



The Attitudes of EFL Teachers in Kazakhstan towards Continuous Professional Development

Lazzat Karibayeva

Suleyman Demirel University, Kazakhstan

Akmarzhan A. Nogaibayeva

Suleyman Demirel University, Kazakhstan

Gulzhaina K. Kassymova

Abai Kazakh National Pedagogical University, Kazakhstan

Menkebanu Nursultan

Suleyman Demirel University, Kazakhstan

Article Info

Article History

Received:
1 May 2023

Accepted:
10 November 2023

Keywords

Professional development,
Continuous development,
EFL teachers' attitudes,
Secondary education,
Teachers in Kazakhstan

Abstract

This research looks into Kazakhstani EFL teachers' attitudes towards continuous professional development (CPD). It looks at both the beneficial and challenging aspects of their CPD involvement. The study analyzed the attitudes of nine EFL teachers who participated in continuous professional training within the last year. The study aimed to understand teachers' perceptions of their ability to self-control their learning, their needs, and their relatedness to colleagues and course instructors. The qualitative method was utilized in the study, which implied thematic analysis and the interpretation of the findings. Overall, the participants have a positive attitude toward CPD, but they have trouble accessing a wider variety of professional development activities that suit their interests and specific professional needs. The study also highlights how crucial it is to develop and establish policies and programs that foster professional development and deal with these issues. The results can direct the creation and implementation of CPD initiatives in Kazakhstan and other comparable settings.

To cite this article

Karibayeva, L., Nogaibayeva, A. A., Kassymova, G. K., & Nursultan, M. (2023). The attitudes of EFL teachers in Kazakhstan towards continuous professional development. *International Journal of Academic Studies in Science and Education (IJASSE)*, 1(1), 43-55.

Corresponding Author: Lazzat Karibayeva, lyazzat110@gmail.com



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

Introduction

The purpose of this research is to explore the attitudes of EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teachers in Kazakhstan towards continuous professional development (CPD). In addition to examining general opinions regarding CPD, the challenging and positive aspects of EFL teachers' participation in CPD are described in this article. The insights into the attitudes, needs, and expectations of EFL teachers represent important information that can be used to guide the creation and execution of CPD programs in Kazakhstan and other countries with comparable contexts.

Teachers uphold and expand their expertise through a lifetime learning and practice called continuing professional development. For teachers to stay informed about developments in the field and give their students the best education possible, they should be involved in ongoing professional development activities. There are many different ways to access CPD, including conferences, workshops, online learning, and official training programs. In addition, attending networking events, collaborating with professionals in education, and reading books and magazines authored by subject-matter experts are examples of informal CPD activities for teachers.

Regarding the context of the study, participation in professional development courses is a requirement for schoolteachers in Kazakhstan to be awarded a higher professional qualification (Yakavets, et al., 2022). To assist teachers in their professional growth, the government of Kazakhstan established the National Center for Teacher Professional Development. Teachers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) also need to grow as professionals to meet the high standards of modern foreign language teaching.

Within secondary school education in Kazakhstan, children are encouraged to learn a foreign language. In the present day, English is the most widely taught foreign language in Kazakhstan. Moreover, at the secondary level, some subjects are studied in English in different schools throughout the country. School graduation exams, university entry requirements, and tertiary-level education demand knowledge of the foreign language at a sufficient level. Some students opt to apply for a university program abroad, which adds to the greater expectations of society for high-quality language teaching. Therefore, EFL teachers may need support and guidance on how to best meet the demands of their students. Continuous professional development programs may well serve such purposes.

Literature Review

Within the past few years, a significant body of research on teachers' perspectives on CPD has been undertaken worldwide. Notwithstanding, advanced countries were the locations under the investigation. Kazakhstan and

Central Asia still lack sufficient thorough analysis concerning Continuous Development among teachers, including teachers of foreign languages.

A recent study by Bouaissane and Mourchid (2022) explored Moroccan EFL teachers' views about CPD events. The irrelevance of the training content to the remaining problems was identified by the researchers. The authors recommended improving the quality of professional training by allowing attending teachers to express their needs and perspectives. The significance of expert teacher involvement in designing the content of the development program was highlighted as well. This would prompt more efficient CPD participation.

In contrast, an Indonesian study discovered a beneficial relationship between teachers' involvement in professional training and EFL students' achievements (Ayu & Ningsih, 2023). The participants said that their teaching abilities had improved as a result of the seminars and courses on crucial pedagogical problems. Therefore, it can be concluded that the content of professional training should correspond to the needs of teachers so that beneficial and positive experiences are provided.

Chernobay and Tashibayeva (2020) investigated the topic of teacher professional development in Russia and Kazakhstan. The authors highly recommend taking into account teachers' professional needs along with updating educational standards and content, especially when it comes to digital technology use and critical and creative thinking. According to their findings, enhancing teachers' abilities when working with students who have special education needs should be the primary objective. To remove obstacles to teacher development, resources such as opportunities for practice and financial incentives, need to be allocated. The research highlighted on the necessity of observing teachers' professional interests and requests at local, state, and education levels to guarantee coherent and enhanced educational activities.

A recent study conducted in Kazakhstan agreed with the necessity of using needs analysis (Ismagulova et al., 2023). It draws attention to the challenges secondary teachers have when putting together curricula and changing existing content. The findings emphasize the significance of evaluating teachers' expectations and interests to support efficient teaching and learning. The study also accentuates the need for inviting highly professional colleagues to assist less experienced teachers in gaining new knowledge in teaching foreign languages.

Thus, the review of the relevant recent studies revealed several aspects that contribute to teacher attitudes toward CPD:

- Correspondence to or incongruity of trainees' needs and expectations (at individual, school, region, and country levels)

- Provision or lack of support and guidance from school administration, course instructors, colleagues, and field experts
- Capability to voice opinions regarding the selection of types of CPD activities and course content
- The proficiency and expertise of the course instructors
- Impact on teaching skills and student performance
- Other external factors such as rewards, barriers, resources, professional environment, and regulations
- Internal factors such as motivation, values, and psychological needs

To systematize further analysis, such factors can be categorized into three major facets that determine one's attitudes. Since this research focuses on the experiences and feelings of a few participants, the detailed consideration of the positive attitudes and negative experiences was made possible. The following section provides the theoretical background for this investigation.

Theoretical Background

Considering the aforesaid, the self-determination theory (SDT) framework serves as the theoretical basis for analysis in this work (Ryan & Deci, 2017). According to the SDT, teachers' attitudes towards CPD depend on their interests and relevance to their needs (Yang, 2021). As the theory suggests, if teachers can control their learning, choose the activities pertinent to their needs and expectations, and are provided with sufficient support, they will be more motivated to participate in CPD (Figure 1).



Figure 1. EFL Teacher Attitude towards CPD

Teachers' attitudes toward professional development are based on how their basic psychological needs are satisfied (Kao et al., 2020). The three needs are known as relatedness, competence, and autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Positive or negative attitudes, in turn, may impact teachers' decisions about their development activities (Chiu et al., 2021). *Relatedness* is the search for connection to other people. Teachers need to feel connected to their colleagues and field experts to collaborate, share best practices, and seek advice. *Competence* is a belief that one can meet challenges and undertakings. Teachers need to maintain assurance in their own capacity to grow as educators. This means having access to challenging but realistic, excellent CPD opportunities. It also implies the opportunity to reflect on and apply what they have learned in

their classrooms. The need for *autonomy* is satisfied when teachers feel they can make their own decisions regarding professional development. This implies that individuals ought to be free to select the CPD activities that most closely match their needs and areas of interest, as well as flexible enough to fit their participation around other commitments.

These three facets contribute to the willingness, readiness, and determination to partake in ongoing professional learning. SDT fits into assessing teacher attitudes toward CPD since it addresses teachers' fundamental needs that lead to particular attitude development. The three-faceted model used in the current research is based on the Self Determination Framework by Ryan and Deci (2017), see figure 2.

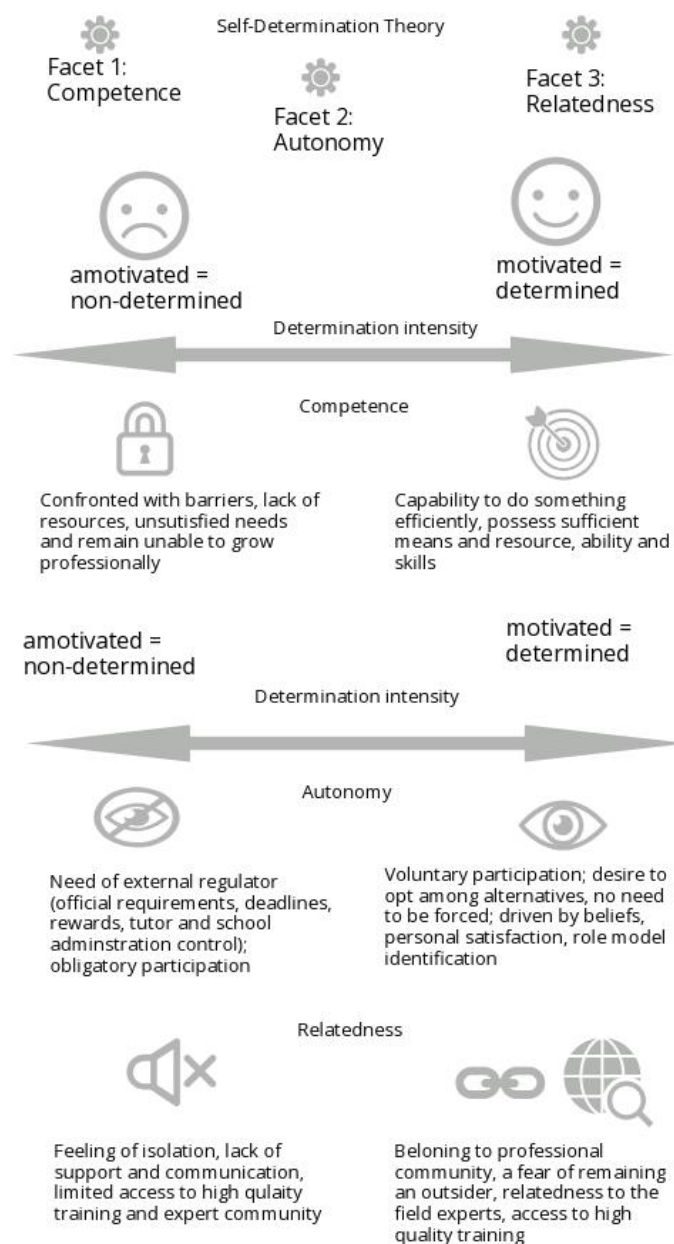


Figure 2. The Three-faceted Model of Teacher Self Determination

Method

Research Design

This research was conducted using a qualitative method. It is a case study of nine EFL teachers from the same suburban school in Kazakhstan, three male and six female teachers. They have all participated in a CPD course in the summer of 2023. Upon completion of the training, the participants were interviewed using semi-structured interviews. The following questions were included:

General background and opinion:

- Could you briefly describe your teaching experience and current responsibilities?
- What is your overall opinion about participating in CPD?

Autonomy:

- How much control do you have over choosing what professional development activities to participate in (e.g. online/offline mode, paid courses/MOOCs, formal/informal activities)?
- How much flexibility do you have when deciding how to complete your training?
- What kind of external regulation do you feel you need to successfully complete training?

Competence:

- How would you rate the quality of CPD training you have participated in?
- To what extent do CPD training help you improve the knowledge and skills you need at work?
- To what extent does the content of the CPD course reflect your current professional needs?
- What expectations do you have about the content and activities of CPD?

Relatedness:

- How can collaboration with colleagues help you develop professionally?
- What motivates or discourages you from participating in CPD?

The interviews were transcribed and then analyzed thematically. The common themes were identified and coded to gain comprehension of the teachers' attitudes toward CPD. The themes were categorized into challenges they face and supportive features to evaluate what contributes to teachers' positive or negative feelings about their ability to self-control their learning (correspondence to their needs and expectations), competence (motivation to improve their skills), and relatedness (support from peers, instructors, and school administration).

Results

Based on the data, teachers have largely favorable views about continuing professional development (CPD). Social recognition, qualification development, salary rises, and network growth were among the benefits

mentioned by the participants. However, some of the barriers impacted participants' autonomy. For example, the interviewees expressed a preference for flexibility in their CPD engagements. For instance, two teachers mentioned the advantages of informal activities, such as observing other colleagues' lessons. However, they felt challenged when had to demonstrate their lessons. Demo-lesson planning and purchasing materials for the lesson activities were a huge burden. In addition, anxiety due to discrepancies in student abilities and needs led to demotivation toward lesson demonstration practices.

When it comes to course attendance, the teachers expressed some interest in distance courses since their school is located in a suburban area and daily commuting to a training center would cause a serious barrier. Therefore, online courses could be a solution. However, distance training is mainly provided by private organizations, and the cost of such courses is often exorbitant, according to the interviewees. As for the free-of-charge MOOCs (massive open online courses), only one of the participants used them actively. Two teachers reported being aware of such opportunities but were not determined to complete MOOCs due to a lack of external regulations. According to one of the respondents, massive online courses offer limited training. Some teachers recommended that such courses should be organized by local training centers to suit particular contexts and circumstances. Teachers need to be able to use the acquired knowledge in a real classroom setting. Therefore, high self-determination depends on participants' beliefs that the professional course will apply to the local context and their actual needs. Access to training activities should be more flexible as well. A wider variety of course content, access to video-recorded sample lessons, workshops on activities for learners with special education needs, and training organized by in-service expert teachers were some of the recommendations. Another suggestion was a series of short seminars. Therefore, such activities can be used to promote teachers' autonomy and motivation toward further professional growth.

Regarding the teachers' need to improve their competence, the following information was gathered: the participants have a positive attitude toward expanding their knowledge and abilities. All the participants believe professional training should help them become effective and resourceful teachers equipped with practical tools to adapt their teaching methods and approaches. However, there are constraints, such as the obligation to follow the pace, content, and lesson organization predisposed by the curriculum and state regulations:

“I would be more than willing to put in more work in the classroom. I can tell from experience that something needs to be modified, or even entirely omitted to better meet the needs of students. Nonetheless, the time allotted restricts the choices and actions of teachers. So, sometimes it appears to be useless to learn something new.”

Almost half of the participants think the initiatives that are successful abroad may not always be suitable for Kazakhstani settings. They assume that professional development programs typically do not include contextual factors that influence teaching environments. It means that copying the models employed in other circumstances can be ineffective unless adaptations are made. One of the participants with six years of teaching experience clarified:

“In my class of 11 final year school students, only three of them are active, motivated English learners. They are eager to implement challenging and creative activities, communicate in English, and learn to be independent learners. The others prefer to listen to the teacher explain a new theme in their first language and simply do some exercises. The reason behind that can be the students’ focus on other subjects of specialization. Therefore, I am unable to fully apply modern, innovative methods in my practice.”

As regards the sense of relatedness, the teachers value the opportunity to access training since this is beneficial for their growth. The teachers in the country are periodically invited to participate in professional development courses, which the participants consider an excellent way to build a professional network:

“School teachers in my town tend to be supportive of each other and ready to share their materials and knowledge. The more colleagues I meet, the more support I can receive».

“Teachers also need to learn. Students can learn from each other, and I learn a lot from my colleagues. Therefore, I believe professional development provides us with many opportunities, although we need to sacrifice much time and energy. That is worthy».

“Most seminars I attended were delivered by qualified educators. Although I am often aware of many things presented at the seminars, I enjoy the change in routine and attending events with other teachers. I can still review what I might have forgotten”.

To sum up the findings, the teachers have encountered significant obstacles although they all find professional development activities beneficial. Among the challenges most frequently mentioned were a lack of time, financial burden, and insufficient support from the school. Moreover, they need more opportunities for practice and the provision of more detailed feedback from the course instructor. Time restrictions were also identified as a barrier by the majority of the interviewees. Having to commute to a training center, dealing with personal affairs, and still implementing schoolwork were cited as very exhausting. Furthermore, the participants find it challenging to access CPD courses that suit their specific needs, such as implementing the assessment or

dealing with students with special educational needs. A novice teacher who recently started working at the school expressed her anxiety about a lack of experience in document preparation.

Discussion

The analysis of barriers has demonstrated that teachers' motivation for professional development can be stimulated by drawing on aspects of SDT theory (Purwanti & Octavia, 2022). To begin, EFL teachers should be financially supported by the government. Although teachers are entitled to salary supplements for achievement and career development, the cost of quality professional courses can be very high. The Kazakhstani Ministry of Education has been supporting teachers over the past few years. Yet, the need for various forms of continuing professional development programs is far from being met. This is evident from the findings of this study. Therefore, the content of educational programs should be expanded according to the specific educational requests of language learners as well as teachers' professional needs. In other words, specific, learning-by-doing programs should be promoted (Liu, 2022). The CDP Framework developed by the British Council (2015) identifies twelve elements of teaching practices. The elements include managing lessons and resources, planning, promoting 21st-century skills, ICT integration, practicing inclusive education, and other aspects. Accordingly, EFL teachers may need support in any of the diagnosed areas. Moreover, online professional courses have the potential to solve the issues of time limits or geographical locations (Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2020). MOOCs could serve as an alternative to costly professional development courses.

The suggested measures bear the character of external factors that influence intrinsic motivation in terms of SDT theory. The effectiveness of intrinsic motivation in the educational context has been proven by empirical studies (Niemic & Ryan, 2009). Nonetheless, teachers' interest should be stimulated not only by government rewards but also by school and teacher initiatives. In other words, educational institutions should guide teachers in planning for career achievements and provide methodological recommendations and resources.

The current study revealed that teachers are likely to possess a natural need to be part of a community, surrounded by people with the same interests. Consequently, by stimulating this need positive attitudes toward continuous development can be supported. This will help them to share their experiences, seek help, and discuss their teaching practices. Regarding the availability of quality training and the reluctance to interrupt professional employment, the recent pandemic has opened up the possibilities of online approaches to improving knowledge and skills (OECD, 2020). Nowadays, online and face-to-face forms of continuing professional education are available and language teachers should be encouraged to practice lifelong learning. Teachers who adhere to this philosophy are more likely to be intrinsically motivated to fulfill their potential in

education. All of the above will help to counteract the weakening of teachers' motivation for professional development.

Recommendations

This study examined the barriers that EFL teachers face when participating in continuous professional development activities. In addition, the investigation uncovered some stimulating practices that could promote teachers' determination toward active, lifelong learning. Both an in-depth analysis of the recently published literature and evidence from the lives and experiences of nine EFL teachers from Kazakhstan are provided.

Although this study was conducted in a particular setting with a small number of participants, it presents a valuable contribution. The experiences and attitudes of EFL teachers from a suburban school in Kazakhstan were deeply explored to obtain insights into what needs to be improved. The following are some recommendations derived from the analysis:

- Stimulate the three facets of teacher determination to active professional growth (competence, autonomy, and relatedness)

Competence

- Provide support on subject-related aspects as well as on teaching methods. Among the needs can be language proficiency, methodology, document administration for novice teachers, support during curriculum reorganization, ICT skills, 21st-century skills, planning for students with special educational needs, etc.
- Improve the quality of training. Since some concern is raised regarding the quality of local programs and applicability of modern, trendy teaching approaches within the existing actuality and demands of the local community, the training could be organized by local training centers in co-operation with well-known international educational institutions.
- Inform about the multiple existing educational resources.
- Equip teachers with tools that can assist in their work (ICT tools, applications, programs, etc.).

Ensure the theoretical knowledge is practiced within the development programs followed by feedback and recommendations.

Autonomy

- Develop and put into action CPD programs that are relevant to teachers' needs and areas of interest.
- Make professional development opportunities more accessible, free of charge, or low-priced for teachers.
- Allocate time and resources needed for teachers to participate in CPD.

- Stimulate teacher motivation by addressing their needs and providing a variety of course forms and content.
- Provide alternative opportunities for professional development, such as MOOCs and voluntary participation in different activities.
- Ensure rewards and external regulation since some individuals may need some control and direction.

Relatedness

- Ensure in-service expert teacher participation in workshops or seminars so that they share best practices and knowledge.
- Provide opportunities to build a professional network and cooperate with colleagues.
- Assist in achieving professional goals.

In addition, the researchers recommend further investigation of this topic including a larger population from different regions of Kazakhstan. This will allow testing the applicability of these findings in other settings. A deeper analysis should be conducted on MOOCs as an opportunity for teachers' continuous professional development.

Conclusion

The research questions explored the EFL teachers' attitudes towards continuous professional development in the context of suburban secondary school in Kazakhstan. The results indicate that despite difficulties experienced by the teachers, they view professional development positively. For continuous development activities to be more beneficial and engaging, it is necessary to assess the needs and expectations of participants.

Some CPD opportunities are available nowadays due to government education policies in Kazakhstan and a growing demand for higher professionalism in EFL teaching. Social rewards, qualification promotion, and belonging to the professional community act as intrinsic motivations to participate in CPD. Regarding the availability of peer support, they feel satisfied with opportunities for cooperation. However, they would like more feedback and assistance from course instructors. Overall, teachers view the content and activities in CPD workshops positively. However, they want to access a wider variety of topics and areas for development. For instance, some teachers indicated their interest in improving their language proficiency.

In summary, initial pedagogical education and training constitute the first step to professional growth. The development may not be feasible unless teachers feel determined to continuously improve their skills and knowledge. Therefore, educational policymakers and stakeholders should further encourage and assist educators in learning and applying the best practices.

Acknowledgements

The valuable contribution of the research participants who shared their experiences and views regarding participation in professional development programs should be particularly acknowledged in this study. The willingness and readiness to contribute deserve special mention in this research work.

References

- Bouaissane, M., Mourchid, M., & Brigui, H. (2022). A Study of Moroccan EFL Teachers' Attitudes towards In-service Continuing Professional Development. *ResearchGate*. <https://doi.org/10.9790/0837-2710075971>
- British Council. (2015). Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Framework for teachers. *Teaching for Success*. <https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/publications/resource-books/british-council-cpd-framework>
- Chernobay, E., & Tashibaeva, D. (2020). Teacher Professional Development in Russia and Kazakhstan. Evidence from TALIS-2018. *Voprosy Obrazovaniâ*, 4, 141–164. <https://doi.org/10.17323/1814-9545-2020-4-141-164>
- Chiu, T. K. F., Chai, C. S., Williams, P. J., & Lin, T.-J. (2021). Teacher Professional Development on Self-Determination Theory-Based Design Thinking in STEM Education. *Educational Technology & Society*, 24(4), 153–165. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48629252>
- Ismagulova, A., Ryspayeva, D., Zholdabayeva, A., Kandalina, Y., & Furman, O. (2023). Professional Development Needs of English Teachers in Kazakhstan. *Bulletin of the Karaganda University*, 2(110).
- Kao, C., Wu, Y. T., Chang, Y., Chien, H. M., & Mou, T. (2020). Understanding Web-Based Professional Development in Education: The role of attitudes and Self-efficacy in predicting Teachers' Technology-Teaching Integration. *The Asia-Pacific Education Researcher*, 29(5), 405–415. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40299-019-00493-x>
- Liu, F. (2022). *English teaching in China: EFL teacher motivation and demotivation at the university level* (Doctoral dissertation, Karlstads universitet). <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2%3A1646800&dswid=-6384>
- Morrison-Smith, S., & Ruiz, J. (2020). Challenges and barriers in virtual teams: a literature review. *SN Applied Sciences*, 2(6). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42452-020-2801-5>
- Niemiec, C. P., & Ryan, R. M. (2009). Autonomy, competence, and relatedness in the classroom. *Theory and Research in Education*, 7, 133–144. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1477878509104318>
- Ningsih, S. K. (2023). The Effect of EFL Teachers' Participation in Professional Development Program on The Change of Their Teaching Behaviour. *jurnal.uhn.ac.id*. <https://doi.org/10.36655/jetal.v5i1.1193>

- Purwanti, E. & Octavia, S. (2022). Examining teachers' motivation in conducting teacher professional development: A self-determination theory perspective. *English Language Teaching Educational Journal*, 5(3), 202-213.
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2017). *Self-determination theory: Basic psychological needs in motivation, development, and wellness*. The Guilford Press. <https://doi.org/10.1521/978.14625/28806>
- Yakavets, N., Winter, L., Malone, K., Zhontayeva, Z., & Khamidulina, Z. (2022). Educational reform and teachers' agency in reconstructing pedagogical practices in Kazakhstan. *Journal of Educational Change*, 24(4), Article 4. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10833-022-09463-5>
- Yang J. (2021). Understanding and Enhancing Chinese TEFL Teachers' Motivation for Continuing Professional Development Through the Lens of Self-Determination Theory. *Frontiers in psychology*, 12, 768320. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.768320>

Authors Information

Lazzat Karibayeva

<https://orcid.org/0009-0004-9826-8503>
Suleyman Demirel University
Almaty district, Karasay region 040900,
Kaskelen City, Abylai khan street, 1/1
Kazakhstan

Akmarzhan A. Nogaibayeva

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9121-7595>
Suleyman Demirel University
Almaty district, Karasay region 040900,
Kaskelen City, Abylai khan street, 1/1
Kazakhstan

Gulzhaina K. Kassymova

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7004-3864>
Abai Kazakh National Pedagogical University
050010, Dostyk ave., 13, Almaty
Kazakhstan

Menkebanu Nursultan

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2050-4113>
Suleyman Demirel University
Almaty district, Karasay region 040900,
Kaskelen City, Abylai khan street, 1/1
Kazakhstan
