# Professional Development of English Teachers in Higher Education: A Systematic Review

**Hijjatul Qamariah**
Department of Learning and instruction, Faculty of humanities and social sciences, University of Szeged, Szeged, Hungary, *hijjatul.qamariah@edu.u-szeged.hu*

**Maria Hercz**
Department of education, Faculty of primary and pre-school education, Eotvos Lorand university, Budapest, Hungary, *hercz.maria@tok.elte.hu*

Research on the professional development of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers has predominantly focused on student achievement and pedagogic quality. However, fewer studies explore the professional development of university-level teacher educators and trainers. Higher education institutions play a crucial role in preparing future EFL teachers, making professional development an essential factor in their success. This review examines the professional development process of EFL teacher educators, addressing the challenges they face and the strategies they employ for growth. Specifically, it aims to identify existing research gaps, analyse the factors influencing professional development efforts, and evaluate the impacts of these initiatives on university-level EFL teachers. The study follows the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) 2009 framework, including data identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion. A qualitative approach is applied, analysing content from 28 selected articles. The review highlights key challenges within professional development programs, motivations and expectations of EFL educators, factors driving their professional growth—including aspirations for expertise and institutional demands—and the overall impact of training programs on their professional development. Findings reveal a gap in research concerning the emotional state and personal identity of EFL teachers in relation to professional development. Personal goals, self-management strategies, and their broader professional journey remain underexplored.

Keywords: EFL instructors, professional development, higher education, professional development programs, university teachers

## INTRODUCTION

Teacher professional development (TPD) has long been a vital topic in education. It is widely studied and universally acknowledged as essential in enhancing teaching and

learning quality (Kennedy, 2016; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Ping et al., 2018; Desimone, 2009; Saberi & Sahragard, 2019). TPD is defined as an evolving process of teachers' reflection, structured learning and action that improves teachers' knowledge and skills that leading to the enhancement of teaching practice for better learner achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2017). TPD results much more from teaching reflection, which involves reflection and evaluation of their teaching practice to examine the overall effectiveness of teaching methods and strategies applied (Sun & Ahmad, 2025). Research primarily examines TPD through student performance outcomes, emphasising the connection between pedagogical expertise and student achievement. It is widely accepted that stronger teaching leads to better student success (Burroughs et al., 2019).

Despite its significance, TPD is interpreted in various ways. Czerniawski et al. (2017) describe professional development and professional learning as both formal and informal processes aimed at improving teacher educators' practice throughout their careers. Desimone (2009) associates TPD with instructional changes that enhance student learning, while Desimone et al. (2002) view it as a mechanism for strengthening content knowledge and teaching methods. Vonk (1991) defines it as an ongoing process of acquiring skills, professional knowledge, values, and personal qualities that enable educators to adapt within evolving educational systems. In summary, TPD encompasses all formal and informal activities that help teachers enhance their knowledge, skills, and instructional practices to support their careers and improve educational outcomes.

TPD is also called professional learning, where teachers improve their professionalism through structured activities, such as trainings, workshops, conferences, seminars, and many other formats of professional programs that are designed to assist teachers in stepping ahead in their career (Truong & Murray, 2019; Zhang et al, 2021).

Continuous professional development is essential, encompassing training, practice, and feedback, supplemented by systematic opportunities for reflection and follow-up support. Effective programs involve educators in activities (Tóth & Szivák, 2022) that replicate classroom instruction and nurture collaborative learning communities. There is an increasing focus on transforming educational institutions into learning organizations, fostering structured opportunities for teachers to share knowledge and experiences (OECD, 2005). Research conducted in rural India indicates that professional development initiatives that substantively improve student learning align participation with career incentives and access to resources (Popova et al., 2021). A comprehensive professional development framework should be integrated into teaching and learning systems to ensure students acquire requisite skills for the 21st century. Professional learning needs to be connected to teachers' early career experiences, instructional requirements, assessment strategies, and leadership opportunities to establish a cohesive support system (Hammond et al., 2017).

While extensive research has examined TPD at the primary and secondary education levels, relatively little attention has been given to its significance for teacher educators in higher education. These professionals play a critical role in shaping the next generation of teachers (Ping et al., 2018). However, studies rarely explore the initiatives

teacher educators undertake to advance their professional development. This review addresses gaps in research on TPD in higher education, examining the efforts of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instructors, the factors influencing their participation in professional development, and the outcomes of their growth initiatives.

**Purpose of the Study**

The problems found that few studies address the professional development of EFL university teachers or also called EFL teacher educators, while teacher educators are considered to have significant roles in preparing the qualified future EFL teachers. Some previous studies on EFL teachers in higher education address the PD programs attended by the teachers as a crucial aspect in PD (Alzahrani et al., 2021), while other studies mentioned that the use of technology in teaching is considered part of PD empowerment. For example, research by Boonmoh et al. (2022) revealed that teachers go through a three-stage journey toward empowerment, shaped by both external supports (e.g. collaboration, resources) and internal factors (e.g. motivation, self-efficacy). This study emphasises the systemic PD model for teacher empowerment. Moreover, Yang et al. (2021) explored how emotions and identity interact in the professional lives of Chinese EFL teachers. The study emphasised that emotional resilience and identity negotiation are central to teacher development and long-term professional empowerment. Others also claimed that reflective teaching is a teacher development tool (Shukri, 2014; Sibahi, 2015). Shukri (2014) highlighted that reflective teaching helped them better meet student needs, improve instructional strategies, and grow professionally. While Sibahi (2015) addressed the need for professional development programs that promote a culture of inquiry and support reflective growth

As many different issues related to PD in higher education were addressed by different authors, and every aspect is considered significant. This review, however, would like to draw an overview of EFL teacher educators by addressing the problems and reporting the issues regarding the process that EFL teacher educators went through to improve their PD. The following research questions guided this review:

1. What problems are addressed in the research of English teacher professional development in higher education?
2. What factors are associated with improving the professional development of English teachers with respect to the efforts taken?
3. What are the impacts of these efforts on the professional development of higher education EFL teachers?

**METHOD**

This study applied a systematic review design. Systematic literature reviews (SRs) constitute a methodological approach for the synthesis of scientific evidence, aimed at addressing specific research questions in a manner that is both transparent and replicable. This process endeavours to encompass all existing published evidence relevant to the subject matter while rigorously assessing the quality of the evidence provided (Lame, 2019). The current study followed the Preferred Reporting Items for

Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) 2009 phases flow diagram which include the identification of the data, the screening process of the data, the eligibility of the data and the inclusion of the data (Moher et al, 2009). The data analysis process follows the qualitative research approach by looking at the content of the data. The result of the review is then depicted into several themes found from the data analysis. The focus of this study is only on the TPD of EFL in higher education. The EFL teacher here was defined as teacher educators, teacher trainers, or instructors who are teaching at the university level.

**Data Identification**

In a systematic literature review, the process of searching databases involves using a consistent, predefined search string (Randles & Finnegan, 2023). This usually involves employing several synonyms for each thematic element of the review topic, complemented by a comprehensive search strategy. This strategy should incorporate free-text terms in, at a minimum, the title and abstract, along with the controlled vocabulary from the database thesaurus (Philip & Baker, 2021). The databases that were included in the data collection process were Scopus, Web of Science, EBSCO, Science Direct, and Sage. In addition, the data were also searched on another search engine, Google Scholar, after considering that the data were relevant to the topic by setting up the advanced search with the keywords mentioned in the titles and abstract. The data searched were limited to the last ten years, from 2013 to 2023. Those data were filtered by limiting them to some keywords such as 'EFL teachers' AND 'university teachers' AND 'professional development' AND 'higher education' AND 'professional development programs' AND impacts of professional development.'

The Rayyan systematic literature review application (https://new.rayyan.ai) was used in conducting the evaluation and analysis of the articles searched. From the database searched, 286 articles were found in total.

Table 1
Database searched from 2013 to 2023

| Database searched | Keywords used | Article identified |
|---|---|---|
| Scopus | "EFL teachers" AND "Professional Development" AND "Higher education" AND "Professional Development Programs" AND Professional Development Impacts" | 15 |
| Web of Science | "EFL teachers" AND "Professional Development" AND "Higher education" AND "Professional Development Programs" AND Professional Development Impacts" | 23 |
| Science Direct | "EFL teachers" AND "Professional Development" AND "Higher education" AND "Professional Development Programs" AND Professional Development Impacts" | 62 |
| EBSCO | "EFL teachers" AND "Professional Development" AND "Higher education" AND "Professional Development Programs" AND Professional Development Impacts" | 129 |
| Sage | "EFL teachers" AND "Professional Development" AND "Higher education" AND "Professional Development Programs" AND Professional Development Impacts" | 27 |
| Google scholars | "EFL teachers" AND "Professional Development" AND "Higher education" "University Teachers" AND Professional Development" AND "Professional Development Program" AND "Professional Development Impacts" | 30 |

**Data Screening**

Initially, a duplicate screening process was conducted, identifying 17 duplicate papers across the databases, resulting in a total of 269 papers. The procedure then progressed to an abstract and title screening.

**Data Exclusion**

Articles lacking the specified keywords in their abstracts and titles were excluded; as a result, 52 papers were retained, while 217 were excluded. A full-text selection was subsequently performed on the 52 retained articles, applying inclusion criteria that stipulated the research subjects be university teachers, teacher educators, or college instructors, exclusively within the EFL field, and focused on professional development. Articles pertinent to the keywords were included, whereas those involving student teachers, classroom teachers, teacher effectiveness, and belief were excluded, culminating in the inclusion of only 28 papers for analysis. We also adopted the qualitative data analysis process for this review. Moreover, guided by the research questions, several analytical steps were undertaken, including reading the articles, identifying codes within the articles related to professional development, categorizing these codes, and ultimately discerning themes from these categories.
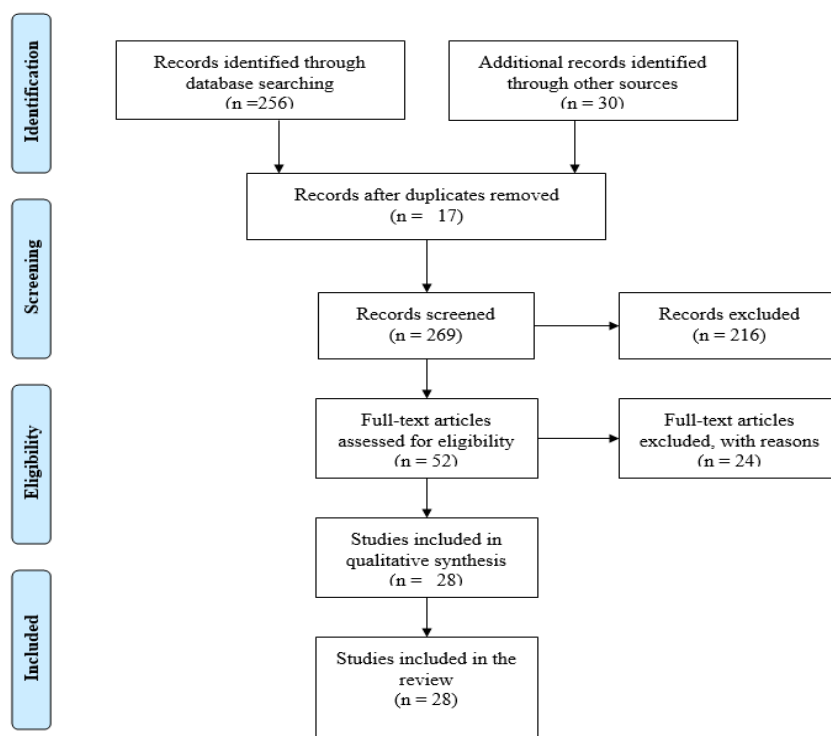
Figure 1
PRISMA flow diagram

**FINDINGS**

Based on the research objectives of this review, the problems of English teacher professional development in higher education in the literature, the efforts of EFL teachers in higher education to improve their professional development, the factors behind taking those efforts to improve their professionalism and the impacts of the TPD programs on their professionalism were addressed. 28 articles were analysed by applying thematic analysis. The 28 articles include three PhD theses about the professional development of EFL teacher educators at the university. The researchers think it is also important to include these types of manuscripts since it is up-to-date within the time frame and the topic matches the keywords. It is necessary to include grey literature in a systematic review, as suggested by Phillip and Baker (2021), to minimise bias in the review. The data were analysed manually by highlighting and sorting firsthand. To ease the categorisation of codes, we also applied a qualitative analysis tool, MAXQDA 2020. The themes are driven by the elicitation of research problems we had before. Therefore, it is related to the questions we asked about.
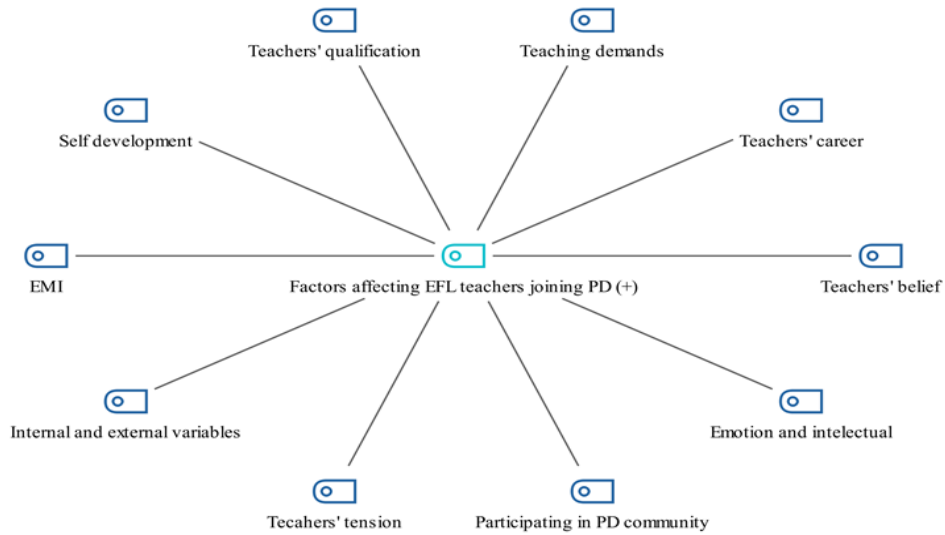
Figure 2
Codes analysis about factors affecting EFL teachers in participating in professional development

This figure shows the codes and subcodes about factors that influence EFL instructors in higher education institutions participating in professional development programs.
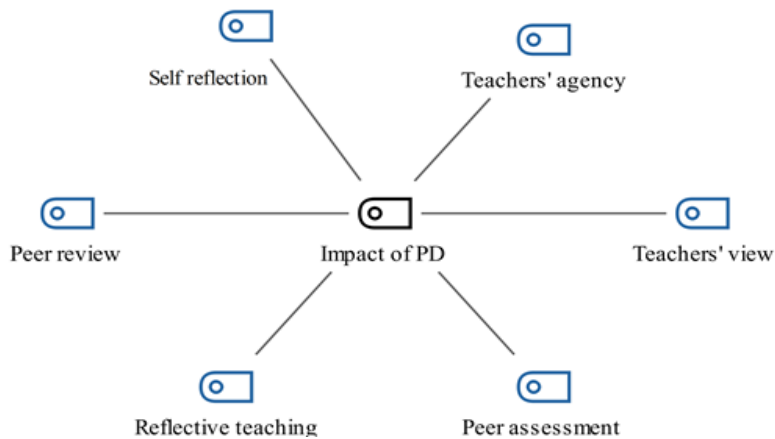


Figure 3
Codes analysis about Impacts of professional development

This figure shows the codes of professional development programs impact on EFL instructors.
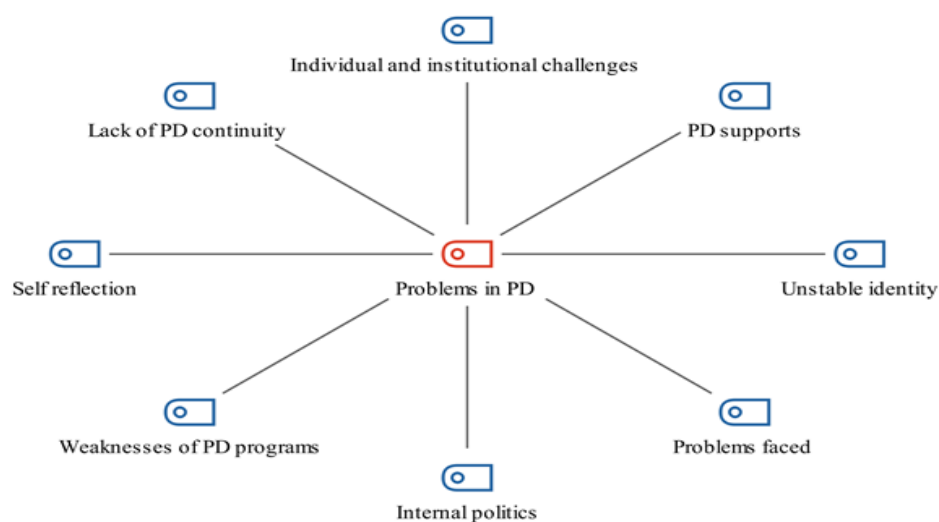
Figure 4
Codes analysis about problems in professional development

This figure shows the codes of the problems found in professional development research in the last decades.
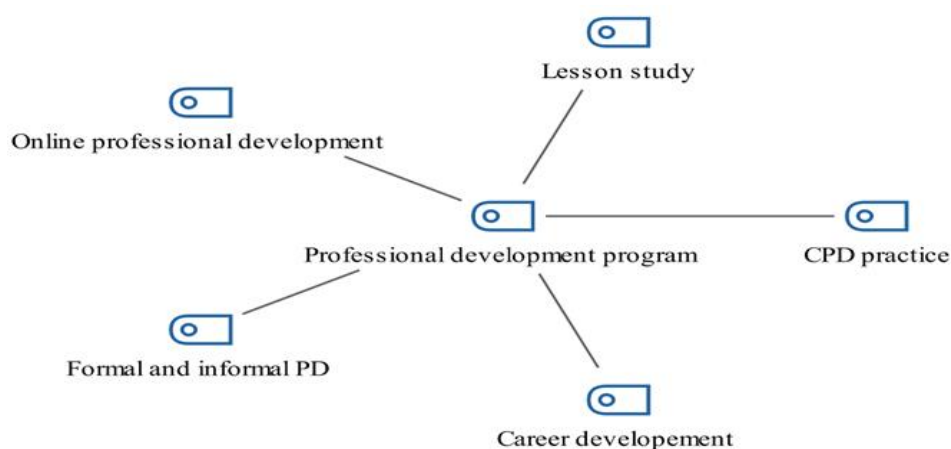


Figure 5
Code analysis about professional development program

This figure shows the codes of types of professional development programs that have been participated by EFL instructors.

The following is the result of the analysis from the 28 articles we found from the data based after the screening process.

Table 2
28 studies included in the analysis

| Authors | Title | Category | Theme |
|---|---|---|---|
| (Yang et al, 2021) | 'Frustration drives me to grow': Unravelling EFL teachers' emotional trajectory interacting with identity development' | Teacher motivation, External support | Factors influencing PD, PD Programs initiative |
| (Alzahrani & Althaqafi, 2020) | 'EFL Teachers' Perceptions of the Effectiveness of Online Professional Development in Higher Education in Saudi Arabia' | Problems of PD program | Impacts of PD |
| (Zhiyong et al, 2020) | 'College English language teaching reform and key factors determining EFL teachers' professional development' | PD programs | Impacts of PD |
| (Shen & Ba, 2019) | 'Facilitating university teachers' continuing professional development through peer-assisted research and implementation teamwork in China' | Teachers' initiative, awareness, efforts | Factors influencing PD |
| (Sadeghi & Navaie, 2021) | 'Iranian EFL teachers' experiences with online professional development: Perceptions and preferences' | Teachers' belief on PD program | PD Programs participation |
| (Bayram & Bikmas, 2021) | 'Implications of lesson study for tertiary-level efl teachers' professional development: a case study from Turkey' | Teachers' difficulties | Problems in PD |
| (Bayram & Canaran, 2020) | 'Lesson study in action: A multiple case study of EFL teachers' | Lesson study improving professionalism | PD programs impact |
| (Roemer, 2021) | 'Professional development of EFL teachers in Tanzania: Ubinafsi or ujamaa?' | lack of PD assistance | Problems of PD support from stakeholders |
| (Boonmoh et al, 2022) | 'Integration of Technology during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Experience, Challenges and Needs of Thai EFL Teachers' | Teachers' difficulties | PD community assistance/ programs |
| (Shukri, 2014) | 'Female teachers' perception of reflective teaching as a teacher development tool in the Saudi context' | Teacher belief on successful PD | PD Programs participation |
| (Sibahi, 2015) | 'Exploring reflective practice among college EFL teachers in Saudi Arabia' | Teacher's belief on reflective teaching to support PD | PD programs participation |
| (Irgatouglu, 2021) | 'EFL instructors' attitudes towards professional self-development' | Teachers' problems, self- reflection | Problems hinder PD |
| (Alzahrani & Nor, 2021) | 'Professional development and EFL teachers 'practices in activating learners' acquisition of 21st century skills' | No effect of teacher qualification | PD programs participation |
| (Green & Pappa, 2021) | 'EFL teacher education in Finland: Manifestations of professional agency in teacher educators' work' | Professionalism in practice | PD programs |
| (Rostami et al, 2020) | 'Gaining favourable identities of Iranian EFL teachers: a single case study of transition from elementary schools to universities' | Effective teachers | Factors affecting PD |
| (Celik et al, 2013) | 'The need for ongoing professional development: Perspectives of Turkish university-level EFL instructors' | Teachers' motivation and awareness | Problems hinder PD |
| (Bao & Feng 2022) | "Doing research is not beyond my reach": The reconstruction of College English teachers' professional identities through a | Teacher's problems | Problems of identity towards PD |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | domestic visiting program' | | |
| (Rasskazova et al, 2017) | 'English language teacher development in a Russian university: Context, problems and implications' | Teacher's suggestions | PD programs initiative |
| (Zhang et al, 2022) | 'The emotion-intellect dialectic in an EFL teacher's development of a research identity: A sociocultural perspective' | Teachers internal and external problems | Professional Development demands |
| (Yurtseven & Altun, 2018) | 'The role of self-reflection and peer review in curriculum-focused professional development for teachers' | Contribution to TPD | Impacts on PD |
| (Wu, 2022) | 'A Longitudinal Study of EFL Teacher Agency and Sustainable Identity Development: A Positioning Theory Perspective' | Professional Career's development towards PD | Professional identity development |
| (Ha, 2023) | 'Community of practice professional development: A study of tertiary EFL teachers in North-Eastern Vietnam' | Teachers' problems joining PD | PD programs Problems, teachers' participation of PD programs |
| (Ahmad et al, 2018) | 'Shaping professional identity through professional development: A retrospective study of TESOL professionals' | Involvement in PD | The impacts of PD programs |
| (Phothongsunan, 2018) | 'EFL university teachers' professional development in the Thai context' | Teachers' career and PD opportunities | Problems of participating in PD |
| (Nguyen, 2019) | 'Professional development: Vietnamese English-as-a-foreign-language teacher educators' experiences and perceptions' | Awareness of PD | Impact of PD |
| (Meng &Tajaroensuk, 2013) | 'An investigation of tertiary EFL teachers' problems in their in-service professional development' | Component of Teachers' professional development | Problems of PD Programs |
| (Alhassan, 2021) | 'Challenges and professional development needs of EMI lecturers in Omani higher education' | Teachers' need of PD | Problems in PD programs |
| (Phuaphaiboon, 2019) | 'An Investigation of Thai Tertiary EFL Teacher Experience of Formal and Informal Professional Development ' | Challenges in teaching practice | PD impacts |

Based on the analysis conducted, several themes can be reported, namely problems in PD, factors affecting PD also related to the efforts of teachers to participate in PD, and the impacts of PD programs. These themes are presented based on the research questions formulated previously.

*Research question 1: Problems in PD Research*

The literature on professional development primarily addresses issues pertaining to the effectiveness of PD programs, the discontinuity of these programs, and the scarcity of well-designed practical programs (Meng & Tajaroensuk, 2013). These challenges are reported to significantly hinder professional development efforts in service. Furthermore, certain PD programs have been identified as impractical, with their materials not aligning with actual classroom teaching practices. Consequently, it is imperative to create and implement sustainable PD programs that are both practical and closely aligned with classroom instruction by educators (Ha, 2013). Bayram and Bikmaz (2021) also highlighted that while traditional PD programs are generally effective in university environments, programs such as lesson study demand considerable time and dedication from teachers, indicating that shifting from a passive

to an active approach necessitates additional support for educators and is not a straightforward task. Additionally, the transition from offline to online PD programs has proven challenging. This difficulty arises because such programs often do not address changes in instructional practices. For example, research by Alzahrani et al. (2020) pointed out that online PD courses lack the essential core features of effective PD as proposed by Desimone (2009).

Conversely, the challenges are not solely attributable to PD programs but are intricately linked to the issues confronting teachers. These challenges encompass both impersonal and personal dimensions for educators. A significant workload and excessive teaching responsibilities lead to diminished motivation (Phothongsunan, 2018), which hampers their ability to effectively engage in self-development activities. Despite their awareness of incorporating self-development activities in their EFL classes, this awareness is identified as an impediment to the PD process (Irgatouglu, 2021). EFL educators also encounter difficulties in implementing novel teaching skills and approaches based on student-centred methodologies such as task-based learning, project-based teaching and the flipped classroom model, and experience pressure to address the linguistic needs of students in specific disciplines. Furthermore, they confront institutional challenges related to their professional development (Phuaphaiboon, 2019).

A recent case study by Zhang et al. (2022) elucidated an additional dimension of PD challenges. It presented the case of Wang (subject), who experiences a conflict between his current developmental state and the ideal developmental state. This conflict is evidenced through the interplay between emotion and intelligence, on one hand, and the social environment on the other, which collectively unify his past, present, and envisioned ideal future. Such identity development critically influences the PD process. Additionally, the internal politics embedded within some universities, professional associations, and governmental structures pose barriers to educators' access to educational development (Phothongsunan, 2018; Roemer, 2021). Nonetheless, EFL educators appear to heavily depend on their institutions for TPD.

*Research question 2: Factors Affecting EFL Teachers Joining PD Programs and EFL Teachers' Efforts in Improving Their Professional Development*

According to the literature review conducted, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) educators within higher education sectors have undertaken various initiatives to enhance their professional competencies through Professional Development (PD) programs. These initiatives are influenced by a multitude of factors. Predominantly, the literature indicates that the determination of EFL educators to deliver high-quality instruction and achieve expertise in their respective domains encourages them to explore diverse avenues to engage in PD. For example, Yang et al. (2021) observed that numerous teachers are driven by their discontent with the conventional, monotonous routines of traditional, teacher-cantered pedagogy, alongside their aspiration to excel as expert educators, which propels them towards self-improvement. Consequently, Yang et al. (2021) further recommended the reinforcement of this enthusiasm through robust teacher development programs, such as offering visiting scholarships, technological

advancements, and fostering enhanced teacher autonomy alongside equitable performance appraisal systems.

Moreover, the impetus for most educators to advance their professionalism can also be incited by the exigencies associated with their teaching careers. As previously documented by Shen and Ba (2019), educators frequently perceive a deficiency in advanced pedagogical strategies and consequently endure substantial workloads. The imperative for innovative teaching, as demanded by students, compels them to pursue PD or Continuing Professional Development (CPD). Nevertheless, the implementation of new Western-based pedagogical strategies within PD encounters significant challenges in aligning with local contexts (Bao & Pham, 2022), which evidently presents obstacles for educators striving to attain optimal instructional quality.

Another intriguing but rational factor, such as career growth and having a good salary, higher education EFL teachers were motivated to obtain a higher degree in their field as part of the professional development journey (Phothongsunan, 2018). On the contrary, a study from Celik et al. (2013) revealed that despite teachers considering professional development to be essential, they generally did not view the offered career growth prospects to be applicable to their teaching practice.

Additionally, certain internal factors can serve as variables impacting teacher professional development. Rostami et al. (2020) asserted that the integration of internal components, such as self-esteem and self-concept, along with external elements like social position and superior identity, influences teacher professional formation and willingness. Celik et al. (2013) is recognized as a significant factor in professional development. Moreover, a recent study by Bao and Feng (2022) indicated that elements of internal conflict, namely the practised self and the ideal self, along with institutional pressure stemming from the *publish or perish* culture and diminished self-esteem due to low research achievement, encouraged teachers to engage with the professional development program and adapt to the new context.

*Research question 3: Impacts of Professional Development Programs on Teachers*

A review of several findings has indicated that professional development (PD) programs have a beneficial impact on teacher development. Shukri (2014) and Sibahi (2015) both posited that reflective teaching is crucial for enhancing teacher professional development. The reflective process is considered to encourage educators to excel in their teaching roles, elevate educational standards, and foster creativity in teaching (Shukri, 2014; Sibahi, 2015). Moreover, during the reflective process, the incorporation of mentoring and peer feedback can lead to successful professional development. It facilitates the attainment of enduring results in professional growth (Yurtseven & Altun, 2018; Rasskazova et al., 2017). In general, since PD is systematically designed to enhance teacher professionalism, research by Ahmad et al. (2018) demonstrated that teachers' comprehension of the teaching context has been significantly expanded as a result of engaging in PD programs. Specifically, Nguyen (2019) asserted that the involvement of teachers of English as a foreign language in PD initiatives facilitates changes in perceptions across various aspects of their careers, as evidenced by a deeper understanding of their needs and the evolution of their professional identity. Nguyen

also noted that the mindset of EFL teachers evolved, with PD programs exerting a positive influence on their daily teaching practices at every stage of their professional journey. Among the most favourable impacts of PD on EFL teachers is their enhanced ability to tailor their instructional methods to meet learner needs and to foster a more authentic teaching and learning environment (Phuaphaiboon, 2019).

Various forms of PD or Online Professional Development (OPD) have exerted a positive impact on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers. The study conducted by Alzahrani & Althafiqi (2020) demonstrated that OPD significantly enhances meaningful and constructive communication among EFL teachers concerning the exchange of knowledge and experiences, thereby encouraging greater awareness, enhanced knowledge, and improved pedagogical skills. In a similar vein, Sadeghi and Navaie (2021) indicated that OPD can contribute to the career development of the majority of teachers, although a minority of educators perceived this program as ineffective. The lesson study approach is also recognized as a PD program that can augment teachers' practical knowledge through continuous reflection on their classroom practices (Bayram & Canaran, 2020). Furthermore, Zhiyong et al. (2020) noted that teachers' understanding, self-reflection, and pedagogical practice stand out as promising factors influencing the implementation of PD programs.

**DISCUSSION**

This literature review examines the professional development (PD) of EFL teachers, focusing on key challenges, contributing factors, and the broader impacts of PD programs. The findings highlight that PD is deeply intertwined with internal and external variables, both of which shape teachers' engagement with professional growth opportunities. These findings align well with Desimone's (2009) Core Conceptual Framework for studying the effect of professional development on teachers and students, which identifies five key features of effective PD: Content focus, Active learning, Coherence with school goals, Duration and Collective participation. Beliefs, motivation, and identity have been recognized as internal variables impacting teachers' PD, while external elements like institutional support, policy, and resources influence the results of PD.

EFL educators in higher education institutions navigate complex professional landscapes marked by demanding workloads, end-of-term evaluations, certification requirements, career advancement pressures, and research expectations. These obligations often hinder their ability to engage in continuous professional development (Phothongsunan, 2018; Shen & Ba, 2019; Bao & Feng, 2022). The results further confirm that excessive teaching responsibilities diminish motivation and restrict self-development efforts (Irgatouglu, 2021). Additionally, institutional politics and hierarchical structures within universities create barriers to PD access, exacerbating disparities in professional growth opportunities (Phothongsunan, 2018; Roemer, 2021).

The literature suggests that EFL teachers experience an evolving identity formation process shaped by emotional and psychological factors (Green & Pappa, 2021; Wu, 2022). Self-concept, self-esteem, willingness, and motivation significantly influence educators' perceptions of PD. Wang's professional development journey (Zhang et al.,

2022) illustrates how internal conflicts between one's current state and ideal professional aspirations shape engagement with PD. Similarly, teachers' motivations, whether driven by professional expertise, career progression, or financial incentives—impact their commitment to PD participation (Phothongsunan, 2018). The review underscores that PD is not merely a set of training sessions but a dynamic process that fosters educators' identity construction.

PD programs cannot rely solely on self-driven initiatives; they require structural support from universities, professional organizations, and government agencies. Institutional backing through scholarships, technological resources, mentorship programs, and equitable evaluation systems plays a pivotal role in sustaining effective PD (Yang et al., 2021). Findings further indicate that EFL educators rely heavily on their universities for professional growth, underscoring the necessity of structured support systems (Phothongsunan, 2018). However, limited time, financial constraints, and insufficient backing from institutions remain significant obstacles to PD engagement (Ha, 2013). Addressing these concerns demands collaborative efforts among universities, policymakers, and professional associations (Roemer, 2021).

The study confirms that PD fosters meaningful improvements in instructional strategies and student learning experiences (Shukri, 2014; Sibahi, 2015). However, current research shows that the original design of PD concepts often changes because of mismatches with the specific context (Marshall & Horn, 2025). Moreover, anxiety and other negative emotions can hinder adaptive teaching, even when PD is accessible. School climate and emotional support are crucial elements often overlooked in PD planning (Kouhsari et al. (2024). Reflective teaching and peer collaboration have proven essential in refining pedagogical practices (Yurtseven & Altun, 2018; Rasskazova et al., 2017). Moreover, engagement in PD broadens educators' understanding of their teaching contexts, facilitating informed decision-making and adaptive classroom strategies (Ahmad et al., 2018). Nguyen (2019) further emphasizes the transformative effect of PD, illustrating how teachers' evolving perspectives influence their instructional approaches at various career stages. However, in numerous settings, conventional teaching approaches, such as lectures, continue to prevail, and professional development alone has a constrained impact on promoting student-centered methodologies without overarching systemic transformation (Zhang et al. (2025). From these studies, it is understood that reflection and collaboration are indeed valuable for PD; however, PD success depends heavily on contextual alignment, emotional climate, and institutional support.

PD programs, including online professional development (OPD), have also contributed positively to teacher collaboration, knowledge-sharing, and instructional refinement (Alzahrani & Althafiqi, 2020; Sadeghi & Navaie, 2021). However, some educators report challenges with integrating Western-based teaching methodologies into their local contexts (Shen & Ba, 2019). These findings highlight the need for contextualized PD initiatives that accommodate diverse educational environments while maintaining pedagogical effectiveness.

## LIMITATION

The search process for literature is considered complex and systematic. However, there are still some criteria, such as keywords used for searching, the database is not fully organized and narrow. The used of Boolean operator is not fully addressed; the researchers didn't focus of option such as the use of 'OR'. The use of well-structured Boolean operators will yield better articles found. Moreover, several trials in searching gave no result with the keywords used until it was mixed and modified with some terms that are considered relevant to the topic. The research questions used to guide this literature review seem perplexing; the questions should be narrowed down to find the specific information about the topic. The next search can be performed on a well-organized database with a clear but specific criterion. Moreover, the qualitative analysis presented in this review requires further elaboration. While MAXQDA aids in categorizing the codes, the themes should not be restricted solely to the research questions. This implies that themes can extend beyond the specified research questions.

## CONCLUSION

The review of the professional development of EFL teachers in higher education uncovers significant insights regarding the challenges in the PD process, PD programs, the efforts by EFL teachers to enhance their professionalism, and the factors influencing these initiatives, along with certain PD components involving EFL teachers. Research on EFL Teachers' PD in universities primarily addresses the PD programs in which they engaged, and the benefits derived from these programs in terms of their teaching practice and knowledge acquisition. Other studies highlight the challenges faced due to external factors, such as the continuity of programs and the practical application of acquired knowledge. Some novice EFL teachers encountered difficulties with the practical context and demands of their roles, as well as with their self-perception. The pursuit of suitable PD programs prompted the need for professional and career progression.

Upon analyzing the 28 reviews, it becomes evident that there is a lack of research addressing the emotional state of EFL teachers and their personal identity as it relates to professional development. This encompasses personal goals and self-management within the context of their professional development journey. Additionally, the literature review indicates an absence of studies focusing specifically on the professional development of EFL teachers in higher education with respect to gender issues. This includes examining gender perspectives on professional development and identity, exploring the differing roles and priorities of men and women in relation to professional development, and incorporating variables such as social and cultural perspectives on gender in relation to professionalism. Moreover, future research could beneficially explore the collaboration between stakeholders and higher education institutions in facilitating professional development programs, evaluating their effectiveness, and determining the extent to which they assist teachers of English as a foreign language in achieving professionalism.

**DISCLOSURE STATEMENT**

We applied the MAXQDA qualitative tools in organizing the codes. We also used Writefull.AI in checking the language clarity.

**REFERENCES**

Ahmad, H., Latada, F., Wahab, M. N., Shah, S. R., & Khan, K. (2018). Shaping professional identity through professional development: A retrospective study of TESOL professionals. *International Journal of English Linguistics*, *8*(6), 37-51. https://doi.org/10.5539/ijel.v8n6p37

Alhassan, A. (2021). Challenges and professional development needs of EMI lecturers in Omani higher education. *SAGE Open*, *11*(4), 21582440211061527. https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440211061527

Alzahrani, M. A., & Nor, F. M. (2021). Professional development and EFL teachers 'practices in activating learners' acquisition of 21st century skills. *Problems of Education in the 21st Century*, 80, 652-678. http://dx.doi.org/10.33225/pec/22.80.652

Alzahrani, F. Y., & Althaqafi, A. S. (2020). EFL Teachers' Perceptions of the Effectiveness of Online Professional Development in Higher Education in Saudi Arabia. *Higher Education Studies*, *10*(1), 121-131. https://doi.org/10.5539/hes.v10n1p121

Bao, J., & Feng, D. W. (2022). "Doing research is not beyond my reach": The reconstruction of College English teachers' professional identities through a domestic visiting program. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *112*, 103648. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2022.103648

Bao, D., & Pham, T. (Eds.). (2021). *Transforming pedagogies through engagement with learners, teachers and communities* (Vol. 57). Springer Nature. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-0057-9

Bayram, İ., & Bıkmaz, F. (2021). Implications of lesson study for tertiary-level EFL teachers' professional development: a case study from Turkey. *Sage Open*, *11*(2),21582440211023771.http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/21582440211023771

Bayram, I., & Canaran, Ö. (2020). Lesson study in action: A multiple case study of EFL teachers. *Bartın University Journal of Faculty of Education*, *9*(3), 666-679. https://dergipark.org.tr/en/pub/buefad/issue/57134/730780

Boonmoh, A., Jumpakate, T., Saengmanee, S., & Rungkaew, T. (2022). Integration of Technology during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Experience, Challenges and Needs of Thai EFL Teachers. *REFLections*, *29*(2), 251-277. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1359371

Burroughs, N., Kampfen, F., Nilsen, T., & Strietholt, R. (2019). A review of the literature on teacher effectiveness and student outcomes. In T. Nilsen & J. E. Gustafsson (Eds.), *Teaching for excellence and equity: Investigating the impact of teacher quality on student outcomes* (Vol. 6, pp. 5–55). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-16151-4_2

Çelik, S., Bayraktar-Çepni, S., & İlyas, H. (2013). The need for ongoing professional development: Perspectives of Turkish university-level EFL instructors. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, *70*, 1860-1871. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2013.01.264

Czerniawski, G., Guberman, A., & MacPhail, A. (2017). The professional developmental needs of higher education-based teacher educators: an international comparative needs analysis. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, *40*(1), 127-140. https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2016.1246528

Darling-Hammond, L., Hyler, M. E., & Gardner, M. (2017). Effective teacher professional development. https://doi.org/10.54300/122.311

Desimone, L. M. (2009). Improving impact studies of teachers' professional development: Toward better conceptualizations and measures. *Educational researcher*, *38*(3), 181-199. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X08331140

Desimone, L. M., Porter, A. C., Garet, M. S., Yoon, K. S., & Birman, B. F. (2002). Effects of Professional Development on Teachers' Instruction: Results from a Three-year Longitudinal Study. Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 24(2), 81–112. https://doi.org/10.3102/01623737024002081

Green, C., & Pappa, S. (2021). EFL teacher education in Finland: Manifestations of professional agency in teacher educators' work. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, *65*(4), 552-568. https://doi.org/10.1080/00313831.2020.1739128

Ha, T. C. (2023). *Community of practice professional development: A study of tertiary EFL teachers in North-Eastern Vietnam* (Doctoral dissertation, La Trobe). https://doi.org/10.26181/21852711.v1

Irgatoğlu, A. & Peker, B. G. (2021). EFL instructors' attitudes towards professional selfdevelopment. *International Journal of Contemporary Educational Research*, 8(2), 172-191. https://doi.org/10.33200/ijcer.894375

Kennedy, M. M. (2016). How does professional development improve teaching?. *Review of educational research*, *86*(4), 945-980. https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654315626800

Kouhsari, M., Huang, X., Wang, C., & Lee, J. C. (2024). The association between school climate, teacher emotions, and adaptive instruction. *Frontiers in Education*, *9*, 1447440. https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2024.1447440

Lame, G. (2019). *Systematic Literature Reviews: An Introduction*. Cambridge University Press (CUP). https://doi.org/10.17863/CAM.38788

Marshall, S. A., & Horn, I. S. (2025). Teachers as agentic synthesizers: Recontextualizing personally meaningful practices from professional development. *Journal of the Learning Sciences*, 1–39. https://doi.org/10.1080/10508406.2025.2468230

Meng, J., & Tajaroensuk, S. (2013). An investigation of tertiary EFL teachers' problems in their in-service professional development. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, *4*(6), 1356. https://doi.org/10.4304/jltr.4.6.1356-1364

Moher D, Liberati A, Tetzlaff J, Altman DG, The PRISMA Group (2009) Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses: The PRISMA Statement. *PLoS Med,* 6(7): e1000097. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1000097

Nguyen, T. T. T. (2019). Professional development: Vietnamese English-as-a-foreign-language teacher educators' experiences and perceptions. (Doctoral dissertation, New castle). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-9761-5

OECD. Publishing, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development Staff, & Centre for Educational Research and Innovation. (2005). *Education at a Glance 2005: OECD Indicators*. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. https://doi.org/10.1787/eag-2005-en

Phillips, V., & Barker, E. (2021). Systematic reviews: Structure, form and content. *Journal of Perioperative Practice*. https://doi.org/10.1177/1750458921994693

Phothongsunan, S. (2018). EFL university teachers' professional development in the Thai context. *Arab World English Journal (AWEJ) Volume*, *9*. https://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3201959

Phuaphaiboon, N. (2019). *An Investigation of Thai Tertiary EFL Teacher Experience of Formal and Informal Professional Development* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Newcastle, Australia).
https://novaprdlb.newcastle.edu.au/vital/access/%20/manager/Repository?view=null&f0=sm_identifier%3A%22http%3A%2F%2Fhdl.handle.net%2F1959.13%2F1414752%22&sort=sort_ss_sm_creator+asc

Ping, C., Schellings, G., & Beijaard, D. (2018). Teacher educators' professional learning: A literature review. *Teaching and teacher education*, *75*, 93-104. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2018.06.003

Popova, A., Evans, D. K., Breeding, M. E., & Arancibia, V. (2022). Teacher professional development around the world: The gap between evidence and practice. *The World Bank Research Observer*, *37*(1), 107-136. https://doi.org/10.1093/wbro/lkab006

Randles, R., & Finnegan, A. (2023). Guidelines for writing a systematic review. *Nurse Education Today*, *125*, 105803. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nedt.2023.105803

Rasskazova, T., Guzikova, M., & Green, A. (2017). English language teacher development in a Russian university: Context, problems and implications. *Ampersand*, *4*, 1-9. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amper.2017.01.001

Roemer, A. E. (2021). Professional development of EFL teachers in Tanzania: Ubinafsi or ujamaa?. *Tesol Journal*, *12*(3), e594. https://doi.org/10.1002/tesj.594

Rostami, F., Yousefi, M.H. & Amini, D. Gaining favorable identities of Iranian EFL teachers: a single case study of transition from elementary schools to universities. *Asian. J. Second. Foreign. Lang. Educ.* 5, 8 (2020). https://doi.org/10.1186/s40862-020-00086-y

Saberi, L., & Sahragard, R. (2019). Designing and Validating Teachers' Professional Development Scale: Iranian EFL Contexts in Focus. *International Journal of Instruction*, 12(1), 1609- 1626. https://doi.org/10.29333/iji.2019.121102a

Sadeghi, K., & Ashegh Navaie, L. (2021). Iranian EFL teachers' experiences with online professional development: Perceptions and preferences. *Iranian Journal of Language Teaching Research*, *9*(3 (Special Issue)), 9-23. https://doi.org/10.30466/ijltr.2021.121073

Shen, B., & Bai, B. (2019). Facilitating university teachers' continuing professional development through peer-assisted research and implementation teamwork in China. *Journal of Education for Teaching*, *45*(4), 476-480. https://doi.org/10.1080/02607476.2019.1639265

Shukri, N. (2014). Female teachers' perception of reflective teaching as a teacher development tool in the Saudi context. *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, *5*(5), 192-201. http://journals.aiac.org.au/index.php/alls/article/view/521

Sibahi, R. (2016). Exploring reflective practice among college EFL teachers in Saudi Arabia. *Arab World English Journal (AWEJ) Vol*, *6*. https://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2834402

Sun, Y., & Ahmad, N. J. (2025). Exploring in-service English teachers' reflective practice for professional development in Chinese higher education. *International Journal of Instruction*, *18*(4), 691-712.

Tóth, Á. N., & Szivák, J. (2022). Theoretical Framework Model (TFM) for Examining the Professional Development of Teachers. *International Journal of Instruction*, *15*(3), 733-750. https://doi.org/10.29333/iji.2022.15340a

Vonk, H. (1991). Some trends in the development of curricula for the professional preparation of primary and secondary school teachers in Europe: A comparative study. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, *39*(2), 117-137. https://doi.org/10.1080/00071005.1991.9973879

Wu, X. (2022). A Longitudinal Study of EFL Teacher Agency and Sustainable Identity Development: A Positioning Theory Perspective. *Sustainability*, *15*(1), 48. https://doi.org/10.3390/su15010048

Yang, S., Shu, D., & Yin, H. (2021). 'Frustration drives me to grow': Unraveling EFL teachers' emotional trajectory interacting with identity development. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *105*, 103420. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2021.103420

Yurtseven, N., & Altun, S. (2018). The role of self-reflection and peer review in curriculum-focused professional development for teachers. *Hacettepe Universitesi*

*Egitim Fakultesi Dergisi-Hacettepe University Journal of Education*, *33*(1). http://doi.org/10.16986/huje.2017030461

Zhang, Y., Guo, W., Tara, A. N., Cao, X., Wu, H., & Shi, H. (2025). The effects of different instructional strategies on the college students' critical thinking learning experience and neural correlates using functional near-infrared spectroscopy. *Education and Information Technologies*, 1-28. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11165-025-10252-2

Zhang, Y., Lantolf, J. P., & Meng, Y. (2022). The emotion~ intellect dialectic in an EFL teacher's development of a research identity: A sociocultural perspective. *System*, *111*, 102954. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2022.102954

Zhiyong, S., Muthukrishnan, P., & Sidhu, G. K. (2020). College English language teaching reform and key factors determining EFL teachers' professional development. *European Journal of Educational Research*, 9(4), 1393-1404. https://doi.org/10.12973/eu-jer.9.4.1393