

Conducting Online Courses for the Professional Development of English Teachers: Integration of Synchronous and Asynchronous Components

Realización de cursos en línea para el desarrollo profesional de docentes de inglés: integración de componentes sincrónicos y asincrónicos

Ministrando cursos online para o desenvolvimento profissional de professores de inglês: integração de componentes síncronos e assíncronos

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Abstract

The design and implementation of teacher training courses for English teachers demand careful strategic planning to integrate synchronous and asynchronous components effectively. Such courses play a critical role in fostering meaningful professional development by addressing the unique needs of educators and their educational contexts. This article examines the essential considerations for creating an online learning environment that supports both theoretical understanding and practical application. Key aspects discussed include aligning learning objectives with interactive and engaging activities, leveraging accessible and user-friendly technological tools, and cultivating spaces for reflection, collaboration, and knowledge sharing among participants. The integration of synchronous sessions enables real-time interaction, fostering a sense of community and immediacy, while asynchronous components provide flexibility and opportunities for self-paced learning. Together, these elements ensure a balanced approach to teacher development. The article also highlights strategies for bridging theory and practice, ensuring that educators can apply course content to real-world classroom scenarios. These strategies include using case studies, project-based tasks, and reflective exercises tailored to the challenges teachers face in their practice. The conclusion emphasizes the importance of designing culturally and linguistically inclusive learning experiences that not only strengthen teachers' pedagogical and linguistic competencies, but also enhance their capacity to create effective language learning opportunities for students. By prioritizing sustainable and context-sensitive approaches, these courses can contribute significantly to improving language education outcomes. Furthermore, it follows Guskey (2002) in valuing the assessment of instances of professional development with a view to improvement.

Keywords:

online courses, professional development, synchronous, asynchronous, teacher training, pedagogical competencies.

Resumen

El diseño e implementación de cursos de formación docente para profesores de inglés requiere una planificación estratégica cuidadosa para integrar de manera efectiva componentes sincrónicos y asincrónicos. Estos cursos desempeñan un papel fundamental en el fomento del desarrollo profesional significativo al atender las necesidades específicas de los docentes y sus contextos educativos. Este artículo examina las consideraciones esenciales para crear un entorno de aprendizaje en línea, que apoye tanto la comprensión teórica como la aplicación práctica. Se discuten aspectos clave como la alineación de los objetivos de aprendizaje con actividades interactivas y atractivas, el uso de herramientas tecnológicas accesibles y fáciles de usar, y la creación de espacios que fomenten la reflexión, la colaboración y el intercambio de conocimientos entre los participantes. La integración de sesiones sincrónicas permite interacciones en tiempo real, promoviendo un sentido de comunidad e inmediatez, mientras que los componentes asincrónicos ofrecen flexibilidad y oportunidades de aprendizaje a ritmo propio. En conjunto, estos elementos aseguran un enfoque equilibrado para el desarrollo docente. El artículo también destaca estrategias para conectar la teoría con la práctica, asegurando que los docentes puedan aplicar los contenidos del curso en escenarios reales de aula. Estas estrategias incluyen el uso de estudios

de caso, tareas basadas en proyectos y ejercicios de reflexión adaptados a los desafíos de la práctica docente. La conclusión resalta la importancia de diseñar experiencias de aprendizaje cultural y lingüísticamente inclusivas que no solo fortalezcan las competencias pedagógicas y lingüísticas de los docentes, sino que también mejoren su capacidad para crear oportunidades efectivas de aprendizaje de idiomas para los estudiantes. Al priorizar enfoques sostenibles y sensibles al contexto, estos cursos pueden contribuir significativamente a la mejora de los resultados en la enseñanza de idiomas.

Resumo

O design e a implementação de cursos de formação para professores de inglês exigem um planejamento estratégico cuidadoso para integrar de forma eficaz os componentes síncronos e assíncronos. Esses cursos desempenham um papel fundamental no fomento do desenvolvimento profissional significativo, atendendo às necessidades específicas dos educadores e de seus contextos educacionais. Este artigo examina as considerações essenciais para criar um ambiente de aprendizagem online que apoie tanto a compreensão teórica quanto a aplicação prática. São discutidos aspectos-chave, como o alinhamento dos objetivos de aprendizagem com atividades interativas e envolventes, o uso de ferramentas tecnológicas acessíveis e amigáveis, e a criação de espaços que promovam reflexão, colaboração e troca de conhecimentos entre os participantes. A integração de sessões síncronas permite interações em tempo real, promovendo um senso de comunidade e imediatismo, enquanto os componentes assíncronos oferecem flexibilidade e oportunidades para aprendizado no próprio ritmo. Juntos, esses elementos garantem uma abordagem equilibrada para o desenvolvimento docente. O artigo também destaca estratégias para conectar teoria e prática, garantindo que os educadores possam aplicar o conteúdo do curso em cenários reais de sala de aula. Essas estratégias incluem o uso de estudos de caso, tarefas baseadas em projetos e exercícios de reflexão adaptados aos desafios da prática docente. A conclusão enfatiza a importância de projetar experiências de aprendizagem cultural e linguisticamente inclusivas que não apenas fortaleçam as competências pedagógicas e linguísticas dos professores, mas também aprimorem sua capacidade de criar oportunidades reais de aprendizagem de idiomas para os alunos. Ao priorizar abordagens sustentáveis e sensíveis ao contexto, esses cursos podem contribuir significativamente para a melhoria dos resultados no ensino de idiomas.

Palabras clave:

cursos en línea,
desarrollo profesional,
sincrónico, asincrónico,
formación docente,
competencias
pedagógicas.

Palavras-chave:

cursos online,
desenvolvimento
profissional, síncrono,
assíncrono, formação
docente, competências
pedagógicas.

Introduction

This paper presents an account of the design and implementation of a professional development cycle for English language teachers working across multiple sites at a university in Chile. The cycle incorporates two self-access courses completed autonomously by participants, three synchronous webinars, a series of asynchronous activities, and several practical tasks, including the production of a podcast. The cycle was collaboratively designed by two of the authors in partnership with the third author, who serves as a teacher coordinator at the university.

The focus of this professional development initiative is on teaching grammar within a program for higher education students learning English. The cycle participants conduct their teaching activities by engaging with students via an online platform and blended face-to-face sessions. This is the basis of the four mandatory English courses included in undergraduate programs at the University already mentioned. Each course lasts a semester (16 weeks for instruction and 2 weeks for exams). The purpose of these courses is to develop English language communicative skills for students to reach the level of an independent user (B1 of the Common European Framework of References). To this end, a Blended Learning (BL) approach was considered appropriate in this context due to its advantages to both students and faculty (Owston *et al.*, 2013). The online component (50% of the time) is based on a commercial online platform that provides practice on grammar, listening, reading and pronunciation with automated feedback. The weekly face-to-face sessions with the instructor (50% of the time) are devoted to practice activities through pair or group work and reinforcement of topics and grammar items. Furthermore, students are expected to take part in interactive online forum activities during the course.

Initiatives like the cycle discussed in this article are vital components of in-service professional development for teachers. It is our contention that institutions should prioritize such programs to ensure continuous improvement in teaching quality, thereby enhancing teacher effectiveness, supporting student learning outcomes (Darling-Hammond, 1999), and fostering broader community development.

To explore the processes involved in setting up such a cycle, this paper provides an overview of key principles underpinning professional development programs for ESOL teachers. It delves into the design and implementation phases of the cycle, reflecting on the outcomes and their implications. The specificity of the local context plays a pivotal role in shaping effective professional development initiatives, and this paper highlights how contextual considerations inform the design and execution of such programs. Sharing these insights is presented as an integral part of refining and improving the professional development process.

Object of Study

This article investigates the critical need for professional development (PD) programs tailored to address the unique challenges and opportunities within higher education environments, particularly for English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) teachers. It seeks to fill a gap in existing research on online professional development programs designed specifically for ESOL educators, who face distinct challenges

such as limited resources, professional isolation, and restricted access to peer networks in virtual teaching settings. "Although we need to build teachers' capacity for improvement, we also need to be sure that time, effort, and scarce resources are expended only on quality programs that teach with and about best practices" (Dede *et al.*, 2009, p. 8).

The study focuses on understanding how local contexts influence teacher development and student outcomes in online higher education. It argues that generic PD initiatives often fail to address these context-specific challenges, underscoring the need for localized, adaptable solutions that are responsive to the realities of teaching in diverse online environments. ESOL courses should take into account that teaching and learning a language involves much more than just developing linguistic skills but being aware of cultural background, cultural identity, individual attitudes toward languages, concepts of race and social class (Jong & Harper, 2005). The same applies to PD programs.

By examining these issues, the article aims to evaluate the effectiveness of context-sensitive PD programs in enhancing teacher performance, improving student success, and fostering community engagement. It sets the stage for a discussion on how tailored PD initiatives can bridge the gap between theoretical frameworks and practical applications, ensuring that teachers in higher education are better equipped to meet the needs of their learners.

Background

The professional development cycle under scrutiny here was implemented at a university in Chile, where English language instruction is a critical component of the curriculum for higher education students. The participating teachers work across multiple campuses and deliver English courses to a diverse cohort of students, many of whom are non-traditional learners balancing academic studies with professional and personal commitments.

The university's English program is designed to support students in achieving the language proficiency required for academic success and professional advancement. It adopts a blended learning approach, combining an online platform for self-directed learning with synchronous tutorial sessions facilitated by the teachers. The program emphasizes practical language use, targeting skills such as reading, writing, speaking, and grammar in real-world contexts relevant to the students' fields of study.

Teachers in this context face unique challenges, including managing large class sizes, addressing varied levels of English proficiency, and leveraging online platforms to create engaging and effective learning experiences. These factors informed the development of the professional development cycle, ensuring it was tailored to address the specific needs and realities of the teaching environment. Research supported our plan:

Theory drives practice (Hennissen *et al.*, 2017); therefore, strengthening the teacher mindset is crucial to teacher development and growth. Teacher education programs that promote theory-based practice (i.e., culturally relevant teaching, culturally responsive teaching, culturally sustaining) have the potential to cultivate preservice teachers (PSTs) cultural competency and

critical consciousness. Shifting from a deficit perspective toward developing an asset-based mindset (Flint & Jagers, 2021) requires introspection and reflexivity, as well as in-depth knowledge of the communities that teachers serve. As a way of supporting cultural understanding, partnerships between universities and local area school districts are needed to support both PST learning and in-service teacher practice. (Dwomoh, 2023, pp. 1421-1422)

The professional development cycle originated from a collaborative effort between the university's teacher coordinator and external experts in English language teaching. It was designed in response to the growing need for targeted support in teaching grammar effectively within the university's blended learning model. The initiative sought to enhance teachers' pedagogical competencies, particularly in integrating grammar instruction with the broader aims of academic and professional language use. Furthermore, as the cycle was delivered using an online platform, it aimed to allow participants to experience learning in a similar format to that experienced by the learners they teach, thus providing an added benefit.

The cycle involved English language teachers from several campuses, representing a range of experience levels. Some participants were relatively new to teaching English in higher education, while others brought years of experience but sought to refine and reflect upon their approaches to teaching grammar in an online blended learning context.

The professional development cycle consisted of:

- **Two self-access courses:** These were designed to be completed autonomously, allowing participants to explore key concepts in grammar instruction and blended learning pedagogy at their own pace.
- **Three synchronous webinars:** Facilitated by the program's designers, these webinars provided opportunities for real-time interaction, sharing best practices, and addressing challenges faced in the classroom. The first introductory webinar was meant as an introduction to the cycle and helped organizers become acquainted with participants' needs and expectations. The second webinar focused on challenges teachers face when teaching grammar and the last one, as a closing session, provided feedback on the cycle.
- **Asynchronous activities:** Participants engaged in collaborative discussions, reflective tasks, and peer feedback through the online learning platform over the course of several weeks.
- **Practical tasks:** These included designing a collaborative lesson plan and the production of a podcast, which required participants to apply theoretical knowledge to create a tangible product demonstrating their pedagogical approaches to grammar instruction. Participants were also provided with extended and optional bibliography on each of the topics covered catering for the needs of both experienced and novice teachers.

Participants were expected to

- engage actively with all components of the cycle, including self-access courses, webinars, and tasks;
- reflect on their current teaching practices and identify areas for improvement;

- demonstrate the application of new strategies in their teaching contexts, particularly in grammar instruction.

Cycle tutors engaged with participants by

- providing expert guidance and support throughout the cycle;
- facilitating meaningful discussions and offering constructive feedback on participants' work;
- adapting content and approaches to meet the evolving needs of the participants.

Cycle managers, which in this case were also the course tutors but could have been other individuals, were responsible for

- ensuring the professional development cycle aligns with institutional goals and priorities;
- monitoring participant progress and encouraging active participation;
- fostering a culture of continuous learning and professional growth among teaching staff.

This comprehensive professional development initiative aimed not only to enhance teachers' pedagogical skills but also to build a community of practice (CP) among educators, fostering collaboration and innovation in teaching grammar within a blended learning environment and beyond. A growing body of research supports the benefits of a community of practice: it fosters collaborative learning beyond formal educational institutions (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998; Wenger *et al.*, 2002, in Iswati, 2023); it consists of three main components — *mutual engagement* (interactions and relationships among members), *joint enterprise* (participants' commitment to the community's development), and *shared repertoire* (transformation of resources into assets for the community) (Wenger, 1998, in Iswati, 2023); and it helps develop valuable skills that contribute to teachers' professional growth (Richards, 2010, in Iswati, 2023).

Theoretical Framework

Teacher development and professional learning are dynamic, context-sensitive processes rooted in constructivist and sociocultural theories. Constructivist approaches emphasize that teachers learn best when they actively engage with content, reflect on their practices, and collaborate with peers to construct new knowledge (Van Schaik *et al.*, 2019). Sociocultural theories, such as Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development, highlight the importance of social interaction and community in fostering professional growth. These perspectives underscore that effective professional development (PD) should be collaborative, reflective, and contextually relevant to empower teachers to adapt to their unique environments.

In the design of the program under analysis, the principles for professional development proposed by Casteel and Ballantyne (2010), as well as by Irby, Beverly J., guided the authors Guerrero, Lara-Alecio, Tong, and Rodriguez (2012). These principles are combined and summarized below:

Effective professional development programs for ESOL teachers are grounded in a set of principles designed to enhance teacher expertise, foster reflective practice, and improve student outcomes. These principles include:

1. **Building on Existing Expertise** - Professional development should build on teachers' foundational skills, knowledge, and experience, integrating these with evidence-based practices to address the specific needs of English language learners. (Darling-Hammond *et al.*, 2017)
2. **Engaging Participants as Learners** - Teachers are actively involved as learners, engaging with content, teaching strategies, integrated technologies, and curriculum standards. This approach mirrors the practices they will apply in their classrooms, ensuring relevance and applicability.
3. **Providing Practice, Feedback, and Follow-Up** - Opportunities for hands-on practice and immediate feedback are integral to the learning process. Follow-up sessions support teachers in implementing new strategies and refining their skills over time.
4. **Facilitating Inquiry and Reflection** - Encouraging teachers to engage in inquiry-based learning fosters critical reflection on their practices. This process enables continuous improvement and adaptation to diverse teaching contexts.
5. **Ensuring Sustained Engagement** - Effective professional development requires a substantial and ongoing commitment from both participants and program developers. This sustained effort allows for deeper learning and meaningful integration of new strategies into teaching practices.
6. **Measuring Impact** - Professional development programs must assess their effectiveness by evaluating changes in teacher knowledge, instructional practices, and student performance (Antoniou & Kyriakides 2013). These assessments guide future iterations of the program, ensuring continuous alignment with best practices and educational standards.
7. **Focusing on Teacher Effectiveness and Learner Outcomes** - A key goal is to improve teacher effectiveness, which directly impacts learners' language acquisition and overall learning (Akiba & Liang, 2016). By linking professional development efforts to measurable improvements in student performance, programs can demonstrate their value and drive sustained support.

By adhering to these principles, professional development initiatives can create meaningful, lasting improvements in the education of learners while supporting teachers in meeting the challenges of diverse and dynamic learning environments.

Effective PD programs are often evaluated using frameworks that focus on measurable outcomes such as teacher knowledge, instructional practices, and student achievement. Guskey's five levels of evaluation, for instance, assess PD impact across multiple dimensions: participant reactions, learning, organizational support, application of knowledge, and student outcomes. This layered approach ensures that PD programs are not only engaging and informative but also lead to tangible improvements in teaching efficacy and student performance.

Traditional PD models for ESOL teachers include workshops, online courses, and seminars, each with distinct strengths and limitations. Workshops often provide hands-on strategies but may lack continuity and depth. Online courses offer flexibility

and access to a broad range of resources, yet they may fail to foster the same level of peer interaction as face-to-face formats. On-demand online professional development resources have been shown to impact student achievement positively (Shaha & Ellsworth, 2013). Seminars and conferences, while valuable for networking and exposure to new ideas, can sometimes be too generalized to address the specific needs of individual educators.

Increasingly, blended PD models are gaining traction, combining synchronous and asynchronous online components with in-person sessions to balance accessibility and depth. These models align well with the diverse demands of ESOL teachers, who often require practical, context-sensitive strategies for addressing linguistic and cultural diversity in their classrooms.

Research highlights significant challenges faced by teachers in online education, particularly within higher education environments. Professional isolation is a recurring theme, as educators often lack access to immediate peer support or informal learning opportunities. Limited resources and technological barriers further compound these challenges, especially in underfunded institutions.

For ESOL teachers, these difficulties are magnified by the need to adapt language-teaching methodologies to online platforms, which may not fully support interactive, communicative approaches. Additionally, teachers often face increased demands to balance instructional quality with the technical complexities of managing online learning environments. These challenges emphasize the need for PD programs specifically designed to address the realities of online education, equipping teachers with the skills and tools necessary for effective practice.

This theoretical and contextual foundation underscores the importance of designing professional development initiatives that are rooted in established theories of teacher learning while remaining adaptable to the unique challenges of online and blended educational contexts.

Design and Methodology

The professional development (PD) cycle under analysis was designed to address the specific needs of ESOL teachers working in diverse higher education contexts, including online environments. The program included a combination of self-access courses, synchronous webinars, asynchronous activities, and tasks, such as the creation of podcasts. These elements were integrated to provide a blended learning experience aimed at fostering teacher collaboration, enhancing instructional practices, and addressing the challenges unique to online education.

Two self-access courses provided participants with foundational knowledge on key topics, while the webinars served as interactive sessions for discussion, reflection, and guidance. Asynchronous activities, including contributions to collaborative tools like Padlet, allowed participants to engage at their own pace, promoting deeper reflection and exploration of concepts introduced in the webinars.

Data collection focused on capturing participant engagement and contributions throughout the PD cycle. Qualitative data were gathered from various sources, including:

- **Webinar Contributions:** Discussions, reflections, and queries shared by participants during synchronous sessions.
- **Padlet Contributions:** Posts and comments provided by participants during asynchronous activities, which highlighted their reflections, challenges, and practical applications of the concepts.
- **Discussion questions:** questions designed to foster reflection on the theoretical components and/or their application in the learning environment.
- **Submitted Tasks:** Artifacts such as lesson plans and podcasts created by participants as part of the program's requirements, offering insight into their application of new knowledge.

While the majority of the data collected were qualitative in nature, some elements, such as participation rates and task completion levels, were quantified to provide a broader understanding of engagement.

The effectiveness of the PD cycle was evaluated based on the following criteria:

- **Changes in Teaching Methods:** Evidence of shifts in instructional practices, such as the adoption of more interactive or context-sensitive approaches to teaching grammar.
- **Improvements in Student Language Acquisition:** Indirect measures, such as anecdotal feedback from participants about student progress or specific classroom outcomes resulting from new teaching strategies.
- **Increased Community Engagement:** Indicators of enhanced collaboration among participants, including the establishment of peer networks or increased willingness to share and discuss pedagogical strategies.

The combination of these criteria provided a comprehensive framework for assessing the program's impact on teacher development and its alignment with the objectives of fostering effective, context-sensitive professional learning.

By employing these methods and criteria, the study aimed to provide a nuanced understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement in the PD cycle, while also contributing valuable insights to the broader discourse on teacher development in higher education.

Results

Even though this PD program was not meant as a research project, teachers' participation was carefully recorded, which allowed the cycle organizers and the university to analyze the levels of commitment during the different components of the cycle. The quantitative analysis of participation renders the following results:

- 66 participants enrolled in the course.
- 55% of enrolled participants attended the first introductory synchronous webinar
- All participants completed one of the online courses provided on the platform, i.e. "Teaching Grammar" and "Teacher Talk Time vs. Student Talk Time".

- 29% of those enrolled in the course never took part in it.
- 25% (average) of the participants engaged in the asynchronous interactive weekly activities in the online platform.
- 80% (average) submitted the evaluation activities (group lesson plan and individual podcast)

Feedback was collected from the participants by means of surveys conducted during the cycle, which allowed organizers to make adjustments to satisfy teachers' needs and strengthen their motivation. For instance, participants required the activities to be uploaded to the platform over the weekend instead of on Monday morning, as originally planned. This change was immediately implemented and facilitated completion of tasks.

Discussion

As mentioned, this cycle consisted of different synchronous and asynchronous activities that demanded a considerable amount of time and effort on the part of the participants. Taking into account participants are busy teachers, the whole cycle was presented to them at the beginning of the course and detailed explanations on how it would be implemented were provided during the first webinar. Subsequently, activities were uploaded to the platform weekly, with a detailed description of how they were to be conducted. Each task was different, catering for this heterogeneous group of both experienced and novice teachers. Furthermore, participants were given a whole week to submit their answers or participate in the discussion forum. As previously indicated, participants were also provided with optional bibliography for those that were interested in further developing their knowledge of a certain perspective.

Following Schwartzman *et al.* (2019), the whole course was based on the following pillars:

- Technology as a territory: the whole course was designed and carried out online.
- Interactions with the content, the teachers and with colleagues that was part of the learning process.
- E-activities: the online learning activities proposed were meant as the backbone of the course and implied the practical application of theoretical concepts.
- Careful selection of content and digital resources
- Tutors as guides throughout the process

It is considered that this PD cycle addressed the specific needs of teachers in this context because of the following:

- It was meant to solve teachers' needs (how to teach grammar more effectively)
- It was designed to address teachers' challenges when teaching grammar, as discussed in the first webinar.

- It provided theoretical knowledge and practical activities on different approaches to the teaching of grammar.
- It presented different digital resources that could be implemented in their courses (e.g. Padlet, podcast recording, Wooclap, Chat GPT and others).

It is worth mentioning that even though these digital resources were meant as suggestions to be applied to their English courses at University we do not have information as regards their real implementation.

As expected, the program faced a number of challenges that were duly addressed. First of all, participants' limited time to fully develop the activities. To this end, most deadlines were extended to ensure a broader participation. Secondly, participants' limited experience as learners in the use of digital platforms, which was solved by means of detailed and guided explanations on the platform or individual help provided via personalized e-mails. Thirdly, participants' initial issues with organization, which was addressed by means of a weekly reminder on the platform summarizing the stage of the cycle they were at and the deadline they were to meet.

Teachers' enrollment in the course shows that they were highly interested in the proposal. The fact that 30% of them did not take part in the program and an even more reduced number complied with 100% of the requirements of the cycle might be ascribed to limited time in an overloaded teaching schedule. Teachers tend to be overworked and even though they might be motivated by the idea of professional development, their everyday lives discourage them from taking on other responsibilities and seeing them through.

A qualitative analysis of participation in the cycle shows that the more activities the participants engaged in, the better their performance in the overall assessment was. It was clearly observed that those who took part in the discussion forums and online tasks managed to record a podcast that showed a deeper understanding of the concepts developed during the course and a more critical reflection on their classroom practices.

Conclusions

The design and implementation of online professional development cycles for English teachers, integrating synchronous and asynchronous components, such as the one described in this paper underscores the importance of thoughtful planning and contextual awareness. This study highlights several key lessons that can inform future initiatives.

First, the collaborative design of courses with stakeholders who have direct contact with teachers ensures alignment with participants' interests and professional realities. By grounding course content in the experiences and needs of teachers, the program becomes more relevant and impactful.

Second, the combination of synchronous and asynchronous modes facilitates greater flexibility, promoting both engagement and accessibility. Synchronous sessions provide real-time interaction; fostering community and immediacy, while asynchronous elements allow participants to learn at their own pace and accommodate their busy

schedules. The option to access recordings of live sessions further supports inclusivity and sustained participation.

Third, breaking content into manageable and engaging chunks maintains motivation and retention, especially when tasks are perceived as appropriately challenging. Designing activities that leverage teachers' real-life experiences, such as contributions to collaborative platforms like Padlet or podcast production, strengthens the connection between theoretical learning and practical application.

Finally, the integration of collaborative tasks, such as the collaborative development of a lesson plan from one of the perspectives discussed during the course, group podcast projects, enhances not only participant engagement but also fosters professional networking. These tasks encourage reflection, dialogue, and mutual understanding of diverse teaching approaches, contributing to the creation of a professional learning community.

Successful implementation of such programs requires attention to logistical details, including the timing of activities in relation to the academic calendar and the coordination challenges of multi-campus collaboration. By addressing these factors, online professional development courses can achieve their dual aims of enhancing teacher competencies and improving language education outcomes.

As a potential avenue for future research, it would be valuable to incorporate a structured follow-up mechanism in the initial activity design, allowing participants to reflect on how the course content has influenced their teaching practices. This could include, for example, longitudinal feedback surveys, classroom observations, or the analysis of student work to assess pedagogical impact. At the institutional level, fostering small-scale, collaborative forums—whether in-person or virtual—could provide teachers with opportunities to share their implementation experiences, exchange insights, and collaboratively refine professional development strategies. Such an approach would not only enhance reflective practice but also promote sustained engagement and continuous improvement in teacher training initiatives.

Ultimately, the study reaffirms the need for culturally and contextually responsive course designs. By fostering inclusive and sustainable learning environments, these programs can empower English teachers to better serve their students and navigate the evolving demands of language education.

Limitations of the Study

While this study provides valuable insights into the design and implementation of a professional development (PD) cycle for ESOL teachers, several limitations should be acknowledged to contextualize its findings.

The initiative was not originally conceived as a formal research project but as a practical PD cycle aimed at supporting ESOL teachers in their professional growth. Consequently, the study lacks some of the methodological rigor typically associated with research, such as pre-defined hypotheses or experimental controls. This practical focus limits the generalizability of the findings, as they are primarily reflective of a specific institutional context.

Data collection posed significant challenges, particularly in assessing the long-term impacts of the PD cycle. The study relied on a relatively small sample size, as the participating teachers were drawn from a single university. This limited pool of participants reduces the ability to extrapolate findings to other settings or broader populations. Additionally, tracking the impact of the program on teachers' practices and student outcomes over time proved difficult due to logistical constraints and the early stages of the program's implementation.

The findings presented in this study are based on preliminary data, as the PD cycle is still in its early stages. This limits the ability to draw definitive conclusions about the program's effectiveness or its broader implications for professional development in online higher education contexts.

Further research is needed to fully understand the impact of place-based professional development programs in similar contexts. This includes longitudinal studies to monitor the sustained effects of the PD cycle on teaching practices, such as specific changes in lesson planning or instructional strategies. Additionally, more comprehensive evaluations of student outcomes would provide a clearer picture of the program's overall effectiveness.

One key limitation is the lack of detailed follow-up on how the PD cycle influenced participants' educational practices. While anecdotal evidence suggests positive changes, systematic monitoring of specific instances—such as the integration of new approaches to grammar instruction in lesson plans—remains an area for future exploration.

Acknowledging these limitations is essential for situating the findings within a realistic framework and for guiding subsequent efforts to refine and expand place-based professional development initiatives for ESOL educators.

Notes:

Final approval of the article:

Lourdes Cardozo-Gaibisso, PhD, guest editor of the special issue.

Authorship contribution:

Cristina Banfi and Analía Esquerré were responsible for project conceptualization, data collection and analysis, and bibliographical compilation.

Monica Frenzel conducted part of the research, data collection and analysis, and manuscript review. She also participated in the management and coordination of project implementation.

Availability of data:

The dataset supporting the findings of this study is not publicly available.

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