

Foreword

In the era of globalization, technology, and artificial intelligence (AI), the entire world is witnessing rapid and unprecedented changes. In light of these transformations driven by technological advancements, automation, and interconnectedness of the global economy, there is a pressing need for professional development in diverse fields. Professional development is a dynamic and continuous process that individuals engage in to enhance their skills, knowledge, and effectiveness within their chosen profession. The goal of professional development is to foster ongoing learning and growth. This intentional effort goes beyond initial training, recognizing that the evolving nature of professions requires individuals to stay current, adapt to change, and continually refine their expertise.

In language education, similarly, the dynamic educational landscape shaped by globalization and the emergence of technological and AI tools underscores the vital necessity for educators to engage in a continuous process of learning, growth, and refinement of teaching practices to meet the evolving needs of students and the changing terrain of language education. Through continuing professional development, educators enhance their pedagogical skills, stay updated on the latest linguistic theories and teaching methodologies, and incorporate technological advancements into their practices. This ongoing learning process helps educators create a more engaging and effective learning environment for their students.

This special issue on “Professional Development in Language Education” is dedicated to exploring issues, challenges, and practices associated with professional development in language education. It features three articles that delve into critical areas of teacher professional development in language education, ranging from fostering essential 21st century skills such as critical thinking to addressing the unique needs of substitute teachers and leveraging professional learning communities for sustained development.

Yang and Mak’s paper explores one important 21st century skill – critical thinking (CT) – that features prominently in the language curricula of different educational contexts in the world, such as China, Hong Kong, and

Singapore. While much of the CT literature has focused on language teachers' critical instruction, Yang and Mak's study advances our understanding of CT and CT instruction by zeroing in on language teacher educators' beliefs and practices regarding the preparation of pre-service language teachers to be critical thinkers and to teach CT in their future language classrooms. Although the study was conducted in the EFL context, the study provides valuable insights about how CT and CT instruction can be nurtured in language teacher education programs.

In another paper about teacher professional development, Liu and Hong address an understudied group of teachers – substitute teachers in Taiwan – and investigate their professional development through the adaptive expertise lens. While the two substitute teachers in the study possessed teacher training qualifications and displayed some attributes of adaptive expertise, such as professional knowledge and professional agency, their development of adaptive expertise was hindered by the constraints they faced as substitute teachers, including job insecurity and low self-efficacy. The study presents a novel perspective on research into teachers' adaptive expertise, uncovering the professional development needs of a group of teachers who typically receive less attention in the teacher professional development literature.

The final paper by Chiang Kwun Man wraps up the special issue by shedding important light on the mechanism of teacher professional development (TPD) within the professional learning community (PLC). Focusing on EFL teachers, Chiang proposes a model of teacher professional development that captures the complexity of TPD by explicating the interplay of influencing factors at the micro-, meso-, exo-, macro-, and chrono-levels. The ecological model offers a nuanced understanding of the complexity involved in TPD within EFL teachers' PLCs, with valuable practical implications for maximizing TPD through PLCs.

Collectively, these contributions highlight the complexity and importance of professional development in language education, offering actionable insights for educators, policymakers, and researchers to navigate the changing educational landscape. We strongly believe that there are other domains of professional development in language education that need further exploration, including the integration of AI tools, intercultural competence, and strategies for fostering inclusivity in diverse classrooms.

We, therefore, invite you to read and critically engage with us in this evolving and multifaceted phenomenon: professional development in language education in foreign language studies.

Special Issue Editors,
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