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## INVESTIGATING EFL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS AND PRACTICES OF SELF-DIRECTED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN DONG THAP PROVINCE

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### Abstract

*This research investigates Dong Thap high school English teachers' perceptions and practices of self-directed teacher professional development model. A mixed-methods approach was used as an explanatory sequential design. Quantitative data were collected from 57 teachers via a questionnaire, while the qualitative research was conducted by involving 7 teachers using semi-structured interviews. The findings indicate that the majority of teachers have positive perceptions of the self-directed teacher professional development model and actively participate in various learning activities. However, the implementation of the self-directed teacher professional development is still affected by workload, administrative pressure, and working environment conditions. The research findings indicate that self-directed teacher professional development can be a potential practice for professional development in the Vietnamese context of education reforms.*

**Keywords:** Dong Thap province, EFL teachers, perceptions practices, self-directed learning, teacher professional development (TPD).

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## **NGHIÊN CỨU NHẬN THỨC VÀ THỰC TIỄN ÁP DỤNG MÔ HÌNH PHÁT TRIỂN CHUYÊN MÔN TỰ ĐỊNH HƯỚNG CỦA GIÁO VIÊN TIẾNG ANH TẠI TỈNH ĐỒNG THÁP**

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### **Lịch sử bài báo**

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### **Tóm tắt**

*Nghiên cứu này nhằm khảo sát nhận thức và thực tiễn áp dụng mô hình phát triển chuyên môn tự định hướng của giáo viên tiếng Anh trung học phổ thông tại tỉnh Đồng Tháp. Nghiên cứu sử dụng phương pháp hỗn hợp với thiết kế giải thích tuần tự. Dữ liệu định lượng được thu thập từ 57 giáo viên thông qua bảng hỏi, trong khi dữ liệu định tính được thu thập từ 7 giáo viên thông qua phỏng vấn bán cấu trúc. Kết quả nghiên cứu cho thấy đa số giáo viên có nhận thức tích cực về mô hình phát triển chuyên môn tự định hướng và chủ động tham gia vào nhiều hoạt động học tập khác nhau. Tuy nhiên, việc triển khai mô hình này vẫn chịu ảnh hưởng bởi khối lượng công việc, áp lực hành chính và điều kiện môi trường làm việc. Kết quả nghiên cứu cũng chỉ ra rằng phát triển chuyên môn tự định hướng có tiềm năng trở thành một hướng tiếp cận hiệu quả trong phát triển nghề nghiệp giáo viên trong bối cảnh đổi mới giáo dục tại Việt Nam.*

**Từ khóa:** *Giáo viên tiếng Anh, học tập tự định hướng, nhận thức, phát triển chuyên môn, tỉnh Đồng Tháp, thực hành.*

## **1. Introduction**

On the growing development of English language education, teacher professional development (TPD) is considered a key factor in improving teaching quality and student learning outcomes (Nguyen et al., 2023). Many education systems require teachers to participate in regular professional development (PD) activities. However, this alone is not enough to guarantee effectiveness. Research shows that the success of TPD also depends on the initiative and active participation of teachers in their own learning process (Cirocki & Farrell, 2019). Therefore, TPD should be viewed as a continuous and long-term process rather than merely a formal requirement.

Recent studies have shown that the relevance and design of PD programs play a crucial role in enhancing the effectiveness of TPD. Research indicates that PD activities need to meet the actual needs of teachers to be effective (Saud, 2025). At the same time, teachers are expected to continuously improve their professional competence to meet changes in education (Herda et al., 2024). As a result, many researchers now focus on ways to help teachers take a more active role in their own development. One such method is self-directed learning (SDL), which refers to a learning approach in which individuals plan, organize, and evaluate their own learning process (Robinson & Persky, 2020). When applied to TPD, SDL emphasizes the role of teachers as active and independent learners.

In Vietnam, English plays a crucial role in education and international integration (Putra, 2020). As Vietnam is undertaking educational reforms, especially in English language teaching and learning, research into teachers' perceptions and practices regarding self-directed TPD is necessary and has practical significance (Huynh & Phan, 2025). The government has issued numerous policies aimed at improving the quality of English language teaching, such as the National Foreign Language Project and the Teacher Professional Standards (Ministry of Education and Training, 2014; 2018). These policies aim to enhance teachers' foreign language proficiency and teaching skills. As a result, most teachers consider TPD important for improving their professional knowledge and teaching skills, as well as supporting curriculum reform (Nguyen et al., 2022). However, the effectiveness of TPD remains uneven due to challenges such as limited time, lack of resources, and insufficient support (Pham et al., 2023; Nguyen & Pham, 2024).

Previous studies on TPD have highlighted the important role of self-directed TPD. Phan et al. (2025) showed that teachers highly value SDL in their PD, and regularly share experiences, collaborate, and improve teaching methods. Similarly, Le (2020) indicated that teachers are well aware of their own strengths, weaknesses, and needs, and can therefore proactively develop PD plans. In this context, Dong Thap is considered a locality with many efforts in educational and human resource development (Trung Hung, 2023). Although training programs for teachers have been organized (Tan Phat, 2023), research on the practical implementation of self-directed TPD in this locality is remains limited.

Based on this gap, this research aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What are EFL teachers' perceptions of self-directed TPD?
2. How do EFL teachers implement self-directed approaches in their TPD practices?

## **2. Theoretical Overview**

### **2.1. Teacher Professional Development**

Teacher professional development is a process that facilitates teachers' continuous improvement of their skills and knowledge as educators. While OECD (2009) defines TPD as activities aimed at developing teachers' knowledge, skills, and abilities, Guskey (2002)

considers it a systematic process designed to bring about changes in teachers' practices, beliefs, and attitudes. Still, they agree that TPD helps improve both teaching quality (OECD, 2009) and students' learning outcomes (Guskey, 2002). According to Richards and Farrell (2005), throughout in this long-term learning process, teachers need to continually reflect on and evaluate what they do as teachers and work with each other to develop their professional competencies. Modern research has also emphasized that successful TPD must be closely aligned with teachers' practical needs. Furthermore, it must support the development of complex teaching skills necessary in modern education (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Collin & Smith, 2021). On the other hand, according to Nguyen et al. (2020), TPD is useful for helping teachers meet the demands imposed by education because it improves their knowledge, skills, and professional attitudes. Bui and Nguyen (2022) also point out that TPD contributes to improved student learning outcomes and teaching quality, while supporting teachers in adopting new methods and developing necessary skills such as planning and time management. As a result, TPD plays a vital role in enhancing teachers' professional competencies and promoting student achievement.

## **2.2. Self-Directed Learning in Teacher Professional Development**

Self-directed learning has become a more popular strategy in adult education and TPD. Knowles (1975) views SDL as "a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes" (p. 18). Most of adults' learning activities are planned and carried out by themselves, demonstrating their own central role (Tough, 1979). Other researchers confirm SDL as an integrated learning process, with three major components: self-management, self-monitoring, and learning motivation (Garrison, 1997), and learners set their own goals and select appropriate methods and resources (Park, 2014; Ahmad et al., 2023). For EFL teachers, SDL can be applied in self-assessment, peer review, and PD, enhancing teaching effectiveness (Simegn, 2014). In light of these viewpoints, recent researches have also highlighted the significance of SDL in relation to TPD. SDL is closely related to teacher autonomy and motivation in participating in PD (Lan, 2022). Through SDL, teachers can easily realize their abilities and choose suitable learning activities (Bhatt, 2021). In addition, SDL supports flexible and personalized learning through various forms such as reading, collaboration, and online activities (Kousar et al., 2023). Overall, SDL contributes to teachers' professional growth and promotes lifelong learning (Aisyah et al., 2023).

## **2.3. Teachers' Perceptions and Practices of Teacher Professional Development**

In general, teachers' attitudes towards TPD are positive, as teachers believe that TPD is an essential part of PD and lifelong learning. According to the findings from the study conducted by Tyagi and Misra (2019), most teachers perceive TPD as the process of learning which lasts during their entire career, and 67.1% of the respondents believe that TPD is connected with long-term PD. Teacher perceptions are understood as the thoughts, feelings, and attitudes that teachers develop while working and being in the classroom (Demirdağ & Efe, 2023). Studies indicate that the beliefs and perceptions of teachers about their work greatly affect their practice (Pajares, 1992; Richardson, 1996). These perceptions of a teacher are not formed in a vacuum; rather, they are influenced by a variety of factors related to their past experiences of learning and teaching, the professional environment and culture of collaboration, and the broader environment (Richardson, 1996; Obara, 2011). In addition, PD policies and programs can also create incentives or barriers to teachers' participation in PD activities (Gaible & Burns, 2005; Jeram & Davids, 2020).

The practices of TPD do not only refer to the implementation of theories in the classroom. Rather, it is a process of continuous learning in a particular context of teaching practice. According to Jeram and Davids (2020), practice-based professional learning helps bridge the gap between theories and practice through continuous, collaborative, and supported activities in a real-world context of practice. Besides, professional practice assists in developing professional knowledge through various activities in the classroom, including planning, sharing with colleagues, and reflecting on practice (Ford, 2006). In addition, various studies have shown that teachers' perceptions are closely related to teaching practices; that is, when teachers' perceptions are consistent with theoretical principles, it is easier for them to apply teaching practices more effectively (Richardson et al., 1991). However, in practice, there are various difficulties in implementing theories in practice due to various factors such as conditions and policies in the organization, as well as a lack of resources (Purnomo et al., 2020). Therefore, TPD programs should combine theory with practical activities and support collaboration among teachers (Amemasor et al., 2025).

#### **2.4. Teacher Professional Development in EFL Context**

In EFL contexts, teachers are always in need of PD that is aligned with educational innovations and emerging demands. Firstly, teachers have to develop their language proficiency, in addition to their skill and sub-skill knowledge, which include grammar, vocabulary, discourse, etc. (Isaee & Barjesteh, 2023). Moreover, teachers have to develop their teaching methodologies to increase learning efficiency (Alzahrani & Mohamad Nor, 2021). In addition, teachers have to develop their technological skills, which have become essential in contemporary education (Negi, 2016). In Vietnam, the PD of English teachers is based on policies issued by the state, including the Professional Standards for Teachers and the National Foreign Language Project. The purpose of such policies is to enhance teachers' professional competencies and instructional practices (Ministry of Education and Training, 2014, 2018; Huyen Duc, 2024). Nevertheless, teachers are currently struggling to engage in PD activities because of time and financial limitations (Pham et al., 2023; Nguyen & Pham, 2024). For EFL teachers in Dong Thap province, SDL is viewed as a means of PD through experience sharing, professional collaboration, and improving teaching methods (Phan et al., 2025; Le, 2020). The supportive learning environment and assistance from training institutions such as Dong Thap University contribute to promoting TPD.

#### **2.5. Conceptual framework**

The framework is based on the assumption that teachers' perceptions of self-directed TPD play a fundamental role, directly influencing their practices in the workplace. The perceptions of the teachers about PD impact the motivation and engagement level of the teachers, their professional competencies (Jaewoo & Woonsun, 2021; Alnefaie, 2021). According to Louws (2017), teachers' perceptions of self-directed TPD have three main parts: *what they want to learn, how they want to learn, and why they want to learn*. Self-directed TPD is undertaken by teachers who take responsibility for managing and monitoring their own learning through goal-setting, selecting learning activities, and assessing their progress (Mushayikwa & Lubben, 2009; Garrison, 1997). Motivation is important in this process because it affects how much effort teachers put into their learning. Moreover, self-management and self-monitoring skills are important in this learning process since they provide teachers with a mechanism for controlling both external and internal factors during learning (Garrison, 1997; Richards & Farrell, 2005).

### **3. Data and research methods**

This research was conducted using a mixed-method research approach following an explanatory sequential design model (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), in which the process began

with data collection and analysis of quantitative data and was followed by the collection and analysis of qualitative data to further explain the results. During the first phase, data were collected from 57 high school EFL teachers in Dong Thap province. A structured questionnaire was used, which was developed based on the research objectives, conceptual framework, and previous studies on self-directed TPD. The instrument used a 5-point Likert scale to examine teachers' perceptions and practices (Nemoto & Beglar, 2014). Participants were selected through convenience sampling due to accessibility (Golzar et al., 2022). In the second phase, 7 teachers were purposively selected based on survey results and demographic diversity to participate in semi-structured interviews (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Tajik et al., 2024). The interview protocol consisted of two main domains with 22 questions. It was developed based on the research questions, the theoretical framework, and quantitative findings, allowing in-depth exploration while maintaining flexibility (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021).

**Table 1. Reliability Statistics of the Survey**

<b>Reliability Statistics</b>	<b>Number of items</b>	<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>
Domain 1: Perceptions on self-directed TPD	9	0.827
Domain 2: Self-directed TPD process and activities	13	0.884
All items	22	0.846

The Cronbach's Alpha of the survey is 0.846, which indicates a high level of reliability. For each question group, the Alpha coefficients is 0.827 for domain 1, and 0.884 for domain 2. All these values are greater than 0.7, indicating the reliability of the scales (Shammout, 2007). Therefore, the scales are considered reliable and suitable for further data analysis. Frequency, percentage, means, and standard deviations were used to identify trends on how teachers perceived and practiced self-directed TPD. For the qualitative data analysis, thematic analysis was used to identify major themes on teachers' experiences and viewpoints on self-directed TPD from responses collected from semi-structured interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Combining both qualitative and quantitative data led to better knowledge about the problem under study and increased the reliability of results. The ethical requirements such as informed consent, voluntarism, and confidentiality were followed during this research (Hasan et al., 2021).

**4. Results and discussion**

**4.1. Results**

*4.1.1. Findings from the questionnaire*

*a. Teachers' Perceptions of self-directed Teacher Professional Development*

**Table 2. Teachers' Perceptions of Self-directed Teacher Professional Development**

<b>Statement</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
1. I believe that self-directed is an important element in TPD.	4.40	0.863
2. I think teachers should set their own goals and direct their own learning.	4.37	0.919
3. I believe that self-directed learning meets the diverse abilities and needs of teachers.	4.26	0.877

Statement	Mean	SD
4. I believe that self-directed learning helps improve teaching effectiveness.	4.33	0.873
5. I believe that each teacher's motivation and beliefs influence the level and process of their participation in self-directed TPD.	4.32	0.848
6. I think Self-monitoring and Self-assessment are ineffective for TPD.	3.42	1.336
7. I think self-directed learning does not help me increase my autonomy.	3.63	1.263
8. I think self-directed learning does not help increase professional responsibility.	3.75	1.184
9. I believe that self-directed learning is interesting and beneficial for my career.	4.28	0.840

As shown in Table 2, teachers have positive attitudes toward self-directed TPD, with an overall mean score of 4.09 (SD = 0.66). The reliability test for the scale achieves a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.827, indicating good reliability. All variables are retained because the variable-total correlation coefficients are all greater than 0.30. According to the findings, teachers highly value the importance of self-directed TPD. In particular, teachers consider SDL as of crucial importance for their PD (M = 4.40), and believe that teachers should design their own goals and direct their own learning process (M = 4.37). Moreover, teachers are of the view that SDL can meet the different needs and abilities of teachers (M = 4.26), improve their teaching competence (M = 4.33), and be influenced by their personal motivation and beliefs (M = 4.32). Teachers also find SDL an enjoyable activity that helps them in their PD (M = 4.28). Nonetheless, some items concerning self-regulation, autonomy, and professional responsibility record relatively high standard deviations, varying between 1.18 and 1.34. These show a wide range of opinions among teachers regarding the effectiveness of these factors in SDL.

*b. Teachers' Practices of self-directed Teacher Professional Development*

**Table 3. Teachers' Practices of Self-directed Teacher Professional Development**

Statement	Mean	SD
1. I know how to manage my learning process.	4.18	0.782
2. I have difficulty proactively deciding on learning methods and approaches that suit my personal needs.	3.11	1.175
3. I regularly monitor my own learning progress and results.	4.04	0.823
4. I have difficulty maintaining long-term self-directed learning motivation.	3.07	1.178
5. I actively engage in self-directed learning because it is necessary and beneficial to my teaching work.	4.11	0.859

**Section 1: Teacher's self-directed TPD Process**

	<b>Statement</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
<b>Section 2: Teacher's self-directed Learning Activities</b>	1. I often watch classroom demonstration videos to learn.	3.75	1.057
	2. I read professional books to improve my professional knowledge.	4.19	0.854
	3. I write a journal to reflect on my learning process and self-assessment.	3.53	1.136
	4. I rarely conduct case studies in my classroom.	3.32	1.167
	5. I know how to analyze real-life situations to find solutions to problems in teaching.	4.00	0.824
	6. I apply the knowledge gained from real-life situations to my teaching.	4.16	0.727
	7. I participate in online courses as needed to improve my professional skills.	3.96	0.865
	8. I rarely observe my colleagues' classes to learn from their experience.	3.75	1.214

From Table 3, it is seen that teachers are engaged in SDL as part of their PD to a certain extent. The reliability of the scale is quite solid since the Cronbach's Alpha is 0.884. This means that the measures are reliable and the variables meet the requirements.

Regarding the SDL process, teachers demonstrate a relatively high level of engagement ( $M = 3.70$ ,  $SD = 0.667$ ). While they report strong abilities in managing their learning ( $M = 4.18$ ) and monitoring progress ( $M = 4.04$ ), some challenges still evident. Specifically, teachers report moderate difficulty in proactively selecting appropriate learning methods ( $M = 3.11$ ) and maintaining long-term motivation ( $M = 3.07$ ). These findings suggest that, although teachers are generally capable of engaging in SDL, certain aspects of the process remain challenging.

With regard to SDL activities, the teachers' average score is  $M = 3.83$  ( $SD = 0.692$ ). Teachers have participated in activities such as reading professional literature ( $M = 4.19$ ), applying knowledge from the real world to their teaching ( $M = 4.16$ ), and analyzing the real world to find solutions ( $M = 4.00$ ). They also tend to participate in online courses if they are needed ( $M = 3.96$ ) and watch video lectures ( $M = 3.75$ ).

### *c. Summary*

The results show that teachers consider self-directed TPD as important and valuable for their growth as professionals. The reliability of the data collected through the scales is satisfactory. Thus, it is ready for analysis. Furthermore, it is observed that teachers are moderately engaged in SDL activities, focusing more on individual activities that can be applied directly to teaching situations. However, teachers still don't fully use activities like reflection and working together.

#### *4.1.2. Findings from the interviews*

##### *a. Teachers' Perceptions of self-directed Teacher Professional Development*

The results of the interview analysis indicate that the perception of teachers on self-directed TPD has three major themes: autonomy and ownership in PD; the importance of adapting to the context of educational innovation; and motivation and basis for defining learning goals. First, most teachers see self-directed TPD as an active and responsible learning process. In this process, they identify their own learning needs, set goals, find learning materials, and evaluate their learning outcomes. According to one teacher, "it is a shift from 'having to learn' to 'wanting to learn'" (Teacher 1, IQ1). Another teacher added that "it is a process where teachers define their own goals, plan their implementation, and adjust as needed" (Teacher 3, IQ1). This shared perception among teachers showed that they no longer saw PD as something they had to do. Rather, it is a self-direction and ownership of their own profession.

Moreover, SDL is seen as an important way for teachers to adapt to changes in the educational environment. Some teachers have the perspective that "If they do not self-direct, they will quickly fall behind the development of their students" (Teacher 7, IQ2). On the other hand, the motivation to learn comes from the actual needs of the teaching situation. This is the perspective of one teacher on how they set their learning goals: "I usually base my goals on: The actual needs of the students... the requirements of the curriculum... or the limitations I have identified in my teaching experience." (Teacher 2, IQ3). On the other hand, the motivation to engage in self-directed TPD comes from a variety of sources. Some sources are "professional pride" (Teacher 1, IQ5) or the motivation to "improve teaching effectiveness and help students at specialized schools access the most advanced knowledge" (Teacher 7, IQ5). self-directed TPD is recognized by the teachers as a goal-oriented, planned, and personalized learning activity to proactively adapt to the teaching environment.

##### *b. Teachers' Practices of self-directed Teacher Professional Development*

The analysis of the interview data shows four main themes of teachers' self-directed TPD. These include starting from practical problems and reflection, self-management and motivation, forms of SDL, and the influence of context and adaptability.

*Firstly*, the process of self-directed TPD begins with identifying specific classroom problems and reflecting on teaching. Most teachers mentioned that they often observe and record the difficulties in teaching and try to solve these problems. For instance, one teacher mentioned that "...At the end of each teaching day, I usually note down what went well and what didn't. When the 'not going well' is repeated enough times, it becomes a problem that I am forced to find a solution to..." (Teacher 1, IQ1). Some other teachers mentioned that the process of learning started from specific difficulties in teaching. For instance, one teacher mentioned that "I usually start by identifying a specific problem in the classroom, for example: students lack confidence when speaking English." (Teacher 4, IQ 1). It can be identified that self-directed TPD is highly associated with classroom practices and the goal of improving students' learning outcomes.

*Secondly*, to ensure the sustainability of the learning process, teachers also engage in self-management activities, especially by dividing the learning process into specific steps. A teacher observed that "Learning alone is very discouraging, so I usually break down my goals" (Teacher 1, IQ2). At the same time, the motivation for learning is mainly driven by the students' learning process and the need to enhance the quality of teaching. A teacher observed that "Seeing students improve is the greatest motivation" (Teacher 2, IQ2). This indicates that self-directed TPD is not only a learning process but also a process of self-management to ensure motivation for professional learning.

*Thirdly*, teachers engage in self-directed TPD activities using various learning approaches. The learning approaches include reading professional literature, engaging in online learning activities, watching webinars, sharing ideas with other teachers, observing students' learning processes, and engaging in reflection journals. For example, some teachers read literature on academic websites or engage in online learning activities: "...Watch videos illustrating effective teaching methods and classroom models, read professional books, documents, and professional guidance texts. Participate in online or in-person courses, workshops, and training..." (Teacher 3, IQ 5). Some teachers also engage in action research or analyze students' learning processes to update their teaching methods "One of the most effective activities for me is action research" (Teacher 1, IQ 5), "...In particular, the most effective activity for me is researching and analyzing real-life classroom situations." (Teacher 5, IQ 5). This indicates that self-directed TPD is implemented through learning activities.

*Finally*, the data suggest that the context of the school work affects the process of self-directed TPD. For instance, many teachers complained that administrative pressures, including paperwork, were the major obstacles for their self-learning (Teacher 1-7, IQ6). However, under the favorable context of the school, teachers were more willing to learn and improve professionally (Teacher 5, Teacher 6, IQ6). Meanwhile, when teachers experienced difficulties, they were willing to adjust the learning goals, methods, etc. (Teacher 2, Teacher 5, IQ7). This implies that self-directed TPD is a proactive, continuous, adaptive learning process.

### *c. Summary*

From the analysis of the findings from the interview results, it is clear that teachers are able to handle self-directed TPD well and are actively engaged in their own PD. This is because teachers see self-directed TPD as a personal and independent learning experience. They are motivated to identify their own learning needs and flexibly respond to educational demands through activities such as identifying classroom problems, taking online courses, and engaging in professional reflection. It is important to note that the teachers are proactive and flexible in dealing with the demands of education.

## **4.2. Discussion**

### *4.2.1. Teachers' Perceptions of self-directed Teacher Professional Development*

From the survey and interview results, it can be concluded that teachers have positive and consistent views on self-directed TPD. This is supported by past research showing that teachers usually value autonomy and individual responsibility when engaging in PD activities (Lan, 2022; Limbu, 2020). Though there is a high degree of consensus on the role of self-direction among teachers. According to the survey results, the interview data suggest that teachers perceive self-directed TPD as being goal-oriented and individually responsible learning activity. This suggests a movement from the concept of "training" to "self-training", as pointed out by Little (1995) in relation to teacher autonomy. Moreover, educational innovation is now becoming one of the major motivators for encouraging teacher engagement in self-directed TPD. This is consistent with the claim made by Jeram and Davids (2020) that any change to the curriculum necessitates the involvement of teachers in TPD. While it is evident from the survey results that teachers view self-directed TPD positively and how it contributes to improving their teaching efficacy, the interview findings give more insight into their motivation. According to the findings, teachers are not only motivated by external motivations but also by internal motivators such as professional pride, curiosity, and passion in teaching. Generally, these results are in line with earlier studies which show that teachers' perceptions and beliefs significantly influence their participation in PD programs (Pajares, 1992; Demirdağ & Efe, 2023).

#### *4.2.2. Teachers' Practices of self-directed Teacher Professional Development*

The comparison of survey and interview results proves that teachers not only have positive attitudes towards SDL but also apply them during their TPD. As indicated by the survey outcomes, teachers regularly perform self-directed TPD in different forms, for example, through reading professional literature, attending online training courses, and applying the new acquired information in the process of teaching. These results correlate with the conclusions made by Kousar et al. (2023) concerning the wide range of activities of self-directed TPD. Nevertheless, the interview results analyzed this issue from a different perspective. Specifically, teachers apply self-directed TPD practices to solve specific problems in their classes, for instance, ineffective lessons and changes in curricula. Such facts prove that professional learning is related to the practical aspects of teaching (Jeram & Davids, 2020). Furthermore, teachers use self-management and self-monitoring practices recommended by Garrison (1997), and mentioned by Jeram & Davids (2020), which consist in setting goals, motivating themselves, and changing strategies. At the same time, there is evidence that different teachers may not be equally engaged in these processes. Some of them engage themselves into activities like peer observation, reflective journaling, or action research, while others do that less often. This is influenced, to some extent, by organizational variables, as noted by Gaible and Burns (2005), whereby workload and administrative demands affect teachers' participation in SDL. Overall, it is evident that there is high coherence between quantitative and qualitative findings. Whereas the survey indicates the general engagement of teachers in self-directed TPD, the interview gives more insight into the process of learning, particularly how teachers plan and manage their PD within the constraints of the context.

### **5. Conclusion and implications**

The purpose of this article is to explore the perceptions of high school English teachers in Dong Thap province on the self-directed TPD model. The findings revealed that teachers have a positive perception on the importance of SDL in PD. Teachers are proactive in all kinds of learning activities such as reading professional literature, taking online courses, etc. Meanwhile, the implementation of self-directed TPD is also influenced by some objective factors, including workload, pressure from the administration, and working environment conditions. In general, however, teachers are active participants in self-directed learning activities for improving their knowledge, teaching competence, and professional ability.

However, the implementation of self-directed TPD is also subject to some objective factors like workload, administrative pressure, and the school environment. These factors can limit the time teachers have for TPD activities. Despite all these challenges, teachers still try to take part in SDL to enhance their knowledge, teaching skills, and professional competence. This suggests that self-directed TPD has the potential to become an important approach for supporting teacher PD in the context of the current educational reforms. This paper contributes to the existing literature by providing empirical data based on the Vietnamese experience regarding teachers' perception and practice of self-directed TPD in real teaching situations.

The study results suggest several implications for improving the effectiveness of self-directed TPD. Firstly, schools and educational management agencies should create more favorable conditions for teachers to participate in PD activities. This can be done by reducing the administrative burden and time management in a more efficient way. In addition, learning communities both within and outside the school setting should also be developed. This can serve as a platform for sharing experiences and learning resources among teachers. Additionally, teachers can share experiences and solve problems together. Moreover, workshops or training need to be done on self-directed TPD. This can be a platform for teachers to develop their ability to identify their learning needs and set appropriate learning goals.

However, this study has some limitations, including the relatively small sample size and the focus on one province, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. In further studies, the scope of the research could be expanded to other educational levels or regions. This would help provide a deeper understanding of the application of self-directed TPD in the Vietnamese education sector. At the same time, further studies could examine other factors that affect the implementation of self-directed TPD. This would help propose more suitable solutions to support TPD. This could help acquire a deeper understanding of the role played by self-directed TPD in improving the quality of TPD.

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