

TEACHER-LED PROFESSIONAL GROWTH: THE REALITY OF BOTTOM-UP TPD AMONG EFL TEACHERS IN INDONESIA

Caecilia Lucky Dewi Purnomo
Universitas Sanata Dharma
dewipurnomodewi@gmail.com

Paulus Kuswandono
Universitas Sanata Dharma
kus@usd.ac.id

Abstract: English teacher professional development in Indonesia traditionally has been more top-down and oriented towards administrative fulfilment. However, a bottom-up approach has begun gaining attention as an effective way to foster meaningful and sustainable professional growth, even though it remains underexplored in Indonesian contexts. Addressing this gap, the researchers formulate the following research questions: 1) How do Indonesian EFL teachers initiate and implement bottom-up professional development, and perceive the impact? 2) What challenges and barriers do Indonesian EFL teachers face in engaging with bottom-up professional development, and how do institutional and external factors influence their efforts? This research aims to explore teachers' strategies to initiate and implement bottom-up TPD and the impact, in conjunction with the challenges and barriers that influence their efforts, especially from institutional and external factors. The data were collected through an open-ended questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The results reveal that bottom-up TPD works through synergy between personal initiative, collaboration between teachers, technology support, and a conducive school environment, which significantly influences changes in teaching practices and teacher professional development. Simultaneously, teachers also face obstacles in the form of high workload, time constraints, and inconsistent institutional support, requiring teacher resilience as an important factor in maintaining the TPD process. Despite these challenges, bottom-up TPD among English teachers brings more positive results on their teaching practice, although the present study still lacks the balanced depth of narrating the success and failure of bottom-up TPD.

Keywords: *bottom-up TPD, Indonesian EFL teachers, teacher professional development*

INTRODUCTION

In Indonesia, teacher training and professional development (TPD) are generally top-down and led by the government. The government has control in determining the objectives, format, and implementation of TPD programs, such as the teacher certification program, which aims to improve teacher quality through professional recognition and financial incentives (Avillanova & Kuswandono, 2019; Revina et al., 2023). However, in practice, these programs often focus more on fulfilling administrative demands than on developing genuine learning, so many teachers feel that the program has not fully addressed real challenges in the field or their self-development needs as educators. Aside from that, provisions regarding the obligation for

teachers to participate in TPD are regulated in laws and several other technical regulations. Many teachers participate in TPD solely to meet regulatory demands, not because of a genuine motivation to learn, so that the space for developing creativity, reflection, and professional autonomy is limited (Rahman, 2021).

Previous studies have explored the dynamics of teacher professional development (TPD) in Indonesia and abroad, both through policy approaches and by placing teachers as subject learners. Recent studies confirm the weaknesses of TPD models that focus on administrative compliance. Although teacher participation in TPD programs is high, their effectiveness in improving teaching practices is low. This is influenced by several factors, one of which is the top-down nature of the TPD model, which does not accommodate teachers' unique needs and contexts, and the lack of program continuity. On the other hand, many teachers-especially in vocational high schools-see TPD only as an administrative demand for promotion, not as a means for meaningful self-development (Rahman, 2021; Revina et al., 2020; Widayati et al., 2021). This concern appears more complicated in rural areas, where geographical difficulties and insufficient policy support limit the existence of appropriate and sustainable TPD. As a response, several initiatives have attempted to create TPD models that are more relevant in local contexts, collaborative, and oriented to teacher empowerment, such as the initiatives done by Tanoto Foundation, which accommodated and facilitated teacher development in several remote areas in Indonesia (Sutomo & Siregar, 2022).

To respond to the ineffectiveness of top-down approaches, bottom-up TPD emerges and gains attention. It emphasizes teachers' initiatives to develop their professionalism by reflecting on real teaching experiences, aligning with the teaching needs, and growing internal motivation. A number of studies have revealed that EFL teachers in Indonesia highly value professional development that includes knowledge, pedagogical skills, and language competence. They have the tendency to choose bottom-up approaches over top-down since those approaches are more relevant to the needs of the classroom and they provide personally empowering effects (Dewi et al., 2024; Macias, 2017; Schreurs & De Laat, 2012). Conferences initiated by teacher communities and network-based learning systems are examples of bottom-up TPD that offer inclusive discussion rooms, promote authentic knowledge exchange, and increase teachers' confidence as professionals (Macias, 2017; Schreurs & De Laat, 2012). However, the teacher's involvement in self-driven TPD is still relatively low. One of the reasons is the lack of institutional support and school environment, which is not entirely conducive to TPD in professional communities (Cirocki & Farrell, 2019; Widayati et al., 2021).

Several international studies have shown that bottom-up approaches to TPD have great potential. Bottom-up TPD has been considered to strengthen the role of teachers as independent and reflective agents, as shown in the implementation of a TPD conference initiated by teachers in Armenia (Kyureghyan, 2024; Poulton, 2020; Uştuk & De Costa, 2021). In the process of educational change, teacher agency is an important issue, as it is often limited by centralized policies. However, when teachers are allowed to be involved in decision-making and curriculum development at the school level, their agency capacity increases, and more meaningful learning innovations can develop. Reflection is the key aspect of the bottom-up approach. Systematic reflection during and after teaching is considered an effective way to enhance teachers' professional awareness (Bergmark, 2020; Farrell, 2019). If this reflection is integrated into daily practice and carried out collectively, it can promote real change in the way teachers think, act, and establish professional relationships. For example, a research-based

program in Sweden showed that contextualized reflection guided by researchers can bring about significant improvements in teachers' practice and thinking.

To support teacher agency, the existence of a teacher community plays a very important role in professional development. An effective community in various forms, formal, semi-formal, and informal, can be a powerful place for reflection and professional growth, especially when supported by supportive leadership, trust between members, and respect for diversity (Cirocki & Farrell, 2019; Romero & Vasilopoulos, 2020; Vangrieken et al., 2017). A concrete example is seen in the EFL teacher learning community in China that was formed organically after training in Canada. This community became an effective medium for reflection, adaptation, and application of new knowledge in the local context. In Indonesia itself, many secondary school EFL teachers benefit more from informal or teacher-led professional development, although this model has not received adequate systematic support (Cirocki & Farrell, 2019).

Intrinsic motivation is one of the crucial aspects of successful teacher professional development. Teachers who are driven by internal motivations—such as a sense of responsibility, personal satisfaction, and a desire to build a positive and creative learning atmosphere—tend to exhibit more innovative, adaptable, and committed attitudes towards continuous self-development (Goa, 2021; Mayangsari et al., 2025; Perdana et al., 2023). Such motivation can be enhanced through an empowering CPD (Continuing Professional Development) approach, especially if it is bottom-up and in line with the real needs of teachers in the field. However, the implementation of CPD in Indonesia still encounters various structural barriers, such as overly rigid bureaucracy, inconsistent policies, and program designs that are not contextualized and aligned with teachers' experiences. In addition, CPD programs are often not equipped with adequate follow-up mechanisms and are instead generalized without regard to teachers' level of experience. To overcome these problems, it is necessary to revise the direction of education policy, especially in facing the challenges of the Industrial Revolution 4.0, by focusing on strengthening technology-based competencies and implementing a more flexible TPD model (Indira et al., 2020; Revina et al., 2020).

Given these findings, there is an urgent need to shift the focus of TPD in Indonesia from a bureaucratic approach to one that empowers teachers. Reflection-based, collaborative, intrinsic motivational, and contextually relevant approaches have been shown to have great potential in supporting authentic and sustainable teacher professional growth. However, to date, there have been limited studies that specifically reveal the reality of bottom-up TPD implementation among EFL teachers in Indonesia, including factors that support and hinder its sustainability. However, they have not sufficiently addressed institutional roles that affect how teachers carry out the TPD and the perceived impacts. Understanding these aspects is significant for evaluating the practice and processes of bottom-up TPD. Hence, this research aims to fill the gaps by uncovering the implementation, challenges, and impacts of bottom-up TPD among Indonesian EFL teachers by answering the following two research questions: 1) How do Indonesian EFL teachers initiate and implement bottom-up professional development, and perceive the impact? 2) What challenges and barriers do Indonesian EFL teachers face in engaging with bottom-up professional development, and how do institutional and external factors influence their efforts?

Bottom-Up TPD

Teacher Professional Development (TPD) is a key to improving the quality of education, but approaches to TPD vary. Traditionally, TPD often uses a top-down model where programs are developed by educational authorities or external parties, and then implemented by teachers. This type of TPD approach assumes that national standards or standardized policies can meet teacher needs. However, several studies have shown that top-down TPD often does not consider local contexts and teachers' specific needs, and hinders teachers as agents of change (Díaz-Maggioli, 2004).

As a response to the limitations, the teacher-led TPD approach initiated by teachers themselves has gained attention. Bottom-up TPD fuels teachers' initiative in identifying students' needs, developing activity designs, and reflecting on their practice (Borg, 2015). This approach is more contextual and based on the real needs in the field, allowing teachers to employ their creativity and autonomy. A study by Opfer & Pedder (2011) shows that effective TPD considers elements such as teachers' experience and intrinsic motivations, students' characteristics, and institutions' sociocultural environment to achieve this through the bottom-up model.

Furthermore, bottom-up TPD not only increases the relevance of training materials but also strengthens teachers' sense of ownership of their professionalism process. Teachers become not only recipients of policies, but active learners and innovators in their communities. Effective teacher professional development occurs in real contexts, not in formal training separate from everyday practice. Initiatives such as teacher learning communities, lesson study, and action research are concrete examples of the implementation of bottom-up TPD (Macias, 2017; Romero & Vasilopoulos, 2020). Situated Learning Theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991) supports the idea that meaningful learning occurs when teachers learn from real contexts through direct involvement in practice. At this point, teachers' learning process involves reflection while teaching (reflection-in-action) to adjust teaching in real-time and reflection after teaching (reflection-on-action) to reflect on what went well and what did not (Farrell, 2019; Schön, 1983). Teachers experience a profound change in their perspective on their teaching roles and practices as seen through the lens of Transformative Learning Theory (Mezirow, 1991). As a result, students experience increased engagement and better learning outcomes (Piaget, 1970; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001).

Thus, to empower teachers sustainably, much of the literature suggests an integration between the two approaches, but with more space for teacher initiative (bottom-up) (Lieberman & Miller, 2008). However, there are always challenges. Lack of institutional support, unsupportive school culture, and homogenous educational policies obstruct the implementation of bottom-up TPD (Cirocki & Farrell, 2019; Widayati et al., 2021). Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978) emphasizes that social and structural factors significantly influence teacher professional development.

Teacher Agency and Autonomy

Teacher agency describes the capacity of teachers to make autonomous professional decisions, direct the learning process, and overcome challenges in complex educational environments (Priestley et al., 2011). Day (2018) states that agency is at the core of true professionalism. Teachers with agency tend to be more creative, reflective, and able to withstand challenges in education. Within this framework, Resilience Theory (Gu & Day,

2007) reveals that agency plays an important role in maintaining teacher morale and commitment, especially in stressful situations or when policy changes occur. In the bottom-up TPD model, agency is a key pillar that enables teachers to initiate and sustain professional development independently. (Poulton, 2020) highlights that education systems that rely too much on top-down policies often leave little room for bottom-up TPD approaches.

This context is highly related to teacher autonomy, where teachers have the freedom to make learning decisions (Little, 1995), and is also closely related to Bottom-Up TPD. Teachers with high levels of autonomy are more likely to choose development activities that are relevant to their personal needs and classroom contexts, rather than simply following formal instructions from government or institutions.

Priestley et al. (2015), in their Teacher Agency Theory, state that there are three dimensions influencing teacher agency:

- Iterational (past experiences)
- Practical-evaluative (current conditions)
- Projective (future hopes and goals)

In practice, Organizational Learning Theory highlights that teachers who feel supported by flexible school policies and a collaborative work culture have more room to express their agency through Bottom-Up TPD context (Argyris & Schön, 1996). In contrast, a rigid organizational structure can hinder room for individual improvement and initiative (Eteläpelto et al., 2013). A sense of belonging to the teaching profession is a strong motivator for teachers to be involved in TPD led by their own initiative. Teachers need to feel that their voice and contribution are acknowledged to maintain high motivation for TPD. In a supportive work environment, teacher agency encourages teachers to improve their own practice, as well as contribute to establishing collective professional development as a school culture.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Bottom-up TPD depends on teachers' agency and contextual knowledge; therefore, the diverse experiences and settings of EFL teachers provide valuable insights into self-led professional development. Fifteen EFL teachers from various regions in Indonesia were involved in this research. They were recruited through purposive sampling (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) because they were most knowledgeable and experienced regarding the bottom-up TPD programs. Almost all of them are young teachers who teach at different levels of education. The detailed information about the participants is presented in Table 1 below.

Variable	Category	Count
Age	21 - 30	14
	31 - 40	1
Gender	Male	1
	Female	14
Education	Bachelor's degree	14
	Master's degree	1
Years of experience	< 1	2
	1 - 3	10
	4 - 7	2

Level of teaching	8 - 10	1
	Elementary school	3
	Junior high school	5
	Senior high school	6
	All levels	1

Table 1. Participant Demography

The participants filled out an informed consent form stating that they agreed to participate in the study before the study was conducted. Creswell (2014) discussed that obtaining informed consent ensures voluntary participation and protects participant identities in qualitative studies. The informed consent form informed the participants of the research purpose, data usage, and confidentiality. They were assured that their identities and data collected would remain confidential and be used solely for research purposes. The researcher also sought their consent for a potential in-depth interview as part of further data collection. They were given three options to choose from: available for further interview, possibly available but undecided, and not available. Seven teachers voluntarily expressed that they were available for interviews.

Name (Initial)	Gender	Level of Teaching	Years of Experience
Teacher C	Female	Senior high school	3
Teacher D	Female	Elementary school	3
Teacher E	Female	Junior high school	3
Teacher J	Male	Senior high school	2
Teacher L	Female	Senior high school	3
Teacher T	Female	Elementary school	<1
Teacher Y	Female	Senior high school	9

Table 2. Interviewed Teachers

This research utilized a qualitative research method (Creswell, 2014), using multiple data collections such as qualitative questionnaires and in-depth interviews to triangulate the data. The qualitative questionnaire containing 16 open-ended questions based on theoretical blueprints was designed to gather multifaceted views on bottom-up TPD among EFL teachers, concentrating on how they implement teacher-led TPD, face the challenges, and perceive the impacts. The validation of the questionnaire was not tested empirically, but justified against the construct validity from a blueprint, among others, reflective practice theory (Schön, 1983), constructivist theory (Piaget, 1970), community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991), and teacher agency (Day, 2018). In addition, in-depth interviews provided deeper data (Kvale, 1996) into teachers' personal experiences of initiating and engaging their TPD practices.

The data gathered from the questionnaire and interviews were analyzed thematically, allowing the researcher to recognize the patterns, key themes, and meaningful insights related to how EFL teachers perform their bottom-up TPD. Prior to the analysis, the interview results were transcribed into an intelligent verbatim transcription. Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used to categorize the findings into more comprehensive themes based on recurring patterns and to help understand the complexity of teachers' experiences, beliefs, and contextual

challenges. It allowed the researcher to remain flexible in accommodating emerging themes and interpretations. The responses were coded and grouped based on their similarity.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on the chart, the frequency of teacher involvement in bottom-up professional development activities shows quite significant variations. Most respondents are in the categories of "sometimes (once a month)" and "rarely (several times a year)", indicating that, despite internal motivation, participation has not occurred consistently. However, several teachers reported quite active involvement, namely "often (several times a month)" and even "very often (weekly or more often)", reflecting a high initiative in developing themselves continuously. This shows great potential if supported by the right environment and opportunities.

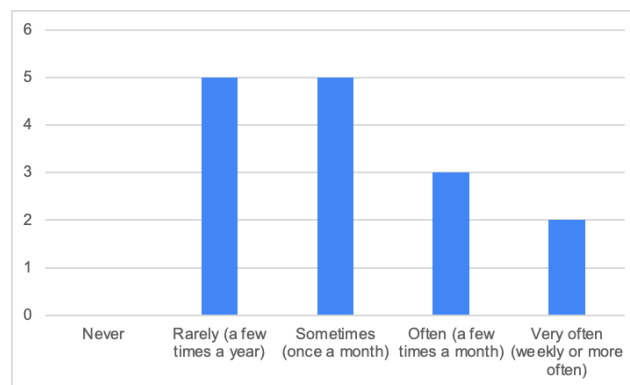


Image 1. The frequency of bottom-up TPD involvement

Based on the findings of this research, there were four main themes emerged in the analysis. Each theme highlights the experiences of the EFL teachers in initiating bottom-up TPD. From the experiences, several key findings were drawn and elaborated as follows.

No.	Theme	Description of Theme	Key Findings
1.	Transformation and implementation of teacher professional development	Teachers initiate TPD activities actively through personal initiative, collaboration, and the use of technology with institutional support.	Synergy of personal initiatives, collaboration, and institutional support

No.	Theme	Description of Theme	Key Findings
2.	The impact of bottom-up TPD on teaching practices and professional development	Bottom-up TPD leads to changes in teaching strategies, student engagement, teacher reflection, and deeper professional satisfaction.	Method changes, increased self-confidence, continuous reflection, and classroom needs-based learning.
3.	Teacher resilience and professional transformation	Teachers are able to continue to develop professionally amidst high workloads, time constraints, and minimal institutional support.	Self-management, intrinsic motivation, practice-based reflection, and strategy adaptation amidst constraints.
4.	The ambivalent role of the institution	Educational institutions have a dual role, some supporting teacher initiatives, others limiting them through structures that are less relevant to teachers' needs.	Unequal support, bottom-up and top-down collaboration, variation in collaborative cultures, and the importance of policy-initiative synergy.

Table 3. Themes and Key Findings

The findings of this research strengthen the idea that teacher professional development through bottom-up approaches has significant impacts on teaching practice and teachers' professional development, especially in the context of EFL teachers in Indonesia. The four themes—(1) transformation and implementation of teacher professional development; (2) the impact of bottom-up TPD on teaching practices and teacher professional development; (3) teacher resilience and professional transformation; and (4) the ambivalent role of institutions—emerge as the interpretative framework which is relevant to TPD dynamics.

Transformation and implementation of teacher professional development

The findings of this research show that teacher professional development is no longer dominated by top-down approaches; instead, they highlight the bottom-up approaches with the synergy between personal initiative, collaboration, and school ecosystem support. Several activities carried out by the teachers are collaboration and feedback, independent learning, sharing with colleagues, research, such as CAR, and teacher-led workshops. Teacher E, for instance, created a Question Hunt in her classroom action research (CAR) to increase student engagement through participatory methods. She explained,

"I take an example from my CAR entitled Increasing Student Participation through Gamification of Question Hunt in Role Play Activities. When the speaking assessment was in the form of role-play, the students in Class 8B did not pay attention to their

friends who were performing. I then created a Question Hunt strategy. Eventually, the participation increased.” (Interview with teacher E, 2025)

In other cases, Teacher J implemented question differentiation after seeing the very diverse needs of the class, and Teacher D utilized social media to explore learning strategies, exposing social media as a practical and adaptive learning resource. These bottom-up approaches highlight the critical correlation between classroom-based innovation and reflective processes, strengthening the value of teacher agency in designing effective lessons.

The transformation from top-down to bottom-up approaches is facilitated by supportive cultural institutions, easily accessible resources, and spaces for reflective practice and experiential knowledge exchange. This process aligns with the teacher agency concept (Little, 1995; Priestley et al., 2015), which emphasizes the importance of teachers' active roles in making professional decisions and directing their own learning. The teachers in this research demonstrate a high level of agency through exploring technology-based learning resources, informal collaboration, and personal reflection (Dewi et al., 2024; Kyureghyan, 2024). Teacher D, who utilizes social media to gain new teaching strategies, shows that teachers now are self-directed learners, which, according to Little (1995), is the core of continuous TPD.

Initiative is also seen in reflective practices that are carried out regularly. Teacher J evaluated and designed learning on Fridays, where he had more time outside the classroom. Meanwhile, Teacher Y and Teacher L emphasized the importance of adapting learning methods based on direct evaluation of student learning outcomes. Teacher D learned from previous mistakes and rearranged his teaching strategies. These findings are in line with the manifestation of transformative learning and constructivist learning, where teachers' initiatives in developing professionalism are based on motivation from within themselves to make changes and increase student involvement (Mezirow, 1991; Piaget, 1970). They are also in accordance with the practice of reflective teaching, where teachers reflect during and after teaching to improve learning (Bergmark, 2020; Farrell, 2019; Schön, 1983; Uştuk & De Costa, 2021).

Peer sharing and peer collaboration are also reinforcements in the implementation of bottom-up TPD, where teachers can share and provide new ideas to improve teaching. For example, Teacher Y gained a new insight into how to enhance students' reading comprehension through Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) from the MGMP forum. She elaborated,

“From there, I just learned the term Sustained Silent Reading (SSR). I started to try to apply it in class, at the beginning or end of the lesson, depending on the material load. ... Even though it was only one or two paragraphs, it turned out that the impact was felt. The process was not instant, but their level of comprehension increased.” (Interview with teacher Y, 2025)

Informal collaboration, such as light discussions or giving each other input on teaching methods, was also mentioned by Teacher J and Teacher L as a practice that strengthened their enthusiasm for learning and enriched their teaching approaches. From this collaborative practice, it was found that student engagement increases, and learning becomes more effective. This practice reflects the positive role of teacher communities for professional growth (Macias, 2017; Romero & Vasilopoulos, 2020; Vangrieken et al., 2017).

In addition to collaboration, technology plays a crucial role as a tool for innovation and access to learning. Teacher D and Teacher E follow various online channels, including YouTube and innovative teacher accounts on Instagram, to get teaching ideas that suit the characteristics of today's students. Teacher J uses various platforms to find ways to make materials more varied and fun. Using various educational channels on Instagram and TikTok to get learning ideas that are relevant to the characteristics of today's students and utilizing various platforms to make materials more varied and interesting are real examples of the role of technology in providing learning resources (Dewi et al., 2024; Mayangsari et al., 2025). In accordance with the study of Indira et al. (2020), the teachers in this study utilized technology not only as a tool, but as an enabler for global connections and flexible professional expression.

The impact of bottom-up TPD on teaching practices and professional development

Bottom-Up TPD encourages teachers to explore and implement new learning approaches that better suit students' needs. Teacher E, for example, developed the Question Hunt strategy as part of her Classroom Action Research (CAR) to increase student participation in role-play activities. She noted that before this strategy was implemented, students tended to be passive when their friends performed. However, after it was implemented, all students became more involved because they had the responsibility to generate questions from their friends' performances. Likewise, Teacher C utilized the gallery walk method to suit the characteristics of kinesthetic students. The activity made students more active in moving and thinking. She stated,

"I use the gallery walk method. So, the children have to go around each stop to complete the questions. That fulfills the characteristics of my students—almost all of them have kinesthetic characteristics. So, using the gallery walk method really accommodates their learning styles." (Interview with teacher C, 2025)

Teacher J, who implemented question differentiation to adjust the level of difficulty to the students' abilities, kept the more advanced students challenged. Teacher T also said that she learned directly from teaching practice experiences and developed strategies such as the flipped classroom, which encourages students to prepare materials in advance. These strategies have a real impact on student engagement and performance. Teacher C saw how the interactive approach, such as a gallery walk, made students more active in following the lesson. This was reinforced by Teacher Y, who said that the SSR method she used made students more enthusiastic because the material was relevant to them. Teacher E also experienced something similar after using an interactive approach based on gamification: students who were previously inactive became more involved. Teacher L emphasized that the initiative in the bottom-up strategy allows teachers to understand the real conditions of the class and respond to them with appropriate solutions. She considers this approach more effective because it is based on direct reflection from daily teaching practices. Teacher J said that the use of media and strategies that he adjusted directly affected students' understanding. Teacher T added that when she observed passive students at the beginning of the semester, she immediately adjusted her teaching methods so that students became more interested and active. She noticed changes in student attitudes after she implemented a more interactive method, and then continued to refine it. Teacher J and Teacher Y reflected by using student learning outcomes as an indicator of success and adjusted their approach periodically. To sum up, Bottom-Up TPD has significantly contributed to transforming EFL teachers' teaching practices in Indonesia. Through strategic changes, increased student participation, ongoing reflection, and personal

initiative, teachers not only improve the quality of learning but also build a stronger and more meaningful professional identity (Day, 2018).

Based on the findings, teacher professional development through a bottom-up approach can run optimally when it gets support from four main elements: personal initiative, peer collaboration, supportive technology, and a supportive school environment. The synergy between these four components provides a living, dynamic, and empowering learning ecosystem for teachers. This is in accordance with the integrated personal development model, which emphasizes the importance of processes, contexts, and content that are relevant to classroom needs through bottom-up TPD (Bergmark, 2020; Dewi et al., 2024; Opfer & Pedder, 2011).

The most prominent impact of Bottom-Up TPD in this research is a change in instructional strategies. Many teachers adopted interactive teaching approaches and instructional differentiation to suit students' needs (Dewi et al., 2024; Macias, 2017; Schreurs & De Laat, 2012). This finding supports the theory of situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991), which states that professional knowledge is formed contextually in real learning environments. Student engagement also increased significantly. Teachers reported increased enthusiasm, active participation, and even academic performance, although the changes were not always drastic (Mayangsari et al., 2025; Perdana et al., 2023).

Teacher Resilience and Professional Transformation

Structural and cultural challenges are real obstacles to the sustainability of independent TPD. High workload, limited time, and a school culture that does not fully support teacher initiatives are obstacles faced by almost all teachers. Teacher Y said that although she wants to continue learning, sometimes physical and time are the main limitations. Teacher E noted that the school system often does not provide enough space for teachers to try different approaches. Teacher T also added that differences in curriculum between schools in the MGMP community make discussions not always relevant and applicable. They said,

"Additional burdens, such as organizing events at school, often took up a larger portion. As a result, my duty as a teacher to teach was neglected. (Interview with Teacher Y, 2025)

"When I joined the CAR competition, it was really hard, especially in terms of time management. Sometimes I had to work overtime until the weekend to finish the CAR ... but I am also an extracurricular mentor. So, taking time in between activities is really hard." (Interview with Teacher E, 2025)

In this context, the success of TPD is highly dependent on the flexibility of the institution and the readiness of the school culture to accept changes from below. In dealing with these conditions, they rely on internal motivation, good self-management, and commitment to the quality of learning to continue to grow professionally. Strategies used by teachers include managing time strategically, preparing materials in installments, and providing rest space to stay physically and mentally balanced. Teacher J, for example, uses Friday, which is a short day, to reflect and prepare learning plans. Teacher Y mentioned the importance of time management and awareness to maintain stamina so that she can continue to develop herself, while Teacher L chooses to do tasks in installments and take breaks to maintain balance.

These results reveal that resilience is the main foundation for teachers in facing various structural and cultural challenges in the bottom-up professional development process. Amidst high workloads, time constraints, and lack of support from institutions, teachers are still able to maintain their enthusiasm for learning and renew their teaching practices reflectively and adaptively. This resilience is in line with the concept of teacher resilience explained by Gu & Day (2007), namely the capacity of teachers to survive, adapt, and develop professionally despite facing heavy pressure (Uştuk & De Costa, 2021).

The Ambivalent Role of Institutions

A supportive school environment is an important element that allows teacher initiatives to develop sustainably. Teacher C and Teacher E emphasized the importance of principal support and recognition of teachers' efforts in implementing new strategies in the classroom. She felt more motivated when the institution gave her space to experiment. Teacher Y got space to share good practices in the school community that encouraged innovation. The other teachers mentioned that they have the freedom to join any development programs as well as create and apply new strategies in their classroom. When schools provide recognition, facilities, and opportunities for sharing, teachers' initiatives not only develop but also become rooted sustainably in the professional culture of the school.

The principal's recognition and support for new strategies made one teacher more motivated to try new things in the classroom. Another teacher felt the benefits of having reflective time. The support from the culture of sharing in the school felt by one teacher, is one example of support from the school environment that encourages teachers to keep innovating and developing themselves. This underlines the importance of organizational learning culture (Argyris & Schön, 1996) in educational institutions where teachers have room to develop with the support of flexible school policies and a collaborative work culture (Revina et al., 2020, 2023; Vangrieken et al., 2017).

The findings of this study also indicate that the role of institutions in supporting teacher-initiated TPD is ambivalent and inconsistent (Cirocki & Farrell, 2019; Revina et al., 2023). Some teachers feel that there is real structural support, such as access to option-given training and recognition of innovation. However, many teachers said that the most meaningful professional development occurs when they do it independently, without direct intervention from the institutions, and when they are given space to explore. In practice, there is significant variation in institutional support. Teacher J benefited from the flexible time provided by the school, which allowed him to reflect and strategize her teaching. Teacher E had the space to experiment and received appreciation from the school leadership for her innovations that resulted in increased student participation. In contrast, Teacher L and Teacher D experienced barriers due to a lack of recognition or support from the institution. Teacher D stated that most of her professional development was self-directed because there was no specific training provided by the school. This finding underscores the importance of enabling conditions in supporting teacher initiatives: without adequate support structures, even strong initiatives are unlikely to be sustainable (Dehghan, 2020; Revina et al., 2020; Sutomo & Siregar, 2022; Vangrieken et al., 2017). The others mentioned that the high administrative and non-instructional burden often shifted their main priorities as educators, such as being PIC for school events and extracurricular mentors. It shows that time and workload are the two most common obstacles in implementing bottom-up TPD (Rahman, 2021).

In addition to institutional support, the success of bottom-up TPD is also influenced by the variety of peer contributions and the collaborative culture that develops in the work environment (Cirocki & Farrell, 2019; Vangrieken et al., 2017). Teachers T and Y exemplified that an environment that supports collaboration can accelerate professional growth through discussion of learning issues and sharing of good practices. However, not all teachers experience the same benefits. Teachers J and Y revealed that different visions and levels of enthusiasm among teachers sometimes hinder the sharing process. Most teachers mentioned that the most frequent form of collaboration is informal collaboration, such as casual discussions and exchanging materials, compared to more formal collaborative programs such as MGMP. Although unstructured, these informal collaboration spaces remain an important means of exchanging useful ideas and strategies (Dewi et al., 2024; Schreurs & De Laat, 2012).

Overall, the role of institutions in bottom-up teacher professional development is complex and multifaceted. On the one hand, structural support, quality training, and collaborative culture can strengthen teacher initiatives (Sutomo & Siregar, 2022; Vangrieken et al., 2017). However, on the other hand, inconsistent policies, lack of recognition of teacher efforts, and a rigid work culture can be obstacles. This finding strengthens Cirocki & Farrell's argument (2019) that the success of TPD is highly dependent on the mutual relationship between the system and individual actors within it.

Thus, a systemic approach is needed that integrates space for teacher initiatives with adaptive institutional support. The synergy between bottom-up and top-down is not just a technical strategy, but a foundation for building a sustainable learning ecosystem and empowering teachers as agents of educational change (Priestley et al., 2015).

CONCLUSION

This research aims to explore 1) how English teachers in Indonesia initiate and implement bottom-up teacher professional development (TPD) and 2) how they perceive the impacts and challenges arising from the process. For the first research question, the results show that the direction of English teacher professional development in Indonesia is increasingly moving towards a bottom-up approach that emphasizes individual initiative, peer collaboration, the use of technology, and the creation of a supportive school environment. This approach is proven to encourage changes in learning practices and strengthen the process of independent and reflective professional development. As for the second research question, the teachers reported barriers such as high workloads, time constraints, and a lack of consistent institutional support. In the face of these challenges, teacher resilience is a key factor. Therefore, a strong collaboration between teacher initiative and responsive institutional support is needed to create a sustainable learning ecosystem and empower teachers as agents of educational transformation. This research has limitations related to the balance of narrating the success and failure of bottom-up TPD. Most discussions narrate the positive experiences in initiating TPD and underexplore the failure and resistance. This may result in a lack of overview of structural challenges. In addition, variations in institutional support and different school cultures may also influence the implementation of bottom-up TPD differently. Future research is recommended to explore the structural challenges and factors that influence the failure and resistance of bottom-up TPD. Research can also explore more deeply the role of technology and how bottom-up and top-down integration can be optimized in diverse education systems.

REFERENCES

- Argyris, C., & Schön, D. A. (1996). *Organizational Learning II: Theory, Method and Practice*. Addison-Wesley.
- Avillanova, A. A., & Kuswandono, P. (2019). English teacher professional development in Indonesia: The challenges and opportunities. *English Review: Journal of English Education*, 8(1), 41–50. <https://doi.org/10.25134/erjee.v8i1.1972>
- Bergmark, U. (2020). Teachers' professional learning when building a research-based education: context-specific, collaborative and teacher-driven professional development. *Professional Development in Education*, 49(2), 210–224. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2020.1827011>
- Borg, S. (2015). *Teacher cognition and language education: Research and practice*. Bloomsbury.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Cirocki, A., & Farrell, T. S. C. (2019). Professional development of secondary school EFL teachers: Voices from Indonesia. *System*, 85. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2019.102111>
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. Sage.
- Day, C. (2018). Professional Identity Matters: Agency, Emotions, and Resilience. In *Research on Teacher Identity: Mapping Challenges and Innovations* (pp. 61–70).
- Dehghan, F. (2020). Teachers' perceptions of professionalism: a top-down or a bottom-up decision-making process? *Professional Development in Education*, 48(4), 705–714. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2020.1725597>
- Dewi, U., Fithriani, R., & Berutu, H. (2024). Indonesian EFL teachers' professional development: Views and current practices. *Indonesian Research Journal in Education*, 8(2), 589–607. <https://doi.org/10.22437/irje.v8i2.39425>
- Díaz-Maggioli, G. (2004). *Teacher-centered Professional Development*. ASCD.
- Eteläpelto, A., Vähäsantanen, K., Hökkä, P., & Paloniemi, S. (2013). What Is Agency? Conceptualizing Professional Agency at Work. *Educational Research Review*, 10, 45–65. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2013.05.001>
- Farrell, T. S. (2019). Professional development through reflective practice for English-medium instruction (EMI) teachers. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 23(3), 277–286. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2019.1612840>

- Goa, E. (2021). The Effect of Bottom-Up Continuous Professional Development Approach on English Language Teachers' Self-Efficacy Belief. *Turkish Online Journal of Qualitative Inquiry*, 12(7).
- Gu, Q., & Day, C. (2007). Teachers resilience: A necessary condition for effectiveness. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 23(8), 1302–1316. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2006.06.006>
- Indira, E. W. M., Hermanto, A., & Pramono, S. E. (2020). Improvement of Teacher Competence in the Industrial Revolution Era 4.0. *International Conference on Science and Education and Technology (ISET 2019)*, 350–352.
- Kvale, S. (1996). *InterViews: An introduction to qualitative research interviewing*. SAGE Publications.
- Kyureghyan, H. (2024). *Exploring teacher professional agency in the context of the bottom-up professional development conferences: perspectives and implications*. <https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk>
- Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*. Cambridge University Press.
- Lieberman, A., & Miller, L. (2008). *Teachers in Professional Communities: Improving Teaching and Learning*. Teachers College Press.
- Little, D. (1995). Learning as dialogue: The Dependence of Learner Autonomy on Teacher Autonomy. *System*, 23(2), 175–181. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0346-251X\(95\)00006-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/0346-251X(95)00006-6)
- Macias, A. (2017). Teacher-Led Professional Development: A Proposal for a Bottom-Up Structure Approach. *International Journal of Teacher Leadership*, 8(1), 76–91.
- Mayangsari, D., Nawangsari, N. A. F., Yoenanto, N. H., & Suminar, D. R. (2025). Unraveling Intrinsic Motivation: The Key to Empowering Teacher Professional Growth. *Journal Evaluation in Education (JEE)*, 6(1), 268–277. <https://doi.org/10.37251/jee.v6i1.1390>
- Mezirow, J. (1991). *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*. Jossey-Bass.
- Opfer, V. D., & Pedder, D. (2011). Conceptualizing Teacher Professional Learning. *Review of Educational Research*, 81(3), 376–407. <https://doi.org/10.3102/003465431141360>
- Perdana, I., Ishak, R. B., & binti Mansor, M. (2023). Determinants of Intrinsic Motivation in Private School Teachers in South Kalimantan: an Empirical Analysis Based on Herzberg's Motivator Factor Theory. *Jurnal Syntax Transformation*, 4(12), 216–226. <https://doi.org/10.46799/jst.v4i12.887>
- Piaget, J. (1970). *The Science of Education and the Psychology of The Child*. New York.
- Poulton, P. (2020). Teacher agency in curriculum reform: The role of assessment in enabling and constraining primary teachers' agency. *Curriculum Perspectives*, 40(1), 35–48. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41297-020-00100-w>
- Priestley, M., Biesta, G., & Robinson, S. (2015). Teacher Agency: What is it and why does it matter? In *Flip the System: Changing Education from the Bottom Up*. Routledge.

- Priestley, M., Robinson, S., & Biesta, G. (2011). Mapping Teacher Agency: An Ecological Approach to Understanding Teachers' Work. *Oxford Ethnography and Education Conference*, 1.
- Rahman, A. (2021). High participation, low impact: The challenge for teacher professional development in Indonesia. *International Journal of Pedagogy and Teacher Education*, 5(1), 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.20961/ijpte.v5i1.46636>
- Revina, S., Pramana, R. P., Bjork, C., & Suryadarma, D. (2023). Replacing the old with the new: Long-term issues of teacher professional development reforms in Indonesia. *Asian Education and Development Studies*, 12(4/5), 262–274. <https://doi.org/10.1108/AEDS-12-2022-0148>
- Revina, S., Pramana, R. P., Fillaili, R., & Suryadarma, D. (2020). *Systemic Constraints Facing Teacher Professional Development in a Middle-Income Country: Indonesia's Experience over Four Decades*. RISE Working Paper Series. <https://doi.org/10.25446/oxford.21107782.v1>
- Romero, G., & Vasilopoulos, G. (2020). From rural China to Canada: Communities of Practice to Support A Teacher Professional Development Study Program Abroad. *TESL-EJ*, 23(4).
- Schön, D. (1983). *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*. Temple Smith.
- Schreurs, B., & De Laat, M. (2012). Work-Based Networked Learning: a bottom-up approach to stimulate the professional development of teachers. *International Conference on Networked Learning*, 8, 284–293.
- Sutomo, M., & Siregar, E. S. (2022). Teacher professional development in Indonesia's remote areas with driven educational philanthropic institutions. *Jurnal Penelitian Dan Pengembangan Pendidikan*, 6(3), 500–509. <https://doi.org/10.23887/jpppp.v6i3.55742>
- Tschannen-Moran, M., & Hoy, A. W. (2001). Teacher Efficacy: Capturing an Elusive Construct. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 17(7), 783–805. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0742-051X\(01\)00036-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0742-051X(01)00036-1)
- Uştuk, Ö., & De Costa, P. I. (2021). Reflection as meta-action: Lesson study and EFL teacher professional development. *TESOL Journal*, 12(1). <https://doi.org/10.1002/tesj.531>
- Vangrieken, K., Meredith, C., Packer, T., & Kyndt, E. (2017). Teacher communities as a context for professional development: A systematic review. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 61, 47–59. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2016.10.001>
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*. Harvard University Press.
- Widayati, A., MacCallum, J., & Woods-McConney, A. (2021). Teachers' perceptions of continuing professional development: A study of Vocational High School Teachers in Indonesia. *Teacher Development*, 25(5), 604–621. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13664530.2021.1933159>