial for both the teachers and the students. Therefore, I put forward the idea of coming together in a CFG every other week to discuss issues that impede our classrooms.

At the dawn of the study a needs analysis was conducted through a reflective paper which asked the teachers to reflect on issues they had encountered since the start of the academic year. The reflective essays were combed through and the following issues emerged:

Table 3: Overview of Issues

- Material problems in writing classes
- Teacher-centered classroom
- Teacher and student motivation
- Lack of input in communicative skill classes
- Lack of objective
- Pacing problems

During the first meeting issues were highlighted, and the participants were debriefed. The group members talked in detail about each issue and decided that they should put all of the issues in front of them while practicing reflective teaching methods but focus on writing lessons since it was agreed to be the main reason behind the issues that emerged. The group came to an agreement to share the load and prepare lesson plans that would be more engaging for the learners. Finally, the first reflective

practice was introduced as the facilitator handed the instructors a journal and asked them to reflect on their practices.

In the second CFG meeting, the instructors were debriefed on journal keeping to gain insight on their perceptions. Afterwards, they were asked about their writing classes to learn if any change had occurred. Moreover, instructors were asked to reflect on their lessons even if they had not written in their journals. The instructors agreed to continue designing lesson plans in the upcoming weeks but refused to draw up formal lesson plans due to the workload. The teachers were introduced to various writing activities from Nation's book 'Teaching ESL/EFL Reading and Writing'. Finally, the facilitator introduced the next reflective practice which was peer observations. Teachers were asked about the frequency in which it should be implemented and decided on practicing it once a week. The meeting ended with the distribution of peer observation templates.

The instructors were not able to meet for a month due to markings of exams and other school activities such as parent teacher conferences and international exams. Therefore, the issues encountered during the needs analysis were repeated at the start of the third meeting. Afterwards, the instructors were debriefed on their experiences with peer observation. When the facilitator asked the participants for the peer observation reports, the teachers stated that they did not want to fill them out. They were all against formal observations and preferred to have a quick dialogue about the lessons. Therefore, the facilitator decided on continuing the unorthodox observations until the next meeting.

The focus of the forth meeting was reflecting on the lessons they had observed. The facilitator wanted to gain insight on how they had changed their practices. Due to the heavy workload and busy schedules the participants did not want to continue observing their peers. As a result, the next reflective practice, self-monitoring, was introduced to the group. They were asked to record their lessons and watch themselves before the next meeting. The teachers reflected on various activities implemented in their classrooms. Finally, the lesson concluded with an overview of the issues mentioned at the start of the meeting and teachers were reminded of the alternate activities that can increase engagement of the learners in writing lessons.

The focus of the fifth meeting was analyzing recordings of the instructors. Two of the participants played their own videos and received constructive feedback as the facilitator allowed discussion to take place on self-observation to better understand the perceptions of teachers on the phenomenon. Teachers were asked to reflect on their own lessons as they generated ideas on how to adapt specific activities to their own classrooms. The teachers agreed that the material and curriculum in hand affected the learning process in a negative way; therefore, they all agreed to focus on growth of the learners rather than covering the book itself. All the participants reflected on how their classrooms changed when the curriculum was left aside. At the end of the meeting, the facilitator introduced micro-teaching, which would be the final reflective practice.

In the last meeting, none of the instructors were ready with a formal lesson plan. Therefore, the facilitator chose a participant and asked if they would like to do a micro-teaching lesson after five minutes of preparation time. The facilitator emphasized that this was the reality in the school and persuaded a teacher to prepare and implement a micro-teaching session to the rest of the group. The teachers acted as if they were students and constructive feedback was given after the lesson. The meeting ended with a discussion about planning lessons and final remarks about the CFG itself.

3.4 Procedures

This section provides detailed information about sampling types, data collection instruments, data analysis, trustworthiness, and limitations.

3.4.1 Sampling. The participants were purposeful in that they were all teaching writing in preparatory classes at the same high school and had similar educational background. Creswell (2005) states that in purposeful sampling the researcher selects individuals intentionally to learn or understand a central phenomenon. In the current study, the researcher wanted to gain insight on the perceptions of ELT teachers who were working in a private K-12 school towards INSET through CFGs to see if the issues encountered in the classrooms can be solved by teachers themselves through collaboration and reflective practice.

3.4.2 Sources of data. In this study, data derived from the meeting transcripts, reflective essays, structured interviews, and the researcher's notes.

3.4.2.1 Recording of CFG meetings. One of the purposes of the CFG was to gain insight on participants' opinion on different reflective practices such as peer observation, journal keeping, and self-observation. Teachers were asked to practice these various reflective teaching methods before the CFG meetings, so they could reflect on their teaching practice. Thus, the goal of the research was to elicit the perceptions of EFL teachers towards an INSET program conducted through CFG and to see if it played any role in their teaching practices. Some of the CFG meetings were used to demonstrate different approaches to reflective practice such as microteaching and analyzing recorded classroom footage. During the meetings, teachers were given an opportunity to discuss classroom issues collaboratively while analyzing recorded classroom sessions. Moreover, teachers discussed pending issues and come up with solutions. Data collection began with recording the CFG meetings and transcribing them, which amounted to five hours of data.

3.4.2.2 Reflective essays. The CFG participants were asked to write a reflective essay at the start, middle, and end of the CFG to gain insight on their thoughts towards the group. There was no set format given to the teachers before the study, nor were they asked to write about specific topics. Data was combed through carefully to see how teachers changed their practices since the start of the CFG and their perceived thoughts about reflective practice and their learning experience.

3.4.2.3 Interviews. In qualitative research, researchers ask open-ended questions and record participant answers to gain insight on the phenomenon that in being researched. It is then transcribed for analysis (Creswell, 2005). Due to the small number of participants, they were interviewed individually.

Structured interviews were conducted at the start and end of the study to gain insight on the perceptions of teachers towards CFGs to determine if reflective practice has affected the way they approach their classrooms. Therefore, they were predetermined by the researcher. Finally, its goal was to see how partaking in such INSET activities might help solve classroom issues and enhance professional development.

3.4.2.4 Researcher's notes. The facilitator took his notes while observing the recordings of the CFG meetings. He jotted down notes during some of the meetings,

but most of his entries were done after the meetings while analyzing the recordings. Recordings were analyzed in detail as the researcher monitored the body language as well as the demeanor of the participants during these meetings. In the end, the journal was scanned to illustrate data that would assist in answering the research questions.

3.4.3 Data analysis procedures. The data analysis procedures for the study used in vivo coding to group data that were collected from multiple sources such as recorded CFG meetings, reflective journals, interviews, and researcher's notes. Professional teachers collaborated to implement INSET through CFG focusing on issues that had come out from the initial needs analysis. The researcher wanted to learn if the program assisted teachers in solving classroom these issues while trying to gain insight on their perceptions of CFG and reflective practice. Creswell (2005) states that the identification of themes provides the complexity of a story and adds depth to the insight about understanding individual experiences. Therefore, codes were reduced as they were grouped according to their themes. They were then refined and supported by quotes from the participants. Moreover, remarks about the CFG or reflective practices were highlighted from their reflective essays and all data were shared with the participants as debriefing sessions were done after interpreting the data from multiple sources. Finally, the researcher used structured interviewing at the start and end of the study to gain insight on the teachers' perceptions of INSET and reflective practice through CFG to see how it has helped their teaching practice.

3.5 Trustworthiness

Guba (1981) states that the four criteria for trustworthiness are credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability.

To establish credibility, triangulation was used as data was gathered from four different tools to get a more detailed and balanced result. Using multiple data sources helped to gain better insight on the issue. In addition, member checking by the other mentor assisted in narrowing down the focus of the research as a bottom-up approach was used to deduce the data collected. Finally, debriefing sessions were used with the participants on a regular basis.

Transferability is related to how a study could be used in other contexts. In the current study, transferability plays an important role because there are limited studies regarding CFG in a K-12 ELT context and none to be found in Turkey. CFGs can be implemented into any high-paced school environment if the planning and scheduling are done properly. However, without the intrinsic motivation from the instructors, such programs would be nothing more than a coffee session with colleagues. Therefore, to show the importance of the group, teachers should discuss the agenda of the meetings explicitly at the start of the meeting.

Dependability is ensured when findings could be repeated and consistent. Therefore, data were collected with different tools to depict overlapping comments that could be used in the analysis procedure.

Conformability should be ensured by the researcher. The bias or the interest of the study should not be imposed on the participants. Therefore, the role of triangulation could be emphasized again, but more important is the bottom-up approach taken as research questions were derived after analyzing the data.

3.6 Limitations

The present study has some limitations that should be taken into consideration. Due to time constraints and heavy workload, the study was kept short as the participants were able to meet six times. In addition, some of the meeting were kept shorter than anticipated due to other administrative meetings. For the reliability of the findings regarding the effectiveness of CFG, a longitudinal study can be planned for further research.

Finally, the research was lacking quantitative data collection tools. In addition, the researcher did not collect any data from the students of the participants. Perceptions of students prior to the implementation of CFG and after could have given more concrete results.

Chapter 4

Findings

This chapter analyses the results of the case studies in terms of participants' context of experience, engagement of CFG and its effects, if any, on their practices as a result of it, perceptions of CFG as a means for INSET and their thoughts of reflective teaching engagement, which brought out four collective case studies and their qualitative analyses. Since the researcher was also the facilitator of the group, he will use first-person in his narrative while discussing each case in detail.

4.1 Case Analyses

4.1.1 Case of Sam

4.1.1.1 Background of Sam

Born and raised in Chicago, Sam had lived in the Washington D.C. area for the last few years teaching young adults English as an ESL instructor before coming to Turkey. This is his first experience teaching high school kids apart from being a substitute teacher in public schools around Virginia, and his first experience away from home. Before becoming a teacher, he spent over 20 years in the banking industry and stated in his first interview "*Although the money was better in banking, I got a greater sense of satisfaction from teaching*". He earned a masters' degree in international training and education at American University in Washington D.C. and has been teaching English for the last 16 years. Despite this long experience in teaching he confessed, "*Although I regularly participated in INSET through workshops, seminars, and casual teacher support groups, I've never been a part of a critical friend group that met consistently and focused on specific issues through reflective practice.*" Even though he was the most experienced teacher in the group, he was novice when it came to teaching EFL to teenagers in a foreign country.

4.1.1.2 Engagement of CFG

At the start of the first CFG meeting the issues encountered by all the teachers were put in front of the teachers and Sam was given the first word. He stated that all the issues were important and the importance of each and every issue changed from

day to day. He added that they were critical stakeholders, yet the system dictated the material they had to use in the classrooms. He included that the system would never be successful without the teachers and explained that there should not be a top to bottom approach and that headquarters needed to change their one size fits all mentality. As the team started looking for concrete solutions to the material problem in hand, Sam asked if it was realistic to try to solve these issues now and added that data from this group should be used as a springboard to change things for the following year. I redirected him back to the purpose of the CFG, which was for teachers to try to make a difference now and that there would never be that perfect curriculum no matter how hard we tried. We agreed as a group to come up with solutions to make our writing classes more engaging for the students and reflect on our practices along the way so everyone else could benefit from these experiences. The lines below taken from his first reflection best describes the bias that Sam had at the start of the CFG meetings, thus his lack of motivation had other reasons behind it as he compared the training to previous ones that he had participated in back in the U.S.:

> I have participated in teacher support groups similar to this one before, however, there are a few differences between the groups I had attended in the states and this one. One major difference is that we used to get paid for the time we came together. It was called prep time and teachers would use it to plan lessons and vent to one another. Since the teachers knew that they were getting paid to plan, we had to do it whereas here I tend not to because of the lack of time and hectic schedule.

Sam was coming from a background where in-service teacher education and support groups were demonstrated as a common practice, implemented into the teacher schedules and compensated by the administration. He strongly emphasizes the need for extrinsic motivational factors in his post interview when asked if CFGs could be a part of in-service teacher education across the nation.

> I think without the proper incentive, maybe financial incentive or some other way the school system in Turkey might devise … without incenting teachers to spend time outside of the classroom planning, preparing ... they should do it in class also, but they must spend time outside in order to effectively implement

something like the CFG or they could call it whatever they would like to, in-service training, that includes the concepts that we covered. Without incenting the teacher, they won't do it. In the U.S. teachers are paid to do planning, not all teacher but in many private institutions they're paid additional hourly wages to plan. This will work out well in the states I think, but in Turkey without the proper incentive, I don't know if people would want to invest their spare time or free time thinking about school and how to be a more effective teacher.

His bias towards the CFG group would gradually break as the CFG meetings progressed. He didn't participate in journal keeping written or electronically, as he promised he would after the second CFG meeting, but his second reflection after the third CFG meeting showed us that change was on the horizon.

> … a month has passed I feel that as the meetings have progressed, I realize that this group was really essential as it was the only time we practice any sort of in-service teacher training.

When asked about the group at the end of the last CFG meeting he stated that CFGs were an invaluable part of INSET. The following quotes from his post interview emphasizes that he tried to reflect in action more due to CFG and the issues it had imbedded in the back of his mind.

> Before the CFG, I didn't think about teacher-centered classrooms versus student-centered classrooms. I have been more conscious of my TTT, and when I think about it I try to adjust.

> It was INSET, and it filled the void that currently exists at the school because they don't offer in-service training, so it really helped me highlight the points of my teaching methods and planning that are weak, and I need to do something about them and I didn't get that anywhere else in this school.

By looking at Sam's remarks throughout the two months of CFG meetings, it could be said that CFG has filled the void of INSET he had desired to be filled since the day he had arrived. Let us not forget that it was the first time he was teaching ESL to teenagers at a high school. Perhaps the difficulties were amplified when combining the fact that he was doing this in a foreign country without extra compensation.

Nevertheless, the CFG provided him with safe grounds to discuss the issues he had been struggling with as it created an atmosphere where teachers shared ideas and thoughts without hesitation.

4.1.1.3 CFG as a Tool for Learning

Before starting the CFG, I wanted to include our head of department thinking the group would benefit from his experience since he was undertaking his PHD in English Language Teaching. I thought he would be a great asset as he could provide us with workshops and presentations on topics that were troubling us. After speaking with my mentor and reading up on the literature, I realized that having such an individual in the group would disrupt the dynamics of the group. Perhaps the most important aspect of these types of groups is the sense of security teachers have when talking to their peers about their classes and problems they have been encountering. Sam highlights this sense of collaboration and collegiality with the following quotes in his second reflection sent after the third CFG meeting.

> Even though I wasn't enthusiastic about spending time after school hours, I found the teacher support group to be invaluable as it was the only time teachers came together and tried to help one another with issues they had in the classroom. Even if there were no issues, I believe that teachers need to download pending issues and vent what they have been feeling in and out of the classroom. This friendly environment gave us a chance to look at our teaching practices in different ways.

Sam also highlighted some specific activities he had learned from his colleagues. He stated in both the final CFG meeting and reflection that the dicto-biography activity was something he would try out with all his classrooms. He stated that all of his students took notes and listened attentively as he spoke about his life in detail. To his surprise, the whole class handed in his biography the following day. Another activity that helped improve his writing classes was 'Process Writing' and 'Group Writing'. These were two activities that he learned directly from Sevda as he highlights this in final reflection.

I was never a fan of group writing, nor did I ever think that students could check their friend's work, but after hearing Sevda talk about them, I thought it would be worth giving it a shot.

Although it was the first time these teachers came together, a sense of trust had grown within the team. When peer observation was introduced as the next reflective activity teachers were going to practice, Sam said that we could be upfront with him when giving feedback and that he did not want us to schedule the observations in advance as he thought it would eliminate the naturality of the observation. He exemplified the importance of reliance when he stated during the third CFG meeting that the group was a good outlet to download information before leaving school and a good way to hear what other teachers were doing in their classrooms. We had become a tightknit group in a short amount of time.

4.1.1.4 Engagement in Reflective Practice

One of the purposes of the CFG was to learn the perceptions of teachers towards reflective practice. Each CFG was designed to introduce a different approach to reflective teaching. Teachers were asked to reflect on the issues in hand while practicing journal keeping, peer observation, self-monitoring, and micro-teaching. Sam stated in his post-interview that although journal keeping was an invaluable tool, he had found it difficult and impractical. The following quote from his second reflection illuminates his thoughts on this process.

I don't think journal keeping is a very practical way of reflection. I highly doubt any teacher would write into a journal after their lessons. I much prefer having a cup of coffee and a cig myself.

Peer observation was something that Sam was very familiar with. He had observed more teachers than he could account for, both in class and outside of class using cameras. He believes that traditional peer observations do not illustrate the true portrait of the teacher. He elucidates this in his first interview when reflecting on observations he had done while working on the administrative side of a university back in Washington D.C.

People change, and professionals change when they know they are being observed, so they are not the true teacher they are when I'm there. Therefore, I wouldn't say that they are helpful or valuable tools to assess teachers.

The one reflective activity that stood out for him was self-monitoring. This was a prolonged method of reflective teaching that he had been meaning to do, and the CFG provided him with the opportunity to endeavor in this adventure. The following quotes were taken from his second interview when asked about the different reflective teaching methods they had practiced throughout the CFG.

I can't control what the schools do as far as someone sitting in my class checking boxes or writing whatever narratives they write about my teaching methods, but the most meaningful method is me watching myself trying to correct myself, not based on somebody else's input but based on what I know is the teaching standard that I want to reach.

I filmed myself and that's a critical component of my positive viewpoint about the CFG. That's something I got directly from it, and that is to me has been best practice. No matter how long I teach or where I teach, I will periodically do a self-analysis or self-assessment by filming myself and actually see how I approach implementing my objectives in the classroom and classroom management and all the other things that associated with teaching, so I've done that directly and it has had a direct impact on me.

When Sam was debriefed on his statements, he thought that he sounded a bit obnoxious at times but stood behind his words.

4.2.1 Case of Nalan

4.2.1.1 Background of Nalan

She was a novice teacher that graduated from Bogazici English Language and Literature in 2016. At first, she wanted to work in human resources or as a content editor; however, decided that this was not the right job for her, so she turned the helm to pursue a career as a research assistant and continue her studies in literature. When realizing that it was difficult to land such a job, she decided on undertaking an MA in curriculum and instruction at Bilkent University where she also earned her pedagogical

formation and IB teaching and learning certificates. Her body language and tone in her voice implied the uncertainty and ambivalence as she talked about her teaching experience five weeks into the school year in the first interview before starting the CFG meetings when she stated, *"This is my first real teaching experience with the exception of my internships, so here I started here with a set curriculum and we are following certain books. I think I will see how it goes from here on."*

4.2.1.2 Engagement in CFG

She was clearly aware of the lack of creativity the books had to offer her when she mentioned the issues in hand during her first reflection. She was looking for support when she stated, *"I feel that I only try to finish the pages I need to cover for each week, especially in my lessons with the 9th graders. I believe they are already equipped with most of the skills the book focuses on. So… it is a great challenge for me to keep them motivated. I would like to hear some ideas from you that I can incorporate in my lessons to make them more appealing."* The book chosen for this class was found to not satisfy the needs of her students.

During the first CFG meeting the facilitator steered the conversation towards material problems in writing lessons since Nalan emphasized this issue in her first reflection she was given first word on the matter.

> ... I used the book but I did something else ... The topic was how to write a compare and contrast essay and for example we discussed the topic in detail rather before writing. It was about different countries and cities, so we talked about them and compared them to one another. Afterwards, the students read the paragraph and answered some questions. Then they were asked to take the table with the different countries and compare them to a country of their choice. For example, today I did it like a discussion with minimum writing, but still it's like I'm just sticking to the book. I feel like that! It's not as enjoyable as it can be because it's only writing lesson. Where are the other parts, I don't understand?

Although she had already taken action to make her writing classes more engaging, she was looking for support from her colleagues as the group wasn't sure if

the book could be set aside completely since the parents had paid lots of money, thus not using it would create acrimony amongst them. Nalan stated strongly that the group needed a solid plan to deal with this dilemma. At the end of the meeting the teachers decided that they would split the pages up and create lessons plans for certain pages as Nalan was responsible for the last six pages of the unit.

In our second CFG meeting, Nalan was asked to reflect on the last two weeks of her classes while trying to focus on the issues in hand stated at the start of the first CFG meeting. Since she was moving at a different pace then her colleagues, she found it difficult to share lesson plans with them. However, she did continue to act independently and reflected on how she took a topic from the book and designed a speaking class:

> There was a paragraph about pets and kids. I asked them if they ever had a pet, and whether they thought it would be hard to take care of a pet and things like that. It was a long discussion. In the end, I didn't ask them to do anything. It was like a speaking lesson. I think we have to do that from time to time in our writing lessons.

She had transformed her dull writing class into a fun environment where students interacted with each other and the teacher. She stated that her lesson was more student centered and her teacher-talking-time (TTT) was lower, resulting in a more enjoyable lesson. Her confidence level continued to elevate when she confessed in the fifth CFG meeting that she was 40 pages behind the curriculum norms, and that she was not worried because her students were having fun. Nalan showed great change in her practices and acted on the issues while reflecting on them during the CFG meetings. She sums up her thoughts on CFG and the change that occurred as a result of it in her last interview.

> They generate ideas together and brainstorm a lot. Although we do writing lessons together we spend most of the lesson talking about the issues, so it's better for students, it's more fun. When it comes to writing, they are really prepared at that point because we talked a lot, we watched videos about the topic, or we read news pieces about them, and they feel much more ready and they have much more fun, and they write in a shorter time after all these things.

She saw the group as a place where she could receive empathy from her peers and condolence as she was approaching the writing lessons in an unorthodox manner. Her perceived goal of the CFG was to change the way she approached writing lessons as she clearly stated these thoughts in her last interview, "*how to go out of the curriculum was our thing basically in the critical friend group and our discussions.*"

4.2.1.3 CFG as a Tool for Learning

Even though Nalan was a novice teacher, she adapted to the group quickly and became an important part of the CFG with her valuable reflections. Since the start of the CFG meetings, she was active in the group and never held back from any of the discussions. Rather than following the curriculum word for word, she focused on the needs of the learners and felt fortunate to learn from her colleagues along the way when she exemplified this thought in her post interview when stating, "*having a group of teachers, who were working for the first time together work on solving classroom issues was a big chance for me as a new teacher.*"

Although she had participated in teacher support groups and workshops in her preservice teacher education training at Bilkent University, she claimed in her post interview that this group was more disciplined and organized than her previous coaching experiences. When comparing the CFG to the seminars she had attended she emphasized the lack of interaction in those seminars in the following words taken from her the same interview:

> In those seminars you just sit and get bored I think, but in these kinds of groups you are more connected to other people. You can share your ideas with the rest of the group or just one person sitting even next to you maybe then it becomes a topic to talk about all together. I think workshops or CFGs will be more meaningful instead of those seminars.

She added her appreciation of the group in this interview when she said, "*Having somebody to talk to except from the book and the curriculum itself was really nice, and I had some great ideas from this group.*" She expanded on the benefits of the group when she said, "*We shared our experiences in the classrooms, what kind of strategies or things we used in the classroom, so it was really fruitful for me.*" She

reported on specific activities that helped enhance the learning experience for her students in her second reflection.

> We discuss the topic in detail, brainstorm together then the students start writing. I found this to be the best way to bring the students into the lesson. I sometimes have them write in pairs or groups which brings even more enthusiasm to the lessons. I wouldn't have been able to do it on my own, but when we share the workload it makes it possible and more motivating. This has made a world of a difference and I don't think I would've been possible if we all hadn't decided on this together.

Nalan stated that she benefited greatly from the CFG meetings and that they have been more rewarding than the seminars she had attended in the past. The interaction between colleagues and sharing experiences gave her a sense of satisfaction as she was able to relate to the issues to her classrooms and took action in and outside the classroom to help the learners progress in the process of English language development.

4.2.1.4 Engagement in Reflective Practice

The INSET program implemented through CFG was designed to also learn the perceptions of teachers towards reflective practice. She was aware of the several types of reflective practices as they were presented during her MA program at Bilkent University. However, this was the first time she was going physically take part in such an INSET program. She was asked to reflect on the issues through journal keeping, peer observations, self-monitoring, and micro teaching.

She showed her empty journal in the second CFG meeting and said that she could not write anything in it due to the busy schedule at school. She added that she had been very busy with marking exams and was going through a lot of things outside of school which prevented her from participating in journal keeping. Nalan was witnessing a lot of personal issues outside of school as well since she had moved to a new city and was trying to get use to the fast-paced environment of a private high school.

Although she was unsuccessful in keeping a journal, she found peer observation a useful tool when reflecting on practice. She observed the facilitator and was observed by him. Before I observed her, we had a short meeting regarding the points on which she wanted feedback on. The key issues she wanted to get feedback about were in line with the concepts put forward in her needs analysis, which was TTT and students having fun in writing classes. She reflected on her lesson and focused on the negative aspects of her lesson while I gave her constructive feedback. When she returned the favor and observed me a couple days later. She was very supportive as I was self-reflecting on problematic issues. She began to reflect on her own lessons during the feedback session when she said, "*Recently I have this problem with my students as they want to know the Turkish of a certain word, they want to conceptualize it in their head. It sometimes breaks the flow of the lesson, so it can be positive or negative at times.*" When I confessed that I had a problem stating a clear objectives for every lesson, she empathized with me and stated, "*I think this is like a general problem, it's also a problem for me but it is because of the materials I think because like if that's a reading lesson it should be about reading, and the post activity should follow after the reading part, the vocab practice part, but we have also have grammar in the middle of it, so it just kind of breaks the flow and makes it difficult for us to adjust.*" She gave constructive feedback and showed a great sense of compassion while choosing her words carefully. Her feedback was concise and to the point. When the facilitator stated at the end of the feedback session that he should have planned better, she soothed him and said, "*I never plan also because I don't have time. I have many lessons, I'm a new teacher, so it's difficult for me.*"

Her experience with self-monitoring was interesting as she decided to watch her lesson with her boyfriend to get an outside perception from someone she trusts. The following words from her post-interview perhaps describes this experience in the best way:

> So … I recorded myself during the lesson and I just watched it myself. And I actually made my boyfriend watch it also, so it was interesting to see myself, to evaluate myself, to reflect on it and also some other person who is not even a teacher commented on it, commented on my body language and how it looks.

So, I think it is closer to a student's perspective also, so I think it is really a nice way reflect.

She chose to have somebody she trusts watch her lesson to gain a distinct perspective from outside the school. Someone that does not know her students and could relate to it from a students' perspective better than any teacher in the group. Therefore, it could be said that self-monitoring is a useful tool for teachers to use when they want an outside source to help them reflect.

4.3.1 Case of Gamze

4.3.1.1 Background of Gamze

Gamze graduated from the department of translation and interpretation in 2004 from Hacettepe University, Ankara, where she went on to take her English language teaching training. She continued her education when she decided to undertake her masters' degree at Maltepe University three years after her completing her BA. When completing her studies in 2008, she started teaching at a private language institution until she landed a public teaching job in Istanbul where she would work 8 years before coming to Izmir. I met her last year while she was working with young learners. She had just applied for our high school and was looking forward to teaching teenagers again as I remember her saying, *"I love the little guys, but I miss teaching teenagers."* During our professional development sessions before the start of the school year, she practiced micro teaching as she took a reading activity and transformed it into an interactive class. I was thrilled when I found out that she would volunteer to participate in our critical friend group.

4.3.1.2 Engagement in CFG

She was critical of the material we had been using since the start of the year and mentioned in her needs analysis that writing tasks were far from being creative and that the material was repetitive as she needed extra planning to create quality production activities. Obviously, she had issues regarding the material she was using in her writing classes and was worried about putting the book aside completely since there were high expectations from both the administration and parents. Her words taken from the first CFG meeting firmly confirm these thoughts, *"we need to cover the*

books because we have parent issues, they have bought the books, and somehow, we need to cover the books from the parent's aspect ... this is what the school suggested we use with them, so this is what the parents expect for us to use." Towards the end of the first CFG meeting she stated while pounding her fist in her hand that the group needed a solid plan to make the writing classes more engaging.

Although she initiated the idea of the plan, and the teachers agreed to construct lesson plans for the designated pages they were assigned, she was not able to produce any lesson plans for the group to use. She claimed to be busy with grading exams and could not attend the second CFG meeting nor did she find the time to do any extra planning for the team. She expressed signs of fatigue in the third CFG meeting when she openly said, *"In fact I agree. What we are doing here, this cooperation, this reflective practice, being a team, feeling better about what we are doing, but sometimes I get so tired and I really don't want to observe Nalan's class because I have two classes to grade and lots of things to do. I hope I can do it. I'll try my best. If I had fewer than 18 hours a week, it would work for me. I'm sure!"*

In the same meeting she announced that she was relieved to find out that the students were not responsible for the material in their writing books, *"No exam for the book, so I feel very relieved with that. I don't use that book anymore. It's just homework for the students. We watch TED Talks videos, we raise curiosity driven questions and we write about them, not really organized but the results are much better, much better than the dull paragraphs we were writing beforehand. I want to make it different somehow for my classroom, it really works for me."* Although Gamze did not attend half the meetings, she was able to show change in her classroom as she used the book in hand more like a workbook than a main course book which in return brought excitement back into her classrooms.

4.3.1.3 CFG as a Tool for Learning

Perhaps it might be thought that the CFG was not much of a learning experience for Gamze since she was not consistent in attending the meetings on a regular basis. However, her words from her second interview would imply otherwise, *"I really enjoyed participating in this because we were so close. Nobody criticized the other with bad intentions in fact. I believe we have helped each other to a great extent. If it*

wasn't for this group, we wouldn't see each other ... we criticized material ... we came up with different lesson plans and ideas. Ideas matter! At least we came together and shared our problems. It really worked for me."

She emphasizes these thoughts in her third reflection when she wrote:

With all said and done, did this group help me with some of the issues I've been having with my classes? Certainly! As a group we collaborated and came up with a game plan for our problematic writing book. The classes were becoming very boring and the students were not motivated. When I found out that the source wouldn't be used in the testing, we were freed from the curriculum.

She stated some specific activities that she had tried as an outcome of reflection and collaboration when she wrote:

Most of the time they don't have any ideas about the subject they are writing about, but when they watch an interesting video and we talk in detail, they are readier and have more things to say and write. Picture composition was an idea I got from Nalan and it works really well when the picture story is interesting. It is sometimes difficult to find interesting stories for my students so when Nalan shares these pictures with me I'm thrilled. I've also done more silent videos as the students improvise the words and write their own dialogue. This is also lots of fun and was a great idea I got from you.

When it is difficult for a teacher to decide on whether or not they will follow a set curriculum, teachers look for support from the outside. Sometimes it takes a group of rebellious teachers to overthrow a curriculum, and in this case, the support of the group encouraged Gamze to focus on the growth of her students as she used authentic, inquisitive material while implementing content-based lessons to her classroom.

4.3.1.4 Engagement in Reflective Practice

She found time to be an issue throughout the teacher support group. She acted on issues independently and openly discussed her inability to practice reflective teaching as part of the INSET program. She stated that observing a colleague would not be her priority when she had exams waiting to be graded. Therefore, she stayed

away from any type of time consuming activities. The only reflective teaching practice she participated in was self-monitoring. She recorded herself and had given it to the facilitator before the forth CFG meeting, so her colleagues could watch her lesson and give her feedback. She stated the reasons behind why she had found self-monitoring fruitful with the following sentences:

> Because you are not always aware of what you are doing sometimes. You have lots of things on your mind. You think you are doing something very well, but what you see is not that. I think we should do it more usually than this.

However, self-observation was not something she would see herself practicing in the future, rather she would prefer micro-teaching sessions as she justified it the same interview when she answered, "*Microteaching ... because I could do it or I really like observing it ... these are different kind of views coming together and there is no student around, we could share our hesitations right there and then. This contributes the most according to me.*" Unfortunately, she was not able to attend the final CFG session where teachers performed microteaching sessions.

4.4.1 Case of Sevda

4.4.1.1 Background of Sevda

Sevda graduated from Ege University with a Bachelor of Arts Degree in English Language and Literature. In the following years of her graduation, she earned certification in Teaching English as a Second Language from Dokuz Eylül University and completed her CELTA training in the UK. The following words taken from her reflective essay written on teacher identity as part of an assignment for one of her ELT MA course best describes the type of teacher she is:

> As a highly compassionate and approachable teaching professional, with over 8 years of teaching experience, I am confident in my ability to become an enthusiastic participant in this course that has a desire to learn more in every step. In the first year of my teaching, I had some very strict ideas on how to be the best teacher and how to teach a foreign language merely based on what I had experienced during my own school years. As a student teacher who had just graduated, I did not have the slightest idea about my own teacher identity.

Since then, I have been trying to shape not only the professional aspect of my teacher identity but also the personal aspect of it. In the first years of my career, I focused on my professional development more. I desperately needed to learn the effective and academic ways of teaching feeling the lack of self- confidence as an English Literature graduate. Therefore, after a couple of years of teaching experience, I started a CELTA course in the UK and tried to challenge myself and improve my teaching skills.

She had just started undertaking her ELT MA and was enthusiastic to join the CFG from the start since there were some issue in hand that she wanted to deal with. Five weeks into the school year, she wrote a detailed needs analysis and mentioned three key issues she wanted to focus on throughout the study: Student Motivation, Material, and TTT.

4.4.1.2 Engagement in CFG

She believed that writing was the most difficult skill to teach learners and was looking for insight when she reported in her needs analysis, *"It is an undeniable fact that writing is assumed as the most difficult skill and a tedious job by most students. As teachers, we have to break this prejudice first and lead students' dynamic energy into the class. Unfortunately, the class material in our hand is not really helpful to achieve this goal. For the last four weeks, I cannot say that I have been doing my best to overcome this issue."*

As a result of the not being very classroom friendly, she found her TTT even higher than usually as it has been a challenge for her to create a more student orientated classroom since the start of the school year. She was aware of the issue when she reflected, *"An issue I have been having for a very long time especially in writing sessions. I used to think that It was the nature of the course to be deductive and teacher centered, as it is the writing class and students have to learn all the rules first in order to produce something. However, after I started using a content-based approach I saw that it was all wrong."* She had already started to reflect on her practices and recognized the need for change before the CFG meeting had begun. Sevda put emphasis on this issue when she admitted in the first CFG meeting, *"I just take the book and go there, it kills my creativity ... it's a very dull lesson ... it's teacher-centered*

cause I just tell them the name of the activity, they do it and then we go on, so it's not very creative. Since the beginning of the year it's been like this and I haven't done anything to change it." She proposed an idea to split the pages amongst the teachers and asked everyone to create engaging activities with the designated pages assigned. She enthusiastically offered to split the workload amongst the participants, *"Why don't we have a look at unit 1 from that book and try to come up with some creative activities. So, we could share and use them during the classes. Let's look at the pages and think about some activities for that specific unit."*

It did not take her much time to change her approach to her writing class as she reflected on one of her classes during the second CFG meeting, where she reflected on how she practiced process writing with an enjoyable kinesthetic activity. She explained in detail how she took the topic from the book and incorporated her own unique touch to make it more inviting for the students, *"So here ... Features of a paragraph, the book gave four, I made it five. Today we talked about the features and then I gave them some cutouts of mixed sentences, they formed a paragraph with them and they talked if the paragraph had the necessary features in it. So that was it! So we got the idea from here but we added some fun stuff."* She continued to give her honest reflections throughout all the CFG meetings as she asserted in the third meeting that she would have been apathetic without the teacher support group, *"Without this I'm sure I would be lazier than this because with the problems in my mind they serve as a focusing point for me. I focus on them, so I try to solve those problems, which is nice for me. I go to my lessons with a plan in my hand, so it works for me."* She was an active player all through the CFG meetings and her positive attitude helped boast the energy level of the group tremendously. Her enthusiasm and drive to work on the issues she had been challenged with since the start of the school year was watched with admiration as it continued from start to finish.

4.4.1.3 CFG as a Tool for Learning

Sevda was one the most enthusiastic members of the group and showed signs of being a good team player from the outset. In her first interview she wished to gain knowledge from her peers as she stated, *"I hope to learn to from my colleagues. We could share our problems and come up with solutions together. Every teacher has*

different experiences and different tactics, so it will be good to learn from one another." She was a leader in the group and tried to come up with concrete solutions to the issues in hand. She was very comfortable when expressing her thoughts and was inquisitive to see if her colleagues were experiencing similar problems in their respected classrooms. In the second CFG meeting she expressed her concerns about differentiating instructions to weaker learners and started a discussion around this dilemma. Her colleagues asserted that they were witnessing similar issues and that practicing differentiation when the classrooms consisted of various learner types was challenging for them as well. She was comforted by her colleagues as they reflected on their own classes while indicating that she was doing more than them.

She was looking for concrete ideas that would help her support differentiated learning and help promote growth for all the learners while making the learning experience more engaging. She was aware that her classrooms were teacher-centered and that her TTT was high, as this had been an ongoing issue in her teaching practice. She reflected on this dilemma and was able to show change in her teaching method with the help of Nation's 'Teaching ESL/EFL Reading and Writing' book, which the facilitator gave her at the start of the CFG. He had given photocopies of Chapter 7 'Helping Learners Write' to all the participants, but Sevda was the only one who mentioned its benefits explicitly in her last reflection as she stated:

> I was able to refresh my knowledge on different ways to make the writing classes fun. Although I wasn't able to read the chapter given about writing at the start of the CFG, I was able to get some ideas from it later on. Activities like group composition, running dictation, dicto-gloss, or writing with a secretary were from there. With stronger groups I tried process writing and found it a great success as it reduced my TTT significantly. Hearing different ideas from my colleagues and practicing them in my own classes gave me a better chance to see which ones work well and why others didn't. I found that grouping students in writing classes helped the learning process as it was more engaging and weaker students were helped by stronger ones as it enhanced their 21st century skills like collaboration and creativity, something I hadn't focused too much on beforehand.

Her thoughts on peer observation also showed change. It had never been a method that she enjoyed doing since her previous experiences were not very constructive. Once or twice a year, teachers are usually observed by the administration and it is used as an assessment tool to grade teacher performance. She compared her past experiences with the recent observation done by her peers in her third reflective essay, "… *having a colleague watch my lesson is much more comforting than having the head of department or principal in class. I know he or she is there to help me rather than depict my weak points. I had some department heads in the past stop me in the middle of my lesson and tell me that I'm talking too much which might have left a bad taste in my mouth.*" Although she had negative thoughts about peer observation in the past, her thoughts changed after getting constructive feedback from her colleagues. The INSET through CFG had one goal, which was to help the teacher. None of the teachers were out to call her out on her mistakes, rather, its purpose was to assist teachers on issues that they thought were relevant to their development an English language teacher.

Her ongoing teacher education was not confined with just the CFG. As I mentioned earlier, she was a partaking in an MA in ELT; therefore, the CFG was a chance for her to bring theory into practice as she expressed these thoughts in her second reflective essay, *"Honestly, I thought that the critical friend group was an excellent idea. As a student studying ELT, I had a chance to bring theory into practice. In my in-service teacher education class we have been talking about INSET and I had chance to see it first-hand so I am very thankful for this*." In her post interview she confirmed the type of learner she was when she expressed her view on ESL seminars, *'I think ESL seminars can serve as a starting point, but in CFGs we are in action!'*

Her demeanor towards INSET should not only be accounted to her positive attitude but should be associated with the nonjudgmental environment she was working in as she mentioned off the record that she had not experienced this sort of atmosphere in her prior schools.

4.4.1.4 Engagement in Reflective Practice

She was the only participant that practiced all four reflective teaching methods in the two months the group rehearsed INSET. She had never exercised these methods

beforehand and was keen on embarking on this endeavor. She started off with journal keeping and despite her entries at the dawn of reflective teaching, she was not able to persevere as she reflected in her final essay, *"I did a few entries into my journal but because of the fast pace, hall duty, students asking questions between lessons, I found it difficult to keep up with it."* On the other hand, her experience with peer observation in the CFG changed the way she looked at the practice as she thought it was only a tool of assessment used by the administration. She described her experience with the following words taken from her second reflection:

> Koray observed one of my writing lessons and later we evaluated the lesson together to see if we made any progress about the writing related issues. It was nice to have some feedback and see the points I had to focus on in the following weeks.

After she was observed by the facilitator of the group, she was asked to do a self-evaluation of her lesson where she reflected on action. She stated that she had to reflect in action since her students had forgotten their books at home. She criticized her classroom management and added that her TTT was a bit too high during the lesson. She concluded that she was comfortable with the facilitator in the room because she knew that his goal was to help, so she did not stress out.

She found self-monitoring a practical way to reflect as she stated in her final reflective essay, *"I really enjoyed watching my own lessons because I was able to stop and go back to certain parts to watch what the kids were doing. I could see what I did right or wrong."* She chose to record the lesson that her head of department observed which put extra pressure on her. When reflecting on the lesson, she mentioned that she was not able to follow her lesson plan as she had wished, and that she was a bit nervous due to the assessment factor. She plans on using this method of reflection in the future.

The last CFG meeting was designated to micro teaching lessons. All the teachers were asked to demonstrate a micro lesson to their peers, however, two of the teachers were not able to attend because of other institutional meetings. Neither Sam nor Sevda were prepared with a lesson plan, so the facilitator said that it was a perfect opportunity to demonstrate a true demo class since none of the participants ever prepared lesson plans on a regular basis. As a result, Sevda was chosen to give the group a micro lesson

of a random topic chosen by the facilitator. She had five minutes to prepare a lesson which focused on writing as a production activity. She reflected on this experience in her final essay, "*I think that it was a great way to practice since in real life we do the same thing. The feedback I got afterwards helped me look at all my lessons in a different way.*"

Chapter 5

Discussions and Conclusions

5.1 Discussion of Findings for Research Questions

The aim of the study was to gain insight on the perceptions of teachers towards practicing reflective teaching methods in a CFG to understand how it could be used as a vehicle to assist teachers in resolving EFL classroom issues at a language preparatory program of a private high school in Turkey. Specifically, the researcher tried to gain insight on what aspects of the CFG could assist the learning process for EFL teachers. Finally, the researcher wanted to grasp the obstacles teachers face when these sorts of teacher support groups are implemented. Having presented the four cases in the previous chapter, we now discuss them in relation to our research questions and the literature.

5.1.1 Discussions about the perceptions of teachers towards practicing in reflective teaching methods through CFG. It must be understood that CFGs are a dynamic way of practicing INSET and can be adapted to any environment. As mentioned earlier in the study, one of the goals of implementing CFG was to gain insight on the perceptions of teachers towards reflective practice through CFG. However, the facilitator had to alter his approach considering the environment teachers were working in and their backgrounds. Richards and Lockhart (1994) suggested that language teachers' beliefs are derived from social and individual factors such as experience as a student, personality preferences, professional knowledge by means of teaching, public educational theories obtained by courses or reading. Similarly, Kennedy (1999) stated competence in teaching as a product of expert knowledge and their own experiential knowledge. Kirk and Walter (1981) suggested group members

to be chosen from teachers who have similar background and competency, but yet have different interests, points of view and opinions. Therefore, the researcher was fortunate to work with such a sample since all of them had earned or were in the process of completing of their MA in ELT. It would have been demotivating and dull if the facilitator had lectured them about different approaches to their lessons and ways to reflect. Thus, the facilitator reminded the participants about the issues and gave them opportunities to reflect on their practices both in and outside of their classes. Ball (2000) asserted that teachers develop expert knowledge according to their own need as well as classroom needs and acclimate instruction suitable for their goals. The sample was familiar with the reflective teaching methods introduced by the facilitator but had not been actively using them. The CFG was the vehicle that provided this opportunity. Johnson (1999) defines L2 teacher/teaching expertise as the reflection of complex ways where teachers evaluate how to teach a specific learner group at a specific time in a specific school environment. Since the group was a voluntary group, no pressure was put on the participants. When they engage in professional development activities against their will, the end result is often a disappointment and waste of time (Borg, 2015). All of them adhered to at least one type of the reflective teaching method; however, one of them was able to practice all four of them in the two-month CFG program. Sevda was the only participant able to practice journal keeping, peer observation, self-monitoring, and micro-teaching in this time frame. It could be said that her intrinsic motivation came partly from the ELT MA she was undertaking, in which rote-learning is practiced, as she connected the concepts discussed during the CFG to classes such as 'INSET' and 'Curriculum Design', thus bringing theory into practice. Vygotsky (1986) stated that rote-learning of academic concepts should be blended with standard teaching concepts. Parallel to this thought, Kennedy (1999) agrees that expertise in teaching binds experiential and teacher knowledge. Except for Gamze, who claimed she did not have the time to observe anyone because of the workload, the group was able to fit peer observations into their schedules. Even though generating lesson plans before entering the classroom is an important aspect of teaching EFL, teachers did not want to design formal lesson plans before being observed, nor did the observers want to use the observation templates given to them. Instead, they preferred to give their colleagues a briefing about the

teaching concepts they wanted analyzed prior to the given lessons and have a friendly discussion afterwards.

One similarity across the cases was that all group members practiced reflection through self-monitoring. Gamze was the only participant who had observed herself prior to the CFG. Sam was the most enthusiastic participant when practicing self-monitoring as he confessed that he had always wanted to record his classes but never had the right motivation to do so. He referenced this experience when discussing the benefits of the INSET program and stated that he would do this time and time again in the future. The reason that self-monitoring was so popular amongst the participants might have been the practicality of the process. Unlike the other reflective teaching methods, participants did not have to spend extra time implementing this method of reflection. Since time is of the essence to all teachers, it does not surprise me that three out of the four participants would prefer this method of reflection over the others.

5.1.2 Discussions regarding the aspects of CFG that assists in professional development. All of the participant perceived the CFG as a vehicle where collegiality and collaborations helped assist teachers in the learning process. Sevda implied that each teacher was equipped with a different arsenal of teaching tools as she aimed to improve her teaching through past experiences of her colleagues. Sam preferred to use the group as a place to vent and download as Gamze and Nalan perceived the CFG as a platform where teachers came together to share problems and work on solving them collectively. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory suggests that human cognition development is intrinsically social since it is derived from participation in social interaction which is then internalized as a psychological tool for thinking. Therefore, teachers feel more comfortable speaking to their peers about issues that hinder the learning process. McKenzie and Carr-Reardon (2003) states that CFGs are the communities of peer teachers where no-one is bound by the hierarchical statuses and where everyone shares their ideas and experiences in a democratic, reflective and a collaborative way.

Each participant's personality and background were unique which created diverse views on specific classroom issues. Richards and Lockhart (1994) suggested that language teachers' beliefs are derived from social and individual factors. These

factors include their experiences as students, personalities, knowledge of the language, and educational backgrounds. It was this divergence that enhanced professional development for the language teachers. Bambino (2003) claimed that CFGs have helped teachers in the U.S. improve instruction and student learning while being the catalyst for changes in the teaching, learning, culture, and climate of learning communities across the country. Unfortunately, the National School Reform Faculty (2006) suggested that CFGs exist in less than 2% of U.S. schools (K-12). Thus, this number could be considered lower since there are no published studies regarding the implementation of CFGs at K-12 schools in Turkey.

When the issues that had been encountered since the start of the year were put in front of the teachers every other week during the CFG meetings, they had a chance to discuss their practices with other group members. Vygotsky's theory stresses how social interaction works as a psychological tool for thinking; therefore, it was crucial to not have a hierarchy amongst teachers. As a result, they were able to think aloud and speak candidly about issues that had been hindering their professional learning process.

The participants vividly conceptualized the issues from the outset of the meetings and showed great effort to find concrete solutions to the material and curriculum problems at hand. Although the initial plan of splitting the designated writing book evenly amongst the participants was not achieved, teachers continued to change their approaches to the writing classes as they reflected on those lessons during the meetings and implemented new engaging activities for their classrooms. The sample including the facilitator, who actively participated in the reflection process, brought forth alternative approaches to their writing lessons. Sam claimed that his rapport with the students changed after he did a dictation activity, where he asked the learners to take notes as he told them about his life and asked them to write a biography. He claimed that the activity was a great success as it was the first time all of his students had put such great effort into a writing assignment and that he would continue these sort of dictation biographies throughout his teaching career. Sam had been having classroom management issues with this class since the beginning of the year. Showing the learners the real person behind the mask, gave them a chance to get to know their teacher up close. This was an activity that he got directly from the facilitator as he

reflected on it during the second CFG meeting and final reflection. Gamze on the other hand, used authentic material to help enhance the learning process. After the group had learned that the students were not responsible for the content inside the writing book, Gamze was relieved and immediately changed her approach as she began to implement TED TALKS videos to arouse attention of learners before they began writing. Nation and Gu (2007) states that such linked skills tasks fit easily to theme-based work. She also adapted 'Picture Composition' to her classrooms as they exchanged material with Nalan regularly. Parallel to Gamze, Nalan took a similar approach to her classes as she tried to raise their attentiveness by using similar videos. She preferred to discuss the given topics in detail and orchestrated longer than usual brainstorming activities with the whole class before having them write about a given topic. Robert (2016) indicated that individual growth is an exchange between social powers within the school which allows accumulation of knowledge; hence, teacher learning naturally recognizes the interplay between the teacher's social environment and internal development. In contrast to Gamze, Sevda did not throw the book completely out the window. She preferred to play it safe and use the topics in the book as she altered her methodology. She began to do more kinesthetic activities and implemented 'Process Writing', which gave the learners a chance to practice peer editing and increase autonomy. In addition, she had students practice 'Dicto-gloss' and 'Writing with a Secretary' activities in groups that helped lower TTT and transform her teacher-centered classrooms to a more student-centered one. Vygotsky (1986) stated a teacher using a system based on rote-learning can only stimulate a knowledge of what should be learnt as a concept; however, the ultimate purpose of concept development is to blend academic concepts and everyday concepts as true concepts. All of the teachers had one thing in mind when conducting their writing classes and that was to make them more alluring for the learner. Consequently, the participants reflected on their practices and tried to alter their approaches, which in return, helped enhance both teacher and student motivation; thus, allowing for a healthier learning environment.

5.1.3 Discussions about the challenges which were experienced by teachers and how those challenges were overcome. Various challenges such as the way in which CFGs are conducted and motivational factors of teacher-learners influence the success of implementing CFGs. If it is imposed upon the teachers by the

administration, it would be a burden for most teachers since they already have a heavy workload. This specific group was teaching 24-26 classroom hours weekly excluding the hours managing clubs, tutoring, checking work, orchestrating drama, marking exams, and mentoring students while participating in weekly administrative meetings. Thus, the environment of the teachers must be taken into account when implementing such teacher support groups. Even though the sample consisted of volunteers, there was resistance when the facilitator started the second meeting with a handout which discussed different theoretical approaches to writing lessons. It was implied from their body language that they were disengaged with the activity as some of the teachers started talking about other subjects. The facilitator had to adjust the content of the CFG meetings as he transformed them into more reflective sessions. Teachers were asked questions about how they approached certain issues, thus, giving them an opportunity to reflect on their lessons through social interaction. However, whenever they were asked to spend time on reflective teaching methods outside of teaching hours it became a burden. Sam and Gamze believed that extrinsic factors would help motivate teachers to participate in INSET. Gamze stated that such INSET could be possible if teachers worked less hours while Sam believed that teachers should be compensated for the extra work they do after school. Recent research shows that teachers experience an acceleration of working speed as well as an increasing number of assignments throughout the academic year, resulting in less time for rest and recovery (Hargreaves, 2003; Lindqvist & Nordänger, 2006; as cited in Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010)

Various factors would seem to influence the success of the INSET program through CFG. If it is imposed, as a top-down process, it is likely that teachers would resist, considering their workload. Nevertheless, the sample in this study was purposeful since they were the only high school teachers who were teaching writing skills. The teachers had to stay after school twice a week due to regulations set by the administration. These extra hours were scheduled for teachers to help students in need of extra help. In addition, the administration uses these hours to hold weekly meetings. However, most of the time EFL teachers use this time to check student homework or grade exams. Sam was not happy staying afterschool, hence the reason for his bias at the start of the CFG. The environment he came from compensated teachers for the extra time they put in for INSET. Moreover, the institutions he had worked at

previously provided its teachers with weekly preparation time which was compensated. Gamze was able to attend half the meetings as she witnessed teacher burnout.

5.1.4   Discussions about change that has occurred through CFG which would not have been possible through other forms of INSET. Sevda and Nalan stated that seminars do not have the same effect as CFGs because of their direct teaching approach. Sevda thought ESL seminars could be a start to INSET but enjoyed CFG more as she felt that the interaction with colleagues brought enthusiasm to the learning environment. Sam and Gamze agreed that interaction amongst teachers allowed them to collaborate as they were able to dawn on specific issues that were pending in their classrooms. This concept of social learning is in parallel with Vygotsky's sociocultural theory where he stated that through others, teachers become themselves (Vygotsky, 1997, p. 105). With the exception of the occasional seminars in the region and mandatory training at the start of every semester, teachers are not exposed to any sort of scheduled INSET in K-12 schools across Turkey. In fact, the seminars given in the region are usually sponsored by publishers and given in various schools or universities once or twice a year. They tend to have a 'drive-by' approach as experienced teacher trainers try to teach specific concepts of language teaching. However, teachers are left with little knowledge to use in their respected classrooms.

The analysis of the reflective essays and first CFG meeting helped illuminate the dilemmas surrounding communicative skills classes while the designated book for this class was ruled the culprit for most of the issues at hand. These were specific issues that emerged from the needs analysis conducted before any meetings had taken place. Unlike 'drive by' seminars, teachers were asked to dwell on real classroom issues rather than being taught specific concepts that might not relate to their respected classrooms. Wyatt and Dikilitaş (2016) argue that inquiry-based learning is critical as teachers need self-initiated, directed and monitored professional development more than ever to be able to work as autonomous, self-efficacious life-long-learning professionals.

With the exception of Gamze, who thought these seminars were a complete waste of time, other participants thought they could be useful if they are supported by

CFGs; thus, bringing theory into practice by connecting new knowledge to real classrooms and reflecting on them through collaborative discussion groups.

5.2 Implications

In brief, the study shows us that the importance of implementing INSET programs and the positive outcomes of this phenomenon. As it is becoming more and more popular in institutions around the world, it is not truly recognized in Turkey. The authorities do not pay the required attention to the subject and teachers are overworked as they do not have the time or energy to participate in LTE. Most INSET programs are one-shot seminars organized on weekends and mandated by the schools. As a result, neither the mentors, presenters, nor the participant teachers can get efficient results from these activities due to the lack of consistency and top-bottom approach. At this point, the importance of implementing INSET through CFGs become even more evident. CFGs are more beneficial for both teachers and their students because they provide long-term development and a bottom-up approach. Teachers, who are the critical stakeholders in the education process, decide on the topics they wish to put under the magnifying glass. They come together voluntarily and attend the teacher support group that suits their interest. Consequently, the teacher-learners are able to share the workload in solving classroom issues together rather than on their own, thus, allowing collaboration to enhance collegiality in the school.

Most private K-12 schools require their teachers to stay after school hours at least once a week. If planned and organized at the start of the year by the administration and teachers, there is no reason why teachers cannot get together at least once a month to discuss real issues. From this qualitative case study of four EFL teachers participating in INSET through CFG at a private high school located in Turkey, various insights on teachers as learners, along with the benefits and obstacles they perceived while partaking in the CFG have been gained. However, it should be stressed that the findings from such a small-scale case study would not be generalized to all teachers since particularities of the lived experience has been highlighted (Stake, 1995).

5.3 Conclusions

In this light, participating in Critical Friend Groups:

- Can be more fruitful than traditional teacher training as rote-learning can increase knowledge, whereas CFGs blend academic concepts with everyday concepts (Vygotsky,1986).
- Can assist teachers in developing expert knowledge according to their own need and classroom needs (Ball, 2000).
- Can help assist L2 teachers reflect on complex ways of approaching different learner groups in alternate settings (Johnson, 1999).
- Can help enhance expert knowledge and experiential knowledge (Kennedy, 1999).
- Can help solve classroom issues of L2 teacher through collaboration (Günbay and Mede, 2017)
- May help teachers feel more comfortable discussing issues that hinder the learning process for learners (McKenzie & Carr-Reardon, 2003).
- Can be a catalyst to help improve instruction and student learning (Bambino, 2003).
- Can increase motivation, better teaching, benefit the learners, increase collegiality and collaboration (Oliphant, 1997).

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APPENDICES

A. Interview Questions

    a) Pre-interview questions

1. Have you ever participated in a CFG before or anything similar?

2. What are your expectations from this group?

3. How are your writing classes going so far?

4. Can you tell me a little about your background?

    b) Post-interview questions

1. What are your thoughts on teacher support groups like CFGs?

2. How has CFG helped you focus on classroom issues?

3. What have you done differently since the beginning of the year?

4. What are your thoughts on reflective teaching methods such as journal keeping, peer observation, self-monitoring, and micro teaching?

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