

Research Article

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Assessing EFL Teachers' Professional Development Practices and Challenges of Middle-Level Schools in Bahir Dar City Administration

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Abstract

Professional development (PD) is essential for enhancing English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers' instructional effectiveness and their ability to meet evolving educational demands. Despite its importance, evidence on PD practices and challenges among middle-level EFL teachers in Ethiopia remains limited. To address this gap, the study examined the PD practices and challenges of EFL teachers in middle-level schools in Bahir Dar City. Guided by a pragmatic paradigm, the research employed a mixed-methods explanatory sequential design. Quantitative data were collected via questionnaires from a census of 54 EFL teachers, followed by qualitative data from eight teachers selected through maximum variation sampling and eight school leaders purposively selected. Interviews and document analysis were conducted to gain deeper insights into PD practices in the selected schools. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, independent-samples t-tests, and one-way ANOVA, while qualitative data were analyzed thematically. The findings revealed that teachers primarily engaged in individual and school-based PD activities, with limited participation in externally organized programs. The integration of educational technologies, including smartphones, online resources, and audiovisual materials, was minimal. Major challenges included inadequate institutional support, limited resources, weak coordination, and insufficient continuous training and motivation. Furthermore, no significant differences were observed in PD practices or challenges based on gender, school location, or years of teaching experience. Overall, the study underscores the need for a structured, sustainable, and context-sensitive PD framework that strengthens institutional support and promotes sustained teacher engagement, ultimately improving the quality of EFL instruction in Ethiopian middle-level schools.

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Introduction

In today's increasingly interconnected and rapidly evolving world, the role of English as a global lingua franca has become more prominent than ever (Kurniawan, 2024; Thammakhan, 2024). English serves as the primary medium for international diplomacy, commerce, science, and technology (Alzankawi & Alenezi, 2021; Rehman et al., 2025). Consequently, English proficiency is no longer merely a communication skill but a fundamental prerequisite for meaningful participation in the global economy and knowledge society (Salomone & Salomone, 2022). In countries such as Ethiopia, where English is taught as a foreign language, proficiency in English is closely linked to national development, economic competitiveness, and access to global knowledge resources (Esho, 2024; Kule et al., 2024). Within this context, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers play a pivotal role in preparing learners to meet these growing global and national demands.

To perform this role effectively, EFL teachers must possess up-to-date pedagogical knowledge as well as strong linguistic competence (Abraham et al., 2022; Alzankawi & Alenezi, 2021; Lakew et al., 2025). However, maintaining such competencies in a rapidly changing educational landscape requires more than initial teacher preparation. As lifelong learners, EFL teachers need continuous opportunities to enhance their instructional skills in response to evolving curricula, technological advancements, and increasing learner diversity (Bergil, 2023; Castro-Carracedo, 2024). Consequently, teachers professional development (PD) has become a central mechanism for improving teaching quality, promoting reflective practice, fostering pedagogical innovation, and supporting sustained professional growth (Temiz, 2024; Yusop et al., 2025). For EFL teachers in particular, effective PD is essential for aligning classroom instruction with global standards while remaining responsive to local educational contexts (Alharbi, 2024; Lakew et al., 2025).

Globally, PD has long been recognized as a key driver of educational improvement. The introduction of structured staff development programs in the United States during the 1950s and 1960s laid the foundation for formalized teacher learning, influencing education systems worldwide, including those in developing countries such as Ethiopia (Belair, 2021). In the Ethiopian context, the significance of English in education dates back to the establishment of the

first modern school by Emperor Menelik II in 1908 (Mengistu, 2019; Woldeyes, 2022). Since then, English has progressively become the principal medium of instruction at middle, secondary, and tertiary levels (Arega et al., 2024). This historical and policy trajectory has intensified the demand for highly qualified English teachers who are supported by well-structured and sustained PD initiatives (Herut & Setlhako, 2024, 2025)..

Despite widespread recognition of the importance of PD, its implementation in Ethiopia remains inconsistent and often lacks strategic coordination, particularly at the middle school level (Dereb, 2023; Kim, 2022). Teachers frequently report limited access to organized, relevant, and sustainable professional learning opportunities (Bulbula et al., 2023; Ejigu et al., 2018). These challenges are further compounded by systemic constraints, including inadequate resources, weak institutional support, and an overly theoretical emphasis in pre-service teacher education programs (Ageye, 2023; Kedir & Gutema, 2021). Scholars like (Ali, 2020) and (Mak, 2019). Scholars have warned that without continuous and meaningful PD, teachers' instructional practices may stagnate, reducing their ability to respond effectively to changing classroom demands (Ali et al., 2020; Mak, 2019). Moreover, the effectiveness of PD depends not only on program availability but also on teachers' engagement, motivation, and belief systems factors that are often overlooked in PD design and implementation (Amponsah, 2023; Fütterer, 2024; Zhang, 2021).

These concerns are particularly evident among middle-level EFL teachers in Ethiopia. Observations conducted during the supervision of student teachers, along with findings from a tracer study involving graduates of Finote Selam College of Teacher Education, revealed notable gaps in pedagogical practice. These gaps suggest limited engagement in meaningful and sustained PD activities, raising critical questions about the relevance and effectiveness of existing PD provisions for middle school EFL teachers.

At the same time, Ethiopia has recently introduced major educational reforms, including revised curricula, updated instructional materials, and new PD frameworks aimed at promoting continuous teacher learning (Herut, 2024; Kassaye, 2025). In parallel, increasing attention has been given to the potential of technology to enhance PD delivery and teacher collaboration. However, the extent to which these reforms and innovations have translated into effective,

practice-oriented PD experiences for EFL teachers remains unclear. This uncertainty underscores the need for empirical investigation into how PD policies and initiatives are enacted at the classroom level.

Internationally, numerous studies have examined PD from diverse perspectives. For example, (Luthra et al., 2024) explored PD in relation to educational policies and curriculum reforms, highlighting the importance of systemic alignment. Similarly, (Suryandari et al., 2024) investigated perceptions of PD among teachers and students, emphasizing stakeholder engagement in effective professional learning. Other studies have focused on emerging priorities such as digital learning and collaboration. (Amemasor et al., 2025) examined teachers' attitudes toward digital learning, while (Chen et al., 2015) analyzed the relationship between PD, technology integration, and collaborative learning. Likewise, (Zhao, 2024) demonstrated the positive impact of collaborative learning on teachers' professional growth. Despite these contributions, the existing literature often addresses PD in fragmented ways, focusing on isolated dimensions such as policy, perception, technology, or collaboration. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, there is limited empirical evidence that comprehensively examines EFL teachers' professional development practices and challenges across individual, school-based, and out-of-school dimensions in an integrated and interrelated manne. This gap is particularly evident in developing educational contexts.

Similarly, although several local studies have explored aspects of PD in Ethiopia, most have maintained a narrow focus. For instance, Abie (2023) examined lesson study using a quasi-experimental design but limited the analysis to a single PD approach. Other studies by Asfaw (2024), Wolde (2024), Woldegiyorgis (2025), Gizachew (2024) and Asmare (2025) investigated the professional growth of English teachers, primarily in relation to language teaching. While these studies provide valuable insights, they tend to address isolated components of PD and do not offer a holistic understanding of EFL teachers' professional development experiences.

A comprehensive examination of PD therefore requires attention to multiple, interconnected dimensions. Individual PD practices include self-directed activities such as reflection, reading, and technology integration, reflecting teachers' intrinsic motivation for professional growth (Koay, 2023; Mokoena, 2024). School-based PD emphasizes collaborative learning within the

school community, promoting shared practice and sustained improvement (De Jong, 2022) Out-of-school PD, in contrast, provides externally facilitated learning opportunities, such as workshops and university-based programs, that expose teachers to broader innovations and specialized expertise (Oktay, 2024; Wever Frerichs, 2018).

However, engagement in these PD dimensions is often constrained by multiple challenges. At the individual level, personal responsibilities, limited motivation, and the need to engage in income-generating activities reduce teachers' capacity to participate in PD (Booth, 2021; Tafazoli, 2023). At the school level, weak leadership support, lack of resources, and the absence of structured PD programs limit the effectiveness of school-based initiatives (Taddese, 2022; Zindi, 2023). Systemically, the scarcity of relevant training opportunities and the short-term, fragmented nature of out-of-school PD further restrict access to sustained professional learning (Boulay, 2023).

In response to these gaps, the present study investigates the professional development practices and challenges of middle-level EFL teachers in the Bahir Dar City Administration. Specifically, the study aims to address the following central questions:

1. What are the professional development practices of middle-level school EFL teachers in Bahir Dar City?
2. What challenges hinder middle-level school EFL teachers from participating in professional development?
3. How do gender, teaching experience, and school location influence the professional development practices and challenges of middle-level school EFL teachers in Bahir Dar City?

Conceptual Framework

This study's conceptual framework is grounded in the understanding that teachers' professional development (PD) for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers is a multidimensional and contextually influenced process, shaped by personal initiative, school-level support, and broader educational structures. Guided primarily by Richards and Farrell (2005) framework, the study

operationalizes teacher professional learning across three interrelated domains: individual, school-based, and externally supported PD practices, emphasizing the central role of continuous in-service PD in sustaining teacher growth and maintaining the relevance of educational programs. Complementing this framework, contemporary PD models Ewen (2025) provide a lens for examining collaborative learning, reflective practice, inclusive teaching enhancement, and the influence of contextual factors on teachers' professional growth.

Within this framework, PD is conceptualized across three interconnected levels. At the individual level, professional learning is driven by self-directed, reflective, and research-informed practices initiated by teachers themselves. The school-based level includes collaborative activities such as mentoring, peer observation, workshops, and professional learning communities, which collectively cultivate a culture of continuous improvement. The externally supported level encompasses formal professional learning opportunities beyond the school context, such as structured training programs, academic conferences, certification courses, and university-led initiatives, which reinforce and broaden teachers' professional competencies.

The framework further recognizes that teachers' engagement in PD is mediated and constrained by multiple challenges, including institutional and contextual limitations, insufficient resources, and inadequate professional support, which may hinder participation and continuity in PD activities. Additionally, demographic and contextual factors, such as gender, years of teaching experience, and school location (urban or rural), are included as influencing variables, shaping both the extent and nature of teachers' involvement in professional development.

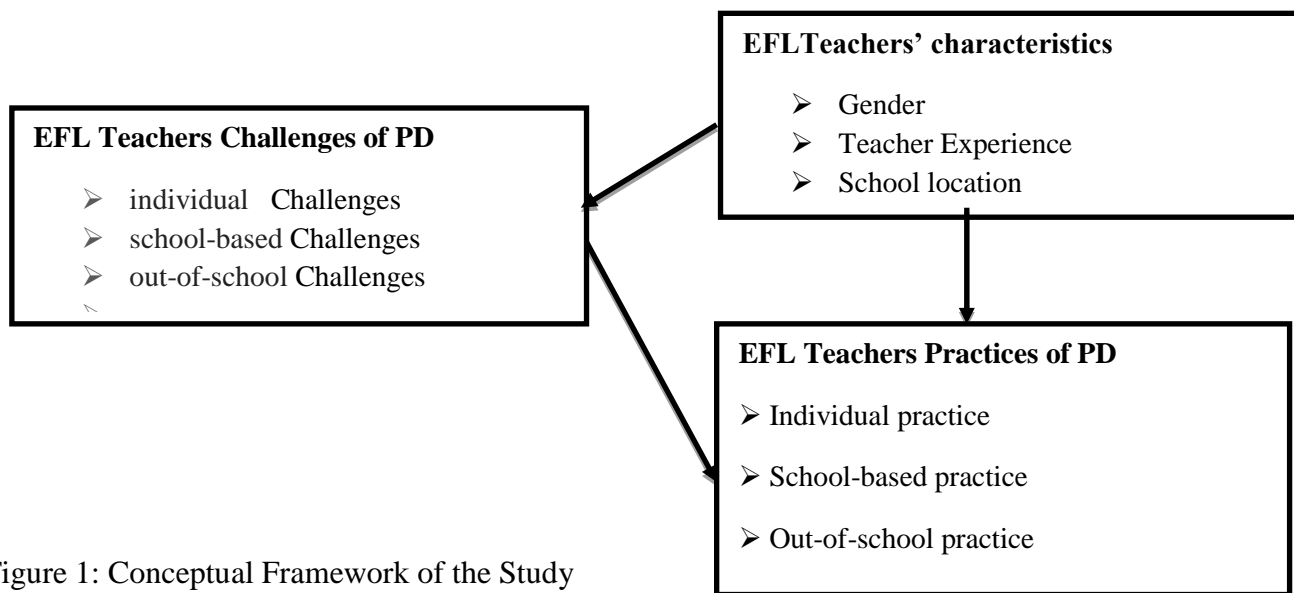


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of the Study

As illustrated in Figure 1, the conceptual model presents the hypothesized relationships between the independent variables (challenges and demographic/contextual factors) and the dependent variable (teachers' participation in PD across individual, school-based, and externally supported dimensions). This framework provides a coherent lens for understanding the interplay between personal motivation, institutional environments, and systemic factors, guiding the analysis and interpretation of both quantitative (QUANT) and qualitative (QUAL) findings. By explicitly linking each set of findings to the framework's components, the model enhances the explanation of how EFL teachers engage in PD and how challenges and contextual factors facilitate or limit their professional growth.

Methods

Research Design

This study adopts a pragmatic research paradigm, which supports the use of a mixed-methods approach to effectively address the research objectives. In line with this paradigm, an explanatory sequential research design was employed, beginning with the collection and analysis

of quantitative data, followed by qualitative data to help explain and elaborate on the initial results (Toyon, 2021).

Mixed-methods research, grounded in the pragmatic tradition, integrates diverse research instruments to produce a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of complex research problems (Creswell, 2017). Building on this perspective, Gayner (2012) emphasizes that the true strength of mixed-methods research lies in its ability to draw on the complementary advantages of both quantitative and qualitative approaches. This methodological integration is especially valuable when a single method alone may be insufficient to capture the full complexity of a phenomenon, particularly if used inappropriately or in isolation. Therefore, by employing a mixed-methods design, this study enhances the credibility, depth, and overall richness of its findings, allowing for a more robust exploration of the research questions.

Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

The study employed a census sampling approach for the quantitative data, which involves including the entire target population in the sample. In this study, the population comprised all government Grade 7 and 8 EFL teachers working in both urban and rural schools under the Bahir Dar City Administration. A total of 62 teachers were invited to participate, of whom 54 teachers (33 male and 21 female) completed and returned the questionnaire, resulting in a response rate of 85.48%. According to Holtom et al. (2022) a response rate above 80% is generally considered a strong indicator of participant engagement and data reliability, as it reduces the risk of non-response bias. This comprehensive sampling strategy enabled the study to capture a broad range of perspectives from key stakeholders involved in EFL instruction, enhancing the robustness and generalizability of the quantitative findings.

Building on the quantitative phase, the qualitative component of the study employed a maximum variation sampling strategy to capture diverse perspectives and experiences. This purposive approach, commonly used in qualitative research, seeks to ensure variation within a specific context (Nyimbili, 2024). In line with the methodological guidance of Cohen et al. (2007) and

Creswell (2017) participants were intentionally selected based on predefined criteria, including gender, teaching experience, and school location.

Accordingly, the eligibility criteria required participants to be EFL teachers with substantial teaching experience, representing both male and female perspectives, drawn from urban or rural schools, and willing to participate. Based on these criteria, eight EFL teachers were selected for in-depth interviews. In addition, eight school leaders were purposively chosen to provide institutional and managerial insights into professional development practices.

EFL teachers were prioritised as the primary participants, providing quantitative data through questionnaires and, for a subset, qualitative data through interviews, as they are the direct implementers and beneficiaries of professional development activities. School leaders, in contrast, were included in qualitative interviews to offer perspectives on the planning, support, and implementation of professional development at the institutional level. Their inclusion allowed for triangulation of data, complementing teachers' self-reported experiences with leadership insights, thereby enhancing the credibility, depth, and overall comprehensiveness of the study's findings.

Data Collection Tool

Data were collected using an explanatory sequential design, in which questionnaire data were collected first, followed by semi-structured interviews and document reviews to explain and enrich the quantitative findings and to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the research problem. The questionnaire, which included both five-point Likert scale items and open-ended questions, was designed to capture teachers' PD practices and challenges (see appendix A) across individual, school-based, and out-of-school contexts. It was adapted from previously validated instruments developed by (Avillanova & Kuswandono, 2019; Korkmazgil, 2015a; Meng & Tajaroesuk, 2013). To complement the questionnaire data, semi-structured interviews were conducted with middle-level school EFL teachers (see appendix B) and school Leaders (see appendix C), incorporating both closed and open-ended questions to allow for deeper insights and contextual elaboration. In addition, the document review (see appendix D) served as a supplementary method to support the study's quantitative findings, focusing on materials related

to EFL teachers' PD. Documents such as records, manuals, circulars, and meeting minutes were collected from selected schools and cluster centers.

Data analysis

The quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, independent samples t-tests, and one-way ANOVA to identify patterns, trends, and variations across different groups. To interpret the significance of the reported teachers professional development (PD) practices and associated challenges, respondents' ratings were categorized systematically. Ratings of 1 (strongly disagree) and 2 (disagree) were considered indicative of minimal or absent practices and challenges, whereas ratings of 4 (agree) and 5 (strongly agree) were interpreted as reflecting substantial engagement in PD practices and the presence of notable challenges. An independent t-test was then employed to determine whether the mean scores of the variables significantly deviated from the expected mean value of 3.0. In this context, practices and challenges were deemed significant if the grand mean exceeded the benchmark and less significant if it fell below.

To ensure the validity of the statistical analyses, normality tests were conducted before applying parametric procedures. The results of skewness and kurtosis, ranging from -0.357 to 0.177 and -0.494 to -0.254, respectively, based on (Collier et al., 2022) rule of thumb, indicated that the data were approximately normally distributed. This was further confirmed visually using a Normal P-P Plot. The assumption of homogeneity of variance was also assessed, and since $p < 0.05$, this assumption was met, making it appropriate to proceed with the standard independent t-test. All observations were independent. Additionally, the results showed that $p > 0.05$, indicating no statistically significant difference in out-of-school professional development practice scores between urban and rural teachers, even after accounting for unequal variances.

The qualitative data were analysed using Braun and Clarke (2006) six-step thematic analysis model. The researcher conducted multiple, iterative readings of the interview transcripts to achieve data familiarisation, followed by systematic open coding of meaningful segments. These initial codes were then compared across transcripts and grouped into broader categories based on recurring patterns. Through continuous refinement and review, the categories were consolidated into overarching themes. To enhance the trustworthiness of the analysis, the coding process was

reviewed through peer debriefing with a colleague experienced in qualitative research. Portions of the transcripts and the preliminary coding scheme were independently examined, and discrepancies in code interpretation were discussed until consensus was reached. This collaborative review process helped ensure consistency and credibility in theme development. The final analysis yielded three major themes: participants' perceptions of professional development, their actual engagement in PD practices, and the challenges they encountered in accessing PD opportunities.

This section presents the findings of the research that examined EFL teachers' practices and challenges of PD. Quantitative and qualitative methodologies were applied together to analyze the data. The data of the survey questionnaire were collected from EFL teachers. The survey questionnaire was distributed to 62 EFL teachers, but 54 refined copies were used for data analysis. In addition, qualitative data were collected through structured interview and document. Interview was conducted to EFL teachers and school leaders. The document data were collected from schools, clusters and Bahir Dar City Administration Education Office.

Pilot Testing

Before the main study, the data collection instruments were pilot-tested to ensure clarity, relevance, and suitability. Quantitative reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with all scales exceeding the 0.70 threshold: the teachers professional development (PD) practices scale scored 0.76, and the PD challenges scale 0.83, indicating good internal consistency. Qualitative tools underwent trustworthiness checks addressing credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, ensuring robust, credible, and rigorous findings aligned with the study's objectives

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical standards throughout the research process. Ethical approval was obtained from the College Review Board of Bahir Dar University Teacher Education College (Approval No: FREC12/2025). Participants were fully informed about the study's purpose, assured of confidentiality, and provided voluntary written consent. To protect privacy,

questionnaires contained no personal identifiers, and all data were securely stored and used solely for academic purposes, with no identifying information disclosed in any reports or publications.

Result

EFL Teachers’ Practices in Professional Development

EFL teachers’ professional development practices consist of three main components: individual teachers’ practices, school-based professional development practices, and out-of-school professional development practices.

Individual Teachers’ Practices

At the individual level, teachers demonstrated notably positive self-initiated practices, with an overall mean of $M = 3.34$, $SD = 0.33$). A substantial 87% of teachers reported regularly reading English language materials ($M = 3.96$), indicating a strong commitment to professional development through independent reading. Similarly, 59.3% maintained professional portfolios ($M = 3.37$), and 85.2% utilized student feedback to enhance instruction ($M = 4.04$), reflecting a learner-centered orientation in their teaching contributed the practice of PD.

Table 1 EFL Teachers’ Professional Development Practices

	ITEMS	SD	DA	% U	A	SA	M	SD
Individual teachers’ practice								
1	I read English as a foreign language books	3.70	5.60	3.70	64.80	22.20	3.96	.91
2	I conduct action research to solve the problem that I face in my classes.	18.50	38.90	1.90	29.60	11.10	2.76	1.36
3	I collect my professional portfolio regularly.	1.90	24.10	14.80	53.70	5.60	3.37	0.98
4	I use pupils’ feedback to improve my classroom teaching.	1.90	7.40	5.60	55.60	29.60	4.04	.91
5	I use technology like smart phones, online sources, and educational audiovisual materials thoroughly and regularly to support my teaching.	24.10	37.00	1.90	29.20	7.20	2.59	1.34
	Grand Mean						3.34	0.33
School-based practice								
6	I share new teaching methods with my colleagues to enhance student learning.	-	11.10	3.70	57.40	27.80	4.02	.88
7	I collaborate with teachers from other schools to improve teaching and learning in my and	14.80	13.00	7.40	57.40	7.40	3.30	1.24

	their classrooms.							
8	I participate in collaborative professional learning.	-	3.70	3.70	77.80	14.80	4.04	.58
9	I conduct collaborative action research.	27.80	31.50	14.80	20.40	5.60	2.44	1.25
10	I join discussion and support groups with colleagues.	-	13.00	1.90	64.80	20.40	3.93	.87
11	I participate in mentoring and peer-coaching to improve my professionin my school.	11.10	9.30	1.90	64.80	13.0	3.59	1.17
	Grand Mean						3.55	0.59
	Out-of-school practice							
12	I take part in further professional development trainings out of my school.	7.40	24.10	11.10	53.70	3.70	3.22	1.09
13	I take additional training from a university/ college to improve my profession.	11.10	24.10	7.40	38.90	18.50	3.30	1.32
14	I have taken EFL training sessions like in workshops and conferences offered outside of	9.30	18.50	11.10	46.30	14.80	3.39	1.22
15	I have participated in the training of the EFL that I teach.	16.70	13.00	9.30	53.70	7.40	3.22	1.27
16	I have taken part in the training of using computers for instruction.	38.90	29.60	9.30	20.40	1.90	2.12	1.21
17	I have got training on action research in professional development out of my school.	33.30	27.80	11.10	25.90	1.90	2.35	1.25
18	I have the training on teaching special need students.	31.50	25.90	11.10	22.20	9.30	2.52	1.38
	Grand mean						2.88	0.46
	Total Grand meanPractices in Professional						3.26	0.46

Note: SD=Strongly Disagree; DA=Disagree; U= Undecided; A=Agree; SA=Strongly Agree; M= mean; SD= standard deviation

Despite these strengths, certain gaps were evident. For instance, 57.4% of EFL teachers reported not conducting action research, with this practice receiving a mean score of (M = 2.76) falling below the expected standard. Furthermore, 61.1 % of respondents did not actively integrate technology including smartphones, online resources, and audiovisual materials into their teaching. With a mean score of (M = 2.59) this indicates a shortfall in leveraging modern educational tools to support instruction.

School-Based Professional Development Practices

School-based teachers professional development (PD) practices among EFL teachers in Bahir Dar were positively rated, with an overall mean score of (M = 3.55, SD = 0.59), exceeding the

expected benchmark of 3.0. This indicates strong engagement in collaborative and peer-supported activities. Collaborative learning was particularly prominent, with 85% of teachers regularly sharing innovative methods ($M = 4.02$). Cross-school collaboration was also observed, as 64.8% of teachers worked with peers from other schools ($M = 3.30$).

Participation in collaborative professional learning sessions was notably high, with 92.6% of teachers involved ($M = 4.04$), representing the highest mean score recorded. Additionally, 85.2% engaged in discussion and support groups ($M = 3.93$), and 77.8% participated in mentoring or peer coaching ($M = 3.59$), reflecting a strong culture of collegial interaction that fosters instructional improvement and professional growth. Despite these positive trends, collaborative action research was notably weak. A majority of teachers (59.3%) did not engage in such activities, reflected in a low mean score of $M = 2.44$.

Out-of-School Professional Development Practices

Out-of-school teachers professional development (PD) activities received lower ratings compared to individual and school-based practices, with an overall mean of ($M = 2.88, SD = 0.46$). Significant gaps were observed in technology-related training, as 68.5% of teachers reported no experience in using computers for instructional purposes, resulting in a low mean score of ($M = 2.12$). Similarly, 61.1% of teachers had not received training in action research ($M = 2.35$), and 57.4% lacked preparation for teaching students with special needs ($M = 2.52$), revealing critical deficiencies in inclusive and research-informed teaching competencies.

Nonetheless, some out-of-school PD activities were positively rated. For instance, 61.1% of teachers participated in external training programs ($M = 3.22$), an equal proportion attended workshops or conferences ($M = 3.39$), and 57.4% pursued further training at universities or colleges ($M = 3.30$), reflecting selective engagement in professional growth opportunities

EFL Teachers' Challenges in Professional Development

Table2 EFL Teachers' Professional Development Challenges

N	ITEMS	%						
		SD	DA	U	A	SA	M	SD

Individual Teachers' Challenges								
1	I have less time to participate in professional development programmes because of family responsibilities.	31.50	35.20	13.00	11.10	9.30	2.56	1.09
2	I have less time to participate in professional development programmes because of my heavy workload.	24.10	37.00	11.10	25.90	1.90	2.44	1.18
3	I have a lack of access to the required resources for professional development.	9.30	29.60	7.40	50.00	3.70	3.09	1.15
4	I am less interested in participating in any professional development programmes.	31.50	46.30	3.70	14.80	3.70	2.31	1.00
5	I want to use my free time to seek additional income rather than Self-directed professional development.	25.90	24.10	13.00	27.80	9.30	2.85	1.21
	Grand mean						2.65	0.53
School based Challenges								
6	The school fails to offer suitable school-based professional development programmes.	7.40	31.50	8.90	32.20	20.00	3.02	0.39
7	There is a lack of professional development training manuals or guidelines in my school.	7.40	42.60	3.70	25.90	20.40	3.09	1.35
8	There is a lack of support from school leaders.	13.00	29.60	6.10	29.60	21.70	3.07	1.34
	Grand mean						3.06	1.17
Out-of-school Challenges								
9	There are quite limited out of school professional development programs for middle school EFL teachers'.	5.60	11.10	16.70	44.40	22.20	3.67	1.11
10	The school fails to facilitate out of school professional development programs for the past two years.	3.70	25.90	16.70	27.80	25.90	3.46	1.24
11	Much training for EFL teachers is short-term and they are unable to contribute to the continuity of professional development.	1.90	11.10	16.70	46.30	24.10	3.80	.99
	Grand mean						3.64	0.23
	Total Grand mean						3.03	0.38

Note: SD=Strongly Disagree; DA=Disagree; U= Undecided; A=Agree; SA=Strongly Agree; M= mean; SD= standard deviation

Individual EFL Teachers' Challenges

According to Table 2, individual challenges among middle-level EFL teachers were generally minimal, with an overall mean of (M = 2.65, SD = 0.53), below the expected mean of 3.00.

Specifically, 66.7% of teachers reported that family responsibilities ($M = 2.56$) and 61.1% indicated that heavy workloads ($M = 2.44$) did not significantly hinder their participation in professional development. Furthermore, 77.8% of teachers expressed interest in PD activities, suggesting that motivation was not a major barrier ($M = 2.31$).

School-Based EFL Teachers' challenges

School-based challenges were more pronounced, with an overall mean of ($M = 3.06$, $SD = 0.39$). More than half of the EFL teachers reported that their schools lacked appropriate professional development programs ($M = 3.02$), while 51.3% indicated that insufficient leadership support affected their engagement in PD activities ($M = 3.07$). Additionally, 46.7% of teachers noted that the absence of PD manuals posed a challenge to the effective implementation of professional development, highlighting key institutional shortcomings ($M = 3.09$).

Out-of-school EFL Teachers' Challenges

Out-of-school challenges were found to significantly affect the practice of professional development, with a grand mean of ($M = 3.64$, $SD = 0.23$), exceeding the expected mean of 3.00. Specifically, 66.6% of respondents reported a limited availability of out-of-school PD programs for middle-level EFL teachers, reflected by a high mean score ($M = 3.67$), indicating a substantial barrier to effective PD practice. In addition, 53.7% of respondents indicated that schools failed to facilitate teachers' participation in out-of-school PD activities, with a mean score of ($M = 3.46$), further confirming the presence of significant institutional constraints. Moreover, 70.4% of respondents noted that short-term training programs were insufficient and did not support the continuity of professional development, as evidenced by the highest mean score ($M = 3.80$), highlighting a critical limitation in sustaining long-term PD initiatives. The following analysis is based on differences among EFL teachers in terms of gender, teaching experience, and location.

Gender Differences in EFL Teachers' PD Practices and Challenges

It was essential to assess whether sex differences influenced the outcomes of the variables in this research. Consequently, the results from the descriptive analysis and independent t-test are presented below.

Table 3 Mean, Standard deviation, and T-test results of Male and Female EFL Teachers' Practices and Challenges on PD

Variable	Sex	N	M	SD	T	df	p	Cohen's d
Practice	Male	33	3.30	2.28	0.169	52	.867	0.01
	Female	21	3.27	2.27				
Challenge	Male	33	3.02	1.24	-0.178	52	.859	-0.02
	Female	21	3.05	1.43				

Note:-N= M=mean, SD= standard Deviation, df= Degree of freedom p<0.05 is significant

As shown in Table 3, both male and female EFL teachers reported PD practices and challenges with mean scores above the expected threshold of 3.00. Male teachers reported slightly higher PD engagement (M = 3.30, SD = 2.283) than females (M = 3.27, SD = 2.274), while female teachers reported marginally greater challenges (M = 3.05, SD = 1.435) than males (M = 3.02, SD = 1.248). However, these differences were not statistically significant. Independent t-test results showed no meaningful variation in PD practices ($t(52) = 0.169, p = .867$). The effect size was negligible (Cohen's $d = 0.01$), indicating no practically meaningful difference between the two groups. Similarly, challenges ($t(52) = -0.178, p = .859$), as both p-values exceeded the standard alpha level of 0.05. The effect size was also negligible (Cohen's $d = -0.02$), suggesting that sex explains virtually none of the variation in perceived challenges.

Location Differences in EFL Teachers' PD Practices and Challenges

The location of schools, whether urban or rural, was considered as a factor potentially influencing the data for both variables. Descriptive statistics and independent t-tests were employed to assess differences in PD practices and challenges between urban and rural EFL teachers.

Table 4 Mean, Standard Deviation, and T-test results of Urban and Rural EFL Teachers' Practices and Challenges on PD

Variable	School location	N	M	SD	t	df	P	Cohen's d
Practice	Urban	43	3.35	2.07	1.484	52	0.144	0.14
	Rural	11	3.04	2.79				
Challenge	Urban	43	3.02	1.30	-0.252	52	0.802	-
	Rural	11	3.07	0.62				0.04

An independent samples *t*-test was conducted to examine whether teachers' practice and challenge differed by school location (urban vs. rural). The results revealed no statistically significant differences between the two groups for either variable. For practice, urban teachers ($M = 3.35$, $SD = 2.07$) reported slightly higher mean scores than rural teachers ($M = 3.04$, $SD = 2.79$). However, this difference was not statistically significant, $t(52) = 1.484$, $p = .144$. The effect size was small (Cohen's $d = 0.14$), indicating that the practical difference between urban and rural teachers' practices was minimal. Similarly, for challenge, urban teachers ($M = 3.02$, $SD = 1.30$) and rural teachers ($M = 3.07$, $SD = 0.62$) showed nearly identical mean scores. The difference was not statistically significant, $t(52) = -0.252$, $p = .802$, with a negligible effect size (Cohen's $d = -0.04$), suggesting virtually no practical difference between the two groups..

Teaching Experience, Differences in EFL Teachers' PD Practices and Challenges

To examine the influence of teaching experience on teachers' engagement in PD practices and the challenges they encounter, a one-way ANOVA was conducted. Participants were classified into six distinct groups according to Ethiopia's career ladder framework: beginner teachers (1–2 years), junior teachers (3–5 years), teachers (6–9 years), senior teachers (10–13 years), associate lead teachers (14–17 years), and lead teachers (18 years and above). This categorization follows

the career structure outlined by Tekleselassie (2005) and Tsehay (2024) in their study Teachers' Career Ladder Policy in Ethiopia: An Opportunity for Professional Growth.

The ANOVA results, presented in Table 5 and Table 6, reveal the extent to which years of teaching experience impact both the level of PD practice and the nature of challenges faced by educators across different career stages.

Table 5 ANOVA Analysis of EFL Teachers' Practices

		ANOVA					ETA SQUARED η^2
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p	
Individual practice	Between Groups	27.74	5	5.54	.521	.759	0.05
	Within Groups	511.51	49	10.65			
	Total	539.25	53				
School based practice	Between Groups	139.64	5	27.93	2.121	.079	0.18
	Within Groups	632.01	49	13.17			
	Total	771.65	53				
Out-of-school practice	Between Groups	235.77	5	47.15	1.256	.298	0.12
	Within Groups	1801.73	49	37.53			
	Total	2037.50	53				

The one-way ANOVA conducted to examine differences in teachers' practices revealed that there was no statistically significant difference among the groups in individual practice, $F(5, 49) = 0.52, p = .759$, with a small effect size ($\eta^2 = 0.05$), indicating that only a small proportion of the variance in individual practice was attributable to group membership. For school-based practice, the analysis showed a non-significant difference among the groups, $F(5, 49) = 2.12, p = .079$, yet the effect size was relatively large ($\eta^2 = 0.18$), suggesting that group differences accounted for a substantial proportion of the variance in school-based practice even though this difference did not reach statistical significance. Out-of-school practice also did not differ significantly across the groups, $F(5, 49) = 1.26, p = .298$, with a moderate effect size ($\eta^2 = 0.12$), indicating a modest proportion of variance explained by group membership. Overall, these results suggest that while group membership does not produce statistically significant differences in teachers' practices, variations in school-based and out-of-school practices may still have

practical relevance, particularly for school-based practice, which showed the largest proportion of explained variance.

Table 6 ANOVA Analysis of EFL Teachers’ Challenges

			ANOVA				eta squared η^2
			Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	
individual challenge	Between Groups		56.60	5	11.32	.855	.518
	Within Groups		635.77	48	13.25		
	Total		692.37	53			
school based challenge	Between Groups		75.89	5	15.17	1.701	.152
	Within Groups		428.26	48	8.92		
	Total		504.15	53			
out of school challenge	Between Groups		27.65	5	5.53	.721	.611
	Within Groups		368.06	48	7.67		
	Total		395.70	53			

The one-way ANOVA conducted to examine differences in teachers’ perceived challenges revealed that there was no statistically significant difference among the groups in individual challenge, $F(5, 48) = 0.86, p = .518$, indicating that group membership accounted for very little variation in teachers’ individual challenges(Tabe 6). Similarly, for school-based challenge, the analysis showed no significant difference among the groups, $F(5, 48) = 1.70, p = .152$, suggesting that differences between groups in school-based challenges were not statistically meaningful, although the between-group variance was somewhat higher compared with individual challenges. Out-of-school challenge also did not differ significantly across groups, $F(5, 48) = 0.72, p = .611$, indicating that group membership had minimal impact on out-of-school challenges. Overall, these results suggest that teachers’ perceived challenges whether individual, school-based, or out-of-school do not significantly vary by group, with the majority of variance being explained within rather than between groups.

Analysis of Data obtained through Interview and Document

To address the research questions, in-depth interviews were conducted with the teachers. As a result of this qualitative inquiry, three key themes emerged concerning EFL teachers' professional development. These themes included: participants' (both EFL teachers and school leaders) perceptions of PD, their actual practices related to PD, and the challenges they face in engaging with PD opportunities. Together, these themes offer a comprehensive understanding of how PD is viewed, implemented, and experienced by educators across different contexts.

Theme one: Participants' Views on Professional Development Participation

During interviews, EFL teachers described PD as a continuous process for improving teaching skills and expanding knowledge. They emphasized its role in adapting to curriculum changes and enhancing student outcomes. One teacher said, "Professional development means improving myself to meet my students' needs," while another noted it helps update teaching methods for greater confidence and effectiveness. Teachers see PD as essential for professional growth and lifelong learning.

When asked about PD's relevance, participants unanimously agreed it's vital for improving instructional quality and meeting evolving educational demands. They highlighted PD's role in keeping skills current and addressing diverse student needs. One stated, "PD helps us stay effective," another added, "Without PD, we remain stagnant." These views underscore PD as an ongoing, crucial process for teacher development.

During the interviews, school leaders participants were asked, "How important is professional development for middle-level EFL teachers in your schools?", 6 out of eight that is =75% of the school leaders participants unanimously emphasized its critical role in improving teaching quality and student outcomes. They highlighted that PD is essential for equipping teachers with updated skills and knowledge, especially in adapting to new curricula and instructional methods. One leader stated, "Delivering professional development activities is not optional; it is essential for improving the performance of our English teachers." Another added, "PD helps our teachers grow professionally and handle classroom challenges more effectively." Despite this

recognition, some leaders acknowledged that the PD program in 2024 was inconsistent in their schools due to lack of teachers commitment to practice PD.

EFL teachers generally perceived that their institutions offered limited PD opportunities, with lesson study emerging as the primary in-school activity. According to the participants, lesson study involved collaborative reflection, evaluation of weekly lessons, and joint planning within English departments, serving as a consistent platform for internal professional growth. However, teachers also emphasized the lack of diverse and sustained out-of-school PD opportunities. Most interviewees noted that the only external PD activity they had engaged in was a single training session on the new curriculum, facilitated through cluster schools. Reflecting on this situation, one teacher explained: “The school pushes EFL teachers to participate in lesson study. When I face a certain problem, I solve it with my colleagues in the weekly lesson study programed. Out-of-school opportunities are almost none but only one from cluster schools trained how to train the new curriculum for the rest of the teachers..

Theme two: Participants’ Perceived Practice of Professional Development

During the interviews, EFL teacher participants were asked, “Have you taken part in professional development programs?” Half of the interviewed teachers confirmed their participation in such programs, reflecting a shared recognition of the importance of PD for their ongoing professional growth. These teachers reported involvement in a range of PD activities, including school-based lesson study sessions, short-term external training workshops, and collaborative discussions among colleagues. Their engagement in these activities was often motivated by the desire to improve instructional practices, adapt to curriculum changes, and share effective strategies with colleagues. Similarly, the document review indicated that EFL teachers were predominantly engaged in school-based professional development activities such as lesson plan preparation, lesson study reports, and short training-in-school training sessions.

However, the remaining half of the participants indicated limited or no participation in PD programs. Some cited a lack of accessible opportunities, while others mentioned constraints such as time, workload, or insufficient institutional support. One teacher noted, “We are willing to attend PD programs, but sometimes they are not available or not well-organized.” This contrast in

participation highlights a significant gap in access and consistency of PD offerings among middle-level EFL teachers. While some teachers benefit from ongoing development opportunities, others are left without the necessary support to enhance their professional competence.

Regarding the organization of PD activities, 75% of school leaders interviewed reported regularly organizing PD activities for EFL teachers. These initiatives such as workshops and seminars are seen not as occasional tasks but as essential strategies to enhance instructional quality, introduce current methodologies, and support ongoing teacher growth. One leader emphasized, “Providing regular PD is not just beneficial; it's essential for maintaining quality English instruction.” However, the remaining 25% of school leaders (two out of eight) admitted that they had not consistently provided such opportunities. They cited various challenges, including budget constraints, time limitations, and lack of external support or resources. One participant explained, Although we understand the importance of PD, organizing consistent training has been difficult due to limited funding and competing school priorities.

Regarding the use of smartphones, online sources, and educational audiovisual materials in the EFL classroom, a significant gap was reported in the integration of technology both EFL teachers and schools leaders in the interview. According to the data, 87.5% of EFL teacher(seven out of eight) reported that they neither used nor encouraged the use of such tools during English lessons. This trend was further confirmed by school leaders, all of whom stated that EFL teachers in their institutions did not incorporate technological resources such as smartphones, internet-based materials, or audiovisual aids to enhance language teaching.

This consistent feedback from teachers and administrators reveals a broader issue: the underuse of technology that could enhance learning. Despite many digital resources like language apps, interactive videos, and online materials, most EFL classrooms remain traditional. This gap may result from inadequate teacher training, limited access to reliable technology, or resistance due to concerns about classroom management and student distraction. In an era where digital knowledge is increasingly essential, reluctance or inability to use educational technology in EFL instruction represents a missed opportunity to foster engaging, collaborative, and student-centered learning.

Theme Three: Challenges Faced by Participants in Implementing Professional Development

This report presents findings from interviews with EFL teachers and school leaders concerning the challenges encountered in participating in PD programs within the Bahir Dar City Administration. The data indicate that these challenges are complex and operate across three interconnected levels: the individual level, the school-based level, and the external (out-of-school) institutional level.

All interviewed EFL teachers acknowledged experiencing barriers that hindered their ability to engage fully in PD. While some challenges were rooted in personal circumstances, others stemmed from systemic and institutional limitations. Approximately 62.5% (five out of eight) of EFL teachers reported facing individual challenges, including low motivation, limited access to self-directed learning resources, and lack of career advancement opportunities. These personal constraints often reduced their ability to commit to ongoing PD efforts. Further complicating the situation, 75% (six out of eight) of the participants indicated that their motivation was diminished by a lack of access to smartphones and other technologies essential for digital PD activities, making it difficult to benefit from online resources and platforms.

At the school level, teachers highlighted significant problems in the way PD programs were organized and implemented. Around 75% of participants emphasized the absence of effective planning, monitoring, and motivational mechanisms within their schools. PD sessions particularly lesson study meetings were frequently conducted in a superficial manner, lacking adequate materials, logistical support, and meaningful follow-up. Teachers expressed frustration with the lack of administrative interest and commitment. One participant noted,

I am not interested in participating in PD programs since there is no motivation. The school has facilitation problems. It does not deliver material and refreshment during the lesson study programs. The school leaders only seek quarterly reports from the focal person of the lesson study.

This sentiment reflects the broader view that PD is often reduced to a box-checking exercise rather than a genuine effort to build professional competence. Challenges were also evident beyond the school context. Out-of-school bodies such as cluster schools, sub-city offices, and the city education bureau were repeatedly criticized for their limited involvement and support in PD implementation. Three-fourths of the EFL teachers expressed disappointment in the lack of follow-up, resources, and incentives provided by these bodies. Training for PD coordinators was reported as infrequent or nonexistent, and no reward systems, certifications, or supervisory mechanisms were in place to encourage or evaluate teacher participation. As one teacher explained,

I have never seen the input of out-of-school bodies in PD programs. For example, the city education office does not offer certification or rewards for participating teachers. They do not supervise how PD programs are going on in schools.

These findings were further supported by insights from school leaders, all of whom confirmed that middle-level EFL teachers face significant challenges in participating in PD. While 25% (two out of eight school leaders) of leaders identified these challenges as individual-based, a more substantial 75% agreed that they span across all three levels: individual, school-based, and out-of-school. Leaders cited a lack of teacher motivation as a major barrier, with 87.5% (seven out of eight school leaders) attributing it to the absence of a clear incentive system, heavy workloads, and weak support structures. Many noted that some teachers, particularly those who have reached the peak of their career structure, see little value in engaging further in PD, as they do not anticipate additional promotions or recognition. One school leader commented,

Experienced teachers do not have interest because they have already completed their career structure. They do not expect any more promotion and this does not motivate them to participate in PD.

There was a shared belief among school leaders that the current six-level career structure is limiting and fails to encourage long-term engagement in PD. They advocated for an expanded framework or alternative forms of recognition to keep experienced teachers actively involved. In terms of implementation, school leaders reported major structural and resource-based constraints.

PD initiatives were often poorly managed due to the lack of a dedicated, full-time focal person to coordinate and follow up on activities. Moreover, schools lacked trained facilitators, teaching materials, and budgetary allocations to run effective programs. This poor infrastructure severely affected the quality and sustainability of PD practices within schools.

Out-of-school institutions were similarly criticized by school leaders for their failure to supervise and support school-based PD. Despite PD being a requirement for career advancement and teacher transfers, there was no consistent monitoring, feedback, or incentive mechanism from the city education office. As one leader observed,

The city education office does not give timely supervision or support to overcome barriers in developing teachers' profession. The career structure and transfer rules must be strictly practiced to support school-based PD programs.

This lack of coordination and accountability at the policy level has undermined the credibility and effectiveness of PD initiatives. Furthermore, the data gathered from the document review revealed significant challenges in the PD of EFL teachers. Although the Bahir Dar City Administration had made efforts to initiate PD activities by issuing circulars at the beginning of the school year, the lack of systematic follow-up and support mechanisms was a major concern. The documents reviewed showed no evidence of supervision or monitoring to ensure that the planned activities were implemented effectively. Moreover, there was a notable absence of continuous training. The only training activity referenced in the documentation was the initial orientation related to curriculum changes, with no indication that the city administration had provided any ongoing PD sessions for either teachers or facilitators.

The responsibilities assigned to colleges also appeared to be unfulfilled. Colleges were expected to develop and distribute supplementary PD materials to the schools within their network. However, the document review did not uncover any records indicating that these materials were created or shared. This lack of resource provision further weakened the support structure necessary for effective PD implementation. In terms of accountability, schools were rated by the administration as having "very good," "medium," or "low/no participation" in PD activities. Despite this classification, there were no documents outlining any follow-up actions or measures

taken in response to poor participation. Similarly, there was no documentation of recognition or incentives for teachers who actively engaged in PD programs, such as weekly school-based lesson study sessions.

The document review also revealed a broader issue of implementation gaps. While various tools and resources such as PD manuals, teacher portfolios, and lesson study minutes were available to guide practice, they were not effectively utilized to address on-the-ground challenges. These materials were not enough to ensure impact, as the underlying structural and systemic issues remained unresolved. Finally, the role of stakeholders in PD activities was found to be largely ineffective. Though responsibilities had been distributed among different entities, including the city education office, cluster centers, schools, and teachers themselves, the failure to coordinate and actively carry out these roles significantly hindered the success of the PD programs. Stakeholder engagement remained weak, with little evidence of collaborative efforts to overcome the barriers identified.

In conclusion, the document review illustrates that while PD was prioritized at the policy level within Bahir Dar City Administration, the lack of follow-through, resource support, accountability mechanisms, and stakeholder commitment posed major challenges to its effectiveness. EFL teachers in Bahir Dar City face complex challenges in accessing PD, mainly at the institutional level. While individual factors like time and motivation play a role, issues such as poor planning, lack of incentives, untrained staff, and weak supervision undermine PD effectiveness.

Discussion

This study aimed to answer the following research question: examines the professional development practices and challenges of middle-level EFL teachers in the Bahir Dar City Administration and study also examines how variables such as gender, teaching experience, and school location shape both PD practices and challenges. The findings revealed that both individual and school-based professional development (PD) activities exceeded the expected threshold, indicating a high level of teacher engagement in continuous professional learning. This quantitative evidence was further corroborated by interview data, which showed that

school-based practices such as peer supervision, lesson study, and professional discussions were regularly implemented. In line with this, school leaders confirmed their active involvement in facilitating PD through organised peer observations, lesson studies, training on new curricula, and short-term professional development programmes. Collectively, these practices reflect a supportive institutional culture that prioritises collaborative and sustained teacher learning, a finding that aligns with (Rugambwa et al., 2022).

Importantly, these results are strongly supported by established PD frameworks. Guskey (2002) and Desimone (2011) core features of effective professional development emphasise that PD is most impactful when it is content-focused, collaborative, coherent, sustained over time, and actively supported by schools and education systems. Similarly, King (2014) framework highlights that meaningful PD should be systematically planned, closely linked to classroom practice, and evaluated based on its influence on teachers' instructional practices and student learning outcomes. Within this perspective, the prominence of lesson study and peer collaboration in the present study suggests that school-based PD practices are being used as practical mechanisms to address instructional challenges and improve teaching effectiveness. The complementary frameworks of Guskey (2002) and Desimone (2011) therefore provide a strong theoretical lens for interpreting the observed PD practices as indicators of effective and purposeful professional learning.

Furthermore, the findings are consistent with a growing body of international research demonstrating that EFL teachers predominantly engage in school-based and self-directed professional development. Studies by (Cirocki & Farrell, 2019; Ji, 2023; Temiz, 2024), similarly reported that collaborative learning activities, reflective practices, and teacher-initiated PD constitute the core of teachers' professional growth. These studies reinforce the argument that school-embedded and teacher-driven PD models are particularly effective in fostering sustained engagement and contextualised learning among EFL teachers.

However, the results of the present study contrast with findings from local studies conducted in Ethiopia, such as those by Tessema and Belihu (2023) and Helate et al. (2022), which reported that both individual and school-based PD practices among EFL teachers were notably inadequate. This discrepancy may point to contextual variations in institutional support,

leadership commitment, and access to structured PD opportunities across different settings. Such inconsistencies highlight a persistent gap in the availability and effectiveness of PD provisions in some Ethiopian schools, which may ultimately undermine the quality of English language instruction and limit teachers' capacity to respond to evolving pedagogical demands.

On the other hand, the quantitative findings indicated that the mean score for out-of-school professional development practices fell below the expected threshold, suggesting limited engagement of EFL teachers in such activities. This pattern was further reinforced by qualitative evidence from interviews, document reviews, and reports, which revealed that EFL teachers had not received adequate training in action research and had limited opportunities to attend workshops or seminars related to the new curriculum. In support of these findings, school leaders confirmed that schools, sub-cities, and the Bahir Dar City Administration education departments had not provided sufficient or structured opportunities for out-of-school professional development. Collectively, these results point to systemic gaps in external professional learning support for EFL teachers. The findings are consistent with Chen (2020) who reported that EFL teachers faced substantial constraints in conducting action research. However, they contrast with the study by Tran (2020) which found that teachers had access to workshops and school-based training and were actively engaged in action research activities. In light of these findings, it is suggested that education authorities strengthen structured out-of-school professional development by offering targeted action research training, institutionalising curriculum-aligned workshops, and enhancing collaboration between schools and education departments to ensure equitable and sustained professional learning opportunities for EFL teachers.

The findings also revealed that both school-based and out-of-school professional development (PD) practices constituted major challenges affecting the effective implementation of PD activities. Evidence from interviews with school leaders and city education officers indicated that schools lacked formal PD support and systematic evaluation mechanisms, faced resource constraints such as limited access to smartphones, and provided insufficient training in action research. In addition, participants reported the absence of annual PD budgets, weak monitoring and follow-up systems, and a lack of motivational strategies, all of which significantly hindered teachers' engagement in professional development. These findings are consistent with studies by

Bhatt (2021), Lőrincz (2023) and Zhou (2023) which reported that inadequate institutional support, weak follow-up systems, and low motivation discouraged teachers' participation in out-of-school PD. Similarly, (Saeb et al., 2021) found that limited training in action research and other professional development activities constrained EFL teachers' involvement in PD.

In contrast, studies by Guskey (2002), Belay and Melesse (2024), Chen and Vibulphol (2019), Long et al. (2024) and Yang (2021) demonstrated that both school-based and out-of-school PD programmes are more effective when they intentionally incorporate motivational strategies, continuous support, and structured training in action research to enhance teachers' engagement and commitment to professional learning. Likewise, Richards and Farrell (2005), Lu (2023) and Taşdemir (2022) emphasised that schools and educational institutions share a collective responsibility to provide teachers with sustained and meaningful opportunities for long-term professional growth. These findings highlight a substantial gap between the ideal, research-informed models of professional development and their current implementation, underscoring the need for systematic reforms that strengthen institutional support, resource allocation, monitoring mechanisms, and teacher motivation within PD systems.

At the school level, leaders identified several interrelated challenges that hindered the effective implementation of professional development (PD) activities. These challenges included the absence of motivational strategies to recognise and reward high-performing EFL teachers, as well as the limited consideration of PD performance in teacher licensing and relicensing processes. This finding is consistent with the study by Belay and Melesse (2024) who reported that a lack of incentives and motivation negatively affected teachers' participation in professional development. Consequently, the absence of recognition and incentive mechanisms contributed to weak implementation of school-based PD initiatives, such as lesson study programmes, which were often poorly planned, inconsistently implemented, and inadequately monitored. As a result, these programmes were less effective in supporting teachers' professional growth and sustaining their engagement in PD activities.

Document reviews further revealed substantial challenges in the professional development (PD) of EFL teachers. Although the Bahir Dar City Administration Education Office disseminated circulars at the beginning of the school year encouraging schools to organise PD activities, there

was no documented evidence of systematic follow-up supervision, sustained support, or motivational initiatives. Moreover, the records did not indicate that the Education Office had provided continuous training for EFL teachers or PD facilitators beyond introductory sessions related to the new curriculum. Similarly, there was no evidence demonstrating deliberate efforts by the Bahir Dar City Administration Education Office to address these challenges, recognise good performance, or promote effective PD practices. These findings are consistent with previous studies by Girma et al. (2019), Korkmazgil (2015b), Yan (2023) and Tan Yiğit (2024) which identified inadequate support, guidance, and supervision as major barriers to EFL teachers' professional development.. This finding highlights a gap between policy and practice, where PD becomes compliance-driven due to inadequate follow-up, support, and motivation. Strengthening EFL teachers' professional growth requires a coordinated system with continuous support, targeted training, recognition of achievements, and systematic supervision.

The study also examined how specific teacher characteristics namely gender, school location, and teaching experience impact their professional development (PD). Quantitative data indicated that the mean scores for these factors were below the expected threshold. Gender, in particular, did not have a significant effect on EFL teachers' PD, as the differences in mean scores were not supported by the independent t-test; the observed p-values for both male and female teachers exceeded the alpha level ($p > 0.05$) The effect size was negligible (Cohen's $d = 0.01$), indicating no practically meaningful difference between the two groups. This finding aligns with the study of Alfaleh et al. (2025) who reported no significant differences in PD practices between male and female teachers. However, Mashhadi et al. (2023) found that female teachers tend to engage more in PD activities via mobile devices compared to their male counterparts. Similarly, school location did not significantly influence the PD of middle-level EFL teachers The difference was not statistically significant, with a negligible effect size (Cohen's $d = -0.04$), suggesting virtually no practical difference between the two groups. In contrast, Cadero-Smith (2020) reported that rural teachers engage less in PD than urban teachers, largely due to constraints in available resources.

Teachers' teaching experience was another key characteristic examined in this study. The one-way ANOVA results indicate that there were no statistically significant differences in EFL

teachers' professional development practices and perceived challenges across different levels of teaching experience, as all observed p -values were greater than 0.05 for individual, school-based, and out-of-school practices (with a moderate effect size indicating a modest proportion of variance explained by group membership) and challenges. These findings are consistent with previous research by Yıldırım et al. (2022) and Jamalizade & Fatehi Rad, (2022) who similarly found no significant differences among EFL teachers in the practice of professional development. In addition, Herzallah (2011) reported that factors such as gender, location, and teaching experience did not significantly influence participation in, or outcomes of, PD activities. Together, these findings suggest that teachers' engagement in professional development is relatively independent of teaching experience, highlighting the importance of designing PD systems that are comprehensive and universally applicable, rather than targeting specific experience levels. This reinforces the need for reforms that ensure equitable access to professional learning opportunities and support continuous teacher growth across all levels of experience.

Conclusion and Implications

This study revealed that middle-level EFL teachers face significant challenges in PD across individual, school-based, and out-of-school contexts. Although teachers engage in practices such as individual learning and school-based activities, systemic gaps in support, evaluation, and motivational strategies continue to hinder the effectiveness of PD programs. The absence of formal procedures, inadequate budgets, limited training opportunities, and a lack of incentives were identified as key barriers. Additionally, external educational bodies were found to provide minimal and unsustainable support, further exacerbating these challenges. Notably, the study found no significant differences in PD practices and challenges based on gender, location, or teaching experience. This indicates that the issues are widespread and not limited to specific demographic groups, underscoring the need for universally applicable reforms.

To address these challenges, the study highlights the importance of establishing a comprehensive and standardized PD framework that clearly defines roles, responsibilities, timelines, and expected outcomes. This framework must be supported by regular monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to ensure that PD activities are both effective and measurable. Furthermore, stronger

collaboration with colleges and other educational bodies is essential. These institutions must shift from symbolic involvement to providing ongoing, relevant, and practical support for teachers, including the timely development and distribution of PD materials.

Motivational strategies also need to be integrated into PD programs. Providing both intrinsic and extrinsic incentives such as recognition for high-performing teachers and support for those less engaged will help foster a more motivated and committed teaching workforce. Given that challenges are shared across all teacher groups, PD reforms must be inclusive, system-wide, and designed with sustainability and contextual relevance in mind. Ultimately, moving from policy-level intentions to practical, well-supported implementation is crucial. Doing so will ensure that professional development becomes a transformative tool for enhancing teacher effectiveness and improving overall educational outcomes.

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BA collected the questionnaire, interview and document data. BA performed the analysis, drafted the manuscript and designed the figures with support from KS, BS and WA. KS, BS and WA helped supervise the project. All authors discussed the results and contributed to the final manuscript.

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No potential conflicts of interest

Appendices

Appendix A: Questionnaire for Middle-Level School EFL Teachers

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE DED PROGRAM IN TEFLBAHIR DAR UNIVERSITY

Middle-Level School EFL Teachers' Questionnaire

Dear Teachers,

The following descriptive survey questionnaire items are designed to know your professional development practices and challenges. Your responses will be used for my Doctor of Education dissertation work and they are kept confidential. Therefore, please read each question carefully and circle your choice.

Thank you in advance for your time and cooperation!

Part A: Background Information

Direction: These questions are about you and your school's background information.

1. School name: _____
2. Region: Amhara 3. Zone: _____ 4. Woreda: _____
5. Sex: Male Female
6. Location of the school: Urban Rural

7. Experience in teaching: 1&2 years 3-5 years 6-9 years 10-13 years 14-17 years 18 and above years
8. Qualification in teaching English: diploma first degree master’s degree
9. Long formal training that you are attending currently in university or college:
 Diploma in TEFL first degree in TEFL master’s degree in TEFL other field

Part B: Measures of teachers’ professional development practices

1=stronglydisagree2=disagree3=undecided 4=agree5=stronglyagree

No.	Items	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	agree	Strongly agree
1	I read English as a foreign language books regularly.	1	2	3	4	5
2	I conduct action research to solve the problem that I face in my classes.	1	2	3	4	5
3	I collect my professional portfolio regularly.	1	2	3	4	5
4	I use pupils’ feedback to improve my classroom teaching.	1	2	3	4	5
5	I use technology like smart phones, online sources, and educational audiovisual materials thoroughly and regularly to support my teaching.	1	2	3	4	5
6	I share new teaching methods with my colleagues to enhance student learning.	1	2	3	4	5
7	I collaborate with teachers from other schools to improve teaching and learning in my and their classrooms.	1	2	3	4	5
8	I participate in collaborative professional learning.	1	2	3	4	5
9	I conduct collaborative action research.	1	2	3	4	5
10	I join discussion and support groups with colleagues.	1	2	3	4	5
11	I participate in mentoring and peer-coaching to improve my profession in my school.	1	2	3	4	5
12	I take part in further professional development trainings out of my school.	1	2	3	4	5
13	I take additional training from a university/ college to improve my profession.	1	2	3	4	5
14	I have taken EFL training sessions like in workshops and conferences offered during or outside of school hours.	1	2	3	4	5
15	I have participated in the training of the EFL contents that I teach,	1	2	3	4	5
16	I have taken part in the training of using computers for instruction,	1	2	3	4	5
17	I have got training on action research in professional development out of my school.	1	2	3	4	5
18	I have the training on teaching special need students.	1	2	3	4	5

Part C: Measures of teachers’ professional development Challenges

1=stronglydisagree2=disagree 3=undecided 4=agree 5=stronglyagree

No	Items	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	agree	Strongly agree
1	I have less time to participate in professional development programmes because of family responsibilities.	1	2	3	4	5
2	I have less time to participate in professional development programmes because of my heavy workload.	1	2	3	4	5
3	I have a lack of access to the required resources for professional development.	1	2	3	4	5
4	I am less interested in participating in any professional development programmes.	1	2	3	4	5
5	I want to use my free time to seek additional income rather than self directed professional development.	1	2	3	4	5
6	The school fails to offer suitable school-based professional development programmes.	1	2	3	4	5
7	There is a lack of professional development training manuals or guidelines in my school.	1	2	3	4	5
8	There is a lack of support from school leaders.	1	2	3	4	5
9	There are quite limited out of school professional development programs for middle school EFL teachers’.	1	2	3	4	5
10	The school fails to facilitate out of school professional development programs for the past two years.	1	2	3	4	5
11	Many trainings for EFL teachers are short-term and they are unable to contribute to the continuity of professional development.	1	2	3	4	5

1. What do you usually do for professional development individually? Please describe the activities.

2. What do you usually do for professional development in school-based programs? Please describe the activities.

3. What do you usually do in the outside school professional development programs? Please describe the activities.

Appendix B: EFL Teachers’ Semi-Structured Interview Schedule

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE DED PROGRAM IN TEFLBAHIR DAR UNIVERSITY

Middle Level School EFL Teachers’ Interview Schedule

I'm a student of doctoral education at BDU and I'm conducting a research. The objective is to study the professional development of middle-level school EFL teachers' perception, practice and challenges; Bahir Dar City in focus.

Thank you very much for your permission for the interview!

General questions

1. Date of interview _____
2. Tell me your place of work as a teacher. Name of 'Woreda'(district) _____
school _____ rural urban
3. Sex: male female
4. Tell me about your career structure in the teachers' ladder of development.
_____.
5. Tell me your qualifications. _____
6. How long have you been teaching? _____

Questions on Views of Professional Development

1. What does professional development mean to you?

2. How do you perceive the relevance of professional development for teachers?

3. How do you see the professional development opportunities provided in your institution?

Questions on the Practice of Professional Development

4. Have you taken part in professional development programs?

5. What are these programs?

6. What do you usually do for professional development? Please describe the activities.

7. Have you ever used technology like smart phones, online sources, and educational audiovisual materials thoroughly and regularly to support your teaching?

Questions on challenges of Professional Development

8. Have you ever faced challenges to participate in professional developments?

9. If yes, are the challenges created by you or other bodies?

10. What challenges do you usually face in participating in professional development programs like:

a. professional development on individual effort? -----

b. school-based professional development? -----

c. out-of-school professional development?-----

Appendix C: Middle-level School Leaders' Semi-Structured Interview Schedule

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE DED PROGRAM IN
TEFL,BAHIR DAR UNIVERSITY

Interview checklist for Middle-Level school leaders

I'm a student of doctoral education at Bahir Dar University and I'm conducting a research. The objective is to study the professional development of middle-level school EFL teachers' perception, practice, and challenges: Bahir Dar City in focus.

Thank you very much for your permission for the interview!

General Questions

1. Date of interview _____

2. Tell me your place of work as a teacher. Name of Woreda _____ school _____

Location of the school: rural urban

3. Sex: male female

4. Would you tell me about your position in your school or district? _____.

5. What is your qualification? Diploma degree master's degree

6. How long have you been working as a leader of school? _____

Questions on Practices of Professional Development

1. Do you regularly deliver professional development activities to EFL teachers to develop their profession?

2. What are the activities that you deliver?

3. Do you encourage using technology like smart phones, online sources, and educational audiovisual materials to support teaching?

Questions on challenges of Professional Development

1. Are there challenges to participating in professional development programs like on individual effort, school-based and out of school professional development?

2. If yes, who creates the challenges?

3. Mention the challenges that EFL teachers face.

Appendix D: Document Analysis Protocol

For the Research Study: “Assessing Effectiveness of English as a Foreign Language Teachers’ Professional Development Practices and Challenges in Bahir Dar Middle-Level Schools, Ethiopia”

Program: DED in TEFL

Institution: Bahir Dar University, Department of English Language and Literature

Purpose of the Document Analysis

To explore and triangulate evidence on:

1. Professional development practices of middle-level school EFL teachers.
2. Challenges they face in engaging in PD activities.
3. The support and implementation mechanisms from schools and educational offices.

Types of Documents to be Collected and Analyzed

Document Type	Source	Purpose
1. Teacher Portfolios	Schools	To analyze individual PD practices, reflections, and evidence of growth
2. Meeting Minutes (PD-focused)	Schools, Woreda, City Education Office	To identify organized PD activities and collaborative practices
3. Written Reports/Plans of PD activities	Teachers, Cluster Coordinators, Schools	To assess the scope, content, and frequency of PD programs
4. Official Memos/Directives	Woreda, City Education Office	To explore policy-level expectations and mandates regarding PD
5. Attendance Sheets or Logs	Schools, Clusters	To verify participation in PD events or trainings

Document Review Template

Category	Focus Questions	Notes
1. Document Information		
Title of Document	What is the name of the document?	
Type of Document	(e.g., portfolio, minutes, report)	
Source	Where was the document collected from? (School, Woreda, City Office)	
Date of Document	When was it created or last updated?	
Responsible Body	Who authored or endorsed it?	
2. Relevance to PD Practice		
Evidence of PD Activities	What kinds of professional development activities are recorded? (e.g., workshops, peer observation)	
Frequency	How often are PD sessions or activities held?	
Teacher Involvement	Do teachers initiate or lead any PD activities?	
Use of Technology	Is there mention of technology use in PD (e.g., mobile learning, online resources)?	
Reflective Practice	Are teachers reflecting on or evaluating their own practice?	
3. Evidence of PD Challenges		
Participation Issues	Are there issues with attendance, commitment, or motivation noted?	
Resource Constraints	Are shortages of materials, time, or support mentioned?	
Administrative Barriers	Are there challenges from leadership or systemic issues?	
4. Institutional/Policy Support		
Leadership Support	Does the document show leadership encouraging or planning PD?	
Collaboration	Is there evidence of collaboration (e.g., cluster work, mentoring)?	
Alignment with Policy	Is the PD aligned with national or regional education strategies?	