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## SECONDARY EFL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT EFFECTIVENESS: A VIETNAMESE CONTEXT

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**Abstract:** In Vietnam, the approval of new English textbooks has heightened the demand for effective teacher training. This study uses a 6-point Likert-scale questionnaire to survey the perceptions of 103 secondary school EFL teachers regarding the effectiveness of the professional development (PD) courses they have participated in over a ten-year period. The study focuses on such aspects of PD effectiveness as professional attributes, subject matter knowledge, and the application of learned knowledge to teaching practice. The results reveal moderate overall effectiveness, with teaching knowledge showing the strongest gains and professional attributes the weakest. A significant non-linear relationship between teaching experience and perceived effectiveness emerged, with teachers in mid-to-late career stages (11-15 years and 21-25 years) reporting the highest benefits, while those with over 25 years of experience reported the lowest ratings. Although school type and gender did not show statistically significant effects, descriptive patterns suggested that teachers in rural normal schools perceived greater benefits than those in rural selective schools. A persistent gap was identified between knowledge acquisition and practical classroom application, particularly in adapting materials and teaching productive skills. The teachers expressed a strong preference for condensed, one-week PD sessions, highlighting the tension between time-efficiency and the need for sustained support. These findings underscore the necessity of differentiated, career-stage-responsive PD programs that balance practical intensity with ongoing support, address contextual needs, and strengthen the bridge between theoretical knowledge and classroom implementation.

*Keywords:* professional development, PD courses, effectiveness, EFL

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# NHẬN THỨC CỦA GIÁO VIÊN TIẾNG ANH CẤP 2 VỀ HIỆU QUẢ CỦA CÁC KHÓA PHÁT TRIỂN CHUYÊN MÔN: MỘT NGHIÊN CỨU TẠI VIỆT NAM

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**Tóm tắt:** Tại Việt Nam, việc Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo Việt Nam phê duyệt nhiều bộ sách giáo khoa tiếng Anh mới đã làm gia tăng nhu cầu về các khóa bồi dưỡng cho giáo viên hiện đang công tác tại các trường phổ thông. Nghiên cứu này sử dụng bảng hỏi có thang đo 6 mức để khảo sát nhận thức của 103 giáo viên tiếng Anh trung học cơ sở về hiệu quả của các khóa phát triển chuyên môn mà họ đã tham gia trong suốt một thập kỷ. Nghiên cứu tập trung vào các khía cạnh như: phẩm chất nghề nghiệp, kiến thức chuyên ngành và việc vận dụng kiến thức đã học vào thực tế giảng dạy. Kết quả nghiên cứu cho thấy nhìn chung các khóa bồi dưỡng mà họ từng tham gia có hiệu quả vừa phải, với mức hiệu quả tổng thể được đánh giá ở mức trung bình. Đáng chú ý, nhóm giáo viên có thâm niên từ 11 đến 15 và nhóm có thâm niên từ 21 đến 25 năm cho rằng các khóa phát triển chuyên môn mang lại lợi ích lớn nhất, còn nhóm giáo viên có thâm niên trên 25 năm có đánh giá thấp nhất về hiệu quả của các khóa bồi dưỡng họ tham gia trong vòng 10 năm. Mặc dù loại trường học và giới tính không thể hiện tác động lên việc giáo viên đánh giá hiệu quả của các khóa bồi dưỡng về mặt thống kê, các con số cũng cho thấy giáo viên giảng dạy tại các trường bình thường ở các vùng nông thôn nhận thấy các khóa bồi dưỡng hiệu quả hơn các giáo viên đến từ các trường chọn ở nông thôn. Nghiên cứu cũng chỉ ra một khoảng cách giữa việc nắm bắt kiến thức và việc ứng dụng các kiến thức đó vào thực tiễn giảng dạy, đặc biệt trong việc xử lý tài liệu dạy và giảng dạy các kỹ năng sản sinh. Bên cạnh đó, giáo viên cũng cho biết họ thích các khóa đào tạo ngắn gọn và đáp ứng các nhu cầu của họ hơn là các khóa dài. Những kết quả này nhấn mạnh sự cần thiết phải thiết kế các chương trình bồi dưỡng giáo viên phù hợp với từng bối cảnh dạy học và đáp ứng các nhu cầu của giáo viên để giúp họ phát triển nghề nghiệp của mình.

*Từ khóa:* phát triển chuyên môn, khóa đào tạo bồi dưỡng, hiệu quả, tiếng Anh như một ngoại ngữ

## 1. Introduction

English is now widely recognized as a global lingua franca, facilitating communication among people from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. As a result, its crucial role spans science and technology, business and trade, diplomacy, and academia. In Vietnam and countries where English is learned as a foreign language, education has continually evolved to enhance learners' English proficiency, equipping them for effective communication in everyday life and professional contexts.

The Vietnamese education sector has undergone two landmark transformations in English language instruction. The first occurred in 2010-2011, when the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) launched a pilot communicative English curriculum for primary schools beginning with Grade 3 students (MOET, 2010). The second, more comprehensive phase commenced with the official introduction of the 2018 General Education Program (MOET, 2018), which mandated substantial curriculum innovation across design, teaching methodologies, assessment practices, and textbook content, with a particular emphasis on

developing students' competencies.

A critical outcome of this second phase was the approval of a series of new English textbooks for public schools, which necessitated immediate in-service training for secondary school teachers. Since 2011, MOET and collaborating educational institutions have organized numerous professional development programs aimed at supporting teachers' adaptation to these evolving curricular demands. Despite this sustained investment in PD, empirical investigation into teachers' perceptions of PD effectiveness – particularly how secondary teachers evaluate the impact of these courses on their professional attitudes, teaching knowledge, and practical application of the learnt knowledge remains limited in the Vietnamese context.

Extensive international research has examined the impact of professional development activities on teachers' professional knowledge and instructional performance, documenting positive effects across diverse contexts and disciplines (Alruqi & Alharbi, 2022; Am et al., 2023; Ashrafuzzaman, 2018; Averina & Kuswando, 2023). However, despite the breadth of global scholarship, professional development remains an emerging field of inquiry within Vietnam's EFL teaching context. Existing Vietnamese studies have addressed the management of PD activities (Duong & Thai, 2024), teacher satisfaction with PD (Cao & Bui, 2023), and reflective teaching practices (Nguyen et al., 2023). Nevertheless, the literature reveals a paucity of research on the effectiveness of PD programs within the school sector, especially among secondary school teachers who now face increased responsibilities to engage in a range of PD courses (Nguyen et al., 2019).

Acknowledging the crucial role of PD in fostering educational reform, this study aims to explore secondary school EFL teachers' perceptions of the professional development courses they have attended over the past ten years in a northern province of Vietnam. The study addressed the existing gap in empirical knowledge by examining the focus and perceived effectiveness of PD programs in a specific provincial context. Accordingly, this study aims to answer the following questions.

- 1. What are the main content foci of the professional development courses attended by EFL secondary school teachers over the past ten years?*
- 2. How do EFL secondary school teachers perceive the effectiveness of these professional development courses in their professional practice?*

## **2. Literature Review**

### ***2.1. What is Professional Development?***

Professional development (PD) broadly refers to the activities undertaken throughout one's career to enhance professional competence. In language teaching specifically, PD is commonly defined as an ongoing process designed to equip teachers with the knowledge, skills, and attributes necessary to improve both teaching quality and student learning outcomes (Bayar & Kösterelioğlu, 2014). This study adopts a similar definition, viewing PD as a continuous effort to foster teachers' growth in teaching knowledge, instructional skills, and professional attitudes in pursuit of improved educational effectiveness.

Professional development activities are often classified into two main types: traditional and non-traditional (Richards & Farrell, 2005). Traditional activities include structured activities such as workshops, seminars, conferences, and formal training courses. These typically provide teachers with systematic teaching knowledge and research-informed practices. Non-traditional activities, by contrast, include peer observation, mentorship, informal

meetings, teacher networking, and collaborative research, providing timely assistance to help teachers address current teaching challenges. For optimal effectiveness, teachers should attend both traditional and non-traditional activities.

## ***2.2. Benefits of Professional Development in the EFL Context***

Literature has documented varied benefits of PD activities for EFL teachers, including improved language proficiency, mastery of teaching knowledge, enhanced instructional skills, increased self-efficacy, positive impacts on student learning outcomes, and greater adaptability to changes. These benefits have been studied and confirmed by empirical studies in various contexts.

Firstly, PD programs were found to enhance EFL teachers' language competence across the four language skills in communicative domains (Ahmadi & Keshavarzi, 2013). Target language proficiency is often regarded as an important factor in successful language teaching (Pawlak, 2011).

Improvements in teaching knowledge have also been well documented (Alshumaimeri & Almohaisen, 2017; Am et al., 2023; Averina & Kuswando, 2023). Teaching knowledge encompasses a range of teaching aspects, including lesson planning, effective teaching techniques, the use of educational technology, and classroom management. For example, Alshumaimeri and Almohaisen's (2017) study of Saudi EFL teachers identified workshops and seminars as the most popular and the most beneficial PD formats, as perceived by the teachers. Nevertheless, Averina and Kuswando (2023) distinguish popularity from preference, highlighting the need for contextually relevant programs.

Moreover, PD contributes to improved instructional skills and teaching practices. (Alruqi & Alharbi, 2022; Alshumaimeri & Almohaisen, 2017; Ashrafuzzaman, 2018; Coldwell, 2017). Alshumaimeri and Almohaisen (2017) reported that PD inspired teachers to design creative teaching materials, manage classrooms more effectively, integrate media in the classroom, and adopt innovative pedagogies. Simultaneously, PD activities have fostered teachers' self-efficacy, attitudes and beliefs (Asad & Javed, 2023; Averina & Kuswando, 2023; Coldwell, 2017). The belief in one's own ability to accomplish tasks effectively has been regarded as one of the essential factors that drive effective teaching (Bandura, 1986).

Though indirect, PD positively impacts student learning, mainly through enhanced teaching practices (Alruqi & Alharbi, 2022; Babinski et al., 2025; Borg, 2018; Zeng, 2023). For instance, Babinski et al.'s (2025) experimental research substantiates the effect of PD on literacy growth among young multilingual learners. Finally, PD is instrumental in enhancing teachers' adaptability to policy, curricular, and teaching reforms (Nalbantoğlu & Bümen, 2024; Shang, 2025). The recent implementation of new textbooks and curricula in Vietnam also underscores the urgency of PD that prepares EFL teachers for ongoing educational evolution.

## ***2.3. Challenges in Professional Development***

Despite its benefits, professional development faces several challenges, which can be classified into three broad categories: teacher-related, school-related, and program-related factors. The problem most teachers often face is the excessive workload and scheduling conflicts. Averina and Kuswando (2023) reported mismatches in schedules among Indonesian EFL secondary school teachers. Moreover, translating theory from training into practice remains a significant obstacle without adequate ongoing support. Asad and Javed (2023) found that tertiary EFL teachers experienced difficulty in transferring the new knowledge from training courses to real classroom situations.

School-related barriers recorded include administrative directives, ‘tick-box’ exercises disconnected from classroom realities, and the lack of sustained institutional backing. Utami and Prestridge (2018) reported teachers’ frustration with repeated, irrelevant PD in Indonesian EFL contexts, while Bulut (2022) emphasized aligning PD with teachers’ genuine interests and expectations. Researchers also highlight the necessity of continuous support for teachers to overcome barriers effectively (Ghasem Tahimash et al., 2024; Mohammed & Gutema, 2023).

Program-related challenges include the top-down nature of many PD initiatives that fail to address teachers’ diverse contextual needs. In Alfaidi and Elhassan (2020)’s research, over 70% of EFL teachers reported unmet educational needs. The excessive focus on theoretical content, combined with insufficient hands-on, practice-based sessions further reduces the practical applicability of professional development. A shortage of practice-based sessions further limits PD’s applicability (Bayar & Kösterelioğlu, 2014; Ghasem Tahimash et al., 2024). Additionally, low quality of facilitators compromises training effectiveness (Bayar & Kösterelioğlu, 2014).

#### ***2.4. Key Insights***

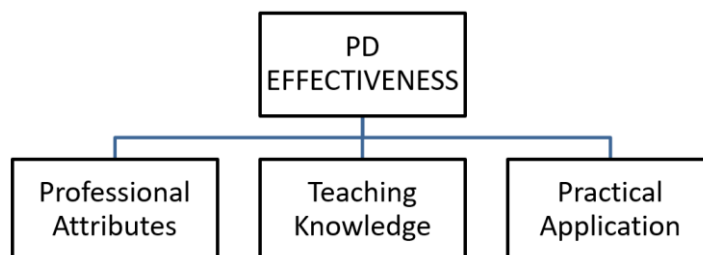
The literature consistently emphasizes the importance of tailored, context-specific, and participatory PD to maximize effectiveness. In other words, PD programs have the greatest impact when designed to meet teacher needs, tightly linked to classroom practices, and supported by ongoing reflection and collaboration.

Professional development remains critical for sustaining teacher competence amid evolving educational demands. In ELT contexts, PD is indispensable due to curricular reforms, innovative methodologies, and growing learner needs. Recent curricular changes in Vietnam highlight the urgent demand for effective PD that prepares teachers to handle new textbooks, methodologies, and teaching challenges in a globalized world.

Given the current pace of PD implementation nationwide, a rigorous investigation into the effectiveness of the completed PD courses is essential, particularly in under-researched school settings. This study addresses that gap by exploring secondary school EFL teachers’ perceptions of how formal PD courses impact their knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

#### ***2.5. Conceptual Framework for Understanding PD Effectiveness***

Professional development effectiveness has been conceptualized through various theoretical lenses in the literature. Desimone (2009) proposed a comprehensive framework for studying the impact of PD on teachers and students. The framework links core features of PD (i.e., content focus, active learning, coherence, duration, and collective participation) to teacher outcomes and ultimately student learning. The improvement of knowledge and skills in teachers lead to changes in their attitudes and beliefs, which causes changes in instruction, thus resulting in student learning. In addition, Bandura’s (1986) social cognitive theory emphasizes that the belief in one’s capability to execute specific tasks is a critical determinant of their behavior. Building on these foundations and being informed by empirical research in EFL contexts previously discussed such as Alshumaimeri and Almohaisen (2017), Ashrafuzzaman (2018), Averina and Kuswandono (2023), and Coldwell (2017), this study develops a framework that conceptualizes PD effectiveness across three interconnected dimensions, as illustrated in Figure 1 below.

**Figure 1***Conceptual Framework for PD Effectiveness**Dimension 1: Professional Attributes*

This dimension encompasses teachers' psychological and affective responses to PD, including confidence in their teaching, motivation in teaching and taking personal PD activities, and willingness to engage in future professional development courses. Research in EFL contexts confirms that effective PD enhances teacher confidence (Coldwell, 2017; Asad & Javed, 2023), which in turn influences their willingness to implement new practices and participate in future professional learning activities.

*Dimension 2: Teaching Knowledge*

The second dimension addresses teachers' enhancement of teaching knowledge, including understanding of diverse techniques for language teaching, lesson planning, technology integration, and classroom management. These core components directly align with Cambridge English's Teaching Knowledge Test (TKT) framework, which structures teaching knowledge across three interconnected modules, covering language teaching techniques, lesson planning, resource preparation and classroom management (Cambridge English, n.d.). This dimension of teaching content knowledge has been extensively documented as a primary outcome of PD in EFL teaching (Alshumaimeri & Almohaisen, 2017; Averina & Kuswando, 2023; Am et al., 2023). Effective PD programs provide teachers with content-focused learning that directly relates to their instructional contexts.

*Dimension 3: Practical Application*

The third dimension focuses on the actual transfer and implementation of learned knowledge and skills into classroom practice. This includes teachers' ability to apply appropriate teaching techniques, utilize technology effectively, adapt lesson planning strategies, and manage classroom dynamics. Research consistently demonstrates that the ultimate measure of PD effectiveness lies in observable changes in teaching practice (Alruqi & Alharbi, 2022; Ashrafuzzaman, 2018). However, the literature also reveals persistent challenges in translating theoretical knowledge from training into authentic classroom contexts, particularly without sustained institutional support (Asad & Javed, 2023; Mohammed & Gutema, 2023).

These three dimensions are conceptualized as interconnected rather than isolated constructs. Enhanced professional attributes facilitate the acquisition of teaching knowledge, which in turn enables more effective practical application. Furthermore, the framework acknowledges that contextual factors – including teachers' career stages, school type, geographic location – mediate the relationship between PD participation and perceived effectiveness. This recognition is particularly relevant in the Vietnamese EFL context, where diverse teaching conditions across urban and rural settings, normal and selective schools, create varied professional learning needs (Nguyen et al., 2019).

This framework guided the design of the research instrument and the analysis of teachers' perceptions. The questionnaire was structured to capture data across all three dimensions, enabling a comprehensive assessment of PD effectiveness from multiple angles. The framework also informed the analytical approach, examining not only overall effectiveness but also variations across contextual factors such as teaching experience and school type. By employing this multidimensional lens, the study aims to provide nuanced insights into how secondary school EFL teachers experience and evaluate professional development in their specific contexts.

### **3. Methodology**

This study employed a quantitative descriptive design to collect detailed information on how secondary school EFL teachers perceived the effectiveness of the PD courses they attended over a period of 10 years. Descriptive research is widely recognized for its suitability in educational settings, with a goal to systematically describe characteristics, attitudes, or behaviors of a particular group without manipulating variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2022; McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). This approach allows researchers to capture current phenomena in natural contexts and provide a factual basis for understanding trends and informing policy or practice (Salkind, 2022).

In the context of PD research, quantitative descriptive designs have been effectively used to assess teachers' experiences and perceptions, enabling the collection of standardized data that can be analyzed statistically to identify patterns and inform program improvements (Lee, 2024). Thus, this design was appropriate to gather empirical evidence on the foci of PD courses attended and their perceived effectiveness from a relatively large sample of EFL teachers.

#### **3.1. Participants**

This study employed convenience sampling to recruit participants from secondary school EFL teachers in a northern province of Vietnam. While convenience sampling has limitations regarding generalizability, it is widely used in educational research when studying specific populations and contexts (Creswell & Creswell, 2022) and has been employed in comparable PD effectiveness studies (Lee, 2024). This recruitment strategy yielded three key advantages: access to a diverse, experienced cohort; a 100% response rate; and temporal separation to minimize recency bias.

Participants were recruited at the beginning of a professional development training course organized by a well-known university specializing in EFL teacher education in the northern region. Importantly, this PD course served solely as a recruitment site; it was not the subject of evaluation in this study. By administering the questionnaire before training commenced, temporal separation was achieved, ensuring that responses reflected only prior PD experiences accumulated over ten years.

#### **3.2. Instrument**

The questionnaire consists of three parts. The first part collected demographic information about participants (age, gender, qualification, teaching experience, and workplace). The second part identified the main topic areas of the PD courses attended over the past ten years, presented as a checklist. This ten-year retrospective period was selected to balance recall accuracy with temporal breadth while investigating the cumulative impacts of PD on a variedly experienced cohort.

The third part elicited teachers' perceptions of PD effectiveness in enhancing their knowledge, skills, and professional attributes. Items were generated from the conceptual framework (Section 2.5) and relevant PD effectiveness literature (e.g., Alfaidi & Elhassan, 2020; Alshumaimeri & Almohaisen, 2017; Asad & Javed, 2023; Ashrafuzzaman, 2018; Averina & Kuswando, 2023; Coldwell, 2017; Bulut, 2022; Mohammed & Gutema, 2023; Am et al., 2023). The items were then carefully reviewed to ensure content validity and clarity. Subsequently, a pilot test with 5 secondary school EFL teachers identified ambiguous wording, and minor revisions were implemented accordingly.

The third part contained 32 Likert-scale items organized into three sections: (i) English language competence and professional attributes (5 items exploring confidence, motivation, and willingness to attend future PD courses); (ii) teaching knowledge (4 items addressing teaching techniques, lesson planning, classroom management, and technology use); and (iii) practical application (23 items assessing implementation of teaching techniques, classroom management strategies, and lesson planning). All items were rated on a 6-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 6 = strongly agree). The questionnaire demonstrated high internal consistency, with an overall Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.90. This reliability estimate confirms that the questionnaire consistently measures the intended constructs and is suitable for assessing teachers' PD perceptions in this context. Additionally, one item assessed teachers' preferences regarding optimal PD duration, providing actionable insights for program designers.

### ***3.3. Data Collection and Analysis Procedure***

The questionnaire was administered at the beginning of a designated PD course, before any instructional activities commenced. This timing ensured that responses reflected only teachers' prior PD experiences accumulated over ten years, eliminating potential recency bias from the current training. Participants were provided with a comprehensive explanation of the study's purpose and were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. All participants were provided with written informed consent before completing the questionnaire.

A total of 103 completed questionnaires were collected, representing a 100% response rate. This high completion rate was facilitated by the face-to-face, in-person administration format, which also allowed for immediate clarification of any ambiguous items.

Quantitative data were coded and analyzed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations (SD), and frequencies) were computed to summarize participants' demographic characteristics and perceptions across all measured dimensions. Comparative analysis using one-way ANOVA tested for significant differences in perceived PD effectiveness across teaching experience groups and school types, with post-hoc tests (Tukey HSD) applied when significant main effects were detected.

## **4. Findings**

### ***4.1. Participants' Demographic Characteristics***

A total of 103 secondary school EFL teachers participated in the study. The cohort comprised teachers from varied school types: rural normal schools (76%,  $n = 78$ ), urban normal schools (16%,  $n = 16$ ), and rural selective schools (8%,  $n = 8$ ). None of these teachers reported coming from urban selective schools. A summary of participants' demographic features is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Participants' Demographic Characteristics*

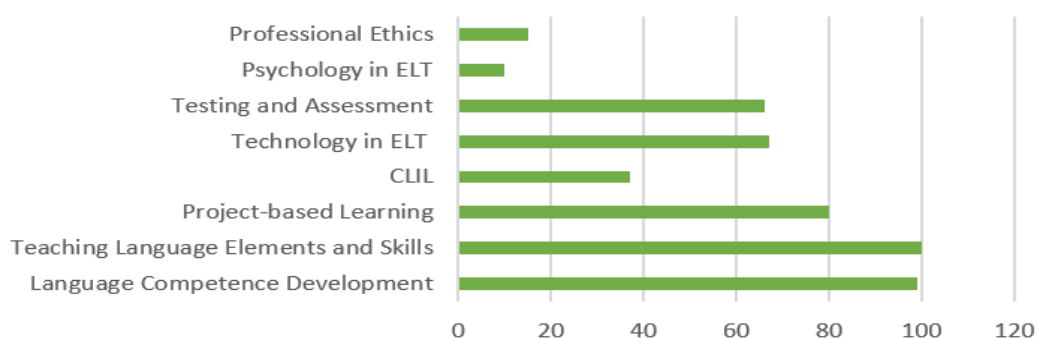
Category	Sub-group	Percentage
Age	20–29	1%
	30–39	32%
	40–49	63%
	50 and above	4%
Highest Qualification	Bachelor	93%
	Master	7%
Teaching Experience	1–5 years	9.6%
	6–10 years	2.9%
	11–15 years	20.2%
	16–20 years	20.2%
	21–25 years	40.4%
	Over 25 years	5.8%
Workplace	Urban Normal School	16%
	Rural Selective School	8%
	Rural Normal School	76%
Gender	Male	19%
	Female	76%
	Not to say	5%

The majority of participants were female (76%, n=78), with 19% male (n=20) and 5% (n=5) not disclosing their gender. Age distribution was concentrated in mid-to-late career stages, with 63% aged 40–49 years and 32% aged 30–39 years; only 1% were aged 20–29, and 4% were aged 50 and above. Nearly half (46.2%) had over 20 years of teaching experience, with the largest group having 21–25 years (40.4%), while only 9.6% had 1–5 years of experience. The predominance of experienced, mid-career teachers means the sample reflects substantial cumulative exposure to diverse PD initiatives, making them well-positioned to report on long-term PD impacts.

**4.2. Focus of Professional Development Courses Attended**

**Figure 1**

*Foci of PD Courses Attended*



Teachers' reports on PD attended over the previous ten years show that *Language Competence Development* and *Teaching Language Elements and Skills* were the most frequently

addressed topics, reflecting the primacy of foundational language and teaching content in PD offerings. The next tier of emphasis included *Project-Based Learning* (approximately 85% of teachers), *Technology Integration in ELT* (approximately 65%), and *Testing and Assessment* (approximately 60%), indicating that current PD programs increasingly target contemporary teaching approaches alongside traditional skills development (Figure 1).

In contrast, emerging or interdisciplinary topics showed significantly lower representation. *CLIL* was reported by approximately 45% of teachers, while *Professional Ethics* and *Psychology in ELT* were among the least frequently addressed (both < 25%).

### 4.3. Perceived Effectiveness of Professional Development Courses

**Table 2**

*Areas of Improvement from PD Courses*

Areas of Improvement	English language competence	Professional Attributes	Teaching Knowledge	Practical Application
Mean (SD)	3.50 (1.22)	3.38 (1.26)	3.61 (1.15)	3.45 (1.19)

Table 2 summarizes the perceived improvements across four key dimensions of professional development. The overall effectiveness of the previously attended courses was rated as moderate, with no dimension exceeding a mean score of 3.61 on the 6-point scale. Teaching Knowledge emerged as the most positively rated area (M = 3.61), followed by English Language Competence (M = 3.50) and Practical Application (M = 3.45). These results suggest that teachers primarily valued the courses for enhancing their teaching knowledge and instructional skills. Conversely, Professional Attributes showed the least improvement (M = 3.38), falling into the lower range of moderate agreement. The substantial standard deviations across all categories (1.15–1.26) indicate considerable variability in individual teachers' experiences, reflecting diverse perceptions of the impact of PD courses.

#### 4.3.1. Professional Attributes

**Table 3**

*Improvements in Professional Attributes*

Areas of improvement	Mean	SD
Q2. Confidence in teaching	3.42	1.25
Q3. Motivation in teaching	3.29	1.28
Q4. Motivation in personal PD activities	3.31	1.31
Q33. Willingness to attend future PD courses	3.51	1.20

Table 3 details outcomes within the Professional Attributes dimension. Willingness to attend future PD courses received the highest rating (M = 3.51), barely exceeding the midpoint, which suggests a general openness to professional learning rather than strong enthusiasm. Confidence in teaching showed limited improvement (M = 3.42), falling slightly below the moderate threshold. Notably, motivation, both in teaching (M = 3.29) and in personal PD activities (M = 3.31), received the lowest scores, indicating the needs to foster intrinsic drive. This gap between willingness to attend and actual motivation implies that while teachers accept the necessity of PD, they may engage out of obligation rather than genuine inspiration.

### 4.3.2. Teaching Knowledge

**Table 4**

*Perceived Improvements in Teaching Knowledge*

Areas of improvement	Mean	SD
<i>Q5. Knowledge of teaching techniques</i>	3.65	1.07
<i>Q6. Knowledge of lesson planning</i>	3.70	1.21
<i>Q7. Knowledge of classroom management</i>	3.50	1.16
<i>Q8. Knowledge of technology use</i>	3.59	1.18

Table 4 details findings for the Teaching Knowledge dimension, which garnered the most positive ratings in the study, though still within a moderate range. Teachers reported notable gains in their knowledge of lesson planning ( $M = 3.70$ ) and teaching techniques ( $M = 3.65$ ), suggesting that PD courses were relatively successful in conveying core instructional strategies compared to other areas. Technology use was also viewed positively ( $M = 3.59$ ). Conversely, knowledge of classroom management received the lowest rating in this category ( $M = 3.50$ ), hovering at the scale's midpoint, which indicates a need for more practical support in mastering classroom dynamics.

### 4.3.3. Practical Application

Table 5 summarizes teachers' perceptions of their application of the learnt knowledge. The results indicate modest effectiveness across all sub-domains, with mean scores falling slightly below the scale midpoint of 3.5. Classroom Management was rated marginally higher ( $M = 3.47$ ) than Lesson Planning ( $M = 3.37$ ) and Teaching Language Elements ( $M = 3.35$ ), suggesting that teachers found applying knowledge in practice to be a challenging area with limited improvement.

**Table 5**

*Perceived Improvements in Application of Knowledge*

Areas of Improvement	Teaching language elements and skills	Classroom management	Lesson planning and developing activities
Mean (SD)	3.35 (1.12)	3.47 (1.25)	3.37 (1.20)

Further breakdown in Table 6 indicates that perceived improvements in specific teaching techniques were generally modest. Among the assessed areas, the application of technology ( $M = 3.53$ ) and vocabulary teaching ( $M = 3.49$ ) received the comparatively highest ratings, hovering around the scale's midpoint. In contrast, the application of instruction for productive and receptive skills received notably lower scores, particularly writing ( $M = 3.23$ ) and listening ( $M = 3.25$ ). These ratings fall below the moderate threshold, highlighting persistent difficulties teachers face in effectively translating these complex skills into classroom practice.

**Table 6**

*Application of Teaching Techniques*

Areas of improvement	Mean	SD
<i>Q9. Application of vocabulary teaching techniques</i>	3.49	1.15
<i>Q10. Application of Grammar teaching techniques</i>	3.36	1.15
<i>Q11. Application of pronunciation teaching techniques</i>	3.26	1.10

<i>Q12. Application of Listening teaching techniques</i>	3.25	1.06
<i>Q13. Application of reading teaching techniques</i>	3.42	1.08
<i>Q14. Application of speaking teaching techniques</i>	3.29	1.11
<i>Q15. Application of writing teaching techniques</i>	3.23	1.13
<i>Q16. Application of technology</i>	3.53	1.16

In terms of classroom management (Table 7), teachers reported the most notable gains in tangible skills such as using teaching aids ( $M = 3.80$ ) and providing feedback ( $M = 3.59$ ), which were among the few areas to exceed the scale's midpoint significantly. However, improvements in more complex, interactional management tasks were markedly lower. Specifically, dealing with learning problems and giving/checking instructions both received mean scores of 3.34, falling below the moderate threshold. This discrepancy suggests that while PD courses effectively transfer technical skills (like using aids), they are less successful in enhancing teachers' capacity to manage dynamic student interactions and learning difficulties.

**Table 7***Application of Techniques in Classroom Management*

<b>Areas of improvement</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
<i>Q20. Organizing teaching activities</i>	3.50	1.22
<i>Q21. Dealing with learning problems</i>	3.34	1.21
<i>Q22. Encouraging students to participate</i>	3.47	1.29
<i>Q23. Starting and ending a lesson</i>	3.44	1.31
<i>Q24. Making transitions between activities</i>	3.35	1.20
<i>Q25. Giving and checking instructions</i>	3.34	1.19
<i>Q26. Grouping and seating arrangement</i>	3.35	1.24
<i>Q27. Teacher positioning</i>	3.48	1.25
<i>Q28. Using teaching aids</i>	3.80	1.36
<i>Q29. Using eliciting techniques</i>	3.44	1.20
<i>Q30. Providing feedback</i>	3.59	1.27

Finally, regarding lesson planning and activity development (Table 8), a notable divergence emerged. While teachers expressed a moderate level of confidence in the procedural task of creating lesson plans ( $M = 3.51$ ,  $SD = 1.18$ ), the adaptation of textbook activities proved to be significantly more challenging, receiving the lowest rating in this category ( $M = 3.21$ ,  $SD = 1.23$ ). This finding implies that while PD courses successfully train teachers to follow structured planning frameworks, they fall short in empowering teachers to creatively modify and tailor materials to their specific classroom contexts – critical skill for differentiated instruction.

**Table 8***Application in Techniques in Lesson Planning and Activity Development*

<b>Areas of improvement</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
<i>Q17. Exploitation of textbook activities</i>	3.43	1.20
<i>Q18. Adaptation of textbook activities</i>	3.21	1.23
<i>Q19. Creation of additional materials</i>	3.34	1.18
<i>Q31. Creating lesson plans</i>	3.51	1.18

#### 4.3.4. Differences Across Experience Groups

**Table 9**

*Perceived Effectiveness of Professional Development by Work Experience*

Teaching experience	English Language Competence Mean (SD)	Professional Attributes Mean (SD)	Teaching Knowledge Mean (SD)	Practical Application Mean (SD)
1-5 years	3.10 (1.28)	2.90 (0.99)	3.48 (1.09)	3.12 (0.84)
6-10 years	3.00 (1.00)	3.03 (0.28)	3.87 (0.50)	3.62 (0.51)
11-15 years	3.67 (0.96)	3.76 (0.63)	3.94 (0.55)	3.86 (0.53)
16-20 years	2.95 (1.53)	2.46 (1.36)	2.87 (1.35)	2.71 (1.25)
21-25 years	4.05 (0.88)	3.80 (0.85)	3.96 (0.65)	3.69 (0.93)
Over 25 years	2.00 (0.89)	2.16 (1.12)	2.60 (1.76)	2.63 (1.82)

A series of Welch's ANOVAs were conducted to examine the impact of teaching experience on four dimensions of professional development effectiveness: English Language Competence, Professional Attributes, Teaching Knowledge, and Practical Application.

Teaching experience significantly affected the perceived impact of PD courses on teachers' professional attributes (Welch's  $F(5, 17.21) = 6.777, p = .001$ ), with teachers in the 21–25 years category reporting the highest perceived effectiveness, while those with over 25 years reported the lowest. Similarly, English Language Competence was significantly influenced by teaching experience (Welch's  $F(5, 14.26) = 6.127, p = .003$ ). A significant effect was also found for Practical Application (Welch's  $F(5, 14.77) = 3.543, p = .026$ ), and the effect on Teaching Knowledge was marginally significant (Welch's  $F(5, 14.34) = 2.879, p = .053$ ).

Across all dimensions, a consistent curvilinear pattern was observed. Teachers in the mid-to-late career stages (11–15 years and 21–25 years) consistently reported the highest effectiveness scores (M range: 3.69–4.05). In contrast, teachers in the 16–20 years group and those with over 25 years of experience reported significantly lower scores, with the over 25 years group showing the lowest perceptions across all dimensions (M range: 2.00–2.63). This suggests that while mid-career teachers perceive high value in PD, late-career teachers may be experiencing 'PD fatigue' or find current programs less relevant to their needs.

#### 4.3.5. Differences Across School Type

**Table 10**

*Perceived Effectiveness of Professional Development by Workplace*

Workplace	English Language Competence Mean (SD)	Professional Attributes Mean (SD)	Teaching Knowledge Mean (SD)	Practical Application Mean (SD)
Urban Normal	3.35 (0.99)	3.63 (0.81)	3.68 (0.41)	3.31 (0.76)
Rural Normal	3.59 (1.15)	2.75 (1.87)	3.68 (1.01)	2.60 (1.72)
Rural Selective	2.71 (2.13)	3.31 (1.08)	2.46 (1.88)	3.51 (1.03)

Unlike teaching experience, workplace location does not appear to be a determining factor in how teachers perceive the effectiveness of these professional development courses. Results indicated no statistically significant differences in perceived effectiveness based on workplace location for any of the dimensions ((Welch's  $F$  range: 0.591-1.375, all  $p > .282$ ).

While descriptive statistics suggested that teachers in Rural Selective schools generally reported lower mean scores (e.g.,  $M = 2.60$  for Application), compared to their peers in 'Urban

Normal' ( $M = 3.31$ ) and 'Rural Normal' ( $M = 3.51$ ) settings. These differences were not statistically significant, likely due to the small sample size ( $N=8$ ) and high variability ( $SD > 1.70$ ) within the Rural Selective group.

#### 4.3.6. Differences Across Gender

**Table 11**

*Perceived Effectiveness of Professional Development by Gender*

Gender	English Language Competence Mean (SD)	Professional Attributes Mean (SD)	Teaching Knowledge Mean (SD)	Practical Application Mean (SD)
Female	3.44 (1.32)	3.32 (1.18)	3.50 (1.15)	3.32 (1.18)
Male	3.80 (0.95)	3.54 (0.86)	3.99 (0.57)	3.77 (0.62)
Not to Say	3.40 (0.54)	2.40 (0.80)	3.60 (0.37)	3.43 (0.28)

The analysis revealed a statistically significant effect of gender on Teaching Knowledge, Welch's  $F(2, 15.40) = 3.686$ ,  $p = .049$ . Descriptive statistics indicated that male teachers reported significantly higher effectiveness scores ( $M = 3.99$ ) compared to their female counterparts ( $M = 3.51$ ).

A marginally significant effect was found for Professional Attributes, Welch's  $F(2, 11.27) = 3.691$ ,  $p = .059$ , with male teachers again reporting higher impact ( $M = 3.54$ ) than female teachers ( $M = 3.32$ ). The 'Not to Say' group reported the lowest scores across most dimensions (e.g., Professional Attributes  $M = 2.40$ ), though interpretations are limited due to the small sample size ( $N=5$ ).

No significant gender differences were found for English Language Competence ( $p = .363$ ) or Practical Application ( $p = .080$ ), although the trend of male teachers reporting higher scores persisted across these domains as well.

#### 4.3.7. Preferences for Future PD Courses

Teachers expressed a clear preference for future PD courses that are practical and closely aligned with individual needs. Notably, 92% of participants favored condensed one-week PD sessions, indicating that time-efficient training better fits teachers' professional schedules.

#### 4.4. Discussion of Key Findings

##### *PD Foci: Priorities and Gaps*

The majority of PD programs concentrated on teaching core English language elements and skills, alongside the development of overall English language competence, reflecting a foundational priority in strengthening core language teaching abilities. Significant attention was also given to courses on project-based teaching approaches, technology integration in ELT, and English language testing and assessment. These findings align with the literature indicating that traditional language skills development remains the central focus of PD programs, while emerging or interdisciplinary areas such as CLIL, ethics, and psychology tend to be underrepresented (e.g., Ghasem Tahimash et al., 2024). The underrepresentation of CLIL is particularly concerning given Vietnam's curriculum reforms and the documented shortage of qualified CLIL educators in the country (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2024).

##### *Teaching Knowledge: Core Success*

The study revealed that teaching knowledge was the area of most significant improvement, with teachers reporting higher improvements in their knowledge of lesson

planning and teaching techniques. This finding aligns strongly with the literature, which documents teaching knowledge mastery as a primary outcome of effective PD (Am et al., 2023; Averina & Kuswando, 2023). The positive reception of these core instructional strategies resonates with Alshumaimeri and Almohaisen's (2017) conclusion that teachers value PD formats that directly enhance their teaching repertoire. The consistent improvements in this domain suggest that current PD programs are relatively successful in delivering the 'technical' teaching knowledge required for teaching organization and lesson structuring.

#### *The Knowledge-Practice Gap*

A critical divergence appears in the Practical Application dimension. While teachers could apply technology, they had little improvement in adapting textbook activities and teaching productive skills. The difficulty in translating knowledge into context-specific practice directly supports Asad and Javed's (2023) finding that teachers face significant difficulties in transferring new knowledge to real classroom situations. The low ratings for materials adaptation likely reflect the 'theory-heavy' nature of PD cited by Bayar and Kösterelioğlu (2014), which limits applicability. Furthermore, this struggle points to the 'top-down' barrier mentioned by Alfaidi and Elhassan (2020), where PD initiatives fail to address teachers' diverse, specific contextual needs.

Besides, the low effectiveness ratings were reported for teaching skills such as writing, speaking, listening, and teaching pronunciation. These areas typically require extended support and continuous practice to see substantial improvement, which may be challenging to achieve through short-term PD courses alone. These findings align with existing research demonstrating that while PD can significantly enhance practical teaching skills (e.g., Coldwell, 2017; Alruqi & Alharbi, 2022; Alshumaimeri, 2017; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017), persistent challenges remain in training productive skills effectively (Viera et al., 2024), which necessitate extended, specialized support beyond generic PD offerings.

#### *Language Competence and Classroom Management*

English language competence emerged as the second most improved area, confirming findings by Ahmadi and Keshavarzi (2013) that PD programs can effectively enhance teachers' proficiency across communicative domains. Given that target language proficiency is a cornerstone of successful EFL teaching (Pawlak, 2011), this is a positive indicator of program impact. Similarly, improvements in classroom management - particularly in the use of teaching aids and feedback provision - mirror outcomes reported by Ashrafuzzaman (2018) and Alshumaimeri & Almohaisen (2017). However, the lower ratings for handling dynamic learning problems in this study suggest that while teachers are acquiring management techniques, they may still lack the skills needed for real classroom situations.

#### *Professional Attributes: The Motivation Paradox*

Perhaps the most telling finding is the low rating for motivation and Professional Attributes overall, despite a moderate willingness to attend future courses. This outcome stands in contrast to research by Coldwell (2017) and Averina & Kuswando (2023), who reported that PD substantially fosters teacher self-efficacy and attitudes. In this study, the gap between willingness to attend PD courses and motivation in teaching and taking personal PD activities strongly echoes Utami and Prestridge's (2018) description of 'tick-box' exercises. It suggests that teachers may be participating in PD to fulfill administrative mandates rather than out of a genuine drive for professional growth. This lack of intrinsic motivation likely stems from the disconnect between PD content and classroom realities, a school-related barrier emphasized by Bulut (2022). Without bridging this gap, PD risks remaining a formal requirement rather than a catalyst for the

sustained ‘transformative’ change needed in the current educational reform context.

#### *The Non-Linear Effect of Teaching Experience*

The findings revealed a significant, non-linear relationship between teaching experience and perceived PD effectiveness across most dimensions. This curvilinear pattern challenges the assumption that more experience automatically leads to greater benefit from PD and contrasts with Ahmadi and Keshavarzi’s (2013) finding that work experience did not significantly affect teachers’ professional development. The very low ratings among teachers with over 25 years of experience may reflect proximity to retirement, a preference for stability over change, or a perception that generic PD offerings no longer address their advanced professional needs. By contrast, the strong ratings in the 11–15 and 21–25-year groups suggest a ‘career sweet spot’ in which teachers have consolidated core skills but remain motivated to refine their practice and assume new roles. In line with Coldwell’s (2017) argument that PD impact depends on personal relevance and career stage, these results emphasize the need for differentiated PD programs rather than a uniform ‘one-size-fits-all’ model.

#### *Contextual Factors: School Type and Location*

With respect to workplace location, Welch’s ANOVAs indicated no statistically significant differences in perceived PD effectiveness across Urban Normal, Rural Normal, and Rural Selective schools for any of the four dimensions. Nonetheless, descriptive statistics suggested that teachers in Rural Selective schools tended to rate PD effectiveness lower than their peers in Urban and Rural Normal schools, though these differences did not reach significance, which is likely due to the small, diverse Rural Selective subgroup. This pattern tentatively indicates a potential misalignment between province-level PD content and the highly demanding, exam-oriented context of selective schools. Consistent with Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) and Ashrafuzzaman (2018), the findings suggest that PD may be most impactful when it is school-embedded and context-responsive, designed around the specific instructional realities of different school types rather than delivered as a generic, top-down package (Alfaidi & Elhassan, 2020).

#### *Gender and Individual Variability*

Although Welch’s test indicated a statistically significant gender effect only for Teaching Knowledge and a marginal effect for Professional Attributes, the overall pattern remained modest. Male teachers reported somewhat higher and more homogeneous ratings than female teachers on these dimensions, while no significant differences emerged for English Language Competence or Practical Application. Given the small number of male participants and the very small ‘Not to Say’ group, these results should be interpreted cautiously. Taken together with studies that found no meaningful gender differences in teachers’ PD perceptions (e.g., Ashrafian, & Alimohammadi, 2025; Bin-Hady et al., 2024), the present findings suggest that program quality, relevance, and contextual fit are likely far more important than gender per se. The greater variability among female teachers’ responses may instead reflect differing workloads, roles, or school cultures, reinforcing the need for flexible, context-sensitive PD design rather than gender-targeted interventions.

#### *The Tension Between Feasibility and Depth*

The overwhelming preference (92%) for condensed, one-week PD courses highlights a critical tension. While teachers favor time-efficient models due to workload constraints (Averina & Kuswando, 2023), research consistently indicates that sustained, ongoing support

is necessary for deep instructional change (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). This preference for 'short and practical' may explain why *Teaching Knowledge* (easier to acquire in short bursts) improved more than *Practical Application* (requiring sustained practice). Future PD initiatives must navigate this trade-off, perhaps by blending intensive workshops with long-term, low-intensity follow-up mechanisms (mentoring, peer observation) to satisfy both teacher preferences and effectiveness criteria.

## 5. Conclusion

This study investigated secondary school EFL teachers' perceptions of professional development (PD) effectiveness for courses attended over a ten-year period in northern Vietnam. The findings indicate that, overall, PD programs were moderately effective, with gains in teaching knowledge showed the biggest, while professional motivation remained the weakest area. In terms of content, PD provision was dominated by traditional language skills and teaching methodology, whereas emerging areas such as CLIL, professional ethics, and psychology in language teaching received limited attention.

Career stage emerged as a more influential factor than demographic characteristics. A significant, non-linear relationship between teaching experience and perceived effectiveness indicated that mid-to-late career teachers (11–15 years and 21–25 years) reported substantially higher benefits than both early-career and near-retirement cohorts. Teachers with over 25 years of experience may have felt PD fatigue or found the misalignment between program content and their professional needs. In contrast, school type and gender showed no statistically significant effects, though descriptive patterns suggested that teachers in selective schools and some female teachers may benefit from more customized support.

A notable finding was the gap between teaching knowledge gains and practical application of that knowledge, especially in adapting materials and teaching productive skills. This suggests a persistent challenge in translating theory into classroom practice. Although teachers acquired theoretical knowledge, they had difficulty in implementing these strategies in authentic classroom contexts.

Teachers' strong preference for one-week intensive courses reveals a tension between feasibility and depth. While short formats are easier to fit within teachers' workloads, meaningful instructional change requires more sustained and coherent support. To maximize PD impact, policymakers should prioritize: (1) differentiated pathways accounting for teachers' career stages, with tailored content and delivery for early-career, mid-career, and late-career teachers; (2) school-embedded, context-responsive design that acknowledges the specific needs of certain schools; (3) strengthened bridge between theory and practice through extended practice-based support; (4) intrinsic motivation engagement, moving beyond compliance-driven participation.

Ultimately, PD should be viewed not as a series of mandatory workshops but as a personalized, continuous system responsive to teachers' evolving professional needs across their careers. Future research should employ longitudinal designs to examine how different PD models affect long-term teaching practice, investigate the influence of school leadership and institutional culture on PD effectiveness, and explore targeted interventions for late-career teachers to sustain professional growth and motivation.

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