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Investigating the Barriers to EFL Teachers' Professional Development in Erbil High Schools

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Keywords: - Barriers - EFL teachers -professional Development	Abstract The present study entitled, “ Investigating the Barriers to EFL Teachers' Professional Development in Erbil High Schools”, aims at investigating the barriers to English Language teachers' professional development in the city Centre of Erbil. To achieve the aims of the study, a questionnaire has been constructed to investigate the barriers to professional development. The tool of the study was exposed to some experts as jury members in the fields of English language, linguistics, and applied linguistics to achieve its validity. The sample of the study is 100 English Language teachers in public high schools. The data was analyzed after being statistically computed by employing SPSS programme to show Percentage, the Mean, and the Standard Deviation of the items of the questionnaire. The findings of this study reveal that there are some outstanding barriers that prevent English Language teachers from participating in professional development activities or training courses. The barriers are: (poor internet infrastructure and teachers' illiteracy with modern technological tools, the ineffectiveness of teachers' performance appraisal system, a bad design of professional development programmes,
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	<p>Training venues, financial constraints, teachers' demotivation, the lack of qualified and professional English language trainers, English language teachers' excessive workload, administrative routines, personal problems (family problems) and poor economic conditions, teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards the professionalism of their performance, the effects of colleagues. The study also shows that the variables such as gender, age, marital status, qualification, years of teaching, and teaching hours per week have an impact on teachers' participation in career-development activities. The contribution of this study can help other researchers in conducting further studies to investigate the barriers that influence teachers' participation in profession-related activities or training courses among public high school English language teachers. It also helps the education decision makers to plan effective professional development programmes</p>
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التحقيق في العوائق التي تحول دون التطوير المهني لمعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في
مدارس أربيل الثانوية

نجم الدين شمس الدين محمود
روزگار جلال خض

الملخص	الكلمات الدالة:-
<p>الدراسة الحالية بعنوان "التحقيق في المعوقات امام التطور المهني لمعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في اعداديات أربيل". وتهدف هذه الدراسة إلى التحقق من العوائق التي تقع امام التطوير المهني لمعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية في مركز مدينة أربيل. لوصول أهداف الدراسة ، تم إنشاء استبيان للدراسة في العوائق امام التطوير المهني. تم عرض أداة الدراسة على بعض الخبراء كأعضاء لجنة تحكيم في مجالات اللغة الإنجليزية واللغويات واللغويات التطبيقية للتحقق من صحتها. عينة الدراسة كان 100 مدرس لغة انجليزية في المدارس الأعدادية. تم تحليل البيانات بعد حسابها إحصائياً باستخدام برنامج SPSS لبيان النسبة المئوية والمتوسط والانحراف المعياري لبنود الاستبيان. تبين نتائج هذه الدراسة أن هناك بعض العوائق البارزة التي تمنع معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية من المشاركة في أنشطة التطوير المهني أو الدورات التدريبية. تتمثل العوائق في: (ضعف البنية التحتية للإنترنت وعدم امكانية المعلمين لأستعمال أدوات التكنولوجيا الحديثة ، وعدم وجود نظام فعال لتقييم أداء المعلمين ، وتصميم السبئ لبرامج التطوير المهني ، وأماكن التدريب ، والقيود المالية ، وتشبيط المعلمين ونقص المؤهلين والمهنيين مدربي اللغة الإنجليزية ، عبء العمل المفرط لمعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية والإجراءات الإدارية والمشاكل الشخصية (المشاكل الأسرية) والظروف الاقتصادية السيئة ومعتقدات و مواقف المعلمين اتجاه أدائهم المهنية وتأثير الزملاء عليهم. أيضاً تظهر الدراسة أن المتغيرات مثل الجنس والعمر والحالة الاجتماعية والمؤهلات وسنوات التدريس وساعات التدريس في الأسبوع لها تأثير على مشاركة المعلمين في أنشطة التطوير الوظيفي. مساهمة هذه الدراسة يمكن أن تساعد الباحثين الآخرين في إجراء مزيد من الدراسات للتحقيق في العوائق التي تؤثر على مشاركة المعلمين في الأنشطة ذات الصلة بالمهنة أو الدورات التدريبية بين معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية بالمدارس الأعدادية. كما أنه تساعد صانعي قرار التربوي على تخطيط برامج تطوير مهني الفعالة.</p>	<p>- الحواجز - معلمو اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية -التطوير المهني</p> <p>معلومات البحث تاريخ البحث: الاستلام: 2022_3_28 القبول: 2022_4_10 التوفر على النت</p>

1. Introduction

The professional development for teachers is of vital importance to the success of the teaching and learning process. This topic has been the focus of the Ministry of Education, policymakers everywhere in the world and the research as well especially recently (Avalos, 2011). Similarly, improving the quality of teaching and professional development are primary concerns of teachers so as to both boost the students' learning outcomes and teachers' confidence (Powell & Bodur, 2019). Teachers, throughout their professional lives, have to update and boost their performance by making use of the experience, knowledge, and skills of their peer professionals (Hargreaves & Fullan,

2012). There is no escape from professional development for teachers as professionals. So, they need to grow professionally in order to stay effective in their teaching practices. Thus, teachers' professional development is of prime significance to increase the quality of education. (Desimone, 2009).

There are different activities and programmes so as to improve English teachers' Professional development in public high schools. Richards and Farrell (2005: 9-10), state a variety of PD activities that can be applied to teachers such as 'workshops, self-monitoring, teacher support groups, journaling, classroom visitation, teaching portfolios, analysis of critical incidents, case analysis, peer coaching, team teaching, and action research.' Teachers had to participate in such traditional professional development activities in a traditional way in which their needs and interests were not considered (Flint et al., 2011). Lumpe (2007) asserts that in traditional activities of PD, teachers suffer from isolation in the professional community because such traditional activities as one-sided workshops transfer information to teachers unilaterally. As a result, the quality of the given PD activity is regarded as one of the most serious challenges for teachers' PD. When teachers have limited access to quality PD, these challenges may even be aggravated (Powell & Bdur, 2019). In other words, when PD activities are of poor quality, then teachers may not get benefit from them. In addition to the above challenges, there are many barriers that restrict teacher' engagement in the activities or training courses dedicated to professional development.

1.1 Research Questions

The study attempts to achieve the aims by finding the answers to these research questions:

- 1-What are the barriers that prevent English language teachers from persistently taking part in professional development activities from the perspectives of English teachers?
- 2- What type of barrier mostly gets in the way of English language teachers' professional development?
- 3- Does the Covid-19 pandemic have any impact on teachers' participation in professional development courses as a new variable during the last two years?
- 4-What variables are related to the public high school teachers' participation in professional development training courses or activities?

2. Review of the literature

2.1 Review of Previous Related Studies:

Recently, Eroglu and Kaya (2021), conducted qualitative research on "Professional Development barriers of Teachers". The study aimed at finding out the barriers to teachers' professional development activities. For the purpose of collecting the data, the researcher employed a semi-structured interview. The participants of the study were twelve teachers who worked in Turkish public high schools in the city Centre of Elazig. Further, the profile of participants was varied in terms of gender, age, and educational level. The population of that study included four high schools in the city of Elezig, Turkey. Its sample comprised twelve subject branch teachers who were teaching in that four schools. According to the findings of that study, the barriers to teacher's professional development were problems related to functioning at schools, the inadequacy of in-service training, and teachers themselves. Also, the barriers to professional development attributed to teachers' negative attitudes to in-service professional training courses, conflict with work schedule, inefficiency of course trainers, the monotony of training courses content, irrelevant content knowledge, inadequate evaluation for teacher's

performance, financial constraints, heavy workload and the absence of professional development opportunities.

Fang, Chan, and Ralogeropoulos (2021), made a study entitled “Secondary School Teachers’ professional development in Australia and Shanghai: Needs, Support, and Barriers.” The aims of the study were to explore teachers’ needs, support, and barriers to their professional development. For the purpose of conducting the study, the three researchers used data from (TALIS, 2013). The study collected data from Australian and Shanghai secondary school teachers. The population of the study was 200 hundred schools in Shanghai and 154 schools in Australia. Next, nearly, twenty teachers with different subject matter backgrounds were selected as a sample of that study.

With regard to the barriers, the teachers perceived two primary barriers that prevented them from their participation in teacher professional development activities: “working schedule” and “a lack of monetary incentives to take part.”

Hoang (2020) conducted a study entitled “The Enablers and Barriers to Professional Development for In-service teachers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in the Vietnamese Higher Education Context.” The study had two main aims: to understand the current situation of teacher professional development for EFL teachers in Vietnam at the university level and to find factors enabling and hindering their engagement in professional development. To achieve the study’s aims, the researchers constructed a questionnaire for EFL teachers and conducted personal interviews with managers at the university, that is to say, the researcher used a mixed method: quantitative and qualitative. The population of that study comprised 170 English language teachers at the university level in Vietnam as well as four managers. The sample of that study was thirty-five teachers and four managers. The researcher arrived at the followings:

The findings indicated that the managers attributed the barriers to professional development to inadequacy of financial support, and factors related to teachers such as poor awareness of PD, beliefs, limited access to PD information, poor expertise, or age.

On the other hand, the EFL teachers ascribed the obstacles to professional development to structural factors like late issues of regulations, insufficient financial support, and work overload.

In 2018, Sazegar and Motallebzadeh, did research entitled “Investigating EFL Teachers’ Perspectives on the Importance and Barriers to Professional Development”. The study intended to investigate teachers’ viewpoints on professional development and barriers to professional development. The population of that study was teachers at different universities and English language institutes in Mashhad. The sample contained one hundred teachers. So as to carefully examine teachers’ perspectives on professional development and their barriers as well, the researchers designed a questionnaire to collect data from one hundred English language teachers at different Iranian institutes of English and universities in the city of Mashhad. Depending on the findings of that study, the most frequent barriers to the teacher professional development were a lack of monetary incentives for the teacher trainees, no relevant professional

Similarly, Meng and Tajaroensuk in (2013), conducted a study to investigate teachers’ major problems with professional development. The title of the study was “An Investigation of Tertiary EFL Teachers’ Problems in Their In-service professional Development”. The population of the study was composed of English language teachers at Guiyang University. The sample of the study consisted of fifty-five English as a foreign language teacher. The aim was to investigate the problems that English as a foreign language teachers may face at Chinese University of Guiyang. For the purpose of collecting data for the study, both researchers used two instruments, namely, a semi-structured group interview and a questionnaire. A questionnaire was formulated to

discover the problems that Chinese EFL teachers encounter in their professional development. Another purpose behind designing the questionnaire was to obtain the suggestions which they can make. Meanwhile, a semi-structured interview was conducted with twelve teacher participants as the interviews to obtain more detailed information about the participants' problems related their in-service professional development and the suggestions they could offer in this regard. Based on the findings of the study, the tertiary English as a foreign language teachers faced problems like the inappropriateness of programmes, the limitations of programmes, and the discontinuity of programmes.

3. Methodology

3.3.1 Participants' Demographic Data

The study sample is composed of 100 teachers (50 males and 50 females) who are in-service teachers of English as a foreign language were randomly selected from thirty-five different public high schools in the city Centre of Erbil. These teachers are teaching in different public high schools including general schools, evening schools, and model English schools. Below table shows a brief description of the participants' teaching service:

Table 1: Participants' Demographic Data

Total Number	Teacher Degree	Teachers' Age	Teaching Experience	Teaching Hours	PD Participation	School Type
100	87 BA/BSc	29 youngest	6 Min.	6 Min.	0 Min.	Morning
50 males	13 MA	61 oldest	37 Max.	20 Max.	15 Max.	Evening
50 females						Model

3.3.2 The Tool of the Study

Employing a questionnaire is a favorable method to gather data. A questionnaire supplies a large amount of data at a relatively low cost (Dornyei, 2003, Neuman, 1994). The questionnaire is comprised of twenty-seven items related to the investigation of the barriers to professional development of English language teachers in public high schools in the city Centre of Erbil. Moreover, the items of the questionnaire have a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to disagree, neutral, agree, and strongly agree. Details about the questionnaire is found in Appendix).

3.3.3 The Validity of the Questionnaire

It is not easy to check the appropriateness or elucidate information further in a questionnaire since "on-the-spot clarification is not possible" (Brown, 2001: 6). This study adopts face validity so as to reduce this weakness. Face validity means that the experts who understand the researcher's topic look at the items of the questionnaire to evaluate as to whether the items of the questionnaire appear to clear, relevant, and unambiguous and reasonable (Oluwatayo, 2012). In order to establish the face validity of the questionnaire, it was electronically sent to five Ph.D. holders who are currently teaching applied linguistics and linguistics in English departments at the university level.

Based on jurors' comments, the researcher restructured, reworded and improved the instructions and the items before producing the last version of the questionnaire.

3.4.3 The Reliability of the Questionnaire

Drost (2011) defines reliability as a tool that refers to the extent to which a measuring device gives the same results if the measurements were to be taken again under the same conditions. To find out the reliability of the questionnaire items, the researcher randomly selected twenty English language teachers (10 females and 10 males) in ten public high schools. The researcher visited these ten schools to administer the questionnaire in ten randomly selected public high schools and then analyzed the data. For finding the internal consistency of the items of the questionnaire Cronbach's Alpha formula has been applied in SPSS programme and thus the value recorded (0.72). The closer the value to (1), the greater the reliability is (George & Mallery, 2021). Based on the value output out of the test, the questionnaire is said to be reliable because the result showed a good similarity among the responses of the respondents. Table (1) shows that the questionnaire is reliable.

Table 2: Questionnaire Reliability

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized items	No of Items
0.72	0.773	28

4.1 Analysis of the Questionnaire Data

The results of the questionnaire items are interpreted using percentages, mean scores, and standard deviation. The results are shown in tables (3 and 4)

Table 3: Corresponding Range Scale of the Mean Scores

No.	Range	Mean score interpretation
1	1.00-1.80	strongly disagree
2	1.90-2.60	Disagree
3	2.70-3.40	Neutral
4	3.50-4.20	Agree
5	4.30-5.00	strongly agree

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics of the Barriers hindering English Teachers from PDA

Item	Likert Scales						Mean	STD Deviation
	SD	D	N	A	SA			
1-I am not motivated enough to participate in professional	Fr	9	13	0	11	67	4.1400	1.41436

development activities

	%	9	13	0	11	67		
2-I do not need to develop my knowledge and skills as classes do not require very high level of knowledge	Fr	26	13	0	2	59		
	%	26	13	0	2	59	3.5500	1.81116
3-I perceive professional development activities as a complete waste of time.	Fr	21	18	0	30	31		
	%	21	18	0	30	31	3.3200	1.57557
4--I do not have a strong desire to adopt new teaching methods or technological tools in my class to develop professionally	Fr	25	14	0	11	50		
	%	25	14	0	11	50	3.4700	1.74920
5- A poor relationship with my colleagues prevents me from professional development.	Fr	14	20	0	55	11		
	%	14	20	0	55	11	3.2900	1.29720
6- My workload at school hinders me from participating in professional development activities	Fr	1	14	0	58	27		
	%	1	14	0	58	27	3.9600	.96316

7- I am busy with my family and personal issues to earn a living that prevents me from developing professionally	Fr	6	12	0	54	28	3.8600	1.13725
	%	6	12	0	54	28		
8- I do not need professional development activities for being experienced in the field.	Fr	21	18	0	34	27	3.2800	1.54449
	%	21	18	0	34	27		
9- There is a repetition in the content of the professional development programmes	Fr	1	6	17	55	21	3.8900	.83961
	%	1	6	17	55	21		
Item		Likert Scales					Mean	STD Deviation
10- The teacher's opinions are not taken into consideration in designing professional development programmes.		SD	D	N	A	SA		
	Fr	0	0	9	33	58	4.4900	.65897
%	0	0	9	33	58			
11-There is a weak or no relationship between the content of professional development programmes and what is really taught in the classrooms.	Fr	1	3	9	60	27	4.0900	.75338
	%	1	3	9	60	27		
12-There is no field	Fr	0	0	9	49	42	4.3300	.63652

follow-up supervision for teachers to ensure the effectiveness of the professional development training courses.	%	0	0	9	49	42		
13- There is a lack of an electronically-based follow-up programme for recording the progress of the trainees.	Fr	0	0	9	47	44		
	%	0	0	9	47	44	4.3500	.64157
14- The professional development programmes are not based on contemporary global experiences.	Fr	0	0	9	63	28		
	%	0	0	9	63	28	4.1900	.58075
15- Teacher trainers of professional development programmes are less qualified compared to some participants.	Fr	1	4	9	59	27		
	%	1	4	9	59	27	4.0700	.78180
16- Teacher trainers seem not to have a thorough knowledge about training content.	Fr	1	4	9	61	25		
	%						4.0500	.77035
17- There is a waste of training time in discussing irrelevant points to the	Fr	1	19	9	56	15		
							3.6500	.98857

Item		Likert Scales					Mean	STD Deviation
		SD	D	N	A	SA		
training activities.	%	1	19	9	56	15		
18- There is a delay in informing teacher candidates for professional development enrollment.	Fr	1	9	9	57	24	3.9400	.88557
	%	1	9	9	57	24		
19- Most of professional development activities are not durable to have long-lasting effects	Fr	0	0	9	57	34	4.2500	.60927
	%	0	0	9	57	34		
20- The training time overlaps with school hours	Fr	0	0	9	49	42	4.3300	.63652
	%	0	0	9	49	42		
21- The training sessions last for a longer time than expected.	Fr	5	15	9	60	11	3.5700	1.03724
	%	5	15	9	60	11		
22- Training centres are not provided with appropriate equipment.	Fr	0	2	9	54	35	4.2200	.69019
	%	0	2	9	54	35		
23-The place where the	Fr	4	19	9	51	17	3.5800	1.10261

training centre is located is far from the teacher's residence.	%	4	19	9	51	17		
24- Teachers who participate in professional development activities are not given financial incentives.	Fr	0	5	9	47	39		
	%	0	5	9	47	39	4.2000	.80403
25- Teacher's promotion is not linked to attendance in professional development activities or programmes.	Fr	0	0	0	50	50		
	%	0	0	0	50	50	4.5000	.50252
26- Course enrollment is not compulsory for teachers.	Fr	0	0	0	57	43		
	%	0	0	0	57	43	4.4300	.49757
27- The Covid-19 pandemic causes problems to proceed with professional development activities.	Fr	0	0	0	35	65		
	%	0	0	0	35	65	4.6500	.47937

4.1 Discussion of the results:

The results uncover multiple barriers for public high school teachers in the development process of their profession. So, the most noticeable barriers to teachers' participation in activities or training courses related to professional development, according to the results of this study, are the following main categories: *Poor internet infrastructure and teachers' illiteracy with modern technological tool* is the most outstanding barrier that affected teachers' participation during the Covid-19 pandemic.

This result answers the third research question of the study which says (does the Covid-19 pandemic have any impact on teachers' participation in professional as a new variable during the last two years?). This result is new in its type as this study has been done during the Coronavirus epidemic.

The second category is *Ineffectiveness of teachers' performance appraisal system*. This category is related to voluntary participation in PDA and non-linkage of teachers to attendance in PDA. Personal performance appraisal is extremely importance for teachers' professional development. So, they need to be provided with rewards for their efforts. Yet, based on the results of the current study, teachers' promotion is not linked to hours attended on the profession-related activities or training courses, that is, the appraisal system for teachers is ineffective and unsatisfactory. Similarly, Eroglu and Kaya (2021) claim that an ineffective appraisal system for teachers' performance seriously reduces teachers' participation in activities or training courses associated with professional development. Thus, this result is consistent with their results in their study.

The third main category of barriers is *A bad design of professional development programmes*, which includes these subcategories: *disregarding teachers' opinions, no electronic follow-up programme, no field follow-up supervision, the inconvenience of training timing, the discontinuity of the activities, outdatedness of the programmes, impracticality and the invariability of the content*. A noticeable result obtained from the current study is that in designing the programmes related to the professional development of teachers, teachers' opinions were disregarded. The result is different from the previously conducted research or studies on teachers' professional development. The previously conducted studies did not mention the teachers' opinions.

Moreover, this study reveals that there is a lack of an electronic follow-up programme for recording the progress of trainees. And also, this implies that there is no robust electronic system to assess the effect of training programmes in the field. The studies or research on professional development did not mention this barrier, so this study is not similar to previous related studies.

The result of this study also discloses that there is no post-follow-up supervision to assess the effectiveness of those profession-related activities or training courses on participating teachers. The previously mentioned studies did not discuss this issue. So, that is a new result in this study.

The inconvenience of timing for training courses is another result of the present study. The inconvenience of training time is one of the challenges that hindered teachers' participation in activities or courses on professional development as in studies by Eroglu and Kaya (2021), Fang, Keung Chan, and Ralogeropoulos (2021).

Another significant result of the present study is the discontinuity of the programmes relevant to the professional development of teachers. Most professional development programmes are fragmented and brief that do not have the desired impact on English language teachers in public high schools (Meng and Tajarosuk, 2013)

The sixth sub-category is outdatedness of the programmes:

The results of this study also reveals that the existing professional development programmes were outdated, that is, they are not based on global experiences. The results of the previously mentioned studies did not mention this issue.

The last subcategory is relevant to the existence of repetition in the content of p professional development programmes. And also, the programmes are not practical, that

is, the focus was placed on theoretical facets. This implies that the programmes are boring and irrelevant to classroom practice. While examining the results of the previous studies, similar barriers to teachers participating in the programmes on professional development appear in other contexts as well. In a recent study conducted by Eroglu and Kaya (2021), irrelevant content knowledge, and the monotony of the content of the training courses have been underlined. Similarly, in another study by Meng and Tajaroensuk (2013), the inappropriateness of these programmes was thrown light on.

The fourth category is training venues. The training centres are convenient places for training teachers due to the lack of resources and their locations are not appropriate for the teachers. The previously mentioned studies on professional development did not mention these issues.

The fifth category is *financial constraints*.

This barrier is emphasized in the studies conducted by Eroglu and Kaya (2021), Fang, Chan and Ralogeropoulos (2021), Hoang (2020), and Sazegar and Motallebzadeh (2018).

The sixth category is *Teachers' demotivation*. Teacher demotivation is highlighted in the study by (Hoang, 2020).

The seventh category of barriers is *the lack of qualified and professional English language trainers*. The study discloses that there is a waste of training time in discussing irrelevant points to the training activities. The ineffectiveness of courses trainers has been emphasized in a recent study by Eroglu and Kaya (2021).

The eighth category of barriers is *English language teachers' excessive workload*. Many studies indicate that excessive workload is viewed as a common obstacle for teachers leading to discouraging teachers from taking part in activities related to sustainable professional development (Eroglu and Kaya, 2021; Hoang, 2020).

The ninth category of barriers is *administrative routines*. This implies that centralized administrative routine regulations result in late informing the teacher candidates for participating in activities or events associated with professional development. This result, in this regard, is consistent with the study of Eroglu and Kaya (2021).

The tenth category of barriers is *personal issues and poor economic conditions*. This implies that teachers have no time for participating in activities or training courses pertinent to professional development as a result of personal problems such as family problems and poor economic conditions. The previous related studies did not mention this issue, that is, this study in this concern is inconsistent with previously mentioned studies.

The eleventh category of barriers is *teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards the professional development*. This embraces teachers' personal characteristics such as age, qualification, years of teaching experience, and teaching hours. Depending on the frequency test results, these variable affect teachers' participation in activities or training courses devoted to professional

These variables have not been mentioned in the previous related studies.

lastly, *The Effects of colleagues* are another category of barriers that influence teachers' participation in activities or training courses dedicated to professional development. The previous related studies do not highlight this barrier.

The above barriers answer the second research of this study which states (what are the barriers that prevent English language teachers from persistently taking part in

professional development activities from different stakeholders' perspectives (English language teachers, the directors of training institutes, and teacher trainers).

Regarding the last research question (what variables are related to the public high school teachers' participation in professional development training courses or activities?), gender, age, marital status, qualification, years of teaching experience and teaching hours per week, according to the frequency test results, are the independent variable which affected teachers' engagement in the process of developing themselves professionally.

In a word, the results of the present are mostly compatible with previously related studies. While, this study reveals new barriers, namely, Poor internet infrastructure and teachers' illiteracy with modern technological tools, a bad design of professional development programmes (which includes these sub-barriers: no electronic follow-up programme, disregarding teachers' opinions, no field follow-up supervision, outdatedness of the programmes), Training venues. This study also discloses that female teachers are more motivated to participate in profession-related courses or activities than male teachers. Some variables such as age, years of teachers, qualification, teaching hours, and marital status appeared to have an influence on teachers' participation in profession-related courses or events.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

The current study uncovers numerous barriers that prevent the public high school English language teachers from participating in activities or training courses of profession-related development during their in-service period. The barriers fall into these multiple categories (*poor internet infrastructure and teachers' illiteracy with modern technological tools, the ineffectiveness of teachers' performance appraisal system, a bad design of professional development programmes, Training venues, financial constraints, teachers' demotivation, the lack of qualified and professional English language trainers, English language teachers' excessive workload, administrative routines, personal problems (family problems) and poor economic conditions, teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards the professionalism of their performance, the effects of colleagues*). And also, the most frequently reported subcategory of the barriers is related to the outbreak of the covid-19 pandemic which cease all the indoor activities related to profession-related advancement. Moreover, the study reveals that the variables such as gender, age, marital status, qualification, years of teaching, and teaching hours per week influence teachers' participation activities or training courses devoted to teacher professional development. The results of the current study are globally similar to the results of the past studies on barriers associated with professional development. However, this study discovers some new results concerning barriers related to teacher professional development, namely, poor internet infrastructure, the trainers' inefficacy, and the inconvenience of training venues.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the results and conclusions of the current study, some recommendations are made to remove the barriers to teachers' participation in activities or training courses related to professional development.

1. The training venues should be provided with a strong internet infrastructure.
2. It is important to activate the teachers' performance appraisal system.
3. It is necessary to allocate a special budget for organizing the durable professional development training courses.

4. It would be more effective if the education decision-makers prepare local professional and qualified teacher trainers to train teachers.
5. The Ministry of Education should support teachers both financially and morally to encourage them to engage in various workshops, conferences and seminars so as to exchange ideas, knowledge, and information with their teacher colleagues.
6. The Ministry of Education had better decentralize the professional development programmes.
7. The teacher trainers should provide the teachers with practical knowledge and skills not just theoretical information.
8. The Ministry of Education should choose the most convenient time for training, that is, the training time should not be at the expense of the school work.
9. The Ministry of Education should have a follow-up supervision to assess the effectiveness of the professional development programmes in the field.

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Appendix:

The Questionnaire

Dear teachers,

The thesis is entitled (Investigating the Barriers to EFL Teachers Professional Development in Erbil High Schools). The researcher developed this questionnaire in order to investigate the barriers to teachers' professional development in Erbil public high schools during the in-service period. The questionnaire is comprised of two parts. The first part is about the participants' autobiography, whereas the second part is the questionnaire that consists of 27 items related to barriers to the professional development of English language teachers in public high schools in the city Centre of Erbil. So, you are kindly asked to put (√) in the box which is considered most appropriate to you and be objective and accurate when putting the sign (√) in the box that is appropriate. Note that the purpose of this study is only scientific research, your responses will not, in any way, affect your personal or professional situation.

Note: Strongly disagree= SD, Disagree=D, Neutral=N, Agree=A, Strongly Agree=SA

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For example:

Item	SD	D	N	A	SA
The teacher's opinions are not taken into consideration in designing professional development programmes.					√

Part 1: Personal Information

- 1- Gender: Female Male
- 2- Age: _____
- 3- Marital status: Single Married
- 4- Qualification: teachers' diploma Bachelor's degree Master's degree Ph.D.
- 5- Years of teaching experience: _____
- 6- Teaching hours per week: 0 hours 1-15 hours 16- 20 hours more than 20 hours
- 7- How many professional development training courses have you taken part in so far?

Part 2: The Questionnaire

No	Items	SD	D	N	A	SA
1	I am not motivated enough to participate in professional development activities.					
2	I do not need to develop my knowledge and skills as classes do not require a very high level of knowled					
3	I perceive professional development activities as a complete waste of time.					
4	I do not have a strong desire to adopt new teaching methods or technological tools in my class to develop professionally.					
5	A poor relationship with my colleagues prevents me from professional development.					
6	My workload at school hinders me from participating in professional development activities.					
7	I am busy with my family and personal issues to earn a living that prevents me from developing professionally.					
8	I do not need professional development activities for being experienced in the field.					
9	There is a repetition in the content of the professional development programmes.					
10	The teacher's opinions are not taken into consideration in designing professional development programmes.					
11	There is a weak or no relationship between the content of professional development programmes and what is really taught in the classrooms.					
12	There is no field follow-up supervision for teachers to ensure the effectiveness of the professional development training courses.					
13	There is a lack of an electronically-based follow-up programme for recording the progress of the trainees.					
14	The professional development programmes are not based on contemporary global experiences.					
15	Teacher trainers of professional development programmes are less qualified compared to some participants.					
16	Teacher trainers seem not to have thorough knowledge about training content.					
17	There is a waste of training time in discussing irrelevant points to the training activities.					

18	There is a delay in informing teacher candidates for professional development enrollment.					
19	Most professional development activities are not durable to have long-lasting effects.					
20	The training time overlaps with school hours.					
21	The training sessions last for a longer time than expected.					
22	Training centres are not provided with appropriate equipment.					
23	The place where the training centre is located is far from the teacher's residence.					
24	Teachers who participate in professional development activities are not given financial incentives.					
25	Teacher's promotion is not linked to attendance in professional development activities or programmes.					
26	Course enrollment is not compulsory for teachers.					
27	The Covid-19 pandemic causes problems to proceed with professional development activities.					