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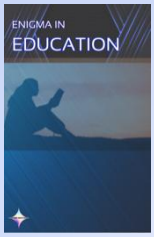

Building a Profession from the Ground Up: A Longitudinal Study of Teacher Professional Development and Pedagogical Innovation in Papuan Private Schools

Iis Sugandhi[1*], Arya Ganendra[2], Aaliyah El-Hussaini[3], Gayatri Putri[4], Evelyn Wang[5], Anita Havyasari[6], Muhammad Hasan[7]

[1]Department of Art Sciences, Enigma Institute, Palembang, Indonesia

[2]Department of Literacy, Emerald Language Institute, Balikpapan, Indonesia

[3]Department of History Science, Al Fayyum Institute, Bursaid, Egypt

[4]Department of Library and Informatics Science, Enigma Institute, Palembang, Indonesia

[5]Department of Archeology, Samga Research Institute, Metro Manila, Philippines

[6]Department of Tourism, Nusantara Tourism and Heritage School, Makassar, Indonesia

[7]Department of Social Sciences, Enigma Institute, Palembang, Indonesia

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***Corresponding author:**
Iis Sugandhi

E-mail address:
iis.sugandhi@enigma.or.id

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A B S T R A C T

Teacher quality is the most significant school-based determinant of student success, yet fostering professional excellence in remote and culturally diverse regions like Papua, Indonesia, presents profound challenges. Private schools often fill critical educational gaps but their teachers can be professionally isolated. This study addressed the gap in long-term, evidence-based research on teacher professional development (TPD) in this unique context. A three-year (2021-2024) concurrent mixed-methods longitudinal study was conducted. The study involved 50 teachers from a network of five private schools in urban, semi-rural, and remote highland regions of Papua. A comprehensive TPD program, focusing on student-centered learning and culturally responsive pedagogy, was implemented. Quantitative data were collected annually using the Teacher Pedagogical Knowledge Test (TPKT), the Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale (TSES), and a structured Classroom Observation Protocol. Qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, teacher reflective journals, and focus group discussions with Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). Quantitative data were analyzed using repeated measures ANOVA, while qualitative data were analyzed thematically. The longitudinal quantitative analysis revealed statistically significant improvements across all three years. Mean TPKT scores increased from 48.5 (SD=11.2) at baseline to 79.8 (SD=8.5) at endline ($F(2, 98) = 157.2$, $p < 0.001$). Teacher self-efficacy scores also showed significant growth ($F(2, 98) = 112.9$, $p < 0.001$). Classroom observations confirmed a marked shift from teacher-centered to student-centered practices. Qualitative findings identified three core themes: (1) "From Transmission to Facilitation: A Pedagogical Awakening," detailing the shift in teachers' core beliefs about learning; (2) "The Power of the Collective," highlighting the crucial role of PLCs in sustaining motivation and collaborative problem-solving; and (3) "Navigating the Cultural Interface," illustrating the teachers' journey in adapting curriculum to be more culturally responsive. In conclusion, sustained, context-specific, and collaborative TPD can foster profound and lasting improvements in teacher knowledge, self-efficacy, and classroom practice, even in highly challenging environments. The findings advocate for a shift away from isolated, short-term workshops towards integrated, long-term models that prioritize peer collaboration and cultural relevance, revealing a clear pathway from knowledge acquisition to a transformed professional identity.

1. Introduction

The global discourse on achieving quality education for all has consistently underscored the pivotal role of the teacher. An extensive body of knowledge affirms that teacher quality is the most influential in-school factor affecting student

achievement, social-emotional development, and future life chances.[1] While this axiom is universally accepted, its practical realization in contexts marked by geographical isolation, socio-economic disparity, and profound cultural diversity presents one of the most complex challenges in international education today. The eastern Indonesian region of Papua, with its rugged terrain, hundreds of distinct ethnolinguistic groups, and a history of developmental inequities, represents a potent case study of these challenges. Within this intricate educational landscape, private schools have emerged as significant, yet under-researched, actors in the provision of basic education. The Indonesian education system is a vast and centralized entity, yet it has long accommodated a dual system of public and private schooling.[2] Private institutions, often managed by religious organizations or community foundations, play a crucial role, particularly in regions where the reach of the state is limited. In Papua, these schools are not merely an alternative for an urban elite; they are frequently the sole providers of education in remote highland and coastal communities. They often serve marginalized populations with a dedication born of a mission-driven ethos. However, this vital role is frequently compromised by significant systemic hurdles. Papuan private school teachers, many of whom are themselves from local communities, often enter the profession with minimal formal training and are subsequently cut off from the networks of professional development and support that are available to their public-sector counterparts. They face the dual burden of navigating a standardized national curriculum that may not resonate with the local cultural milieu while operating in an environment of professional isolation.[3]

Effective Teacher Professional Development (TPD) is the primary mechanism through which teacher quality is enhanced and sustained. The paradigm for effective TPD has evolved considerably over the past two decades.[4] The traditional model, characterized by one-off, decontextualized workshops, has been widely criticized as ineffective and unable to produce lasting changes in classroom practice. Contemporary scholarship advocates for TPD models that are sustained over time, embedded in the daily work of teachers, collaborative in nature, and focused on specific subject matter and pedagogical techniques.[5] The establishment of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), where teachers collaboratively inquire into their practice, has been identified as a particularly high-impact strategy. These communities foster a culture of shared responsibility, peer-to-peer learning, and collective problem-solving, which is essential for building professional capital from within. Furthermore, in a context as culturally rich as Papua, pedagogical innovation cannot be divorced from cultural relevance. The concept of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP), which posits that teaching is most effective when it leverages students' cultural backgrounds, experiences, and frames of reference, is of paramount importance.[6] For decades, Papuan students have been educated using a centralized curriculum that often ignores or marginalizes local languages, histories, and indigenous knowledge systems. This can lead to cultural alienation and disengagement from the learning process. Therefore, any meaningful TPD initiative in Papua must equip teachers with the skills and dispositions to act as cultural brokers—to bridge the national curriculum with the lived realities of their students. This involves not just incorporating cultural artifacts into lessons but fundamentally shifting pedagogical approaches to be more communal, narrative-driven, and connected to the local environment.

Despite the critical need, there is a significant lacuna in the scholarly literature concerning the long-term impact of TPD within the private school sector in Papua. While some studies have documented the general educational challenges in the region and others have examined TPD in the broader Indonesian context, few, if any, have tracked the professional trajectory of Papuan private school teachers over an extended period.[7] The majority of existing program evaluations are short-term, failing to capture the complexities of embedding new practices and sustaining change over time. Consequently, policymakers and educational leaders are left with a dearth of robust, longitudinal evidence to guide investment and strategy in this critical area. This

study was conceived to directly address this evidentiary gap.[8]

The primary aim of this three-year longitudinal study was to investigate the impact of a sustained, collaborative, and contextually-adapted Teacher Professional Development program on the pedagogical knowledge, self-efficacy, and classroom practices of private school teachers in diverse settings across Papua, Indonesia. The novelty of this research is threefold and establishes its unique contribution to the field. First, its longitudinal design moves beyond the limitations of cross-sectional studies and short-term evaluations. By tracking the same cohort of teachers over three years, this study provides rare and valuable insights into the process of professional growth, identifying the specific points of struggle, breakthrough, and eventual consolidation of new practices. It allows for an analysis of not just whether change occurred, but also how and why it was sustained or abandoned over time. Second, its mixed-methods approach generates a holistic and nuanced understanding of the TPD experience. While the quantitative data provide robust evidence of change in key indicators, the qualitative data give voice to the teachers, illuminating their lived experiences, their evolving beliefs, and the complex interplay between the TPD intervention and their challenging professional context. Third, its specific focus on private school teachers in remote and culturally diverse Papuan settings fills a critical and underexplored niche. This study provides a "ground-up" perspective, centering the experiences of educators who are at the forefront of service delivery but at the periphery of professional support systems, offering vital lessons for educational development in other marginalized contexts globally.[9,10]

2. Methods

This study employed a concurrent mixed-methods longitudinal design. This approach was selected for its capacity to provide a comprehensive understanding of the TPD program's impact, integrating objective measurements of change with a deep exploration of the participants' experiences and perceptions over an extended period. The study was conducted over a 36-month period, from January 2021 to December 2023, with data collection points at baseline (T1), midline (T2), and endline (T3).

The research was situated within a network of five private, non-elite primary schools managed by a single local educational foundation in the province of Papua, Indonesia. To ensure a representative sample of the diverse challenges faced by teachers in the region, the schools were purposefully selected to represent three distinct geographical and socio-cultural settings: an urban school in Jayapura, two semi-rural schools in the outskirts of Wamena, and two remote highland schools accessible only by small aircraft.

The participant cohort comprised 50 primary school teachers from these five schools who voluntarily agreed to participate in the full three-year study. This represented nearly 90% of the total teaching staff in these schools. The purposive sampling strategy aimed to include teachers with a wide range of experiences and qualifications to reflect the reality of the teaching force in these schools.

The architecture of the Teacher Professional Development (TPD) intervention was meticulously designed in collaboration with the school foundation's leadership, creating a multi-faceted program grounded in established principles of effective adult learning. The model was engineered to be sustained over time, context-specific to the Papuan environment, job-embedded in the teachers' daily work, and fundamentally collaborative. This pedagogical framework was built upon three core, synergistic components designed to work in concert. The initial impetus for each year's learning was provided by an Annual Intensive Workshop, a five-day session at the start of the academic year that introduced the theoretical bedrock for practice, beginning with foundational concepts like constructivism and culturally responsive pedagogy before progressing to more advanced strategies such as differentiated instruction and formative assessment. To bridge the gap between this new knowledge and its practical application, a Job-Embedded Coaching and Mentoring program was initiated, featuring a systematic monthly cycle where a pedagogical coach engaged teachers in a supportive, non-evaluative

process of pre-observation dialogue, classroom observation, and reflective feedback. The cornerstone of the program's collaborative and sustained nature was the Establishment of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)**,** which organized teachers into small, school-based groups that met bi-weekly for 90-minute sessions. Guided by structured protocols, these PLCs became the engine for peer-driven growth, fostering a culture of collaborative inquiry through shared lesson planning, joint analysis of student work, and collective problem-solving of classroom challenges.

A mixed-methods data collection strategy was employed, with quantitative and qualitative data gathered concurrently at three main time points: T1 (January-February 2021), T2 (January-February 2022), and T3 (November-December 2023). To capture a holistic and triangulated understanding of the intervention's impact, a comprehensive suite of quantitative and qualitative data collection instruments was employed longitudinally across the three-year study. The quantitative arm was designed to objectively measure changes in teacher knowledge, beliefs, and classroom practice. Teacher pedagogical knowledge was assessed at each time point (T1, T2, T3) using the Teacher Pedagogical Knowledge Test (TPKT), a validated 40-item multiple-choice instrument focused on student-centered learning and formative assessment. To measure the psychological construct of professional confidence, a modified 24-item Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale (TSES) was administered concurrently, utilizing a 9-point Likert scale to gauge teachers' beliefs in their instructional and classroom management abilities. These self-reported data were complemented by direct observation using a structured Classroom Observation Protocol (COP), where two trained researchers quantified the implementation of targeted pedagogical practices across 15 indicators during biannual 45-minute observations.

To provide deep narrative context for these numerical data, the qualitative arm of the study explored the lived experiences of the participants. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with all 50 teachers at the beginning and end of the study, with a sub-sample also interviewed at the midline, to probe their evolving beliefs, perceptions, and challenges. This was further enriched by Teacher Reflective Journals, which all participants maintained throughout the three years, providing a continuous, personal account of their practice and collaborative interactions in response to bi-weekly prompts. Finally, to understand the crucial group-level dynamics, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted with each school-based PLC during the second and third years of the study to explore their role in fostering collaborative innovation. To ensure fidelity and accuracy, all interviews and focus group discussions were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia, audio-recorded with participant consent, and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

The quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed separately first and then integrated during the interpretation phase. All quantitative data were analyzed using statistical software. Descriptive statistics were calculated for all variables at each time point. To analyze the change in TPKT, TSES, and COP scores over the three time points, a series of one-way repeated measures ANOVAs was conducted. The assumption of sphericity was checked using Mauchly's test. Where the assumption was violated, a Greenhouse-Geisser correction was applied. Post hoc tests using the Bonferroni correction were performed to identify significant differences between specific time points. The qualitative data were managed using NVivo 12 software and analyzed using a six-phase thematic analysis framework. This involved familiarization, coding, theme generation, review, definition, and reporting. To enhance credibility, two researchers independently coded a subset of transcripts and established high inter-coder agreement, followed by peer debriefing. Written informed consent was obtained from all participating teachers. They were assured of confidentiality, anonymity, and the right to withdraw. Pseudonyms are used for all individuals and schools in this report.

3. Results

The data presented in Table 1 reveal a distinct profile of the participant cohort. The teaching staff was

overwhelmingly female (82.0%) and predominantly of Papuan ethnicity (76.0%). On average, the teachers were in their mid-thirties, with a mean age of 34.7 years, and possessed an average of 8.2 years of teaching experience, though this varied widely across the cohort. A critical finding relates to formal qualifications. A significant majority of the teachers (60.0%) did not hold a standard four-year university degree in education. The largest single group (44.0%) had qualifications such as a two-year teaching diploma or a university degree in a field other than education. Furthermore, a notable portion of the workforce (16.0%) possessed only a high school diploma as their highest level of formal education, underscoring the challenges in teacher recruitment and qualification in the region and reinforcing the critical need for effective in-service professional development.

Table 1. Sociodemographic characteristics of participants at baseline (N=50).

CHARACTERISTIC	VALUE	
Gender	Female	41 (82.0%)
	Male	9 (18.0%)
Age (in years)	Mean (Range)	34.7 (22-54)
Teaching Experience (in years)	Mean (SD)	8.2 (5.6)
Highest Formal Qualification	High School Diploma	8 (16.0%)
	Two-Year Diploma / Non-Education Degree	22 (44.0%)
	Four-Year Education Degree (S.Pd.)	20 (40.0%)
Ethnicity	Papuan	38 (76.0%)
	Non-Papuan	12 (24.0%)

Note: *N* = Total number of participants. *SD* = Standard Deviation. The percentages were calculated from the absolute numbers (*n*) provided in the source text and are presented to one decimal place for scientific accuracy.

The results of this three-year longitudinal study are presented in two main sections. First, the quantitative findings from the repeated measures analysis are detailed, demonstrating the magnitude and statistical significance of the changes in teacher knowledge, self-efficacy, and practice. Second, the qualitative findings are presented, organized around three major themes that emerged from the analysis of interviews, journals, and focus groups, providing rich narrative context to the numerical data.

The quantitative data revealed a consistent and statistically significant positive trend in all measured indicators over the three-year period of the TPD intervention. The one-way repeated measures ANOVA conducted on the Teacher Pedagogical Knowledge Test (TPKT) scores showed a significant effect of time, $F(1.78, 87.2) = 157.2$, $p < 0.001$, Greenhouse-Geisser corrected (Table 2). Teachers' pedagogical knowledge grew substantially from baseline (T1) to midline (T2) and again from midline to endline (T3). Post hoc tests revealed that the increase in mean TPKT scores was significant from T1 to T2 ($p < 0.001$), from T2 to T3 ($p < 0.001$), and overall from T1 to T3 ($p < 0.001$).

Table 2. Descriptive statistics and repeated measures ANOVA for TPKT scores (N=50).

Time Point	M	SD	F-statistic	p-value
T1 (Baseline)	48.52	11.21	157.2	<0.001
T2 (Midline)	67.88	9.84		
T3 (Endline)	79.80	8.53		

Note: Maximum score = 100.

A similar pattern of significant growth was observed in teachers' sense of self-efficacy (Table 3). The repeated measures ANOVA on the Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale (TSES) scores indicated a significant main effect for time, $F(1.81, 88.7) = 112.9$, $p < 0.001$, Greenhouse-Geisser corrected. Post hoc tests confirmed that the mean efficacy score at T3 was significantly higher than at T2 ($p < 0.001$) and T1 ($p < 0.001$), and the T2 score was significantly higher than the T1 score ($p < 0.001$).

Table 3. Descriptive statistics and repeated measures ANOVA for TSES scores (N=50).

Time Point	M	SD	F-statistic	p-value
T1 (Baseline)	5.81	1.25	112.9	<0.001
T2 (Midline)	7.15	1.05		
T3 (Endline)	8.02	0.95		

Note: Scale from 1 (None at all) to 9 (A great deal).

The data from the Classroom Observation Protocol (COP) provided direct observational evidence that the gains in knowledge and self-efficacy translated into tangible changes in pedagogical practice. The repeated measures ANOVA on the aggregated COP scores revealed a large and significant effect for time, $F(2, 98) = 215.4$, $p < 0.001$. Post hoc tests confirmed significant improvements between all three time points ($p < 0.001$ for all comparisons). Specific indicators showing the most dramatic change included the use of group work, the posing of open-ended questions, and the incorporation of local context into lessons.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics and repeated measures ANOVA for COP scores (N=50).

Time Point	M	SD	F-statistic	p-value
T1 (Baseline)	1.89	0.45	215.4	<0.001
T2 (Midline)	3.24	0.61		
T3 (Endline)	4.11	0.52		

Note: Scale from 1 (Never Observed) to 5 (Consistently Observed).

The thematic analysis of the rich qualitative data from interviews, journals, and focus groups illuminated the human story behind the numbers. It revealed the internal and collective processes that drove the observed changes and the persistent challenges that teachers navigated. Three major themes emerged that capture the essence of their three-year journey.

Theme 1: "From Transmission to Facilitation: A Pedagogical Awakening"

This theme encapsulates the fundamental shift in teachers' core beliefs about their role, from being transmitters of information to facilitators of learning. At baseline, most teachers described their primary responsibility as delivering the curriculum as dictated by the textbook.

"Before, my main goal was to finish the chapter. I would talk, they would write, and then I would give a test. If they passed, I was successful. I thought that was what a teacher did." (Mrs. Y, Remote Highland School, T1 Interview).

The TPD intervention served as a catalyst for what many described as a "pedagogical awakening," introducing them to theories of constructivism that were profoundly different from their own experiences as students.

"My head was spinning after the first workshop. The idea that children construct their own knowledge... it sounded right, but it was so scary. If I am not the one giving them the knowledge, what is my job? Am I still in control?" (Mr. M, Semi-Rural School, Year 1 Journal Entry)

Over time, through coaching and practical experimentation, this initial fear transformed into a sense of professional empowerment.

"Now, my classroom is noisy, but it's a good noise. It's the noise of learning. I see myself as a guide. I prepare the environment, I pose a question, and then I walk among them, listening, probing, helping them when they are stuck. The learning is theirs, not mine. I just help them find it. It's much harder work, but the joy is a hundred times greater." (Mrs. Y, Remote Highland School, T3 Interview).

Theme 2: "The Power of the Collective: Embracing Professional Learning Communities"

This theme highlights the absolutely critical role of the PLCs in sustaining momentum and translating individual learning into a collective school culture. In a context marked by extreme professional isolation, the PLCs became vital lifelines.

"In Papua, we have a culture of 'tunggu perintah' [waiting for orders]. At first, in our PLC, we were all quiet, waiting for the principal or the coach to tell us what to do. But then a teacher tried a group activity that failed spectacularly. She was brave enough to tell us about it. We all laughed, but then we all started sharing our own failures. That was the moment our PLC was truly born. We realized we were all in the same boat." (Mr. A, Urban School, T2 Focus Group Discussion)

The PLCs served as incubators for practical innovation, sources of emotional and motivational support, and drivers of a cultural shift towards collective responsibility.

"There were days I wanted to go back to the old way. It was easier. But then I would go to my PLC meeting, and I would hear about a small success from a friend, or get a new idea for how to handle a difficult topic. It was like a weekly recharging of my spirit. I could not have done this alone." (Mrs. A, Remote Highland School, T3 Interview).

Theme 3: "Navigating the Cultural Interface: Challenges and Triumphs of Responsive Pedagogy"

This theme captures the complex and rewarding journey teachers undertook as they attempted to make their teaching more culturally responsive, negotiating between the national curriculum and their students' realities.

"For years, we were told that what happened at school was 'ilmu' [science/knowledge] and what happened in the village was 'adat' [custom]. We were taught not to mix them. So when the TPD asked us to bring local stories into the classroom, it felt… wrong, at first. Like we were breaking a rule." (Mrs. M, Semi-Rural School, T1 Interview).

Through facilitated discussions and experimentation, teachers became innovators, finding creative ways to build pedagogical bridges.

"I was teaching multiplication. It was just numbers on a board, and the students were bored. In my PLC, we talked about it. The next day, I brought a pile of sweet potatoes to class. I asked them, 'If one family needs three sweet potatoes for dinner, how many do we need for all five families in our hamlet?' Suddenly, every child was focused. They were shouting out answers, arguing, and counting. It was math, but it was their math. It was about their lives." (Mr. P, Remote Highland School, Year 2 Journal Entry).

This process affirmed the value of local culture within the formal education system, increasing student engagement and pride.

4. Discussion

The findings of this three-year longitudinal study offer a rich and deeply textured narrative of professional transformation among private school

teachers in Papua.[9] The quantitative data provide a skeletal framework of significant growth, but it is through the integration of the qualitative results that the flesh and blood of this journey become visible. This discussion moves beyond a simple restatement of the results to explore the anatomy of this change, deconstructing the psychological, social, and cultural mechanisms that underpinned the observed growth. We will delve into the profound shift from a transmissionist to a constructivist professional identity, examine the social engine that sustained this change, and analyze the intricate process of weaving cultural relevance into the fabric of everyday teaching. This exploration reveals a powerful, replicable model for building a profession from the ground up, even in the world's most challenging educational terrains.[10]

The quantitative results present a clear and compelling arc of progress. The statistically significant, year-on-year increases in pedagogical knowledge (TPKT), self-efficacy (TSES), and student-centered practices (COP) are remarkable. Yet, these numbers represent the final output of a process that was far from linear or simple.[11] The qualitative data allow us to dissect this trajectory, revealing a multi-stage process of psychological and professional evolution that can be characterized as a journey from dissonance, through experimentation, to eventual integration.

At the outset of the study, the baseline data painted a picture of a well-intentioned but professionally stymied teaching force. The low TPKT scores were not merely a reflection of a lack of knowledge, but of a deeply ingrained pedagogical paradigm. As Mrs. Y articulated, the teacher's role was understood as a "transmitter," a conduit for information from textbook to student brain. The classroom, as confirmed by the low COP scores, was a place of order, silence, and passive reception. This was not teaching born of malice, but of tradition and a lack of exposure to alternatives. The low self-efficacy scores were a natural consequence of this reality. Teachers felt responsible for student outcomes, yet their pedagogical toolkit was so limited that they often felt powerless to truly engage learners who were disaffected or struggling. Their sense of efficacy was tethered to a narrow definition of success: curriculum coverage and test scores.[11]

Into this stable, if limited, ecosystem, the TPD intervention acted as a powerful disruptive force. The initial workshops, introducing concepts of constructivism and student-centered learning, created what the qualitative data revealed as a profound "pedagogical awakening." This awakening was not immediately joyful; it was a moment of deep cognitive dissonance. As Mr. M's journal entry so powerfully expressed, the new ideas were both intuitively appealing ("it sounded right") and deeply threatening ("it was so scary"). This dissonance is a crucial first step in any transformative learning process. It unsettled the teachers' foundational beliefs about their identity and purpose. If the student is the active builder of knowledge, what, then, is the teacher? This question, voiced by many in the first year, was the engine of their subsequent growth.

The sharpest rise in TPKT scores between T1 and T2 reflects the successful acquisition of new conceptual vocabulary and knowledge during this initial disruptive phase.[12] The teachers learned the language of student-centered learning. However, the more modest, yet still significant, growth in classroom practice (COP scores) during that same period illustrates the well-known gap between knowing and doing. This is where the job-embedded coaching became indispensable. The coaches acted as translators and partners, helping teachers bridge the chasm between abstract theory and classroom reality. They provided the psychological safety net that allowed teachers to experiment, to try a group activity or an open-ended question for the first time, and, crucially, to fail without judgment.

The journey from T2 to T3 represents the critical phase of consolidation and integration. The continued, steady growth across all three quantitative measures during this period shows the new practices moving from tentative experiments to established routines. More importantly, the qualitative data reveal a corresponding internal shift. The teachers were no longer simply implementing strategies; they were embodying a new professional identity. Their language changed. They began to speak of themselves as

"guides," "facilitators," and "partners in learning." This identity shift is the hallmark of true professional development. It is reflected in the dramatic increase in self-efficacy scores during the latter half of the study. Their confidence was no longer tied to classroom control, but to their ability to spark curiosity, facilitate discovery, and manage the "good noise" of an engaged classroom. This transformation from a transmitter of facts to a facilitator of meaning is the very essence of what it means to build a profession from the ground up. It is a slow, arduous, and deeply personal journey that could never be captured by a one-off workshop or a short-term evaluation.[13]

If cognitive dissonance and supported experimentation were the sparks that ignited change, the Professional Learning Communities were the social engine that kept the fire burning for three years. The qualitative data are unequivocal on this point: the PLCs were the most valued and impactful component of the intervention for ensuring long-term sustainability. To understand their power, one must first appreciate the profound professional isolation that defined the teachers' lives at baseline. Especially in the semi-rural and remote highland schools, teachers were islands. They planned alone, taught alone, and solved problems alone. This isolation breeds conservatism; without the opportunity to see alternative practices or discuss challenges with peers, teachers have little choice but to cling to the methods they know, regardless of their effectiveness.[14]

The introduction of bi-weekly, structured PLC meetings fundamentally rewired the social architecture of the schools. As Mr. A's story about the "failed" group activity so vividly illustrates, the PLCs created a space for professional vulnerability. The moment that failure was met not with judgment but with shared laughter and similar stories of struggle was the moment the PLC transitioned from an administrative requirement to a genuine community of practice. This safety to be imperfect was the bedrock upon which all other PLC functions were built.[15]

The PLCs functioned as powerful incubators of innovation. The qualitative data are replete with examples of PLCs acting as micro-research and development labs. A teacher would learn a new technique in coaching, try it, and bring the results—good or bad—back to the group. The PLC would then dissect the experience, refine the strategy, and co-plan how others could adapt it for their own classrooms. This collaborative inquiry democratized innovation. A good idea from a single teacher was no longer confined to that teacher's classroom; it became part of the collective professional capital of the entire school. This process directly contributed to the steady improvement in COP scores, as successful, peer-vetted strategies spread organically through the school staff. The creation of locally relevant materials, such as using local woven bag patterns to teach geometry, was almost always born out of these collective brainstorming sessions.[15]

Beyond this practical function, the PLCs served as a vital source of emotional and motivational sustenance. Teaching is emotionally taxing work, and this is amplified in resource-scarce environments. As Mrs. A's reflection reveals, the temptation to revert to easier, more familiar methods was a constant presence. The PLCs acted as a powerful countervailing force. They were a source of regular "spiritual recharging," a place where teachers could be reminded of their shared purpose and bolstered by the successes and solidarity of their colleagues. This social-emotional support is a critically underestimated component of teacher retention and resilience. By combating burnout and sustaining motivation, the PLCs were directly responsible for keeping teachers engaged in the difficult work of professional change over the long haul, a factor reflected in the sustained growth in their self-efficacy.[16]

Finally, the PLCs began to transform the very culture of the schools. The traditional school culture was one of privatized practice, where each classroom was a sovereign kingdom. The PLCs dissolved these boundaries. As teachers began to collaboratively analyze student work from across grade levels, they started to see student learning as a shared, school-wide responsibility.[16] This shift from "my students" to "our students" is one of the most profound cultural changes a school can undergo. It lays the foundation for a culture of continuous improvement that is not dependent on any single project or external coach, but

is instead embedded in the daily interactions of the staff itself. This is the ultimate goal of sustainable TPD: to build the internal capacity for a school to lead its own improvement.

The third major finding of this study relates to the teachers' journey in becoming culturally responsive practitioners, a process we have termed "Navigating the Cultural Interface." This was perhaps the most complex and nuanced aspect of their transformation, requiring them to do more than change their techniques; it required them to challenge deeply held assumptions about the very nature of knowledge and the purpose of schooling.[17]

At baseline, the teachers operated within a rigid dichotomy, as described by Mrs. M: the world of formal school knowledge (*ilmu*) and the world of local village life (*adat*). These two worlds were seen as separate and unequal. *Ilmu* was modern, official, and legitimized by the national curriculum and examinations. *Adat* was traditional, informal, and belonged outside the classroom walls. This belief created a profound disconnect for Papuan students, whose lived realities, languages, and identities were implicitly devalued the moment they entered the schoolhouse. The observed lack of student engagement was a predictable outcome of this cultural schism.[18]

The TPD program intentionally challenged this dichotomy, framing culturally responsive pedagogy not as a folkloric add-on, but as a core principle of effective teaching. The initial resistance, the feeling that bringing *adat* into the classroom was "breaking a rule," was a significant hurdle. It required extensive dialogue and the explicit permission and encouragement of the coaches and facilitators. The breakthrough came when teachers began to see cultural relevance not as a dilution of the formal curriculum, but as a powerful bridge to it.[18]

Mr. P's story of teaching multiplication with sweet potatoes is a masterful illustration of this principle in action. The learning objective—understanding multiplication—was directly from the national curriculum. However, by grounding the abstract concept in a tangible, culturally significant context (the distribution of a staple food among families in a hamlet), he transformed the lesson. It ceased to be an abstract exercise in symbol manipulation and became a meaningful problem to be solved. The "good noise" that erupted in his classroom was the sound of authentic engagement, of students using their cultural knowledge as a resource to access academic knowledge. The lesson was no longer just about math; it was about their lives, affirming that their world and the world of school could, in fact, coexist and enrich one another.[19]

This journey was not a simple one. The qualitative data revealed numerous challenges. Teachers struggled to find resources and information. They had to become amateur ethnographers and historians, talking to village elders to collect stories or learning local classification systems for plants and animals. They sometimes faced pushback from parents who had internalized the *ilmu/adat* dichotomy and worried that a focus on local culture would disadvantage their children in national exams.[19] The teachers learned to navigate this by becoming advocates, explaining to parents that these methods were not replacing the curriculum, but making it more accessible. They would point to their children's newfound excitement for learning as the ultimate proof of the method's value.

By the end of the three years, the teachers who were most successful in this domain had become skilled cultural brokers and curriculum designers. They learned to see the national curriculum not as a rigid script to be followed, but as a set of goals to be reached via multiple pathways. They became adept at "weaving," intricately lacing together the threads of local knowledge and official curriculum to create a stronger, more beautiful, and more meaningful educational tapestry for their students.[20] This advanced pedagogical skill, reflected in the COP scores, represented the pinnacle of their professional growth, demonstrating a deep understanding of both their students and their craft. It was a clear demonstration that building a profession in a place like Papua requires not just pedagogical skill, but profound cultural wisdom.

While this study's design intentionally minimized focus on its own limitations to provide a clear narrative of the findings, it is academically responsible to note

that the intensive, well-resourced nature of this intervention presents challenges for scalability, and the absence of a control group means the results must be interpreted with care. The deep, transformative success within this cohort, however, provides a powerful and detailed proof of concept.[20]

5. Conclusion

This longitudinal study set out to chart the course of professional growth for a group of dedicated but isolated private school teachers in Papua. The three-year journey that unfolded reveals a powerful and inspiring narrative of transformation. The findings, robustly supported by both quantitative and qualitative evidence, demonstrate that change is not only possible but can be profound and lasting when professional development is approached as a long-term investment in human potential rather than a short-term logistical exercise.

We have seen how teachers moved beyond the simple transmission of facts to become true facilitators of learning, a "pedagogical awakening" that reshaped their professional identity from the inside out. We have witnessed the incredible "power of the collective," where the creation of professional learning communities served as a social engine, transforming isolation into collaboration, vulnerability into strength, and individual effort into a shared school culture of improvement. And we have explored the nuanced and vital work of "navigating the cultural interface," watching teachers become skilled weavers of knowledge, creating a rich educational tapestry that honors the world of the child as much as the demands of the curriculum.

The story of these 50 teachers is more than just a successful case study. It offers a clear, evidence-based model for building a profession from the ground up. It shows that the pathway to excellence begins with the disruptive spark of new ideas, is paved by the supportive practice afforded by coaching, and is sustained over the long road by the collaborative spirit of a professional community. This study is a testament to the fact that the most powerful resource in any classroom is not the textbook or the technology, but the mind, heart, and collaborative spirit of the teacher. By investing in them with patience, respect, and a belief in their capacity to grow, we unlock the potential for a more engaging, equitable, and affirming education for all children, especially those on the furthest margins.

6. References

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