

## EYL Teachers' Challenges on Professional Development

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### Abstract

*The current article discusses English for young learner (EYL) teacher's challenges on professional development (PD) and divides the issues into three parts. The study is based on the experiences of EYL teachers' challenge on PD in teaching English. The article starts by discussing the conceptualization of PD. Next, it delves into model, benefit and characteristics of effective PD. The last part discusses EYL teachers' challenges on PD and its implication. This study has contributed to the research field by providing in-depth insights into Indonesian EYL teachers' challenges on PD. The findings from this study raise EYL teachers' awareness of their own challenges on PD. This article provides a theoretical basis for understanding the flux and the dynamic nature of EYL teachers' challenge on PD for further research. Finally, this paper discusses the limitations of this study and provides suggestions for future research.*

**Keywords:** *English as a foreign language (EFL); challenges; Professional Development.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Professional Development plays an important role for EYL teachers' career path (Shawer, 2010). The language teachers need to have opportunities for PD because they have to keep their knowledge and skills updated (Richards & Farrell, 2005). The language teachers also follow this rule without exception. It is obvious that language teaching profession encounters challenges of continuous changes or reforms in

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terms of educational paradigms, curriculum trends, national tests, assessment, student needs or technology. Moreover, language teachers' knowledge about language teaching and learning is provided at pre-service training, but this kind of knowledge is not always sufficient, so language teachers need to update current knowledge, approaches and other developments in the field. As a result, PD is a good way to bridge the gap between what language teachers have already possessed and what they need to update and improve.

In recent years, there have definitely been some research studies investigating about PD in English as a foreign language (EFL) and English as a second language (ESL) settings have been conducted. (e.g. Afrilyasanti & Basthomi, 2024; Al-Maamari, 2021; Baecher & Chung, 2020; Basikin, 2020; Bozbiyik & Morton, 2023; Draji, et al., 2023; Fitriyah et al., 2022; Gudeta, 2022; Hınız & Yavuz, 2024; Lo & To, 2023; Sak, 2024; Tanjung et al., 2021). However, not much attention and under-developed has been devoted to investigating EFL lecturers' challenge on professional development.

To fill in the research gaps, the current article aims to delve EYL teachers' challenge on PD. This study can provide insights into effective pedagogical practices that can shed light on the challenges faced by EYL teachers on PD. Hence, investigating EYL teachers' challenges in teaching English in Indonesia is essential to promoting effective and supporting their academic and professional success. Research findings are then presented and discussed in light of the existing literature.

## **2. The Conceptualization of Professional Development**

Professional Development is defined by different authors (Birman et al., 2000; Richards & Farrell, 2005; Shawer, 2010). In general, PD is understood as a life-long learning process including activities through which in-service teachers can improve professional skills and knowledge

during their career to raise the quality of students' learning. The success of educational reforms is largely attributed to the PD of teachers, especially those who teach English as a foreign language (EFL).

Teachers are required to engage in ongoing PD to stay up to date with the rapid changes occurring in the educational system. Participating in PD activities is essential for EYL teachers' not only for their own personal and PD but also for the benefit of students' learning, institutional advancement, and educational system quality. Any activity that a language teacher engages in to enhance their teaching methods and/or student performance while working under the direction and consent of their employer's school or school system is referred to as PD. As a result, PD is seen as a crucial and worthwhile endeavor that educators should carry out throughout their careers.

EYL teachers' roles are widely recognized in the framework of global educational reforms that have shaped the concept of PD. In order to guarantee that EYL teachers' have the necessary and current information, competences, and abilities to support their increasingly varied students and create inclusive learning environments, it is imperative that PD be provided (Hsu & Lin, 2020; Mercader & Gairín, 2020). After someone enters the employment, they can continue to learn and get career training to help them grow their careers, acquire new skills, and stay up to date with industry trends. This process is known as PD (Powell & Bodur, 2019). People can continue to advance their professional skills in a variety of ways. PD techniques include mentorship, job rotation, networks, conferences, self-study courses, seminars, workshops, and networking events (Sanders et al., 2022; Uzorka et al., 2021).

In general, PD activities are offered through workshops, regional and national conferences, college courses, special institutes and centers, and

are mostly or partially focused on improving performance in current or future responsibilities. These kinds of actions happen in all the different settings throughout the professional career cycle. They are a component of an intricate process of development that can enhance instructors' ability to teach as well as develop, administer, and evaluate curricula. The procedure continues for the duration of their employment as teachers (Little, 1993), and serves as a framework for their growth from schooling for pre-service to retirement. To support instructors' credentials and PD in the teaching profession, the process entails initial training, induction, and certification. Through this process, teachers' PD can be linked to the academic achievements of their pupils.

One of the most important components of improving the caliber of academic teaching is PD. Few studies have been conducted on PD in higher education, and little is known about the ways in which contextual factors affect PD for EYL teachers'. An outline of the PD problems faced by EYL teachers' may be found in this article. Their professional progress appears feeble and still faces many obstacles as a result of a lack of possibilities.

### **3. MODELS OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Since the list of teacher professional development models is always growing, there is no set number. Kennedy (2005) states nine models (see table 1.0). Meanwhile, Sparks & Loucks-Horsley (1989) present five models of staff development (see table 2.0). Within each model is a list of activities that help a program's objectives to be achieved, such as workshop, conference, peer coaching, reviewing student work and discussing case studies. However, a review of the literature denotes some variation and contradictions between universities in their categorization of a model, an activity and a strategy.

Table 1.0. List of teacher professional development models

9 models of professional development

1. Training
2. Award-bearing
3. Deficit
4. Cascade
5. Standards-based
6. Coaching/mentoring
7. Community of practice
8. Action research
9. Transformative

Source: Kennedy (2005)

Table 2.0. List of teacher professional development models

Models of professional development

1. In-service training
2. Observation/assessment
3. Development/improvement process
4. Inquiry/action research
5. Individually guided activities

Source: Sparks & Loucks-Horsley (1989)

#### 4. BENEFITS OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The term of effective professional development refers to structured professional learning that results in changes in teacher practices and improvements in student learning outcomes. The updating of skills and knowledge, the improvement of student accomplishment, the growth of expert performance, and professionalism are the four primary goals of professional development for educators.

First, EYL teachers' should take part in PD to regularly update skills, enhance knowledge of pedagogy, theory, and technology, and improve teaching practices (Darling-Hammond, 2008; Knapp, 2003). This is because the ELT profession's constantly changing body of knowledge necessitates that professionals update their skill sets on a regular basis

(Richards & Farrell, 2005). Furthermore, Lee and Chowdhury (2018) point out that while moving into new educational contexts in the ELT field, even highly certified and experienced, teachers should participate in PD.

Second, research indicates that PD improves student learning outcomes and achievement, thus instructors should participate in it (Desimone, 2009). Research has also demonstrated the beneficial effects of employing research-based teaching principles (Ellis, 2005) on student performance.

Third, Participating in PD can help instructors become more professional. Most researchers agree that PD is essential for growing and succeeding in a career as a professional teacher (Wang & Lin, 2013). A career path, credentials, and theoretical knowledge are all necessary for a professional career. Therefore, participation in PD promotes professionalism.

Lastly, PD is a good way for educators to become experts in their field. Knowledge growth is the result of updating one's abilities and knowledge by substituting fresh information for outdated information. Additionally, it seems that PD promotes the exchange of ideas between theoretical information and real-world experience, which may make it possible for theoretical knowledge to be used to teaching (Tsui, 2013).

## **5. Characteristics of Effective Professional Development**

In order to advance their careers, educators should consistently partake in a variety of research-based (Guskey, 2003) formal and informal PD activities (e.g., workshops, reading groups) (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). Researchers generally agree in the pertinent literature about what makes for good PD. Richards & Farrell (2005) state seven overlapping optimum professional Development components that will serve as our analysis's guidance, along with instances of PD activities (see Table 3.0 below).

No	PD components	PD Activities
1	Engage in critical reflection	self-monitor (audio/video record lessons), do peer observation
2	Acquire new knowledge	read scholarly journals, attend conferences
3	Gain and upgrade skills	attend workshops, enroll in online/distance education programs
4	Collaborate with other teachers	start teacher support groups, co-write/co-edit learning materials
5	Experiment and problem-solve	do action research, analyze classroom incidents
6	Receive expert coaching and feedback	arrange local one-on-one expert coaching, mentor other teachers
7	Advance one's career	present at conferences, engage in research, enroll in a higher degree program

TABLE 3.0 Characteristics of Effective PD: Components &amp; Activities

Taken from: Richards & Farrell, 2005.

Effective PD necessitates educators to use a variety of deliberate and goal-directed tactics, as seen in the table above. These are covered in more detail below.

First, effective PD critical reflection and feedback, either individually or together, is required. In order to improve the visibility of implicit information, reframe assumptions, broaden one's professional expertise, influence future planning and decision-making, connect theory and practice, and facilitate more complex understandings of teaching, educators should reflect on their own practices. This can be done by methodically gathering data on their teaching practices, examining and evaluating it, and challenging common routines (Richards & Farrell, 2005; Yin, 2018).

Second, effective PD comprises working with resources from professional organizations and research-based, peer-reviewed literature to acquire and deepen pedagogic teaching knowledge (Knapp, 2003; Kwakman, 2003; Scribner, 1999), as well as information obtained from peer instructors or knowledgeable teacher educators (Johnson & Golombek, 2020).

Third, effective PD should prioritize improving teachers' abilities through intensive programs for example workshop that offer professional advice, useful classroom applications, and concrete, immediately applicable knowledge and teaching techniques that cater to instructors' current needs, interests, and circumstances (Richards & Farrell, 2005). Lecturers still favor short-term PD events despite their widely acknowledged shortcomings. Scribner (1999) discovered that educators looked for relevant "tricks of the trade" or "nuggets of knowledge" that they could implement right away in their unique classroom settings while attending seminars.

Fourth, effective PD should involve teachers working together to share professional knowledge and experiences that can advance and enhance successful teaching practices (Crandall & Christison, 2016; Scribner, 1999), enabling educators to leave the isolation of their own learning environment, providing them with chances to assess and adjust current methods, expand their knowledge of pedagogy, and enhance student performance (Lieberman & Pointer-Mace, 2009). Collaboration-related dilemmas and conflicts can also force educators to consider and question preconceived notions and ideas, which can lead to the development of more successful practices (Helsing, 2007; Pareja & Margalef, 2013).



Fifth, the use of instructional innovations and experimentation are essential components of effective PD (Kwakman, 2003). For giving an illustration, Teachers could experiment with task-based learning or try to address a problem in the classroom by applying the knowledge they have learned in training sessions (Edwards & Willis, 2005).

Sixth, professionals should be given professional mentoring and feedback in their local teaching situations (Johnson & Golombek, 2020). For instance, Smith (2017) discovered that by participating in reflection exercises in the presence of a skilled coach, educators demonstrated a heightened sense of awareness regarding the connections between their professional knowledge and practice, which further enhanced their comprehension of the guiding principles of their teaching methods.

## **6. Efl Lecturers' Challenges on Professional Development**

This section discusses (1) top-down national requirements, (2) inappropriate institutional policies, (3) insufficient collegial and managerial support, as the three main demotivating factors as perceived by lecturers for their engagement in PD opportunities.

### **7. Top-Down National Requirements**

Extensive international research has noted the impact of educational reforms on EYL teachers' work and their professional growth (e.g., Jiang, 2017; Little, 1993; Starkey et al., 2009). Even though the national education reforms, including some significant projects, had provided Indonesian EFL lecturers with many favourable conditions and opportunities for their career enhancement, these national policies generally followed a top-down approach and placed more pressure on EFL lecturers' motivation for PD. This finding indicates that "overambitious and unrealistic goals"

regarding lecturers' doctoral education and English proficiency established by the Indonesian government had been considered big challenges for EYL teachers' to achieve because these top-down policies were not built on lecturers' actual needs.

## **8. Inappropriate Institutional Policies**

The institutional policies related to EYL teachers' PD mainly followed the directions imposed by the Indonesian government. Although there had been many positive changes in professional policies for EYL teachers', some institutional policies (e.g., gaps in current policy requirements, the lack of financial support, and complicated administrative procedures) were demotivators of lecturers' engagement in PD. These factors were viewed as key and direct inhibitors affecting lecturers' professional advancement. Irrelevant institutional policies (e.g., low salary and insufficient financial support) have been regarded as an inhibiting factor for teachers' on-going PD. The institutional policies have an important impact on EYL teachers' motivation to participate in PD activities.

Moreover, in recent years, the financial autonomy of the university has led to higher competitiveness among lecturers. Thus, EYL teachers' are more highly motivated to partake in PD in order to upgrade their professional expertise. However, due to the lack of comprehensive PD, policies at the institutional level, EYL teachers' felt demotivated to take part in PD activities. It is possible that lecturers did not understand the clear directions and objectives of PD. Policies set by the Indonesian government and their organization. This study highlights the significant influence of the institutional policies on EYL teachers' career development in the Indonesian education context.

Ineffective policies at the institutional level (e.g. a lack of mandatory policies concerning lecturers' participation in PD, a lack of financial

support and complicated administrative procedures) were barriers to EYL teachers' PD. Through these findings, it is clear that the institutional factors had a greater negative impact on EYL teachers' PD experiences than a positive one.

## 9. INSUFFICIENT COLLEGIAL AND MANAGERIAL SUPPORT

The lack of collegial and managerial support as another negative factor influencing EYL teachers' engagement in PD. And the value of managerial support in their career development because academic managers provided on going leadership to support lecturers' change and played a prominent part in the planning and implementation of PD initiatives. Academic leaders in Indonesia played an important role in implementing and supporting their lecturers' PD, and that the principals had created four workplace conditions to promote PD including (1) collaboration, (2) EYL teachers' empowerment, (3) supervision and evaluation, and (4) EYL teachers' motivational strategies.

Academic leaders play a vital part in lecturers' PD because they are not only in charge of task-oriented and administrative leadership, but also instructional and educational leadership. Academic leaders also take the responsibility for creating a working context that motivated teachers to look over and reflect on their own teaching behaviour. The role of leadership in creating conditions that motivate, engage, and sustain the on-going learning of EYL teachers' involvement in PD.

As EFL lecturers felt that collaborative PD activities were more effective than individual PD ones in enhancing their teaching quality and student achievement, they placed a great deal of emphasis on the needs for collegial and managerial support. More than half of the participants identified a lack of collegial and managerial support as another barrier influencing their career growth. These findings show that collegial and

managerial support plays a vital role in EYL teachers' engagement in PD. However, in the Indonesian context, the challenges mentioned above is not enough, there are several EYL teachers' challenges on professional development.

## 10. IMPLICATIONS

In this section, implications for EYL teachers' and future research are identified. The implications drawn here are not going to happen simply by preaching to lecturers but also require changes in the national and institutional policies.

First, it is essential for EYL teachers' to be aware of the importance of on-going learning during their teaching career from start to finish. EYL teachers' need to be proactive in upgrading their professional knowledge and skills in order to meet the increasing global, national, and institutional demands. It can be argued that, at the individual level, lecturers need to be independent learners taking responsibility for their own on-going learning. At the institutional level, because collegiality plays an important part in lecturers' professional growth, lecturers need to be able to collaborate with other colleagues in order to develop their career as suggested by Nguyen et al. (2020): "considering others as a learning resource or working cooperatively with others for shared learning".

Second, together with language competency and teaching methodologies, it is important for EYL teachers' to take opportunities to improve other areas of their knowledge (e.g., applied linguistics, foreign cultures, research skills, and the use of modern technology in the classroom). PD activities for Indonesian EYL teachers' have focused on two main purposes: enhancing lecturers' English proficiency to the mandated level and updating their pedagogical practices with new teaching methodologies. In order to more fully develop their professional

expertise, classroom practices, and thus potentially improve student outcomes, lecturers should be involved in PD activities with a broader content focus.

Third, if EYL teachers' fully understand their specific needs for PD, it is essential for them to carefully consider engaging in kinds of PD that are appropriate to their individual conditions and situation. Alibakhshi and Dehvari (2015) state that PD is context dependent, and lecturers from different career stages and institutions may have different views of PD. Therefore, lecturers need to be self-aware and critical when selecting relevant PD activities to engage in. In addition, this paper has strived to address a gap in the literature, particularly, to understand EYL teachers' challenge on professional development. The implication for further research of this study have highlighted some potential areas for further research.

First, the data from this study have demonstrated the importance of understanding lecturers' needs in planning and implementing effective PD. However, due to a lack of empirical studies concerning tertiary EYL teachers' needs for PD, particularly, those needs at their different career stages, more research needs to be implemented in this area within the context of Indonesian education.

Second, this study has indicated that as a result of the national language reforms, EYL teachers' have been exposed to numerous formal and job-embedded PD activities. In order to enhance the quality of lecturers' PD, further studies are needed to unravel aspects of the impact of informal and collaborative PD activities on Indonesian EYL teachers' PD experiences.

Lastly, the evidence from this study has revealed that the contextual factors had significant effects on EYL teachers' PD experiences.

Nevertheless, as there has been a shortage of empirical studies investigating the influence of the contextual factors (e.g., English as a global language, national policies and projects, occupational prestige, and personal responsibility) on EYL teachers' PD under the setting of education reforms in Indonesia, more research will in fact be necessary to refine and further elaborate the new findings of my study.

## 11. CONCLUSION

The findings have emphasized the critical role that PD plays in EYL teachers' professional growth and the success of the national education reforms. It is important for EYL teachers to undertake on-going learning throughout their career in order to ensure that they have sufficient professional knowledge and pedagogical skills to fulfil the national and institutional requirements together with meeting the students' needs. In addition, the finding has drawn the attention of PD planners and academic managers to the fact that EYL teachers cannot perform as expected unless their needs and voices are included in the process of planning and implementing PD activities. Although there are on-going changes happening in the area of EYL teachers' PD, there is still place for further change and enhancement.

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