

# Sustainable Strategies in ESOL Teacher Development: Connecting Theory, Practice, and Community

Estrategias sostenibles en el desarrollo profesional de docentes de ESOL: conectando teoría, práctica y comunidad

Estratégias sustentáveis no desenvolvimento de professores de ESOL: conectando teoria, prática e comunidade

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## Abstract

This paper discusses sustainable approaches to ESOL (English to Speakers of Other Languages) teacher professional learning that effectively integrate theory, practice, and community engagement for long-term growth and positive impact. As classrooms become increasingly multilingual and diverse due to globalization and rapid technological advancements, it is essential that professional development for teachers is comprehensive, adaptable to various contexts, and deeply embedded within community ecosystems. Such an approach ensures that teachers are equipped with relevant skills and knowledge to meet evolving student needs while fostering a supportive learning environment. The paper highlights several effective strategies, including the creation of professional learning communities, mentorship programs, action research initiatives, and place-based practices. These methods help bridge the gap between research and practice by encouraging authentic, real-world classroom experiences. Additionally, the paper discusses common challenges faced when implementing sustainable teacher development, such as ideological resistance, resource limitations, and systemic barriers within educational institutions. To address these issues, the paper offers recommendations for shaping educational policies, fostering leadership development, and promoting community-driven initiatives. Overall, it emphasizes that sustainable ESOL professional learning requires ongoing collaboration and commitment from all stakeholders to create a resilient and inclusive educational ecosystem that benefits both teachers and learners in the long term.

**Keywords:** sustainable teacher professional development, TESOL, community engagement, multilingual classrooms, education policy.

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## Resumen

Este artículo examina enfoques sostenibles para la formación profesional de docentes de ESOL (Inglés para Hablantes de Otros Idiomas), que combinan de manera efectiva la teoría, la práctica y la participación comunitaria para promover un crecimiento a largo plazo y un impacto positivo. A medida que las aulas se vuelven más multilingües y diversas debido a la globalización y los avances tecnológicos rápidos, es esencial que el desarrollo profesional sea integral, adaptable a distintos contextos y esté profundamente enraizado en los ecosistemas comunitarios. Este enfoque asegura que los docentes dispongan de las habilidades y conocimientos necesarios para responder a las necesidades cambiantes de los estudiantes, fomentando además un ambiente de aprendizaje inclusivo y solidario. El artículo propone varias estrategias efectivas, como la creación de comunidades de aprendizaje, programas de mentoría, investigaciones-acción y prácticas situadas en el entorno local. Estas metodologías ayudan a reducir la brecha entre investigación y práctica, promoviendo experiencias reales en el aula. También se abordan los desafíos comunes, como la resistencia ideológica, la limitación de recursos y las barreras estructurales en las instituciones educativas. Para enfrentar estos obstáculos, el documento ofrece recomendaciones para la formulación de políticas, el fortalecimiento del liderazgo y la promoción de iniciativas comunitarias. En definitiva, el artículo sostiene que el aprendizaje profesional sostenible en ESOL requiere colaboración constante y compromiso de todos los actores para construir un ecosistema educativo resiliente e inclusivo, en beneficio de docentes y estudiantes a largo plazo.

**Palabras clave:** desarrollo profesional sostenible de docentes, TESOL, participación comunitaria, aulas multilingües, política educativa.

## Resumo

Este artigo examina abordagens sustentáveis para a formação profissional de professores de ESOL (Inglês para Falantes de Outras Línguas), que integram, de forma eficaz, teoria, prática e envolvimento comunitário para promover um crescimento de longo prazo e um impacto positivo. À medida que as salas de aula se tornam cada vez mais multilíngues e diversificadas devido à globalização e aos avanços tecnológicos rápidos, é fundamental que o desenvolvimento profissional dos professores seja abrangente, adaptável a diferentes contextos e profundamente enraizado nos ecossistemas comunitários. Essa abordagem garante que os professores estejam equipados com as habilidades e os conhecimentos exigidos para atender às necessidades cambiantes dos estudantes, fomentando um ambiente de aprendizagem inclusivo e solidário. O artigo apresenta várias estratégias eficazes, incluindo a formação de comunidades de aprendizagem, programas de mentoria, iniciativas de pesquisa-ação e práticas baseadas no ambiente local. Essas metodologias ajudam a reduzir a distância entre pesquisa e prática, promovendo experiências autênticas em sala de aula. Além disso, aborda os desafios comuns, como resistência ideológica, limitações de recursos e barreiras sistêmicas nas instituições de ensino. Para enfrentar esses problemas, o documento oferece recomendações para formular políticas, desenvolver lideranças e promover iniciativas comunitárias. Em suma, reforça que a aprendizagem profissional sustentável em ESOL exige colaboração contínua e compromisso de todos os envolvidos para criar um ecossistema educacional resiliente e inclusivo, beneficiando professores e alunos no longo prazo.

**Palavras-chave:** desenvolvimento profissional sustentável de professores, TESOL, engajamento comunitário, salas de aula multilíngues, política educacional.

## Introduction

The field of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) has experienced significant transformation over recent decades. Continual change in educational contexts occurs for many reasons, including (but not limited to) increasing student language diversity in schools, rapid technology innovation, shifting policy agendas, globalization, and unexpected crises (Cardozo-Gaibisso *et al.*, 2024). These are just some of the reasons why teacher professional learning (TPL) must be ongoing and adapted to meet in-service and pre-service ESOL teachers' needs. For example, ongoing professional learning can help pre-service and in-service ESOL teachers learn more about a range of pedagogical practices (e.g., modeling, reflective inquiry) that they may not be familiar with to promote more equitable and effective practices (Fackler, 2024).

TPL (also known as professional development) extends beyond a single "one-and-done" workshop or summer training session. In this regard, this paper advocates for continuous, embedded, and community-supported learning experiences that are based on designed based models (Buxton *et al.*, 2017) that go beyond traditional methods by providing opportunities for not only knowledge and skill development, but also for reflection, community building, and systems change to help ensure their long-term sustainability. Research shows that the most effective approaches are not only rooted in sound theory to inform practice, but also adapted to meet the specific needs of the context in which they are being implemented (Allexsaht-Snider *et al.*, 2016; de Oliveira *et al.*, 2023). These approaches also emphasize collaboration, cultural responsiveness, and a deep understanding of the specific challenges and resources of the communities they serve. The focus on bridging theory and practice is also critical. Indeed, teachers need opportunities to apply sound theoretical foundations to develop authentic classroom strategies that will lead to meaningful and sustainable change. As a result, TPL is most impactful when it is informed by a strong theoretical framework and a sound approach, as described in the next section.

## Approaches to ESOL Teacher Professional Learning

Emerging models for teacher professional learning (TPL) stress job-embedded growth as a continual, integrated, and sustained approach to professional development. Models like collaborative communities of practice, mentoring, online learning networks, inquiry-based practices, and peer coaching promote deep, job-embedded engagement with classroom practice in real contexts. This addresses concerns that stand-alone trainings are ineffective, while ongoing, sustained, and embedded TPL can substantially improve student achievement. To be effective, TPL should involve authentic, inquiry-based learning anchored in real classrooms, student work, and life. Additionally, it should involve active engagement, collaboration, models of effective practice, coaching and expert guidance; it should also promote feedback and reflection, and be delivered over an extended period (Vaillant & Cardozo-Gaibisso, 2017; Darling-Hammond *et al.*, 2017).

Professional learning communities (PLCs) are some of the most common job-embedded growth models. PLCs create structures for regular, ongoing teacher collaboration to support sustained, long-term learning. Collaborative PLC structures and processes provide teachers with the time and space to examine student data, co-plan instruction and interventions, and offer each other feedback, engage in reflection and problem-solving, and support goal-setting. PLCs in diverse ESOL contexts enable teachers to share ideas around culturally responsive pedagogies, co-construct curricula that address their students' linguistic and cultural needs, and work through challenges together. Peer-driven PLCs and growth models create professional networks that reduce isolation, model innovation, and develop confidence and ownership in teachers over their own practice. Collaboration and shared inquiry through observation and feedback have also been shown to improve classroom practice.

Peer coaching, mentoring, and personalized instruction also support ongoing, teacher-directed growth. Darling-Hammond *et al.* (2017) explain that personalized mentoring with an experienced coach can offer novice or struggling teachers immediate, relevant, and applicable pedagogical strategies, constructive feedback, and encouragement to help build their confidence and capacity. Mentoring can also provide a safe space to discuss more complex ideas, such as creating inclusive-multilingual classrooms, language development, content instruction, asset-based pedagogies, and equity issues that may not be addressed in traditional TPL (de Oliveira, 2023).

Action research, or the process by which teachers can examine and refine their own practice through systematic and cyclical inquiry, has also been shown to support sustainable teacher growth. Widiastari and Fithriani (2024) show how action research is an experiential process of purposeful reflection, evaluation, and implementation that allows teachers to identify and understand problems in their classroom, test interventions, and analyze results to support deeper conceptual understanding of pedagogy and a sense of agency. The cyclical nature of action research also makes it a powerful approach to contextualize, and adapt evidence-based practices to the needs of individual teachers and their students. Teachers can take research on such strategies as scaffolding, translanguaging, culturally sustaining pedagogies, and more, and adapt them for their students. Teachers can transform their understanding of students' linguistic and cultural diversity from a problem to be overcome into a resource to build upon. In practice, action research can be especially powerful when integrated into the structure of collaborative PLCs, thus helping to more tightly integrate research into practice.

Online and blended TPL models create additional structures for expanding teacher growth opportunities. Webinars, digital resources, and online learning communities allow teachers to connect with their peers and coaches beyond their immediate setting. This is particularly important for teachers in remote or resource-poor contexts. Clinical supervision, or classroom observations followed by reflection and feedback, is another ongoing and embedded growth model that links theory with practice. Blended learning formats and clinical supervision practices can create psychological safety for teachers to try new things, take risks, and be innovative. These are essential ingredients for sustainable TPL.

Teacher reflection is the core and underpinning of all of these TPL approaches and is a crucial aspect of deliberate, purposeful practice (Widiastari & Fithriani, 2024). Reflection on teaching strategies, student work, and classroom conversations

can help teachers to make more intentional, thoughtful, and research-informed decisions. Sharing reflections can further promote deliberate inquiry and deeper learning, particularly in the realm of language use and supporting students' language development (Fackler & Harman, 2025). To be more effective, reflection can involve more authentic, experiential activities, such as lesson study, case studies, and role-plays, where teachers can be immersed in real classroom problems and dilemmas. Experiential activities that simulate real practice, particularly when they involve the analysis of actual practice or video-recorded classroom activities, create cognitive disequilibrium that motivates teachers to confront and change their assumptions and try new practices.

To support reflection, psychological safety is key. Teachers need to feel safe to explore, to try new things, and to make mistakes—and to reflect on these mistakes—without being judged. Mentoring relationships and peer learning networks can foster trust and reduce anxiety in the classroom, supporting innovation in the use of translanguaging, culturally sustaining pedagogies, and multiple forms of assessment. While it is vital to learn from and support each other, trusting relationships—supported by structured observations and feedback—allow teachers to take risks in their practice. It is also important to provide teachers with the time and space to try things out and reflect on their practice, to support active, experiential learning and gradual transformation in their instruction. For all of these TPL models to be effective, they must be grounded in teachers' immediate needs, such as building language-supportive strategies like designing formative assessments for language development, integrating language objectives into content instruction, and scaffolding. In this way, teachers are learning strategies they can immediately use with their students—, reflect upon, and improve through ongoing reflection and data analysis.

## Communities of Inquiry and Practice as Engines of Sustainable TPL

Building effective and sustainable TPL models can also take form as communities of practice, where teachers can learn with and from each other through inquiry, reflection, and shared experience. Communities of Inquiry and Communities of Practice are two closely related concepts that can be applied to look at these communities.

A community of inquiry (Garrison *et al.*, 1999) is a group of teachers who collaborate and inquire critically and methodically into problems, new knowledge, and a better understanding of their own teaching practice. Communities of inquiry have been shown to be highly effective in prompting teacher reflection on practice and pedagogical improvement. For example, a community of inquiry could consist of a group of teachers working with multilingual learners who ask the following questions: how to differentiate instruction for different language levels, how to scaffold language and content, how to incorporate students' home languages and cultures into the curriculum, and so on. Through these inquiries, teachers in the community can support each other in building more effective and responsive instructional practices.

Communities of practice (Wagner, 1999) in turn, are groups of teachers who share an interest in a particular theme and a set of practices, resources, routines, and artifacts of learning. Teachers in a community of practice have been found to be more likely to

visit each other's classrooms, co-develop and exchange lesson plans and materials, co-create pedagogical solutions that are locally meaningful and relevant to the students they work with, and develop a common language, a repertoire of strategies, and a broader sense of ownership over their learning.

Communities of inquiry and practice can also be supported with the use of technology. For example, digital ethnography can be used to examine and analyze interactions and activities within online learning communities to identify patterns of social, cognitive, and pedagogical engagement (Johnson, 2021). This information can, in turn, be used to design more relevant, inclusive, and scalable online professional development opportunities. In addition to professional development, webinars, asynchronous discussion forums, and social media groups could allow for interaction, resources, and joint problem-solving between teachers even in remote or isolated settings.

The essential first step in building effective communities of inquiry and practice is to build trust, common goals, and reflective communication. When teachers feel that they are welcomed and respected members of their professional communities, they are more likely to experiment with new teaching practices, such as translanguaging or culturally sustaining pedagogy, and more likely to learn from their peers' successes and failures. Additionally, being active in a professional community helps teachers feel more connected and competent, which is also important for their motivation and growth.

Communities of inquiry and practice can be built into larger systemic policies and school cultures with intentional and effective leadership. School leaders and decision-makers need to provide these communities time, space, resources, and recognition to sustain their existence and to make them an essential component of teachers' professional development journeys. In addition, by recognizing teachers' agency and expertise in these communities, school leaders can also help build a sense of ownership and collective responsibility over student success, including the success of multilingual learners.

## Systemic Support and Policy Frameworks for Sustainability: Challenges and Barriers

While individual efforts, community support, and theoretical underpinnings are crucial, the sustainability of ESOL TPL is fundamentally supported by systemic and structural backing. It is imperative that policymakers and educational institutions establish and maintain an enabling environment that fosters and ingrains ongoing teacher learning as an intrinsic part of the school culture. The key lies in embedding continual TPL through strategic policy development that connects teacher growth to the overall institutional and educational goals. This requires measures such as the establishment of quality standards, dedicated funding, and the creation of leadership that not only supports but also actively promotes collaborative learning and innovation. When teacher development is recognized as a valuable investment, resources are allocated towards coaching, collaborative planning, and reflective practice sessions.

Moreover, a school culture that values feedback, data-driven decision-making, and flexibility ensures that the learning programs remain relevant and adaptable to the changing needs (Hora *et al.*, 2017). This could involve regular check-ins, data-driven



feedback sessions, and the flexibility to modify strategies as per evolving needs and circumstances. An integral part of the policy also involves addressing equity, particularly for schools in rural or underserved areas, by ensuring they have equal opportunities for access and growth. This can be achieved through equitable funding distribution, flexible scheduling, and technological support. Leadership, from school administrators to district leaders, must make the cultivation of a shared vision for continual and culturally responsive teacher growth, an imperative that aligns with a broader commitment to educational equity, their primary focus (Azano *et al.*, 2020).

Research has provided evidence to support a community of practice approach to teacher professional learning and development. However, despite the strengths of this model, there are a few significant issues and challenges to its sustainability. Teachers' beliefs and self-efficacy play a pivotal role in their professional development. A lack of confidence or negative perceptions towards change can serve as a barrier. Institutional constraints such as heavy workloads and inadequate support can also hinder teachers' efforts to engage in community-based learning (Saud & Mahara, 2024). Systemic changes are needed to prioritize teacher well-being and provide necessary resources to alleviate such burdens. Ideological and political beliefs about language, culture, and identity can also create resistance, particularly in contexts where language-in-education policies promote monolingual norms or colonial ideologies.

## Adapting Strategies: The Role of Place-Based Professional Development for Lasting Impact

Urban schools are characterized by their diversity, high mobility, and often by resource constraints. Teachers in these contexts need TPL to support differentiated instruction, intercultural competence, and community partnership. Supportive practices for these settings should account for the linguistic and cultural diversity of the student body. This might include TPL on supporting English language learners or differentiating instruction, as well as managing large, dynamic classroom environments. Workshops on culturally responsive teaching, trauma-informed practices, and conflict resolution; classroom coaching on differentiating instruction and creating classroom routines; and opportunities to forge community partnerships would be highly useful. Emphasizing resilience and resourcefulness in the face of overcrowding and resource shortages would be key (Darling-Hammond *et al.*, 2017).

In rural and remote contexts, geographic isolation, limited access to traditional TPL models, and infrastructure (e.g. poor internet access) all limit teacher engagement and capacity building. Online TPL modules, virtual coaching, and online communities of practice can link rural teachers to broader professional networks and resources.

While these are just a few context-specific examples, several general principles across different contexts emerge that can inform the success of contextually relevant TPL. These strategies should first begin by being adaptive and responsive to local needs. A needs assessment can be an important first step in each context or community. Gathering data through surveys, classroom observations, stakeholder interviews, and town halls can help to inform a relevant, contextualized program. Another principle is implementation flexibility: teachers should have a choice in topics, and flexibility to engage with TPL in multiple formats (workshops, online modules, coaching) and

on short- and long-term timelines. Formative assessment and feedback are also important. When integrated with TPL activities, these processes enable teachers to self-reflect and course-correct. Responsive strategies that evolve over time are also more likely to remain well aligned with the local context.

Building place-based TPL that engages with specific contexts should also leverage cultural assets to foster local ownership. Including local histories, languages, Indigenous knowledge, cultural practices, and community resources into TPL materials and resources makes learning more relevant for teachers and students (Coady *et al.*, 2023). When teachers bring local stories, languages, and resources into their pedagogy, they also create classroom environments that affirm students' identities. This approach is related to place-based education, a framework that centers teaching and learning rooted in community social, cultural, economic, and historical dynamics (Gruenewald & Smith, 2014).

Engaged communities are another authentic strategy to deepen cultural relevance and build trusting relationships. Local partners, community organizations, elders, students, and families can be integral to deepening TPL for teachers. Engaged communities can help teachers unpack local histories, build community relationships, and learn about cultural practices. These relationships position classrooms as sites of cultural sustainability and authenticity, which can, in turn, engage students.

Place-based TPL will be most effective and long-term when systemic supports are in place. Schools and districts must allocate time and resources to make community engagement as a clear priority. Flexible support structures must be in place to allow teachers to regularly reflect on and build community engagement. Local teacher leaders can serve as local guides and mentors to their peers, weaving community relevance into ongoing teacher learning. Teachers who view community engagement as part of their professional role and identity are also more likely to incorporate these practices. Integrating long-term, reflective community engagement into TPL structures will also ensure professional resilience and cultural sustainability.

Place-based TPL may be particularly useful for teachers in multilingual and multicultural classrooms. By forging local impact and deepening community partnerships, it can build a flexible, organic pedagogical environment that has the capacity to evolve. To sustain this over the long term, systemic policies and shifts are needed to institutionalize long-term community engagement. When TPL helps teachers bring in local cultural assets, traditional knowledge, and community histories, these teachers can create highly relevant and affirming pedagogies. In these spaces, students can see their own identities and experiences reflected in the classroom and engage deeply and over the long term. Long-term impact in TPL will be achieved when we begin to mainstream these place-based approaches. We should work to shift them from the margins to a central part of TPL practice, and in doing so, shape the way teachers learn for generations to come.

## Fostering Sustainable TPL: Policy, Community Support, and Flexibility

Long-term TPL requires a system-level approach that integrates evaluation, reflection, community, adaptability, and policy support into the fabric of teaching practice —



not just effective program design, but the deliberate development of structures for evaluation and reflection, the creation of spaces and opportunities for both, and the encouragement of adaptive practice in changing environments. Support through policy and community creates a foundation and reinforces this infrastructure, which, when in place, can take TPL from one-off activities to a sustainable cycle that truly improves teaching and learning.

## **Systematic Evaluation and Reflective Practice**

The foundation of sustainable TPL is a robust system of evaluation. Programs must be designed around clear, measurable goals that tie directly to teacher effectiveness and student achievement. Such goals might include improvements in classroom management, specific pedagogical strategies like translanguaging, or cultural responsiveness. Tools such as teacher portfolios, classroom observations, student performance data, and community feedback sessions serve as vital instruments for monitoring progress. These assessments help identify strengths and areas for growth while fostering transparency and accountability. When administrators and teachers regularly review these measures, they cultivate a school culture where continuous improvement is valued over static compliance, reinforcing the habit of ongoing learning and adaptation.

In addition, reflexivity plays a crucial role. Teachers should be encouraged to analyze their practice critically, learning from both successes and setbacks. Reflective practices, embedded through scheduled reflection sessions, journals, collaborative inquiry projects, and peer discussions—transform professional learning into an ongoing cycle rather than a one-time event. As Darling-Hammond *et al.* (2017) emphasize, embedding reflection into routines helps teachers develop a growth mindset and self-awareness, which are vital for sustained change. When reflection routines become institutionalized, they foster a culture of inquiry where teachers are continuously refining their practices, aligning with community needs and research insights.

## **Flexibility and Adaptability**

Flexibility is important in multilingual and multicultural contexts, which can be changeable and often have unpredictable elements. TPL programs should be flexible enough to allow teachers and schools to adjust their aims, activities, and the distribution of resources as needed, according to what they learn during implementation. Such an iterative and responsive approach to program development recognizes that different contexts often require different approaches and that an initial set of activities and goals may become inappropriate as community needs and circumstances change, or new issues emerge. Flexibility also allows space for local innovations and adaptations to ensure continued relevance, cultural fit, and longer-term sustainability. Professional development should thus be seen as a process rather than an event.

In terms of policy, flexibility is reinforced when programs allow teachers to tailor their own development rather than mandating specific approaches or actions — for example, by allowing them to select their own topics for study, choose from different

formats (including workshops, webinars, self-guided online courses, and coaching), and focus on classroom problems that are most urgent to them.

## **Policy, Advocacy, and Institutional Support**

Sustainable TPL is anchored by policies that endorse ongoing learning and community participation. Governments and educational authorities play a pivotal role by creating conducive environments through policy reforms, funding, and strategic leadership. Darling-Hammond *et al.* (2017) argue that policies should explicitly recognize continuous professional learning as a core component of school improvement, mandating standards that emphasize equity, cultural responsiveness, and collaboration. These policies can institutionalize practices like protected planning time, collaborative inquiry, and recognition of culturally sustaining pedagogy, thus shifting organizational norms.

Leadership at all levels, district, school, and national, must model reflective, community-engaged practices. Leaders who prioritize teacher agency, advocate for resource equity, and foster transparent decision-making create climates where innovation thrives. Moreover, embedding systematic evaluation processes ensures ongoing reflection and improvement, where data collection, from classroom observations and teacher feedback to student achievement metrics and community input—provides concrete evidence to refine programs (Saud & Mahara, 2024). These insights should guide strategic adjustments, promoting adaptability to changing community needs and policy environments.

## **Building Local Leadership and Community Involvement**

Capacity building and the development of local leadership are key principles for sustainability. Teachers who act as mentors, community leaders, and advocates are embedded within and connected to the communities in which they work. When teachers are empowered to take leadership roles—whether in the realm of community engagement, linguistically responsive practices, or culturally sustaining pedagogy—programs are more likely to be relevant, appropriate, and accepted, as well as sustained over time. This decentralization allows schools and teachers to function more as living ecosystems, where professional development and community outreach are mutually reinforcing.

Community partnerships built on reciprocity, cultural humility, and shared objectives can also strengthen the sustainability of our efforts. When families, community organizations, elders, and students play active roles in curriculum development, school events, and decision-making, schooling becomes truly woven into the social and cultural fabric of the community. These partnerships and alliances make classroom practices more relevant and affirming for students and can help teachers see and leverage local funds of knowledge, histories, and languages. This kind of place-based approach can be beneficial in terms of linguistic justice and cultural sustainability. Recognizing and acting upon the ways in which schools and teachers can be active members of, and advocates for, their communities helps to root and sustain such initiatives.

## Scaling and Institutionalizing for Long-Term Impact

For effective practices to have a lasting impact, they must be scaled thoughtfully and institutionalized within the school system. This involves creating policies that support the regular integration of community engagement, cultural responsiveness, and continuous learning into the routines of schools. Such policies could include mandates for dedicated collaborative time, ongoing capacity building for teacher leaders, and frameworks for reflective practice that are adaptable across diverse contexts.

Scaling should preserve the core principles of the program, such as fostering community, equity, and collaboration, while allowing room for local adaptation. When these practices transition from pilot projects or marginal initiatives into standard operating procedures, they become part of the organizational culture, reinforced by standards and incentives such as recognition programs, grants, and accountability measures. Institutionalization enables these practices to withstand shifts in leadership, policy, and funding, embedding a culture of lifelong, community-centered learning that sustains itself over generations.

## Addressing Barriers to Sustainability

Ideological resistance presents another set of challenges to the sustainability of systemic and community-rooted TPL efforts. These include resistance based on ideological beliefs, such as monolingual language policies, colonial language ideologies, or fears about linguistic assimilation. Advocacy, community action, and consciousness-raising efforts that promote linguistic justice, equity, and the rights of multilingual learners are critical to overcoming ideological barriers. Teachers need to work together to create a community-based advocacy network to combat the harmful effects of these ideologies and to create a more inclusive and equitable learning environment for all students.

Institutional barriers, such as heavy workloads, limited protected time for planning, and lack of administrative support—also undermine the capacity for ongoing growth (Saud & Mahara, 2024). Advocating for protected time for lesson planning, smaller class sizes, and administrative support and mentoring are critical ways to create a more sustainable culture of professional learning. Policy reforms need to prioritize these supports for teachers to ensure that they have the resources they need to be successful in their work. Resistance to ideological barriers must be addressed through ongoing advocacy and grassroots organizing that challenge these harmful beliefs and promote a more just and equitable education system.

The third set of challenges to systemic sustainability includes resource constraints in underfunded or rural school districts. Technology presents potential opportunities for TPL to reach more teachers and communities (online modules, virtual coaching, digital communities), but its potential may be limited by the lack of access to technology infrastructure, devices, and connectivity. Public-private partnerships, grant funding, community fundraising, and state investments in technology infrastructure are potential solutions that can help address these inequities. Digital tools need to be designed and implemented in a way that supports equitable and scalable TPL initiatives. Without intentional efforts to bridge these resource gaps, some teachers and students may be Left behind.

The last and perhaps the most intractable set of sustainability challenges include systemic inequalities in access to resources, leadership capacity, and policy priorities. Persistent advocacy and systemic reform efforts are needed to address these larger structural issues. Building local leadership and empowering teachers as community advocates can create sustainable momentum for change from within the system. When teachers become leaders within their schools and communities, they help to sustain culturally responsive practices over the long term and foster a shared sense of ownership among stakeholders. Cultivating a culture of collaboration and shared responsibility helps prevent fragmentation and burnout, ensuring that successful practices can adapt and evolve in response to changing social, political, and educational contexts.

## Conclusion

The way in which we approach TPL plays a crucial role in fostering culturally responsive and contextually relevant teaching practices. However, their broader impact and sustainability depend on effective mechanisms for scaling and replication across diverse educational settings, when appropriate, and adapting when necessary. Although it can be argued that the issues discussed in this paper should be incorporated into initial teacher education, the evidence shows that this is not the case in most contexts. In this regard then, it becomes essential for school districts, coordinators, or administration, to ensure these students receive a high-quality education. Collaborative partnerships between universities and schools, along with professional development models for teachers, can serve as effective approaches to address this complex situation and enhance the ESOL learning experiences of many students. (Cardozo-Gaibisso *et al.* 2018).

Scaling effective models involves capturing these fundamental principles and developing adaptable frameworks that respect the unique cultural, social, and infrastructural contexts of different communities. Such frameworks should be designed to promote fidelity to core values while granting local educators and communities the autonomy to tailor practices in ways that resonate with their specific needs and circumstances. Policymakers and educational leaders should foster the creation of professional networks, facilitate the sharing of best practices, and develop comprehensive resource repositories. These efforts will help disseminate successful models, promote peer learning, and foster innovation across regions. Expanding TPL opportunities through train-the-trainer models, online sharing platforms, and targeted policy incentives can further support equitable access to quality resources and training, thus enhancing the scalability of promising practices.

Furthermore, embedding these practices within the institutional fabric of educational systems, such as integrating culturally responsive pedagogy into teacher evaluation systems, curriculum standards, and accreditation processes, ensures their longevity and systemic integration. Policies that incentivize local leadership, foster collaborative inquiry, and encourage community partnerships can create ecosystems where educational innovations spread organically and sustain over time. Building capacity at the local level is critical; when practices are owned, adapted, and refined by local educators and communities, they are more likely to be sustained beyond initial pilot phases, funding cycles, or leadership changes. Continuous research, formative

evaluation, and feedback mechanisms are vital in refining these models and ensuring their relevance and efficacy across varied contexts.

In the face of today's increasingly multilingual and multicultural classrooms, the development of sustainable, context-relevant approaches to ESOL teacher professional development is paramount (Cardozo- Gaibisso *et al.*, 2022). When grounded in reputable theoretical frameworks, strategies such as place-based professional learning, community engagement, translanguaging, reflective inquiry, and culturally responsive pedagogy serve as foundational pillars for long-term systemic change. These approaches empower teachers as agents of social justice, advocates for cultural equity, and lifelong learners dedicated to their students' success. They foster an environment where teachers can critically reflect on their practice, collaborate with colleagues, and adapt to the evolving needs of diverse student populations (Harman & Cardozo-Gaibisso, 2019).

Nevertheless, significant challenges remain, ranging from ideological resistance rooted in language and cultural politics, to resource limitations and systemic barriers that inhibit sustained growth. Addressing these obstacles requires persistent advocacy, systemic reform, and community-driven initiatives aimed at dismantling oppressive narratives and promoting broader social justice agendas. Long-term sustainability depends on collective ownership among educators, policymakers, and communities, as well as on ongoing evaluation and adaptive frameworks that respond to shifting contexts. Embedding culturally responsive pedagogies and community partnerships within the fabric of school and district policies is essential to foster resilient and equitable ESOL teaching environments.

Ultimately, achieving sustainable TPL for ESOL educators is both an ethical and an educational imperative. It requires a comprehensive approach that values and supports learners' linguistic and cultural identities while promoting systemic reforms that uphold community ownership, systemic support, and culturally responsive pedagogies.

#### **Notes:**

#### **Final approval of the article:**

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#### **Authorship contribution:**

Lourdes Cardozo Gaibisso is the sole author of this article. She handled both the conceptualization and the writing of the entire manuscript.

#### **Availability of data:**

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

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