

Chapter 5

Cultivating EFL Teacher Self-Efficacy Through Sustained Professional Development

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1. RATIONALE

The shift to post-pandemic teaching has not been easy for university lecturers, especially those teaching English as a Foreign Language. Many now juggle blended classes, new technology, and pressure to publish, all at once. This mix of demands can quietly wear down a lecturer's confidence in their own teaching. That confidence matters more than it might seem, because how a lecturer feels about their own ability tends to shape how they actually teach, from the activities they choose to how they respond when a lesson goes sideways. Bandura (1997) calls this confidence "self-efficacy." Simply put, it means how much a person believes they can do what is asked of them. A recent systematic review by Zhang et al. (2026), which looked at 28 studies on teacher self-efficacy from 2019 to 2025, found that self-efficacy is not something fixed. It changes over time, shaped by what teachers go through and the support they get.

Professional development (PD) keeps coming up as one of the strongest ways to build that confidence back. Zhang et al. (2026) found that PD works best for self-efficacy when it is ongoing and tied to real classroom practice, not just a one-time workshop. This pattern holds up statistically too. Zhou et al. (2023), pooling results from 21 experimental and quasi-

experimental studies, found that PD training had a strong overall effect on teacher self-efficacy. The catch is this kind of evidence still mostly comes from school settings. A recent qualitative study by Qamariah & Hercz (2025), based on interviews with EFL instructors at five Indonesian universities, found a different picture. PD for lecturers is often squeezed out by heavy teaching loads, accreditation paperwork, and rigid institutional rules, leaving many instructors to find their own way to grow professionally, often without much structure or support at all.

This gap matters because lecturer PD simply does not look like school PD. A schoolteacher might join a subject teacher forum or a scheduled training. A lecturer's growth is often scattered. It happens through writing a paper, working with a colleague abroad, sitting through a PhD seminar, or just reflecting after a rough class, the kind of activities Qamariah & Hercz (2025) found Indonesian lecturers pursuing largely on their own. This chapter argues that these every day, often informal forms of PD deserve more attention. They may be just as important, maybe even more so, in shaping how confident EFL lecturers feel in their work today.

2. IMPLEMENTATION

Professional development for university lecturers does not always look like a workshop or a training session. It can show up in many different forms, some formal, some not. Below are four ways EFL lecturers tend to build their teaching confidence, drawn from what is happening in everyday academic life today.

2.1 Research as Path to Confidence

Writing papers, running a study, or working through a doctoral program is rarely framed as "professional development," yet it shapes a lecturer's sense of competence in real ways. Miao et al. (2025), studying Doctor of Education students in China, found that research self-efficacy predicted academic achievement,

and that this confidence grew through sustained engagement with the research process itself, not just coursework. This tracks with what many lecturers experience anecdotally. A doctoral candidate who survives a tough round of feedback from a promotor, or who finally gets a methodology approved after several revisions, walks away from that process with a sharper sense of their own competence, even if no certificate is issued at the end of it. For an EFL lecturer pursuing doctoral study while teaching, each completed chapter, each successful data collection, or each accepted manuscript becomes its own small mastery experience. These experiences accumulate quietly. They rarely get labelled as PD, but they build the same kind of confidence that formal training is meant to produce.

2.2 Learning Through Cross-Border Collaboration

Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) connects lecturers and students from different countries through joint coursework, usually run online. Hackett et al. (2023) found that COIL strengthens not just student intercultural competence but also gives instructors a structured space to co-design teaching with a partner from another institution. For an EFL lecturer, working through a COIL module with a counterpart abroad means negotiating teaching decisions together, adjusting to a different academic culture, and troubleshooting in real time. Designing a cross-cultural understanding course is itself a similar kind of stretch (Hasbi, 2025a). Susyetina (2026), reflecting on the instructional design process behind one such course, found that building a course around intercultural competence forces a lecturer to rethink familiar teaching habits, since the content constantly demands stepping outside one's own cultural assumptions. This kind of exchange exposes lecturers to teaching styles and student expectations they might never encounter on their own campus, and many describe coming away from it more confident handling diverse classrooms.

2.3 Reflecting on What Happened in Class

Reflective teaching means looking back at a lesson and asking honestly what worked and what did not (Astawa et al., 2026). Dang et al. (2025), studying EFL teachers at a Vietnamese university, found that this kind of structured reflection had a measurable, positive effect on self-efficacy, particularly in classroom management and instructional decision-making. The practice does not need to be elaborate. A short note after a difficult class, a quick debrief with a colleague, or even a deliberate pause to think through why a particular activity flopped can all count. What matters is that the lecturer is actively learning from their own experience, rather than letting it pass unexamined.

2.4 Staying Connected to the Academic Community

Lecturers also grow through their wider academic involvement: reviewing papers for journals, joining professional associations, or taking part in community service (PkM) projects, one of the three pillars Indonesian lecturers are required to fulfil alongside teaching and research. Peer reviewing, for instance, quietly sharpens a lecturer's own writing and critical eye, since judging someone else's argument tends to make a person more aware of the same weaknesses in their own work. Hasbi (2025b), reflecting on how Indonesian EFL lecturers navigate this Tridharma mandate, notes that heavy teaching loads and administrative demands often leave research and community service underdeveloped, yet lecturers who manage to stay active in these areas, through writing groups, mentorship schemes, or collaborative outreach, tend to sustain their sense of professional growth more consistently than those who treat teaching as their only responsibility. Community engagement work tends to put theory into immediate practice, since lecturers must adapt what they know to serve a non-academic audience, which is its own kind of test of competence. Although this type of PD is less visible than a certificate-bearing workshop, it keeps lecturers tied into a

community of practice that reinforces their professional identity over time.

3. REFLECTION

The four pathways described above (research, collaboration, reflection, and community engagement) show that EFL lecturers are already building self-efficacy in ways that PD frameworks rarely account for. But this raises a fair question. If most of this growth happens informally, does it actually count as professional development, or is it just lecturers managing on their own because formal support is thin? Barton & Dexter (2019) suggest both can be true at once. Their study found that teachers draw self-efficacy from formal, informal, and independent learning alike, and that no single source is enough on its own. A lecturer who only attends scheduled workshops but never reflects on their own teaching, or who publishes constantly but never collaborates with anyone outside their department, is probably missing something. The four pathways in this chapter work best together, not as substitutes for one another.

There is also a real downside to relying too heavily on informal PD, and it is worth naming honestly. Informal growth is invisible to the systems that evaluate lecturers. A university promotion committee can count certificates and credit hours; it cannot easily count the confidence gained from a hard semester of trial and error, or from mentoring a junior colleague through a tough class. Qamariah & Hercz (2025) found exactly this kind of mismatch in their interviews with Indonesian EFL instructors, where lecturers described doing meaningful developmental work that their institutions never formally recognized. Without recognition, informal PD risks becoming something lecturers do quietly, on their own time, with little institutional payoff beyond the personal confidence it builds. That confidence matters, but it should not have to come at the cost of being overlooked.

Going forward, institutions could do more to bridge this gap rather than leaving it entirely to individual lecturers. Simple steps,

like counting community service contributions toward performance reviews, building in time for peer reflection sessions, or formally recognizing international collaboration as professional growth, could go a long way. Department heads and program coordinators are usually in the best position to start this, since they are the ones who already see, informally, who is doing this kind of work and could begin documenting it more deliberately. None of this requires large budgets. It mostly requires institutions to notice and value the kind of PD that lecturers are already doing for themselves. Until that happens, EFL lecturers will likely keep cultivating their own self-efficacy quietly, on their own initiative, the way they always have.

Author



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