In-service Novice EFL Teachers' Perception on Self-Initiated Professional Development: A Narrative Inquiry

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ABSTRACT

Top-down teacher professional development in Indonesia prevents teachers from choosing and determining programs or activities that suit their interests, goals, and needs; however, some activities can assist teachers in developing it, known as self-initiated professional development (SiPD). SiPD demonstrates that people who take the initiative learn more and better than those who are passively taught with or without the assistance of others. This research investigated novice EFL teachers' perceptions and the types of SiPD they engaged in. This study employed a narrative inquiry approach using semi-structured interviews as data collection. The study involved three EFL teachers selected through purposive sampling. Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the collected data. The findings of this study are that novice EFL teachers regard and comprehend self-initiated professional development positively as responsible professionals seeking to acquire new skills, knowledge, and pedagogy to better prepare for their profession's obstacles and improve their student's performance and achievement. They became proactive learners, taking control of their education and taking the initiative to develop their teaching abilities. Furthermore, self-initiated professional development ensured that EFL teachers were current on the newest teaching trends, techniques, and resources.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Teachers confront considerable hurdles when adapting to online teaching while retaining limited touch with students and supporting their development and success (König, Daniela, Biela, & Glutsch, 2020). Professional development (PD) has long been considered a means for developing and sustaining teachers’ professional expertise and participation in valued-based training to plan, implement, and evaluate various strategies to promote learners’ attainment (DuFour, 2015; Fairman et al., 2020). Professional development is crucial because it is the teacher’s responsibility, yet changing the learning system is complicated. To handle the problems of a changing environment, teachers should build new professional abilities by utilizing their finest resources, and teachers should be able to actively engage
with new ideas and issues, as they would expect their students to do, and reflect on how they relate to their environment (Cole, 2021; Day & Gu, 2007). Participation in well-designed, well-implemented, or continuous professional development (CPD) programs might enhance teacher instructional effectiveness and enable teachers to keep their knowledge and skills up to date (Silvhiany et al., 2022; Whitehead et al., 2019), lead to beneficial changes in teachers’ attitudes and beliefs (Li & Jones, 2019; Smith, 2017; Van Ha & Murray, 2021), and contribute to the improvement of student learning outcomes, student achievement and school quality (Borghouts et al., 2021; Cordingley, 2015; He et al., 2011; Melesse & Gulie, 2019).

Rochsantiningsih (2005) stated that teacher professional development (PD) in Indonesia is top-down, with teachers not involved in the planning or preparation. Traditional modes of professional development, such as conferences, workshops, courses, and seminars delivered by external experts (Duncan-Howell, 2010), are criticized for their lack of long-term impact on teaching and learning. Traditional techniques for professional development include maintaining instructors’ certification by indicating the annual credit hours, and PD activities may include episodic on-topic seminars chosen by regional institutions or schools (Fairman et al., 2020). Coldwell (2017) showed that teachers are frequently engaged in passive learning during the program, opportunities to communicate with colleagues and instructional coaches are limited, and teachers require more latitude to choose the material they are interested in and require.

Teachers can choose and determine programs or activities that suit their interests, goals, and needs; these activities are called self-initiated professional development. Self-initiated teacher professional development (SiTPD) is suitable for application since the teacher initiates the activities on their initiative. Asonglefac (2021) stated that self-initiated can help teachers develop their pedagogical knowledge and competencies. Teacher self-initiated can support teacher quality, according to the government’s CPD program in PERMENNEGPN and RB NO.16 of 2009, because the activities are carried out consciously and not only to develop self-quality, motivation, competence, and knowledge but also to assist teachers in publishing scientific papers and making learning innovations for students. Self-directed is solid evidence that people who take the initiative learn more and better than those passively taught with or without the assistance of others (Knowles, 1975). Knowles also mentioned the five-step process of self-directed learning, which includes (1) diagnosing their learning needs, (2) creating learning goals, (3) recognizing material and human resources for acquiring knowledge, (4) choosing and implementing suitable strategies for learning, and (5) assessing outcomes of learning.

Research has shown that teachers positively perceived self-initiated professional development, and SiTPD activities significantly impacted their skills. One study found that Saudi EFL teachers were dedicated professionals well-versed in TPD resources and opportunities. Self-directed earning was seen as preferred by many participants over institutional provisions. The essential qualities of self-directed learning represented in teachers’ current practices are networking, cooperation, reflection, and collegiality (Alshaikh, 2020). The study by Widayati et al. (2021) looked into vocational high school teachers’ perspectives of CPD and CPD at different phases of their employment. The finding showed that civil servant instructors receive more organized CPD than non-civil servant counterparts. Teachers’ professionalism must be enhanced by merging microsystem and exosystem aspects. Teachers must be more conscious of their professional development (CPD) since CPD activities are increasingly directly tied to advancement.

Third, Bhatt (2021) found out that teachers at the secondary level face challenges such as large classes, inadequate teacher training, and improper use of CAS. They employ various strategies to address these challenges. These include reading printed materials, using the Internet and ICT tools, conducting action research, reflecting, and collaborating with colleagues. Another study conducted by Tessema and Belihu (2023) revealed that most EFL teachers had a favorable sense of self-initiated professional growth, reflected in their self-monitoring and critical incident analysis practices. On the other hand, teachers did not keep a teaching journal, perform action research, reflect on their teaching, or create a teaching portfolio. Furthermore, characteristics such as a lack of teamwork among
coworkers, poor communication, and a lack of institutional support appeared to be looming SiPD causes.

Lastly, the study by Aisyah et al. (2023) revealed that SiTPD activities emphasize the need to improve and enhance their oral language proficiency continuously, highlighting the benefits it brings to teaching and learning. One specific example mentioned was the participant’s engagement in self-directed PD activities using the Netflix series, which proved to be highly beneficial for improving linguistic features. The benefits of self-directed professional growth for EFL teachers’ oral language preservation are enormous, both personally and professionally. It gives EFL teachers more power, promotes autonomy, and creates a lifelong learning mindset. EFL teachers can consistently improve and maintain their oral language abilities through self-directed professional development studies, contributing to their growth as educators and improving student learning results.

There is a research gap between previous research and current research; previous research used a qualitative case study approach (Aisyah et al., 2023), mixed method (Tessema & Belihu, 2023), qualitative study (Alshaikh, 2020; Bhatt, 2021; Widyawati et al., 2021). Previous research found that EFL teachers can hardly distinguish between programmed and self-initiated activities. Previous studies have described the challenges of undertaking self-directed professional development. However, they have not focused on the participants’ experiences, another part of the issue that needs further exploration. These considerations motivate the current theoretical perspective that this study used self-initiated teacher professional development to show that there are other opportunities for teachers to improve their quality as teachers. This framework explored teachers’ perceptions and activities for the professional development of three EFL novices. This research likely provided additional insights that will be helpful to teachers and schools as they explore teachers’ professional development through various alternatives, such as self-initiated professional development. In practical terms, this research can be used as a consideration for schools, teachers, facilitators, and policymakers regarding teacher professional development activities that can be carried out by taking the initiative to improve and encourage self-quality apart from existing programs since this program makes it easier for teachers to determine what they want and are interested in depending on the teacher’s needs to develop their skills. This qualitative study used a different approach, Narrative Inquiry, adopted from Barkhuizen, Benson, & Chik, 2014, focusing on EFL teachers’ perceptions and activities of self-initiated professional development. Therefore, this study aimed to explore the issue concerning novice EFL teachers’ perceptions of self-initiated professional development in Indonesia and the activities they engaged in self-initiated professional development. Based on the gap above, this research has the following questions: 1) What is novice EFL teachers’ perception of self-initiated professional development? 2) How do they carry out self-initiated professional development activities?

2. METHODS

In this qualitative research, we selected junior high school teachers who teach English in several junior high schools in Indonesia as participants, and we selected these participants through purposive sampling. Three novice EFL teachers participated in our research. The three novice EFL teachers were selected because they met the research criteria, had carried out self-initiated teacher professional development and SiPD activities they engaged in, and had less than ten years of experience. The participants were in their late 20s and early 30s. The research adopted a narrative inquiry methodology, facilitating the researcher’s ability to conduct research.

In the meantime, we obtained data about the participants’ experiences through interviews. The primary data sources were the stories of three EFL teachers who undertook self-initiated professional development and their activities. The interviews aim to obtain apparent and in-depth information about EFL teachers’ experiences of self-initiated professional development. We used semi-structured interviews with questions from the interview guide. Thus, semi-structured interviews are beneficial for collecting information on people’s ideas, opinions, or experiences. In this case, the interviewer used an interview guide with pre-programmed questions as “a resource that can be drawn on in whatever way and to whatever extent is appropriate” (Richards, 2003, p. 69). The use of semi-structured interviews
also allows for some flexibility since the interviewer could ask follow-up questions for respondents to clarify or elaborate on as the interview goes on. The interview process was audio recorded, and the data obtained was transcribed. All participants gave their consent for the interviews to be recorded and transcribed. A thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006) was used to analyze the data collected from the participants. They described it as a technique for identifying, analyzing, and reporting data patterns (themes). It organizes and describes the data set in (rich) detail. There are six steps in thematic analysis: 1) familiarizing with the data, 2) generating initial codes, 3) searching for themes, 4) reviewing themes, 5) defining and naming themes, and 6) producing the report.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the result of data analysis, four themes emerged: 1) understanding of professional development; 2) understanding of self-initiated professional development; 3) teachers’ belief on self-initiated professional development; 4) teacher self-initiated professional development activities.

3.1 Understanding of professional development

The results of the participant interviews showed that all participants made similar comments about how they understood teacher professional development. The participants’ understanding indicates that each school supports its teachers in planning, monitoring, and implementing professional development programs for teachers. The evidence suggests that all participants understood the purpose of professional development well. A recurring theme among participants was an understanding of and belief in the positive impact that professional development can have on teaching and learning. In this regard, the teacher PA commented as follows:

“As far as I know, teacher professional development or TPD, which is usually used for teachers as educators to develop their abilities, including teaching, abilities from the material they have as well as the knowledge the teachers have...The government has its platform for teachers to learn that is the Merdeka Belajar Platform, where teachers can learn and understand a lot from video materials, or modules so teachers can develop themselves even without seminars or speakers.” [Teacher PA, Interview]

Teacher PA confirmed that TPD can help teachers improve their abilities in teaching and developing teaching material. The Merdeka Belajar platform’s video materials and modules were professional practices for developing lifelong learning and self-improvement. In this sense, the Merdeka Belajar platform was the tool provided by the government to support teacher professional development.

Supports the statement from Teacher PA, Teacher NS also added her understanding of TPD.

“Teacher professional development or TPD is a program that for me, is like MGMP. That’s from the outside, but from the inside, it’s one of the professional development programs, both to improve the pedagogical, professional competence and personality of a teacher to be even better, to improve core knowledge upgrades like that.” [Teacher NS, Interview]

Teacher NS stated that the TPD program improves teachers' pedagogic, professional competence, and personalities through MGMP provided, and teachers must join in it.

Teacher ND shared her understanding of TPD, the following arguments said:

“In my opinion, as far as I understand, TPD is an effort made by a teacher to improve the level and ability in their profession.” [Teacher ND, Interview]

Teacher ND defines TPD as something that teachers do to advance their careers and abilities in their profession, specifically the ability to teach.
3.2 Understanding of Self-initiated professional development

According to the teacher's interview, self-initiated professional development refers to activities initiated by teachers based on their particular needs, desires for learning, and goals. It is based on the premise that teachers take responsibility for planning and managing their professional development activities. In other words, it stems from the teacher's growth of ideas, experiences, and attitudes. In this study, all participants provided comparable comments about their knowledge of self-initiated teacher professional development. Teacher ND articulates this as follows:

“Teachers as individuals take the initiative to carry out activities to improve their professionalism both in terms of formulating learning objectives, learning methodologies and so on.” [Teacher ND, Interview]

Teacher ND remarked in this interview that teachers must take the lead in initiating professional development programs based on what they lack or enhance the areas of their expertise they are interested in and wish to improve since they tend to be the ones who know their problem.

Teacher PA shared his understanding about SiPD, here he said:

“From what I understand, self-initiated PD is we teachers can determine the learning activities that are needed and are interested in based on time and conditions.” [Teacher PA, Interview]

From Teacher PA’s understanding of self-initiated pd, it can be concluded that this activity can be carried out according to the needs and interests of the teacher and the teacher himself can arrange the desired time and conditions to do the activity they want.

Teacher NS also shared her experience of taking the initiative to participate in the government’s programs, and after the program, she implemented it in her class.

“...activities as an implication of my participation in one of the programs...designing my own poster but for the IT, it still needs to be improved.” [Teacher NS, Interview]

Teachers take the initiative both formally and informally by participating in programs or activities that can improve their professionalism; after doing the activities, teachers can implement the knowledge they get in the classroom.

From the above data, it is possible to see how teachers may be sympathetic to self-initiated PD, emphasizing its value as a means of personal and professional improvement, career advancement, and development as lifelong learners. Nonetheless, although the participants appeared to have some teaching, pedagogical, and classroom management abilities, it was also essential to have up-to-date knowledge of their profession or subject.

3.3 Teachers’ Belief in Self-initiated Professional Development

Our approach to data collection was guided by the themes raised in the theoretical framework on self-initiated professional development. The findings revealed that SiPD correlates with self-realization, self-awareness, and self-reflection. This correlation grants teachers independence and responsibility, allowing them to eliminate inefficiencies, enhance teaching practices, and optimize instruction. The findings also influenced the opinions of specific participants. The arguments for this viewpoint are based on the assumption that instructors must be self-aware for appropriate professional development. What NS, the teacher, had to say about self-awareness.
“Trying things that I haven’t gotten yet, for example, taking part in Guru Penggerak and then followed the PPG.” [Teacher NS, Interview]

Teacher NS is aware that there are many things that she has not learned, so she is encouraged to take part in programs that can provide new knowledge, such as Guru Penggerak and PPG.

Teacher ND also had to talk about self-realization

“Usually I share it first with colleagues or colleagues in other teaching professions, wherever I don’t know the aspects that I lacked, if I lack in the learning strategy or learning method, in my opinion, I don’t master it enough...If those watching videos and reading articles are my interests and my desire for self-improvement or self-development.” [Teacher ND, Interview]

Teacher ND explained that she always shares with her co-teachers about teaching and if there is an aspect that she thinks she is lacking and has not mastered. In addition, she explained that she watches and reads articles to improve her professionalism.

In the same line, Teacher PA also stressed his feeling about self-initiated professional development as self-reflection, thus:

“Oh, for me, before I developed myself through TPD, that was from my teaching method because I don’t have much experience so I still need to learn a lot, experience from other teachers, from learning videos too. So after I did self-initiated professional development it had an impact on my way of teaching.” [Teacher PA, Interview]

Teacher PA explained about his experience doing SIPD, previously he still had difficulty with the learning method. After he did SIPD by asking and after then getting feedback from other teachers and watching videos, he was also able to develop in-class teaching. He realized what he lacked off and asked experienced teachers. From the three teacher statements above, it can be concluded that what they believe will have a positive effect on them to improve their quality in the future.

3.4 Self-initiated Professional Development Activities

Responding to RQ2, participants were asked to indicate the SiPD activities they had undertaken the previous month (e.g., watching videos on YouTube, or Netflix, attending or presenting at a conference, continuing master study, or taking a language course). Respondents were asked about any other SiPD activities they had completed the previous month.

In this regard, we discovered that, as shown in the table above, most EFL teachers engage in SiPD activities when they complete teaching, have free time, or have a day off. Most participating teachers in this study view videos, attend seminars via searching for information on Instagram, and participate in teacher groups. Teacher PA shared his experience with the SiPD activities:

“For seminars, it just so happens that I am continuing my master’s study, automatically seminars are still often followed ... on the internet, for example, on Instagram, there is so much information from my lecturers and supervisors who usually share information in the group.” [Teacher PA, Interview]

Teacher PA explained that during his master’s degree, he often attended seminars, which he got information about from Instagram and his lecturers. Social media also plays an essential role in finding sources of information and learning resources for teachers.

To support Teacher PA’s statement, Teacher ND also shared her SiPD activities. She said:

“Those who watch videos and Netflix also read articles are my interests and desire for self-improvement or self-development... MGMP or the community must be scheduled at least once a month, and it is mandatory to participate like that.” [Teacher ND, Interview]
Through her interest and desire to improve herself, Teacher ND does the activities she feels she needs. Also, she continues to participate in community activities held once a month.

Another SiPD experienced by Teacher NS, she share her interested activities. Mrs. Nisa stated in this regard:

“In addition, my activities include reading articles, presenting at seminars, continuing my master’s degree, and peer feedback with other teachers.” [Teacher NS, Interview]

The activities mentioned by Teacher NS above are activities she often does because she thinks they help her professional development and knowledge.

EFL teachers participate in SiPD initiatives to enhance their proficiency and professional advancement by pursuing continuing education, attending seminars, watching videos, reading articles, and engaging with the community. They emphasize their students’ learning encounters and endeavor to provide efficient and adept instruction in the classroom.

Discussion

As mentioned above, these findings reveal teachers’ perceptions of teacher professional development carried out independently—first, teachers’ understanding of professional development. Teachers carry out PD with support and assistance from government facilities. Apart from that, teachers understand SiPD. Teachers take the initiative to improve their professionalism by identifying areas that they think are lacking and need to be improved, and they gain new knowledge. Teachers also realize they lack in something, so they can be aware of what they need and reflect on themselves.

What are novice EFL teachers’ perceptions of self-initiated professional development?

According to the findings, the three novice EFL teachers consider self-initiated professional development as teachers’ self-direct activities by taking the initiative to improve themselves by purposefully pursuing their needs and growing their skills and knowledge; these findings are in line with Alshaikhi (2020) that the self-initiated TPD experience chosen by the teacher provides opportunities for direct learning that improves their content and pedagogical content knowledge. In the meantime, institutional training is typically intended to impart knowledge and skills to students. This finding was reinforced by Knowles (1975), who indicated that teachers are generally interested in improving their profession to improve their teaching skills and achieve better student results. The activities that novice EFL teachers have done for self-improvement have made them understand the knowledge and positive perceptions of SiPD. This is obtained from the results of the interviews that have been conducted, and this finding is similar to Tessema and Belihu (2023), who discovered that EFL teachers express their positive view of the importance of SiPD and share their belief that the university should facilitate training on the importance and implementation of self-initiated professional development activities. Furthermore, Aisyah et al. (2023) discovered a similar finding, stating that an EFL teacher positively perceives self-directed professional development to maintain her spoken language abilities. It turns out that self-directed professional development is significant for teachers because in addition to improving their professional abilities based on what they need and are interested in and having the autonomy to choose their activities, they can also gain new knowledge and improve skills that they can apply in the classroom to achieve better student results.

How do they carry out professional development activities for self-initiated teachers?

Participants’ responses and engagement in professional development activities are determined by the relevance of the program content rather than the type of professional development. The degree of teacher engagement is determined by the designers’ planning, which incorporates decisions concerning the content, objective, and arrangement of activities. Nonetheless, self-initiated professional development undertakings can advance participants’ personal and professional development, tackle classroom challenges, and enhance the quality of teaching.
Regarding this question, we found that most EFL teachers were enthusiastic about watching videos related to EFL teaching or the English language (YouTube videos, Netflix series). In support of this argument, Aisyah et al., (2023) discovered that participants’ engagement in self-directed PD activities using the Netflix series proved highly useful for enhancing language traits. They also found that EFL teachers can constantly improve and maintain their spoken language abilities, contributing to their growth as educators and increasing student learning outcomes through self-directed professional development. According to Bhatt (2021), due to teaching in remote regions, a shortage of material, and a lack of institutional support, instructors rely on reading materials, the internet and digital devices, reflection, action research, and cooperation for professional development. In our findings, EFL teachers have support from the school in their professional development through SiPD. The school supports the activities that their teachers want to do outside of teaching hours. Our three participant teachers often reflect at the end of each activity they do, share with colleagues, and evaluate. After that, they implement what has been obtained into the classroom.

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, novice EFL teachers positively perceive and understand self-initiated professional development as responsible professionals eager to learn new skills to be better prepared for their profession’s challenges and pursue improving their students’ achievement. They actively participate in programs and activities they find interesting, challenging, or want to improve. They become proactive learners by taking ownership of their learning process and taking the initiative to improve their teaching abilities. Novice EFL teachers are committed professionals with access to various TPD resources and possibilities; they are teacher-initiated and go beyond institutional requirements. Furthermore, self-initiated professional development ensures that EFL teachers know the latest teaching trends, approaches, and resources. This continual learning benefits the EFL teacher and their students’ requirements. It should have been mentioned that the scope of this study limited itself to novice EFL teachers’ perspective of self-initiated professional development (SiPD) and the sorts of SiPD activities. However, this study needs to be expanded to include other groups of teachers at various stages of their careers. Then, future studies can look into the emotional aspects of EFL teachers pursuing self-initiated professional development, as well as other perspective from professional development facilitator, policymakers, and institution. This study also only featured a small number of participants for future research; it is intended that more people would be required to gather different viewpoints and use other research methodologies, such as narrative case studies.

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