

## **Towards effective in-service teacher development in Indonesia: Where is the point of departure?**

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### **Abstract**

In view of the rapid pace of education reforms and the need to improve the quality of teaching, teachers are obliged to engage in continuous professional development (CPD) to improve their pedagogical knowledge and practices. For teachers to be effectively engaged in CPD, programs should be designed not just to expand knowledge and skills, build pedagogical effectiveness, and enhance professionalism, but also to be differentiated to accommodate the diversity of teachers' needs, skills and knowledge. Professional development is not generic programs designed to fit all teachers' needs, rather, it is context-embedded. As such, CPD initiatives can only have a positive effect if teachers are able to articulate their actual needs. This paper aims to argue that it is vital that teachers should be given opportunities to articulate their needs to provide robust data that serve as foundations in designing and developing effective CPD. Additionally, other features of effective teacher development programs are also portrayed. These are discussed in relation to the implications they have for teacher professional development, and teacher professionalism in Indonesia.

**Keywords:** teacher professional development, teacher professionalism, teachers' needs, teachers' voices

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The implementation of Teacher Law No. 14 in 2005 brought about significant changes to the profession of teaching in Indonesia (Pemerintah Republik Indonesia, 2005). A prominent modification was the revised qualification standards, mandating that teachers should have a bachelor's degree from a four-year institution. According to Dilas et al. (2019), this modification meant that those holding two- or three-year diplomas (Diploma 2 or Diploma 3) could no longer pursue teaching careers. Teachers in this circumstance were required to satisfy the new standards by either upgrading their qualifications or enrolling in teacher training programs run by the government (De Ree, 2016; Heyward & Sopantini, 2015).

Additionally, the law established a set of professional competences, which were further defined in the Ministerial Decree No. 16 of 2007 on Teachers' Academic Qualifications and competences. These skills were divided into four primary categories: professional, social, pedagogical, and personal. There were sub-competencies inside each category, and each had its own set of standards. Teachers were encouraged to engage in reflective practices as part of their pedagogical competence, for instance, in order to enhance their teaching techniques. This involved carrying out classroom-based action research (CAR) to further hone their teaching techniques and reporting on their classroom activities. They also used the insights they gained from this process to improve their practice. The foundation for professional standards in teaching was formed by these four competences, which together comprised 70 distinct criteria and 24 subcategories. But the scope of these demands highlights a crucial point: in order for teachers to properly fulfil these professional duties, their needs must be met, one of the needs being effective professional development. This raises another important point: teachers should be supported in critically examining their practice and expressing their

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professional needs, and fulfilling these needs must be the goals of the provision of teacher professional development.

This paper, written as a part of a larger study, argues for a bottom-up strategy in order to design teacher professional development (TPD) programs. Professional development opportunities can be made more meaningful and relevant by placing teachers at the centre of the process and providing them a voice in expressing their needs. This kind of approach increases the efficacy of teachers' professional development while also empowering them.

### **In-service Teacher Professional Development in Indonesia**

Pre-service teacher education in Indonesia is considered insufficient in providing teachers with the necessary skills to tackle continuous educational reforms, even if it covers essential topics such as pedagogy and subject knowledge (Pemerintah Republik Indonesia, 2005; Saukah, 2009; Syahril, 2016; Zein, 2013). It is also no longer adequate to match the increasing complexity teachers experience in their careers as education changes (Khong & Saito, 2014). The advancement of pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1987; Shulman & Shulman, 2004), teaching practices, and overall school quality (Darling-Hammond, 1998), as well as the status of the teaching profession (Sachs, 2016), all depend on continuous professional development (CPD), or in-service teacher training.

Acknowledging this, the Teacher Law of 2005 provides assistance for continuous professional development, guaranteeing teachers' equal access to professional development programs. In an effort to foster collaboration among educators, the Ministry of Education and Culture has subsequently implemented a number of CPD initiatives at the local, regional, and national levels, such as teacher organisations and professional learning communities (Kemenristekdikti, 2017; World Bank, 2018). With a focus on boosting teacher quality through programs like the Pendidikan Profesi Guru (PPG), curricular revisions, and teacher certification, Indonesia has made tremendous progress towards improving education.

Important initiatives have been created to offer spaces for teacher cooperation and professional development, such as Kelompok Kerja Guru (KKG) for primary school teachers and Musyawarah Guru Mata Pelajaran (MGMP) for secondary school teachers (Rahman, 2016). With thousands of active members all around Indonesia, these forums promote peer assistance with topics including lesson planning and teaching techniques. But because these groups rely on government funding and instructor encouragement, some have gone inactive while others have remained active (Rahman, 2016). Notwithstanding these difficulties, KKG and MGMP continue to be vital venues for local professional development and are important conduits via which the government informs teachers about policy changes in education (Chang et al., 2014; Jalal et al., 2009; Rahman, 2016).

### **Some Issues in the Provision of CPD in Indonesia**

The provision of CPD programs in Indonesia faces multiple challenges, including unclear governance, accessibility issues, conflicting views on professionalism, and insufficient program evaluation (Hidayati, 2023). First, there is uncertainty about the functions that local and central governments play in overseeing CPD. There is no clear directive that specifies whether central or local authorities should regularly oversee in-service teacher training, notwithstanding the regulations' shared responsibility (World Bank, 2018). This ambiguity frequently results in fragmented CPD management, where local governments set priorities according to budgetary restraints, leading to inconsistent program provision across the country. According to Alwasilah (2013), local governments are frequently reluctant to support professional development projects because they lack the necessary power and funding. This implies that the central government must step in, especially in cases where local governments are unable to carry out this responsibility.

Second, for many teachers, accessibility is still a major concern. The rigorous workloads of teachers, which require them to teach a minimum of 24 hours a week in addition to substantial administrative and extracurricular responsibilities, often clash with CPD programs (Amin & Saukah, 2015). Teachers find it challenging to strike a balance between their primary responsibilities and professional development, which restricts their engagement. Third, there is a mismatch between teachers' understanding of professionalism and how CPD programs define it. Rather than viewing

professionalism as a dedication to enhancing instructional strategies and pedagogical abilities, many teachers see professionalism through the prisms of financial benefits, career longevity, and allegiance to the government (Bjork, 2003; Yuwono & Harbon, 2010). Teachers' motivation to participate in CPD programs that support professional development is weakened by this impression.

Finally, CPD program design and evaluation are frequently deficient. A robust assessment mechanism is often absent from programs in order to evaluate their impact on teaching practice (World Bank, 2018). Numerous professional development programs, according to research, do not result in significant improvements in teaching effectiveness or classroom practices (Nielsen, 1998). Particularly when it comes to improving their pedagogical skills, teachers have voiced unhappiness with programs that are excessively theoretical, detached from the realities of their classrooms, and mismatched with their actual requirements (Zein, 2013). This problem is made worse by the lack of procedures for including teachers' views in the design of CPD, as such initiatives do not specifically address the demands and issues experienced by teachers (Kuncahya & Basikin, 2018).

### **Effective Teacher Professional Development**

When referring to initiatives designed to improve instructors' knowledge and techniques, the terms professional learning and professional development are sometimes used interchangeably. Teachers' learning, i.e., how they absorb information, put it into practice, and ultimately contribute to the development of students, is the fundamental component of professional development, according to Avalos (2011). In order to foster the establishment of teacher learning communities, the OECD (2009) defines good professional development as continuous, practice-based, and backed by feedback and follow-up.

Current paradigm changes prioritise lifelong learning over sporadic seminars (Fraser et al., 2007). Newer models support learning within instructors' unique circumstances, supporting inquiry-based approaches, self-direction, and collaboration, while traditional models concentrate on teaching knowledge (Borko et al., 2010). Even though it is effective in some ways, traditional professional development is still widely used and frequently fails to tailor it to the specific needs of instructors (Craft, 2002). Conversely, situational and collaborative methods put an emphasis on individual development, tackling both professional expertise and real-world classroom issues (Opfer & Pedder, 2011; Sancar et al., 2021). Formal or informal, teacher collaboration is viewed as a potent instrument for professional development that enables educators to exchange ideas, have critical conversations, and provide practical assistance to one another (Hargreaves, 1994; Vangrieken et al., 2017). In place of conventional workshops, professional learning communities (PLCs) give educators long-term, collaborative chances to advance their careers and enhance their methods in the classroom (Borko et al., 2010).

Professional development must be in line with instructors' larger educational standards, teaching environments, and personal aspirations in order to be effective (Desimone, 2009). Effective programs must have coherence, both in terms of matching professional development to teachers' requirements and preserving consistency throughout PD activities (Lindvall & Ryve, 2019). Furthermore, Hargreaves (1994) asserts that teacher education must be responsive to the varied requirements of schools and areas while also taking context into consideration. In the end, for professional development to be effective, educators must be given the freedom to actively design their learning environments and participate in reflective, inquiry-based practices that foster growth on both a personal and professional level (Diaz-Maggioli, 2003). Collaborative, contextually relevant, and long-lasting programs have a higher chance of producing significant improvements in student outcomes and teaching practices (Avalos, 2011).

### **Designing Effective Teacher Professional Development**

It is essential to recognize that effective professional development cannot be prescribed in a one-size-fits-all manner. There are two main causes for this. First, new educational theories, rapid technological improvements, and pedagogical innovations are all contributing to the ongoing evolution of the complexity in teaching practice. Teachers' demands for professional development must be regularly and continuously assessed in this dynamic context. To guarantee relevance and efficacy, the process of identifying, organizing, and assessing professional learning events must be

iterative and continually reviewed (Kabilan & Veratharaju, 2013). As teachers advance in their professions and adjust to evolving educational environments, such as legislative changes and technology advancements, their demands change as well (Kabilan & Veratharaju, 2013). Opfer and Pedder (2011) highlight that professional development programs should be created with the complex environments in which teachers work in mind. These programs should take into account not just the dynamics between teachers and students but also more general systemic factors such as changes in policy (Zhang et al., 2015).

Second, no single professional development model can be universally applied across all educational settings. To be effective, TPD needs to be customized to each teacher's unique circumstances, cultural values, and professional obstacles. To make sure that the professional development model selected provides significant advantages, Villegas-Reimers (2003) emphasises the significance of determining the particular requirements and circumstances of teachers. For example, professional development has historically been provided in Indonesia through formal, top-down methods that frequently ignore the opinions of teachers. In other Southeast Asian nations like Malaysia (Kabilan & Veratharaju, 2013) and Thailand (Phantharakphong & Liyanage, 2021; Wall, 2008), this leads to programs that are detached from the realities of teachers' everyday practices and professional objectives.

One of the most important aspects of designing effective TPD is taking into account the diversity of teaching experiences and backgrounds. The individualized requirements of teachers are not taken into consideration by generic methods to professional development, especially in courses like English where teachers frequently operate in diverse cultural and educational contexts and confront particular professional obstacles (Gandara et al., 2005). Additionally, because English is a dynamic and ever-evolving subject, teachers must constantly update their knowledge and methods of instruction in order to remain relevant (Borg, 2006). Therefore, TPD programs need to be adaptable enough to meet the unique needs of teachers and provide a variety of learning opportunities that complement their objectives and areas of interest. Professional development and improved instruction are more likely to result from programs that place a high priority on teacher-driven reflection and practice.

This paper argues that at the core of effective TPD design is the inclusion of teachers' voices. Teachers are best positioned to recognize their own difficulties and the assistance they need. Research, for example, Harris (2000) and Hidayati (2023) highlight how teachers indicate a need for professional development that goes beyond pedagogy and topic knowledge, addressing career growth, personal well-being, and interpersonal skills. According to the research, good TPD should give teachers sufficient time, tools, and opportunities for collaboration in order to engage in continuous learning. As such, TPD initiatives have a higher chance of being pertinent, useful, and in line with the actual requirements of the classroom when they are created with active teacher feedback. Programs that ignore this important detail run the risk of becoming disconnected from the realities of teaching, which lowers engagement and has a smaller measurable impact.

Empowering teachers to articulate their needs ensures that professional development is not only meaningful but also sustainable. Education systems may construct more responsive, flexible, and effective professional development models that genuinely improve teacher practice and student results by cultivating a culture where teachers' opinions are respected and taken into account when designing TPD programs.

### **The Inclusion of Teachers' Voices: The Point of Departure**

Effective Teacher Professional Development (TPD) requires, among other things, the integration of teachers' opinions into the process. Working closely with students and constantly negotiating the complexity of varied classrooms, teachers are at the forefront of education. As a result, their perspectives, experiences, and comments are extremely helpful in developing TPD programs that are applicable, useful, and able to handle the actual difficulties that teachers encounter. If educators are excluded from the planning process, programs may be created that are not based on the realities of the classroom and do not meet their professional needs. The followings are some rationales for why it is important to incorporate teachers' perspectives into the process of designing teacher professional development:

### **Contextual Relevance and Ownership**

In order to make sure that TPD programs are contextually appropriate, teachers' voices are crucial. The teaching profession is not universally applicable; rather, it is formed by distinct local settings, such as student demographics, school cultures, available resources, and local educational legislation. Top-down, standardized programs frequently fail to take into account the unique difficulties that teachers encounter in their unique environments. However, TPD programs can be customized to meet the needs of teachers who actively recognize their own professional development needs. Seeing how closely the training ties to their day-to-day professional practice increases teachers' sense of ownership and engagement.

Participating in the design of their own professional development programs also increases the likelihood that teachers will commit time to their education and actively engage with the material. Studies show that when adults, including teachers, are involved in the learning process and the material speaks to their interests and concerns, they become more motivated to learn (Czerniawski et al., 2017). Teachers are more willing to use new strategies, apply new knowledge in the classroom, and engage in ongoing reflection on their teaching practice when they perceive that their opinions are acknowledged and heard. Any TPD initiative's success is largely dependent on this active participation and dedication to professional development.

### **Addressing Individual and Collective Needs**

The understanding of the various professional demands that teachers have at different phases of their careers is another important justification for incorporating teachers' voices in the TPD process. More experienced teachers, for example, may look for opportunities to pursue leadership development programs or engage in research, while novice teachers may need assistance with classroom management or lesson planning. Teachers in rural schools may have significantly different obstacles than their counterparts in urban ones, such as restricted access to professional learning communities or technology. Without direct input from teachers, TPD programs risk being too generic failing to address these differentiated needs.

Teachers' views also help to improve understanding of both individual and collective needs within school or wider contexts. Teachers can jointly establish development programs that target more general school-wide or community issues by discussing their requirements as a group. Teachers frequently face similar challenges to one another. By fostering a sense of solidarity among teachers, this collaborative method not only makes teacher professional development more relevant but also strengthens professional learning communities (Hidayati, 2023).

### **Enhancing Professional Agency and Empowerment**

Teachers' sense of professional agency and empowerment is also increased when they are involved in the design of TPD. When given the opportunity to voice their needs and participate in the selection of the professional development's content and format, teachers are more capable of managing their own learning and professional growth. When teachers feel that they are part of the process, professional development is not only seen as something that is done to them, rather, it can also be seen as something that is done with and for them.

Teachers who experience this kind of empowerment are more willing to try new teaching techniques, and participate in reflective practice. They can also better assist their peers' development and assist their schools in fostering a collaborative culture of shared learning and continuous improvement as a result of their improved positioning. Teachers who feel inspired and empowered are more likely to create dynamic, engaging classroom environments that support student learning outcome, so students ultimately benefit from this empowerment.

### **Bridging the Gap Between Theory and Practice**

Critics of traditional TPD programs occasionally point out that they are too theoretical and disconnected from the day-to-day realities of the classroom (Zein, 2013). Teachers sometimes complain that these programs' curricula does not correspond with the issues they confront on a daily basis, like handling high class numbers, addressing the requirements of a diverse student body, or

successfully incorporating technology into instruction. TPD can close the knowledge gap between theory and practice by incorporating teachers' perspectives into the design process.

Teachers provide invaluable insights into what functions well in their particular classroom environments. Their input on the best practices for techniques, approaches, and resources can help TPD programs become more practically grounded by influencing their structure and content. To further ensure that the program's curriculum is both practically applicable and intellectually interesting and demanding, teachers can assist in determining which theoretical knowledge domains are most pertinent and helpful to their work.

### **Sustainability of Teacher Professional Growth**

Finally, the sustainability of professional development can be manifested by the incorporation of teachers' perspectives in TPD design. When they are in charge of their own professional development, teachers are more inclined to view professional learning as a continuous, lifelong activity than as a one-time occurrence. In order to foster a culture of lifelong learning where educators regularly assess their work, seek out new knowledge, and collaborate with colleagues to improve student learning outcomes, a shift in teachers' mindset is needed.

Teachers' ability to express their changing demands as educational environments and technologies evolve is another essential component of sustainable TPD. Teachers need to be able to explain what kind of support and growth they need when new issues arise. Regularly seeking and incorporating teacher feedback into the system makes it more responsive and flexible, which guarantees that TPD will continue to be useful and relevant in the long run.

In conclusion, it is not only advantageous but also critical that teachers' perspectives be taken into account when designing Teacher Professional Development. Since teachers are the subject matter experts in their classrooms, their opinions, experiences, and thoughts are priceless when taken into account in developing TPD programs that are applicable, useful, and successful. Education systems may provide professional development that not only addresses the particular difficulties teachers confront but also gives them the power to take charge of their own professional development by allowing teachers to participate in the design process.

This collaborative approach to TPD guarantees that programs are contextually relevant, increases engagement, and advances a continuous learning culture. The fact that it recognises teachers as active agents in their own growth and that their opinions are essential to enhancing instructional strategies and student results is perhaps the most significant.

### **CONCLUSION**

This study emphasises the need for a bottom-up strategy to design Teacher Professional Development (TPD) that allows teachers to express their needs. Teachers' perspectives are crucial for fostering meaningful and long-lasting professional growth, as they are the primary forces behind student academic achievement. The difficulties in providing CPD in Indonesia have been examined in this research, which, like many top-down approaches to TPD, often overlook teachers' voices. Without teachers' involvement in the design process, professional development programs run the risk of becoming irrelevant, outdated, generic, and detached from the realities of teaching practice in the classroom.

A standardized, one-size-fits-all approach to teacher professional development, including professional learning, is insufficient given the complexity of teaching. As teaching is a profession that is always changing due to advancements in technology, educational theory, and pedagogy. As such, regarding professional development, teachers might have varied expectations based on the particular career stage, the particular environments in which they operate, and the particular challenges they face. Effective TPD design requires programs to be dynamic and adaptable, continually re-evaluating the needs and situations of instructors to guarantee relevance and impact.

Furthermore, TPD provision is just as important to its success as its concept. Gaining teacher empowerment through professional agency is essential to attain this. Education institutions can increase teacher motivation, involvement, and sense of ownership by incorporating them in the design of TPD. Actively engaging in professional development increases the likelihood that teachers will

incorporate new knowledge into their lessons, continually evaluate their work, and make necessary adjustments. This ultimately leads to improved teaching practices that improve student learning outcomes.

Another way to close the gap between theory and practice is to incorporate teachers' perspectives into the design of TPD. Teachers are in a good position to offer insightful criticism on how theoretical knowledge relates to actual classroom situations. Their involvement guarantees that professional development is not only theoretically sound but also practically applicable, assisting in addressing the actual difficulties encountered in classrooms, such as balancing the demands of a diverse student body, utilizing technology, and raising student engagement.

All things considered, designing TPD that works involves a collaborative, teacher-centred approach that recognises the complexity of education and the range of requirements that teachers have. Teachers' voices should be heard during the design process, which guarantees that TPD programs are applicable, workable, and able to promote ongoing professional development. By positioning teachers at the centre of professional development, authority can design initiatives that improve individual teaching techniques while simultaneously advancing the creation of an overall education system that is more responsive and dynamic. In the end, improving teaching effectiveness, student learning outcome, and the system's overall efficacy all depend heavily on providing teachers with the professional development they need.

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