



Professional Development Strategies and Challenges Among Indonesian English Teachers

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Abstract

This study investigates the challenges faced by Indonesian English teachers in engaging with Continuing Professional Development (CPD), the strategies they employ to sustain professional growth, and the reasons underlying their preferences. Addressing three research questions—teachers' CPD strategies, the rationale behind their choices, and the obstacles encountered—the study adopts a qualitative design using semi-structured interviews with five English teachers at different career stages. Data were analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns related to strategies, motivations, and structural constraints. The findings reveal that teachers combine formal workshops, collaborative forums such as Musyawarah Guru Mata Pelajaran (MGMP), and self-directed online learning to enhance their professional competence. Strategy preference is strongly influenced by practicality, flexibility, classroom relevance, and immediate instructional impact. However, teachers face persistent barriers, including limited access to quality training, financial constraints, heavy administrative workload, and mismatches between CPD content and classroom realities. Differences across career stages also shape motivation and engagement, with novice teachers prioritizing confidence-building, mid-career teachers balancing administrative and instructional demands, and senior teachers emphasizing sustainability and reflective practice. Overall, CPD emerges as a negotiated process shaped by both structural conditions and teacher agency. The study underscores the importance of context-sensitive, accessible, and practice-oriented CPD supported by institutional alignment and equitable distribution of opportunities.

1. Introduction

Continuous Professional Development (CPD) of English teachers represents a critical issue in contemporary education, particularly in response to rapid pedagogical transformation and technological advancement (Vadivel, 2021). Globally, teachers are required to continuously update their instructional practices to remain relevant within evolving educational landscapes (Al-Asmari, 2016). Without sustained professional development, educators may struggle to integrate innovative methodologies and digital tools effectively, potentially affecting student learning outcomes. Thus, CPD has become a structural necessity to ensure educational quality and sustainability.

However, disparities in access to CPD remain a persistent concern, especially between urban and rural contexts (Stein, 2017). Urban schools often benefit from stronger institutional support, better technological infrastructure, and wider professional networks, whereas teachers in rural or semi-rural areas frequently encounter limited access to training, inadequate infrastructure, and restricted professional collaboration. In Indonesia, these structural constraints are further complicated by centralized CPD programs that may lack contextual relevance to local teaching realities (Dau, 2020). As a result, English teachers, particularly in semi-rural areas such as Langkat, North Sumatra, must navigate professional development within resource-constrained environments.

Previous studies have extensively examined CPD from various perspectives. Desimone (2009) emphasizes the core characteristics of effective professional development and its influence on teacher knowledge and student achievement. Similarly, Yoon et al. (2007) highlight the measurable impact of structured CPD programs on instructional quality. Other scholars, including Dede et al. (2009) and Trust, Krutka, and Carpenter (2016), focus on technology integration and digital professional learning networks as innovative approaches to teacher development.

Within the Indonesian context, several studies also confirm the positive effects of CPD. Warsito (2018) finds that CPD enhances teachers' curriculum development and technology integration skills. Sutopo (2019) demonstrates that CPD improves teacher motivation and instructional quality. Hastuti (2017) identifies institutional support and resource availability as key supporting factors, while Wahyuni (2018) emphasizes technological competence and time management as determinants of CPD effectiveness.

Although these studies significantly contribute to the field, they predominantly focus on program effectiveness, institutional frameworks, measurable outcomes, or technological innovation. Limited attention has been given to teachers' lived experiences and adaptive professional practices in contexts characterized by structural limitations.

Despite extensive CPD research, a significant gap remains in understanding how teachers in semi-rural or resource-constrained settings actively construct and sustain their professional development. Large-scale studies rarely explore how

Indonesian English teachers respond when access to formal training, mentoring systems, funding, and digital infrastructure is limited. The micro-level realities of how teachers maintain professional growth through self-directed learning, informal peer collaboration, contextual negotiation, and adaptive decision-making remain underexplored.

Particularly in Langkat, North Sumatra, empirical evidence regarding teachers' professional resilience and adaptive strategies is scarce. There is a need to bridge global CPD discourse and localized teaching realities to better understand how CPD is practiced and negotiated within structurally constrained environments.

Based on the identified gap, this study seeks to answer the following research questions: (1) What strategies do Indonesian English teachers use to enhance their Continuous Professional Development (CPD)?

(2) Why do Indonesian English teachers prefer those strategies? (3) What challenges do Indonesian English teachers face in enhancing their CPD?

Accordingly, the objectives of this study are to explore the professional practices employed by English teachers in sustaining CPD, to examine the reasons underlying their strategic preferences, and to identify the contextual challenges they encounter. The novelty of this research lies in its micro-level, context-sensitive analysis of teachers' adaptive strategies in managing CPD within a semi-rural setting.

(3) Rather than evaluating CPD programs solely based on outcomes or institutional structures, this study foregrounds teachers' professional agency, resilience, and self-directed initiatives in sustaining continuous development under structural constraints. By situating the inquiry within Langkat, North Sumatra, this research provides a grounded contribution that extends broader CPD discussions into localized and resource-limited educational contexts.

2. Method

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to explore Indonesian English teachers' experiences, challenges, and adaptive strategies in sustaining Continuous Professional Development (CPD). A qualitative descriptive approach is appropriate when the aim is to provide a comprehensive yet straightforward account of participants' perspectives within their natural context (Ary, Jacobs, & Sorensen, 2010; Sandelowski, 2000). The design aligns with the study's objective of understanding how teachers interpret and respond to structural demands such as certification requirements, administrative workload, and credit-point (*angka kredit*) accumulation within the Indonesian educational policy framework (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Participants were selected through purposive sampling. Five English teachers from junior high schools in Langkat District, North Sumatra, were recruited based on three criteria: they teach English, have between five and eleven years of teaching experience, and voluntarily agreed to participate. This range

corresponds to the stabilization and experimentation phases in teachers' professional career development (Huberman, 1989), making participants particularly relevant for examining adaptive professional strategies. The small sample size was intended to ensure depth and richness of data rather than statistical generalization.

Data were collected sequentially using three techniques: a close-ended questionnaire with Likert-scale items, semi-structured interviews, and documentation analysis. The questionnaire provided an initial overview of participants' perceptions regarding CPD access, administrative demands, and institutional support. Semi-structured interviews served as the primary data source, allowing in-depth exploration of teachers' lived experiences and adaptive responses (Kallio et al., 2016). Relevant documents, such as certification records and professional development evidence, were examined to support and cross-verify participants' statements. The integration of multiple methods strengthened data credibility through triangulation (Denzin, 1978).

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2006). An abductive coding strategy was applied, combining deductive categories derived from theoretical and policy frameworks with inductively generated themes emerging from participants' narratives. The analysis involved data familiarization, coding, theme development, review, and interpretation in relation to the research questions. To ensure trustworthiness, the study implemented member checking, peer debriefing, reflexive practice, triangulation of data sources, and maintenance of an audit trail. These procedures enhanced the credibility and transparency of the findings.

3. Result

This section presents the findings derived from semi-structured interviews with five Indonesian English teachers regarding their engagement in Continuous Professional Development (CPD). The results are organized according to the three research questions: (1) strategies used to enhance CPD, (2) reasons for preferring those strategies, and (3) challenges encountered in pursuing professional development. The findings are based on thematic analysis of the interview transcripts, supported by questionnaire and documentation data.

Strategies Used to Enhance CPD

Thematic analysis identified three major strategies employed by teachers: participation in formal training programs, engagement in professional teacher communities (MGMP), and self-directed learning.

First, all participants reported attending formal workshops, seminars, and official training organized by educational authorities. These activities were perceived as legitimate and institutionally recognized forms of CPD, particularly useful during curriculum changes or policy updates. Teachers valued formal training for providing updated information, official certification, and alignment

with national educational standards. Such participation reflects both compliance with institutional requirements and efforts toward professional growth.

Second, teachers actively engaged in MGMP (Musyawarah Guru Mata Pelajaran), a subject-based professional learning community. MGMP functioned as a collaborative platform where teachers exchanged lesson plans, teaching strategies, and classroom experiences. Unlike formal seminars, MGMP discussions were described as practical and problem oriented. Teachers emphasized that peer interaction reduced professional isolation and encouraged reflective practice. This strategy represents a socially constructed form of professional learning grounded in collegial dialogue.

Third, self-directed learning emerged as a significant strategy. Teachers independently accessed online webinars, YouTube tutorials, and digital teaching resources to improve their instructional practices. This approach provided flexibility and immediate access to diverse materials. Self-directed learning reflects teachers' autonomy and intrinsic motivation, as they selected topics based on specific classroom challenges. Together, these findings indicate that CPD engagement is multifaceted, combining formal, collaborative, and autonomous initiatives.

Reasons for Preferring These Strategies

Four dominant themes explain why teachers preferred certain CPD strategies: practical relevance, flexibility, collaborative support, and professional growth.

Practical relevance was the most emphasized factor. Teachers preferred CPD activities that offered concrete classroom applications rather than abstract theory. They valued strategies that provided ready-to-use teaching techniques, assessment examples, and classroom management solutions. Immediate applicability to real teaching contexts was considered essential.

Flexibility also influenced preference. Due to heavy teaching and administrative workloads, teachers favored CPD formats that allowed time efficiency, particularly online webinars and independent study. Flexible access reduced travel demands and scheduling conflicts, enabling teachers to balance professional development with work responsibilities.

Collaborative support was another important consideration. Participation in MGMP allowed teachers to share challenges and solutions with colleagues facing similar classroom realities. This interaction provided both professional insight and emotional reassurance, reinforcing a sense of shared responsibility and collective learning.

Finally, teachers associated CPD with increased confidence and professional identity. Engagement in training and independent learning enhanced their competence and self-efficacy in implementing new instructional strategies. Thus, preferred strategies were those that visibly contributed to both skill development and confidence building.

Challenges in Enhancing CPD

Despite active engagement, teachers reported several interrelated challenges: time constraints, financial limitations, and limited contextual relevance of CPD programs.

Time constraints emerged as a primary obstacle. Heavy teaching loads, administrative documentation, and extracurricular responsibilities reduced opportunities for sustained professional learning. Even when training was available, fatigue and scheduling conflicts limited full participation.

Financial barriers also affected participation. Some workshops required registration fees and transportation costs, which were not always covered by institutions. As a result, access to certain professional development opportunities depended on personal financial capacity, creating inequality in participation.

Additionally, teachers reported that some CPD programs lacked contextual relevance. Training content was sometimes perceived as too general and insufficiently aligned with specific classroom needs, particularly in semi-rural contexts. Limited access to high-quality, locally tailored programs further restricted meaningful professional growth.

Overall, the findings indicate that Indonesian English teachers actively pursue CPD through diverse strategies, yet their engagement is shaped by structural, institutional, and contextual constraints. The interplay between agency and limitation characterizes their professional development experiences.

4. Discussion

relevant theoretical perspectives. The analysis integrates qualitative interview data and supporting Likert-scale results to provide a comprehensive interpretation of Indonesian English teachers' engagement in Continuous Professional Development (CPD).

Strategies for Enhancing CPD

The findings demonstrate that Indonesian English teachers employ a combination of formal, collaborative, and self-directed strategies to sustain their professional development. This multidimensional approach reflects an adaptive model of CPD in which teachers strategically navigate institutional structures while exercising professional agency.

Participation in formal workshops and seminars remains an important strategy. Teachers perceive institutionally organized training as legitimate and professionally recognized, particularly during curriculum transitions. This aligns with Opfer and Pedder's (2011) argument that structured professional development provides coherence, legitimacy, and alignment with policy frameworks. However, access to formal CPD is uneven. Teachers in semi-rural areas face transportation costs and geographic limitations, reinforcing UNESCO's (2016) observation regarding disparities in professional development access between urban and non-urban regions. Thus, while formal CPD contributes to policy

alignment and professional credibility, structural inequalities limit equitable participation.

Collaborative engagement through MGMP and informal peer networks also plays a central role. Teachers consistently emphasized the value of discussion, idea-sharing, and collective problem-solving. These findings reflect Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist principle that learning is socially mediated through interaction. Unlike formal seminars, collaborative forums allow teachers to contextualize knowledge, troubleshoot classroom challenges, and reduce professional isolation. The data suggest that CPD in this context is not merely an institutional process but also a socially constructed practice shaped by collegial dialogue.

Self-directed learning further illustrates teachers' professional autonomy. Online webinars, digital platforms, and independent exploration enable flexible and need-based learning. This strategy is particularly significant in addressing time constraints and contextual mismatches in formal programs. The emphasis on practicality and immediate classroom application supports Knowles' (1980) adult learning theory, which highlights relevance, self-direction, and problem-centered learning as key characteristics of adult professional growth. Teachers' preference for sustainable and long-term strategies indicates a shift from compliance-driven participation toward purposeful, self-initiated development.

Overall, the integration of these three strategies demonstrates that CPD among Indonesian English teachers is dynamic and adaptive. Rather than relying solely on institutional programs, teachers combine structured learning, collaborative reflection, and independent study to maximize professional growth within contextual limitations.

Reasons for Strategy Preference

The findings indicate that teachers' preferences are strongly shaped by practical relevance, flexibility, collaborative support, and professional confidence building. Both interview narratives and Likert-scale data confirm that contextual applicability is the most influential factor in selecting CPD activities.

Survey results show high agreement with statements emphasizing context-specific and directly applicable CPD (Mean = 4.8 and 4.6). Interview responses reinforce this pattern, as teachers repeatedly prioritized strategies that could be implemented immediately in classroom practice. This reflects a pragmatic orientation toward professional development, where effectiveness is measured by tangible instructional impact rather than theoretical enrichment. Such findings align with adult learning principles that emphasize goal orientation and immediate utility (Knowles, 1980).

Flexibility also emerged as a critical determinant. The relatively high mean score for difficulty balancing CPD and professional responsibilities (Mean = 4.2) confirms that workload significantly influences participation. Teachers' narratives about fatigue and administrative burden further support this interpretation. In line with Harris and Sass (2011), CPD effectiveness is closely linked to structural

conditions, including time availability and workload management. Without institutional adjustments, even motivated teachers may struggle to engage meaningfully in professional development.

Collaborative environments were preferred because they provide both intellectual and emotional support. Teachers' emphasis on shared problem-solving suggests that CPD fulfills not only instructional needs but also relational and psychological dimensions of professional practice. This confirms Ingersoll and Strong's (2011) findings that collegial support enhances teacher retention and professional resilience.

Additionally, CPD contributes to professional confidence. Teachers reported feeling more competent and motivated after participating in meaningful training. This indicates that CPD strengthens professional identity and self-efficacy, reinforcing the importance of high-quality, practice-oriented development opportunities.

Challenges in Enhancing CPD

Despite proactive engagement, teachers face persistent structural barriers. The findings highlight three primary challenges: time constraints, financial limitations, and limited contextual relevance of some programs.

Time constraints represent the most immediate obstacle. Administrative duties and teaching responsibilities reduce opportunities for sustained professional learning. The convergence between qualitative data and survey results underscores that workload pressures are systemic rather than individual issues. When CPD becomes an additional obligation rather than an integrated professional process, its effectiveness diminishes.

Financial barriers also restrict participation, particularly for teachers outside urban centers. Unequal access to resources reinforces disparities in professional growth opportunities. This structural challenge reflects broader educational inequalities and limits the transformative potential of CPD initiatives. Finally, some programs lack contextual alignment with classroom realities. Moderate agreement with statements indicating mismatch between CPD content and classroom challenges (Mean = 3.6) suggests that not all programs meet teachers' expectations. When CPD shifts toward fulfilling administrative requirements—such as credit-point accumulation—rather than addressing pedagogical needs, professional learning risks becoming compliance-driven rather than growth-oriented.

Collectively, these findings indicate that CPD effectiveness depends not only on teacher motivation but also on systemic support. Reducing administrative burdens, expanding equitable access, and designing context-responsive programs are essential for ensuring that professional development translates into improved instructional practice.

5. Conclusion

This study explored the strategies Indonesian English teachers use to enhance their Continuing Professional Development (CPD), the reasons underlying their preferences, and the challenges they encounter. The findings show that teachers combine formal training, collaborative learning, and self-directed strategies to sustain professional growth. Formal workshops provide institutional recognition, collaborative platforms such as Musyawarah Guru Mata Pelajaran (MGMP) facilitate peer discussion and problem-solving, and online self-directed learning offers flexibility.

Teachers prioritize CPD that is practical, accessible, and directly applicable to classroom needs. However, time constraints, administrative workload, financial limitations, and limited contextual relevance reduce the effectiveness of some programs. CPD therefore functions as a negotiated space between structural constraints and teacher agency. These findings should be interpreted cautiously due to the small and context-specific sample.

The study implies that CPD should be viewed as a socially situated process shaped by teacher agency rather than merely policy compliance. Practically, professional development programs should prioritize contextual relevance, flexibility, and sustained engagement. Recommendations include decentralizing CPD access through hybrid models, integrating CPD into teachers' workload structures, strengthening mentoring and professional learning communities, designing context-sensitive programs, and evaluating CPD based on instructional impact rather than certification alone.

This study is limited by its small sample size, regional focus, and reliance on self-reported data. Future research should involve broader samples across regions, compare urban and rural contexts, and employ longitudinal or mixed methods designs to examine the long-term impact of CPD on teaching practice and student outcomes.

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