

# Prospects and Challenges towards Professional Development of English Lecturers in Islamic Tertiary Education in Indonesia

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## Abstract

Teaching is a complex career in which teachers and those involved in teaching are required to engage in professional development programs to improve teaching competences and guarantee effective teaching. This qualitative case study interviewed top management in higher education institutions and thirty lecturers from three universities. Findings generated through in-depth interviews and focus group discussion (FGD) suggesting several strategies taken and programs joint by English lecturers to improve their professional competences. Some of the strategies taken by university management are improving qualification through doctorate programs, article publications, peer discussions, reviews of journal articles, exploration of educational websites, and joining professional associations. In addition, there are some other programs engaged by lecturers, such as international conferences, workshops, and research projects. In addition, lecturers reported that they improved teaching awareness and became better scholars, allowing them to self-correct their own mistakes. Finally, this study also found that institutional supports are obvious in some universities, while in some others are still lacking.

**Keywords:** professional development, conferences, workshop, lecturers, professional competence

## 1. Introduction

Teaching is a complex career; it is a profession that requires teachers, lecturers, and teaching staffs to engage in constant learning to improve their professional competence. For that reason, teachers should engage in self-professional development through any means possible (Canh & Minh, 2012; Farrel, 2007). In other words, constant engagement with professional development is necessary for all those involved in teaching (Abbassi & David, 2021; Zhang, Admiraal, & Saab (2021); Nurfadhilah, 2015; Rodriguez & McKay, 2010; Yuwono & Harbon, 2010; Wichadee, 2011).

In improving professional competence, teachers, lecturers, or teaching staffs (henceforth educators) may take various strategies. Educators, for example, may take opportunities to continue their studies, joining training, engaging in research, and publishing in academic journals (Johnson, 2009; Hensen-Thomas, Dunlap, Cassey, Starret, 2014). Greenwell and Zygoris-Coe (2012) stated that “teachers need effective and relevant professional development to help them meet the literacy needs of students and the content demands of their discipline” (p. 22).

The other reason for professional development is its positive impact on professionalism, as suggested by Murray (2010) that “is to be empowered-to have the opportunity and confidence to act upon your ideas as well as to influence the way you perform in your profession” (p. 3). The professional development activities also help improve teaching awareness, and the level of awareness of the teaching process is important for successful teaching (Wong, 2011). Hansen-Thomas, Casey, and Grosso (2012) maintained that “teachers learn most when they are actively engaged in examining their regular practice (i.e., teaching and learning) and how the professional development activities contribute to their daily work” (pp. 133-134).

Currently in Indonesia, it is obligatory for all educators to obtain masters’ degrees and other professional degrees (Petrus, 2012). In fact, all educators have to obtain a doctorate’s degree to promote students’ learning success. Having obtained these degrees, educators are hoped to be able to improve their professional competences. In addition

to pursuing formal education, educators are also encouraged to join training or/and workshop, conferences on improving professionalism.

To enable educators to improve professional competencies, there are some aspects that they need to address some aspects upon engaging themselves in professional development. These aspects include subject matter knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge. In addition, authorities' support is an essential triggering factor for professional development.

There have been some studies on this particular issue, which are different in several respects from this current study. For example, Smith's (2014) findings suggest that online learning professional development courses are advantageous to improve teaching performance. This is true since the courses are handy and lecturers can join them at their own pace and time. However, online learning courses are not always successful in certain contexts due to unstable internet connections. Furthermore, Alemu's (2013) study exploring English teachers' professionalism in the Ethiopian higher education context uncovered that teachers "have good professional authority in decision making related to teaching and learning activities" (p. 305). This suggests that teachers should be independent to decide classroom activities for learning success, and such ability can be achieved through professional development activities. In addition, Lin's study (2013) showed that while teaching practices are shaped by ones' personal attitudes and teaching beliefs, professional development activities teachers engage with allow them to gain knowledge on many aspects of teaching. For example, they will learn how to plan the lesson, conduct effective classroom practices, develop well-designed learning materials, and design effective assessment strategies.

Another study by Hansen-Thomas, Casey, and Grosso (2012) explores the effects of collaboration among EFL teachers on their teaching skills. The study found that professional development programs have shifted teachers' identities due to their interaction during the program. They learned how to engage in effective classroom practices and enhance their ability to prepare a well-planned teaching administration. Huang's (2007) research revealed important findings that professional development programs give various benefits to teachers. The programs improve their ability to develop their subject-matter knowledge, general pedagogical knowledge, and pedagogical content knowledge. The program these teachers join also enables them to engage in long-life learning and develop cognitive ability. This knowledge and skills for sure help them enhance their classroom performances.

As these previous studies have shown positive impacts of professional development programs, this research is different in several respects. It also explores if their professional development shifts their professional identity and if authorities support these lecturers' engagement in professional development through their policies.

To guide this work, we raised some research questions that allow us to answer our research inquiries.

1. How do EFL lecturers develop their professional competence? And what programs have they joined for professional development?
2. How does their engagement in professional development shift their professional identity?
3. What policies have been issued by the institutions to develop EFL lecturers' professional competences?

These research questions will be explored qualitatively using in-depth interviews and focus group discussion (FGD). We will return to this topic in more detail in the following section. This study is significant since it will reveal information on types of professional development EFL lecturers in some universities engage with; and how these engagements help shift their professional identity and uncover institutional programs designed to help lecturers improve their professional competences.

## **2. The Nature of Professional Development**

All individuals involved in the educational industries need to engage in professional development at the school level or university level. Lecturers, for example, have to engage in professional development since it plays a vital role in improving and sustain not only their pedagogical knowledge but also subject matter knowledge. Richards and Schmidt (2002) state that pedagogical content knowledge can be gained through persistently engaging in professional development activities. During their training in their pre-service program in Teacher Education College, they have been prepared with many skills through various opportunities and programs. However, having been employed as lecturers, most of them have been occupied with teaching commitment which reduces their opportunities to develop their professional competences.

As the access to training is limited, lecturers should find alternative strategies to improve and maintain their subject matter and pedagogical content knowledge skills. This can be done through their engagement in professional

development (henceforth PD). It is important to note that PD is a must activity that all lecturers should engage with since it helps them improve their teaching performance and classroom management. The PD is beneficial for novice lecturers and experienced lecturers. It is defined as activities that allow lecturers to improve their teaching competence through formal, informal, or non-formal learning (Kaatuuk & Marentek, 2014). Since it is important to provide good educational service, lecturers should regularly engage in effective professional development.

### *2.1 Professional Development Activities*

Lecturers may engage in professional development programs formally or informally, individually, or in groups. While in an informal professional development program, lecturers may do it in their own time and will. In that case, there is no need for a specially designed program or syllabus (Guan & Huang, 2013). The current development on ICT use in educational settings opens more spaces and opportunities for educators in self-professional development. Most online courses on professional development available online are simply accessible by lecturers. This technological advance indeed opens a new venue for self-professional development. This is similar to Luv's (2014) argument that "the initiative for self-development can help to produce the actuation of self-development" (p. 1441). Therefore, it is confirmed that empower themselves, teaching staff, such as lecturers, should always refine their professionalism independently, which they do not rely too much on the institutions' policies. However, the institutionally designed professional development programs should be well-planned, in which syllabus and timelines are prepared ahead of time to ensure success.

Engaging in PD may take several forms. Murray (2010) mentioned several activities that lead to lecturers' professional development. For example, lecturers can consult current research on their field in available national and international journals, become reflective practitioners, engage in peer mentoring/coaching, join local or national or even international academic associations, and participate in workshops, seminars, or conferences.

### *2.2 Being a Reflective Educator*

Gebhard (2005) and Vacilotto and Cummings (2007) suggest that being reflective practitioners through in-depth reflection on self-performance and engaging in peer teaching are the most feasible ways of developing one's professionalism. Their work has uncovered that working collaboratively will improve the feasibility of effective self-professional development. This is because "collaborative endeavors which refine certain aspects of teaching" lead to reflection (Murray, 2010, p. 6). Journaling is the other reflective teaching strategy (Zulfikar & Mujiburrahman, 2018). Teachers write their experiences in the form of journaling, from which they can recall their teaching experience. The teaching written daily will help teachers recognize and analyze their teaching strengths and weaknesses. In the reflective teaching journals, lecturers or teachers may write their thoughts, insights during the teaching, and interactions during the classroom activities and participation (Vacilotto & Cummings, 2007; Zulfikar & Mujiburrahman, 2018).

### *2.3 Team Teaching*

Some researchers (e.g., Vacilotto and Cummins, 2007) noted that "peer coaching led student teachers to improve their organizational and class management skills as they become aware of the need to increase their energy level and be more flexible in class" (p. 156). In addition, Gray's (2012) study suggested that peer observation allows teachers to reflect on their teaching and then conduct an informal conference to discuss issues found during instruction. This is also in line with Alemu's (2013) recommendation that reflection through peer observation allows professional development to occur. It facilitates the senior lecturers to be the mentors for their juniors. This kind of professional development also enables ones to observe the practices of their senior ones (Vacilotto & Cummings, 2007).

At the same notion, Huang (2007) revealed that the study group was used as the media facilitating professional development emergence. The study found that the study group benefited the teachers in five respects: they have more knowledge of classroom instruction, students' learning methods, and intellectual development (Huang, 2007). In addition, Stewart's (2005) study with a group of EFL teachers in Japan revealed that team-teaching is favorable for teacher professional development. The development occurs due to teaching partnerships between teachers.

### *2.4 Attending Conferences*

The other strategy that seems helpful to boost one's professionalism is attending the conference. Borg's (2014) study found several positive impacts of the academic conference: strengthening networking, increasing confidence, and changes in professional practices. Borg (2014) stated that "conference attendance promotes the development of more knowledgeable, confident, and motivated ELT professionals who are committed to their own professional development" (p. 8). Conferences on language teaching have been organized by universities and some teacher forums, such as TEFLIN (Teaching of English as a Foreign Language in Indonesia) Association, ELITE (English,

Linguistics, Literature & Education) Association, and some other international conferences. There are many benefits of conferences on teachers' professional improvement: *first*, lecturers may present their ideas, and at the same time, they need to do some research and write an article-which for sure will enhance their knowledge on certain EFL issues; *second*, being the participants of the conference is also beneficial as they would benefit from getting new ideas from other presenters who may develop new ideas and insights regarding their field of interest; and *third*, another important benefit of the conference, which is most unlike to achieve otherwise is the fact that the conference allows them to develop a network. In line with this idea, Semenza (2010) noted that attending conferences "have the potential to foster useful professional relationship by virtue of [teacher's'] ability to draw like-minded people into relatively intimate environments" (p. 196). However, some concerns may occur regarding what extent the benefits of attending conference can be translated to real teaching; the other concern is the cost of the conference itself, which may not be affordable to all lecturers.

### *2.5 EFL Lecturers' Professional Development*

All those involved in the teaching profession have to be accountable for their professional development. In language class, professional development is not necessarily "imposing fresh language teaching theories, methodologies, and teaching material on teachers" but also "a process of refreshing and reshaping teachers' existing knowledge, beliefs, morals, practices and reflection" (Guan & Huang, 2013, p. 2116). This is so because some EFL teachers still lack competence in producing appropriate pronunciation, using proper vocabulary, and understanding grammatical structure (Luv, 2014).

In addition, Guan and Huang (2013) state that sufficient knowledge of the target language and skill in using the language are two important factors to being qualified lecturers. This knowledge and skills can only be obtained through professional development activities. For that reason, it is essential to note that engagement in professional development is a must for all lecturers.

### *2.6 Effective Professional Development*

It is, in fact, difficult to identify which professional development is effective. For example, a particular lecturer may prefer a specific form of activity, such as a conference, to other activities, such as a reflective journal. However, a well-planned professional development program organized by the institutions should give better success. This is important to note that the institutions own financial resources to prepare for a well-planned program. For example, the institution may encourage lecturers to join a workshop to improve their professional competence; funding can also be supplied to lecturers to attend international seminars or publish in international journals. However, for this program to succeed, there should be commitment from both institutions and lecturers. Greenwell and Zygouris-Coe (2012) found that some professional development programs were not successful due to a lack of commitment from both parties.

Therefore, it is important to note that commitment from all parties: the policymakers, government, educational practitioners, and teaching staffs themselves need to be committed to the same cause. Nevertheless, lecturers' own passion for improving their competences is necessary. A need for professional improvement leads to their commitment to participate in a professional development program. This is so as Vacilotto and Cummings (2007) argued that "effective peer interactions required a high level of care and personal investment in one another to be successful" (p. 158). This suggests that commitment from all parties is necessary for a professional development program to succeed.

Furthermore, improving professional competence is a long-term program, and ones can only improve their professional competence through continuous and consistent engagement in professional development programs. For example, when lecturers join peer coaching and mentoring, they need to do so consistently and continuously since immediate results will not be achieved (Vacilotto & Cummings, 2007).

## **3. Methodology**

### *3.1 Research Design*

This is a qualitative research project in which a case study in multi-sites is used as the methodology. The case study enables researchers to explore issues within certain sites or cases (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Bryman, 2004; Cresswell, 2012; Glesne, 2006). Griffiee (2012) suggests that the case study is an exploration of an inquiry related to certain issues occurring in a particular setting. For that reason, the case study should use many sources to generate data, examine issues in real-life contexts, and use theory to generalize results (Griffiee, 2012; Yin, 2000). In our context,

the case study is more appropriate as the research was conducted in multi settings: three Islamic tertiary education institutions located in Aceh and the neighboring province. The data was also generated from multiple sources to allow more comprehensive information on the investigated cases.

### 3.2 Research Sites and Participants

The research was conducted in three State Islamic Tertiary Education institutions: two in the Aceh Province and the other one is in West Sumatra Province. It is important to conduct this study in three different institutions to allow more comprehensive information on EFL lecturers' professional development and shift in their professional identity due to their engagement in professional development. Here is the list of participating universities and institutes. Pseudonyms were used in data analysis:

No	Research sites	Number of participants
1	The State Islamic University (SIU)	1 dean/vice dean 1 department chair 10-12 lecturers
2	The Northern-State Islamic Institute (NSII)	1 dean/vice dean 1 department chair 10-12 lecturers
3	The Eastern-State Islamic Institute (ESII)	1 dean/vice dean 1 department chairs 10-12 lecturers

The researchers purposively invited lecturers, department chairs, and the deputy chairs from these three Islamic Higher Education Institutions to share their ideas and experiences. We only invited those who are actively engaged in professional development. There are steps we took to recruit the participants:

#### *Step 1: Identifying gatekeepers:*

The gatekeepers are important to identify as the first step in recruiting participants (Litchman, 2010; Holliday, 2010; Mctavish & Loether, 2007; Merriam, 2009). In this particular research, the gatekeepers were the heads of the Department of English Language Education. We asked the gatekeeper to inform us of the number of lecturers actively involved in any teacher training programs, such as seminars, workshops, and other professional development-related programs. Having obtained information on the number of potential participants, we then contacted them directly should they be available as the participants of our study.

#### *Step 2: Contacting Potential Participants*

Having secured the number of participants, we sent them the invitation letter to request their availability to be our participants. We provided an explanatory statement in which we describe the nature of our research to allow potential participants to gain a better understanding of what the study is about. The other important document to prepare is the consent form. Potential participants, who agreed to participate, signed off the consent form as a formal statement of their availability to participate in the study without any coercion voluntarily.

There are five FGDs in the study, given that the number of participants allows for only one FGD in each department. There are around five participants in each FGD. In addition, the researchers also interviewed four Head of the department and four Deans or the Vice Deans of Academic Affairs.

### 3.3 Profile of the Participants

Over 30 lecturers participated in our study coming from three tertiary Islamic institutions. The majority of the participants have taught English for more than 20 years, and some have been serving as English lecturers for over 30 years. Ten lecturers interviewed have held a doctorate degrees in various universities in Indonesia and overseas. We used pseudonyms in referring to our participants.

These participants were chosen due to their rich teaching experience. What we meant by experience here includes the length of teaching or teaching time and the quality of teaching engagement in professional development programs despite relatively short teaching time experience. Their availability to participate in the interview through FGDs and

in-depth interview was another basis for choosing these participants.

**Table 1.** Participants' Profiles

No	Name	Age	Qualification	Teaching Experience
1	Zul	48	Doctorate	20 years
2	Ozi	38	Doctorate	15 years
2	Idah	32	MA	12 years
4	Afna	30	MA	8 years
5	Mus	40	MA	8 years
6	Cut	37	MA	12 years
7	Hus	34	MA	5 years
8	Ika	38	MA	7 years
9	Zai	40	MA	6 years
10	Nur	48	Doctorate	18 years
11	Zur	43	Doctorate	16 years
12	Ida	36	MA	15 years
13	Afif	48	MA	16 years
14	Nas	40	MA	10 years
15	Sir	36	MA	5 years
16	Ati	35	MA	8 years
17	Ris	37	NA	8 years
18	Nash	38	MA	7 years
19	Syar	43	MA	10 years
20	Bes	55	Doctorate	27 years
21	Hadel	53	Doctorate	26 years
22	Nof	42	Doctorate	17 years
23	Em	52	Doctorate	25 years
24	Elis	55	Doctorate	31 years
25	Luli	50	Doctorate	15 years
26	Chan	34	MA	2 years
27	Hid	38	MA	10 years
28	Har	43	MA	15 years
29	Jun	44	MA	15 years
30	Jaka	43	MA	10 years

### 3.4 Methods of Data Collection

To explore this important inquiry, we use two main types of data collection: The FGD and in-depth semi-structured interviews. These two data collection methods are believed to be valid in an inquiry where in-depth exploration of participants' voices, attitudes, and feelings is the main focus of inquiry. This study allows us to use FGD and in-depth semi-structured interviews to explore lecturers' attitudes towards professional development and the extent to which they believe professional development shifts their professional identity.

#### 3.4.1 Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

The FGD was the main method of data collection to explore lecturers' attitudes towards professional development and the perceived influence of the activities. The FGD enables researchers to explore participants' opinions at one particular time. This is because FGD gathers five to six participants in one space, in which researchers explore their inquiries simultaneously from more than one participant. In this particular research, we had two FGDs in those three universities.

#### 3.4.2 In-Depth Interview

The second main method of data collection we used in the research was in-depth semi-structured interviews. The interviews explored the department's chairs and deans of academic affairs' attitudes and ideas on professional development, and the extent to which engagement in professional development programs is perceived effective to improve lecturers' professionalism. The interview lasted for 60 to 90 minutes, depending on the richness of

information expressed by participants.

### *3.5 Methods of Data Analysis*

The data is analyzed using coding techniques, and we referred to the work of Silverman (2020) in analyzing the data for this study. Three main coding techniques were employed: Open Coding, Axial Coding, and Selective Coding. These types of coding function differently but provide unity for the data. The data analysis starts with open coding, in which researchers organize data based on its common themes. These data groups were then regrouped into smaller themes using the axial coding technique. Finally, those smaller themes were carefully selected, and only those relevant to the research inquiry were selected to be the research data, and this final stage of data analysis was called the selective coding.

## **4. Findings**

Based on our FGDs and in-depth interviews with lecturers of the Department of English Education and the top management of the faculty, we identified several important issues. All the participants argued to have been making great efforts to improve their professionalism; they have also been involved in many professional development programs. Out of the many programs they have participated in, three main programs emerged. The fieldwork also reveals the fact that lecturers joining professional programs can shift their professional identities. Finally, our findings also reveal institutional policies and support for lecturers' professional development. All the information regarding our findings is explained in the following sub-sections.

### *4.1 Lecturers' Ways of Developing Their Professional Competence*

Having conducted FGDs, we generated six main strategies used by lecturers in their attempts to improve professional development: Pursuing a doctorate's degree, engaging in academic publications, having regular peer discussion, reviewing academic articles, exploring educational websites, and joining a professional association.

#### **4.1.1 Pursuing a Doctorate Degree**

Four lecturers from SIU, two lecturers from NSII, and three lecturers from ESII mentioned that one way to improve professional development is through improving qualifications. These lecturers believe that pursuing a doctorate degree could be a significant strategy for improving professionalism. For example, a lecturer from SIU states:

I believe that one way to improve my professional competence is by pursuing higher degrees. As you know, I have obtained two masters' degrees, and I just completed my doctorate degree in Australia. These degrees have helped me improve my professionalism (Nof)

Some other lecturers also share many things in common with Nof, in which they perceive that pursuing a higher degree is a prerequisite for professional development. One lecturer also mentioned that:

Although I am already old, I believe that I have to catch up with improving my professionalism by pursuing a doctorate degree. This is important to note that pursuing a doctorate's degree is believed to have helped lecturers improve their professionalism (Bes)

Other lecturers also engaged in professional development through higher degrees, such as taking doctorate degrees. Out of 30 lecturers interviewed, five lecturers at SIU, two lecturers from ESII, and three lecturers from NSII have gained a doctorate's degree in various universities in Indonesia and Australia.

These lecturers strongly emphasized that their doctorate degree has taken them to different positions: academic and administrative positions. Academically, their degree boosts their teaching confidence and is more reflective. At the same time, most of them resume several leadership positions, such as appointments as vice deans, head of a department, and other top management positions.

#### **4.1.2 Engaging in Scholarly Publications**

In addition to pursuing doctorate degrees, most lecturers were interviewed to confirm that working on publication is one way to improve professionalism. For example, some of them state that publishing academic articles in nationally or internationally recognized journals can be a strategy to improve professional competence. To publish a paper, one should have done the research, such as reviewing literature and then writing up their ideas. One of the lecturers, for example, stated that:

I do publication is a part of professional development. So far, I have published over twenty articles in the past two years. This is indeed beneficial for my capacity as a lecturer and thus improves my professional competence (Zur)

This suggests that article publication helps lecturers improve their professional competence. Other lecturers, such as Lul, also believed that publishing academic articles is helpful in professional development. In fact, all higher education institutions perceive publication as an important component to boost academic carrier. For example, universities in Australia receive additional funding based on their academic publication rates, and academic advancement is difficult without a strong publication record.

However, the truth is that only a small minority of academics publish regularly. To correct this, several Australian universities perform some interventions to increase the number of publications. For example, a thorough search of the literature turned up 17 studies published between 1984 and 2004, all published between 1984 and 2004. Writing workshops, writing support groups, and writing coaches are made available to enhance the number of publications (McGrail, Rickard & Jones, 2006).

#### 4.1.3 Regular Peer Discussions

Most lecturers interviewed suggested that engaging in regular peer discussions is central to developing professional competences. Most lecturers interviewed confirmed that organizing regular discussions with colleagues would greatly benefit their professional development. Ms. Em, for example, stated that:

I believe that communicating instructional issues with peers enhances my knowledge. It is also a coincidence that my husband is also an English lecturer, which then allows me always to discuss things related to language instruction (Em)

The other lecturers also suggest that discussing issues in language teaching would add to their professional competence. One of the lecturers in SIU, in fact, confirmed that:

I got used to discussing issues regarding EFL instruction. In fact, I organize a discussion group in which most junior lecturers join the group. We discuss a wide range of issues regarding EFL learning and teaching. Some lecturers in the department also join the discussion group (Nof)

Most lecturers report peer discussion from all institutions. The lecturers of NSII, for example, mention that discussion with peers on instructional issues is an important asset for professional development. A lecturer, for example, stated:

I did an online discussion with my colleagues concerning English teaching. I used many strategies in engaging in regular discussions with peers, one of which is through online communication (Afif)

Our findings then suggest that peer discussion on instructional issues is a central point in the professional development process.

#### 4.1.4 Reviewing Academic Articles/Journal Reviewers

The other salient strategies used in professional development are becoming journal reviewers and reviewing academic articles. It is essential to highlight that reviewing others' academic articles improve professional competence. In addition to becoming journal reviewers, reading articles and analyzing them are also equally important to improve professional development. Three lecturers from SIU confirmed that as they become journal reviewers, they gain opportunities to improve their professional competence. One of them said:

Now, I am a reviewer for several journals, such as Ta'lim Journal of SIU and SIELE of USK Banda Aceh. Doing the reviewing jobs is so much important for professional development. In addition to reviewing journal articles, I browsed academic articles for my own use, and that helped me improve my own competence (Bes)

Other lecturers also suggested similar strategies for professional development-becoming journal reviewers and analyzing articles for personal use. Nof and Hid argued that becoming reviewers of journal articles is beneficial for professional development. This is so since journal reviewers gain opportunities to improve their writing skills and enhance their knowledge on certain issues.

#### 4.1.5 Exploring Educational Website

Most lecturers in these institutions believe that becoming knowledge seekers would benefit them greatly. Some lecturers mentioned that browsing educational websites and gaining knowledge from them is useful for their professional development. There are indeed many educational websites that lecturers could choose from. Some of



these websites are specially designed for subject matter, while others contain pedagogical components. One of the lecturers from SIU stated:

In my spare time, I like to browse educational websites. The websites help me learn more and enhance my knowledge. The websites do not only allow me to improve my subject matter knowledge but also help me to improve my pedagogical skills (Em)

The quote suggests that resources such as educational websites are important sources of professional development.

#### 4.1.6 Joining Professional Associations

Most lecturers interviewed in FGDs recognize the significance of the professional association. For that reason, most lecturers suggested that they join a professional association. One of the lecturers at SIU stated:

I join a professional association. In this case, I joined a Linguistics association as I specified in linguistics. The professional association helps me to reach out to other EFL lecturers and thus would increase my professionalism (Nof)

Other lecturers from NSII and ESII also confirmed that joining a professional association helps them improve their professional competence. For example, Cut of ESII stated that she has a joint professional association such as the ELITE and TEFLIN. She has joint programs, such as seminars and conferences held by the association. The lecturers from NSII also agreed with those from other institutions in perceiving professional association.

#### 4.2 Programs Lecturers Have Joined for Professional Development

Our FGD also reveals various programs that lecturers join in developing professionalism. Lecturers in all institutions being researched mainly attend four programs.

##### 4.2.1 International Conferences

All lecturers in the FGDs agree that joining international conferences are common programs they have followed. For those lecturers, conferences have helped recharge their professional competence. They see the conferences as an effective venue for professional development. Lul from SIU stated:

I joined the conferences, sometimes international conferences, but I joined some local and national conferences the other time. It is really helpful in upgrading my knowledge: content and pedagogical content knowledge

Similarly, other lecturers at SIU and other two institutions also confirm that international conferences are significant for professional development. Els stated that she gained an opportunity to join international conferences in Germany. Ozi and Hus from ESII suggested that they join international conferences as well. Other lecturers from NSII are also aware of the need to join conferences on ELT. Nur and Ida stated that they often joint international conferences, such as ones held by ELITE and TEFLIN.

I have joint international conferences held by ELITE, and I believe it is a must-do activity for all lecturers. The conferences allow me to improve subject matter and pedagogical content knowledge (Ida)

Conferences are important venues for professional development. This is so since conferences are venues to share ideas and receive information on our field of interest. They provide an opportunity to improve one's expertise.

##### 4.2.2 Workshop, Seminar, Symposium & Training

In addition to conferences, most lecturers also highlighted that they join other academic programs. Workshops, seminars, and training are academic programs that resemble conferences; however, they provide different nuances and motivation. The workshop is a small-scale academic program, but it yields more positive results, and this is so since workshops cater specific needs of lecturers.

I have joint workshops on language teaching. In fact, I have participated in long-term training. The training was held in collaboration with SIU, Ministry of Religious Affairs, and State University of Padang. The contents of the workshop deal with preparing us lecturers to gain subject matter knowledge. The training allows us to win an international scholarship (Hid)

Another lecturer, Chan of SIU, stated that:

I joint some training programs facilitated by one of the lecturers at Imam Bonjol. We were trained on how to design a winning application for a scholarship and other important academic stuff (Chan).

Apart from those lecturers, other lecturers believed that those programs are specially designed for improving lecturers' pedagogical competences. For example, a lecturer from NSII also confirmed that workshops, especially those designed for specific purposes, such as language teaching, would be an asset for professional development. For example, the other lecturer from ESII also reiterated that programs such as seminars, workshops, trainings, and symposiums are effective programs to improve professionalism. Lul, for instance of SIU, stated:

I joint a language symposium, in which I learned not only pedagogical knowledge but also content knowledge. The symposium on EFL teaching is beneficial in the attempt to develop my professional (Luli).

Our FGDs show that lecturers are aware of the need to engage in professional development. There are various programs to choose from, such as seminars, workshops, training, and symposiums, and all these programs allow lecturers to engage in professional development.

#### 4.2.3 Conducting Research

Another important academic program undertaken by lecturers is conducting research. Two lecturers from UIN Imam Bonjol stated that doing research is one important medium to engage within their professional development programs. Em, for example, stated:

I did research myself and collaborated with others as well. The research activities are important for professional development. This is so because one should read articles and reviews before writing an actual proposal in doing research. The reviews of literature enable one to improve their content knowledge (Em)

Bes added:

I also applied for research funding. I engage in research collaboration with other scholars. Research funding enables me to conduct research and collaborate with others also enriches my skills; the research skills and content knowledge (Bes)

Conducting research increases one's research skills and increases content knowledge. It is also important to note that research is a must activity that all lecturers should engage with. For that reason, all lecturers must engage in research and publish their research findings actively.

#### 4.3 Shifts in Lecturers' Professional Identity

Our research also explores the perceived implication of undertaking professional development programs, such as doctorate programs, conferences, seminars, workshops, trainings, symposiums, and research activities. Most lecturers confirmed that having pursued their doctorate program or other professional development programs, they become honest scholars, become aware of the nature of the teaching profession, and improved competence.

##### 4.3.1 Becoming an Honest Scholar

One of the lecturers from SIU stated that having studied at Deakin, he shifted his professional identity toward a positive attitude.

One thing that I am aware of gaining after doing the doctorate's degree is becoming more honest toward myself. During my academic journey at Deakin, I have observed that my supervisors always admit when they do not have any knowledge on some issues, and then they will get back to me when they get the answer. So, I am now, when I come back to my university, I become honest with myself and try to be frank if I do not understand something (Hadel)

Other lecturers from ESII and NSII also perceive professional development they participated in benefits them. Nur from NSII seemed to share this opinion suggesting that doing a Ph.D. and other professional development programs help improve not only knowledge but also the drive to become more mature in attitude.

##### 4.3.2 Being Aware of the Nature of Teaching

The lectures in our FGDs also revealed that those various professional development programs help them aware of the nature of teaching. They stated that having engaged in professional programs enables them to be aware of the nature of teaching:

One of the most important results of joining professional development programs is increasing the awareness of what counts of good teaching. For example, the conference that I joint allowed me to enhance my understanding of the teaching profession (Zur)

I have joined many symposiums and workshops during my tenure as a lecturer at ESII. These programs have enabled me to grasp important content and pedagogical knowledge. For example, the workshops and training I have participated in giving me a lot of insights into the teaching and learning process as well (Ozi)

These statements show the benefits of professional development programs on the lecturers' awareness of the teaching nature. From the discussion, other lecturers also feel this shift, in which they become more aware of the teaching nature.

#### 4.3.3 Improving Teaching Competence

The FGDs with English lecturers also identified important information on shifts of identity. Most lecturers such as Nur, Ozi, Nof, Luli, Hid, and many other lecturers perceive that professional development programs allow them to improve teaching competence. Nur stated:

Having gained my doctorate degree, I have become more independent and confident in teaching. This is so because I feel that I am more knowledgeable in content and pedagogical knowledge (Nur).

Hid added:

The training I have joined has given me a lot of opportunities that enable me to improve my professional competence. I learned good ways of teaching and managing my students. I also improve my content knowledge as the result of professional development programs I have followed (Hid)

The two quotes represent other lecturers' perceptions of shifting their professional identity. Most of them reiterate that being involved in professional development programs enables them to shift their professional identity.

#### 4.3 Institutional Policies Toward Professional Development

Another important component investigated in this particular project is the institutional policies. This is significant because professional development programs cannot be effectively implemented without institutional policies.

##### 4.3.1 Improving Financial Support

All lecturers interviewed in the three institutions have something in common in terms of the support given by the institutions. Having interviewed the Vice Dean of Academic Affairs and Head of the department, we revealed an important fact that the institutions in fact working towards increasing the amount of financial support for professional development programs.

We see something progressing for future programs. For example, the rector has improved financial support for professional development programs. The rector has budgeted some funding for visiting lectures, lecturer group discussions, and journal publications (Zur)

In line with Zur, the Vice Dean of Academic Affairs of Faculty of Education, NSII reiterated that although funding is not sufficiently available, there are some improvements in financial support for academic improvement. In her own word:

There are significant improvements in financial sources for professional improvement. Although it is insufficient funding for all programs available, the institution has worked progressively towards providing financial support for lecturers' academic programs, such as international publication and some other important programs (Nur)

Other participants also confirmed that the institutions had provided some funding for professional development. The Vice Dean of Academic Affairs of ESII stated that:

Although funding is not always available, it is increasing now. There have been good intentions from the institution to improve the amount of support for professional development. In our institution, financial support for conferences is available despite the amount given (Zul)

The two quotes suggest that supports for professional development are available regardless of the amount provided for this cause.

##### 4.3.2 Lack of Institutional Supports

The research also reveals that institutions do not provide sufficient support for this important cause. Lecturers from certain universities stated that:

I do not see that the institution has provided enough funding for the professional development program. For example, the institution does not provide sufficient funding to enable lecturers to engage in professional development programs (Bes)

Other lecturers also mentioned that the funding from the institution is not sufficient for professional development.

## 5. Conclusion & Discussion

Professional development is a must activity that all lecturers should get involved in. This is so since it enables educators, such as teachers and lecturers, to improve their competences. Since this topic has attracted scholars worldwide, studies focusing on professional development across settings have sharply increased, such as Taiwan (see Luo, 2014; Chen & Cheng, 2014); Iranian (Tabatabaee-Yazdi, Motallebzadeh, Ashra, & Baghaei, 2018; Alibakhshi & Dehviri, 2013; Karimi, 2011; Motallebzadeh, Hosseinnia & Domskey, 2017; Asraf & Kafi, 2017); Indonesia (Zein, 2017); Belgium (Tack & Vanderlinde, 2014); Japan (Nishino, 2012); Thailand (Wichadee, 2011) and many other settings. All these studies uncovered somewhat similar to those found in our study—that is engagement in professional development programs has benefitted lecturers and teachers in many respects: subject matter, pedagogical content knowledge, and other important attributes for effective instruction.

Our studies found several strategies used by lecturers in their attempt to improve their professional competence. These include improving qualifications, such as pursuing a doctorate's program, publishing journal articles in reputable journals, engaging in peer discussions, acting as journal reviewers, seeking knowledge through educational websites, and joining professional associations such as EFL lecturers, TEFLIN, and ELITE to name a few.

In addition, our finding also shows that international conferences and workshops, seminars, and symposium are important programs to choose from by lecturers. Most lecturers argued that they prefer to improve their pedagogical skills despite preferences for language skills through all these programs. Luo (2014) found that Taiwanese teachers in his study also preferred upgrading their teaching skills instead of language skills. This finding is justifiable since effective pedagogical competences most likely determine successful instruction.

Furthermore, some of the benefits of lecturers who participate in the Professional development (PD) programs are increasing teaching awareness and competences, thus shifting their professional identity (Abbasian & Esmalee, 2018). Tabatabaee-Yazdi, Motallebzadeh, Ashra, & Baghaei (2018) suggest similar findings that revealed that PD had improved teachers' reflexivity, which allows them to improve their teaching practices. Alibakhshi and Dehviri (2015) also state that the participants considered skill improvement, continual learning, keeping up with current issues, studying for fun, and professional rejuvenation to be part of continuing professional development. They also grew professionally due to their employment, formal education, attendance, and presentations at continuing professional development programs. Our participants also argued that continuous engagement in professional development programs improves their teaching skills; and becomes more reflective.

As we also identified institutional factors contributing to successful professional development (Amin & Saukah, 2015), this research attempts to identify institutional supports in these lecturers' efforts for professional development. The findings are straightforward, in which some of them argue that despite insufficient financial support, it seems increasing at the moment, while others suggest that institutional support is limited. Our findings are so much relevant to the work of Hartono (2016), who revealed that his participants see institutional support is lacking. Even though lecturers' initiatives for a self-development is critical, they need relevant support (Filho, et al., 2018; Henard & Leprince-Ringuet, 2008).

In summary, while professional development programs are felt to have contributed positively to teaching competence, they are still not seen as the institutional priority. This argument was echoed by the majority of the participants interviewed. This phenomenon, however, is not unique to our study *per se*. Hartono (2016) also voiced a similar note, who found in his research that the lack of institutional support for postgraduate studies is confirmed.

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