

Bridging Theory and Practice: The Impact of Continuous Professional Development on Teachers' Performance in Klang Valley Schools, Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Continuous Professional Development (CPD) is widely recognised as a cornerstone of educational reform, yet teachers in urban Malaysian schools continue to encounter persistent structural barriers that hinder effective participation, and few studies have examined this phenomenon through an established learning-theoretical lens. This study investigates the influence of professional development on teachers' performance in Klang Valley schools, Malaysia, through three objectives: to examine the effects of professional development on teachers' performance, to identify how school leaders plan professional development activities, and to discover the challenges teachers encounter in participating in such activities. Anchored in Bandura's Social Learning Theory, the study adopted a qualitative descriptive design with phenomenological orientation. Fourteen educators across preschool, elementary, and secondary levels were selected through purposeful sampling, and data were generated through a two-stage process combining a semi-structured online instrument with follow-up clarification interviews. Thematic analysis followed Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework, and trustworthiness was established using Lincoln and Guba's criteria, including member checking and an audit trail. Three sets of themes emerged: professional development enhances teachers' performance through knowledge update, teaching effectiveness, and practical application; school leaders plan professional development through support and encouragement, accessibility, and diversity of training; and teachers face four interrelated challenges, namely bureaucratic hurdles, scheduling conflicts, administrative and competitive challenges, and resource constraints. The findings call for streamlined administrative processes, contextually responsive training, and sustainable funding models.

Keywords: professional development; teacher performance; Klang Valley; qualitative research; Social Learning Theory; Malaysian education

INTRODUCTION

Education systems across the globe are confronting unprecedented transformation driven by rapid technological advancement, changing pedagogical paradigms, and evolving learner expectations. In response, continuous professional development (CPD) has emerged as a critical mechanism through which teachers refine their competencies, update their content knowledge, and adapt their instructional practices to the demands of contemporary classrooms (Sancar, Atal, & Deryakulu, 2021). The OECD has consistently emphasized that the quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers, and the quality of teachers is, in turn, contingent upon the quality of professional learning opportunities afforded to them (Boeskens, Nusche, & Yurita, 2020). In Malaysia, this imperative has been formalized through the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013–2025, which positions teacher quality as one of the eleven shifts essential to transforming the national education system (James, Talin, & Bikar, 2022).

Despite the strategic importance accorded to professional development at policy level, empirical evidence suggests that the implementation of CPD programmes in Malaysian schools remains uneven. Several scholars have documented inadequate support networks, resistance to change, limited tailoring of training content, and

significant work-life balance challenges as recurring impediments to effective professional development (McChesney & Aldridge, 2021; Omar & Rashid, 2019). These challenges are particularly pronounced in densely populated urban regions such as the Klang Valley, where teachers must navigate heavy teaching loads, large class sizes, and culturally diverse student populations while simultaneously engaging in continuous learning (Adams & Lok, 2022). Recent evidence from Soleh, Rokhman, and Mahmud (2025) indicates that the barriers to teacher professional learning are systemic rather than incidental, encompassing time constraints, workload, infrastructure, content misalignment, and motivational deficits. Moreover, while a substantial body of literature has examined the components of effective professional development (Sims & Fletcher-Wood, 2021; Boon, Aziz, Hassan, & Yahaya, 2024), comparatively few studies have explored the lived experiences of teachers in the Klang Valley region, particularly through the analytical lens of established learning theories.

Bandura's Social Learning Theory (Bandura & Walters, 1977) provides a powerful theoretical framework for understanding professional development because it articulates four cognitive and behavioural processes (attention, retention, motor reproduction, and motivation) through which adults observe, internalize, and reproduce new practices in authentic settings. Although the theory was originally developed in the context of children's observational learning, scholars have increasingly recognized its relevance to adult professional learning, particularly within communities of practice and structured training environments (Lawrent, 2024; Wadsworth, 2021). Applying this framework to teacher professional development illuminates not only why certain training interventions succeed but also why others fail to translate into sustained classroom change.

Against this backdrop, the present study investigates the relationship between professional development and teachers' performance in Klang Valley schools through three interrelated research objectives. The first objective examines the effects of professional development activities on teachers' performance. The second objective identifies how school leaders plan professional development activities to enhance teachers' performance. The third objective discovers the challenges that teachers encounter in participating in professional development. Correspondingly, the study addresses the following research questions: (RQ1) What are the effects of professional development activities in improving teachers' performance in Klang Valley schools? (RQ2) How do school leaders plan professional development activities to improve teachers' performance? (RQ3) What challenges do teachers in Klang Valley schools encounter in participating in professional development?

The contribution of this study is threefold and specific. First, theoretically, it is the first study to apply Bandura's Social Learning Theory as an organizing analytical framework for understanding CPD in the urban Klang Valley context, demonstrating how the four social-cognitive processes of attention, retention, motor reproduction, and motivation operate within a structured Malaysian school environment. While Lawrent (2024) and Wadsworth (2021) have extended Social Learning Theory into adult professional learning more broadly, no prior empirical study has applied this framework systematically to teacher CPD in Klang Valley schools. Second, methodologically, this study identifies a previously undocumented four-challenge constellation, comprising bureaucratic hurdles, scheduling conflicts, administrative and competitive challenges, and resource constraints, as an integrated structural pattern that operates in parallel rather than as isolated barriers. Earlier studies (e.g., McChesney & Aldridge, 2021; Soleh, Rokhman, & Mahmud, 2025) have addressed these barriers separately, but the present study is the first to articulate them as an interlocking system in the Malaysian urban school context. Third, practically, the findings provide actionable, context-specific guidance for school leaders, policymakers, and teacher educators seeking to design more responsive, equitable, and sustainable CPD programmes within the Malaysian setting and comparable Asian education systems.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptualising Professional Development and Teachers' Performance

Professional development in the educational context refers to the comprehensive and continuous process through which teachers refine their skills, enhance their knowledge, and update their teaching practices to remain aligned with evolving educational standards and innovations (Shuib & Yusof, 2020). It transcends traditional in-service training by embedding a lifelong learning ethos and embraces a wide spectrum of

activities, including workshops, seminars, collaborative teaching, mentoring, action research, and technology integration training (Sancar et al., 2021). Within the Malaysian context, Kamrozzaman and Elias (2026) emphasise that the lifelong learning ethos is increasingly enacted through the integration of self-determined learning principles and digital technologies, which together cultivate learner autonomy, reflective practice, and capability development. Avalos (2011) defines professional development as a process through which teachers, individually and collectively, review, renew, and extend their commitment as change agents, and acquire and develop critically the knowledge, skills, and emotional intelligence essential for good professional thinking, planning, and practice.

Teachers' performance, in turn, encompasses the array of competencies and behaviours that contribute to effective teaching and positive student outcomes. It includes pedagogical expertise, subject matter mastery, the ability to engage students, classroom management proficiency, and the capacity to adapt instruction to meet diverse learner needs (Othman & Ruslan, 2020). Performance is typically evaluated through classroom observations, peer feedback, student outcome measures, and self-reflection (Tai & Omar, 2023). The relationship between professional development and teachers' performance is widely understood to be symbiotic: well-designed professional development directly addresses identified competency gaps, while changes in classroom practice provide feedback that informs subsequent professional learning (Sims & Fletcher-Wood, 2021; Ventista & Brown, 2023).

Effects of Professional Development on Teachers' Performance

A growing body of evidence indicates that effective professional development positively influences both teaching practice and student learning outcomes. Ventista and Brown (2023), in a systematic review of teachers' professional learning, demonstrate that programmes characterized by sustained duration, content focus, active learning, collective participation, and coherence with school priorities produce measurable improvements in instructional quality. Similarly, Sims and Fletcher-Wood (2021) argue that effective professional development is mechanism-based, meaning it deliberately activates the cognitive and behavioural processes through which teachers acquire and apply new knowledge. Mohamad Marzaini, Haslee Sharil, Supramaniam, and Mat Yusoff (2023) extend this evidence into the Malaysian context, demonstrating that teachers' professional development directly shapes their assessment literacy and the fidelity with which they implement CEFR-aligned classroom-based assessment, while Boon, Aziz, Hassan, and Yahaya (2024) confirm in a systematic review that continuous professional development consistently enhances pedagogical skills, classroom problem-solving abilities, and student perceptions of teaching quality.

In the Malaysian context, studies have highlighted both promising practices and persistent gaps. Yan et al. (2022) examine the School Improvement Specialist Coaching Plus (SISC+) programme and find that it positively influences teacher competencies through ongoing instructional support. Bakar, Maat, and Rosli (2020) demonstrate that targeted professional development enhances mathematics teachers' technological pedagogical content knowledge, while Singh et al. (2022) report that training in digital tools such as Google Classroom strengthened English language teachers' instructional adaptability during the COVID-19 pandemic. More recently, Bin Selamat, Bin Abdul Aziz, and Ahmad (2024) review the strategies and challenges of CPD for English language teachers in Malaysia and argue for online and personalized models that empower teacher agency, while Kabilan, Aziz, and Embi (2025) examine the realization of the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013 to 2025 and identify a substantial gap between policy aspiration and the lived experience of CPD at school level. Jie and Kamrozzaman (2025) further extend this conversation by examining the integration of emerging technologies, such as metaverse-based environments, into Malaysian higher education, identifying both the pedagogical potential and the institutional challenges of preparing educators to harness these innovations effectively. Collectively, these studies suggest that professional development is most effective when it is contextually relevant, sustained over time, and embedded within communities of practice.

The Role of School Leaders in Planning Professional Development

School leaders occupy a pivotal position in mediating the quality, accessibility, and impact of professional development. Abbaspour, Hosseingholizadeh, and Bellibaş (2024) underscore that principals operating within

centralised education systems exert substantial influence over teachers' professional learning by shaping the conditions under which it occurs, allocating time and resources, and modelling a learning orientation. Bryant and Walker (2024) further demonstrate that principal-designed structures, including dedicated learning time, distributed leadership, and explicit coaching pathways, significantly enhance the quality of middle leaders' professional development. Within the Malaysian context, Thien and Liu (2024) report that instructional leadership exerts both linear and nonlinear effects on teacher professional learning through the mediating role of teacher self-efficacy, indicating that the relationship between leadership and professional development is more complex than linear models alone can capture.

The orchestration of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) has emerged as a particularly potent leadership strategy. Tahir et al. (2024), in a study of Malaysian religious-based secondary schools, find that principals who actively support and structure PLCs cultivate environments of collaborative inquiry and shared accountability. Ansari and Asad (2024) similarly report that school leaders in Pakistan who model commitment to professional learning succeed in establishing cultures of continuous improvement. Within the Klang Valley specifically, Azar and Subramaniam (2023) document the leadership practices that enable secondary school principals to build robust professional learning communities, highlighting the importance of trust, distributed authority, and shared vision. Wang, Zhang, Wong, and Hii (2023), drawing on data from 396 primary school teachers, further demonstrate that all five PLC dimensions, namely shared values, supportive leadership, supportive conditions, collective learning, and shared personal practice, are positively associated with teacher performance. Goh, Yeap, and Thien (2023) reinforce this view in the Malaysian secondary school context, showing that collaborative school culture and principal support jointly enhance teacher leadership. These findings collectively suggest that effective leadership of professional development requires not only administrative competence but also the symbolic capacity to communicate the centrality of teacher learning to organizational mission.

Challenges to Teachers' Participation in Professional Development

Despite the documented benefits of professional development, teachers worldwide encounter substantial barriers to meaningful participation. McChesney and Aldridge (2021) identify a constellation of challenges, including time pressure, fragmented programme design, insufficient follow-up, and misalignment between training content and classroom realities. Fairman et al. (2023) extend this analysis, arguing that the relevance of professional development frequently erodes as policy priorities, curricula, and student demographics shift more rapidly than training content can be updated. Soleh, Rokhman, and Mahmud (2025), in a recent qualitative study, identify five recurring barriers to teachers' professional development, namely time constraints and heavy workloads, limited access and infrastructure, misalignment between content and classroom needs, lack of leadership and policy support, and low teacher motivation, and they situate these barriers across individual, institutional, and systemic levels.

Resource constraints constitute another well-documented barrier. Abdulaziz, Bashir, and Alfalih (2022) demonstrate that work overload and inadequate organizational support undermine teachers' organizational commitment and reduce their capacity to engage in professional learning. Pacaol (2021) similarly documents how the intensification of teacher workload in the Asian context displaces professional development to evenings and weekends, exacerbating work-family conflict. In a Malaysian study, Omar and Rashid (2019) report that work commitments and time constraints are the most frequently cited barriers to ESL teachers' professional growth, while Tyagi and Misra (2021) find that nearly half of teacher educators in their Indian sample reported time constraints as the principal impediment to continuing professional development.

Bureaucratic and administrative friction also features prominently in the literature. Hero (2019) and Taghizadeh and Hasani Yourdshahi (2020) describe the cumbersome approval processes that often accompany external training, while Mercader and Gairín (2020) highlight the structural barriers to digital professional learning. Jie and Kamrozzaman (2024), in a study of higher education students' experiences with artificial intelligence, similarly document the layered challenges that learners and educators face when adopting emerging digital tools, including limited institutional support, uneven digital literacy, and ethical uncertainties. Family commitments, particularly for female educators, present additional pressures (Hong, Liu, & Zhang, 2021; Kara, Günes, & Tüysüzer, 2021). Badri et al. (2016), in a large-scale study of teachers in Abu Dhabi,

found that 23.8% of respondents identified family commitments as a barrier to professional progress. Taken together, these studies suggest that the challenges to professional development are systemic, multifaceted, and require coordinated structural responses rather than isolated programmatic interventions.

Theoretical Framework: Bandura's Social Learning Theory

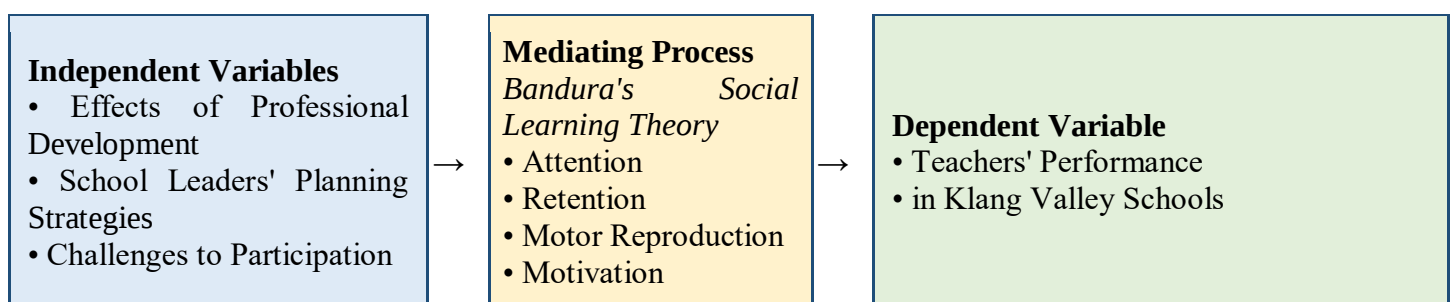
This study is anchored in Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory (Bandura & Walters, 1977), which posits that learning occurs through the observation, imitation, and modelling of behaviours within a social context. The theory articulates four interrelated cognitive and behavioural processes that underpin observational learning: attention, retention, motor reproduction, and motivation. Although Bandura's original formulation focused primarily on the learning of children, contemporary scholars have demonstrated its applicability to adult professional learning environments (Lawrent, 2024; Wadsworth, 2021).

In the context of teacher professional development, attention refers to the cognitive engagement of teachers with the modelled behaviours, techniques, and content presented during training. Retention concerns the encoding and storage of observed practices in a manner that permits later recall and application. Motor reproduction involves the actual enactment of the observed practices in the teacher's own classroom, which is often mediated by opportunities for guided practice, peer observation, and feedback. Motivation, the fourth component, encompasses both the intrinsic and extrinsic incentives that determine whether a teacher will continue to enact the modelled behaviours over time. Malek, Sarin, and Haon (2020) emphasize that the careful balancing of intrinsic and extrinsic motivators is critical to sustaining engagement in adult learning settings. Recent applications of the theory continue to demonstrate its relevance to contemporary teacher development. Amsari, Wahyuni, and Fadhilaturrahmi (2024) argue that observational learning, modelling, and self-efficacy remain central mechanisms for the acquisition of pedagogical competence, while Lou, Hut, Campbell, and Barnicle (2023) document teacher coaches' awareness and practical use of social learning theory in shaping their mentoring practice. Within a structured professional development context, school leaders can deliberately scaffold each of these processes by selecting compelling models, designing practice opportunities, and aligning incentives with teachers' professional aspirations.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Drawing on the theoretical framework above and the reviewed empirical literature, the present study advances the conceptual framework illustrated in Figure 1. The framework posits three independent variables associated with teacher professional development, namely the effects of professional development, the strategies used by school leaders, and the challenges faced by teachers. These variables are theorised to influence the dependent variable, teachers' performance, through the mediating cognitive and behavioural processes articulated by Bandura's Social Learning Theory: attention, retention, motor reproduction, and motivation. The framework explicitly recognises that the relationship between professional development inputs and teacher performance outcomes is not direct but is mediated by the social-cognitive processes through which teachers internalise and enact new practice.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study



Source: Author, adapted from Bandura and Walters (1977)

The conceptual framework foregrounds three propositions that guide the analysis. First, professional development activities and the leadership strategies that surround them must capture and sustain teachers' attention and support retention if they are to produce changes in classroom practice. Second, the structural challenges teachers face operate as friction points that disrupt motor reproduction and motivation, attenuating the translation of learning into sustained behavioural change. Third, the dependent variable, teacher performance, should therefore be understood as the cumulative product of the inputs that are filtered through the social-cognitive processes of the model. This conceptual framework provides the analytical scaffold for interpreting the findings presented in Sections 4 and 5.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative descriptive research design with a phenomenological orientation to explore the lived experiences of teachers in Klang Valley schools regarding their participation in professional development. A qualitative descriptive design is appropriate when the goal is to provide a comprehensive, low-inference summary of participants' experiences in language that closely reflects their own (Sandelowski, 2000; Doyle et al., 2020). The phenomenological orientation, drawn from Creswell and Poth (2016), guided the study's commitment to capturing the common meanings and shared experiences of individuals concerning a particular phenomenon. Together, this hybrid orientation foregrounds the subjective interpretations through which teachers make sense of their professional learning while preserving the descriptive fidelity that supports practical recommendations (Lester, 2021; Vagle, 2018). The hybrid orientation aligns directly with the theoretical framework of the study: just as Bandura's Social Learning Theory privileges the cognitive processing of observed behaviour, the present design privileges the cognitive and emotional processing of experienced reality.

Population and Sample

The target population comprised teachers serving in preschools, elementary schools, and secondary schools across the Klang Valley region of Malaysia, an urban metropolitan area encompassing Kuala Lumpur and adjacent districts in Selangor. Purposeful sampling was employed to identify fourteen educators who voluntarily consented to participate. Purposeful sampling is widely regarded as appropriate for qualitative research because it permits the deliberate selection of information-rich cases that can illuminate the phenomenon of interest (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The sample was purposively diversified across age, gender, years of teaching experience, level of educational qualification, and teaching specialization to capture a broad spectrum of perspectives. Veteran educators with more than fifteen years of experience were included alongside novice teachers with three to eight years of service, ensuring that the sample reflected both established and emerging professional voices. Sample size adequacy was determined through ongoing data saturation analysis. Following the procedures outlined by Hennink and Kaiser (2022), saturation was monitored after each successive interview by examining the emergence of new codes, and code saturation was reached at the eleventh participant, with three additional participants interviewed to confirm meaning saturation across the three educational levels.

Research Instrument

Data was generated using a two-stage instrument package. Stage one comprised a semi-structured online questionnaire delivered through Google Forms, organized into two sections. The first section gathered demographic and professional background information, including gender, age, current role, years of experience in the education sector, grade levels taught, and highest educational qualifications attained. The second section comprised fifteen open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed accounts of participants' experiences with professional development. These questions explored the frequency and types of professional development undertaken, perceived effects on teaching effectiveness and student outcomes, the planning and accessibility of training opportunities, collaboration with colleagues, work-life implications, and recommendations for enhancement. Stage two consisted of follow-up clarification interviews conducted via telephone or video conferencing, lasting approximately twenty to thirty minutes each. The follow-up interviews enabled the

researcher to probe ambiguous responses, request specific examples, and explore unexpected themes that emerged during preliminary analysis, thereby compensating for the limitations of asynchronous text-based data collection. The use of open-ended items was deliberate, as it permits respondents to articulate their experiences in their own terms and to introduce themes that the researcher might not have anticipated.

Data Collection Procedure

The decision to administer stage one through Google Forms was guided by considerations of accessibility, security, and respondent convenience. Google Forms offers a familiar interface for Malaysian educators, integrates seamlessly with established workflows, and ensures structured data capture for subsequent analysis. Participants received a participant information sheet detailing the study's purpose, voluntary nature, and confidentiality safeguards prior to completing the questionnaire. They were assured that their responses would be anonymized and that they could withdraw at any time without consequence. The asynchronous, electronic format permitted respondents to complete the questionnaire at times convenient to their teaching commitments, which is particularly important given the documented time pressures faced by Malaysian teachers (Pacaol, 2021). For stage two, the researcher contacted each participant within two weeks of their questionnaire submission to schedule a follow-up clarification interview. Interviews were audio-recorded with explicit consent, transcribed verbatim, and returned to participants for review prior to analysis.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was conducted following the six-phase framework articulated by Braun, Clarke, and Hayfield (2022): (1) familiarization with the data, (2) generation of initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report. The transcripts were read repeatedly to develop intimate familiarity with the data, and initial codes were generated inductively from the participants' responses. Codes were subsequently clustered into candidate themes that captured the principal dimensions of meaning within the data. The candidate themes were reviewed for internal coherence and external distinctiveness, refined through iterative comparison with the source data, and ultimately consolidated into the thematic structures presented in Section 4.

Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of the qualitative findings was established through deliberate attention to the four criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and elaborated by Nowell, Norris, White, and Moules (2017): credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was supported through three procedures. First, member checking was conducted by returning interview transcripts and preliminary thematic summaries to each participant for verification, with seven of the fourteen participants providing minor clarifications that were incorporated into the analysis. Second, peer debriefing was undertaken with two colleagues holding doctoral qualifications in education, who reviewed the coding scheme and challenged interpretive assumptions. Third, prolonged engagement with the data was achieved through repeated readings and a six-week immersion period during which initial codes were refined.

Transferability was supported through the provision of thick description, including detailed accounts of participant backgrounds (Section 4.1 and Table 1), the institutional contexts in which they teach, and the verbatim interview extracts presented in Tables 2 to 4. These rich contextual details enable readers to assess the applicability of the findings to their own settings. Dependability was supported through the maintenance of a comprehensive audit trail documenting every methodological decision, including the evolution of the coding scheme, the rationale for theme refinement, and the management of discrepant cases. The audit trail is available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. Confirmability was supported through the maintenance of a reflexive journal in which the researcher recorded preconceptions, emergent intuitions, and methodological reflections throughout the data-collection and analysis phases. The reflexive journal enabled the researcher to monitor and bracket personal assumptions, ensuring that the findings reflect the participants' experiences rather than the researcher's prior expectations.

Research Ethics

The study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles of respect for autonomy, non-maleficence, confidentiality, and informed consent. All participants received a detailed information sheet describing the study's purpose, procedures, risks, and benefits, and they provided informed consent before completing the questionnaire. Names and identifying information were replaced with participant numbers (Participant 1 through Participant 8) prior to analysis, and demographic details were generalized to prevent inadvertent identification. Digital data were stored on encrypted servers accessible only to the research team. The reporting of findings was conducted in a manner that respects the dignity and professional standing of all participants, with direct quotations selected to illustrate themes rather than to expose individual identities.

FINDINGS

Profile of Participants

The fourteen participants represented a diverse cross-section of the teaching community in Klang Valley schools. They comprised four preschool teachers, five primary school teachers, and five secondary school teachers, with combined teaching experience of more than 145 years. Eight participants were female and six were male, and their ages ranged from 27 to 49 years. Six participants held postgraduate qualifications (master's degree), and eight held undergraduate qualifications (bachelor's degree). Their disciplinary specializations spanned science, mathematics, English language, Bahasa Malaysia, early childhood education, primary general education, and secondary subject teaching. Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the participants.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Participants (n = 14)

Code	Gender	Age	Years Exp.	Specialization	Level	Qualification
P1	Male	45	18	Science	Secondary	Master's
P2	Female	39	15	Mathematics	Secondary	Master's
P3	Male	28	6	Science	Primary	Bachelor's
P4	Female	34	8	English Language	Primary	Bachelor's
P5	Female	38	14	Early Childhood	Preschool	Bachelor's
P6	Male	36	12	Science	Primary	Master's
P7	Female	31	8	Early Childhood	Preschool	Bachelor's
P8	Male	28	5	General Primary	Primary	Master's
P9	Female	42	17	Bahasa Malaysia	Secondary	Bachelor's
P10	Male	33	9	Mathematics	Primary	Bachelor's
P11	Female	29	4	Early Childhood	Preschool	Bachelor's
P12	Female	47	22	English Language	Secondary	Master's
P13	Male	27	3	History	Secondary	Bachelor's
P14	Female	35	11	Early Childhood	Preschool	Master's

The diversity of the sample, in terms of age, gender, years of experience, qualification level, subject specialization, and educational level taught, supports the transferability of the findings to comparable settings. The inclusion of both veteran teachers (with seventeen to twenty-two years of experience) and novice teachers (with three to six years) enables the analysis to capture differential perspectives across career stages.

Effects of Professional Development on Teachers' Performance (RO1)

Three principal themes emerged from the participants' accounts of how professional development had affected their performance: knowledge update, teaching effectiveness, and practical application. Table 2 presents the coding scheme together with illustrative interview extracts.

Table 2. Coding and Themes for RO1: Effects of Professional Development

Source	Interview Extract	Codes	Theme
Participant 1	<i>"Professional development is very important for us. As a senior teacher, I always find that these courses help me keep up with the latest teaching methods and technologies."</i>	Importance of staying updated	Knowledge Update
Participant 3	<i>"I strongly believe that professional development has been instrumental in my career growth. It keeps me updated with the latest teaching techniques and scientific discoveries, which I can then bring into the classroom."</i>	Career growth; staying updated	Knowledge Update
Participant 4	<i>"Professional development helps me a lot to grow as a teacher. For example, I attended a course on differentiated instruction which taught me how to cater to students of different abilities. It has made my lessons more inclusive and engaging."</i>	Differentiated instruction; inclusivity; engagement	Knowledge Update
Participant 2	<i>"The impact on my teaching effectiveness has been significant. My students are more engaged, and their understanding of mathematical concepts has improved."</i>	Improved student engagement	Teaching Effectiveness
Participant 5	<i>"Attending courses on child psychology and development has provided me with deeper insights into how young children learn and behave. This knowledge has allowed me to create more effective learning environments."</i>	Child psychology; effective environments	Teaching Effectiveness
Participant 8	<i>"The professional development courses have greatly improved my teaching effectiveness. My students are more engaged in science lessons, and their understanding of complex topics has improved."</i>	Engagement; understanding complex topics	Teaching Effectiveness
Participant 1	<i>"I remember a workshop on student-centred learning conducted by a lecturer"</i>	Hands-on activities; immediate	Practical Application

Source	Interview Extract	Codes	Theme
	<i>from Universiti Malaya. The hands-on activities were so engaging, and I saw immediate improvements in my students' participation after I implemented those strategies."</i>	improvements	
Participant 6	<i>"An impactful experience was attending a seminar on environmental education organized by WWF Malaysia. It provided practical activities and projects that I implemented in my classroom. My students even started a recycling program at school."</i>	Environmental projects; school programmes	Practical Application
Participant 7	<i>"One memorable experience was a workshop on incorporating play-based learning into the curriculum. The hands-on activities and practical examples were incredibly impactful. I saw immediate improvements in my students' engagement and learning outcomes."</i>	Play-based learning; engagement	Practical Application
Participant 9	<i>"After every training, I always update my lesson plans because the methods we learn must be applied immediately. Otherwise, we forget. The CPD I attended on language assessment changed how I evaluate my students."</i>	Continuous updating; assessment reform	Knowledge Update
Participant 12	<i>"Twenty-two years in the classroom, and I still attend every CPD I can. Without it, I would still be teaching the way I taught in 2003. The training keeps me alive as a teacher."</i>	Career-long learning; renewal	Knowledge Update
Participant 14	<i>"After attending the inclusive education workshop, I started identifying children with different learning needs more accurately and adapting activities accordingly. The change in my classroom was almost immediate."</i>	Inclusive education; classroom adaptation	Teaching Effectiveness

The first theme, knowledge update, captured the central role of professional development in keeping teachers abreast of contemporary pedagogical trends, content knowledge, and educational technologies. This theme was articulated most strongly by senior teachers, who positioned professional development as essential to professional longevity. Participant 1, a senior science teacher with eighteen years of experience, observed that ongoing courses helped him keep up with the latest teaching methods and technologies. Participants 3, 6, and 9 likewise emphasized that staying updated was essential to their career growth and the integration of contemporary pedagogical and content knowledge into their classrooms. Participant 4 reported that a course on differentiated instruction had transformed her capacity to cater to students of different abilities, a finding that suggests the knowledge update theme extends beyond awareness to encompass conceptual reorientation. Participant 12, with twenty-two years of teaching experience, was particularly emphatic in framing CPD as a

vehicle for career-long renewal, stating that without continuous learning she would still be teaching as she had in 2003.

The second theme, teaching effectiveness, reflected the translation of acquired knowledge into improved instructional practice and student engagement. Participant 2, a senior mathematics teacher, reported that the impact of professional development on her teaching effectiveness had been significant, with students demonstrating greater engagement and improved conceptual understanding. Participant 5, drawing on courses in child psychology and development, described how deeper insights into young learners' cognitive and emotional patterns had enabled her to design more effective learning environments. Participant 8 echoed similar improvements in student engagement and conceptual understanding in primary science. Participant 14, a preschool teacher, reported that an inclusive education workshop had enabled her to identify and respond to diverse learning needs more accurately and to produce almost immediate changes in her classroom. These accounts suggest that effective professional development not only adds to teachers' technical repertoire but also enhances their interpretive capacity to read and respond to students.

The third theme, practical application, emphasized the immediacy with which knowledge gained through professional development was implemented in the classroom. Participant 1 described a workshop on student-centred learning conducted by a lecturer from Universiti Malaya, the hands-on activities of which produced immediate improvements in student participation upon implementation. Participant 6 recounted an environmental education seminar organized by WWF Malaysia, the practical projects of which led to the establishment of a school recycling programme, an example of professional development extending its influence beyond the immediate classroom into school-wide initiatives. Participant 7 similarly reported that a workshop on play-based learning produced immediate improvements in student engagement and learning outcomes. The recurring emphasis on hands-on, practically grounded training echoes a long-standing finding in the literature: that experiential, contextually anchored professional development is more readily transferred into classroom practice than abstract or didactic alternatives.

How School Leaders Plan Professional Development (RO2)

The participants' accounts of how their school leaders planned professional development clustered around three themes: support and encouragement, accessibility, and diversity of training. Table 3 summarises the coding for this objective.

Table 3. Coding and Themes for RO2: How School Leaders Plan Professional Development

Source	Interview Extract	Codes	Theme
Participant 1	<i>"Our school administration is very proactive when it comes to professional development. They organize in-house training sessions and encourage us to attend external workshops and conferences."</i>	Proactive leadership; encouragement	Support and Encouragement
Participant 6	<i>"School leaders organize collaborative projects and in-house training sessions. They actively encourage us to participate in different professional development activities."</i>	Collaborative projects; in-house training	Support and Encouragement
Participant 3	<i>"The school provides webinars and online courses, which we can attend at our own pace. This flexibility makes professional development accessible despite our busy schedules."</i>	Webinars; flexibility	Accessibility

Source	Interview Extract	Codes	Theme
Participant 5	<i>"Most of the workshops are arranged on weekends or during the school holidays so that they don't disrupt our teaching schedule. The school also gives us access to online learning platforms."</i>	Convenient timing; online platforms	Accessibility
Participant 2	<i>"The school offers a variety of professional development opportunities, ranging from in-house training sessions to external workshops and conferences. They cover topics from classroom management to subject-specific pedagogy."</i>	Variety of formats; broad topic coverage	Diversity of Training
Participant 4	<i>"My school leaders enrolled us in a wide range of training, from language teaching methodologies to digital tools for the classroom, ensuring we are equipped for different aspects of teaching."</i>	Range of methodologies; digital tools	Diversity of Training
Participant 7	<i>"Our school leaders ensure that the training programmes cover a wide spectrum, from early childhood pedagogy to inclusive education and parental engagement."</i>	Broad spectrum of training topics	Diversity of Training
Participant 10	<i>"My headmaster always reminds us that professional development is not optional, it is part of our duty as teachers. He even joins some of the training sessions himself, which motivates us a lot."</i>	Leader modelling; obligation framing	Support and Encouragement
Participant 13	<i>"As a young teacher, I appreciate that my school sends us to a mix of online webinars, weekend workshops, and even short courses with universities. The variety means there is always something useful for new teachers like me."</i>	Mixed formats; novice-friendly	Diversity of Training

The first theme, support and encouragement, captured a leadership posture that explicitly affirms the legitimacy and importance of teacher professional development. Participant 1 described his school administration as proactive in organising in-house training and encouraging external workshop attendance, while Participant 6 emphasized that leaders organised collaborative projects and modelled active engagement with professional learning. Participant 10 articulated a particularly strong instance of this leadership posture, recounting that his headmaster framed professional development as a duty rather than an option and personally joined training sessions, which produced motivational spillover among staff. This theme is consistent with transformational and instructional leadership models, in which the symbolic affirmation of teacher learning is

understood to be as consequential as the structural arrangements that support it (Day, Sammons, & Gorgen, 2020).

The second theme, accessibility, foregrounded the structural arrangements that enabled teachers to participate in professional development without compromising their teaching duties. Participant 3 highlighted webinars and online courses that could be undertaken at her own pace, while Participant 5 noted that workshops were typically scheduled on weekends or during school holidays to avoid disrupting teaching. The provision of online learning platforms was a recurring feature of accessibility, reflecting the broader pivot toward technology-mediated professional learning that has accelerated in the post-pandemic period.

The third theme, diversity of training, emphasized the breadth of topics, formats, and pedagogical approaches that school leaders had built into their professional development portfolios. Participant 2 described a range that extended from in-house training sessions to external workshops and conferences, encompassing classroom management, subject-specific pedagogy, and digital integration. Participant 4 highlighted training that ranged from language teaching methodologies to digital tools for the classroom, while Participant 7 described a portfolio that included early childhood pedagogy, inclusive education, and parental engagement. Participant 13, a novice secondary teacher, valued the mix of online webinars, weekend workshops, and short university-led courses, suggesting that diversity of format is particularly significant for early-career teachers seeking entry points into professional learning. The diversity of training reported here suggests that school leaders in Klang Valley are increasingly approaching professional development as a curriculum to be designed rather than a sequence of discrete events.

Challenges to Teachers' Participation in Professional Development (RO3)

The participants identified four interrelated challenges to their participation in professional development: bureaucratic hurdles, scheduling conflicts, administrative and competitive challenges, and resource constraints. Table 4 summarises the coding for this objective.

Table 4. Coding and Themes for RO3: Challenges to Participating in Professional Development

Source	Interview Extract	Codes	Theme
Participant 1	<i>"There are some challenges, especially with the strict schedules we have. Sometimes our timetable clashes with the training sessions. Also, there is a lot of paperwork to apply for these courses, which can be tedious."</i>	Schedule clashes; paperwork	Bureaucratic Hurdles
Participant 2	<i>"One challenge is the bureaucratic process of getting approval for certain courses, which can be time-consuming. There are also scheduling conflicts that make it difficult to attend all the sessions we would like to."</i>	Approval delays; conflicts	Bureaucratic Hurdles
Participant 8	<i>"Sometimes the bureaucratic process of getting approval to attend these sessions can be cumbersome."</i>	Cumbersome bureaucracy	Bureaucratic Hurdles
Participant 3	<i>"Approval for external courses can be slow. There are also instances where the professional development sessions are scheduled during busy periods, making it hard to attend."</i>	Slow approval; busy- period scheduling	Scheduling Conflicts

Source	Interview Extract	Codes	Theme
Participant 6	<i>"There are times when the courses clash with our teaching schedule, making it hard to attend."</i>	Schedule conflict	Scheduling Conflicts
Participant 4	<i>"We need to get approval from the school administration to attend these courses, which can be a lengthy process. If too many teachers apply for the same course, it becomes competitive."</i>	Lengthy approval; competition	Administrative & Competitive Challenges
Participant 5	<i>"The lack of substitute teachers makes it difficult to attend sessions during school hours."</i>	Lack of substitutes	Resource Constraints
Participant 7	<i>"Sometimes the scheduling of these sessions conflicts with my personal commitments. Limited funding for these programmes can also be a barrier."</i>	Personal conflicts; funding	Resource Constraints
Participant 11	<i>"As a young mother, I find it very difficult to attend sessions held on weekends. The school does not really consider work-life balance when scheduling CPD."</i>	Weekend scheduling; family conflict	Scheduling Conflicts
Participant 14	<i>"In our preschool we hardly have substitute teachers, so attending CPD means leaving the children with a colleague who already has a full class. It is not fair to anyone, so I often skip the training."</i>	No substitutes; collegial burden	Resource Constraints

Bureaucratic hurdles represented the most frequently reported challenge. Participant 1 described the volume of paperwork required to apply for courses as tedious, while Participant 2 reported that the approval process for certain courses was time-consuming. Participant 8 echoed these concerns, characterising the bureaucratic process as cumbersome. The recurrence of this theme across participants of different ages, genders, and school levels suggests that bureaucratic friction is a structural rather than idiosyncratic feature of the Malaysian professional development landscape.

Scheduling conflicts emerged as a closely related but analytically distinct challenge. Participant 3 reported that professional development sessions were sometimes scheduled during the busiest periods of the school calendar, while Participant 6 noted that course timings frequently clashed with regular teaching schedules. Participant 11, a young mother, articulated a particularly acute version of this challenge: weekend scheduling, while operationally convenient for school administrators, conflicted directly with family responsibilities and produced a gendered burden that the school had not adequately considered. Where bureaucratic hurdles concern the procedural friction of accessing professional development, scheduling conflicts concern the temporal friction of fitting it into a heavily committed working life.

Administrative and competitive challenges added a third layer of difficulty. Participant 4 described an approval process that was simultaneously lengthy and competitive: when too many teachers applied for the same course, internal rationing produced an exclusionary dynamic that discouraged less assertive applicants. This

competitive element transforms what should be a developmental opportunity into a contested resource, with implications for collegial relationships and equity of access.

Finally, resource constraints emerged as a substantive barrier. Participant 5 highlighted the absence of substitute teachers as a barrier to attending professional development during school hours, while Participant 7 cited limited funding for professional development programmes. Participant 14 articulated a particularly compounded form of this challenge: the absence of substitute teachers meant that attending CPD imposed an unfair burden on already overstretched colleagues, leading her to forgo training opportunities altogether. The intersection of personnel shortages and funding limitations creates a compounding disadvantage in which teachers must absorb the opportunity cost of training either by displacing instruction or by foregoing the opportunity altogether. This pattern is consistent with international evidence concerning the resource intensity of effective professional development.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study advance the understanding of teacher professional development in Klang Valley schools by linking the empirical themes to established theoretical frameworks and to the broader international literature. The discussion is organized around the three research objectives, with each subsection synthesizing the findings, situating them within prior scholarship, and interpreting them through the lens of Bandura's Social Learning Theory and complementary perspectives.

Effects of Professional Development on Teachers' Performance

The three themes identified under the first research objective, namely knowledge update, teaching effectiveness, and practical application, collectively trace the cognitive and behavioural arc that Bandura's Social Learning Theory predicts for adult learning. Knowledge update corresponds closely to the attention and retention phases of social learning. As Bandura and Walters (1977) argued, the encoding of new behaviour into memory is contingent upon initial attentional engagement and subsequent symbolic representation. The participants' accounts confirm this: Participant 1 and Participant 3 explicitly described professional development courses as the principal means by which they remained cognizant of new teaching methods, technologies, and disciplinary content. The literature supports this interpretation. Avalos (2011) emphasizes that professional development functions as a continuous knowledge-renewal process that prevents teachers' practice from drifting out of alignment with contemporary educational expectations, while Sims and Fletcher-Wood (2021) demonstrate that effective professional development deliberately activates teachers' attentional engagement through content focus and active learning. Recent evidence from Luo, Bi, and Wang (2026) reinforces this argument, showing through structural equation modelling on a sample of 620 university teachers that growth mindset and lifelong learning are positively associated with teacher performance, with professional development serving as the mediating mechanism that translates these dispositional resources into observable instructional gains.

Teaching effectiveness, the second theme, corresponds to the motor reproduction phase of Bandura's framework. Motor reproduction concerns the actual enactment of observed practices, and the participants' reports of improved student engagement and conceptual understanding represent the behavioural manifestation of this enactment. Hennessy et al. (2022) reach similar conclusions in their systematic review of technology-supported professional development in low- and middle-income countries, finding that programmes incorporating active learning opportunities produced more substantial changes in classroom practice than passive, lecture-style alternatives. Vanderlinde et al. (2021) similarly argue that effective professional development cultivates not only technical competence but also the reflective and adaptive capacities that allow teachers to refine their practice over time. Participant 5's reference to deeper insights into child psychology gained through targeted training illustrates this enriched interpretive capacity, corroborating Bowman et al. (2022) who demonstrate that exposure to professional development mediates the quality of instructional technology use through teachers' value and ability beliefs.

Practical application, the third theme, embodies what Boeskens, Nusche, and Yurita (2020) describe as the immediacy criterion of effective continuing professional learning: the gap between the training experience and

the classroom enactment must be short, supported, and accompanied by feedback. The participants' accounts of immediately implementable strategies, ranging from the student-centred activities described by Participant 1 to the environmental projects described by Participant 6 and the play-based learning approaches described by Participant 7, demonstrate that the most impactful programmes provide concrete, transferable tools rather than abstract principles. This finding aligns with Cortina and Earl (2020), who argue that intercultural professional development requires attention to context-specific applications, and with Gleason and Jaramillo Cherez (2021), whose study of design thinking in teacher education emphasizes the importance of authentic problem-solving experiences. From a Social Learning Theory perspective, practical application represents the consolidation of motor reproduction into stable repertoires, which Bandura argued is essential for the maintenance of newly acquired behaviour.

How School Leaders Plan Professional Development

The findings concerning the planning of professional development by school leaders, namely support and encouragement, accessibility, and diversity of training, resonate with the contemporary literature on instructional and transformational leadership. Support and encouragement reflect a leadership orientation that aligns with what Smith and Gillespie (2023) describe as a generative culture of professional learning, in which leaders explicitly position teacher development as a core organizational priority. Hero (2019) argues that supportive leadership cultivates teachers' willingness to invest discretionary effort in professional growth, while Boeskens et al. (2020) note in their OECD review that leadership commitment is one of the most consistent predictors of effective professional learning. Within the Malaysian context, Tahir et al. (2024) demonstrate that principals who actively scaffold professional learning communities cultivate environments of collaborative inquiry, an observation that maps directly onto Participant 6's account of collaborative projects organised by school leaders. The recent work of Adams, Hussain, and Tan (2023) further underscores that inclusive leadership is essential to ensuring that all teachers, regardless of subject specialisation or career stage, are afforded equitable access to professional growth opportunities.

Accessibility, the second theme, reflects the increasing recognition that professional development must be designed with attention to the temporal, geographic, and technological constraints that shape teachers' working lives. The diffusion of innovations framework (Abidin, Mathrani, & Hunter, 2021) suggests that the adoption of new technologies and methodologies is accelerated when they are made accessible through tailored implementation strategies. The participants' accounts of webinars and online courses, particularly Participant 3's description of self-paced webinars and Participant 5's account of weekend and school-holiday workshops, illustrate the practical operationalization of accessibility. Bragg, Walsh, and Heyeres (2021), in a systematic review of online professional development, conclude that flexibility, learner agency, and asynchronous design are critical to participation, particularly for time-constrained educators. The post-pandemic acceleration of digital professional learning has further normalized these arrangements, although Fernández-Batanero et al. (2022) caution that accessibility must be matched by digital pedagogical competence if online professional development is to be substantively effective. A recent comparative analysis by Gu, He, Huang, and Sun (2025) of online TPD across China and the United States similarly reports that web-based professional development achieves participation rates above 75% and effectiveness scores above 4.3 in both systems, yet persistent gaps in functional access and contextual appropriateness remain, particularly in rural and under-resourced settings.

Diversity of training, the third theme, indicates a sophisticated approach to professional development design that recognizes the heterogeneity of teachers' needs across subject specializations, career stages, and educational levels. This finding aligns with situational leadership theory, which holds that effective leaders calibrate their interventions to the developmental needs of their team members (Bragg et al., 2021; Gubbins & Hayden, 2021). The breadth of programming reported by Participant 2, Participant 4, and Participant 7, which encompassed classroom management, subject-specific pedagogy, digital tools, early childhood pedagogy, inclusive education, and parental engagement, reflects what Sancar et al. (2021) describe as a portfolio approach to professional development. Such an approach is consistent with Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which emphasizes that learning is most effective when it is embedded in the social and cultural contexts of the learner (Mercader & Gairín, 2020). Salmerón Aroca, Moreno Abellán, and Martínez de Miguel López (2022) reinforce this view in a systematic review covering 56 studies, demonstrating that effective professional

development must be calibrated to generational and career-stage differences if it is to address the heterogeneous needs of contemporary teachers.

Challenges to Teachers' Participation in Professional Development

The four challenges identified, namely bureaucratic hurdles, scheduling conflicts, administrative and competitive challenges, and resource constraints, form a coherent constellation of structural impediments that the international literature has documented in remarkably similar terms. Bureaucratic hurdles align closely with McChesney and Aldridge's (2021) account of procedural friction in teacher professional development. The participants' descriptions of tedious paperwork, time-consuming approval processes, and cumbersome procedures reflect what organizational theorists have long identified as the unintended consequences of bureaucratic structures: while bureaucracies are designed to ensure consistency and accountability, they can also impede the flow of innovation when their procedural demands exceed the developmental opportunities they regulate (Smith & Gillespie, 2023). Within the Malaysian education system, the centralized nature of policy implementation may amplify these procedural demands, an observation consistent with Abbaspour, Hosseingholizadeh, and Bellibaş's (2024) analysis of principals' mediating role in centralized systems. Soleh, Rokhman, and Mahmud (2025) similarly identify policy and leadership misalignment as one of the principal institutional barriers to teacher professional learning.

Scheduling conflicts, the second theme, reflect the temporal compression that has come to characterize contemporary teaching. Bragg et al. (2021) emphasize the need for flexible professional development opportunities that can accommodate diverse teaching schedules, while Byrd and Alexander (2020) argue that adult learning theory requires alignment between training timing and learner availability. Participant 3's account of professional development being scheduled during the busiest periods of the school year, and Participant 6's account of recurring schedule clashes, illustrate the structural gap between the design of training and the rhythms of school life. Pacaol (2021) documents the broader phenomenon of teacher workload intensification in the Asian context, arguing that the displacement of professional development to evenings and weekends produces unsustainable burdens, particularly for teachers with caregiving responsibilities.

Administrative and competitive challenges, the third theme, illuminate a less frequently discussed dimension of professional development access. Hero (2019) and Taghizadeh and Hasani Yourdshahi (2020) note that the competitive allocation of professional development opportunities can create exclusionary dynamics, particularly when oversubscription requires schools to ration access. Resource Dependency Theory provides one analytical framework for understanding this phenomenon: when professional development is treated as a scarce resource subject to administrative gatekeeping, the social dynamics of the school workplace come to mediate access in ways that may be at odds with developmental need (Mercader & Gairín, 2020). Participant 4's description of the competitive environment when too many teachers applied for the same course illustrates this dynamic and suggests that the ostensibly meritocratic distribution of training may, in practice, reproduce inequalities in professional capital.

Resource constraints, the fourth theme, situate the challenges of professional development within the broader resource environment of the school. Abdulaziz, Bashir, and Alfalih (2022) demonstrate that work overload and inadequate organizational support undermine teachers' capacity to engage in professional learning, while Parker, Zenkov, and Glaser (2021) argue that equity theory provides a useful lens for understanding how perceived inequity in resource distribution affects teacher motivation. The participants' accounts, particularly Participant 5's reference to the absence of substitute teachers and Participant 7's reference to limited funding, indicate that resource constraints operate at multiple levels simultaneously: at the school level, in terms of staffing and budget; at the system level, in terms of allocation decisions; and at the individual level, in terms of the personal costs that teachers absorb when systemic resources are inadequate. Bloomfield, Fox, and Leif (2024) similarly demonstrate, through a systematic review of tiered professional development models, that resource intensity is one of the principal constraints on the implementation of high-quality coaching and feedback structures, particularly when those structures aim to extend beyond universal training to targeted support. Addressing these constraints requires coordinated intervention at all three levels.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretically, the findings extend Bandura's Social Learning Theory into the domain of structured adult professional learning, an extension that builds on the work of Lawrent (2024) and Wadsworth (2021). The empirical articulation of attention, retention, motor reproduction, and motivation in the participants' accounts supports the theory's explanatory adequacy in adult educational settings. At the same time, the prominence of structural challenges in the participants' narratives suggests that an exclusively cognitive account of professional learning is insufficient. The findings indicate that the social-cognitive processes Bandura identifies are mediated by organizational, administrative, and resource conditions, an insight that aligns with the broader move in educational research toward ecological models of teacher learning (Sancar et al., 2021).

Practically, the findings carry several implications for school leaders and policymakers. First, the persistent salience of bureaucratic hurdles indicates a need for procedural simplification, including streamlined approval pathways, digitalized application processes, and transparent allocation criteria. Second, the challenges of scheduling and resource constraints suggest that professional development should be embedded within the regular school calendar rather than displaced to evenings, weekends, and school holidays. This embedding requires deliberate timetable design, the provision of substitute teachers, and the protection of professional learning time as a non-negotiable organizational priority (Smith & Gillespie, 2023). Third, the findings on diversity of training and accessibility suggest that school leaders should approach professional development as a curriculum to be designed rather than a series of discrete events. Fourth, the interaction between motivation and structural conditions implies that motivational interventions, alone, will not produce sustainable engagement: structural conditions must be aligned with motivational design (Malek, Sarin, & Haon, 2020).

Limitations

Several limitations of the study should be acknowledged. First, the qualitative descriptive design with phenomenological orientation, while well suited to the exploration of lived experience, does not permit statistical generalization to the broader population of Malaysian teachers. Second, the sample of fourteen participants from the Klang Valley region, although diverse along several axes and adequate for code and meaning saturation in this study, cannot capture the full range of experiences across rural, semi-urban, and other regional contexts in Malaysia. Third, the use of an asynchronous online questionnaire as the first stage of data collection, although mitigated through follow-up clarification interviews, did not afford the depth of immediate, real-time exchange that a fully synchronous interview format would permit. Future research could address these limitations through larger, mixed-methods designs that incorporate longitudinal tracking, comparative regional analysis, and in-person interviewing.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has examined the influence of professional development on teachers' performance in Klang Valley schools through a phenomenological investigation grounded in Bandura's Social Learning Theory. The findings indicate that professional development enhances teachers' performance through three interrelated mechanisms, namely knowledge update, teaching effectiveness, and practical application, that correspond closely to the attention, retention, motor reproduction, and motivation phases of social learning. School leaders plan professional development through three principal strategies: support and encouragement, accessibility, and diversity of training. Teachers, however, encounter four interrelated challenges that constrain their participation: bureaucratic hurdles, scheduling conflicts, administrative and competitive challenges, and resource constraints. These findings simultaneously affirm the transformative potential of well-designed professional development and underscore the structural impediments that must be addressed if that potential is to be realized.

On the basis of these findings, several recommendations are offered. First, school administrators and education authorities should review and streamline the procedural requirements associated with professional development applications, including the digitalization of approval workflows and the establishment of transparent allocation criteria. Second, professional development should be embedded within the regular school calendar through deliberate timetable design, the provision of substitute teachers, and the protection of

professional learning time. Third, the diversity and accessibility of professional development offerings should be expanded through the use of online and blended delivery, the differentiation of programmes by career stage and specialization, and the development of contextually responsive content for the Malaysian educational setting (Bin Selamat, Bin Abdul Aziz, & Ahmad, 2024; Kabilan, Aziz, & Embi, 2025). Fourth, sustainable funding models should be developed to ensure equitable access to professional development resources across schools and districts. Fifth, future research should employ longitudinal and mixed-methods designs to track the long-term effects of professional development on teacher performance, career progression, and student outcomes, and should examine cultural and contextual factors that shape the reception of professional development in diverse Malaysian and international settings.

By addressing the structural conditions that mediate the social-cognitive processes of professional learning, school leaders and policymakers can foster a more equitable, sustainable, and effective professional development ecosystem, one in which the aspiration of continuous teacher growth is matched by the conditions that make it achievable.

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