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The Impact of Professional Development Programs on English as a Foreign Language Instructors in Higher Education Institutions

Hijjatul Qamariah [1,*] and Maria Hercz [2]

[1] Doctoral School of Education, University of Szeged, 6720 Szeged, Hungary
[2] Department of Education, Eotvos Loránd University, 1117 Budapest, Hungary; hercz.maria@tok.elte.hu
* Correspondence: hijjatulqamariah@gmail.com

Abstract

Professional development (PD) is crucial for teacher growth, yet research on EFL instructors in higher education remains scarce. In Indonesia, PD research focuses more on secondary and primary school teachers, and the research that emphasises EFL teachers' professionalism is limited. However, EFL teachers' PD plays an important role in preparing future teachers for better employment opportunities and international communication, so it is a critical component of higher education curricula. This study explores the impact of professional development programs on EFL instructors in Indonesian universities, focusing on types of professional development programs and personal initiatives. Ten EFL instructors from five different universities in Indonesia were recruited using a purposive sampling technique. Using a qualitative approach with semi-structured interviews, thematic analysis reveals that most professional development efforts are self-driven rather than institutionally supported. Key impacts of professional development programs and activities they have participated in on their professionalism include research collaboration, publication skills, ELT strategy improvements, networking, reflective teaching, and language proficiency gains. The findings underscore the need for customised professional development programs that address educators' specific contexts, ensuring sustainable enhancements in teaching practices. This study highlights the critical role of independent professional development efforts in higher education and provides insights into structuring more impactful support systems for EFL instructors globally.

Keywords: professional development; EFL instructors; higher education; teacher training; professional development programs

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1. Introduction

Teacher professional development (TPD) plays a fundamental role in enhancing instructional quality and student outcomes across all educational levels (Kennedy, 2016; Desimone, 2009). Despite its significance, research on higher education English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instructors' professional development remains underexplored, with most studies focusing on primary and secondary educators (Ping et al., 2018). Given that EFL instructors navigate complex pedagogical and linguistic challenges, understanding how professional development influences their growth is critical. Among the intricate pedagogical challenges that EFL teachers face, particularly in the Indonesian context, are curriculum mismatches, difficulties balancing national curriculum content with authentic language use, and the pressure to tailor strategies to diverse proficiency levels and learning styles. Moreover, they encounter complex assessment criteria, making it hard to craft

evaluations that mirror real-life language use while complying with standardised testing requirements (Boy Jon et al., 2021). Not only are the instructional difficulties significant, but the linguistic problems are also challenging for the teachers. Low exposure to English limits authentic practice opportunities. As we know, Indonesia is part of the expanding circle of English use, meaning that students rarely use English outside the classroom (Listyani, 2022). Another potential issue is the tension surrounding translanguaging; though employing local languages can facilitate understanding, it might impede English immersion (Rasmin & Samsudin, 2024). Teachers need to determine the right timing and manner for using Indonesian or regional dialects to enhance effectiveness.

The concept of TPD is understood in various ways by different scholars. Czerniawski et al. (2017) define it as a combination of formal and informal processes that empower teacher educators to improve their professional practices throughout their careers, ultimately benefiting the educational system. This concept is associated with changes in teaching methods that promote student learning and success (Desimone, 2009), acting as a vital mechanism for enhancing teachers' content knowledge and refining their instructional strategies (Desimone et al., 2002). Additionally, it helps teachers adopt a more professional mindset in their roles and prepares them for future teaching positions. In an earlier definition, Vonk (1991) described professional development as the continuous acquisition of skills, professional knowledge, values, and personal attributes that enable educators to adapt effectively within the educational environment. In summary, TPD includes any formal or informal activities that teachers engage in to improve their education, knowledge, and practices, fostering professionalism and advancing their careers for better educational outcomes.

TPD encompasses a wide range of activities designed to improve teachers' skills, knowledge, and effectiveness in the classroom. These activities can include workshops (Caffarella & Barnett, 2000), seminars, collaborative planning sessions, peer observations, and mentorship programs, all aimed at fostering a culture of lifelong learning among educators. The ultimate goal of TPD is not only to enhance individual teacher performance but also to create a ripple effect that positively impacts the entire educational ecosystem.

Predominantly, studies on TPD have focused on evaluating student performance after the teaching and learning cycle. This focus is rooted in the understanding that student outcomes are inextricably linked to the pedagogical competencies of their teachers. Research consistently shows that when teachers engage in meaningful professional development, they are better equipped to implement effective instructional strategies, adapt to diverse learning needs, and create engaging learning environments. The prevailing belief is that higher student achievement correlates with superior teaching quality delivered by educators in the classroom (Burroughs et al., 2019).

TPD is essential for elevating educational standards and improving student outcomes, as research shows a critical link between teacher effectiveness and student achievement, highlighting the need to focus on teacher quality; moreover, TPD impacts extend beyond immediate student performance metrics, with Kennedy (2016) asserting that effective professional development can increase teacher motivation, job satisfaction, and retention rates, which are crucial for maintaining a stable and experienced teaching workforce. When teachers feel supported and empowered through ongoing professional learning, they are more likely to remain in the profession and contribute positively to their school communities (Korsager et al., 2022; Kennedy, 2016).

In addition to traditional forms of TPD, there is a growing emphasis on the importance of collaborative and job-embedded professional development models. These approaches encourage teachers to work together, share best practices, and engage in reflective practices that promote continuous improvement (Guskey, 2002; Borg, 2015). By fostering a collabora-

tive culture, schools can create an environment where teachers feel valued and invested in their professional growth, ultimately leading to enhanced student learning experiences (Opfer & Pedder, 2011).

Effective professional development is characterised by its continuous nature, incorporating training, practice, and feedback, while also providing adequate time and follow-up support. Successful programs engage educators in instructional activities that mirror those they will implement with students, fostering the development of collaborative learning communities among teachers. There is a growing interest in transforming educational institutions into learning organisations, facilitating more structured opportunities for teachers to exchange their knowledge and experiences (OECD, 2005). A study conducted in rural India indicated that professional development programs linked to career incentives and access to teaching resources are significantly associated with improved student learning outcomes (Popova et al., 2022). Well-structured and effectively executed professional development should be viewed as an essential component of a comprehensive teaching and learning framework that aids students in acquiring the necessary knowledge, skills, and competencies to succeed in the twenty-first century. Professional learning should align with teachers' experiences during their preparation and induction phases, as well as with instructional needs and assessments, to create an integrated framework that supports educators throughout their professional journey. Additionally, it should be connected to leadership opportunities to ensure a cohesive framework, focused on the growth and development of teachers (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

In Indonesia, the strategy for PD for EFL instructors has significantly evolved, influenced by national educational reforms, global standards, and the increasing necessity for English competence in higher education (Isharyanti et al., 2024; Kusumarasdyati, 2023). However, the enactment of PD policies often reveals inconsistencies and underscores considerable discrepancies between intended policies and actual classroom practices (Averina & Kuswandono, 2023; Wulyani et al., 2019). In Indonesian universities, PD implementation is challenged by fragmented delivery methods, short-lived top-down programs that fail to meet teachers' requirements (Zein et al., 2020); restricted opportunities in underfunded areas, owing to insufficient resources, time, and support (Qamariah & Hercz, 2025); language proficiency disparities among EFL teachers, with overlooked needs for skills enhancement (Averina & Kuswandono, 2023; Wulyani et al., 2019); and a gap between policy formulation and execution, accompanied by minimal teacher participation in PD planning and evaluation (Zein et al., 2020). Despite these challenges, participating in PD either by self-initiative or institutional support is vital, and continuous PD programs are encouraged. Similar to other countries, such as Singapore and China, implementing Continuous Professional Development (CPD) programs with a structured and sustained approach might be a breakthrough in cascade, centralised, short-term PD delivery methods (Revina et al., 2023). Indonesia's EFL teachers need improvement in all aspects of pedagogical, language proficiency, and career growth to be able to engage in a global context.

Existing literature on TPD emphasises its impact on student achievement (Burroughs et al., 2019) and teacher effectiveness, yet limited studies examine how EFL instructors actively engage in self-directed professional development. This research aims to bridge that gap by investigating how EFL instructors in Indonesia initiate and experience professional development, analysing both institutional efforts and personal learning strategies. Through a qualitative approach, this study seeks to identify the real-world effects of PD programs, offering insights into best practices for EFL educator support globally. It is anticipated that lessons from Indonesia could guide the development of TPD strategies in other developing countries encountering comparable difficulties.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Professional Development Research

The existing body of research on teacher professional development (PD) has predominantly concentrated on the multifaceted challenges that hinder the effectiveness, continuity, and practical relevance of PD programs. Numerous studies have underscored the notion that many PD initiatives are not only impractical but also fail to adequately address the real-world classroom teaching needs of educators (Meng & Tajaroensuk, 2013; Ha, 2023). This disconnect between PD offerings and the actual requirements of teachers can lead to a lack of engagement and enthusiasm for professional growth opportunities.

Moreover, the transition to innovative PD approaches, particularly the shift from traditional offline formats to online platforms, has proven to be fraught with difficulties. Many of these online PD programs often lack the essential characteristics of effective professional development, as delineated by Desimone (2009), which include a focus on content, active learning, coherence, duration, and collective participation (Alzahrani & Althaqafi, 2020). The absence of these core features can result in PD experiences that are superficial and fail to foster meaningful change in teaching practices.

In addition to the structural and programmatic issues surrounding PD, it is crucial to recognise that the challenges extend beyond the programs themselves and encompass the personal and professional hurdles that teachers face. For instance, heavy workloads and excessive teaching responsibilities can significantly diminish teachers' motivation and capacity to engage in self-development activities (Phothongsunan, 2018; Irgatoğlu & Peker, 2021). This is particularly evident among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers, who have reported substantial difficulties in implementing new pedagogical skills and teaching methodologies. They often feel overwhelmed by the pressures of addressing students' language-related challenges, which can further exacerbate their reluctance to participate in PD initiatives.

Another important period of research on PD is during the COVID-19 pandemic, in which there were some different key findings towards PD structure. Teachers experience psychological stress due to restricted access to the PD programs and teaching mode. The movement towards online, hybrid, and blended learning environments has been accompanied by a transition to digital tools and platforms. Additionally, new activities have been introduced to address the evolving professional learning needs of teachers in this context (González et al., 2023; Perry, 2023). The PD programs were delivered through peer-to-peer learning as a form of global solidarity toward emergency teaching conditions (Cohen & Sikenyi, 2025). In Indonesia, during the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers participating in TPD activities encountered opportunities such as mastering technology, enhancing their skills in designing online classes, refining their classroom management abilities, and fostering peer collaboration. On the downside, they faced challenges such as insufficient digital skills, unreliable internet connections, a scarcity of TPD initiatives, and a lack of adequate support systems (Purwanti et al., 2023). The challenges of PD are even harder during the pandemic, even though there are opportunities to upgrade new skills.

Consequently, the interplay between the inadequacies of PD programs and the personal challenges faced by teachers creates a complex landscape that necessitates a re-evaluation of how professional development is designed and delivered. To foster a more supportive and effective PD environment, it is essential to consider the specific needs and contexts of teachers, ensuring that professional development is not only relevant and practical but also aligned with their professional realities and aspirations. By addressing these interconnected issues, we can pave the way for more meaningful and impactful professional development experiences that ultimately enhance teaching practices and student learning outcomes.

2.2. Motives Influencing EFL Teachers' Participation in Professional Development

Various internal factors can influence the professional development of teachers. Rostami et al. (2020) indicated that a combination of internal elements, such as self-esteem and self-concept, along with external factors such as social status and professional identity, significantly impacts teachers' professional growth and their willingness to engage in development activities (Çelik et al., 2013). Furthermore, a recent study by Bao and Feng (2022) highlighted those internal conflicts, including the disparity between the actual self and the ideal self, institutional pressures stemming from a "publish or perish" mentality, and diminished self-esteem due to insufficient research achievements, which drive teachers to participate in professional development programs and adapt to new environments.

Not only because of those motives, but previous studies primarily emphasise that EFL teachers are motivated to provide high-quality instruction and achieve expertise in their field (Gore et al., 2017), prompting them to seek out diverse opportunities for PD participation. For instance, Yang et al. (2021) observed that many teachers were motivated to pursue improvement due to their dissatisfaction with traditional, monotonous teaching methods, such as teacher-centred approaches, along with their aspiration to become more skilled educators. As a result, Yang et al. (2021) suggested that this enthusiasm should be supported by effective teacher development programs (Lim et al., 2025), which could include opportunities for visiting scholarships, advancements in technology, and resources that empower teachers to gain greater autonomy and receive fair performance evaluations.

The motivation for many educators to enhance their professional skills also arises from the challenges inherent in the teaching profession (Appova & Arbaugh, 2017). A previous study conducted by Shen and Bai (2019) indicated that teachers frequently perceive a deficiency in advanced teaching methodologies and experience significant workloads. Additionally, the expectations for innovative teaching from students compel them to pursue ongoing professional development (OPD) or continuing professional development (CPD). Nevertheless, the pedagogical strategies introduced from Western contexts during PD sessions may not align with local circumstances, presenting a challenge for educators striving to deliver high-quality instruction.

Moreover, in the higher education context, EFL teachers have increasingly sought advanced degrees as a means of enhancing their professional development. This pursuit is often motivated by a variety of compelling and logical factors, including the desire for career advancement (Sadeghi & Richards, 2021) and the potential for competitive salaries. According to Phothongsunan (2018), these motivations are significant drivers for educators who wish to elevate their qualifications and improve their standing within the academic community. The attainment of advanced degrees not only equips teachers with deeper knowledge and expertise in their field but also positions them favourably for promotions and higher-paying roles, thereby contributing to their overall job satisfaction and professional growth.

On the other hand, research conducted by Çelik et al. (2013) presents a contrasting perspective on the relationship between professional development and teaching practices. While many teachers recognise the importance of ongoing professional development, they often do not view the available opportunities for career growth as directly relevant to their day-to-day teaching practices. This disconnect suggests that, despite acknowledging the value of professional development, there may be a gap between the types of training and advancement opportunities offered and the specific needs and realities of teachers in the classroom. As a result, teachers may feel that the professional development initiatives do not adequately address the challenges they face or enhance their teaching effectiveness, leading to a lack of engagement with these opportunities. While the pursuit of advanced degrees among EFL teachers in higher education is largely driven by aspirations for ca-

reer advancement and improved financial prospects, there remains a significant concern regarding the relevance and applicability of professional development opportunities to their actual teaching practices (Bellibas & Gumus, 2016). This highlights the need for a more tailored approach to professional development that aligns with the specific needs and contexts of educators, ensuring that they can effectively translate their learning into improved teaching outcomes (Sadeghi & Richards, 2021).

In Indonesia, higher education professional development initiatives mainly target university lecturers and teacher educators at teacher training institutions. These efforts are overseen by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek). Yet, there is frequently a lack of effective coordination between the central body and the institutions, leading to inconsistency in both quality and relevance (Kusanagi, 2022). Many of these initiatives prioritise research output and academic publications, instead of focusing on improving teaching quality, thus hindering pedagogical advancements (Revina et al., 2023). While online professional development platforms seem promising, their accessibility is limited for educators in remote regions due to poor infrastructure (Isharyanti et al., 2024). Studies reveal that certification programs such as PPG have not significantly enhanced teaching practices or student achievements in higher education (Tias & Tongjean, 2022). Commonly, these professional development initiatives lack elements such as peer mentoring, classroom research, and reflective teaching practices, which are essential for improving educational outcomes. Compared to school-level professional development, there is less research on TPD in higher education. The shift to digital learning following the pandemic calls for innovative models of professional development that are flexible, inclusive, and based on sound teaching methods. Indonesia's diverse socio-cultural and institutional contexts provide a fertile ground for crafting adaptable TPD frameworks. Often, professional development programs in Indonesia replicate international models without adequate adaptation to local contexts, a practice described as isomorphic mimicry (Tias & Tongjean, 2022). In contrast, nations such as Singapore and China closely tailor their TPD efforts to national goals and the specific needs of educators, achieving more positive outcomes.

This research investigates the impact of professional development initiatives on the advancement of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) educators within Indonesian higher education institutions. Previous studies have highlighted a notable shortage of research specifically targeting EFL practitioners in this context, resulting in an incomplete grasp of their professional skills, such as pedagogical techniques and academic proficiencies. This study explores how these programs influence their perspectives on professionalism by examining EFL teachers' views on the professional development programs and activities they have participated in.

To seek the effects of professional development programs on EFL instructors' professionalism, this study was designed to answer the following question:

RQ: How do professional development programs impact EFL instructors in higher education institutions?

3. Method

3.1. Participants and Setting

This research took place within Indonesian tertiary education institutions. In Indonesia, these institutions operate under two primary sectors: public and private. Most public universities fall under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC), with 98 institutions, and the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MoRA), with 52 institutions (Moeliodihardjo, n.d.). There are five categories of higher education institutions, namely universities, institutes, colleges, academies, and polytechnics. The participants in this

study were recruited from a range of institutions. A total of ten EFL instructors took part in this study. Most participants were affiliated with universities, with two from polytechnic schools, one from an academy, and another from a college. These higher education institutions include both private and public entities. All ten instructors hold advanced degrees, namely M.Ed. and M.TESOL, in English language teaching and applied linguistics, while two have earned doctorates in education and applied linguistics. Their ages range between 35 and 45 years. Refer to Table 1 for details on the participants. To maintain anonymity, participant names have been replaced with EFL instructor codes, numbered 1 through 10.

Table 1. Participant information.

EFL Instructors	Gender	Educational Qualification	Teaching Experience
EFL instructor 1	Female	M.Ed.	15 years
EFL instructor 2	Female	M.TESOL, M.Ed.	17 years
EFL instructor 3	Male	M.Ed.	10 years
EFL instructor 5	Female	M.Ed.	13 years
EFL instructor 4	Female	M.TESOL, M.Ed.	12 years
EFL instructor 6	Male	Doctorate in Linguistics	25 years
EFL instructor 7	Male	Doctorate in Education	22 years
EFL instructor 8	Female	M.TESOL, M.Ed.	12 years
EFL instructor 9	Male	M.Ed.	13 years
EFL instructor 10	Male	M.A	12 years

3.2. Data Collection

The research employed a qualitative methodology, utilising semi-structured interviews with ten English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instructors from five different universities in Indonesia. Before data collection, approval was secured from the ethics committee of the doctoral school of education, University of Szeged Institutional Review Board (IRB): Reference number: 13/2024. This study employed purposive sampling to select participants who met specific qualifications and possessed relevant professional experiences aligned with the research objectives. Purposive sampling, a non-probability method, enables researchers to intentionally select individuals who possess a wealth of information and can provide detailed insights into the examined phenomenon (Patton, 2014). This investigation incorporated criterion-based, expert, and homogeneous purposive sampling to identify participants capable of offering comprehensive insights into EFL instruction within Indonesian higher education. The participants were required to fulfil the following criteria: holding a master's degree (M.Ed. or M.TESOL) or a doctoral degree in Education or Applied Linguistics, possessing at least five years of experience teaching EFL at the university level, and being actively engaged in teaching EFL learners during the study period. These selection methods ensured that participants were both professionally competent and pertinent to the research focus. Their shared attributes provided a homogeneous sample, while their expertise justified the use of expert sampling to gather informed views on EFL teaching practices. This study involved ten participants, with the sample size determined by the principle of data saturation, a critical aspect of qualitative research. Saturation refers to the point at which no new themes or insights emerge from additional data (Guest et al., 2006). Given the sample's uniformity and targeted scope of inquiry, saturation was achieved with this number. Each participant contributed valuable and detailed perspectives, collectively offering a comprehensive understanding of the research topic.

Semi-structured interviews were deemed suitable for this research, as they facilitate more flexible and authentic discussions with participants, thereby reducing interview tension (Fylan, 2005). These interviews are effective for acquiring qualitative data, as they permit participants to comfortably reflect on their experiences (Magaldi & Berler, 2020).

Participants were approached by contacting an association of EFL instructors via WhatsApp, where an invitation was circulated to the group. Each participant confirmed their willingness to participate in this study through direct messages. Informed consent was obtained prior to the interviews, with the participants agreeing to their participation. The interviews were conducted during the participants' available time, in a setting conducive to open and flexible communication. The interviews encompassed various questions concerning the activities and programs the participants engaged in for professional development. The interviews commenced with open-ended questions regarding their efforts to enhance professionalism and how these efforts, along with programs or activities, contribute to this growth, seeking their perspectives on professionalism, self-assessment of their professional development, and their views on professional conduct. Conducted in English, the interviews assumed that participants had sufficient English proficiency, negating the need for translation. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim for subsequent data analysis.

3.3. Data Analysis

Before the interviews, the researcher provided comprehensive information about this study's nature, objectives, significance, and the anticipated duration of the interviews. Participants were guaranteed anonymity and were informed of their right to decline participation or withdraw from this study at any point without the need for further explanation. Written consent was obtained from all participants before the interviews commenced. The interview guide was developed based on a review of relevant literature in teacher education, EFL pedagogy, and professional development frameworks. The questions were aligned with this study's research objective and refined through expert feedback. Sample questions included the following:

- How do you think professional development improves your professionalism?
- What activities do you think can improve EFL instructors' professionalism?
- What professional activities have you joined to improve your professional development so far
- Do you join any activities to improve your teaching skills? What are they?

The interviews took place face-to-face in a calm and secluded environment to ensure that participants remained comfortable, and their privacy was protected. Each session lasted around 35 to 40 min. English was primarily used, reflecting the professional language of the participants, although there were moments when participants switched to Bahasa Indonesia, especially when they needed to clarify or convey culturally specific ideas. These instances of code-switching were documented and translated during transcription to maintain their intended meaning.

The recorded interviews were reviewed multiple times for accuracy before being fully transcribed. During the transcription phase, participants were contacted to confirm the correctness of their responses. Once all transcriptions were finalised, the data were input into MAXQDA for qualitative analysis. After gathering the interview data, thematic analysis was conducted to explore the influence of professional development programs on the growth of EFL instructors. We followed the thematic analysis procedure proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) by starting with familiarising ourselves with the dataset. We read the transcriptions and made some notes while reading them. We cross-checked the transcriptions against the audio while reading them several times. After that, we started by jotting down initial codes from the data. The coding process was carried out manually and iteratively, enabling themes to naturally develop from the data. To strengthen credibility, member checking was utilized throughout the analysis.

Besides doing this stage manually, we also used a tool to help us organise the codes, namely MAXQDA 2020 software. In MAXQDA, we undertook several steps to organise the data, including making notes on ongoing responses, memo writing, and the extraction of codes from the analyses. The next stage was extracting the themes from the codes and sub-codes that we had already found. In doing so, the codes were continuously compared to one another to develop relevant themes. Saturation of data was attained by the eighth interview, when additional discussions yielded no new themes or insights. The last two interviews functioned to validate and further support the patterns already identified. Considering the uniformity of the sample—all being experienced EFL instructors holding advanced degrees and working in comparable professional settings—the sample size of ten was both sufficient and justified for reaching saturation. In the next phase, these themes were subsequently re-evaluated to ensure their applicability to both the excerpts and the overall datasets, resulting in the creation and naming of the themes. In MAXQDA, we produced the thematic map that showed the relevant themes we agreed upon in the analysis.

4. Findings

From the interview analysis, it was found that the effects of PD programs on EFL instructors are various. To answer our research question about "How do professional development programs impact EFL instructors in higher education institutions?", we display the themes found in the analysis as follows (see Figure 1):

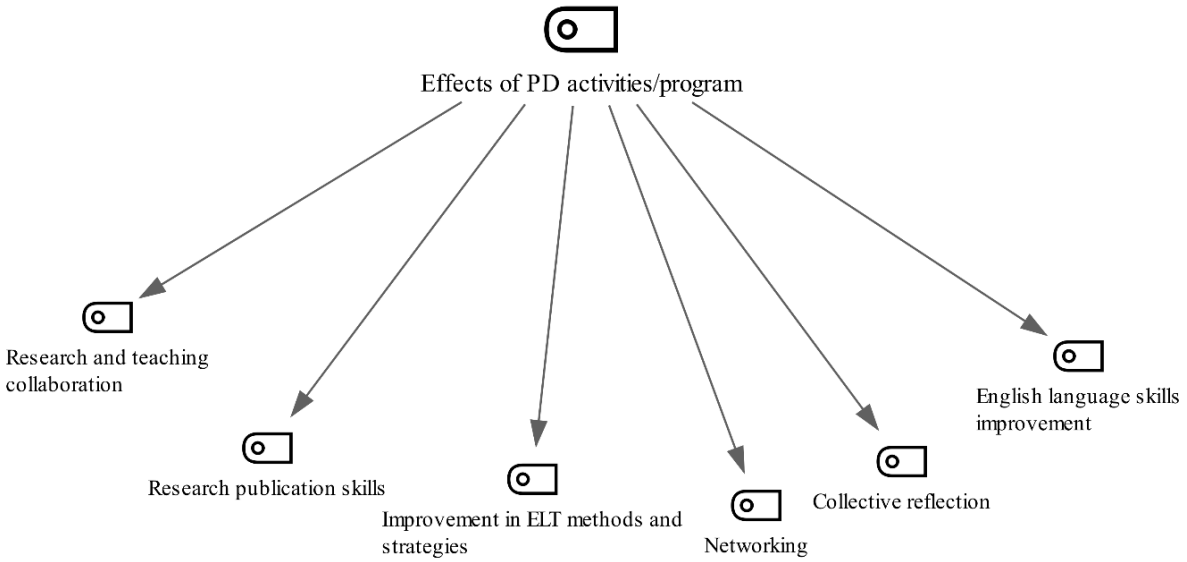


Figure 1. Themes revealed from the analysis.

4.1. Research and Teaching Collaboration

Among several effects of PD programs on EFL instructors' professionalism, the participants mentioned that the PD activity that they had previously joined helped them work with other colleagues and friends in research. They mentioned that joining PD programs such as conferences and workshops enabled them to build a good network with other EFL instructors and to engage in research collaboration.

> "Okay, in terms of collaboration, what I remember is we were in some activities, I think we were in activities, we gather together and share knowledge and different perspective in teaching then we can share difference experiences because like here in the university of Syiah Kuala and UIN Ar raniry and we collaborate in teaching, but for just one meeting" (EFL instructor 6)

> "I am the English coordinator; we always collaborate and discuss every Monday. We discuss what we should do to help with our teaching problems, sometimes we switch the class" (EFL instructor 10)

> "Of course, collaboration with our colleagues will strengthen the connection between us, and make us strong, because the job is not only teaching or delivering knowledge, but also many more" (EFL instructor 1)

The EFL instructors agreed that collaborative work with friends and colleagues helps improve their professionalism. It gives them more information about teaching and learning in ELT and research. This finding corresponds with Darling-Hammond et al. (2017), who stressed that professional development (PD) programs offer opportunities for educators to become involved in professional communities, exchange knowledge, and collaborate on research projects.

In a similar vein, Guskey (2002) posited that effective PD programs establish environments where educators can engage, share ideas, and cultivate relationships that extend beyond the program's timeframe. The participants' experiences underscore the significance of such interactions in fostering a sense of community and common purpose among EFL instructors. The participants indicated that the networks established during PD programs frequently resulted in collaborative research initiatives. This observation accords with the findings of Borg (2015), who observed that collaborative research among EFL instructors not only enhances their professional acumen but also contributes to the broader domain of language education. Collaborative research enables instructors to amalgamate their expertise, confront complex educational challenges, and achieve outcomes that are more consequential than individual endeavours. Furthermore, as Richards and Farrell (2005) elucidated, participation in research collaboration assists in cultivating critical research skills, such as problem-solving, data analysis, and academic writing, which are indispensable for their professional advancement.

While the participants recognised the advantages of PD programs in initiating collaboration, they also accentuated the necessity for enduring support to sustain these professional networks. This insight is corroborated by Opfer and Pedder (2011), who contended that the enduring influence of PD programs hinges on the provision of continuous opportunities for collaboration and learning. Thus, it is incumbent upon institutions and policymakers to consider establishing frameworks that promote continuous engagement among EFL instructors, such as online communities, research grants, and follow-up workshops. These initiatives can facilitate the sustained momentum engendered by PD programs and ensure that collaboration persists as a core element of professional development.

4.2. Research Publication Skills

The participant also mentioned that their research publication skills improved after they joined the PD program at the research workshop. They can share ideas with other colleagues about research in ELT, which, it is believed, can help them understand more about research methodology and publication strategies.

> "Maybe like writing an article, and I also write a book related to research and English materials. I think it's also how to improve our ability by writing. Learning the module, like teaching learning materials" (EFL instructor 7)

> "I think that through group discussion, maybe discussing and sharing with other participants will improve my knowledge and also provide other significant information from other participants, because we have different experiences that we have gone through in our lives. So, by doing so, I hope we hope together we can improve our professionalism, through that training or also workshops. And also,

> through publications that we annually publish in reputable journals. By doing this, I think we can improve our writing, our research ability for publication" (EFL instructor 2)

Regarding publication skills, they are also linked with the collaborations that EFL instructors undertook, not only in teaching but also in research. Collaboration is also helpful for learning about publication skills from colleagues. This result aligns with studies demonstrating the efficacy of PD programs in equipping researchers with the requisite skills to navigate the complexities inherent in academic publishing.

> "... every year, in our university, we conduct the seminars, this year we will do it in August, how to write a research proposal and also the articles, I mean the research paper to publish in a national journal, every year" (EFL instructor 8)

Furthermore, workshops providing hands-on experience with writing, revising, and submitting manuscripts have been shown to elevate participants' likelihood of achieving successful publication (Kamler, 2008). The participant's experience exemplifies these advantages, as they acquired practical insights into the publication process, which are critical for navigating the competitive landscape of academic publishing.

4.3. Improvement in ELT Method and Strategies

The activity that the participants join, such as collaborative teaching and learning, helps them learn more about implementing appropriate research methods and strategies in their classroom. They obtain this knowledge from friends and senior lecturers. Regarding this issue, an EFL instructor mentioned the following:

> "I think that I have incorporated myself in praktisi mengajar, last semester, I got many inputs, or insightful views from others that collaborate with me in the classroom, so from them I learn something, some new things, new teaching methods, and strategies, that they shared with me" (EFL instructor 3)

> "It indeed works, the way how I improve professionalism, because when I do this professional development thing like workshop, webinar training and research, it's easy for me to apply the knowledge that I got from webinar, training or videos, or any sources that I read for example into my professionalism and it works that well because you know, the career as the lecturer is that is quite hard to understand. You need to study the way of how pedagogical skills work and then apply them in teaching and learning in the classroom; it works that much, so my professional development that I have done indeed been impactful in improving my professionalism" (EFL instructor 3)

The professional development (PD) programs attended by EFL instructors exert a notable impact on their English language teaching (ELT) skills, as reflected in the acquisition of new teaching knowledge, reported by participants in interviews. Engagement in collaborative teaching and learning activities within these PD programs is pivotal in enriching participants' comprehension and application of effective research methods and strategies in their classrooms. This collaborative framework facilitates learning from peers and senior lecturers, thereby promoting an environment conducive to knowledge exchange and professional advancement. This observation aligns with Darling-Hammond et al. (2017), who emphasise that PD programs with collaborative learning settings enable educators to reflect on their practices and gain new insights from their peers.

Moreover, the focus on collaborative learning within the PD programs enhances participants' understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of ELT methods and strategies. By participating in discussions and exchanging ideas with peers, instructors can critically

evaluate various approaches to identify those that best fit their particular teaching environments. This coincides with Guskey (2002), who argues that successful PD programs should provide teachers with opportunities for meaningful dialogue and reflection, empowering them to make knowledgeable decisions about their teaching techniques. The input from senior lecturers in these programs plays a crucial role in guiding participants toward implementing effective ELT strategies. As the following excerpt shows, this is what the EFL teacher achieved through the PD program they participated in:

> "...new knowledge because if we talk about teaching, it's always about new methods, yes, it has a change in some ways" (EFL instructors 6)

Specifically, during the interview, the participants mentioned ELT skills that they have improved after following some PD programs and activities, and they also encouraged other colleagues to apply them.

> "So, it is teaching method, mostly classroom management, maybe at the university level, is not that hard compared to senior high school and junior high school, yeah. Because the students in the university are already adults, they can manage themselves" (EFL instructor 10)

> "Yes, this is the modern era, so I want every lecturer, every class, to apply PJBL, project-based learning, because PJBL makes the students create something; we ask the students to create something. I think this is the goal of our education, not only remembering, not only memorizing, but creating something" (EFL instructors 7)

Moreover, EFL instructors improve their PD not only through collaboration but also by relying on self-regulated learning.

> "I always try to find videos on YouTube, how other people teach EFL, like I see how they perform in the class, so I can imitate what they do to teach in my classroom, and I also do research. In doing research, of course, I read materials from that reading I also get to improve my professional development" (EFL instructor 4)

4.4. Networking

Undoubtedly, the participants of this research conveyed that engagement in professional development (PD) programs, such as conferences and seminars, has facilitated the establishment of significant networks with EFL instructors from other universities. These programs are regarded as excellent opportunities for learning from peers about English language teaching (ELT) and research. The participants have reported numerous advantages from participating in PD programs such as workshops and conferences, in terms of networking and establishing connections with other colleagues. This study's findings underscore the crucial role of PD programs, including conferences, seminars, and workshops, in promoting networking opportunities among EFL instructors. The participants collectively acknowledged that these programs have empowered them to forge meaningful connections with peers from various institutions, both locally and internationally. This is consistent with the extant literature, which emphasises the significance of networking in professional development and the exchange of knowledge (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Lieberman & Pointer Mace, 2010).

The capability to engage with peers in the domain of English language teaching (ELT) and research is identified as a beneficial outcome of participation in professional development (PD) programs, as demonstrated by the reflections of participants. For instance, one participant noted,

> "After joining some workshops and conferences, we feel good in teaching and also add networking" (EFL Instructor 5)

This statement powerfully highlights the dual advantages of professional development (PD) programs: not only do they invigorate and refine teaching practices, but they also serve as a catalyst for significantly broadening one's professional network. Similarly, another participant highlighted the importance of these activities as platforms for sharing ideas and gaining new insights:

> "These activities are very important because we can meet most of the people there, and we can share our opinions, ideas, and we can get more information in those activities" (EFL Instructor 7)

Such interactions are crucial for professional growth, as they provide opportunities for collaborative learning and the exchange of innovative teaching strategies (Guskey, 2002).

Participants have indicated that engagement in professional development (PD) programs has significantly facilitated international collaborations, thereby enhancing their professional experiences. For instance, one participant expressed,

> "I believe, because I often do it, with my friend in Saudi Arabia, he is an EFL teacher, and also with my friend in the Philippines, we often collaborate, discuss how to improve our careers" (EFL Instructor 8)

This underscores the global nature of professional networks formed through PD programs, allowing educators to transcend geographical limitations and participate in cross-cultural knowledge exchange. Such collaborations hold particular significance in the realm of English language teaching (ELT), where diverse perspectives can enrich pedagogical practices and research outcomes (Richards & Farrell, 2005).

4.5. Collective Reflection

The collective reflection that the participants mentioned is the activity they did after the workshop and seminars; usually, they engaged in reflection to solve the problems they experienced in the classroom. In the following excerpt, the EFL instructors stated that PD programs offered benefits in terms of sharing knowledge and reflection about teaching practice.

> "Yes, of course, because when we meet other people or maybe colleagues from other universities, or other countries, we share ideas, experiences, which can reflect on our professional identity" (EFL instructor 4)

> "It's impactful; it affects my teaching. Becoming an EFL instructor, these aspects can give me an insight to get a current and factual issues in education, something that we cannot find in the theory, something we cannot find in the book, something you cannot find if you google, because it's based on certain region, the students here will be different from the student in other region, so the collective reflection is the best way or the best platform to give me an insight, or the solution to my actual problem, because the problem cannot be solved by the theoretical base, tis problem is you know only specific to this students. These students only feel this, which never happens in other countries, and then the collective reflection becomes the solution for us to solve these problems, issues. It's more contextual for us" (EFL instructor 3)

The participants emphasised that collective reflection, often conducted after workshops and seminars, served as a platform for addressing classroom-specific challenges and enhancing their teaching practices. This aligns with the literature on reflective practice, which underscores the importance of collaborative reflection in fostering professional

growth and improving instructional strategies (Schön, 1983; Farrell, 2015). The insights shared by the participants demonstrate that collective reflection not only facilitates problem-solving but also contributes to the development of their professional identities.

One of the primary benefits of collective reflection, as noted by the participants, is the opportunity to share knowledge and experiences with colleagues from diverse contexts. For instance, EFL Instructor 4 highlighted the value of exchanging ideas with peers from other universities and countries, stating that such interactions positively influenced their professional identity. This finding resonates with studies that emphasise the role of collaborative learning in PD programs, where educators gain new perspectives and insights by engaging with others (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Similarly, EFL Instructor 3 emphasised the contextual relevance of collective reflection, noting that it provided practical solutions to region-specific challenges that theoretical knowledge alone could not address. This echoes the work of Korthagen (2017), who argues that reflection grounded in real-world experiences is essential for addressing the unique needs of learners in different educational settings.

Moreover, the participants acknowledged the impact of collective reflection on their teaching practices. EFL Instructor 3 described it as a "best platform" for gaining insights and solving actual problems, particularly those related to the specific needs of their students. This aligns with the concept of situated learning, which posits that knowledge is co-constructed through social interaction and shared experiences (Lave & Wenger, 1991). By engaging in collective reflection, instructors were able to contextualise their learning and apply it to their classrooms, thereby enhancing their instructional effectiveness.

The participants also highlighted the role of collective reflection in building professional networks and fostering collaboration. EFL Instructor 7 emphasised the importance of meeting colleagues and sharing ideas during PD activities, while EFL Instructor 8 discussed how collaboration with peers from different countries, such as Saudi Arabia and the Philippines, contributed to their professional growth. This finding is consistent with research that underscores the value of networking in PD programs, as it enables educators to build supportive communities of practice and access diverse perspectives (Lieberman & Pointer Mace, 2010).

To put it briefly, the collective reflection activities described by the participants underscore the transformative potential of PD programs in addressing real-world teaching challenges and fostering professional growth. By engaging in collaborative reflection, EFL instructors were able to share knowledge, gain contextual insights, and build meaningful connections with colleagues. These findings highlight the need for PD programs to incorporate structured opportunities for collective reflection, as it serves as a powerful tool for enhancing teaching practices and addressing the unique needs of learners. Future research could explore the long-term impact of collective reflection on instructional outcomes and professional identity development among EFL instructors.

4.6. Improvement of English Language Skills

The interview findings emphasise the crucial impact of professional development (PD) programs on improving English language abilities among participants, especially EFL instructors. Language proficiency enhancement was linked to both personal and collaborative learning experiences, and the regular use of English in both professional and social settings. Nonetheless, the lack of institutional support for language development was identified as a significant shortcoming, highlighting the necessity for organised interventions to supplement self-directed and peer-supported learning activities.

The participants collectively recognised that their English proficiency was enhanced through self-guided learning, notably by interacting with educational videos and applying teaching strategies.

> "I utilised tools like YouTube and Facebook videos because they are easily accessible and rich in resources. These platforms offer a wide range of materials that enhance language learning, such as expressions we may not be familiar with and comparisons between British and American English" (EFL Instructor 9)

This aligns with the research by Darling-Hammond et al. (2017), who highlight that self-directed professional development activities, including online courses and video-based learning, enable educators to take charge of their professional development. The EFL instructor's statement,

"Online PD is very helpful, it's like training me, like training my brain to use English every day and every night", underscores the importance of consistent exposure to the language. This aligns with Krashen's (1982) Input Hypothesis, which suggests that language acquisition is supported by ongoing and comprehensible input. The participants' proactive pursuit of PD programs demonstrates a significant level of motivation, which is essential for success in language learning (Dörnyei, 2005).

They also mentioned that communicative skills are important to master because they are very useful not only in teaching practice, such as delivering materials to students, but also in demonstrating their capability as language teachers.

> "It is essential to have a strong command of the English language and to stay current with developments in the field. Having good proficiency in speaking and listening skills is important" (EFL Instructor 9)

> "Pedagogical knowledge and teaching skills are essential components of being an effective educator. As teachers and lecturers, we must also develop strong communication abilities to ensure that instructional content is delivered clearly and effectively" (EFL instructor 1)

5. Discussion

This research highlights the diverse advantages of professional development (PD) initiatives for EFL teachers in Indonesian universities. The results indicate that engaging in PD enriches instructors' capabilities in research collaboration, enhancing publication skills, refining ELT strategies, strengthening networking, promoting reflective teaching, and improving language proficiency. These findings emphasise the transformative impact of PD when tailored to the specific professional contexts and requirements of educators.

This research also reveals a significant insight regarding the Indonesian EFL instructors' approach to professional development: it is largely self-driven. While global research often highlights the role of institutional support systems (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Ping et al., 2018), the participants in this study indicated that they primarily advanced their careers through personal initiative. This involves participating in webinars, joining online communities, and pursuing informal mentorship opportunities. These activities underscore a substantial deficiency in organised professional development frameworks in Indonesian universities, where formal support is scarce. This observation is consistent with Guskey's (2002) argument that effective professional development should be contextually relevant and backed by institutional commitment.

The improvement in research collaboration and publication abilities through participation in professional development reflects an increased recognition among Indonesian educators of the significance of academic contributions. As the value placed on scholarly output in higher education rises, PD programs that include research training and writing

assistance become crucial. This aligns with Lee and Boud (2003), who contend that PD centred on research skills can make the publication process more accessible and give early-career academics confidence. In Indonesia, where publishing in international journals is frequently necessary for career promotion, these PD initiatives are not only advantageous but also strategic.

Networking and mentorship were identified as crucial aspects of PD experiences. Participants shared how working collaboratively helped them create long-lasting professional connections, gain access to resources, and receive peer support. These insights align with Prenger et al.'s (2017) perspective that professional learning communities boost teaching effectiveness and career growth. In Indonesia, where geographic and institutional gaps may restrict access to expertise, networks formed through PD activities act as connections across institutional divisions, allowing educators to exchange best practices and jointly develop teaching innovations.

Significant advancements in ELT methods and teaching strategies were frequently noted. Professional development programs encouraging reflective teaching and peer discussion were regarded as especially beneficial. This aligns with Richards and Farrell (2005), who highlight the importance of ongoing learning communities in promoting teaching flexibility. Instructors observed that professional development aided them in incorporating research-based strategies into their instruction, improving student engagement and results. Considering the varied linguistic and cultural classroom environments in Indonesia, such flexibility is vital for successful EFL teaching.

Another significant result was the improvement in language skills, especially in the areas of speaking and listening. This indicates that PD not only boosts teaching abilities but also aids in enhancing their language proficiency, thereby strengthening their confidence and authority in the classroom. In environments where English is a foreign language, and educators are usually non-native speakers, PD focused on language advancement becomes both significant and essential.

While these positive effects are evident, this study highlights a fundamental challenge: the absence of formal PD frameworks within Indonesian higher education. In contrast to Western and certain Asian systems, where PD is integrated into career trajectories (Ping et al., 2018), Indonesian educators frequently depend on their funding and initiative. This dependence on informal PD could hinder uniformity, accessibility, and lasting impact. There is a need for institutional reform to offer tailored, context-specific PD programs that facilitate enduring professional development.

Finally, this study determined that data saturation was achieved with ten participants. Saturation occurred when no new themes emerged after the eighth interview, and the final two interviews reinforced existing patterns. Given the homogeneity of the sample—all participants were experienced EFL instructors with advanced degrees and similar teaching contexts—this sample size was sufficient to capture the depth and breadth of the phenomenon under investigation.

Overall, this research contributes to the evolving discourse on professional development in higher education, particularly within the Indonesian EFL context. It calls for policy-level interventions and institutional commitment to structured PD, while also recognising the resilience and agency of instructors who pursue growth despite systemic limitations. As globalisation continues to shape educational landscapes, contextualised and collaborative PD models will be key to enhancing teaching quality and professional identity among EFL educators.

6. Conclusions

The interview analysis indicates that EFL teachers in Indonesian universities mainly initiate their professional development (PD) independently, frequently seeking and joining online PD programs to improve their language abilities. Although workshops and conferences are also important for building connections among EFL educators and enhancing their research and publication abilities, their proactive efforts are the main catalyst for their professional advancement. This insight differs from previous literature, which often emphasises institutional support as a crucial component of teachers' professional development. In the Indonesian setting, however, EFL teachers do not depend heavily on their institutions for PD opportunities, as they sense a lack of support in this domain. Instead, they display a strong sense of independence and self-drive in furthering their professionalism. This highlights the need for universities to acknowledge and address this gap by offering more organised and supportive PD programs to supplement the instructors' initiatives, ultimately creating a more collaborative and enduring environment for professional growth.

This study, however, has several limitations. First, the participant sample is small, representing only a few higher education institutions in Indonesia. Thus, the results might not cover all the issues present in every university. Therefore, future research can focus on experimental research on the impacts of ongoing PD programs participated in by EFL teachers with a larger sample size. Second, this study only addresses a small part of the main PhD research addressing professional development and identity of EFL instructors in higher education institutions. Thus, examining only the perception of the EFL teachers cannot capture all the problems they face in their professional development attempts. Therefore, examining multiple variables, rather than focusing only on a single variable, such as the impacts of professional development programs, can provide more valuable insights into the research in this field.

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