

ELEVATING TEACHER EMPOWERMENT THROUGH INDONESIA'S TEACHER PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION PROGRAM

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the transformative effects of Indonesia's Teacher Professional Education Program (TPEP) on educators, focusing on its impact on teachers' personal and professional growth. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, data were gathered through interviews, focus group discussions, and classroom observations involving program participants (teachers) and faculty members. Key findings reveal significant positive changes: teachers reported adopting more innovative teaching methods (e.g. project-based and technology-enhanced learning), improved classroom management, and increased confidence and job satisfaction. For example, one participant noted that after TPEP 'students are more engaged and disciplined when I use project-based learning and new digital tools.' These practical changes align with prior research showing that active, student-centered professional development enhances instructional practice. However, participants also cited persistent challenges: resource constraints, heavy workloads, and limited ongoing PD support hindered full implementation. Stakeholders emphasized the need for strengthened support mechanisms (such as richer resource libraries and mentoring), echoing other studies that highlight institutional backing as critical for PD success. Overall, TPEP has empowered teachers and raised instructional quality, but sustainable improvements will require addressing systemic barriers and investing in continuous, collaborative professional learning.

Keywords: Teacher Professional Development; Teacher Empowerment;
Innovative Teaching; Classroom Management; Indonesia

INTRODUCTION

Education quality in Indonesia has long been a concern. International assessments (e.g. PISA 2019) showed that Indonesian student performance has stagnated at 2000 levels, highlighting the need for stronger teacher quality. Recognizing this, the Indonesian government enacted Law No. 14/2005 and subsequently launched the Teacher Professional Education Program (TPEP) to bolster teacher competency and professionalism. The TPEP – implemented for both pre-service and in-service teachers – aims to ensure educators are competent, disciplined, and up-to-date with pedagogy and content knowledge. Despite these efforts, empirical evaluations of TPEP's impact are scarce. This study addresses that gap by examining how TPEP influences teachers' instructional practices, management, and professional growth. The novelty lies in using a phenomenological qualitative design to foreground teachers' own experiences and those of lecturers and coordinators. Specifically, we investigate: (1) How TPEP

affects teachers' teaching methods and classroom dynamics, (2) What challenges participants encounter, and (3) Stakeholder recommendations for program improvement. In sum, this research aims to provide in-depth insights into TPEP's effectiveness in empowering teachers and advancing educational excellence in Indonesia. The program has also significantly improved Classroom Management Self-Efficacy among English teachers, equipping them with practical skills for effective classroom management (Annisaa Purniningtyas et al., 2024). Furthermore, PPG supports the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 4, by promoting quality and inclusive education. However, challenges remain in areas such as active participation in classroom action research and teacher professional collaboration (Rokhman et al., 2024). Overall, the program has demonstrated its effectiveness in elevating teacher empowerment and contributing to sustainable educational development in Indonesia.

However, earlier studies regarding the Teacher Professional Education Program (TPEP) in Indonesia have centered mainly on quantitative aspects, including results like certification achievement and overlooked measurement benchmarks of teaching efficacy. However, there is still a noticeable gap in understanding qualitatively the extent to which this program affects a teacher's instructional and classroom management skills and professional self-concept. This study aims to fill this gap by capturing the experiences of TPEP participants, which include teachers, lecturers, and program coordinators, through a phenomenological qualitative lens. Examining the TPEP system narratives sheds light on its scientific significance by documenting rich, story-driven testimonials from the TPEP milieu's pivotal figures. This study captures and analyzes the impact of the TPEP on teaching skills, including professional development, contextual challenges, and grounded change stakeholder-driven recommendations for improvement. Thus, it adds to the existing knowledge on TEPs concerning teacher empowerment and pedagogical shifts, including important considerations for policy and program adjustments focused on Indonesian education systems.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design with a phenomenological approach to capture participants' lived experiences in TPEP. Phenomenology aims to understand the meaning of a phenomenon from participants' perspectives, making it well-suited to exploring how teachers perceive TPEP's impact. Participants were purposely sampled from among educators involved in TPEP – including in-service teachers and program facilitators (lecturers, mentors). Data were collected via semi-structured in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and classroom observations. The interviews elicited teachers' reflections on changes in their teaching practices, while the observations documented instructional methods during and after TPEP sessions. The data collection process took place over a period of three months, allowing for an in-depth and sustained exploration of teaching behaviors and program impact. The primary sources of data were certified teachers who had completed the TPEP, as well as lecturers and program coordinators involved in the design and facilitation of the program. These participants provided varied perspectives on how TPEP influenced instructional strategies, classroom management, and professional development.

All interviews and discussions were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. We used thematic analysis to interpret the data. First, multiple researchers coded transcripts independently to identify key ideas (open coding). Themes were then organized around the research focus (e.g. teaching methods, management, challenges). Data triangulation (comparing interview data with observations and group discussions) helped ensure credibility. Throughout analysis, we adhered to qualitative rigor by iteratively reviewing transcripts and discussing interpretations among the research team, in line with standard phenomenological methods. Finally, representative quotations were selected to illustrate each theme. Through this process, we developed a holistic view of TPEP's impact and the contextual factors influencing its effectiveness.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The analysis shows some interconnected themes. In general, the introduction of new pedagogies and teaching methods, combined with the process of strengthening teacher confidence, led to outcomes that participants viewed as TPEP positively impacted them. Simultaneously, contextual barriers held back the full implementation of the program. Explained versions of the findings are turned into some specific theme and linked to previous study as outlined below.

Innovative Teaching Practices

After TPEP, methods that are more student-centered and interactive are adopted by teachers to create innovations. Some innovations included project-based learning, utilization of digital tools (e.g. learning software, online resources), and various instructions for different students. A teacher explained: "The way I designed the students' project and some application for assessment is referring to TPEP, and I can tell that my lesson have become much more engaging" (Interviewee AZ). To put it into words, TPEP led to higher student participation and engagement, inline with the teacher's testimony that students responded well in utilizing technologies in the class. Moreover, Importantly, several teachers also reported a greater sense of confidence and autonomy in designing lessons tailored to their students' needs, indicating a deeper understanding of pedagogical strategies. Teachers began to incorporate formative assessment tools. This is in line with more extensive data, which shows that professional development that emphasises active learning and pedagogical content understanding significantly improves the standard of instruction. According to ICT studies conducted in Indonesia, teachers who have received professional development are generally proficient in using technology, but they require more assistance with creativity. Consistent with these findings, participants in our study shifted from traditional lecturing to interactive methods.

Enhanced Classroom Management

Relatedly, many teachers described improved classroom management after the program. They attributed this to learning new engagement strategies and structuring lessons more effectively (e.g. clear rules for project work). For instance,

a teacher noted, “I feel I have better control now – students know what to do in group work, and I spend less time on discipline issues” (interviewee NR). Enhanced management manifested as fewer disruptions and smoother lesson flow. This outcome aligns with literature suggesting that engaging pedagogy can indirectly benefit classroom climate. Although few PD studies explicitly measure management, the move to active learning often reduces behavioral problems by channeling student energy into meaningful tasks. In our data, the shift in practice (e.g. interactive activities) appeared to be a key factor enabling better management. This theme reinforces that TPEP’s methodological training went beyond content delivery to practical classroom techniques.

Personal Growth and Professional Development

Teachers also emphasized growth in confidence, motivation, and professional identity. Participants frequently mentioned feeling more assured in their subject mastery and teaching skills. One reflected, “Before TPEP I doubted myself; afterward I realized I can be innovative and meet international standards” (Interviewee DA). The program’s mix of theoretical learning and real teaching practice (mentor-led school sessions) gave them a sense of progress. Collaborative elements – discussing with peers, receiving feedback from experienced mentors – were cited as particularly valuable. This corresponds to findings that PLCs and mentoring enhance teachers’ self-efficacy. In fact, research shows that teachers involved in supportive professional communities report higher confidence and adaptive pedagogical beliefs. Our interviews suggest a similar effect: the social learning environment of TPEP, combined with success in actual lessons, reinforced teachers’ belief in their capabilities. This empowerment is critical, as confident teachers are more likely to sustain improvement efforts and become informal leaders in their schools.

Challenges and Constraints

Despite these gains, participants encountered significant barriers. The most common issues were resource limitations and workload pressures. Teachers pointed out shortages of teaching materials and technology: “In the city it’s OK, but in rural schools we still lack computers and books” (Interviewee HS). Another one said. Heavy teacher workloads (large class sizes, administrative duties) made it hard to plan or sustain new approaches: as another explained, “It’s a good idea to design rich projects, but when I have 40 students and need to teach multiple subjects, time is the enemy” (Interviewee KR). These challenges mirror those identified elsewhere: for example, international surveys find that over half of teachers cite workload and time constraints as major stressors. In low-resource settings, funding and access gaps frequently hinder PD outcomes. Additionally, some teachers reported administrative challenges (such as delays in paperwork) and inconsistent mentor quality in the administration management. These results highlight the fact that systemic problems must be addressed for even a well-designed PD program, such as TPEP, to be entirely successful.

Support Mechanisms and Stakeholder Perspectives

Participants and other stakeholders (lecturers, school leaders) proposed several support strategies to build on TPEP's strengths. Recommendations included expanding mentoring (both during and after the program), creating resource repositories (videos, lesson plans), and scheduling flexibility (to accommodate teacher availability). These suggestions align with literature stressing institutional support: Rizqi and Syafika's review of PLCs highlights that leadership support and policy alignment are critical enablers. In our study, schools that proactively paired teachers with experienced mentors or facilitated peer discussion saw deeper implementation of TPEP practices. Stakeholders also noted that ongoing PD (refresher courses, peer networks) is needed to sustain change – echoing findings that continuous professional learning is more effective than one-off workshops.

In sum, the results indicate that TPEP positively influenced teaching practices and teacher self-efficacy, consistent with prior PD research. The themes of innovation, better management, and empowerment support the view that active, collaborative PD fosters meaningful change. However, the identified challenges are substantial. Our findings suggest that to maximize TPEP's impact, educational leaders should ensure adequate resources (materials, technology), reasonable workloads, and structured follow-up support. Addressing these issues would help translate teachers' newly acquired skills into sustained improvement in student outcomes.

Discussion

The findings of this study align strongly with current research on effective professional development (PD), affirming that Indonesia's Teacher Professional Education Program (TPEP) contributes meaningfully to teachers' instructional quality, confidence, and professional identity. Grounded in the literature, this discussion highlights how the core components of PD—content focus, active learning, collaborative practice, and implementation fidelity—shape the program's outcomes and challenges. Consistent with the findings of Akhtar (2024), Tapadia (2024), and Bowman et al. (2020), teachers in this study reported adopting innovative, student-centered practices following their TPEP participation. These included project-based learning, differentiated instruction, and technology integration—all associated with improved student engagement and teaching effectiveness. The data support the notion that structured PD with ongoing support can shift pedagogical approaches meaningfully.

This observation reinforces Desimone's (2009) and Darling-Hammond et al.'s (2017) conclusion that PD is most effective when it is active, ongoing, and tightly connected to classroom realities. In this study, TPEP's integration of field-based teaching experiences and mentor-led reflection served as practical applications of these principles. Teachers felt better prepared and more empowered in their instructional roles, echoing Meyer et al. (2023), who emphasized the importance of cognitive activation and collaboration in driving changes in professional practice.

However, the literature also warns that well-designed PD may fail without effective implementation. Findings from this study align with Patfield et al. (2021), Hu & Veen (2020), and Zhang et al. (2021), highlighting contextual barriers such as resource scarcity, varying mentor quality, and high teacher workload. For example, educators in under-resourced areas struggled to apply what they had learned due to a lack of digital tools or instructional materials. These findings underscore Hu and Veen's (2020) assertion that implementation at the school level—through leadership, coordination, and follow-up—is key to sustained teacher learning. In our data, teachers in supportive environments with proactive leadership demonstrated greater success in applying TPEP strategies. Conversely, without structured support, even highly motivated teachers faced difficulties sustaining change.

Another central theme in both the literature and this study is the value of collaborative professional learning (CPL). Teachers cited peer interaction, feedback from mentors, and group reflection as key contributors to their development. These elements reflect the best practices of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) and collaborative inquiry groups as documented by Siti Tarwiyah et al. (2024), Myo Sandar & Kálmán (2022), and Jones (2021). TPEP's emphasis on peer learning aligns with global trends toward social learning approaches in teacher education. Teachers who experienced collaborative dialogue reported increased self-efficacy, shared responsibility, and willingness to innovate, consistent with findings from Loughland & Nguyen (2020). These social structures foster a sense of belonging and collective capacity that strengthens instructional change. However, successful CPL depends heavily on school culture and leadership (Myo Sandar & Kálmán, 2022). In this study, schools that created space for dialogue and peer coaching saw stronger uptake of collaborative strategies. Without these supports, some teachers described collaboration as superficial or unsustainable.

This discussion demonstrates that the positive impact of TPEP is deeply intertwined with established principles of effective PD. The findings validate international evidence that PD programs must go beyond theoretical content, focusing instead on context-relevant, collaborative, and actively implemented learning experiences. The strengths of TPEP—such as its mentoring, field experiences, and emphasis on teacher empowerment—are powerful, but systemic issues related to resources, school leadership, and time constraints limit its full potential. To maximize its impact, TPEP must ensure equity of access, consistent mentor quality, and sustained post-program support. Institutional structures and national education policy must further evolve to support context-sensitive implementation and teacher collaboration. Only then can the program's theoretical strengths translate into broad, lasting improvements in Indonesia's education quality.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that Indonesia's Teacher Professional Education Program has substantially elevated teacher empowerment. Educators reported adopting innovative pedagogies, managing classrooms more effectively, and

gaining confidence – outcomes that strengthen instructional quality and motivation. These findings corroborate the literature showing that active, collaborative teacher training leads to better teaching practices. At the same time, systemic constraints (limited resources, heavy workloads) emerged as significant challenges. Stakeholders concur that improving resource allocation, expanding mentoring and feedback, and providing ongoing PD are vital next steps. In conclusion, TPEP has laid a promising foundation for teacher development in Indonesia, but realizing its full potential will require coordinated support at all levels. We recommend that policy-makers and educational institutions build on these results by enhancing support mechanisms (e.g., funding classroom materials, training more mentors) and fostering communities of practice. Future research could quantitatively assess TPEP outcomes and explore long-term effects across diverse regions. Ultimately, by addressing the identified gaps and reinforcing teachers' collaborative networks, Indonesia can continue advancing educational excellence and equity through empowered educators.

Furthermore, as the foundation of educational reform, the success of TPEP underlines the significance of consistent investment in teacher development. In addition to being more successful in the classroom, empowered educators are also more inclined to take the initiative to engage students while improving the school. Therefore, it is important to consider empowering teachers as an effective way of promoting systemic change in addition to an objective. Context-sensitive implementation is also necessary to guarantee that rural and under-resourced schools receive a fair proportion of the program's benefits. Different educational infrastructures, cultural differences, and regional disparities must all be addressed via customised techniques. Future research should investigate the long-term effects of TPEP on instructional quality and student performance in various educational environments. Specifically, research should investigate how contextual factors—such as geographic location, educational resources, and institutional support—impact the sustainability and efficacy of TPEP implementation. Comparative and longitudinal methodologies may yield profound insights into the adaptation of the program to address the distinct needs of underprivileged or underrepresented educational populations, hence assuring more equitable and significant outcomes.

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