

# Enhancing English Language Teaching: A Comprehensive Examination of Professional Development Needs Across Career Stages

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## Abstract

This research delves into the professional development needs of English language teachers across various career stages, from novice to experienced educators. Utilizing focus group interviews, two distinct groups of teachers were engaged: novice and experienced teachers. The data collected through focus group interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis approach to achieve the study aim: uncover specific areas of professional growth crucial for effective teaching practices and student engagement. For novice teachers, the focus was on foundational teaching skills, including lesson planning, classroom management, and effective instructional strategies. Additionally, attention was given to language proficiency enhancement to facilitate better language learning experiences in the classroom. Mentorship and support programs were identified as vital resources to navigate the challenges of the early stages of teaching. Experienced teachers emphasized the importance of leadership development opportunities, including roles as department heads, curriculum coordinators, or teacher trainers. Access to advanced courses, conferences, and study opportunities was also deemed critical to prevent stagnation and keep up with evolving trends and methodologies in English language teaching. Professional development opportunities centered on technology integration were also highlighted to enhance student engagement and learning outcomes. Overall, this study underscores the necessity of ongoing professional development across all career stages to ensure English teachers remain motivated, effective, and equipped to provide the best possible learning experiences for their students.

**Keywords:** Professional development, English language teachers, Career stages, Support programs

## 1. Introduction

A teacher is essential to classroom education (Galabawa, 2001). In accordance with Rogan (2004) and Mosha (2004), the effectiveness of a teacher is determined by several factors, including academic along with instructional skill, efficiency with regard to aptitude, the workload, alongside dedication, access to learning and instruction materials and methods, as well as encouragement from educational administrators and supervisors. Professional development programmes allow instructors to explore new positions, create creative instructional strategies, and advance both professionally and emotionally. According to Gender (2000, as mentioned in Yadov, 2011), professional development consists of both formal experiences, like going to workshops, taking part in conferences for professionals, and mentoring, and informal experiences, such as reading professional publications and viewing instructive documentaries.

Johnston (2009) describes professional development as an autonomous, collaborative in nature, and inquiry-based learning process for teachers. Teamwork among teachers reshapes their responsibilities, mixing their separate identities rather than keeping them distinct, as Freeman (1998) symbolically explained. Richards (2008, p. 171) recommends that professional development be "autonomous, inquiry-driven, and completely relevant to instructors' professional lives."

Professional development fulfils numerous important tasks in English language teaching (ELT). First, there is an anticipated link between good teaching and student accomplishment (Darling-Hammond, 1999; Diaz-Maggioli, 2003; and Sparks, 2002). Thus, professional development improves teacher learning, resulting in better teaching practices and student learning outcomes, which is the ultimate purpose of education. Second, ELT is continually developing, necessitating regular professional growth to keep instructors current with new innovations, information, and teaching strategies, such as incorporating technology into language learning. Third, the knowledge gained from professional development may energize, encourage, and empower instructors. Murray (2010, p. 3) writes that "teacher authority leads into improvements with regard to student achievement and attitude."

Professional development activities can be initiated by teachers themselves (without regard to the PD) or required by educational organisations (institutional PD), taking place informally through colleague contacts or officially through conferences or workshops. It can be done alone, like as perusing professional literature, or in groups, such as participating in conferences or seminars. Scholars have proposed a variety of professional development programmes for language instructors (Gebhard, 2009; Murray, 2010; Richards, 2015).

Experienced and beginner instructors have different knowledge, abilities, and beliefs, leading to varying professional development requirements (Rodríguez & McKay, 2010). Novice instructors often have little or no preceding teaching expertise, including student teachers and those with less than two years of experience (Gatbonton, 2008). Gatbonton (1999, as referenced in Rodríguez & McKay, 2010) suggests that experienced instructors typically have at least five years of classroom experience.

The early years of teaching are a critical transition period for novice teachers, as they take on assignments like preparing lessons, instruction, assessment of students, and classroom management while grappling with competing ideas regarding efficient methods of instruction (Smagorinsky et al., 2015, p. 289). The theories and pedagogies which promote students-centered approaches clash with prescriptive and standardised norms in US educational institutions (Smagorinsky et al., 2013; Stewart et al., 2021; Au, 2011; Goldstein, 2020; Leonardatos & Zahedi, 2014; Hill et al., 2020; Ravitch, 2010). Smagorinsky et al. (2015) claim this "problem assists in clarifying why new instructors face such conflict when transitioning across universities as well as schools... as they endeavour to cultivate their own unique concept regarding successful instruction" (p. 289).

Beyond the everyday mechanics of teaching, novice instructors have problems such as adjusting to an entirely novel educational community with its own culture (Feiman-Nemser, 2003). To establish themselves as beginner educators, they must adapt to the school atmosphere and take on the position of instructor. Joining a school teaching on your first day necessitates learning skills outside classroom obligations, such as comprehending and carrying out school regulations and forming connections with peers, pupils, and parents. As Feiman-Nemser pointed out, enculturation takes some time and can be plagued with conflict and stress (Fecho et al., 2021). Therefore, professional development programmes should address the particular contextual problems and conflicts encountered by new instructors.

ELT departments seek to prepare instructors to assist students in achieving competence and proficiency, understanding their duties, and communicating effectively. Teachers must adapt to the obstacles presented by varied learner groups, educational programmes, curriculum, resources, policies, and socio-cultural situations from the beginning of their employment. Professional development programmes assist to sustain strong teaching standards and a top-tier teacher workforce. These programmes, which are customised to the requirements and objectives of both experienced and rookie teachers, may guide educators towards new and challenging positions, expose them to new ideas in the field, and promote productive self-reflection, peer cooperation, and classroom-based research. These programmes prioritize qualitative research, coaching, mentoring, and peer observation, as well as provide opportunities ~~chances~~ for solo, couple, or group reflection. Knapp (2003) claims professional development is crucial to improving quality teaching.

### *1.2 Rationale to the Study*

The rationale for conducting this study lies in the imperative need to understand and address the professional development needs of English language teachers across different career stages. With the landscape of education constantly evolving, it is crucial to ensure that educators receive adequate support and training to meet the diverse needs of their students effectively. By examining the specific needs and challenges faced by teachers at various points in their careers, this study aims to inform the design and implementation of targeted professional development programs that cater to these unique requirements.

### *1.3 Research Objective*

By focusing on specific areas of professional development, such as foundational teaching skills, advanced pedagogical techniques, leadership development, and research support, the study aims to uncover the unique needs and challenges faced by English language teachers at different points in their careers. Overall, the qualitative approach and focus group interviews enable researchers to capture the complexity and richness of participants' experiences, contributing valuable insights to the field of English language teaching professional development.

### *1.4 Research Questions*

1. What are the primary professional development needs perceived by novice English language, and how do they prioritize these needs in their early teaching careers?
2. In what ways do experienced English language teachers view their ongoing professional development needs, particularly regarding leadership roles, research engagement, and staying abreast of emerging trends in language teaching methodologies?

## **2. Research Design**

The research design employed in this study is qualitative, specifically utilizing focus group interviews. Qualitative research aims to explore and understand complex phenomena, often using methods such as interviews, observations, or case studies to gather rich, descriptive data. In this case, focus group interviews were chosen to gather insights from English language teachers across different career stages about their professional development needs.

### *2.1 Data Collection Method and Participants*

The study involves categorizing participants into two distinct groups based on their experience levels: novice teachers (0-2 years), and experienced teachers (3+ years). This stratification allows for a nuanced exploration of professional growth needs across two career stages. Through focus group interviews, researchers can elicit in-depth perspectives, experiences, and opinions from each group, providing a comprehensive understanding of the topic.

### *2.2 Data Analysis*

Based on the provided data collected through focus group interviews, the following themes and categories were developed. These themes and categories provide a structured framework for analyzing and interpreting the data collected from focus group interviews, enabling the researcher to draw meaningful conclusions about the professional development needs of English language teachers across different career stages.

#### **2.2.1 Novice Teacher**

- **Foundational Teaching Skills:** Lesson planning, classroom management, instructional strategies.

- Language Proficiency Enhancement: Self-improvement in English language proficiency.
- Mentorship and Support: Access to mentorship programs, support networks.

### 2.2.2 Experiences Teachers

- Leadership Development: Opportunities to develop leadership skills.
- Technology Integration: Professional development on incorporating technology.
- Continued Learning and Renewal: Access to advanced courses, conferences, study opportunities.

## 3. Results and Discussion

### 3.1 Novice Teachers

#### 3.1.1 Foundational Teaching Skills

During the focus group interviews, novice teacher-participants with 0-2 years of experience shared their perspectives on the importance of developing basic teaching skills. They emphasized that foundational teaching skills, including lesson planning, classroom management, and effective instructional strategies, are essential for their professional growth. According to the participants, these skills serve as the bedrock upon which effective teaching practices are built. They highlighted their efforts to hone fundamental abilities such as lesson planning, which they described as a blueprint for guiding student learning and enabling them to incorporate diverse instructional methods to cater to the needs of learners.

Furthermore, novice teachers recognized the significance of adept classroom management in creating a conducive learning environment. They discussed the importance of establishing clear expectations and employing consistent disciplinary procedures to foster a sense of safety and respect within the classroom, thus promoting optimal student engagement and participation. Additionally, they shared their use of a variety of instructional strategies tailored to accommodate different learning styles, ensuring that all students have the opportunity to succeed. Overall, novice teacher-participants expressed how foundational teaching skills empower them to create dynamic and impactful learning experiences that lay the groundwork for student success. The results of the study confirm that the early stages of teaching represent a period of significant change as new educators take on the responsibilities of lesson planning, teaching, assessing students, and managing the classroom, all while wrestling with conflicting ideas about the most effective teaching methods (Smagorinsky et al., 2015).

#### 3.1.2 Language Proficiency Enhancement

In the interview, the participants discussed the significance of language proficiency enhancement in their role as educators. They emphasized the critical link between their own English language proficiency and their effectiveness in facilitating language learning in the classroom. Through personal experiences and professional development initiatives, they highlighted various opportunities they've seized to bolster their language skills. From attending

language courses to engaging in immersive experiences, the participants expressed a proactive approach to honing their proficiency, recognizing its direct impact on their teaching quality and student engagement.

The participants underscored the multifaceted benefits of enhancing their English language proficiency. They articulated how improved language skills not only fostered clearer communication but also enriched their ability to understand diverse linguistic nuances and cultural subtleties. Moreover, they emphasized the ripple effect of their enhanced proficiency on students, noting how it instills confidence and fosters a more conducive learning environment. By actively investing in their linguistic development, the participants conveyed a commitment to continually refining their teaching practice and fostering a more inclusive educational experience for all learners.

Throughout the discussion, the participants reflected on the evolving nature of language proficiency enhancement in the educational landscape. They acknowledged the dynamic interplay between traditional methods and emerging technologies in their pursuit of linguistic excellence. Leveraging resources such as online platforms, interactive language software, and peer collaborations, they embraced a holistic approach to skill development. Ultimately, the interview revealed a shared dedication among the participants to not only elevate their own language proficiency but also inspire a culture of lifelong learning within their educational communities.

### 3.1.3 Mentorship and Support

During the interview, the participants delved into the crucial role of mentorship and support networks in their journey through the early stages of teaching. They emphasized the invaluable guidance provided by mentorship programs, which offered insights, advice, and practical strategies to navigate the complexities of the profession. Drawing from their own experiences, the participants highlighted the significance of having a supportive network of seasoned educators who could offer encouragement, share best practices, and lend a listening ear during challenging times. Through mentorship, they expressed gratitude for the opportunity to learn from experienced colleagues and accelerate their professional growth.

In discussing mentorship and support, the participants illuminated the transformative impact of such initiatives on their teaching practice and overall well-being. They spoke passionately about the sense of belonging and camaraderie fostered within their support networks, where they could openly discuss triumphs, setbacks, and aspirations. By fostering a culture of collaboration and continuous learning, mentorship programs provided a lifeline for the participants, offering reassurance and empowerment as they navigated the early stages of their teaching careers. Moreover, the participants underscored the reciprocal nature of mentorship, where both mentors and mentees mutually benefited from the exchange of knowledge, experiences, and perspectives.

Looking ahead, the participants expressed a collective vision for expanding and enhancing mentorship and support initiatives within the educational landscape. They advocated for increased accessibility to mentorship programs for educators at all career stages, recognizing

the enduring need for guidance and encouragement throughout the teaching journey. Furthermore, they proposed leveraging technology to create virtual mentorship platforms and online communities, thereby overcoming geographical barriers and fostering connections across diverse educational contexts. Through their insights and aspirations, the interview shed light on the profound impact of mentorship and support networks in empowering educators and nurturing a vibrant culture of professional growth within the teaching profession. The understanding of mentoring within the field of education has significantly expanded in recent decades (Fletcher & Mullen, 2012). Since the 1980s, mentoring programs in schools have played a crucial role in supporting the introduction, training, and growth of teachers globally (Hobson et al., 2009). Studies indicate that mentoring could be the most efficacious method for fostering the professional growth of new teachers (Hobson & Ashby, 2012).

### *3.2 Experienced Teachers*

#### *3.2.1 Leadership Development*

In their interview, participants explored the significance of leadership development opportunities within the realm of education. They emphasized the importance of cultivating leadership skills not only for personal growth but also for contributing positively to the educational community. Through opportunities such as becoming department heads, curriculum coordinators, or teacher trainers, participants highlighted their aspirations to lead and inspire change within their institutions. They emphasized the role of leadership in fostering collaboration, innovation, and continuous improvement in educational practices.

Participants shared personal anecdotes and reflections on their journeys toward leadership roles within the educational sphere. They discussed the transformative impact of leadership development programs in honing their skills in areas such as communication, decision-making, and team management. By taking on leadership roles, they expressed a commitment to driving positive change and promoting excellence in teaching and learning. Participants recognized the importance of mentorship and support networks in their leadership journey, highlighting the role of experienced educators in providing guidance and encouragement along the way.

Looking forward, participants articulated a vision for the continued promotion of leadership development opportunities within the education sector. They advocated for comprehensive training programs that equip educators with the knowledge, skills, and confidence needed to assume leadership roles effectively. Moreover, they emphasized the importance of creating a supportive environment where aspiring leaders are encouraged to take risks, learn from failures, and continuously strive for excellence. Through their shared commitment to leadership development, participants demonstrated a dedication to shaping the future of education and making a positive impact on the lives of students and colleagues alike.

Recent scientific literature highlights the traits of a teacher-leader (Ziyadin et al., 2018; Kanayeva, 2019; Erkan, 2022; Li et al., 2022). Broadly, a teacher-leader is someone capable of guiding teams comprising students, parents, or colleagues, while also stimulating their engagement and enthusiasm (Nappi, 2014). This individual influences team dynamics by managing relationships and coordinating specific activities within the group and broader

community (Hunzicker, 2017).

In today's context, a teacher-leader serves as a significant strategic asset for societal transformation across all levels, possessing the ability to generate and embrace innovations while being proactive and inventive (Harris & Jones, 2019). Often, the principal attributes of a teacher-leader closely align with the core competencies of corporate leaders (Poekert, Alexandrou & Shannon, 2016; Ferguson et al., 2021). Moreover, a crucial requirement for a teacher-leader is the understanding of the unique characteristics of pedagogical practices and student groups within schools (Wilson, 2016).

Alternative models and concepts propose that teacher leadership is essential not only for school success but also for enhancing the professional growth of educators, irrespective of their formal authority. Teachers should be afforded the chance to move beyond the confines of their classrooms to engage in collaboration and exchange of best practices with their peers, thus fostering the development of leadership abilities (Cosenza, 2015).

### 3.2.2 Technology Integration

In their interview, the participants delved into the topic of technology integration and its pivotal role in modern education. They underscored the importance of professional development initiatives aimed at equipping educators with the skills and knowledge needed to effectively incorporate technology into their teaching practice. Through ongoing training and support, the participants expressed their commitment to harnessing the power of technology to enhance student engagement, foster critical thinking, and improve learning outcomes. They emphasized the need for educators to stay abreast of emerging technologies and innovative pedagogical approaches to meet the evolving needs of today's digital-native learners.

As the conversation unfolded, the participants shared their experiences and insights into the transformative impact of technology integration in the classroom. They highlighted examples of how technology tools, such as interactive whiteboards, educational apps, and online collaboration platforms, have revolutionized teaching and learning experiences. From virtual field trips to multimedia presentations, the participants showcased the diverse ways in which technology can create immersive and interactive learning environments. By leveraging technology effectively, they emphasized its potential to personalize instruction, differentiate learning experiences, and empower students to take ownership of their learning journey.

Looking ahead, the participants articulated a vision for the future of technology integration in education. They advocated for continued investment in professional development programs that prioritize digital literacy and pedagogical innovation. Moreover, they underscored the importance of fostering a culture of experimentation and collaboration among educators to share best practices and explore new possibilities for technology-enhanced instruction. Through their collective efforts to embrace technology integration, the participants demonstrated a commitment to preparing students for success in a rapidly evolving digital landscape.

Considering that a significant portion of students' language use outside of the classroom is facilitated by digital technologies (Sauro & Chapelle, 2017), it follows that students should



possess the ability to utilize digital tools to enhance their language learning through social activities (Kessler, 2018). Consequently, language educators need to be attentive and comfortable with embracing innovation by integrating digital technologies into students' learning experiences (Xiao et al. 2019). The imperative of incorporating digital tools in the classroom, particularly in online learning environments, becomes more pressing in the context of COVID-19. Numerous recent studies have highlighted the substantial challenges educators worldwide are facing (e.g., Carrillo & Flores, 2020; Kim & Asbury, 2020), as teachers are compelled to swiftly adapt their curriculum, teaching methods, and delivery modes to remote instruction.

### 3.2.3 Continued Learning and Renewal

In the interview, participants explored the significance of continued learning and renewal in the realm of English language teaching. They emphasized the importance of access to advanced courses, conferences, and study opportunities as essential tools for preventing professional stagnation and staying abreast of evolving trends and methodologies in their field. Participants underscored the dynamic nature of language teaching, highlighting the constant influx of new research, technologies, and pedagogical approaches. By embracing opportunities for continued learning and renewal, participants expressed a commitment to maintaining their expertise and efficacy as educators.

Participants shared personal anecdotes and reflections on the transformative impact of continued learning initiatives in their professional journeys. They discussed how participation in advanced courses, such as workshops on innovative teaching techniques or conferences on language education, has rejuvenated their teaching practice and inspired fresh perspectives. Moreover, participants highlighted the value of engaging with fellow educators and experts in the field through study opportunities, collaborative projects, and professional networks. Through their commitment to lifelong learning, participants demonstrated a proactive approach to professional development and a dedication to excellence in English language teaching.

Looking ahead, participants articulated a vision for the continued promotion and support of continued learning and renewal within the English language teaching community. They advocated for increased investment in professional development programs that offer diverse and accessible learning opportunities tailored to the varying needs and interests of educators. Additionally, participants emphasized the importance of creating a culture of curiosity, experimentation, and reflection within educational institutions to foster continuous growth and improvement. Through their collective efforts to embrace continued learning and renewal, participants expressed a commitment to advancing the field of English language teaching and enriching the learning experiences of their students.

CPD, or continuing professional development, is a key component of the practice-oriented definition of professionalism adopted in this context, and one portion of the literature compares conferences to other CPD techniques. For example, Finnegan, McGhee, Roxburgh, and Kent (2019) argue that nursing conferences are often more beneficial than journals because of their capacity to quickly share information. This is made possible by a range of delivery modes, including workshops as well as poster presentations. Shannon, Maeng, and Bell (2019)

undertook the most extensive and rigorous empirical analysis in the literature review, concluding that conferences' principal value is Continuing Professional Development (CPD). Their study featured a case analysis of instructors who attended a two-day scientific conference, using a multi-method approach that included questionnaires, interviews, including post-conference lesson observations. Notably, their use of post-conference training observations, a novel feature in the literature, gave proof of instructors utilising conference-acquired information in the classroom, thereby activating CPD. Similarly, Ologunde, Rabi, Mimi, Koh, and Boffard (2017) attempted to measure knowledge gained at a nursing conference by delivering pre- and post-conference examinations to registrants. While they found a boost in raw test scores, the lack of descriptive statistics makes it difficult to determine the relevance of this rise for CPD. Nonetheless, research in this area is useful since it emphasises the relevance of CPD results, which are especially relevant to professionalism.

#### **4. Conclusion**

In their interviews, participants both experienced and novice unanimously underscored the indispensable role of ongoing professional development for English teachers across all career stages. They emphasized that such development is not just beneficial but essential for maintaining motivation, effectiveness, and ultimately, for providing the best possible learning experiences for their students. Participants articulated how the dynamic nature of education necessitates continual growth and adaptation to evolving pedagogical trends, technological advancements, and student needs.

Looking ahead, majority of the participants both experienced and novice expressed a collective commitment to prioritizing and advocating for ongoing professional development within the English teaching profession. They emphasized the need for accessible and relevant opportunities tailored to the diverse needs and career stages of educators. Additionally, participants emphasized the importance of institutional support and investment in professional development initiatives to ensure that teachers have the resources and encouragement needed to pursue continual growth and improvement. Through their shared recognition of the transformative power of ongoing professional development, participants demonstrated a dedication to excellence in English language education and to providing enriching learning experiences for their students.

##### *4.1 Limitations of the Study*

- Reliance on focus group interviews as the primary data collection method may limit the study. While focus groups offer valuable insights into participants' perspectives, they might not fully capture the breadth and depth of individual experiences and needs.
- The study exclusively involves two distinct groups of teachers: novices and experienced educators. This binary categorization could oversimplify the diversity of experiences and needs within each group, potentially neglecting nuances and variations among teachers at different career stages.

## 4.2 Implications of the Study

### 4.2.1 Tailoring Professional Development Programs

- Educational institutions and development providers can use the study findings to create targeted training for English language teachers at different career stages.
- Novice teachers benefit from workshops on foundational skills and language proficiency, while experienced educators benefit from leadership development and advanced courses.

### 4.2.2 Implementing Mentorship and Support Programs

- School administrators can establish formal mentorship programs to guide novice teachers.
- Mentorship fosters confidence, improves teaching effectiveness, and promotes a sense of community among educators.

### 4.2.3 Promoting Collaboration and Networking

- Encourage collaboration through departmental meetings, conferences, and professional communities.
- Knowledge sharing among peers enhances teaching skills, keeps educators informed, and prevents professional stagnation.

### 4.2.4 Integrating Technology in Teaching

- Prioritize professional development on technology integration to enhance student engagement.
- Training on effective use of educational technology empowers teachers to create dynamic learning experiences.

### 4.2.5 Supporting Ongoing Professional Growth

- Provide access to advanced courses, conferences, and study opportunities.
- Investing in ongoing development ensures teachers remain motivated and equipped to provide high-quality learning experiences.

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