

## Personalizing Professional Development of English Language Teachers Through Modular Learning

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### ABSTRACT

Professional development helps teachers stay updated, build new skills, and become more effective in the classroom. It is not a single event but an ongoing process throughout a teacher's career. Continuous learning allows teachers to adopt best practices and respond confidently to diverse student needs. Research also shows that well-designed professional development can lead to better student outcomes. Drawing on evidences, this paper explores the limitation of the current professional development models, personalization of professional development through modular learning, its relevance on professional development of English language teachers, and strategies for its effective implementation.

**Keywords:** *Personalized professional development, Modular approach, English language teaching*

Teacher professional development is widely acknowledged as essential for improving classroom instruction and student learning. However, the dominant professional development formats are short, one-off workshops that rarely lead to sustained classroom change in India and in many other contexts. Short-term workshops, which are common, often fail to make a difference in teaching and learning. This approach contrasts with international research, which stresses the importance of sustained and coherent professional development. A research based on available studies found that short programs under about 14 hours had little effect on student learning, whereas professional development averaging about 49 hours was linked to substantial gains (Yoon, Duncan, Lee, Scarloss, & Shapley, 2007).

Indian policies have also called for a shift for years. For example, The National Curriculum Framework (NCF, 2005) and the National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education (NCFTE, 2009) argue for continuous, practice-linked professional learning rather than isolated training events. The National Focus Group paper on Teaching of English (NCERT, 2006) also highlights classroom-relevant pedagogy for multilingual contexts. In Bihar, the Joint Review Mission (2013) went further, advising a “field-and-forum” cycle based professional development strategies where teachers are required to learn a new strategy, try it in class, then come back to training programme discuss and reflect. This inherently criticizes the one-shot trainings without follow-up and generic workshops without taking into consideration the training needs and choices of the teachers.

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### ***Modular learning as a personalized professional development approach***

Research shows that short, uniform workshops rarely change classroom practice in a sustainable way. Programs that are short and generic tend to have little effect, while sustained learning tied to real classroom work makes a difference (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001; Yoon, Duncan, Lee, Scarloss, & Shapley, 2007). English language teachers in India work in very different conditions, such as; large classes, multilingual learners, limited resources and materials. So, their professional growth needs to be flexible and personal rather than one-size-fits-all.

Modular learning offers a practical way to do this. Instead of a single course for everyone, professional development is broken into small units of learning called modules. Each module targets a clear skill and includes a short cycle of input, classroom try-out, and reflection. Teachers choose the modules that match their goals and context, and complete them over time. This respects the reality that a teacher can be advanced in one area and a beginner in another; growth is non-linear, and the learning journey should reflect that.

Several organisations already organise professional development in this way. The British Council's Continuing Professional Development (CPD) framework for English teachers maps professional practices (e.g., lesson planning, assessing learning, using digital tools) to resources and suggests staged development. Teachers begin by reflecting on their strengths and needs (often using a self-assessment checklist), then select modules from relevant categories to build a personalized plan. Each module stands on its own and can be combined with others to create a sequence that suits the teacher's priorities. There is no single ladder; the learning depends on needs. (British Council, n.d.).

Modular approach turns professional development from a fixed, course-like event into a personal learning journey. Teachers decide what to learn, when to learn it, and how to apply it with their own students. This directly addresses the diversity of needs among English teachers and treats them as self-directed adult learners. It also aligns with evidence that effective professional development is sustained, content-focused, active, and coherent with teachers' goals (Desimone, 2009; Garet et al., 2001).

### ***Modular Professional Development for English Language Teachers***

There are many advantages of using modular approach for professional development of English language teachers.

- 1. Relevance and Engagement:** Modular professional development is inherently relevant to teachers' real-world classroom situation. Teachers can choose modules that is directly aligned with their individual needs. They are not forced into generic training of little interest. Instead, they pursue learning that addresses the real problems of practice they face, relevance boosts teacher engagement. An English language teacher with many bilingual learners, for instance, might eagerly choose a module that support students with bilingual/multilingual context. In contrast, a generic professional development day may have little chance to address this topic. By targeting what matters most to their context, modular professional development keeps teachers interested and engaged in learning.
- 2. Teacher Agency and Ownership:** A modular approach empowers teachers as active agents in their professional growth. Instead of being passive recipients of pre-planned training, teachers design their own "learning journeys" by selecting modules. This choice increases their sense of ownership and autonomy. Bogler and Somech (2004)

noted that when teachers take responsibility for their own learning, it empowers them and increases their commitment to learning.

3. **Flexibility in Pace and Scheduling:** Modular professional development offers flexibility that is crucial for busy teachers. Lack of time is one of the most commonly cited barriers to participation in teacher professional development. With modules (especially online or self-study ones), teachers can learn at their own pace and convenience. Each module is typically "bite-sized" (often a few hours) which makes it easier to fit into a packed schedule. For example, a teacher could complete a 6-hour module spread over several weeknights. This makes professional development a continuous and job-embedded learning process rather than a one-off event. The flexibility is especially valuable for English language teachers who may juggle heavy workloads or multiple part-time jobs. Modular professional development accommodates teachers' schedules rather than expecting teachers to drop everything for a fixed training date.
4. **Deep and Broad Exploration:** Modules allow teachers to choose between going deep or broad in their learning. An English language teacher can focus intensely on a specific skill by taking multiple modules in that area, or they can explore a range of topics to broaden their expertise. This adaptability is important because language teachers work in diverse context. In essence, modular professional development can be personalized to whether a teacher wants to deepen or widen their knowledge and practice.
5. **Improvements in Practice:** As modules are aligned to what teachers need and often include applied activities, teachers are more likely to implement what they learn. It can provide substantial improvements in teachers' knowledge and teaching practice. For example, the British Council implemented a modular professional development programme in Oman for primary and secondary English teachers. Teachers reported that the topics covered in the modules were practical and helped them refresh and enhance their professional knowledge. Each module included assignments and reflections prompting teachers to apply new strategies and techniques in their classrooms. As a result, participants improved their classroom practices. This example illustrates how modular professional development is flexible and tailored to individual needs, ultimately translating into improved teacher effectiveness. When teachers see their own skills improving and their students benefiting, it reinforces the value of continuing with professional development.

### *Implementation Considerations*

Adopting a modular professional development for English language teachers requires thoughtful planning and deliberation to ensure the approach is effective:

**Needs Assessment:** Start by identifying each teacher's specific learning needs. For modular professional development to be genuinely personalized, teachers should have a clear understanding of their strengths and areas of growth. It is important for the institutions responsible for facilitating or designing training programme to assess the training or professional development needs of teachers before implementing modular professional development. This can be done through self-assessment tools. For example, the Cambridge English Teaching Framework and the British Council's CPD Framework for Teachers may help them evaluate their own teaching skills and identify where they need improvement. This planning ensures module choices are strategic rather than random. Since teachers are involved in the process from the beginning in designing their professional learning journey, they may be more committed to joining the programme.

1. **Alignment and Coherence:** Ensure the collection of modules maps to broader teaching standards or competencies. The modules should collectively cover the important skill domains for English language teaching. Each module should have clear learning objectives and indicate which larger skill or standard it addresses. This way, as teachers complete modules, they can track their progress.
2. **Support and Mentoring:** One risk of self-directed, online modules is teacher isolation; some may struggle alone or fail to apply ideas without discussion. In this situation, teacher support and mentoring are essential for their professional development. For instance, schools can form learning communities or groups where teachers periodically meet to share insights or demonstrate new techniques they have learned. Additionally, having mentors or facilitators “on call” (either online or in-person) can help teachers when they have questions or face some obstacles. The British Council's online modular courses in Oman, for example, used *e-moderators* to guide participants. These moderators helped the teachers' online learning experience. Each group of teachers even had a local “e-observer” (a teacher trainer) who offered extra support and observed how the course was progressing. This kind of scaffolding ensures that teachers reflect deeply on new concepts and figure out how to apply them in their classrooms. This may prevent the modular approach from becoming isolating.
3. **Time and Scheduling:** Allocating time and scheduling is important aspect of effective implementation of modular professional development. Dedicated time slots for professional learning help avoid clash with the teaching duties. Teachers should integrate modular professional development into the schedule wherever possible. Teachers worldwide report work schedule conflicts as a major obstacle to professional development. So, proactively addressing the time issue is crucial. School administrators play an important role in managing time for teachers. By addressing barriers, schools make it realistic for teachers.
4. **Quality Assurance of Modules:** The impact of modular professional development depends on the quality, relevance of the content of the module. Therefore, those developing or selecting modules should use evidence-based content and models. Active learning strategies should be built into modules, such as incorporating interactive tasks, classroom simulations, or opportunities for teachers to practice the new methods, techniques, and strategies learned. It should not be simply dense readings; it should engage teachers and show practical examples. It would be desirable to pilot new modules with a small group of teachers and gather feedback on clarity, relevance, and workload. Teacher feedback after each module can guide revisions and their improvements to better match teachers' requirements
5. **Recognition and Incentives:** Acknowledging teachers' efforts and achievements in professional development is vital. While many teachers are intrinsically motivated to improve, extrinsic recognition further boost their motivation and their time spent on modules is valued. One way to do this is to issue certificates for a block of module completed. For instance, finishing a module on “Teaching Pronunciation” might earn a teacher a certificate to add to their professional portfolio. Schools might encourage teachers to accumulate modular professional development hours and link them to career or salary advancement.

## CONCLUSION

A personalized, modular approach to professional development is an effective way to support English language teachers. Teachers' professional development is more effective when teachers take ownership of their own learning. Moving away from traditional, one-size-fits-all workshops, Modular learning allows teachers to choose learning that is relevant to their

specific needs, take the responsibility of their own learning, and make professional development more engaging and impactful. However, widespread implementation of this model requires a shift in how one thinks about professional development. It is important to trust teachers to take charge of their development and provide the necessary resources and support. While challenges remain, such as ensuring comprehensive learning and maintaining motivation, the flexible and personalized nature of modular professional development aligns with the principles of effective teacher professional development. Modular professional development offers a sustainable, teacher-centered approach that can lead to more skilled and reflective teachers, ultimately improving English language education.

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### Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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