
ESP TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT DURING THE TIME OF CRISIS: A BLESSING IN DISGUISE

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Abstract Teacher professional development is considered vital to the continuation of teaching improvement so that students' learning outcomes can be optimally achieved. The Covid-19 pandemic that struck the world had tremendously changed not only the teaching and learning process but also increased the opportunities for teacher professional development. Webinars, virtual conferences, and workshops are flourishing so teachers can easily access them with little effort. Despite the joy that the pandemic had brought toward teacher professional development, investigating to what extent the professional development programs have enhanced teachers' development was essential. Hence, this study explored to what extent the professional development activities increased areas of professional development according to Richards & Farrel (2005) i.e., subject-matter knowledge, pedagogical expertise, self-awareness, understanding of learners, understanding of curriculum and materials, and career advancement during the time of crisis. Data were gathered through interviews with six ESP teachers in Yogyakarta higher education institutions. The findings implied the need of teachers' self-evaluation on their professional development activities, especially areas of professional development that were still lacking and needed to be enhanced.

Keywords: *teacher professional development, ESP, time of crisis*

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INTRODUCTION

It was evident that the crisis during Covid-19 had tremendously affected all aspects of life and as Daniel (2020) asserted, brought challenges in education. It challenged teachers to be an agent for the success of teaching and learning process. Teachers were supposed to meet current and evolving expectations (Margolis et al., 2017). Thus, teacher professional development was considered vital to the continuation of teaching improvement so that students' learning outcomes can be optimally achieved. The pandemic of Covid-19 highlighted the importance of investing time, money, and other capital in ongoing

professional development (Alexandrou, 2020). Luckily, there has been an increase in opportunities for teacher professional development since the time of crisis. Webinars, virtual conferences, and workshops are flourishing so teachers can easily access them with little effort. By only clicking on a Zoom meeting link, for example, teachers can easily be connected to a professional development program and gain knowledge from world-class experts and practitioners in a diverse area of teaching. Sometimes they are required to fill out a registration form to show a commitment to joining the program. Most online programs are free of charge, although some charge very affordable payments. This surely benefits ESP teachers that have been reputed for their lack of professional development opportunities (Ghafournia & Sabet, 2014; T. Zhang, 2017).

Despite the joy that the pandemic had brought i.e., a wide array of opportunities for easy-to-access teacher professional development programs, investigating to what extent they have enhanced teachers' development was essential. This is because not all professional development programs offered online always comply with teachers' actual needs in their context. Hence, this study was set out to look into how online professional development programs that some ESP teachers had joined during the time of crisis (during Covid-19 pandemic) enhanced their subject-matter knowledge, pedagogical expertise, self-awareness, understanding of learners, understanding of curriculum, and materials, and career advancement (Richards & Farrell, 2005).

LITERATURE REVIEW

ESP teachers' professional development

Despite the importance of teacher professional development, studies have largely pinpointed the lack of professional development programs among ESP teachers. It is indicated by the lack of ESP training (Alsharif & Shukri, 2018; Pei & Milner, 2016; Stojkovic, 2019). The inadequate professional development for ESP teachers contributes to their insufficient competence to teach English in a certain specialized area. The inadequate knowledge and skills of ESP teaching can be seen from their poor teaching performance (Poedjiastutie, 2017). Commonly, ESP teachers are general English teachers who are less prepared yet 'forced' to teach ESP which requires a certain methodology. The need for continuing professional development becomes more critical since the disciplines that ESP teachers deal with continue to develop, keeping up with the market demand and trend. Thus, they must stay updated with the latest development in the fields. It has also been found that what is needed most for ESP teachers' professional development is the teaching of ESP (Bayram & Canaran, 2020).

Professional development during the time of crisis

Before the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, teacher professional development was usually done by attending onsite workshops, training, conference, focus group discussions, etc. Fortunately, when the worldwide pandemic started to strike in early 2020, the fast development of technology is something to be grateful for as it immensely facilitates ESP teachers' professional development. Even, they get more abundant opportunities to join many professional development programs that were not as easily

accessed as before. Learning opportunities become crucial for the development of teachers (König et al., 2020).

Crucial elements in ESP teachers' professional development

Subject-matter knowledge

One purpose of attending professional development programs is to increase subject-matter knowledge. It constitutes a TESOL's disciplinary foundation (Richards & Farrell, 2005). For ESP teachers, subject-matter knowledge of specific content is imperative to possess (Adi & Khotimah, 2018; Li, Khe Liew & Pey, 2014; Psonder et al., 2016). It is because the language that is taught must be closely related to students' specific fields. Topics and language functions must be relevant and useful for students' areas of study.

Pedagogical expertise

Being an ESP teacher also requires considerable pedagogical nature (Luo & Garner, 2017) because teaching ESP needs an appropriate methodology that is suitable to learners' needs (Çelik, 2018). Pedagogical expertise refers to mastery in new teaching areas, expanding one's teaching specializations, and improving one's capacity to teach students with various competencies and backgrounds (Richards & Farrell, 2005).

Self-awareness

Pursuing professional development can also increase one's self-awareness. It means teachers can measure how knowledgeable they are, what values and principles they are attached to, and they can identify their strengths and weaknesses (Richards & Farrell, 2005). Self-awareness leads to teachers' enhancement of their ability with other teachers (Pei & Milner, 2016).

Understanding learners

Professional development that ESP teachers undergo is supposed to be able to increase their understanding of learners. Richards & Farrell (2005) highlighted that understanding learners includes recognizing their learning styles and problems, as well as providing materials that can be easily accessed. Antic (2017) pinpointed that understanding the educational needs of learners indicates a commitment in the teaching and learning process.

Understanding curriculum and materials

As curriculum and materials are central in teaching, understanding them can be attained through professional development programs. Teachers should not only understand the concepts of the employed curriculum and materials but also be able to develop them (Richards & Farrell, 2005).

Career and personal advancement

Another level of professional development is to seek career and personal advancement. Knowledge and expertise that support an increase in career can be gained through professional development (Richards & Farrell, 2005). Pursuing various professional development contents is also essential when teachers are at a higher level of their teaching career (Wichadee, 2012). Therefore, it can be said that professional development is not only a requirement to advance teachers' career, but also needed when teachers' career is progressing.

Review of previous studies

Numerous researchers have reported their studies on online professional development. Wesely (2013) investigated teacher professional development of world language teachers through Twitter. The study reveals that an online community can serve as professional development and facilitates teacher learning. However, it does not investigate how that particular professional development contributes to teaching practice. Tuzlukova & Hall (2017) conducted a study to find out how virtual professional development enhanced teaching practice through a two-day workshop using Moodle. Although the results indicate that teachers were enthusiastic about joining the online workshops, the participants who attended the first day and second day workshops were different. Thus, the claimed findings of the study seem too ambitious.

A study undertaken by Marín et al. (2018) was aimed at describing an online collaborative design for the professional development of twenty-five teachers from different universities in Spain. They participated in a 15-hours online course designed to learn how to use a platform that emphasized collaborative learning design. Although the findings of the study can improve teacher professional development, the 15-hours online course may only increase teachers' knowledge on the use of an ICT-based learning platform. Thus, the concluded findings are still weak.

Another study conducted by Hardin & Koppenhaver (2016) highlighted a flipped professional development model for teachers which integrates face-to-face training and online instruction. The participants had to complete a 10-hours course that was carried out into two modes: online and onsite. Schoology was used as a medium to conduct the online course. This kind of professional development is cost-effective and can accommodate many best practice elements. However, the study lacked reliability and validity as the method was vague. Moreover, the researchers were unable to present convincing data that support the superiority of the flipped professional development.

The studies discussed above show that there are still inadequate studies that investigate to what extent online professional development programs bring benefit to ESP teachers in many elements, i.e. subject-matter knowledge, pedagogical expertise, self-awareness, understanding of learners, understanding of curriculum, and materials, and career advancement. Hence, it is necessary to conduct a study that scrutinizes those domains especially during the present situation in which teaching and learning take place online.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative design (Cresswell, 2014) to investigate how online professional development programs that some ESP teachers in Yogyakarta Province had joined enhance their professional development.

Participants

Six ESP teachers from six different universities in Yogyakarta Province were involved in this study. Each teacher teaches in a different department and has been teaching ESP for various lengths of year. The following table describes the participants' data:

Table 1. Participants' data

Teacher	University/college	Department	Teaching experience
Teacher 1	Private	Nursing	2 years
Teacher 2	State	Nautica	6 years
Teacher 3	Private	Air Transport Management	3 years
Teacher 4	Private	Mining Engineering	2 years
Teacher 5	Private	Tour and Travel Business	7 years
Teacher 6	Private	Informatics Engineering	5 years

Research instrument

To collect the qualitative data through interviews, the instrument of this study is the researcher herself as a human instrument. A semi-structured interview guideline was primarily developed based on the grand theory of professional development for language teachers (Richards & Farrell, 2005). The interview guide consists of the following question prompts:

Table 2. Interview guide

Themes	The main question prompts
Subject-matter knowledge	To what extent did the online PD programs that you participated in increase your subject matter knowledge?
Pedagogical expertise	To what extent did the online PD programs that you participated in enhance your pedagogical expertise?
Self-awareness	To what extent did the online PD programs that you participated in raise your self-awareness about your values, principle, strengths, and weaknesses?
Understanding of learners	To what extent did the online PD programs that you participated in improve your understanding about learners' learning styles, problems, and difficulties?
Understanding of materials and curriculum	To what extent did the online PD programs that you participated in deepen your understanding on curriculum and development of materials?
Career advancement	To what extent did the online PD programs that you participated in widen your knowledge and expertise useful for your personal and career advancement?

Data collection and analysis

The data collected through interviews were used to obtain ESP teachers' perceived professional development programs that they attended during the COVID-19 pandemic. The interview guidelines mainly were used to collect the data although other related questions were also developed. Based on the agreement and convenience between the participants and the researcher, the interviews were conducted through WhatsApp.

Questions were sent to the participants' WhatsApp messaging service, then their answers were audio-recorded and sent through a voice note facility. To minimize misunderstanding, the interviews were carried out in Bahasa Indonesia (the native language of the participants).

After data were collected, they were transcribed. Each transcribed interview was read and learned to discover some underlying phenomena that are in line with certain themes. The themes were then coded, and sub-themes were classified under suitable themes. Then, the data were interpreted. As it is important to ascertain the validity of the interpreted data, debriefing was conducted. The participants were requested to read the interpreted data to anticipate misinterpretation. The procedure of data collection and analysis is shown in the chart as follows:

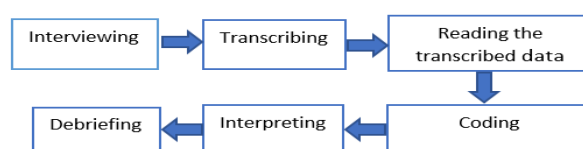


Figure 1. The procedure of data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2014)

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study presents the crucial findings related to how much online professional development programs that some ESP teachers attended during the COVID-19 pandemic contribute to the improvement of their subject-matter knowledge, pedagogical expertise, self-awareness, understanding of learners, understanding of materials and curriculum, and their personal and career advancement.

Enhancing knowledge on teaching ESP

The first element in the ESP teachers' professional development deals with how much the online professional development programs that they participated in during the pandemic increase their subject-matter knowledge on ESP of their contexts.

All respondents claimed that they got new insights on their subject matter after attending some professional development programs online. For example, teacher 5 admitted that she earned knowledge about current issues in language teaching and learning.

"I got a lot of insights particularly dealing with the issues of language teaching in the 21st century." (Teacher 5)

The statement of Teacher 5 illustrates that joining professional development programs keeps her updated with the latest issues in language teaching.

Online professional development programs also expand teachers' knowledge on ESP that they deal with. For example, Teacher 1 declared that the professional development programs she attended during the pandemic have boosted her knowledge in teaching ESP.

"Now I understand that teaching ESP needs more specific knowledge on the students' field." (Teacher 1)

This finding – "Now I understand..." - raises intriguing questions regarding Teacher 1's practice in ESP teaching and her knowledge about the subject matter related to her students' field. It could be conceivably speculated that she had not been equipped with adequate knowledge or training on her students' particular language purposes. If this is the case, then this finding accords with some earlier studies (Hoa & Mai, 2016; Yoestara, 2017).

Similarly, teacher 3 affirmed that she got enlightenment in teaching ESP of her field after participating in a webinar.

".. so when I joined a webinar I got enlightenment especially related to teaching English for aviation. It helps me when I got stuck." (Teacher 3)

These findings are in line with that of (Sharma, 2021) which proclaims that teachers claimed to have acquired beneficial knowledge after joining online professional development programs during COVID-19. From the findings above it can be interpreted that online professional development programs during the pandemic have – to some extent – enhanced their subject-matter knowledge from not knowing to know, from knowing little to more, and from being stuck to being enlightened. This raises the possibility that ESP teachers still encounter unresolved problems when teaching their ESP classes.

Improving pedagogical knowledge, but not expertise

Although none of the teachers explicitly claimed that the professional development programs they joined during the pandemic have instantly turned them to be overnight experts in teaching ESP, all asserted that at least their pedagogical knowledge has been improved.

"Some seminars and conferences in a way give new insights on strategies for teaching general English or ESP." (Teacher 2)

"The sharing session of ESP community that I joined in has increased my teaching knowledge, especially on how to conduct online project-based learning." (Teacher 4)

"I think it's very beneficial because I'm motivated to increase my skills especially in using technology to facilitate my teaching and I also learn to operate many learning applications to support online teaching." (Teacher 1)

It is expressed by the teachers that professional development programs that have been offered during the pandemic have contributed to widening their pedagogical knowledge and skills, especially the use of educational technology in their online teaching. This finding concurs with a previous study (Ellis et al., 2020) which conceded that COVID-19 has turned the spotlight on plentiful benefits of technology to support teachers' teaching experience.

This finding suggests that in terms of pedagogy, the flourishing professional development programs have not yet increased their expertise in teaching ESP but upgraded their pedagogical knowledge and skills on teaching ESP classes using miscellaneous teaching and learning platforms.

Becoming aware of one's weaknesses in teaching

Professional development programs that thrive during the pandemic also contribute to increasing ESP teachers' awareness about their weaknesses and are a sign for improvement.

"I am aware that I need to make a lot of preparation before teaching because it is held online." (Teacher 2)

Teacher 2 affirmed that after attending professional development programs, she realized that online teaching should have taken more preparation compared to onsite teaching. It might mean that so far, she had made inadequate preparation before teaching online. Her decent confession implies that she was aware of her weakness, but most importantly she knew what should have been done. It's like a wake-up call to her.

Similarly, Teacher 3 has reflected on her teaching practice.

"As a teacher, I can reflect on my teaching. What is lacking on my teaching, for example how to employ a technique to make my teaching not monotonous" (Teacher 3)

Teacher 3 showed an intention to improve her teaching practice after attending some professional development programs. This is concurrent with the finding in Czerniawski, (2013). It indicates that professional development programs can arouse teachers' awareness about the need to improve their teaching practice. In other words, the willingness to improve rises after a professional development program induces teachers to investigate their teaching practice.

Meanwhile, Teacher 5 claimed that after joining some professional development, she realized that her perception of online learning was still shallow.

"It turns out that online learning is more sophisticated compared to what I have assumed so far." (Teacher 5)

Teacher 5's confession of how she had deficiently perceived online learning hints an awareness about her weakness. She realized that she needed to open her mind to a myriad

of learning platforms. This finding supports Mitchell & Mitchell (2005) who argue that willingness to declare one's weakness indicates a beginning process of professional growth. It can be interpreted that Teacher's 5 remark on her weakness is a positive sign that shows she is professionally developing.

Generating an understanding of learners

Some teachers declared that professional development programs that they had participated in have aroused their understanding of learners' problems, difficulties, and learning styles.

"We become more open-minded about learning styles and students' problems in learning during the pandemic. Their difficulties in learning can be used as a basis to design materials and choose a suitable learning platform." (Teacher 2)

Teacher 2 seemed to relate understanding learners' difficulties with her decision to develop materials and deliver them through a proper learning platform. This is concurrent with the finding in L. Zhang et al. (2016) which exposed teacher's empathy for students' difficulties in online learning. Understanding learners' difficulties can channel teachers to a more effective way of teaching, especially in selecting an appropriate learning platform.

Contrary to Teacher 2 who claimed to have increased her understanding of her learners, Teacher 1 put herself in her students' shoes to experience difficulties in learning by joining online professional development programs.

"I put myself as a learner, so I can understand the difficulties of joining an online class during this pandemic. So, I think teachers must facilitate and become more creative when teaching online. They must also motivate students and confirm if the chosen method can accommodate their needs." (Teacher 1)

The teacher's 2 experiences in joining online professional development programs have elicited her understanding of learners as she could pinpoint some essential factors in reaching learners beyond the classroom walls: becoming creative, motivating students, and choosing the right method. This discovery is in line with L. Zhang et al. (2016) whose finding unveiled the importance of creativity, motivation, and method in online learning. Likewise, Teacher 3 emphasized the paramount importance of keeping students motivated to learn through online mode.

"To make the students stay motivated to learn online in this pandemic becomes the biggest homework for educators, lecturers, and teachers." (Teacher 3)

Students' motivation to learn through an online mode during the pandemic is also an issue found in Fansury et al. (2020). Teacher 3's utterance above demonstrates a sense of responsibility, if not a burden, of becoming a teacher during the pandemic. In contrast to attending online professional developments which is just one click away, teaching beyond

the classroom walls takes harder effort because understanding learners' condition is no ifs, ands, but.

Diverse professional development programs that the teachers took part in have invoked their understanding of learners' problems and difficulties. This can be attained in two ways. Teachers put themselves as learners so they can experience the difficulties and problems in attending online classes, or the professional development programs discuss issues on understanding students' problems and difficulties.

Improving understanding of curriculum and materials

Regarding what extent professional development programs that the teachers joined increased their understanding of curriculum and materials, two teachers pointed out enthusiastically.

"Of course, I become to understand that online learning is a little different from offline learning. They are similar, but we need to maintain the continuity of the materials in each topic and section. So, I eventually understand the difference of curriculum in teaching online." (Teacher 5)

Teacher 5's explanation above hints that the flourishing professional development programs during the pandemic have generated her understanding of the difference between delivering the materials online and offline. It is to the extent that interconnection of topics and sections of materials should be ensured when the teaching mode is suddenly changed to be online.

"Concerning curriculum and materials, the webinars and sharing sessions that I have participated in really help me in developing lesson plans. I also get access to resources that help me to design the learning process." (Teacher 3)

That finding indicates the benefit of professional development programs that Teacher 3 had joined for teacher's actual teaching. Through webinars, she got insight on how to develop a lesson plan and design a learning process. This is parallel with the finding in Hiew & Murray (2021) which asserted that a professional development program should enable teachers to integrate their knowledge and materials used in teaching. Getting access to teaching resources is an additional benefit for Teacher 3 and she seems to be content with that as it helps her in designing her lesson. It can therefore be assumed that based on the statements of Teacher 5 and Teacher 6, materials for teaching ESP are still an issue. This finding agrees with Medrea & Rus (2012) and Adi & Khotimah (2018) that highlighted the difficulties of selecting or developing resources for ESP classes.

Towards career and personal advancement

Concerning to what extent the professional development programs that teachers joined have contributed to ESP teachers' career advancement, the participants' responses were varied.

"This professional development program is very important because we can get a certificate that recognizes our participation. It can be used to pursue our career as a lecturer such as when applying for the advancement of lecturer's position, achievement, and it can be used to measure our performance." (Teacher 2)

This finding is consistent with the findings in Liton (2013) and Tuzlukova & Hall (2017) which acknowledged teachers' extrinsic motivation in joining professional development activities. It indicates that recognition in the form of a certificate can attract teachers to join professional development activities.

"I become aware of the requirements needed for my functional position as a lecturer, for example by joining a training about how to write effectively to publish in a journal." (Teacher 4)

Jaramillo-Baquerizo et al. (2020) reported similar findings concerning professional development programs to train teachers to be able to publish their research reports in journals as this is required in increasing teachers' careers.

Unlike the above teachers who earned benefits from attending professional development programs, this pandemic has created an opportunity for Teacher 6 to be a mentor for her colleagues. As the use of online learning platforms become pervasive during the pandemic, Teacher 6 who is more technologically savvy among her colleagues was appointed to be a mentor in her campus for the employment of various online learning platforms.

"In my campus, there is an educational technology team. I gave workshops to other lecturers in using online learning platforms, I gave training on how to use online discussion features, so I think that's my advancement." (Teacher 6)

The personal advancement as asserted by Teacher 6 could mean that her institution provides a space for her to grow. Her expertise is appreciated although she teaches ESP which is commonly given less attention in the non-English department. It possibly implies that higher education institutions are now starting to give more recognition to ESP teachers, although generalizing this hint might sound too early.

CONCLUSION

The present research aimed to examine how far the thriving professional development programs during the COVID-19 pandemic have catered benefits for ESP teachers in the non-English department of tertiary education. In terms of subject-matter knowledge, this study has found that most of the teachers claimed to have gained new knowledge and insights relating to their contexts of ESP. Regarding pedagogical expertise in teaching, none of them conveyed that joining professional development programs have

turned them to be an expert in ESP teaching. However, their pedagogical knowledge has improved. Speaking of self-awareness, some teachers confessed their weaknesses in teaching i.e., inadequate teaching preparation and using monotonous teaching techniques. Concerning understanding learners, some professional development programs have made them more emphatic to learners' difficulties, more aware of learners' varied learning styles, and more mindful about teaching responsibility. As for the understanding of curriculum and materials, few teachers confessed to having gained an understanding in designing different curriculum for online classes and some access to useful teaching resources. Concerning career and personal advancement, some teachers admitted to having attended some programs to get a certificate and training on writing for publications, while one teacher interestingly conveyed that her appointment as a mentor for her colleagues is an onset for her personal advancement.

Taken together, the findings of this study suggest that in terms of improving ESP teachers' expertise, the professional development programs that are mushrooming during this pandemic have not yet been able to fulfill it. However, this pandemic has become a blessing in disguise as it opened a door to abundant opportunities for professional development to resolve the pertinent problem in ESP – the lack of ESP teachers' competence. The findings reported here shed new light on the area of professional development for ESP teachers that still needs to be enhanced by higher education institutions, conference organizers, and other stakeholders that have a concern about the professional growth competence and of ESP teachers. Unfortunately, the participants of the study involved only six ESP teachers in Yogyakarta Province, so the findings might not be able to represent the general condition in a wider context. Henceforth, further study might explore similar phenomena by involving more research participants from more diverse geographical backgrounds.

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