

Secondary School EFL Teachers' Perceptions and Experiences of Professional Development

Arif Rahman¹, Mirjam Anugerahwati¹, Sri Rachmajanti¹

¹Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris-Universitas Negeri Malang

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Alamat Korespondensi:

Arif Rahman
Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris
Universitas Negeri Malang
Jalan Semarang 5 Malang
E-mail: arrahmanrahman87@gmail.com

ABSTRAK

Abstract: Professional development (PD) is not just a short involvement but a long process starting from teacher training at university and going on throughout the working life of the individuals. This study assessed the perceptions and experiences of upper secondary school EFL teachers. A semi-structured interview was used to gather the data from five teachers from different schools. The findings revealed that teachers were aware of the significance and necessity of PD and saw it as a process that helped them to be more knowledgeable and experienced teachers. They also pointed out that involving in such studies could help them professionally.

Abstrak: Pengembangan profesi guru bukan merupakan proses singkat melainkan sebuah proses yang panjang yang dimulai dari bangku kuliah yang berlanjut hingga dunia kerja seorang individu. Penelitian ini mengulas tentang persepsi dan pengalaman guru bahasa Inggris tingkat SMA perihal pengembangan profesi guru. Interview digunakan untuk mendapatkan data dari lima guru dari empat SMA yang berbeda. Hasil dari penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa guru bahasa Inggris tingkat SMA menyadari akan pentingnya dan perlunya mereka dalam hal pengembangan keprofesionalan dan memandang hal tersebut sebagai proses untuk menjadi guru yang memiliki banyak pengetahuan dan guru yang berpengalaman.

The quality of education depends on teachers as the essential factor contributing to educational success. Teachers must access ongoing, high-quality professional development (Darling-Hammond, 2017). Similarly, Janawi (2012) argues that one of the essential components needed to concern seriously is the teacher because they have a strategic role in educational contexts. In this case, a teacher is a "front guard" in implementing the educational process. It means that a teacher is the one who directly interacts with the students in transferring knowledge and educates students on such kinds of constructive moral values. Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) study (2000) concluded that the ability of education and training systems to respond to growing expectations from the society for a better education for their people depends on whether teachers can deliver the educational content in ways that meet this growing expectation. In line with Lingard (2005), who claims that from all school variables, it is teachers who have the most significant effect on student learning outcomes.

Teacher Professional Development (TPD) is badly needed to occupy with the goal above. The European Commission (2010) defined teacher professional development as systematic activities to prepare teachers for their job, including initial training, induction courses, in-service training, and continuous professional development within school settings. Professional development can be defined as a movement from unconscious incompetence to unconscious competence, a changing process where people do something bad to do it well (Harmer, 2007). Regarding this definition, professional development requires teachers to be aware of their competencies. Teachers should change the inability to do something related to their profession to the good ability. Another definition stated by Mushayikwa (2015), who perceived that professional development concerns teachers as learners. He argued that the shift in focus is often accompanied by changes in teacher belief systems, attitudes, and perceptions. For example, the shift in focus from content to skills acquisition enables teachers to deal with changes in their context and results in adaptive practitioners.

A self-professional development generally refers to how a teacher assumes primary responsibility for planning, implementing, and evaluating the learning process (Whitty et al., 1990). At the same time, Leung's (2013) perspective refers to teachers' engagement in the reflexive examination of their own beliefs and actions. He argues that:

"Engaging in a reflexive examination is an important element of independent professionalism, or a commitment to a careful and critical examination of the assumptions and practices embedded in sponsored professionalism with reference to discipline-based knowledge and wider social values, and taking action to effect change where appropriate".

Several studies related to professional development have been done by researchers worldwide, such as Dogan & Yagiz (2015), Faozieh & Abbas (2013), Sedova & Svaricek (2016), and Vacilotto and Cummings (2007). Faozieh & Abbas (2013) observed whereby educators recognize the operation of telecommunication systems used in communication training. Still, their research revealed that such a quickly proposed telecommunication system does not assure the educators of their handling. Another study investigated teachers' and academic perception of professional development according to their gender, experience and working institutions. It revealed that not only academic aspect but also teachers have positive perceptions of professional development despite a wide spectrum of impeding factors including excessive workload, strict working hours, financial problems, lack of communication among colleagues, lack of communication with supervisor or administrators, lack of self-motivation, family problems, students' lack of motivation, students' lack of interest, lack of institutional support, education policy, and the educational background (Dogan, & Yagiz, 2015).

Specifically, in the Indonesian context, the studies of teacher professional development studies are abundant. Previous research related to teacher professional development was conducted by Anugerahwati and Saukah (2010). They investigated the profile of an exemplary teacher through an ethnographic study from four different cities in Indonesia; Malang, Lawang, Sidoarjo, and Solok. The results showed that the exemplary teachers try to improve and develop their professional competence through getting involved in conferences, a workshop for in-service training, giving training, and active participation in MGMP. Nurhayati (2018) investigated self-professional development in teaching English. The study aimed to explore the EFL teacher's perception of teacher professional development. The participant of the study were 30 English lecturers from two colleges, one state college and one private college in Tulungagung.

The State Islamic Institute was State Islamic Institute. And the private one was PGRI Teacher Training and Education. The findings of her study showed that EFL college teachers gain a lot as a result of being empowering educators. In conclusion, if they want to upgrade the educators' professional development, they should have a professional identity, career development, academic or intellectual and subject matter ability, factual ability or professional skills, qualified associate, and update with communication information technology. Moreover, Sari (2012) investigated the implementation of online learning community (OLC) for teacher professional development. The study aimed to explore the feasibility of OLC with Indonesian teachers and teacher educators between 2009 and 2010. The participants of the study were teachers, teacher educators, education leaders and the researcher. The researcher played important roles as Design-Based Research (DBR) designer and e Moderator for the OLC.

The rapid exchange of technology, influences the condition of the teaching and learning process in the classroom, teachers who have worked for many years may need professional development to keep them updated with the current development of ELT. Teacher professional development becomes even more crucial for in-service teachers as they already teach in the classroom but have less access to learning as much as when they were in the pre-service teacher training. Teachers need professional development to cope with daily teaching problems and the diversity of students in the classroom. Greenwell and Zygouris-Coe (2012) argued that teachers need adequate and relevant professional development to help them meet the literacy needs of students and the content demands of their discipline. Professional development should be pursued because it benefits both the teachers and students. Greenwell and Zygouris-Coe (2012) argued that the need for professional development is for teacher growth and student achievement.

In the Indonesian context, the government's willingness to improve teachers' professionalism showed by the program, namely teacher certification. Teacher certification is the status of certified teacher that is given to the teachers who have a certain standard of academic qualifications and competencies. To get the status as a certified teacher, incumbent teachers must hold a minimum of a four-year college degree of academic qualification in a related disciplinary field. They must successfully pass a paper-based portfolio assessment. Should they not pass the portfolio assessment, they have to undertake Teacher Professional Training, known as *Pendidikan dan Latihan Profesi Guru* (PLPG) or the current one known as *Pendidikan Profesi Guru* (PPG). From this program, we can see the government's willingness to increase the quality of teachers. To occupy with this program, teachers need to improve their personal development in subject-matter knowledge and pedagogical knowledge. Moreover, it is also inline with the efforts of the government to improve the quality of education in Indonesia by assigning teacher standard competence.

The studies above emphasize the investigation relating to certain approaches in improving teacher professional development, professional development specifically in teaching activities, an institutional perspective, and teacher professional development of college lecturers. From those studies, it can be generalized that teacher professional development is considered as pivotal aspect in enhancing the teachers' quality. The present study focuses on exploring how upper secondary school EFL teachers, especially in Kabupaten Bima, defined and perceived teacher professional development and their experiences of participating in teacher professional development activities. Based on the researcher's scholarly knowledge, previous studies have

focused on the TPD activities in suburban areas like in the Java island. A few of them focused on the TPD activities in rural areas, especially in my home town *Kabupaten Bima*. Based on the research gap and literature review, this study aims at answering the following research questions (1) how do secondary EFL teachers define professional development?; (2) what professional development activities have secondary school EFL teachers done, and how do they perceive its importance for their careers?

METHOD

This study investigates the professional development activities conducted by upper secondary school EFL teachers in *Kabupaten Bima*. Related to the objective of this study, a case study was chosen by the researcher to be a research design. A case study is a flexible research design and can provide a comprehensive, in-depth understanding (Mills et al., 2017). A case study aims to provide illustration and confirmation (Gustafsson, 2017). According to Yin (2009), there are three conditions in employing a case study design: the research questions ask for information in detail by using question marks "how", or "why"; when the perceptions or phenomenon are examined without control from the researcher; and when a study investigates the current event. The present study had fulfilled the three conditions; therefore, the case study design could be employed.

The research participants of this study were upper secondary school English teachers in *Kabupaten Bima*. The research participants also varied in teaching experience, marriage status, and age. In choosing the participant, the researcher first conducted a preliminary study to find the teachers who wanted to participate in this study. The researcher came to the research site and met with the research participants in this step. The total number of research participants was five teachers chosen from different senior high schools in *Kabupaten Bima*. (hereafter referred to as T1, T2, T3, T4, and T5).

RESULT

The result of this study included the major recurrent themes, which are reflective of all S teachers participants' views concerning their perceptions, reasons, impact, etc. of their teacher professional development. This study explored how five EFL teachers defined and perceived teacher professional development. It also investigated their experiences of participating in professional development activities.

Defining Professional Development

One important thing that emerged from the participants' interviews is teachers' understanding of professional development. It is important to note that understanding professional development conceptualization is one step of knowing more about the profession as a teacher. The researcher asked the participants about their knowledge and views of professional development. All participants in this study who teach at the upper secondary level relatively understand the general idea of professional development. They discussed their views on professional development for teachers and described what professional development means to them. Furthermore, they mentioned activities they consider professional development for teachers. The following table is the summary of participants' perceptions of theme defining professional development.

Theme	Description
Divining Professional development	Comfortable classroom atmosphere
	Understanding students' learning style
	Self-development by joining MGMP or seminar
	Read printed or online book
	Good preparation before teaching

The researcher sought a general understanding of teacher professional development from each participant with the interview questions. When asked to define professional development, T1 stated:

"Professional development means teachers try hard to give knowledge to the students by giving them a comfortable classroom atmosphere and making them feel happy to learn English."

Similarly, T2 described her conceptualization of professional development. T2 Asserted:

"Professional development is the way of the teacher to teach the students by understanding their learning style."

T3 also revealed how she defined professional development. T3 said:

"Professional development is how educators develop themselves with some development program in an attempt to be a professional individual in their field by developing their skills in many aspects by joining MGMP or seminars."

T4 defines professional development as being a more prepared teacher, as he explained:

"As a teacher, we need to prepare ourselves in terms of knowledge and teaching strategy, which can be seized in a seminar, joining MGMP, and reading several books. Additionally, we also have to prepare teaching materials to handle the teaching learning process smoothly."

From the T4 statement, it is clear that T4 related professional development to the idea of being a more skilled, knowledgeable teacher. In a similar vein, T5 asserted:

"Teachers should read not only from a textbook but also look for another source from the internet to support the teaching and learning. For instance, looking for appropriate methods and types of media for teaching. The methods or teaching strategies employed in the current semester should not be the same as the following semester."

What can be seen in all participants' responses is that there is a diverse understanding of professional development. The data shows that they relate professional development to various activities such as teaching strategy, joining MGMP, attending seminars or workshop training, preparing teaching materials, and developing teaching methods. These varying responses indicated that each teacher has their conceptualization of what professional development means to them. The five participants have suggested that attending seminars or joining MGMP is the most common and practical way of increasing their knowledge. The majority of the participants clearly understand professional development and what professional development opportunities teachers can engage in. It can be concluded they are well-informed about the opportunities available to them as language teachers. However, there are a lot of other definitions and types of professional development opportunities that the participants did not discuss during the interview. Indeed, professional development goes beyond more than what they have mentioned. In the data, the teachers did not seek professional development activities such as reflective teaching, keeping a teaching journal, peer observation, teaching portfolios, peer coaching, team teaching, and action research. Most of these activities could have been done by the participants. From the data, it can be said that teachers defined and perceived professional development as an activity whose goal is to make them become more effective teachers. Their professional development knowledge is adequate for them to increase their professional growth by participating in various activities. It could be argued that the participants are already aware of what they are supposed to do or what they can do to pursue their professional development for their growth as language teachers.

Professional Development Activities That Teachers Have Done

During the interview, the teachers were asked to describe their professional experiences occurring presently or occurred in the past. The participants were also asked about what they usually do to improve and develop professionally as a language teachers. It was found that the five participants had varied participation in professional development because they each participated in different activities from the others. The researcher found the professional development participants' have done included attending seminars and workshops, Attending MGMP, conducting research, joining professional organizations, reading and finding sources, developing teaching methods, and becoming an adjudicator. The following table is the summary of professional development done by the teachers.

Table 2. Professional Development Activities Done by the Teachers

Theme	Description
Professional Development activities that teachers have done	Involved in a professional association such as MGMP
	Involved in a professional association such as <i>guru penggerak</i>
	Attending seminar
	Read printed or online books
	Read a specific book such as teaching techniques and teaching strategy
	Become a coach and adjudicator

One of the ways to keep being informed about new research and issues in the field is by joining professional organizations. T3 revealed:

"I have been actively involved in professional associations such as a teacher support group called MGMP (Musyawarah Guru Mata Pelajaran)".

In a similar vein, T3 stated that:

" I am a member of professional associations of MGMP and Guru Penggerak".

He said that by joining this professional association, he could keep up to date with the field.

Another participant, T2, also pointed out her involvement in professional development. She said:

"I always update my knowledge by joining MGMP, attending seminars, and reading some articles related to ICT because teachers' work has changed in this globalization era, and I need to start integrating ICT in my teaching".

For T1, one of the easiest and most practical things to do to increase her knowledge is reading printed or online materials. T1 said:

"I usually read the books related to teaching and learning to improve my knowledge regarding teaching techniques and teaching strategies".

Similarly, T5 also pointed out that another activity she finds enjoyable is reading various books on the topics she is interested in. She explained:

"I read many books on teaching techniques to improve my knowledge of the course I am teaching".

Becoming a coach, T1 explained her involvement in events as a coach or a judge as part of her professional development. T1 said:

"I also improve myself professionally by becoming a coach and an adjudicator for English debate".

The Impact of Professional Development

All participants reported that professional development experiences have positively impacted their teaching performance. Participants mentioned that their professional development participation has innovative teaching strategies. The following table summarizes the impact of professional development on teachers.

Table 3. The impact of professional development

Theme	Description
The impact of professional development	The teacher gets a bunch in terms of teaching methods and also how to utilize ICT
	Teaching skill improvement
	Classroom management improvement

One participant, T5, explained that her participation in professional development activities had improved her teaching performance. T5 stated :

"I gained a bunch in terms of teaching method. Now I have come to know other new methods which I have never used before. Additionally, I also now have more insight regarding ICT".

In a similar vein, T4 said:

"My professional development experiences have contributed to my teaching skills, and as a result, I got the appreciation as guru berprestasi. Professionalism is measured by how good the teachers are in the field, how they treat the students, and how the teachers can make use of time for positive things".

Likewise, T5 reported that his participation in professional development activities had helped her work more effectively. T5 explained:

"I feel I have improved since I regularly joined the professional program like seminar, MGMP or sharing with seniors. I will always try to be a better teacher. I will try to make students enjoy the learning experience".

T1 discussed how his professional development experiences impacted his relationship with his students and colleagues and his professionalism. T1 asserted:

"What I have done professionally influences my teaching in class. After I joined the program, I also have a chance to build professional relationships and network with other professional colleagues in the field like becoming an adjudicator".

Another participant, T3 discussed how her professional development experiences had impacted her teaching quality. T3 said:

"What I have done professionally influences my teaching in class. Now I can manage the class smoothly".

DISCUSSION

Defining Professional Development

Based on the study's findings, the researcher discusses what professional development meant to these five participants and what activities they considered professional development. The participants demonstrated different perceptions and understanding of professional development. It can also be said that the participants gave various definitions because each participant believed in what activities can be considered professional development. Yazan (2012) noted that teachers' knowledge and beliefs are constructed through and by the normative ways of thinking, talking, and acting historically and culturally embedded in the communities of practice in which they participate. The participants' definitions of professional development ranged from attending professional events, becoming a professional teacher, and developing teaching methods. From the way, they defined what professional development means, it can be said that they perceived professional as a variety of different activities. They have their ways of developing and empowering themselves professionally. As reported in chapter three, some participants did not specifically define what professional development means to them, instead, they provided examples of activities of professional development such as attending a seminar, mentorship, and developing teaching methods. The study findings revealed the complexity of the teachers' understanding and perceptions of professional development. Their definitions of professional development are elaborated further as follows:

Professional development means attending professional events

The participants defined attending professional events as professional development, which is one of the study's major findings. The majority of the participants described professional development as attending professional events such as seminars, MGMP, and workshops. Their engagement in professional development activities are centered on attending a seminar and joining MGMP. Most participants have indicated that attending professional events was the most common and practical way of professional development activity for them. As Borg (2014) stated seminar attendance promotes the development of more knowledgeable, confident, and motivated ELT professionals who are committed to their own professional development. Attending seminar is one kind of professional development that English teachers should consider participating as it offers many benefits for teachers' growth. In the same vein, Wichadee (2011) also noted that the acquired knowledge does not only bring about improvement in the teaching process, but also leads to career growth.

Professional development is becoming a professional teacher

Another essential theme that emerged in defining the professional development theme is the idea of becoming a professional teacher. T5 explained by saying professional teachers need to know teaching materials, teaching steps and teaching strategies that are appropriate with the students. Another participant agreed that whenever teachers engaged in professional development, they pursued knowledge to be a more professional teacher. One participant said that professional development refers to activities that aim to equip them to be more skilled and effective teachers. T3 also defined professional development as a certified teacher. It means that professional development refers to how teachers develop their pedagogical and subject matter knowledge to be certified. It can be argued that according to T3, the ultimate goal of pursuing professional development is to help teachers become more skilled and knowledgeable, and, ultimately to perform more effectively in class. Alemu (2013) argued that professional development in a broad sense can be defined as the engagement of individuals in any activity for the enhancement of their capacity at the workplace and to gain, improve, and share a body of knowledge and skills that are relevant to perform particular duties in their workplace. It does not matter in what activity teachers are engaged in. What is important is that it results in increased knowledge and skill to enhance their performance as teachers. Becoming a professional teacher would surely require professional development experience. Professional development activities can gain many of the qualities and necessary skills to become more skilled and professional teachers. Once teachers engage in professional development, they learn new concepts, skills, knowledge, and experiences that are important for their professional growth as teachers. Richards and Schmidt (2010) defined teacher development as the professional growth a teacher achieves due to gaining increased experience and knowledge and examining their teaching systematically. With the knowledge they acquire from professional development activities, teachers can grow personally and professionally. It can also be argued that professional development should aim to make teachers become more skilled, knowledgeable, and professional teachers. The majority of the participants revealed that professional development participation has a close relationship with the notion of teacher professionalism. Every teacher can subjectively define the idea of professional. For English teachers, being professional not only goes beyond mastering language skills but also understand pedagogy and knowledge of how language is learned and taught. Participating in professional development enables teachers to acquire skills and knowledge of how to become professional teachers.

Impact of Professional Development on Classroom Performance

Learning about new teaching methods may not be easy to see the impact of professional development on classroom performance, especially when it comes to short-term professional development such as joining a seminar. It is expected that professional development positively impacts teachers' growth. In discussing the impact of professional development, the majority of the participants particularly emphasized attending seminars as the most common professional development that they are engaged and familiar with. Focusing on attending a seminar, and learning about new methods is the most common impact of professional development that these participants revealed. The participants revealed that they gained new teaching methods, ideas, insights, and innovations for their classroom practices by attending a seminar. They admitted that they learned about new teaching methods which they can apply to their teaching situations. This is also found in Borg's study (2014), which revealed three benefits of attending the seminar: an enhanced knowledge of ELT techniques which lead to changes in practice, networking with other ELT professionals, and enhanced professional confidence and motivation. T2 said that the professional development that she engaged in has contributed to her teaching practices, more specifically in terms of newly gained teaching methods. The teachers learned a lot from their professional development experience. Hansen-Thomas, Casey, and Grosso (2013) maintained that teachers learn most when they are actively engaged in examining their regular practice (i.e., teaching and learning) and how the professional development activities contribute to their daily work.

Similarly, Lin's (2013) study indicated that teachers' views on a TEFL professional development program evidenced a desire for the best teaching method. Teachers participate in professional development to learn the most appropriate method for their class. It can be argued that the teachers in this study expected something practical and feasible that they could apply to their classroom situations. In other words, they are more concerned of their teaching performance when they attend professional events. In regards to teachers' classroom performance, Wichadee (2011) noted that when teachers are occasionally introduced to new theories and practices of teaching, they will have an opportunity to reframe how they reflect upon their own teaching they can produce more satisfactory performance in class. The participants also thought that employing new methods would give innovation and variation to their teaching. The participants viewed professional development as beneficial for their growth as teachers. Many of the participants have also revealed that their participation in professional development has contributed to their teaching skills without specifically mentioning certain areas of teaching which has been impacted as a result of their participation. In line with this finding, Kırkgöz's (2013) study reported that the participants benefited from professional development by learning about new ideas implementing them and reflecting upon such innovative practices that addressed issues of the revised curriculum. The finding of this study suggests that the majority of participants benefited from professional development in terms of pedagogical issues around classroom performance. The findings indicate that pedagogy had been a significant concern for these teachers. This is similar to Huang's (2007) findings on study group, which showed that professional development helped teachers develop subject-matter knowledge, general pedagogical knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, foster continuing learning, and cognitive, intellectual, and theoretical development. The participants in this current study perceived professional development to make them more effective teachers who perform well in class. In a similar vein, in a study by Hansen-Thomas, Dunlap, Casey, and Starrett (2013) revealed that a result of the professional participation, their participants not only gained confidence but also expertise in pedagogy. Murray (2010) noted that one reason why teachers have to engage in professional development is to be empowered to have the opportunity and confidence to act upon ideas as well as to influence the way of perform in our profession.

Another point to discuss is that participating in professional development can lead them to become more effective teachers. These teachers viewed pursuing professional development as becoming more effective teachers. The majority of the participants emphasized that the purpose of participating in professional development is to become a more effective teacher who can bring improvement to their teaching in class. It is understood that once teachers participate in professional development activities, they may expect to learn something useful for their profession. Generally, in attending a seminar, the participants in this study expected to gain more knowledge and teaching strategies that apply to their classroom teaching. Professional development is linked to and influences classroom practices. Concerning this, Hansen-Thomas, Casey, and Grosso's (2013) refer to this as transference and translation of knowledge and experience, which is the ability to transfer what they learned from the professional development program and translate it into classroom practices.

Another finding related to the impact of professional development is that T4's account in which he revealed that his professional development experience is an exciting story to be shared with the students. Since these teachers teach students who will become teachers, giving an example of being a teacher scholar who actively participates in professional development encourages students to know more about the teaching profession.

CONCLUSIONS

This research may benefit some parties, such as the teachers, policymakers, and other researchers. The findings indicated a wide range of conceptualization of what professional development means among these teachers. Teachers can have the activities that they can claim as their ways of developing professionally. The activities can take many forms ranging from simple activities such as keeping a journal, reading articles, observing another teacher to conducting research. Teachers need to find ways to

develop professionally by first knowing available opportunities for professional development. To do this, both institutions and teachers have to be proactive in finding those opportunities. In addition to being aware that they are lifelong learners, teachers should be willing to learn and improve their teaching and pedagogical practices. As much as possible, teachers should be involved in activities that enable them to grow as a teacher.

The teachers also had done some professional development activities in developing their competencies. Those PD activities include following workshops and training, joining teacher associations like MGMP (Musyawarah Guru Mata Pelajaran), and independently enhancing their knowledge. By doing these PD activities, the teachers have attempted to improve their performance in teaching. This improvement can be seen from the up-to-date teaching approaches or teaching strategies implemented in the teaching and learning process.

The researcher hopes to see an increased awareness and motivation to engage in professional development in the near future. The researcher envisions more empowered English language teachers in Indonesia with the awareness and support from both teachers and the government.

Being aware of the importance of professional development is not enough. The willingness to pursue professionally to grow professionally is crucial. Also, English teachers need to have the ability to make sense of their profession as teachers to navigate effectively in the world of teaching. Teaching is not just about classroom practices but also knowing the field and the community of practice.

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