Introduction

Teaching a second or foreign language has long been considered a complex task depending on several internal (psycho-emotional) and external (environmental) factors (Derakhshan, 2022; Pennington & Richards, 2016; Pawlak et al., 2020). To deal effectively with the instructional complexities, educational administrators all around the world prompt language teachers to ameliorate their pedagogical and professional practices (Derakhshan & Nazari, 2022). In doing so, they typically prepare some training programs to equip their pre- and in-service language teachers with the novel skills and knowledge they need in the face of a changing world. These training programs, which are called teacher professional development (TPD) programs, are commonly developed by teacher educators and program designers to hone teachers' abilities to take a professional role and gain competencies needed in L2 education (Cirocki & Farrell, 2019).

TPD programs are a set of activities designed to promote an individual's skills, knowledge, expertise, and other characteristics as a teacher (Zeng, 2023). More precisely, TPD programs include formal and informal learning opportunities that pave the way for the professional growth and development of teachers (Kyndt et al., 2016). Formal opportunities encompass structured, pre-planned training programs, including workshops, seminars, and teacher training courses (TTCs), allowing teachers to update and improve their present instructional knowledge and skills (Borg, 2018). Informal opportunities, on the other hand, comprise unstructured and unplanned learning activities that take place both inside and outside the instructional context (Borg et al., 2022). Reading recently published articles, communicating with colleagues, and reflecting on instructional practices are some informal opportunities for teachers to promote their pedagogical knowledge and skills (Farrell & Ives, 2015; Vangrieken et al., 2017).

Previous research on professional development programs has witnessed that both formal and informal learning opportunities bring about desired changes in language teachers' instructional practices (Mehdizadeh et al., 2023; Sadeghi & Richards, 2021; Wu et al., 2023) and lead them to professional success (Derakhshan, Coombe, Arabmofrad et al. 2020; Derakhshan, Coombe, Zhaleh et al. 2020; Fan & Wang, 2022; Garzón et al., 2020; Skevi et al., 2023; Zhi & Wang, 2023). This implies that professional development programs comprising formal and informal learning opportunities enable language teachers to function more effectively at work (Wang et al., 2023). Considering the critical role of language teachers' professional development in their success, factors influencing English teachers' professional growth and their desire to attend development programs need to be widely explored. Given the fact that individuals' perspectives and attitudes towards professional development may influence their engagement in professional development programs (McCray, 2018), how English teachers perceive professional growth and development should be investigated as well. Additionally, it is necessary to examine whether the teaching envi-ronment (online and face-to-face) can induce significant changes in English teachers' perceptions of professional development. In an endeavor to respond to these necessities, the present special issue invited many L2 researchers from different countries (e.g., China, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, New Zealand, Spain, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and the United States) to address the above-men-tioned issues. The following brief overview of this special issue will showcase how some of the above issues were addressed either directly or indirectly in the authors' contributions.

INTRODUCING THE SPECIAL ISSUE

The papers included in the current special issue center around three main topics, namely (a) English teachers' perceptions of different forms of professional development; (b) Implications of English teachers' professional development, professional identity, and identity tensions; and (c) Determinants of English teachers' professional development and identity. Together, these papers address a variety of issues and problems related to teacher professional development and suggest a range of ideas and recommendations for promoting the professional growth and development of language teachers, notably EFL and ESL teachers.

Wang and Wang, for instance, address the first key topic of this special issue by examining Chinese pre-service EFL teachers' perceptions of self-directed professional development. The authors try to uncover the benefits and challenges of this new form of professional development in EFL instructional contexts. Zhou and Eslami pursue this thread of research by exploring EFL teachers' attitudes towards technology-based professional development as another form of teacher professional development. They seek to scrutinize the challenges of this innovative form of professional development from the perspective of EFL teachers. Likewise, in another empirical study, Mashhadi, Hussein, and Fahad look into English teachers' perceptions of mobile-assisted professional development. In a similar attempt, Hua and Zhang probe into novice and experienced English teachers' perceptions, knowledge, and practices. In their survey research, they try to determine whether teaching experience can make significant changes in English teachers' beliefs and perceptions. In Solhi and Busra's phenomenological study, we once again see EFL teachers' perspectives on professional development programs.

The second major topic of this special issue revolving around the implications of teacher identity, identity tensions, and professional development starts with Jia and Derakhshan's paper, which provides valuable insights into the role of English teachers' professional identity in their professional success. Similarly, in their study, Fathi, Naderi, and Soleimani explore the implications of teachers' professional identity in Iranian EFL classrooms. They delve into the role of professional identity in reducing job burnout among Iranian EFL teachers. In a similar vein, Yang and Wang also address the implications of teacher professional identity by evaluating the impact of Chinese EFL teachers' identity on their attrition rate. Further, through a dissonance theory perspective, Pan and Kirkpatrick attempt to divulge the negative consequences of professional identity tensions in EFL instructional settings.

The third topic that emerged from the contributions can be seen in Sun and Zhang's paper. They report on an experimental study examining the role of teaching modes, namely online, blended, and face-to-face, in promoting English teachers' professional development. By the same token, Sanz-de la Cal, Ortiz-Revilla, Alonso-Centeno, and Greca report on a quasi-experimental study assessing the role of co-teaching programs in developing Spanish-English teachers' pedagogical competence and skills. In another research, Zhang and Greenier describe the role of two psycho-affective variables, namely optimism and psychological capital, in improving English teachers' pedagogical effectiveness. Further, using a process model approach, Li and Akram attempt to find out whether emotional regulation can predict EFL teachers' professional development. This theme can also be traced in the work of Wang and Wang, who focus on the contribution of emotion regulation to English teachers' sustainable professional development. Li further continues this research line by studying the implications of teacher emotion regulation in online EFL

classes. In another article, Zhang, Yang, and Proietti Ergün discuss the role of work engagement and buoyancy in predicting Chinese EFL teachers' professional development. Qi and Derakhshan add to the discussion by assessing the impact of job satisfaction and organizational commitment on EFL teachers' desire for professional development. On their part, He, Qin, and Chen take into account the interaction between young teachers' positive and negative emotions and their professional identity. Li and Xu close this interesting topic by exploring the factors that may influence EFL teachers' professional identity formation.

Conclusions and the way forward

The great number of papers submitted to this special issue and the 19 articles published in it, confirm the relevance and importance of teacher professional development in the language education environments, particularly EFL and ESL contexts. As a whole, the papers in this special issue reveal that different forms of professional development programs provide language teachers with a wide range of options and opportunities to ameliorate their pedagogical practices and advance in their profession. Moreover, they provide examples of the psycho-emotional and environmental factors that result in language teachers' professional growth and development. In addition, these studies also identify the implications of professional identity and professional development in language education contexts. We are grateful to the contributors to this special issue for their scholarly and thought-provoking papers, which will undoubtedly be the starting point for future empirical research into what has now become a critical and growing phenomenon in the language education domain.

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