Teachers' Beliefs and Practices in Professional Development: A Higher Education Context

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ABSTRACT

Higher education teachers in Indonesia are required to fulfil the Three Pillars of Higher Education *(Tri Dharma Perguruan Tinggi)*: education, research, and community service. Furthermore, teachers must demonstrate four core competencies—professional, pedagogical, social, and personal—which necessitate ongoing professional development. This study explores higher education teachers' beliefs about their Professional Development (PD) and how their beliefs are manifested in their PD activities at a private Islamic university in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. In addition, this study investigates teachers' challenges and strategies in maintaining their professionalism. Using a descriptive qualitative research design, data were gathered from three purposively selected teachers at an Islamic private university, providing insights into TPD. Through in-depth interviews, the findings reveal several facts. In relation to beliefs about TPD, the participants show 1) their commitment to professional growth, leading to their PD activities such as 2) involving in institutionalized PD, and 3) engaging in innovative and reflective practices. In addition, teachers' challenges in doing their PD comprise 4) competing professional responsibilities, and 5) limited resources and institutional supports. Finally, the participants' strategies in maintaining their PD involve 6) self-regulated and adaptable professional growth, as well as 7) collaboration and networking. The findings suggest that while teachers are intrinsically motivated to grow professionally, they face systemic challenges such as limited institutional support and competing responsibilities. Therefore, higher education institutions should provide more structured, flexible, and collaborative professional development opportunities that acknowledge and support teachers' ongoing efforts.

Introduction

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are responsible for improving the quality of education by preparing the qualified educators. In so doing, HEI's or universities today must accommodate rising student populations, produce high-quality research on a global scale, obtain funding, engage in community service, manage both physical campuses and online learning, stay rooted in local needs while thinking globally, and strike a balance between deep expertise in specific fields and collaboration across disciplines (Giesenbauer & Müller-Christ, 2020). The quality of higher

education is significantly influenced by the quality of its human resources, particularly its academic staffs or teachers. When teachers conduct learning activities, they take on three key roles: guiding instruction, shaping students' character and values, and managing the classroom environment (Muhammadiah et al., 2022). Among the key factors contributing to successful higher education are the competencies and continuous development of teachers, who serve as agents of change and knowledge dissemination (Warizal, 2021).

In Indonesia, the importance of teacher professionalism is emphasized in the Teacher and Lecturer Law No. 14 of 2005 (Kholis & Murwanti, 2019), which defines higher education teachers as professional educators and scholars responsible for transforming, developing, and disseminating science, technology, and the arts through the Three Pillars of Higher Education (*Tri Dharma*): education, research, and community service. In addition to these responsibilities, the Ministry of Education in 2005 required teachers to develop and maintain four core competencies—professional, pedagogical, social, and personal (Arifudin & Ali, 2022). Thus, in an attempt to maintain professionalism, teachers should conduct Professional Development (PD) activities.

Teacher Professional Development (TPD) is widely recognized as a vital process for ensuring that teachers sustain and improve their competencies throughout their careers. In the past, TPD is regarded useful to enable teachers to adapt to pedagogical innovations, manage classroom dynamics more effectively, and improve student outcomes (Avalos, 2011; Guskey, 2002). However, these phenomena are still relevant nowadays as in their research, Haydarova (2024), Kohnke (2024), and Samundeeswari (2024) recently mentioned that TPD plays a vital role in strengthening teaching practices and boosting student achievement. In higher education contexts, regular and sustained PD is essential for navigating the complex demands of academic teaching and scholarship (Culver et al., 2023). Despite its acknowledged importance, the implementation of TPD often faces practical challenges— where academic workloads and institutional support may limit teachers' engagement in continuous development (Culver et al., 2023; El Islami et al., 2022).

Although numerous studies have explored TPD in general higher education contexts, few have examined how teachers in private Islamic institution believe and engage with TPD. Most private Islamic universities in Indonesia integrate faith-based principles into their institutional identity and educational goals. Therefore, these universities often apply *Catur Dharma* in which teachers have to involve actively in Islamic religion and Muhammadiyah organization, too. This setting may shape how teachers in this private Islamic institution perceive and practice professional development, especially in balancing religious values, academic responsibilities, and personal growth. In addition, institutional culture, governance structures, and Islamic values may create

both constraints and strategies for TPD that differ from those in public institutions (Nor et al., 2024).

Existing literatures have described TPD efforts in general. For example, Fernandes et al. (2023) reported positive impacts of pedagogical training on faculty teaching practices in Portugal, while El Islami et al. (2022) emphasized the role of collaborative environments in effective TPD strategies. While these previous studies perhaps overlook the socio-cultural and religious dynamics that may uniquely influence professional development in Islamic contexts, this research was done as an attempt to critically engage with how institutional and cultural contexts shape teachers' beliefs and practices in TPD. Thus, this study bridges the gap.

This study aimed to investigate teachers' beliefs and practices at a private Islamic university in Yogyakarta regarding their professional development. In addition, the challenges they encountered while doing their PD, and the strategies they adopted to overcome the problems are elaborated. It is expected that this study offers a novel contribution by foregrounding the intersection of PD and institutional religious values. Thus, the findings are expected to provide insights for higher education institutions, particularly Islamic universities, in designing more context-sensitive TPD programs. Ultimately, the study aims to support the cultivation of a sustainable culture of professionalism that aligns with both academic standards and Islamic educational missions.

A. Literature Review

TPD plays an important role in helping teachers grow and adapt, especially in higher education where teaching demands are constantly changing. TPD includes a wide range of activities that help teachers build their knowledge, improve their teaching skills, and strengthen their overall professional capacity (Botha & Herselman, 2018; Edu, 2025; Khan & Afridi, 2017). Teachers' beliefs about professional development significantly influence their engagement in various PD activities and shape the ways they the way they engage in these activities and how they maintain their professionalism over time. Moreover, existing research highlights the numerous challenges educators encounter in pursuing professional development and explores the strategies they employ to address these obstacles.

1. Teachers' Beliefs about Professional Development (TPD)

Teacher beliefs significantly influence their motivation, engagement, and persistence in PD activities (Borg, 2015). These beliefs shape how teachers view their roles, responsibilities, and the necessity of continuous learning (De Vries et al., 2013). In addition, De Vries et al. (2014) stated in another research that teachers' beliefs about TPD can influence their teaching practices. Research shows that when teachers perceive TPD as a means to stay relevant and to better serve their students, they are more likely to seek meaningful development experiences (Avalos, 2011). Opfer and Pedder (2011) emphasize that professional development is deeply embedded in teachers'

belief systems and is influenced by their understanding of knowledge, learning, and change. In the Indonesian context, the belief that teaching is a lifelong commitment is echoed in the demands of the *Tri Dharma*, reinforcing the need for sustained growth (Mulyasa, 2022). Additionally, Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) highlight that effective TPD is structured professional learning that results in changes in teacher practices and improvements in student learning outcomes.

2. TPD Activities

TPD can have various forms, from formal training and workshops to informal, self-initiated learning and reflection (Ahadi et al., 2024; Fernandes et al., 2023). Institutionalized PD programs, such as curriculum design seminars, research workshops, and teaching innovation forums, are essential in supporting structured teacher growth (Szelei et al., 2020). Moreover, innovative and reflective practices—such as action research, portfolio development, and peer observation—are increasingly recognized as core to meaningful TPD (Farrell, 2015). Other researchers stated that effective TPD often involves collaborative learning communities (El Islami et al., 2022; Samundeeswari, 2024) where teachers can exchange ideas, reflect on practice, and learn from one another which foster the ability to teach, manage classrooms, and understand subject fields. Samundeeswari (2024) added that professional learning that is continuous and embedded in teachers' daily work tends to be more impactful, and the integration of technology—such as online courses and virtual workshops—has further expanded access and increased teacher engagement. Finally, personalized development plans that align with individual teachers' needs and career aspirations have been shown to significantly enhance professional growth and support teacher retention. These activities not only enhance pedagogical competence but also encourage teachers to align their classroom practices with current educational trends.

3. Challenges in Implementing TPD

Despite the acknowledged importance of TPD, teachers often face challenges that limit their participation. One significant issue is the burden of multiple professional responsibilities, which can make time for PD scarce (Goodall, 2018). Additionally, limited institutional resources, such as lack of funding, support structures, and access to quality PD opportunities, further hinder sustained engagement (Matiba, 2024; Shiddike & Rahman, 2019; Singh et al., 2021). In Indonesian higher education, teachers are expected to carry out teaching, research, and community service—often without adequate administrative or financial support (Saeed & Akhtar, 2021; Zhang et al., 2020), making effective PD difficult to sustain. Silva Didier et al. (2025) identify time constraints, lack of technological infrastructure, and insufficient organizational routines as significant barriers to TPD implementation. Furthermore, Richter et al. (2014) identified motivation as a key factor influencing teachers' participation in PD programs. Their research suggests that increasing teachers' motivation to engage in professional development is essential for the success of these

programs. Finally, Sancar et al. (2021) emphasized the importance of providing teachers with the necessary resources and support to overcome barriers to professional development, such as time constraints and workload pressures.

4. Strategies for Overcoming TPD Challenges

In response to the challenges related to TPD, many teachers adopt self-directed learning strategies to maintain their professional growth (Cleary et al., 2022). This includes autonomous engagement with online resources, educational communities, and scholarly literature. Adaptive and self-regulated learning allows teachers to remain current without relying heavily on institutional structures (Korthagen, 2017). Furthermore, collaboration and networking—both local and international—emerge as critical strategies for mutual learning and professional support (García-Martínez et al., 2022). Professional learning communities (PLCs), peer mentoring, and academic networking provide spaces for teachers to share resources, gain feedback, and sustain motivation for growth. Quota and Bhatia (2021) suggest tailoring TPD to professional needs and classroom contexts, clearly communicating TPD goals, and offering choices to enhance teachers' sense of ownership and drive for learning.

B. Review of Previous Studies

Research on TPD in higher education has been variously conducted by several researchers. Silva Didier et al. (2025) conducted a mixed-methods study to examine the implementation challenges of a TPD program designed to support teachers in using students' perceptions of teaching quality (SPTQ) data. The study involved both quantitative surveys and qualitative semi-structured interviews. Participants included 17 secondary schools in Chile, with professional learning community coordinators from nine schools participating in the interviews. The findings revealed that despite initial interest, 15 of the 17 schools dropped out within 2-3 months due to significant implementation barriers. Key challenges identified were time constraints, lack of technological infrastructure, and insufficient organizational routines. The compatibility between TPD programs and schools' existing structures and routines was identified as a critical bottleneck. In addition, El Islami et al. (2022) conducted a systematic review of 267 articles published between 2015 and 2019 to investigate trends in professional development strategies and learning outcomes. The review analyzed studies involving teachers from various educational contexts globally. The findings highlighted a trend towards collaborative and collegial learning environments in PD programs, emphasizing that such environments are crucial for enhancing teachers' abilities to teach, manage classrooms, and understand subject fields. The study suggested that future PD programs should focus on these collaborative strategies to improve teaching practices. Finally, Quota and Bhatia (2021) conducted a qualitative study to identify strategies for overcoming motivational barriers in TPD programs. The study involved interviews

and focus groups with teachers from Kenya, Peru, Yemen, and Zambia, focusing on those facing significant challenges in their professional environments. The findings outlined ten strategies for addressing motivational barriers, emphasizing the importance of tailoring TPD to professional needs and classroom contexts, clearly communicating TPD goals, and offering choices to enhance teachers' sense of ownership and drive for learning. These strategies were found to be effective in increasing teachers' motivation and engagement in TPD programs.

Method

This study employed a qualitative research approach to explore teachers' beliefs, practices, challenges, and strategies related to their professional development (PD) in higher education. A qualitative approach was chosen because it allowed for a rich, contextualized understanding of participants' lived experiences and viewpoints (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Tisdell et al., 2025). Instead of looking at numbers or statistics, this study aimed to describe the teachers' real-life experiences about their PD in detail. The descriptive nature of the design allowed the study to capture the unique perspectives of these participants without forcing their responses into pre-set categories (Sandelowski, 2000). In so doing, it provides a richer understanding of how these teachers continue to develop professionally in the face of everyday demands and limited resources.

Data were collected using in-depth interviews, a commonly applied approach in qualitative research that focuses on developing deep insights rather than collecting objective facts or theoretical data (Osborne & Grant-Smith, 2021). In-depth interviews are particularly effective for gathering rich, detailed information about the participants' beliefs, attitudes, and experiences. Using semi structured in depth interview, a prepared list of questions was used, offering the researcher flexibility to probe deeper or clarify responses based on the participant's answers (Osborne & Grant-Smith, 2021). In this study, three teachers from a private Islamic university in Yogyakarta were selected as the participants. The small sample size is typical in qualitative research, where the focus is on obtaining detailed and in-depth insights rather than generalizing findings to a larger population. These participants were chosen based on their involvement in professional development activities and their willingness to share their experiences and perspectives. Semi-structured interviews, lasting 45–60 minutes, were conducted using video conference platform. The participants provided informed consent, and ethical approval was obtained. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2006) six-step framework. Initial codes were generated inductively and then organized into broader themes reflecting the teachers' experiences in relation to their PD.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, member checking was employed. Member checking is a technique used in qualitative research to provide the credibility of the data (McKim,

2023). This process involves sharing the findings with the teachers as the participants to confirm the accuracy of the interpretations and to provide an opportunity for them to offer feedback or corrections. By involving the participants in the validation process, member checking helps to ensure that the findings accurately reflect their experiences and perspectives. The member checking result was accurate and aligned well with the original interview data, confirming that the teachers' perspectives were correctly interpreted and represented.

Discussion

This study explored the beliefs, activities, challenges, and strategies related to Teacher Professional Development (TPD) among teachers at an Islamic private university in Yogyakarta. Through in-depth interviews with the three participants, several key themes emerged. To maintain the participants identity, pseudonyms were used; Mr. Bara, Ms. Eery, and Ms. Myra.

A. Finding 1: Commitment to Professional Growth

Regarding their beliefs on TPD, the three participants expressed a strong belief in the importance of continuous professional development as a core aspect of their teaching identity. This internal commitment was described as essential for maintaining relevance, addressing student needs, and responding to broader technological and educational changes. The three participants framed professional development as an ongoing process tied closely to their understanding of teacher professionalism. One of the participants, Ms. Eery emphasized that professional development should be a routine part of academic life despite her heavy workload. She said *"Teachers should conduct professional development activities regularly and continuously amidst their never-ending works. Another participant,* Mr. Bara echoed similar opinions, noting that teachers have a responsibility to remain responsive to educational shifts, and he stated *"Teachers must continuously improve their skills and knowledge to meet the evolving needs of students and society".* While both Ms. Eery and Mr. Bara are in agreement in that professionalism is closely related to continuous learning commitment, Ms. Myra connected this responsibility to the pace of technological change. She noted *"Teachers must update and develop themselves according to student needs and also the development of technology". In this case, students' needs and technology development are paramount for Ms. Myra.*

Beyond the need for improvement, these participants linked professional development to a holistic view of professionalism. They articulated that true professionalism involves not only academic qualifications but also a set of interrelated competencies: pedagogical, professional, personal, and social. These competencies were seen as necessary for fulfilling the demands of higher education, particularly in the Indonesian context of the *Tri Dharma*. As Ms. Eery explained, *"Professionalism is not solely defined by academic qualifications but also by competencies such as*

pedagogical, professional, social, and personal competence". Similarly, Mr. Bara described professionalism as multidimensional by saying *"Professionalism in teaching involves not only academic qualifications but also competencies in pedagogy, professional knowledge, social interactions, and personal development".* Finally, Ms. Myra further emphasized the functional aspect of these competencies in relation to evolving educational landscapes: *"Professional development is a must for teachers to develop and update their skills".*

The three participants demonstrated a strong internal commitment to continuous professional development, viewing it as integral to their professional identity. This supports Borg (2015) view that teacher beliefs significantly influence motivation and persistence in PD. Their perception of TPD as a moral and professional duty aligns with De Vries et al. (2013), who highlight that beliefs shape teachers' understanding of their responsibilities and the importance of lifelong learning. Participants emphasized the routine nature of TPD despite workload pressures, echoing Opfer and Pedder (2011) assertion that professional learning is embedded in teachers' conceptions of knowledge and change. The focus on adapting to student needs and technological advances, as noted by Ms. Myra, corresponds with Avalos (2011) who found that relevance to student outcomes motivates meaningful development. Their holistic view of professionalism—encompassing academic, pedagogical, personal, and social competencies—reflects Mulyasa (2022) linkage to Indonesia's *Tri Dharma* framework, which integrates teaching, research, and community service. Finally, the belief that TPD should lead to improved teaching practices and student outcomes aligns with Darling-Hammond et al. (2017).

B. Finding 2: Involving in Institutionalized PD

In relation to the TPD activities conducted in higher education, the participants in the study demonstrated a strong commitment to participating in structured PD initiatives, such as formal education, training programs, seminars, and workshops. These activities were viewed as essential avenues for improving pedagogical competence and adapting to evolving educational demands. One of the participants, Ms. Eery actively participated in seminars and certification programs to stay abreast of current teaching practices. She said, "I engage in various professional development activities such as attending seminars, workshops, and certification programs." Similarly, Ms. Myra echoed the importance of teacher development, highlighting her participation in workshops: "I have joined several programs that can help update myself such as seminars and workshops". In this context, Ms. Eery and Ms. Myra attended many seminars and workshops as they did not continue their study in the doctoral degree, so their involvements in theses PD activities were emphasized. While Ms. Eery and Ms. Myra actively participated in seminars and workshops as parts of their PD activities, Mr. Bara emphasized the significance of formal academic advancement. He said, "I pursued further education (S3) to enhance my teaching competencies and professional

knowledge." The excerpts from these participants show that PD activities were done using academic degree and non-degree ones under the policy of their university.

The PD activities done by the participants reflect two complementary dimensions of TPD: internal and institutional involvement. Their participation in structured initiatives such as seminars, workshops, certification programs, and advanced academic degrees aligns with Ahadi et al. (2024) and Fernandes et al. (2023) who highlight that professional development can take various forms and that well-designed programs support teacher growth. The choice of activities varied based on individual needs and academic background—where Ms. Eery and Ms. Myra emphasized non-degree PD due to not pursuing doctoral studies, Mr. Bara focused on academic advancement through formal education. This suggests that TPD is both a personal and contextual endeavor shaped by institutional policy and professional aspirations.

C. Finding 3: Engaging in Innovative and Reflective Practices

Another activity done by the participants in conducting TPD is engaging in innovative and reflective practices. Beyond formal programs, participants enriched their professional development by adopting innovative pedagogical tools and engaging in reflective practices such as research and community service. These autonomous activities highlight a proactive orientation toward teaching enhancement. For example, one participant, Ms. Eery, reported using a range of digital platforms to improve student engagement. She shared, "I utilize various teaching tools and methods, including video learning, e-learning platforms, and social media." Similarly, Mr. Bara stressed the role of technology in pedagogical innovation, noting, "I engaged in developing and utilizing online learning platforms, such as Learning Management System (LMS) and video learning, to enhance my teaching methods." Finally, Ms. Myra broadened the concept of professional growth by incorporating scholarly and community engagement into her practice: "Conducting research and community service is also part of professional development." This integration of research and teaching reflects the *Tri Dharma*, which emphasizes the interconnectedness of education, research, and community service (Law No. 14/2005).

Beyond structured programs, participants also demonstrated engagement in innovative and reflective practices—such as integrating technology into teaching and participating in research and community service. These activities reflect a deeper, autonomous form of professional learning. According to Farrell (2015), such reflective practices—like action research and technological experimentation—are central to meaningful TPD. Ms. Eery and Mr. Bara's use of digital tools to enhance teaching effectiveness, along with Ms. Myra's integration of research and service, illustrate a commitment to continuous improvement rooted in the Indonesian context of the *Tri Dharma* (Law No. 14/2005). Together, these findings reinforce the view that effective TPD

is multidimensional, combining institutional support (Szelei et al., 2020) with proactive teacher agency. Additionally, when such efforts are situated in collaborative environments, they foster not only pedagogical growth but also broader professional competencies (El Islami et al., 2022; Samundeeswari, 2024).

D. Finding 4: Competing Professional Responsibilities

Regarding the challenges in conducting TPD, the three participants consistently reported difficulties in managing the competing demands of teaching, research, administration, and community engagement. These overlapping responsibilities, compounded by limited institutional support and time constraints, often left little room for sustained professional development efforts. Ms. Eery reflected, "I face challenges in balancing my teaching, research, and community service responsibilities, especially during the pandemic [COVID-19]." Similarly, Mr. Bara noted, "One of the main challenges I faced was balancing my responsibilities as a teacher and an administrator." Finally, Ms. Myra experienced similar difficulties, and she said, "I do things [teaching, research, administration, and community engagement] slowly, much slower than others, but I still want to finish." Indeed, during the interview Ms. Myra admitted that she was already senior, and therefore she added, "I need more time to read and understand things, which sometimes makes me feel left behind." As this problems continued, she often felt burnout, noting "I feel tired and mentally exhausted.. sometimes feeling hopeless and not useful [because I was slow]."

The participants' experiences highlight significant challenges in balancing the multifaceted responsibilities of teaching, research, administration, and community engagement, which is consistent with Goodall (2018) observation that teachers often struggle to allocate sufficient time for professional development amid competing duties. The heavy workload reported by Ms. Eery, Mr. Bara, and Ms. Myra—especially during demanding periods like the COVID-19 pandemic— exemplifies how these overlapping roles can impede sustained engagement in TPD activities. Ms. Myra's feelings of burnout and being "left behind" further underscore the emotional toll that these pressures can exert on educators, reflecting the critical role of motivation in TPD participation as noted by Richter et al. (2014).

E. Finding 5: Limited Resources and Institutional Supports

Another challenge in conducting TPD emerging from the three participants is related to limited resources and support from the institution. Financial and logistical constraints further complicated their engagement in professional development activities. One of the participants, Ms. Eery experienced challenges related to collaboration, particularly when her colleagues did not share the same work ethic, communication style, or availability. These differences led to frustration and inefficiencies, especially in time-sensitive academic tasks. She reflected, *"I feel there are obstacles when I have to work in a group with people like that,"* referring to colleagues

who were unresponsive or limited their availability strictly to office hours. This situation resulted in ineffective teamwork. She added, *"I always try to make sure everything is finished based on the schedule,"* underscoring her preference for early deadlines and timely completion. The challenge experienced by Ms. Eery indicates how social dynamics and inconsistent work patterns among peers can serve as indirect institutional constraints, limiting the effectiveness of collaborative professional development efforts. Similarly, Mr. Bara expressed frustration with teamwork where fundamental differences in thinking styles and priorities created barriers: *"The most difficult thing is the paradigm. If people have different paradigms, it's hard... even small issues can become big just because we think differently."* In situations such as COVID-19 pandemic couple years ago, these divergent views led to fractured coordination and slowed professional processes. This highlights how limited institutional support in fostering unified professional norms and collaboration tools can exacerbate interpersonal friction, ultimately constraining effective teamwork and growth. However, unlike these two participants, Ms. Myra had different problems. She often had to spend her own money on professional development activities, and she stated, "I spend a lot of money on training and courses, sometimes using my own budget. I need support [from the university]." These statements suggest that while teachers are internally committed to growth, their professional development is often hindered by systemic workload pressures and insufficient institutional resources.

The limited institutional support, including insufficient funding and lack of structural mechanisms to ease the burden, exacerbated these difficulties. These findings resonate with the studies of Matiba (2024), Shiddike and Rahman (2019), and Singh et al. (2021), who argue that lack of funding, support structures, and organizational routines significantly hinder teachers' access to quality PD opportunities. Ms. Eery and Mr. Bara's frustrations with teamwork and divergent paradigms illustrate how social and organizational dynamics can act as indirect institutional obstacles, impeding cohesive and timely professional development efforts. This aligns with Silva Didier et al. (2025), who emphasize that lack of technological infrastructure and coordination routines exacerbate barriers to TPD. Distinctly, Ms. Myra's reliance on personal funds to participate in PD activities highlights the insufficiency of institutional support, reinforcing findings by Saeed and Akhtar (2021) and Zhang et al. (2020) that Indonesian higher education teachers frequently face financial and administrative challenges in fulfilling the *Tri Dharma* mandates. Sancar et al. (2021) stress that providing adequate resources and institutional backing is essential to overcoming such barriers and sustaining teacher motivation and participation in professional development.

F. Finding 6: Self-regulated and Adaptable Professional Growth

As an attempt to overcome the challenges in maintaining their professionalism, the

participants of the study demonstrated a strong sense of autonomy in directing their own professional development. They actively sought out new pedagogical approaches, digital tools, and instructional strategies to stay current and effective in their teaching roles. This self-initiated learning reflects an intrinsic motivation to improve and adapt despite structural limitations. Ms. Eery shared, "I continuously adapt to new teaching methods and technologies, ensuring I remain effective and relevant in my teaching practices." Slightly different, Mr. Bara emphasized, "I'm always open to new ideas and willing to learn from different sources, including colleagues and external experts." Similarly, Ms. Myra highlighted the mindset of hers, and she said, "Never stop learning, never stop asking others, and always be in a good professional learning community." These statements illustrate how self-initiated and adaptable to learning situation as a key strategy for sustaining professional growth under challenging circumstances.

The findings reveal that the participants exercised significant autonomy in directing their professional development, demonstrating strong intrinsic motivation to adapt and grow despite structural and institutional challenges. This self-regulated approach aligns with Cleary et al. (2022), who emphasize that teachers often rely on autonomous learning strategies—such as exploring new pedagogical methods and technologies independently—to sustain their professional growth. The participants' proactive attitudes, reflected in Ms. Eery continuous adaptation and Mr. Bara's openness to learning from diverse sources, exemplify Korthagen (2017) notion that adaptive, self-directed learning enables educators to remain current and effective without sole dependence on formal institutional support.

G. Finding 7: Collaboration and Networking for Professional Growth

In addition to self-regulated learning efforts, the participants actively engaged in collaborative relationships and professional networks to enhance their development. They viewed collegial interactions as vital not only for sharing knowledge and experiences but also for emotional support and validation. Ms. Eery sought collegial spaces where her contributions were valued, noting, "I sought out opportunities to collaborate with colleagues who appreciate my skills and contributions." Mr. Bara reflected a similar view: "I engaged in collaborative activities and networking with other professionals to share knowledge and experiences." Ms. Myra emphasized the importance of global connections, stating, "Helping others and maintaining a network with friends overseas to stay updated." These collective efforts suggest that professional learning communities—both formal and informal—play a crucial role in fostering growth, resilience, and innovation among educators.

The finding on collaboration and networking emerged as a complementary strategy. The participants actively sought collegial spaces and professional networks for knowledge exchange, emotional support, and validation. This reflects García-Martínez et al. (2022) findings that local

and international professional learning communities (PLCs), peer mentoring, and networking are vital for fostering resilience, innovation, and motivation among teachers. Ms. Myra's emphasis on maintaining global connections underscores the expanding role of international collaboration in enriching professional learning and keeping teachers attuned to global trends. Together, these findings highlight that effective TPD is not only about individual initiative but also about creating and sustaining collaborative environments. Quota and Bhatia (2021) suggest that tailoring TPD to meet teachers' professional needs and providing choices in development pathways enhance ownership and engagement, reinforcing the dual importance of self-regulation and collegial interaction in sustaining meaningful professional growth.

Conclusion

This study aimed to understand how higher education teachers in Indonesia view their professional development (PD), the kinds of activities they engage in, the challenges they face, and the strategies they use to keep growing professionally. Grounded in the context of the *Tri Dharma*—which requires university teachers to excel in teaching, research, and community service—this research explored the lived experiences of three teachers at a private Islamic university in Yogyakarta. Using a descriptive qualitative design, the study offered rich insights into how these educators navigate their professional journeys

The findings reveal that the teachers are deeply committed to professional growth. They actively take part in formal, institution-led programs and also pursue personal, reflective, and innovative practices on their own. However, their path is not without obstacles. Balancing teaching, administrative duties, and research often leaves little time or energy for these teachers to focus on their own professional development. Additionally, limited institutional resources and support structures present further barriers. Yet, despite these challenges, these teachers demonstrate resilience by setting their own learning goals and seeking collaboration through professional networks and communities.

Based on these findings, it is clear that professional development is not just a requirement but a meaningful, ongoing process that teachers care deeply about. Institutions, therefore, need to recognize this commitment and provide more responsive and flexible support systems. This could include offering more accessible PD opportunities, reducing administrative overload, and creating platforms for collaboration and peer learning. By doing so, universities can foster an environment where educators feel supported and empowered to grow—benefitting not just their careers but also the future generations they help shape.

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