

Professional Development and Teacher Efficacy in Kachin State, Myanmar: A Qualitative Study

Lum Pan Hpaulu

Inclusive Education, School of Advanced Studies, Saint Louis University, Baguio City, Philippines

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates how professional development (PD) influences teaching confidence and pedagogical effectiveness among high school educators in Maijayang, Kachin State, Myanmar—a region severely impacted by political instability and systemic resource scarcity. Utilizing a qualitative phenomenological approach, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten high school teachers to capture their lived experiences. Data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis framework. Findings reveal that while PD programs successfully enhance internal self-efficacy and promote student-centered instructional strategies, severe infrastructural limitations—specifically frequent power outages and lack of internet access—substantially hinder the implementation of digital or high-tech training models. Consequently, educators adapt by relying heavily on peer-to-peer mentoring and localized solution-sharing as primary drivers for sustained professional growth. This research underscores that standard, high-tech PD frameworks are often ineffective in crisis-affected environments. Ultimately, the study highlights the urgent need for context-sensitive educational interventions, emphasizing that training in resource-limited and conflict-disrupted settings must pivot toward practical, low-resource strategies and community-built support networks to foster sustainable pedagogical resilience.

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Corresponding Author:

Lum Pan Hpaulu,

Inclusive Education, School of Advanced Studies, Saint Louis University, Baguio City, Philippines

Email: panhpaulu@gmail.com

1. INTRODUCTION

The beliefs, practices, and attitudes of educators are crucial determinants of educational quality, directly shaping classroom environments and student achievement (Flint et al., 2024; Gale et al., 2021). Teaching is a demanding profession that requires not only subject mastery and pedagogical skills, but also resilience and emotional character. Didion et al. (2026) notes that professional development (PD) initiates vital changes to improve classroom practices, teacher attitudes, and student learning outcomes. These efforts are closely correlated with teacher efficacy—defined as an

educator's confidence in their ability to influence student performance and manage challenging classroom dynamics (Kahmann et al., 2022).

Globally, professional development serves as a primary mechanism to bridge educational policy and everyday classroom practice (Ab Kadir, 2023; Darling-Hammond, 2017). Effective PD provides active learning opportunities that generate mastery experiences, bolstering pedagogical self-assurance (Asterhan & Lefstein, 2024; Gore et al., 2017; Sims et al., 2025). Conversely, poorly designed or one-size-fits-all training often fails to translate into classroom efficacy and can accelerate teacher burnout (Kennedy et al., 2021; Merchie et al., 2018). Furthermore, modern educational demands require teachers to manage highly diverse classrooms through inclusive frameworks such as Differentiated Instruction (DI) and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) (Capp, 2017; Griful-Freixenet et al., 2017; Kieran & Anderson, 2019).

However, the efficacy of professional development depends heavily on local socio-political and infrastructural contexts. In Myanmar, the educational ecosystem has historically struggled with centralization, underfunding, and limited formal teacher training structures (Rinehart & Tyrosvoutis, 2023; Ulla, 2017). Although the National Education Strategic Plan initiated reforms in 2016 to modernize basic education (Phyo & Theint, 2024; Lall, 2020), these efforts frequently stalled and marginalized ethnic nationality regions. This fragile educational landscape was further fractured by the dual crises of the early 2020s—specifically the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2021 political shifts—creating a severe "double burden" across the Burmese educational system (Nanthakorn et al., 2023).

In regions like Kachin State, formal state education infrastructure faced severe disruptions, leading to widespread teacher shortages, a deepening digital divide, and the suspension of government-led professional development programs (Tsai, 2026). Consequently, schools in locales such as Maijyang operate outside the formal state apparatus, relying heavily on community-led initiatives and non-state education providers to sustain learning (Htut et al., 2022; Tsai, 2026). In this decentralized, under-resourced environment, the definition and function of professional development shift from implementing rigid national standards toward basic instructional survival, trauma-informed pedagogy, and maintaining student engagement amid chronic uncertainty (Desimone & Pak, 2017; Opfer & Pedder, 2018).

While extensive research exists on teacher efficacy and professional development broadly, empirical studies examining these dynamics within crisis-affected, non-state educational settings in Myanmar remain extremely scarce. Previous local studies have investigated general self-efficacy or job satisfaction in other parts of Myanmar (Latt & Wei, 2025; Phyo & Theint, 2024), but none have explored how high school teachers in Maijyang internalize professional development to build and sustain their teaching efficacy under severe geopolitical and infrastructural constraints.

To address this gap, this study investigates the central research question: How does professional development influence the teaching efficacy of high school educators in Maijyang, Kachin State, Myanmar? By examining this context, the study highlights

how informal, community-driven professional development and peer mentorship foster teacher resilience when formal state-led frameworks collapse.

2. METHOD

This study employed qualitative phenomenological research design. Phenomenology is well-suited for capturing the lived experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of individuals regarding specific phenomena (Creswell & Poth, 2016)—in this case, how high school teachers perceive the impact of professional development on their teaching efficacy within a crisis-affected setting. The participants comprised ten ($n = 10$) high school teachers currently teaching at Maijayang High School in Kachin State, Myanmar. Participant demographic profiles—including teaching experience, assigned subject areas, and educational background—were documented during recruitment to ensure maximum variation in qualitative narratives while maintaining strict confidentiality. A purposive sampling technique was utilized based on the following inclusion criteria:

- Currently teaching full-time at the high school level in Maijayang.
- Having participated in at least one formal, informal, or community-led professional development program within the preceding three years.
- Possessing a minimum of two years of teaching experience, enabling them to reflect on changes in their instructional efficacy over time.

Data was gathered through semi-structured, in-depth interviews. An interview guide was developed featuring open-ended questions targeting three core domains:

- The nature, format, and frequency of professional development programs attended.
- Perceived changes in classroom management, instructional delivery, and student engagement post-PD.
- Specific infrastructural, contextual, and political barriers in Kachin State limiting the practical application of learned strategies.

Due to regional sensitivities and mobility restrictions in conflict-affected areas, initial coordination and scheduling protocols were established in consultation with academic administrative personnel. Interviews were conducted securely, audio-recorded with explicit informed consent, and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

The qualitative data collected were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2019) thematic analysis framework:

- Familiarization: Transcripts were read and re-read multiple times to immerse the researcher in the data.
- Coding: Initial codes were generated by highlighting significant statements concerning teacher confidence, instructional shifts, and resource constraints.
- Searching for Themes: Codes were collated into broader candidate themes capturing shared patterns of meaning across participants.
- Reviewing Themes: Themes were cross-checked against the coded extracts and the entire dataset to ensure internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity.

- Defining and Naming Themes: Final thematic labels and definitions were established, supported by verbatim participant excerpts.

To ensure credibility and trustworthiness, data triangulation was performed by cross-referencing interview narratives with observational field notes and informal peer debriefings. Ethical protocols strictly adhered to informed consent, voluntary participation, and guaranteed data anonymization to protect participants operating within a fragile political environment.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Based on the thematic analysis of the semi-structured interviews conducted with the ten high school teachers, three major themes emerged regarding the impact of professional development on teacher efficacy in Maijayang High School.

Theme 1: Navigating Instructional Adaptability

Participants universally indicated that recent professional development efforts, though sparse, were vital in helping them pivot their instructional strategies. Teachers reported that collaborative workshops provided them with the confidence to move away from rigid, rote-memorization tactics toward more student-centered approaches.

"Before the localized training last year, I strictly followed the textbook because I was afraid of losing control of the class. The workshop showed us how to manage group work safely, and now I feel much more capable of keeping the students engaged." (Participant 3)

Another participant echoed this sentiment regarding lesson planning and interactive inquiry:

"Learning how to break down complex topics into smaller collaborative tasks changed my classroom. Even with limited textbooks, I feel confident that my students understand the concepts better through active participation." (Participant 1)

The qualitative data presented in Theme 1 highlights that despite being sparse, recent professional development efforts are critical in empowering educators to pivot their instructional strategies. Specifically, collaborative workshops provide teachers with the necessary confidence to transition away from rigid, rote-memorization tactics toward more dynamic, student-centered approaches. This psychological and methodological shift is exemplified by Participant 3, who noted that localized training alleviated the fear of losing classroom control and equipped them with safe group-work management skills to keep students actively engaged.

Furthermore, this adaptive capability directly enhances teachers' lesson planning and interactive inquiry capacities within resource-constrained environments. As articulated by Participant 1, learning how to break down complex topics into smaller collaborative tasks fundamentally transforms classroom dynamics, instilling confidence that students can grasp concepts better through active participation even when textbooks are limited. These findings underscore that targeted professional development serves as a catalyst

for breaking defensive, textbook-bound teaching habits, fostering a resilient pedagogical mindset capable of thriving amidst adversity.

Theme 2: The Double Burden of Infrastructure and Application

A recurring sub-theme was the frustration of heightened pedagogical efficacy without the means of physical execution. Several teachers noted that while PD seminars on digital literacy and modern instructional tools made them feel theoretically capable, the infrastructural realities of Kachin State severely hampered their actual classroom execution.

"We learned excellent methods for integrating multimedia into our lessons. I felt so empowered. But when I returned to Maijyang, rolling blackouts and lack of internet meant I couldn't use any of it. My confidence dropped immediately." (Participant 7)

Another teacher highlighted the mismatch between advanced technological training and local classroom realities:

"Training programs often assume we have computers, projectors, and stable electricity. When we face overcrowded classrooms with broken furniture and no power, trying to apply high-tech strategies causes immense stress rather than improving our teaching." (Participant 5)

The findings within Theme 2 identify a crucial pedagogical dissonance, wherein teachers experience an increase in theoretical efficacy from professional development training yet remain constrained by severe physical infrastructure barriers in the field. This gap creates profound frustration because the realities in Kachin State—such as rolling blackouts and a lack of internet access—directly paralyze teachers' ability to execute the modern methods they have just learned. This is reflected in the experience of Participant 7, who felt highly empowered when learning multimedia integration, but whose self-confidence dropped immediately upon returning to Maijyang due to the absence of electricity and internet networks.

Furthermore, data interpretation reveals a stark mismatch between the assumptions of advanced training programs and the realities of severely limited local classrooms. As emphasized by Participant 5, training programs often assume the availability of computers, projectors, and a stable power supply, whereas teachers instead face overcrowded classrooms with broken furniture and no electrical power. Attempting to force the application of high-tech strategies ultimately fails to improve teaching quality, instead generating immense psychological pressure and stress for educators in conflict zones.

Theme 3: Peer-to-Peer Mentorship as the Primary Efficacy Builder

In the absence of formal, state-sponsored PD, the teachers in Maijyang have heavily relied on localized, peer-led professional development. The data revealed that teachers derived their strongest sense of self-efficacy not from external experts, but from collaborative problem-solving with their immediate colleagues navigating the same crisis.

"The government programs stopped, so we started training each other. Sharing how we traumatized students or lack of materials gave me the strength to keep teaching. Knowing my peers trust my methods validate my capability more than any certificate." (Participant 10)

A fellow educator added:

"We hold informal sharing sessions every Friday afternoon. We discussed what lesson failed that week and how to fix it together. This mutual support builds our confidence far more effectively than one-off external workshops." (Participant 4)

In the absence of formal, state-sponsored professional development, teachers in Maijyang have heavily relied on localized, peer-led professional development. Data revealed that teachers derived their strongest sense of self-efficacy not from external experts, but from collaborative problem-solving with their immediate colleagues navigating the same crisis. This is underscored by Participant 10, who stated that the halt of government programs pushed teachers to train one another, noting that sharing stories about traumatized students or material shortages gave them the strength to keep teaching, and knowing that peers trusted their methods provided validation of their capabilities far beyond any formal certificate.

Furthermore, this practice of mutual support is institutionalized through consistent and sustainable informal sharing sessions at the grassroots level. As added by Participant 4, educators regularly hold sharing sessions every Friday afternoon to discuss lesson failures from that week and figure out fixes together. This mutual support proves capable of building confidence far more effectively than one-off external workshops, confirming that peer collaboration serves as a vital professional resilience strategy during crises.

Discussion

The findings of this qualitative study underscore the complex, multifaceted relationship between professional development and teacher efficacy in resource-constrained, conflict-affected educational settings. The emergence of Theme 1 (Navigating Instructional Adaptability) confirms that professional development directly impacts teachers' internal self-assurance and pedagogical willingness to adopt student-centered methods (Darling-Hammond, 2017; Noben et al., 2021). When teachers acquire tangible classroom management and interactive strategies, their perceived self-efficacy increases, aligning with Bandura's social cognitive theory regarding mastery experiences (Yin et al., 2022). Furthermore, teachers transition from defensive, textbook-bound teaching to flexible instruction when provided with practical tools by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (Mitchell et al., 2018; Smith et al., 2020). This cognitive shift underscores that effective professional learning must fundamentally target teachers' psychological readiness before expecting methodological transformation in challenging environments.

However, the findings captured in Theme 2 (The Double Burden of Infrastructure and Application) reveal a critical contextual friction that standard Western and centralized professional development literature often overlooks. While training

enhances cognitive preparedness, severe infrastructural deficits—such as chronic power outages, internet blackouts, and scarce learning materials—generate profound pedagogical dissonance. This reality supports [Nanthakorn et al. \(2023\)](#), who identified the "double burden" borne by educators in post-2021 Myanmar, where political instability and technological deprivation actively counteract modernization efforts in education. When teachers cannot apply what they learned due to systemic barriers, initial surges in confidence can rapidly transform into frustration and burnout ([Merchie et al., 2018](#)).

Crucially, Theme 3 (Peer-to-Peer Mentorship as the Primary Efficacy Builder) demonstrates a major theoretical adaptation in crisis settings. In Maijayang, where formal state-sponsored professional development has collapsed, collective efficacy forged through peer-to-peer collaboration serves as the primary engine for professional resilience. Rather than relying on top-down, expert-led seminars, teachers in non-state, crisis-affected schools sustain their instructional efficacy through localized solidarity, shared trauma-informed practices, and mutual problem-solving ([Brunzell et al., 2019](#); [Desimone & Pak, 2017](#); [Luthar & Mendes, 2020](#)). This indicates that in fragile states, effective teacher development must be reconceptualized not as episodic formal training but as continuous, community-embedded professional learning networks.

Synthesizing these three dimensions offers a broader theoretical contribution to educational reform frameworks in protracted crises. While Bandura's traditional paradigms emphasize individual mastery, our findings suggest that in high-stress, under-resourced ecosystems, collective agency heavily mediates the relationship between external professional development and internal resilience. Consequently, policy initiatives cannot simply transplant standardized capacity-building models from stable contexts into conflict zones. Doing so ignores the systemic friction highlighted in Theme 2 and undermines the organic coping mechanisms identified in Theme 3. Sustainable interventions must instead bridge the gap between individual skill acquisition and localized infrastructural realities.

Ultimately, advancing teacher professional development in fragile contexts demands a shift from bureaucratic compliance to adaptive, grassroots ecosystem support. Educational stakeholders and non-governmental organizations operating in regions like northern Myanmar must design frameworks that directly mitigate infrastructural constraints while formally validating informal peer networks. By institutionalizing localized mentorship and supplying resilient, low-tech instructional resources, future programs can transform the "double burden" into a catalyst for community-driven educational endurance. Future research should empirically examine how such decentralized professional learning networks scale across diverse post-conflict geographies without losing their localized responsiveness.

4. CONCLUSION

This qualitative study explored the influence of professional development on the teaching efficacy of high school educators in Maijayang High School, Kachin State, Myanmar. Utilizing a phenomenological approach with ten teachers, the research

concludes that while structured professional development enhances instructional adaptability and internal confidence, its practical success is heavily mediated by severe infrastructural and political constraints. The discovery of the "infrastructural double burden" highlights the fundamental mismatch between high-tech training models and the reality of chronic power and internet outages in conflict-affected regions. Consequently, educators in Maijyang have successfully substituted formal state programs with robust peer-to-peer mentorship networks, proving that collective solidarity and localized problem-solving are vital for sustaining teacher efficacy amidst systemic fragility.

Notwithstanding these insights, the study is limited by its qualitative scope focusing on a single non-state institution with a sample of ten participants, which restricts broader statistical generalizability; thus, future research should pursue longitudinal investigations across multiple ethnic educational jurisdictions in Myanmar to track long-term impacts. Addressing these structural gaps requires non-state education authorities and humanitarian NGOs to shift toward low-resource pedagogical training that prioritizes low-tech, highly adaptable methodologies over digital dependencies. Furthermore, school administrators must institutionalize weekly peer-to-peer professional learning communities and integrate trauma-informed, crisis-responsive support into training curricula to equip educators with essential emotional and psychological coping mechanisms alongside academic instruction.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The authors state that the data supporting the findings of this study will be made available by the corresponding author, L.P. H, upon reasonable request.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

L.P. H: Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal analysis, Investigation, Resources, Data curation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, Project administration. The author has read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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