

Comparative Analysis of EFL Teachers' Views on Fundamentals of English Language Teaching: The Case of Türkiye and Kazakhstan

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Abstract: This study compares the views of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers from Türkiye and Kazakhstan on the fundamental aspects of English language teaching (ELT). As English gains prominence in global communication, understanding EFL teachers' pedagogical knowledge, content knowledge, and personality traits across different contexts is vital for enhancing teaching practices. Adopting a comparative qualitative design, data were collected from 107 in-service EFL teachers (50 from Türkiye, 57 from Kazakhstan) via an online survey with open-ended questions. Thematic analysis revealed six core themes: emotional commitment, pedagogical knowledge, content knowledge, continuous professional development, personality traits and professional dispositions, and student-centeredness. Both groups valued emotional commitment, pedagogical, and content knowledge; however, contextual differences emerged. Turkish teachers emphasized personal traits such as resilience and patience, while their Kazakhstani counterparts focused on content expertise and ongoing development. The study highlights how regional factors influence teacher perspectives and offers implications for tailoring EFL teacher education programs to context-specific needs in both countries.

Anahtar Sözcükler:

Yabancı dil olarak
İngilizce
İngilizce öğretiminin
temelleri
Öğretmen görüşleri
Karşılaştırmalı analiz
Türkiye ve
Kazakistan

Yabancı Dil Olarak İngilizce Öğretmenlerinin İngilizce Öğretiminin Temel Unsurlarına İlişkin Görüşlerinin Karşılaştırmalı Analizi: Türkiye ve Kazakistan Örneği

Özet: Bu çalışma, Türkiye ve Kazakistan'daki Yabancı Dil Olarak İngilizce (YDİ) öğretmenlerinin İngilizce öğretiminin temel yönlerine ilişkin görüşlerini karşılaştırmaktadır. İngilizce küresel iletişimde önem kazandıkça, farklı bağlamlarda İngilizce öğretmenlerinin pedagojik bilgilerini, içerik bilgilerini ve kişisel özelliklerini anlamak, öğretim uygulamalarını geliştirmek için hayati önem taşımaktadır. Karşılaştırmalı nitel bir tasarım benimsenerek, 107 hizmet içi YDİ öğretmeninden (Türkiye'den 50, Kazakistan'dan 57) açık uçlu sorular içeren çevrimiçi bir anket aracılığıyla veri toplanmıştır. Tematik analiz altı ana temayı ortaya çıkarmıştır: duygusal bağlılık, pedagojik bilgi, içerik bilgisi, sürekli mesleki gelişim, kişisel özellikler ve mesleki eğilimler ve öğrenci merkezlilik. Her iki grup da duygusal bağlılık, pedagojik bilgi ve içerik bilgisine değer vermiştir; ancak bağlamsal farklılıklar ortaya çıkmıştır. Türk öğretmenler dayanıklılık ve sabır gibi kişisel özellikleri vurgularken, Kazakistanlı meslektaşları içerik uzmanlığı ve sürekli gelişime odaklanmıştır. Çalışma, bölgesel faktörlerin öğretmenlerin bakış açılarını nasıl etkilediğini vurgulamakta ve her iki ülkede de yabancı dil öğretmen eğitimi programlarının bağlama özgü ihtiyaçlara göre uyarlanması için çıkarımlar sunmaktadır.

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1. Introduction

The instruction of English as a foreign language (EFL) is becoming a significant and dynamic area of interest in a world where English is established as a lingua franca in multiple contexts, including education, business, and international relations (Graddol, 2006; Rose et al., 2021). Given that English remains a global language and in light of its privileged position, the situation of English language education is an important and significant issue in many countries where either English is a minority language or it is a language that students learn as a foreign language (Rizvi, 2023). For instance, the focus of the present study is on the unique context of two countries, Türkiye and Kazakhstan, where English is learned as a foreign language rather than a second language. Each country presents its own context with distinct opportunities and challenges. Within these contexts, many historical, cultural, and socio-political factors influence and are taken into account by teachers regarding how they understand their identity and positionality in English language teaching in both countries (Gültekin & Babayiğit, 2023; Karzhan, 2023). Therefore, to gain a deeper understanding of how teachers utilize resources to enhance their practice, it is essential to examine the key aspects that EFL teachers value in these contexts, particularly in relation to English language teaching (ELT).

Building on this background, the current study examines and compares the perspectives of Turkish and Kazakhstani EFL teachers on the key factors that shape ELT. By exploring teachers' pedagogical knowledge (PK), content knowledge (CK), and personality traits (PTs), the study aims to understand how contextual factors influence their teaching approaches, as well as their beliefs and understanding of these methods. Further, understanding whether EFL teachers' beliefs and views on aspects of ELT are similar or different could add to the understanding of the professional identity of EFL teachers in varied educational contexts. Therefore, in conclusion, the study findings might contribute to the field of comparative education by illustrating how significant and relevant context contributes to EFL teachers' beliefs and practices regarding English Language Teacher Education (ELTE). Based upon the aim of this study, the following research questions are sought to be answered:

1. How do EFL teachers from Türkiye and Kazakhstan perceive the fundamental aspects of ELT?
2. In what aspects do their perceptions demonstrate similarities and differences regarding the fundamental aspects of ELT?

2. Literature Review

In educational research, it is widely acknowledged that teachers' PK, CK, and PTs are among the factors that shape effective teaching and learning (Blömeke & Delaney, 2012; Gao & Cui, 2024; Habiyaemye et al., 2023; Masuhara, 2022). PK refers to a teacher's general capacity to plan, implement, and evaluate purposeful instructional activities that can enhance student learning (Almunawaroh et al., 2024). In contrast, CK involves possessing extensive knowledge of the language (e.g., grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, discourse features) (Almunawaroh et al., 2024). Moreover, PTs that include, but are not limited to empathy, enthusiasm, and flexibility, are imperative to building functional teacher-student relationships and achieving mutual engagement in the classroom space, all of which influence language (Dörnyei, 2005). In this section, the focus is on how these vital aspects of teaching shape educational practices and experiences in the diverse EFL contexts of Kazakhstan and Türkiye by investigating the application of PK, CK, and PTs in each context.

2.1. EFL Teachers' Pedagogical Knowledge

PK is a core component of effective EFL instruction, encompassing lesson planning, instructional strategies, classroom management, student engagement, and assessment. These elements collectively inform the decisions and practices that teachers implement in the classroom (Azma & Talebinejad, 2021; Dadvand & Behzadpoor, 2020). As a fundamental aspect of teachers' PK, purposeful lesson planning allows teachers not only to organize content but to anticipate potential limitations that may arise from linguistic or cultural source differences (Pedro *et al.*, 2022). Teachers who engage in purposeful planning are increasingly well-prepared to address the diverse needs of their students by creating stimulating and supportive classroom environments. Additionally, being able to bridge global teaching practices and local educational contexts is critical in developing an inclusive and authentic language-learning process (Ainscow, 2020). This consideration regarding purposeful lesson planning is even more significant in contexts such as Türkiye and Kazakhstan, where curriculum structures and teacher education emphases differ considerably (Baimbetova & Çakır, 2021).

Underpinning effective learning in EFL contexts is the teachers' knowledge of their learners. Strong EFL pedagogy is informed by a deep understanding of factors about the learners' prior knowledge and experience, as well as linguistic and independent learning preferences (Achieng, 2023). Promoting deep learning and creativity within the diverse student community of Türkiye and Kazakhstan presents multiple challenges, but a diverse student body also provides opportunities for inclusive and creative learning approaches (Butabayeva *et al.*, 2024; Nurgalynova, 2024). Ultimately, teacher development in multicultural and multilingual environments necessitates an adjustment in methods to account for the linguistic variations of their students. In order to meet such linguistic diversity, Nurgalynova (2024) emphasizes the importance of differentiated instruction in the classroom to meet the students' varying levels, accommodate their language abilities, cultivate an inclusive environment, and engage and enrich students' outcomes. However, qualified professional development and support at the institution are needed in some contexts in Kazakhstan (Kazykhankyzy *et al.*, 2024). Similarly, although there is a growing emphasis on professional development in Türkiye, challenges remain in ensuring equitable access to effective training, particularly in adopting modern teaching practices and meeting the needs of an increasingly diverse student population. The lack of support and professional development takes away from the quality of differentiated instruction implemented in the country (Özer & Suna, 2023). Considering these realities, it could be suggested that while teachers are generally aware of their ongoing professional growth, EFL teachers, in particular, must continually adapt their instructional approaches to meet the diverse needs of students, foster meaningful engagement, and promote positive learning experiences.

Assessment literacy is another critical component of PK, encompassing teachers' understanding of how to design, interpret, and apply assessment data to support learning (Giraldo, 2021). Student evaluation typically takes two primary forms: summative and formative assessments. Summative assessment refers to measuring student progress at the end of an instructional unit or academic term, often using standardized criteria (Dunn & Mulvenon, 2009). In contrast, formative assessment is designed to provide ongoing feedback that informs instruction and supports student learning in real-time. As Hattie and Timperley (2007) note, effective formative assessment involves creating valid tools, interpreting data accurately, and using the results to adjust teaching for improved outcomes.

In Türkiye, an exam-oriented system places significant pressure on teachers to prioritize summative assessments, often at the expense of formative feedback that could support student growth. High-stakes exams, such as university entrance tests, reinforce this reliance on standardized evaluations. Although recent reforms have advocated for more formative approaches, in practice, the focus on summative outcomes remains dominant, making it difficult for formative practices to gain traction (Kitchen et al., 2019). In contrast, a more pressing issue in Kazakhstan is the need to adapt assessment practices to better serve students from diverse language backgrounds in multilingual classrooms. Teachers are aware of the varying language proficiencies among their students and have begun implementing classroom differentiation to address these challenges (Nurgalynova, 2024). While differentiated assessment is recognized as a potentially effective strategy, there is a growing call for increased professional development and institutional support to enhance its implementation and overall impact (Kazykhankyzy et al., 2024). According to Karibayeva et al. (2023), enhancing assessment literacy among Kazakhstani teachers requires a clear focus on designing more effective and differentiated assessment practices. Thus, it can be suggested that the success of assessment in both contexts is dependent on balancing between formative and summative approaches, aligning the assessments, and ensuring teacher professional learning and support are present in both settings.

Significantly, both nations create a culture that values professional growth for teachers, so that they can continually engage in assessment for learning. In order to understand how to meet all their learners' needs, teachers should also study and master a range of teaching approaches and methods. Approaches such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), a modern pedagogical approach seeking to help learners acquire high levels of communicative competence through interaction that follows meaning-based activities involving real-life situations, and task-based language teaching, which aims to achieve the same goals of developing meaningful communicative competence through problem-solving tasks, are being used more and more as a way to promote both learners' communicative self-efficacy and critical thinking skills (Kuvandykova, 2024; Nunan, 2004; Richards, 2006). Despite these advances, the effectiveness of these methods remains contingent on several aspects of context, including material support, curriculum structure, and teacher preparedness to implement these practices (Pardo, 2006).

In the educational context of Türkiye, EFL teachers essentially teach students to think critically and approach the language from a communicative standpoint. However, while CLT is generally accepted as recommendable, Turkish EFL teachers rarely practice authentic CLT since in places like Türkiye, explicit instruction of grammar is a favoured task of the EFL teachers (Uysal & Bardakçı, 2014), which is understandable considering the pressures from curriculum changes mostly influenced by national examinations/policies, prioritizing both grammar and reading ability, to transmit information (Fındıklı & Büyükkarcı, 2024). These social responsibilities influence teachers' perceptions of the type of language output their students need to succeed in examinations, often leading them to move away from a CLT-oriented curriculum. Instead, they tend to focus on grammar and vocabulary to better prepare students for standardized tests. With many teachers' practice models still guided by the Grammar Translation Method (GTM), little attention is paid to productively integrating CLT elements into current practice, as GTM is based on accuracy and form-focused instruction. To alleviate this dilemma, teacher education programs should not only emphasize communicative approaches but also provide teachers with practical pedagogical approaches to promote communicative approaches in a standardized testing culture.

In stark contrast, Kazakhstani EFL teachers experience a dual challenge of applying multilingualism while teaching a language (Zhunussova, 2021). Kazakhstan's multilingual education policy emphasizes the use of Kazakh, Russian, and English in the classroom as part of a national commitment to trilingualism, Kazakh as the state language, Russian as the lingua franca for interethnic communication, and English as the language of global integration (Aksholakova & Ismailova, 2013; Reynolds et al., 2022; Yermekova et al., 2024). Despite the clear policy direction, implementing trilingual education has proven to be a highly complex task. Kaiypova and Kim (2024) argue that although English Medium Instruction (EMI) and early English education have been aggressively promoted, insufficient government preparation and a lack of stakeholder coordination have hindered practical application in schools. Teachers report the difficulty of teaching three languages in a single lesson, struggling to balance attention among them while managing language interference. This reflects broader patterns in language choice and use in Central Asia, where English is increasingly negotiated alongside Kazakh and Russian languages in educational and social domains (Ahn & Smagulova, 2022). These challenges are intensified by top-down reforms that often fail to account for classroom realities, placing additional burdens on educators. As Karabassova (2021) illustrates, the implementation of English-medium reforms in Kazakhstan has been uneven across regions, highlighting the contextual complexity of policy enactment at the classroom level. In fact, an overreliance on English and neglect of students' first or heritage languages can impede comprehension and engagement in EFL classrooms (Karabassova & San Isidro, 2020). As a result, while the trilingual policy aims to prepare students for global participation, its implementation can inadvertently constrain the very linguistic flexibility it intends to promote.

2.2. EFL Teachers' Content Knowledge

CK is an additional part of the knowledge base that signals the extent of background knowledge teachers have regarding the knowledge and goals in their particular subject area. Within the realm of EFL teaching, the teachers' command of the language itself, including grammar, pronunciation, syntax, and discourse features, is crucial (Khani & Hajizadeh, 2016). Instructors with robust CK have a greater capacity to explain language concepts, readily respond to student inquiries, and demonstrate the language in ways that cultivate students' comprehension in schools and/or classrooms (Habiyaremye et al., 2023). As a result, language instructors who are proficient in these language components may be perceived as necessary for modelling accurate and authentic aspects of the language experience in a more engaging and meaningful way.

Research also backs the significance of CK as part of sound teaching practice. For instance, Borg (2003) observed that the level of knowledge teachers have about grammar directly influences their decisions about grammar teaching. Generally, when a teacher has a sound understanding of grammar, his or her professional satisfaction is enhanced, and students' motivation to engage with the content is increased. In the same vein as Black (2009), who examined the influence of CK and Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) concerning teachers' practices through professional development, found that teachers showed some limitations in their CK and pedagogical competence, and that it was in their studies that these shortcomings constrained the teachers' and students' performance. Academics such as Black (2009) supported the suggestion that teachers' CK needs to be enhanced before being able to change instructional practices, and it was presented as a prerequisite to being able to demonstrate effective teaching practice. Also, in support of these views in the Turkish EFL context, Akçor and Savaşçı (2020) concluded that pre-service English language teachers

often felt insufficiently prepared to teach subject matter, particularly grammar, which negatively impacted their professional confidence and belief in their efficacy in the classroom. Their conclusions emphasize that CK is essential not only in theory but also in practice, as it plays a key role in shaping confident and capable EFL teachers.

In Türkiye, the educational system places a strong emphasis on language teaching proficiency, focusing on the formulation of grammar and vocabulary. In their research findings, Fındıklı and Büyükkarcı (2024) report that there are expectations for the successful language teacher to have a thorough understanding of grammar and vocabulary concepts to navigate the students through the language learning process. Equally important, in Kazakhstan, where the multilingual context holds significance, teachers are expected to have a high degree of proficiency in the national languages (i.e., Kazakh and Russian), as well as English, as English is regarded as an important language for global communication (Aksholakova & Ismailova, 2013; Reynolds *et al.*, 2022). Therefore, it can be inferred that, whether in a more grammar-oriented context, such as Türkiye, or in a multilingual context, such as Kazakhstan, teachers ought to continue to develop their CK. Cultivating this knowledge not only enhances the quality of instruction but also supports EFL teachers' ability to attend to the diverse language and educational needs of students, which more reliably produces effective language learning outcomes.

2.3. EFL Teachers' Personality Traits

PTs are an important component of successful teaching because they inform how teachers relate to students and respond to classroom dynamics. Specific traits like empathy, patience, enthusiasm, sense of humour, and flexibility are important for establishing a supportive, positive learning environment (Ahmed *et al.*, 2024). Teachers who are naturally demonstrative of these characteristics are more likely to build meaningful relations, ignite motivation, and foster a sense of belonging in the classroom (Zheng, 2022). Stronger teacher-student relationships cultivate learning environments sustained for both students' target language development and personal development (Dai, 2024). In addition, developing teachers' PTs, as a teacher quality, enhances inclusiveness and effective educational practices (Szentcs et al., 2020). These PTs not only enhance student-teacher interaction but also strengthen the relationships students develop with their teachers, an essential factor for EFL success. Moreover, teachers' friendly and helpful demeanour may play a significant role in fostering a supportive and engaging classroom environment that facilitates enhanced learning opportunities.

In addition to the traditional characteristics of an effective EFL teacher, in today's educational environments, greater emphasis is placed on more complex PTs, such as self-efficacy and resilience. The concept of self-efficacy, as described by Bandura (1997), refers to the extent to which individuals believe they can successfully perform necessary teaching tasks. It is therefore an important factor not only in understanding students' needs but also in implementing unfamiliar teaching methodologies. In the contexts of Türkiye and Kazakhstan, this might be particularly important as teachers could face challenges with multilingual classrooms, traditional teaching models, and curricula that are often non-negotiable.

Resilience, as defined by Gu and Day (2013), is the ability to continue in the face of challenges and change. Those teachers who remain resilient in their teaching are more likely to flourish within a context of uncertainty while continuing to deliver high-quality instruction (Mansfield *et al.*, 2016). Resilience may be of particular significance to EFL teachers working in changeable and unpredictable settings. In the context of EFL, resilient teachers persist, adapt, and commit to their profession (Xue, 2022). Resilient teachers are more likely to have a positive attitude

towards change in their classrooms, react positively to challenges, and sustain their motivation in the face of difficulty (Silva et al., 2020). A recent article examining teacher efficacy and teacher resilience by Kırmızı et al. (2025) discusses the idea that teacher resilience is not a stable characteristic but rather a quality that is contextual and dynamic; one can experience resilience depending on internal and external factors. The article specifies that resilience can be situational; resilience can rise and fall given a teacher's own experiences, the challenges they face as a teacher, and the supports they receive. The scholars also indicate that teachers who are active members of a professional learning community and engage in reflecting on their practices will sustain higher levels of resilience. As teachers' resilience becomes part of their professional identity, they can commit to high energy and enthusiasm during difficulties (Mansfield et al., 2016). This ability to "flourish" through obstacles enables teachers to maintain positive learning environments for learners and effectively address their learning needs. Thus, it can be inferred that resilience enhances teachers' overall well-being and fosters a positive attitude towards the teaching profession. The growing emphasis on self-efficacy and resilience highlights their relevance alongside PK, CK, and PTs in shaping teachers' professional identity and overall teaching effectiveness. Considering all these attributes together when evaluating teacher effectiveness in terms of pedagogy offers new and valuable insights.

Different studies have consistently demonstrated the important role of PK, CK, and PTs in teacher effectiveness (e.g., Black, 2009; Dörnyei, 2005; Habiyaemye et al., 2023; Szentes et al., 2020). All three of these components can influence the professional identity of EFL teachers and their ability to cultivate positive learning environments, especially in the case of teaching EFL in countries that have designated English as a foreign language. While the studies related to trainers of EFL teachers, EFL teachers in the classroom, and EFL teacher training tend to be descriptive and focus on different aspects of EFL teaching, (e.g., Akbari & Dadvand, 2014; Almunawaroh et al., 2024; Fatemi et al., 2015), there appears to be a lack of research that identifies how they play out in potentially very different educational contexts. In the cases of Türkiye and Kazakhstan, little is known about how EFL teachers, in linguistically and culturally plural societies, perceive the main elements that shape ELT at the foundational level. Therefore, this study, by examining and systematically comparing the perspectives of Turkish and Kazakhstani EFL teachers, takes a comprehensive look at the main components noted. This study not only contributes to the comparative education literature but also offers insights into teacher training and professional development within multicultural and multilingual educational contexts.

3. Method

3.1. Research Design

This study adopted a comparative qualitative research design to investigate the perceptions of EFL teachers from Kazakhstan and Türkiye. The qualitative approach was selected as it enables a holistic and in-depth exploration of the teachers' perspectives, capturing the situated and contextualized nature of pedagogical practices across educational settings (Hussain, 2015). Furthermore, utilizing a comparative design maximized opportunities to identify relevant similarities and differences arising from EFL teachers' perceptions of the principles of ELT practices.

3.2. Participants

The sample consisted of EFL teachers from Türkiye and Kazakhstan, who taught across various educational levels, ranging from primary to secondary to tertiary institutions. Therefore, information on their distribution is presented in Table 1.

Table 1.
The distribution of the participants

		Working Experience				TOTAL
		<5	5-10	11-20	20>	
Kazakhstan	Female	12	4	18	19	53
	Male	0	1	3	0	4
Türkiye	Female	10	4	18	3	35
	Male	2	4	10	0	15
TOTAL		24	13	49	22	107

As shown in Table 1, 107 EFL teachers participated, 50 were from Türkiye, and 57 from Kazakhstan. This reflects the receptiveness of participants from both countries. The inclusion of EFL teacher samples from both countries strengthened the case for a balanced comparative perspective on EFL teachers working in diverse educational settings. In terms of gender distribution, the study participants were predominantly female, with 88 (82.2%) females and 19 males (17.8%). In terms of teaching experience, the sample included EFL teachers representing a range of teaching experiences. Around 45.8% of participants had been in the teaching profession for 11 to 20 years, indicating a significant presence of experienced educators in the sample. Another meaningful proportion of the sample included teachers with 0 to 5 years' experience, suggesting the possibility of early-career teachers.

The current study employed purposive sampling to recruit EFL teachers in Türkiye and Kazakhstan, aiming to attain informed views based on professional practice. Purposive sampling is defined by Creswell (2013) as the selection of individuals who possess some understanding or experience that reflects the research target. In this research, the aim was to include teachers currently involved in English language instruction, with the assumption that their participation would provide valuable insights into their perspectives on the fundamentals of ELT. While purposive sampling defined the selection strategy, the listing of participants was straightforward, involving those who were both accessible and willing to participate in the study. Therefore, the sampling resulted in some variation in terms of level of teaching experience and professional contexts in both countries. Ultimately, this approach sought to provide a sufficient number of varying, experience-based perspectives, reflective of the complex phenomena that are ELT in Türkiye and Kazakhstan (Creswell, 2013; Khaldi, 2017; Mulisa, 2022).

3.3. Data Collection

In the current study, the data collection tool was an electronic survey, which contained one open-ended question with the prompt "What are the three most important things necessary for teaching English, and why?". Thus, participants were asked to provide three responses that were interrelated in some way, but the inquiry did not delve into the differing aspects of these responses. The aim was to investigate the perspectives of teachers on what they consider essential for effective EFL teaching. To ensure the survey was easily accessible and user-friendly for teachers in both countries, it was developed using an online survey tool (Google Forms). This approach facilitated data collection from geographically dispersed teachers, contributing to a deeper understanding of EFL teachers' perspectives across various educational contexts.

3.4. Data Analysis

Data collection was conducted over one month. Invitations to participate were distributed through professional networks, educational forums, and direct contact with colleagues. Before obtaining voluntary informed consent, each teacher was informed about the purpose of the study

and assured of the confidentiality of their responses. Once the data were collected, the responses were analyzed using thematic analysis, a suitable method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within qualitative data (Kushnir, 2025). Thematic analysis comprises multiple stages: data familiarization, generating initial codes, identifying themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and ultimately producing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The coding process was completed manually to capture a more nuanced impression of the participant responses. For the analysis, a spreadsheet software (Microsoft Excel), commonly used for organizing and analysing quantitative data, was employed, as it also supports basic analytical functions (Meyer & Avery, 2009). The responses were organized in the spreadsheet software, and frequency counts were calculated to derive percentages that highlight recurring themes. To assess the reliability of the thematic analysis, one researcher from this study and an external field expert independently coded the responses. Interrater agreement, calculated using Cohen's Kappa, indicated an almost perfect level of agreement ($\kappa = 0.92$). This high level of consistency between coders supports the reliability and validity of the identified themes (McHugh, 2012).

4. Findings

As a result of the thematic analysis of the question, “*What are the three most important things necessary for teaching English, and why?*”, six significant themes emerged for both groups of Turkish and Kazakhstani EFL teachers: emotional commitment to teaching, PK, CK, continuous professional development (CPD), PTs, and professional dispositions, and student-centeredness. While the themes were similar for both groups, differences emerged in the sub-themes and the relative emphasis given to each.

4.1. Perceptions of Fundamental Aspects of ELT

As shown in Table 2, emotional commitment to teaching was the most frequently cited theme by Kazakhstani EFL teachers (41.5%), including elements such as motivation, passion, and love for the profession. PK (32.2%) was the second most frequently referenced theme, encompassing skills such as classroom management, creating a positive learning environment, fostering constructive interactions, providing clear instructions, and utilizing instructional resources. CK accounted for 15.8% of responses, emphasizing knowledge of English, grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, teaching skills, and communication skills. CPD (4.1%) included references to lifelong learning, collaboration with colleagues, and reflective teaching. PTs (3.5%) were primarily represented by patience, while student-centeredness (2.9%) included attention to learner needs, individual differences, and promoting autonomy.

Table 2.

Kazakhstani EFL Teachers' Views on the Fundamentals of ELT

Order	Themes	Sub-themes	%
1	Emotional commitment to teaching ($f = 71$)	motivation, passion, love for the job	41.5
2	Pedagogical knowledge ($f = 55$)	classroom management, creating a positive learning atmosphere, developing constructive interactions, clear instructions, and the use of resources	32.2
3	Content knowledge ($f = 27$)	knowledge of English, grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, teaching skills, and communication skills	15.8
4	Continuous professional development ($f = 7$)	lifelong learning, collaboration with colleagues, reflective teaching	4.1
5	Personal traits and professional dispositions of the teacher ($f = 6$)	patience	3.5
6	Student-centeredness ($f = 5$)	focusing on student needs, individual differences, and encouraging autonomy	2.9

As shown in Table 3, emotional commitment to teaching was also the predominant theme for Turkish teachers (34%), with frequent references to motivation, passion, and love for the job. PK (32.7%) followed closely, highlighting positive classroom atmosphere, constructive interactions, classroom management, clarity of instruction, and effective use of resources. PTs (14%) were emphasized more by Turkish teachers than their Kazakhstani counterparts, including patience, resilience, flexibility, and adaptability. CK (12%) covered knowledge of English, grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and communication skills. Student-centeredness (4.7%) and CPD (2.6%) were mentioned less frequently.

Table 3.

Turkish EFL Teachers' Views on the Fundamentals of ELT

Order	Themes	Sub-themes	%
1	Emotional commitment to teaching ($f = 51$)	motivation, passion, love for the job creating a positive learning atmosphere,	34
2	Pedagogical knowledge ($f = 49$)	developing constructive interactions, classroom management, clear instructions, use of resources	32.7
3	Personal traits and professional dispositions of the teacher ($f = 21$)	patience, resilience, flexibility, adaptability	14
4	Content knowledge ($f = 18$)	knowledge of English, grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, teaching skills, and communication skills	12
5	Student-centeredness ($f = 7$)	focusing on student needs, individual differences, and encouraging autonomy	4.7
6	Continuous professional development ($f = 4$)	lifelong learning, reflective teaching	2.6

Just like the responses by their Kazakhstani counterparts, responses provided by Turkish EFL teachers (refer to Table 3) indicated that Emotional Commitment to Teaching was the most predominant theme (34%), noting the frequent referencing of terms such as motivation, passion, and love of the profession within the data. The second most endorsed theme was PK (32.7%), which included aspects such as managing a learning space, establishing a positive learning context, providing clarity on the instruction, developing rapport with learners, and using materials effectively. Compared to their counterparts in Kazakhstan, Turkish teachers emphasized PTs and professional dispositions (14%) above the other themes, and qualities such as patience, resilience, flexibility, and adaptability were mentioned frequently in these responses. CK also emerged as a significant theme (12%), indicating that a strong command of the English language and communication skills is considered essential for effective teaching. Student-centeredness appeared less frequently (4.7%) yet still reflected the value Turkish EFL teachers place on addressing learner needs and promoting learner autonomy. Finally, continuous professional development was the least mentioned theme (2.6%), suggesting that although it is viewed as important, it received minimal attention in the responses.

4.2. Similarities and Differences in their Perceptions

The EFL teachers from Kazakhstan and Türkiye expressed shared perspectives and differing views regarding their beliefs about the essential components for teaching English. While both Kazakhstani and Turkish EFL teachers stated that emotional commitment, PK, and CK are among the most important components of effective teaching, the relative weight of each emphasized component varied, reflecting the complexity of the education frameworks and contexts in Kazakhstan and Türkiye.

Regarding similarities, there was a strong emphasis on emotional commitment. It was presented as the most frequently cited and endorsed aspect of effective ELT by both Turkish and Kazakhstani EFL teachers. Both groups viewed passion for teaching as essential for creating a positive and effective learning environment. For instance, a Kazakhstani EFL teacher (Participant 4) stated, *"I love being a teacher because that gives me motivation to keep learning and growing."* Likewise, a Turkish EFL teacher (Participant 92) explained, *"Loving teaching because the teaching process cannot be done without patience and care, because only teachers who love their job can have these things."* Participants in both groups suggested that an emotional connection to the profession fuels their dedication and enhances the quality of their teaching. They also indicated that emotional commitment could play a central role in developing meaningful learning opportunities for students, enabling teachers to support both personal growth and target language development across diverse classroom contexts.

Despite this commonality, Kazakhstani and Turkish EFL teachers differed in the emphasis they placed on various features of effective teaching. Kazakhstani EFL teachers highlighted CK and ongoing professional development more than Turkish EFL teachers did. Participants from Kazakhstan noted the challenges of working in a multilingual context, which requires competence in Kazakh, Russian, and English. This orientation is consistent with research showing that Kazakhstani English teachers often position themselves primarily as knowledge transmitters and language models, reflecting the sociolinguistic expectations placed upon them (Zhunussova *et al.*, 2022). They emphasized that strong CK is a prerequisite for providing accurate language models in multilingual classrooms. They also stressed the value of continuous development through professional growth processes, particularly in complex multilingual teaching settings.

The second most emphasized theme for both groups was PK. Key sub-elements under this theme included classroom management, creating a positive learning environment, and providing explicit instruction. Classroom management was mentioned more frequently by Kazakhstani teachers, alongside the importance of delivering clear instructions and building rapport with students. In contrast, Turkish teachers placed greater emphasis on creating a positive and emotionally safe classroom climate. Both groups acknowledged the significance of classroom management and rapport-building, though the interpretation and application of PK differed according to educational and cultural context. Turkish teachers' focus on relational aspects of teaching may reflect the demands of an exam-oriented system, while the realities of a trilingual education system shaped Kazakhstani teachers' approaches.

CK was also an important theme for both groups, particularly in relation to grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. Several participants linked CK to instructional strategies. For example, a Kazakhstani participant noted, *"...knowledge of English is foremost for teachers' practice, with any disciplinary context that's in English"* (Participant 85). Another added that *"having a strong knowledge of English grammar and vocabulary"* is essential for being an effective EFL teacher (Participant 21). In Kazakhstan, CK extended beyond English to include the integration of multiple languages in classroom practice. Teachers reported mediating learners' knowledge across languages, anticipating linguistic interference, and adapting their pedagogy to the sociolinguistic realities and institutional expectations of their contexts. In Türkiye, CK references were more often linked to grammar and vocabulary, reflecting the traditional grammar-based approach in the national education system.

Some Kazakhstani and Turkish EFL teachers also mentioned the need for professional learning connected to teaching English. For Kazakhstani teachers, this was tied to lifelong learning, collegiality, and reflective practices. Both groups acknowledged the importance of

professional development, though it was given less emphasis compared to other themes. This suggests that, while valued, professional learning opportunities may not always be prioritized or accessible.

Finally, individual character traits such as patience, resilience, flexibility, and adaptability were mentioned more often by Turkish EFL teachers. In contrast, Kazakhstani EFL teachers tended to highlight patience alone, if at all. For example, a Turkish EFL teacher (Participant 35) stated,

...One of the most important features of being a teacher is patience, because students have individual learning styles and some require additional support. Also, teachers may encounter resistance or contradictory beliefs from their students during the teaching process. To summarize, it is crucial to create a supportive learning environment tailored to the needs of students.

While both groups shared specific priorities, the variations reflect the distinct characteristics of each country's educational environment. In Türkiye, the added emphasis on emotional and interpersonal aspects may be linked to the relational demands of a high-stakes, exam-driven system. In Kazakhstan, the focus on CK and professional learning appears to be shaped by the requirements of teaching in a multilingual context and ongoing educational reforms.

5. Discussion

The results of this study indicate that both Turkish and Kazakhstani EFL teachers view emotional commitment, PK, and CK as central elements of effective ELT. However, the emphasis on each differs according to national context. The intense focus on emotional commitment in both groups aligns with Dörnyei's (2005) assertion that intrinsic motivation and emotional attachment are vital for sustaining teacher engagement and is consistent with Silva et al.'s (2020) observation that personal commitment and ongoing professional development play a key role in promoting student learning, particularly in contexts where teachers face external challenges such as large class sizes and institutional complexities. Teachers in both contexts described how such an emotional connection not only sustains their dedication but also strengthens their ability to engage students and enhance the quality of instruction. This perspective reflects the view that teaching effectiveness is not solely dependent on technical skills but also on the level of personal investment teachers bring into the classroom. Netnographic evidence from teachers also links motivation and commitment to outcomes, while highlighting practical barriers that reduce participation (Acar et al., 2024).

PK was another highly emphasized component for both groups, yet the way it was interpreted differed. While Kazakhstani teachers often emphasized aspects such as classroom management, providing clear instructions, and effective use of resources, Turkish teachers highlighted the importance of building rapport and creating a positive and emotionally safe classroom environment. These differences are consistent with the concept of PCK, which emphasizes the integration of subject matter expertise with the ability to manage classroom dynamics effectively (Habiyaremye et al., 2023). They are also in line with Azma and Talebinejad's (2021) assertion that effective PK requires both technical competence and the capacity to establish rapport with learners. In Türkiye's exam-driven system, the relational dimensions of PK may serve as a buffer against performance pressure (Fındıklı & Büyükkarcı, 2024). In Kazakhstan's trilingual education system, structured classroom management and explicit instruction are critical for navigating multilingual settings (Kaiypova & Kim, 2024).

CK was also considered important, but its scope varied between the two contexts. For Kazakhstani teachers, CK extended beyond English to include competence in the Kazakh and Russian languages, reflecting the requirements of a trilingual education policy (Reynolds *et al.*, 2022). This broader understanding of CK aligns with Borg's (2003) and Black's (2009) emphasis on the importance of deep subject-matter knowledge for effective pedagogy, as it enables teachers to anticipate linguistic interference and provide accurate language models. Turkish teachers, on the other hand, tended to associate CK more closely with grammar and vocabulary, which is consistent with the traditional grammar-based approach embedded in Türkiye's educational system (Uysal & Bardakçı, 2014). These distinctions suggest that the concept of CK is shaped by the sociolinguistic environment in which teachers work.

Continuous professional development (CPD) was less frequently mentioned than the other themes, yet it was valued, especially by Kazakhstani teachers. Their emphasis on lifelong learning, collaboration with colleagues, and reflective teaching is consistent with Kazykhankyzy *et al.*'s (2024) and Giraldo's (2021) view that ongoing professional learning enables teachers to adapt to evolving pedagogical demands. This is also in line with Karibayeva *et al.*'s (2023) argument that continuous training supports adaptability in dynamic and multilingual classroom contexts. In Kazakhstan, the multilingual environment may intensify the need for teachers to update their skills regularly. In contrast, in Türkiye, institutional and structural factors may limit the prioritization of CPD despite its recognized importance.

PTs and professional dispositions such as patience, resilience, flexibility, and adaptability were more frequently emphasized by Turkish teachers, which reflects Ahmed *et al.*'s (2024) findings on the importance of teacher personality in creating supportive learning environments. These qualities may be especially critical in Türkiye's high-stakes assessment culture, where teachers balance curricular demands with student well-being (Fındıklı & Büyükkarcı, 2024). This is echoed in findings from the Turkish context, where novice English teachers' professional development has been shown to rely heavily on emotional commitment and adaptive PTs (Zorba, 2022). In contrast, Kazakhstani teachers mentioned PTs less often, with patience being the most frequently mentioned characteristic. Finally, student-centeredness, although the least emphasized theme in both groups, still reflected an awareness of the need to focus on learner needs, account for individual differences, and promote autonomy. The relatively low frequency of this theme may be related to systemic factors such as rigid curricula or large class sizes, which can limit the practical implementation of student-centered practices.

Overall, the differences and similarities observed in this study highlight the importance of considering contextual factors when designing teacher education and professional development programs. In Türkiye, incorporating training that strengthens emotional resilience and relational pedagogy could better prepare teachers for the demands of an exam-driven system. In Kazakhstan, ensuring that CPD is structured, continuous, and accessible could help teachers maintain strong CK while adapting to the challenges of multilingual classrooms. Addressing these context-specific needs has the potential to enhance the quality and relevance of ELT in both settings.

6. Conclusion

This study endeavoured to contribute to the literature on the central themes of ELT, depending on the perceptions of EFL teachers in Kazakhstan and Türkiye. Several aspects of the findings revealed that both Kazakhstan and Türkiye EFL teachers identified emotional commitment, PK, and CK to some degree as priorities for quality teaching; however, there were some

contextual differences in the prominence of this priority. Turkish EFL teachers indicated more PTs, including resilience and patience, as important, which reflects their high-stakes, testing context (Fındıklı & Büyükkarçı, 2024). Kazakhstani EFL teachers emphasized the importance of having expertise in their content area and a commitment to ongoing professional development, which likely reflects the complexities of multilingual contexts and an increasingly fluid educational system in Kazakhstan (Reynolds *et al.*, 2022). These contexts underpin the unique educational demands of both countries, as well as institutional requirements in Türkiye, and multilingual contexts in Kazakhstan. Considering the findings reported in this study, the implications for teacher education and training are substantial. Programs in both countries should be designed to address the specific realities and challenges that teachers face. In Türkiye, the study highlights the need to prepare emotionally resilient and task-oriented teachers who can effectively manage the pressures of an examination-driven education system. Additionally, teacher education should create opportunities for teachers to apply communicative teaching methods, even within a curriculum that remains largely grammar-based. In the case of Kazakhstan, the findings suggest a need to strengthen teachers' CK and support their ability to address challenges arising in multilingual classrooms. Teacher education programs should ensure access to targeted professional development that helps educators navigate complex multilingual and multicultural learning environments (Kazazoglu & Ece, 2021). Moreover, these programs should include training on how to implement the country's trilingual policy in ways that promote authenticity and inclusivity.

To conclude, this investigation furthers the growing knowledge base of comparative ELT, emphasizing the contribution of contextual factors to EFL teachers' professional identities and pedagogical choices in their educational practice. The findings indicate that teacher education in both Kazakhstan and Türkiye pedagogical contexts should acknowledge and address the complexities and challenges that teachers face in their decision-making. By considering the contextual complexities, teacher education programs would support EFL teachers to better respond to the emerging demands of language teaching and improve educational outcomes in the process. In line with this, Türkiye's evolving intercultural stance has also been argued to shape teachers' professional identities and pedagogical orientations, particularly through the juxtaposition of Western and non-Western perspectives (Zorba, 2025). A greater emphasis on supporting personalized professional development, while considering emotional resources, CK, and pedagogical flexibility, could certainly enhance the quality of teaching or EFL education delivered, toward improved outcomes for both Kazakhstani and Turkish EFL students.

Even though this study has provided valuable insights into the EFL teachers' perceptions in Kazakhstan and Türkiye, it has notable limitations. The first limitation is that the reliance on self-report data created a potential for response bias, as teachers may have under-reported certain aspects of their practices or over-reported other elements for reasons of social desirability or in line with what they perceive as an accepted or appropriate practice. Future research in the field can overcome this limitation by using classroom observation or peer review to compare self-reported data, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of teachers' practices. Second, the sample size and geographical concentration may also limit the generalization of the findings. The study, for example, limited itself to a couple of regions in both countries. While the sample showed diversity in terms of teaching experience, the study may not have fully captured the complexity of EFL teacher diversity among regions, especially outside primary urban settings. Future studies should aim to expand geographical sampling to develop a better understanding of factors that work within teachers' perceptions across educational settings. Another limitation to acknowledge is that the study did not

analyse gender differences in the responses. Although it aimed to capture general perceptions by presenting shared views of both male and female teachers, it did not explore how gender explicitly influences teaching perspectives or related classroom practices. Existing literature suggests that gender can shape teaching styles and emotional responses to challenges (Ahmed *et al.*, 2024). To address this methodological gap, future research could investigate teachers' perspectives to gain a deeper understanding of how gender influences educational practices in Kazakhstan and Türkiye, particularly within the context of culturally shaped beliefs and expectations.

Looking ahead, future studies could explore how teachers develop their PK and CK, as well as PTs, particularly through professional development or changes in national educational policies. Longitudinal research would be instrumental in capturing shifts in teachers' views and practices over time, offering more profound insights into how professional growth influences teaching effectiveness. Additionally, comparing teachers' perceptions with those of students could help build a more comprehensive understanding of what constitutes effective teaching and how it impacts student outcomes.

Ethical Issues

The authors confirm that ethical approval was obtained from Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University's School of Graduate Studies (Approval Date: March 21, 2025, No: 28/80).

Conflict of Interest

The authors declared no conflict of interest.

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