



## Navigating a Labyrinth: Systemic Barriers to EFL Teacher Professional Growth in Addis Ababa

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### Abstract

This hermeneutic phenomenological research examines the institutional obstacles to Continuous Professional Development (CPD) among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The study sought to chart the interrelationship of the issues and present a re-conceptualized model of growth. Data were gathered using in-depth interviews with sixteen EFL teachers, two focus group discussion and hermeneutic analysis of eight official CPD portfolios. The triangulated results indicate a vicious cycle of professional stagnation, which is caused by underlying socio-economic precarity, extreme resource loss, in-service training irrelevance, demoralizing classroom conditions, and resultant loss of teacher motivation re-coded as critical consciousness. Importantly, the analysis of the documents revealed the presence of the so-called Performative CPD, where poorly-rated portfolios (average: 2.60/5.00) are artefacts of a system based on compliance, which structurally silences the experience of the teachers. The research concludes that training interventions, which are isolated, do not work. It advocates an ecological approach to professional development, suggesting gradual, system-wide changes, which simultaneously focus on economic welfare, convert bureaucratic tools to dialogic ones, supply the necessary resources, and redesign support as job-inquired inquiry.

**Keywords:** EFL teacher professional development, Performative CPD, vicious cycle, ecological systems theory, hermeneutic phenomenology

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## **Introduction**

Teacher professionalization has taken center stage in the global education scene and the importance of teaching as a dynamic profession that needs to adapt to changes has been realized (Bransford et al., 2005). This need is particularly urgent in the case of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) educators, as they have to work in an area where the methodology is subject to constant change, and the sociopolitical role of the English language in the world is ever-changing (Celce-Murcia, 2001). Therefore, efficient Continuous Professional Development (CPD) is generally known as the determinant of the quality of education and student success (Darling-Hammond and Sykes, 1999; Guskey, 2002).

The current theoretical consensus has been shifting towards the view that top-down, episodic training is not only fundamentally unpacked by the paradigm of seminal critiques (Freeman, 1989; Kennedy, 2005); but also fundamentally outdated. It is based on this that the modern scholarship powerfully supports the idea of CPD as collaborative, job-based, and based on the needs and reflective questions identified by teachers themselves and placed in the context of a socio-constructivist approach (Borg, 2015; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). The paradigm shift however, dramatically reveals a gap in implementation that is critical and persistent, especially in under-resourced situations in education. Although policies can be participatory and bottom-up, in practice, the teacher experience is frequently one of irrelevance, one of bureaucratic compliance, a disconnect that has been well documented in earlier studies of the reform appropriation (Kubanyiova, 2012) as well as more recent studies (Le et al., 2021; Phan, 2017).

Ethiopia has experienced no better place than this dissonance. Although the country has a national CPD framework explicitly supporting school-based, collaborative cycles of professional learning (MOE, 2009), studies have shown that the implementation is highly ineffective and not connected to classroom realities (Abraham, 2019). This is enhanced by disciplinary-specific forces in the case of EFL teachers in Addis Ababa: the necessity to stay personally language proficient, incorporate technology, develop communicative competence in large classes, and to negotiate a cultural ecology in which English might possess limited social currency. This professional stagnation becomes an urgent, but less studied, issue. Although the literature is very strong in outlining the principles of the effective CPD, there is a lack of rich, contextualized understanding of the lived experience of teachers whose lives are navigated (and choked by) a system that fails them.

The current research is meant to fill this gap by exploring the complex obstacles that limit professional development of EFL teachers in the government secondary schools of Addis Ababa. It is informed by three objectives, which include: (1) mapping the interrelated, multi-layered issues-intrinsic, contextual, systemic, and socio-economic- of these educators; (2) analyzing how these issues interact to potentially neutralize existing teacher development models, and (3) suggesting a reconceptualized, ecological teacher development model that deals with systemic sources of the problem.

In order to accomplish these goals, the study will use a hermeneutic phenomenological design as it focuses on subjective experiences of sixteen EFL teachers in four different sub-cities. Their lived realities come out through deep-seated interviews, two well-planned Focus Group Discussions. More importantly, eight official CPD portfolios are triangulated with this oral testimony using a hermeneutic analysis. In this document analysis, the analysis of content is transcended in the interpretation of these artefacts as material forms of the systemic logic themselves, in the attempt to understand not only what teachers say, but how institutional processes may formally organize- or repress- their professional problems.

In trying to trace this intricate maze, this paper claims that it is important to go beyond the symptoms to get a sense of the entrenched, interwoven frameworks that limit the professional development. It puts the inquiry in the form of a critical inquiry that uses phenomenological lens to hear the voice of teachers and hermeneutic lens to read the silent testimony of the bureaucratic documents that define their work. Finally, it will seek to educate an avenue of changing CPD into a possible source of frustration into an actual catalyst of empowerment and systemic change.

## **Literature Review**

Continuous Professional Development (CPD) in instruction is recognized as an imperative practice in teaching based on the fact that the quality of teachers is a crucial factor of student achievement (Darling-Hammond and Sykes, 1999; see also Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). In the case of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers, it is aggravated by the dynamical nature of the discipline that is marked by the constant changes in the methodology and by the changing sociopolitical status of English on the global scale (Celce-Murcia, 2001; Crystal, 2012).

This review summarizes the main literature on the conceptual development of CPD, specifically, the paradigm shifts, which can be applied to the perceived limitations to the EFL teachers, especially in under-resourced settings. Traditionally, teacher development has been confused with top-down training - temporary, in service training (INSET) to instill prescribed knowledge and skills, an influential approach to development that is viewed as a deficit model (Freeman, 1989). This model placed the teachers as passive receivers of externally created expertise (Borg, 2015). But the modern scholarship is the proponent of a more extensive, more transformative notion of development. This perspective redefines CPD as a job-based, collaborative, and fundamentally job-related, lifelong process of growth aimed at enabling the teachers to scrutinize and improve their beliefs and practices on context (Guskey, 2002; Farrell and Richards, 2005; Opfer and Pedder, 2011). Teacher agency, classroom realities, and reflection support are thus defining features of an effective CPD (Borg, 2015; Kennedy, 2014).

This change reflects a wider theoretical change in conceptualizing teacher learning. The field has shifted to socio-constructivist and socio-cultural paradigms, no longer supporting a positivist, skill-acquisition paradigm (Johnson, 2009; Johnson and Golombek, 2016). Teacher learning is now understood as a socially negotiated and distributed one, which comes out of dialog experience in particular communities of practice, and places the teacher as a co-creator of professional knowledge (Borg, 2003; Vescio et al., 2008). This paradigm promotes such practices as reflective teaching, action research, and involvement in professional learning communities (PLCs) that enable the teachers to come up with context-specific solutions (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 2001; Schon, 1983; Richards and Farrell, 2005).

Although this strong theoretical agreement on the effective principles of CPD, there remains a large gap in implementation, particularly in the developing educational setting (Westbrook et al., 2013). The evidence shows that top-down, one-size-fits-all INSET programs do not usually lead to the long-term changes in practice as they do not consider the immediate needs of teachers, practical situations, and their experience (Guskey, 1999; Kubanyiova, 2012; Mitchell et al., 2024). An example is national CPD models in Ethiopia, which profess to a bottom-up, school-based model of promoting collaborative, reflective practice (MOE, 2009). However, the research shows that its implementation is mostly bureaucratic and inefficient with teachers noting irrelevance, absence of resources, and support (Easaw, 2021; Abraham, 2019).

The same gap is also to be interpreted in the context of the Ethiopian chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979)- the time and historical dimension. Part of the present implementation problems is the result of decades of fast educational growth and a series of top-down changes, most of which have been implemented quickly and without thought (Joshi and Verspoor, 2013). This historical trend serves to entrench a culture of institutional inertia and cynicism among the teachers, and even well-intended policies implemented at the bottom-up level can be easily undermined into performativity.

In the case of EFL teachers, there are special disciplinary and situational demands that make the situation worse. These are the continuous necessity to keep personal language competence intact, which is a common theme in the literature (Anderson, 2008; Kohl, 2005; Richards and Farrell, 2005) and negotiating curriculum adjustments, and communicative competence in those settings where English is not necessarily social currency (Wedell, 2009). Also, EFL instructors frequently have to deal with a two-fold burden: the need to implement communicative, student-focused pedagogies and

the systemic barriers to the realization of these approaches: big classes, a lack of teaching resources, and insufficient technology (Kumaravadivelu, 2012; UNESCO, 2023).

This literature achieves a critical dissonance: On the one hand, there is an eloquently defined vision of CPD as a collaborative, inquiry-driven, and empowering process of teachers. At the other end, the reality faced by most EFL teachers, especially within such systems as Ethiopia, is that of fragmented compliance-driven actions that do not result in tackling fundamental challenges (Nguyen and Bui, 2016). Such a gap brings out the inadequacy of a strictly normative approach to CPD and it demonstrates the need to conduct a research study that explores the perceived challenges in the own phenomenological perspective of the teachers. It is necessary to understand these lived experiences, the inherent doubts, situational limitations, and frustrations of the systems to create CPD that goes beyond performative compliance to the actual empowerment and development of the professional. The current research aims at adding to this knowledge by examining the complex ecosystem of challenges that EFL teachers in Addis Ababa have to encounter and thus basing the theoretical framework of successful CPD in the realities of a particular, under-resourced setting.

**Teacher Agency in Constrained Systems:** This philosophical ideal of empowered teacher-learning frequently collides with the reality of very limited systems. According to the literature on teacher agency in such situations (e.g., Datnow, 2011; Priestley et al., 2015; Nguyen and Bui, 2016) professional skepticism and perceived resistance are not signs of apathy but may be a manifestation of situated agency or nascent critical consciousness (Freire, 1970)- a rational reaction to the systems that require change but do not support and enable it. This view plays an important role in understanding the experiences of teachers in those systems where the policy implementation has traditionally been top-down and where agency has frequently been enacted as strategic adjustment or silent opposition within the narrow structural frames.

## **Method**

The research design used in this study was a hermeneutic phenomenological research design that examined the lived experiences of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers in relation to their professional development in the special context of the city of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. It is based on the philosophical efforts of Heidegger and is aimed at comprehending the nature of a common phenomenon, which in the given context is the experience of professional growth, in terms of the definitions that the participants attribute to it in their socio-historical world (van Manen, 2014). In contrast to a positivist search of objective truths, this paradigm recognizes the fact that reality is co-constructed and that the researcher is an inseparable tool in the process of interpretation. This design of the methodology was not to make any generalizations, but to develop profound, contextual knowledge by rigorous, multi-method interaction with teacher-participants.

### **Participants and Sampling Strategy**

A multi-stage, criterion-based purposive sampling strategy was implemented to ensure the selection of information-rich cases that could illuminate the research questions. The sampling prioritized information power (Malterud et al., 2016) and thematic saturation over representativeness. The final core sample consisted of sixteen (16) EFL teachers from governmental secondary schools. This sample size is consistent with phenomenological studies, which typically range from 5 to 25 participants to balance depth and breadth (Creswell, 2013). Saturation - the point where new data yielded no novel thematic insights - was actively monitored through concurrent analysis and was robustly achieved by the twelfth interview. Saturation was systematically determined when analysis of two consecutive interviews (the 11th and 12th) yielded no new thematic codes, and all existing codes were sufficiently dense with exemplars from the prior interviews.

In order to reflect the urban diversity of Addis Ababa, four sub-cities were selected as the main research strata with the help of stratification: Yeka, Gulele, Arada and Akaki Kality. These were selected to reflect central, inner-city, historic and peripheral/expanding zones, respectively, and provided a large range of school contexts. Out of the sub-cities, two schools were chosen randomly (eight schools in total), and two teachers in every school were chosen according to the criterion

sampling (the main criterion: the active participation in CPD activities during the last two years). The last group consisted of 10 male and 6 female teachers, whose experience was between 5 and 34 years.

One of the peculiarities of the design was the methodical application of two Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) as methodological and contextual triangulation (Carter et al., 2014). FGD1 was an inter-contextual conversation and involved four teachers (one teacher each of four main sub-cities) selected as a part of the interview sample. FGD2 was a targeted contrastive case, carried out on four different teachers who were chosen as participants in the study solely in Addis Ketema sub-city, which was purposely not included in the individual interview. This enabled the research to test whether themes that were brought out by the primary sample were, reinforced, or challenged in a distinct, high-density, urban setting, thus defining the limits of transferability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

### **3.2. Data Collection Measures and Methods**

The data were gathered in 3 main sources to guarantee the triangulation and richness:

- ❖ **Deep, Semi-structured Interviews:** The main source of data was the 16 one-on-one phenomenological interviews with durations between 17 and 39 minutes. The interview guide ensured that important areas were addressed and flexibility to address emergent themes. All the interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed word-to-word.
- ❖ **Focus Group Discussions:** The two focus groups (four members each) were designed to bring about interactive discussion in order to build up the meanings that are shared collectively, the norms and differing perceptions on CPD issues and settings.
- ❖ **Document Analysis:** To cross-verify the self-reported information with the actual practice, one full and official CPD portfolio was gathered in every one of the eight schools that participated. The evidence of institutional CPD framing and implementation was presented in the form of artefacts in these documents (annual plans, logs of activities, and reports).

**Document Analysis Protocol:** The eight CPD portfolios were examined with a special hermeneutic protocol (see Appendix A) that was aimed at interpreting how professional issues were expressed, framed, or silenced in the official documentation. The analysis was based on the phenomenological hermeneutics developed by van Manen (2014), and the ecological systems theory by Bronfenbrenner (1979) and paid much attention to one central dimension known as the Narration of Challenges & Constraints. The researcher and an independent coder assessed each of the portfolios separately with the help of a customized 1-5 hermeneutic rating scale (1=Performative/Structural Silencing, 5=Hermeneutic/Critical Depth). This scale did not evaluate the administrative thoroughness of the portfolios, but the richness and reality with which they revealed the lived constraints of the teachers, investigating explicit, implicit, and crucial absences. To eliminate inter-coder variance, consensus discussion was used to decide the final challenge-articulation rating of every document, which gave the quantitative measure (average rating: 2.60/5.00). This intensive interpretive practice as a primary artefact of the logic of the system went beyond content assessment to show patterns of structural silencing, performative compliance, and the ecological framing (micro-, meso-, exo-, macro-, chrono-systemic) of the barriers and presented concrete, material evidence to triangulate with the interview and FGD data.

Official access was secured by contacting through the official channels and starting with Addis Ababa University, and then on to the City Education Bureau, and then to sub-city offices and school principals. Participation was voluntary and anonymous and not incentivized.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

Analysis of data was done in an iterative and hermeneutic circle manner in line with hermeneutical interpretive phenomenological analysis (Smith et al., 2009). The procedure was interprofessional, as the researcher and an independent coder (an Assistant Professor in ELT) worked together to increase interpretive rigor and reduce bias.

- ❖ **Familiarization and First Coding:** To gain immersion the transcripts were read and re-read. The first notes and comments about interpretations were made on the margins.
- ❖ **Thematic Identification:** Descriptive codes were given to units of meaning that were found to be of relevance to the research questions. These codes were compared all the time, and with the help of constant comparison, preliminary themes were formed.
- ❖ **Developing Thematic Networks:** Preliminary themes were checked, perfected, and structured into a rationalized framework of super-ordinate themes that encompassed the nature of the lived experiences of the participants. It was a cyclical process, and early interpretations were constantly subject to reviews against the entire data set
- ❖ **Integration and Interpretation:** Themes of individual interviews, FGDs, and document analysis were integrated. The FGD data, specifically, were utilized to verify, refute, and deepen the personal stories, and FGD2 presented a certain context in which the resonance of the theme could be tested. The last analysis was aimed at creating an all-encompassing, subtle explanation of the phenomenon.

Consensus Building: To guarantee confirmability, any interpretation differences between researcher and the independent coder were resolved by discussion till an agreement was reached. As an illustration, pre-emerging coding of statements regarding lack of time varied; one coder perceived it as personal challenge whereas the other one had associated it with systemic role conflict. Based on going back and reviewing the transcripts and contextual information, a consensus was created to give it the larger theme of Systemic and Policy-Related Challenges, namely, imposing conflicting expectations without justification.

### **Reliable and Ethical Issues**

The trustworthiness of the study was achieved in a number of ways (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Credibility was achieved through method triangulation (interviews, FGDs, documents), researcher reflexivity (bracketing pre-understandings using journaling) and peer debriefing with the independent coder. Reliability was ensured with an auditable decision trail of all the steps in the analysis. Direct participant quotations and the coding process based on the consensus were used to ensure confirmability. The descriptive richness of the setting, participants, and methodology presented here makes transferability possible.

The relevant institutional board approved the study as ethical. Participants all gave written informed consent, were guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity (with pseudonyms such as T1, FGD1\_T2), and given the information that they could withdraw at any time without penalty. This paradigm of methodology, which is focused on phenomenological depth and rigorous triangulation, was aimed at capturing the intricate realities of professional development patterns of EFL teachers in Addis Ababa and faithfully.

### **Researcher Positionality and Reflexivity**

The 19-year experience of the principal researcher in the educational system of Addis Ababa was an invaluable insider information to the contextual insights and access. But this great familiarity required strict bracketing. Reflexive journal was kept to record pre-understandings and possible forms of bias, e.g., my preconception that all INSET was necessarily ineffective was explicitly bracketed out during the process of data collection. This enabled the portfolio analysis to demonstrate the opposite case in School 4, where more context-specific, well-facilitated sessions in high-resource environment were correlated with more coherent portfolio entries and teacher-reported engagement, which made my understanding more nuanced and thus made me recognize the importance of contextual enablement. These were deliberately put aside when collecting the data and at the first analysis. Moreover, the independent coder, who did not belong to this particular situation, was instrumental in

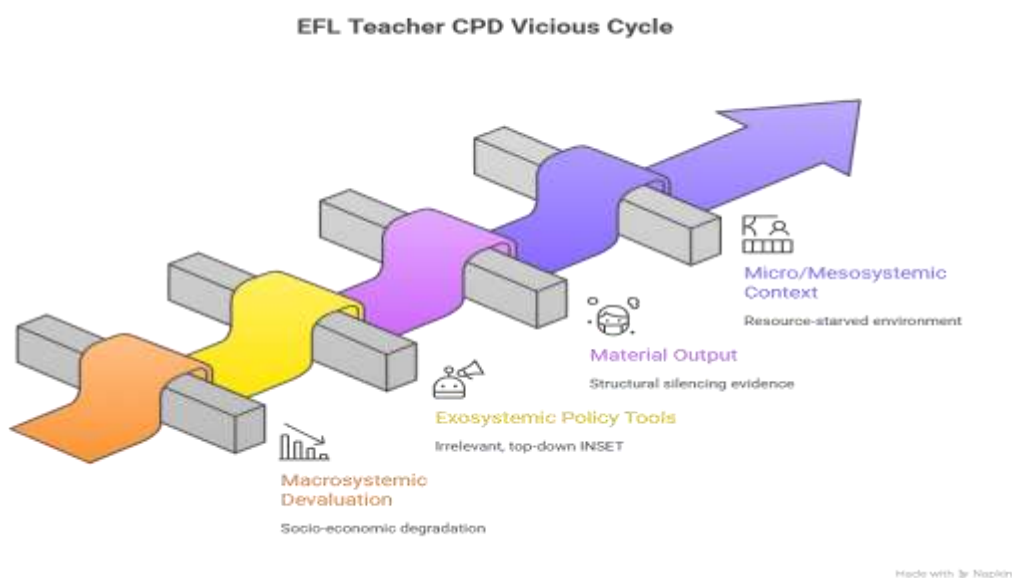
defying insider assumptions and making sure that the data brought out the findings, as opposed to the narratives that existed in his or her mind.

## Findings

The results are presented in a hierarchical structure for ease in reading. First, the five interrelated layers of challenges are laid out separately (Section 4.1). This is followed by an analysis of how these layers interact to form a vicious cycle (Section 4.2) and finally a proposal for an ecological reconceptualization (Section 4.3).

The first two goals of this study were successful since it was able to map the interconnected multi-layered problems of EFL teachers and how these problems interrelate to nullify the current CPD models. The triangulated interviews, FGDs, and document analysis data do not show a list of straightforward barriers, but a vicious cycle of systemic failure and structural silencing that is deeply entrenched and self-reinforcing.

**Figure 1:** The Vicious Cycle of Systemic Failure and Structural Silencing in EFL Teacher CPD



A systemic model illustrating the self-reinforcing vicious cycle that nullifies Continuous Professional Development (CPD) for EFL teachers in Addis Ababa. The cycle originates in foundational socio-economic degradation, fueling a critical consciousness that is met with performative system responses, culminating in structural silencing (as evidenced in portfolio analysis) and leading back to demoralizing classroom realities. This cycle is embedded within and reinforced by broader ecological systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

### Mapping the Interconnected Challenges

The challenges are presented in a logical manner, beginning with the socio-economic level, followed by contextual and/or resource constraints, system and/or policy constraints, student related and cultural constraints and finally, teacher related and intrinsic constraints. The experience of the sixteen teachers became five ecologically complex categories of challenges, in sequential order, beginning with the basis and ending with the implication.

### Foundational Socio-Economic Degradation

This foundational layer influences all subsequent challenges. Crippling economic precarity was the most widespread obstacle mentioned by 12 respondents. It was not a background problem, but the main cause of anxiety, which directly suppresses professional attention. Teachers like T11 shared stark testimonies: "I don't have a home. I am renting... paying almost half of my salary for home

rent.” This precarity was inherently coupled with a sense of loss of respect in society, a loss of professional identity. As FGD2\_T6 noted, teaching is not valued “just like other professionals,” making engagement in CPD seem an unaffordable luxury. This underlining crisis is the source of all difficulties.

### **Contextual and Resource Constraint: A State of Deprivation**

Building upon socio-economic precarity, teachers face severe contextual limitations. A near complete absence of basic 21st-century teaching tools was named as the most commonly mentioned operational barrier (f=12). There was an overall complaint by teachers about the lack of language laboratories, unreliable internet and shortage of textbooks and multimedia. T13 defined the minimal ideal as “Access of internet... access of computer.” The physical setting was also characterized as very hostile - overcrowded, chaotic and devoid of areas to collaborate or rest. This resource scarcity creates a cycle of futility; even when training promotes new methods, teachers “can't employ them because of shortage of materials” (FGD1\_T3).

### **Systemic and Policy-Related Challenges: Irrelevance and Surveillance**

At the institutional level, these difficulties are compounded by systemic factors. Educational system itself was subjected to sharp criticism by the teachers. The In-Service Training (INSET) was always hailed as being top-down, theoretical and irrelevant. T2's experience was typical: “I didn't get anything from that in-service program because the program itself was not attractive.” Worse still, a system of being surveilled without support was explained by teachers as they were evaluated as not developing and were provided with nothing of considerable use and no autonomy. T7 articulated this contradiction: “The government complains about teachers... but... We don't have basic needs. If we don't have basic needs, how are we going to develop our professions?”

### **Student-Related and Cultural Difficulties**

These systemic issues directly affect the classroom environment. The problems carried over into the classroom where the student issues were strong discouraging forces. Educators noted that the lack of engagement, low competence, and socio-economic strains of the students had a direct influence on the professional self-concept of teachers. One of the most crucial, culturally-based challenges was the opposition to the application of English language as a means of communication outside of the classroom. T12 identified the core issue: “The students learn English only in the class. Out of the class, we and the students are the same. We use... Amharic.” This highlights a fundamental flaw in CPD models that ignore the broader linguistic ecology.

### **Teacher-Related Intrinsic Challenges: Erosion of Agency**

Ultimately, these pressures erode teachers' sense of agency and motivation. The climax of the above pressures is the great weakening of intrinsic motivation redefined not as personal apathy but as critical consciousness that is rational. Teachers showed a feeling of futility and burnout. T14 described an internal conflict: “I'm fighting with my inside. What I have to do is just do as my colleagues do.” This was compounded by anxiety over English proficiency gaps and a feeling of directionlessness in navigating CPD, with T10 noting, “There is no coordinator... CPD has no responsible part.”

### **The Vicious Cycle: How Challenges Nullify CPD**

Having laid out the five interconnected layers, we now demonstrate how they dynamically interact to nullify conventional CPD interventions. The categories are not isolated phenomena, they are a dynamic, self-reinforcing cycle which systematically invalidates the conventional CPD interventions.

It starts with the socio-economic degradation of the profession in the baseline level which exhausts both mental and emotional power of the teachers to grow. This is what contributes to a crippling demotivation commonly being misdiagnosed by the system as an attitudinal problem. We redefine this skepticism as an emergent critical consciousness a rational consciousness of the divorce between the systemic requirements of development and the refusal of the fundamental conditions required to fulfill that demands.

The system, in turn, provides irrelevant and top-down INSET and requires performative CPD. This performativity is material and indisputable as is demonstrated by the hermeneutic examination of eight official CPD portfolios. Across seven schools (e.g., Schools 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8), portfolios exhibited structural silencing. Sections for "problems faced" were left blank or filled with non-sequiturs (e.g., "Group work was successful" listed as a problem). The empty prompt "The main purpose of this session is to \_\_\_\_\_" in School 5's portfolio is a phenomenological testament to disengagement. This recording is not bad by chance, it is the logical expression of a compliance-audit mechanism that leaves no real room to express the lived issues such as scarcity of resources or big classes. The portfolio itself is an object of alienation.

This is a breed of further cynicism of the Performative CPD which creates the feedback loop. Unmotivated and demotivated teachers who are demoralized and unsupported will then work in the resource-starved classrooms with demotivated students, which confirms their inefficacy, and the perceived futility of engagement. The high-resource setting is the portfolio of School 4, which is an exception to the rule. Its rational, needs-based strategy presupposed the availability of resources and did not mention the difficulties, which physically embodied the resource-based dichotomy and demonstrated that functional CPD can be but unfairly conditional.

### **Toward an Ecological Reconceptualization**

The triangulated results are very convincing that the most common model of CPD top-down, episodic, deficit-oriented training is not only ineffective but also counterproductive. It deals with symptoms (e.g., "low teacher motivation") but does not deal with the systemic pathogens that trigger them. This failure is evidence and a mechanism of structural silencing documented.

Thus, to meet the third objective, the paradigm shift is necessary, the isolated training should be substituted by the ecological, system-wide reconceptualization of the professional development. Successful intervention should disrupt the vicious cycle by simultaneously cracking it at several levels:

Solve the Foundational Crisis: Recovery of socio-economic dignity as a non-negotiable condition to professional interaction.

- ❖ ***Crack Silencing to Dialogue:*** Radically redesign CPD Portfolios and policies to epistemologically encompass the lived challenges of teachers and turn them into reflective and needs-based dialogue instruments.
- ❖ ***Prepare the Environment:*** Equitable access to basic resources as the condition of pedagogical change.
- ❖ ***Reinvent Support as Collaborative Inquiry:*** Substitute useless INSET with job-based, collaborative mentoring and formative feedback processes.
- ❖ ***Activate the Wider Ecology:*** Create strategies to support a positive linguistic group outside the classroom.

To sum up, the maze that EFL teachers have to deal with in Addis Ababa is structural. The way ahead must be the demolition of the structure of performative compliance and the construction of an ecological model that hearkens to the sound of the voices of teachers, and to the silence of their formal documents, which is deafening, so as to encourage the actual empowerment of professionalism.

### **Discussion**

This research aimed to map systemic obstacles to professional development of EFL teachers in Addis Ababa as well as to understand how the obstacles come into play to neutralise the existing models of professional development. The triangulated results are a much more complicated picture than a mere list of barriers; they display a vicious circle of structural failure, which is materially

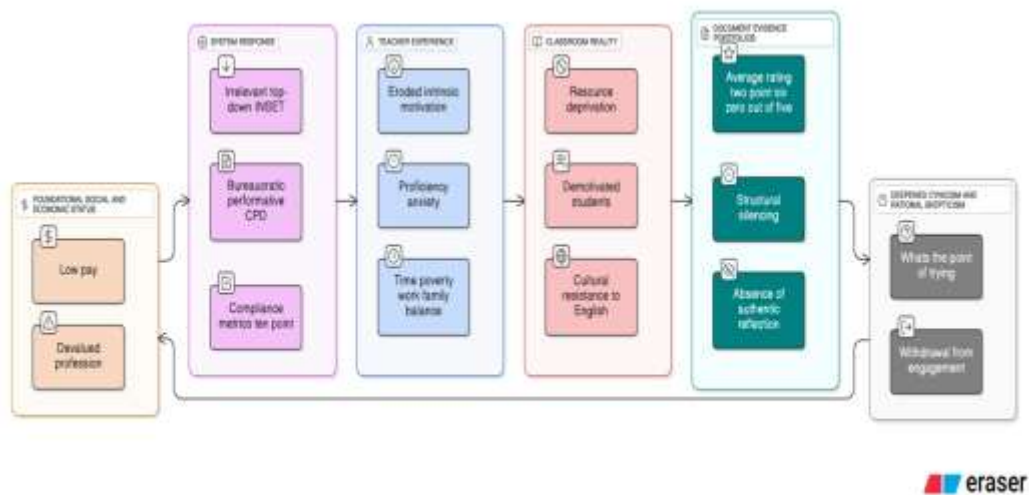
manifested through the phenomenon of structural silencing in the official CPD documentation. In this discussion, these findings are interpreted, and it is argued that the traditional model of teacher development, which is usually termed as deficit, is not only insufficient, but also counterproductive in this regard. A radical paradigm shift to an ecological and critically aware reconceptualization of CPD is, thus, necessary in order to bring meaningful change.

### **The Vicious Cycle: Socio-Economic Precarity to Performative Compliance**

The main value of the research is the fact that it has been empirically demonstrated how discrete difficulties interlock to create a chain of stagnation. The cycle starts with the socio-economic degradation of the teaching profession. The teachers such as T11 will not be able to develop professionally when the anxiety of making a dent in the pocket with half of their salary becomes their focus, rather than a luxury. This precarity is worsened by the fact that the society does not respect it, which undermines the motivational basis on which formal CPD is built.

The administration of this eroded motivation is meanwhile misdiagnosed systematically as an attitudinal problem. Our information forces us to redefine this skepticism. It is a deficiency that arises not personally but as an emergent event of critical consciousness (Freire, 1970) a rational, collective realization of the deep-seated disconnection between the needs of the system to be improved and the very denial of the basic conditions (economic, material, professional) to do so. Educators are not unmotivated; they are harshly conscious of a system that requires them to perform but offers no guidance.

*Figure 2: The Vicious Cycle of Stagnation in EFL Teacher Professional Development*



"Figure 2. The vicious cycle of stagnation of EFL teacher professional development. This theoretical framework demonstrates how the socio-economic precarity contributes to teacher cynicism, which receives inappropriate system reactions, forming material proof (in portfolios) that confirms the critical consciousness of teachers, which, in turn, strengthens their feelings of ineffectiveness and closes the loop.

This critical consciousness is confirmed by the system response that is irrelevant, top-down INSET and requirement of performative CPD. The hermeneutic analysis of CPD portfolios gives us the undeniable artefactual evidence of this performativity. The blank spaces, non-sequiturs (such as Group work was successful was listed as a problem), and blank prompts (The main purpose of this session is to \_\_\_\_\_) in seven out of eight portfolios are not characteristics of bad individual performance. They are the rational result of a bureaucratic compliance system which is highly structured to keep quiet, but not to hear. These documents are artefacts of alienation, which literally entails the process of making the lived reality of teachers of overcrowding, lack of resources, and language anxiety invisible in the official account of their own growth.

A more cynical breeding ground is this "Performative CPD". Teachers, therefore, are thrown in resource-deprived classrooms to deal with a demotivated student body in a culturally hostile linguistic ecology, which justifies their feelings of ineffectiveness and closes the feedback loop. The exception of the coherent portfolio of School 4, which presupposed, instead of describing, resource requirements, is a powerful statement of the resource-based dichotomy, and demonstrates that functional CPD can exist but is wholly dependent on an unequal allocation of institutional capacity.

### **Theoretical Implications: Deconstructing the Deficit Model**

These combined results provide a strong challenge to the common-place so-called deficit model of teacher development (Kennedy, 2005), which puts the issue within the skills or motivation deficiency of the individual teacher. Our statistics show that what is termed as intrinsic issues is largely extrinsically created. The fear of English proficiency is an end product of a system that does not provide any immersive experience; the perception of the lack of knowledge in CPD is due to the lack of explicit guidance and mentorship. This argument is critically extended in the document analysis. The fact that structural silencing in portfolios can not be attributed to lack of reflective writing skills in teachers. Rather it is the direct consequence of system which does not give time, no training and it does not give any credible discursive space of genuine professional conversation. To confuse these dumb, formal papers with teacher apathy is a basic misunderstanding. Instead, they are a kind of logical adjustment and a harsh material account of system failure. This corresponds with research on teacher agency in constrained situations, which seemingly opposing actions are in fact a situated agency or a practical reaction to conflicting demands (Datnow, 2011).

The research is a firm believer in the importance of an ecological system viewpoint (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This ecology is charted in the portfolio analysis: micro-systemic classroom realities are silenced; the meso-systemic inequity of school level is manifested in the comparison between School 4 and others; the exo-systemic instruments of policy (templates, checklists) impose compliance on growth; and the macrosystemic devaluation of teaching grounds the socio-economic crisis. Moreover, the chronosystem- The history of fast, top-down educational reforms in Ethiopia, contributes to explaining the degree of institutional inertia and teacher cynicism, and to exposing how even the best-intentioned policies that are bottom-up may devolve into performative rituals. Ecological Diagnosis to an Ecological Prescription.

The suggested ecological reconceptualization of CPD is thus not a recommendation but a need, which is based on the evidence of the diagnostic directly. The vicious cycle cannot be stopped without a multi-level intervention that will target the links the cycle is based on.

1. **Address the Epistemological Exclusion:** Structural silencing should be broken down as the first and most immediate intervention. The templates of CPD portfolios, policy models will need to be restructured radically to epistemologically accommodate the lived challenges of teachers, such that these instruments of audit become an initiation of reflective, need-based dialogue
2. **Reinvent Support as Collaborative Inquiry:** INSET needs to be eliminated and reimbursed as continuous, job-based collaborative inquiry. The model should not focus on providing content but rather on mentorship, peer observation, and formative feedback processes that directly relate to the contextual reality of teachers.
3. **Prepare the Environment and Strengthen Leadership:** CPD cannot be separated with provision of resource. The school leaders should be trained to utilize diagnostic information of authentic teacher reflection to lobby school level resources, and the professional development should be directly connected to material enablement.
4. **Resolve the Foundational Crisis:** Sustainable change can not be long-term without the socio-economic dignity of profession being restored. Professional respect and competitive remuneration are not peripheral matters but the foundation on which all other developmental activities are anchored.
5. **Go Wider:** An effective CPD to EFL teachers should go beyond the classroom to embrace ways of involving the parents and the community to create a favorable language environment that validates the use of English outside the school gate.

To conclude, the labyrinth that EFL teachers in Addis Ababa have to deal with is not a maze that they have to work their way through but a system that is integrated in the systems that should be supporting them. The blanks in their portfolios speak eloquently in the emptiness of the system. So long as this architecture of performative compliance is not broken, CPD will continue to be a source of frustration, and stagnation of professionals. The way ahead is to create systems that do not only require expansion, but also listen to the teachers they are intended to serve, and take notes and action in response to the voices, and the telling silences, of the teachers.

### **Conclusion**

This paper was aimed at exploring the great disregard between the worldwide necessity to advance teacher professional growth and the actual experience of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) educators in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Based on three aims, to chart the multi-layered issues, investigate how they make current Continuous Professional Development (CPD) models ineffective, and offer a reconceptualised, ecological design, the study utilised a hermeneutic phenomenological design to focus on the experiential knowledge of the teachers. The results of the study are not only a list of barriers, but a vicious cycle of systemic failure and structural silencing that is well established and self-perpetuating through the rigorous triangulation of in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and a hermeneutic analysis of official CPD portfolios.

Mapping a labyrinth of interconnected barriers that is a barrier to the first objective was achieved. These run the gamut of the socio-economic degradation of the profession and disabling resource loss, the irrelevance of top-down In-Service Training (INSET), and the rite of Performative CPD, to the resultant loss of teacher motivation and agency. More importantly, the hermeneutic document analysis transcended the content assessment to identify the phenomenology of bureaucratic artefacts. The CPD portfolios, vacant where difficulties are to be described, illogical in their reasoning and abstract in their priorities, were material, physical proofs of a system, structurally deaf, to the lived realities of teachers. This artefactual evidence was a highly effective confirmation of the interview and FGD accounts, since it proved that the skepticism of teachers is not created by apathy but rather it is a logical reaction to the work of the institutions that create an environment that values compliance over genuine development.

In the achievement of the second aim, the research shows the dynamically neutralizing effect of such ecologically interdependent problems on the usual CPD models. The analysis shows that the so-called attitudinal problem is not a cause but a very important effect, a sort of emergent critical consciousness (*conscientizacao*). The contradiction between the demands of the systemic development and the denial of the conditions of its basic realization is critically noticed by teachers. The analysis of the documents was the final confirmation of this: the vacant prompts and the bare transcripts in the portfolios are not the failures of the particular teachers but the rationality of the system whose formal means are intended to be audited rather than to be discussed. This is a very powerful act of deconstructing the deficit model of teacher development, on the basis that intrinsic struggles are simply too extrinsically constructed in terms of failures at the micro-, meso-, exo-, and macrosystems, with a chronosystem of historically top-down reforms in the background.

As a result and as a reaction to the third purpose, the research would require a paradigm shift in the form of an isolated training towards an ecological and system wide reconceptualization of professional development. The triangulated evidence-informed model suggests that changes in the proposed model should be simultaneous and phased at multiple levels: (1) the underlying socio-economic crisis needs to be addressed to reestablish the dignity of the profession; (2) the processes of CPD documentation and processes must be redone to turn them into the instruments of reflective and needs-oriented dialogue instead of silencing; (3) equitable access to basic resources and technology must be provided as a precondition to pedagogical change; (4) the re-invention of INSET as a job-based, collaborative inquiry.

Although the phenomenological richness of the study is context-dependent, its thick description allows analytical transferability to other centralized, resource-bound educational systems of the same nature. The diagnosis, which is supported by the significant overlap of teacher voice and

documentary testimony, is without doubt. An alienating ecosystem is strategically frustrating the promise of national CPD policy and the career ambitions of EFL teachers. The way forward is to go beyond technical, additive solutions to a bold, full reorganization. This has to start with the act of listening - not merely to the words that teachers are saying but to the muted silence that is coded in their official papers and then take action to tear down the performance compliance architecture. It is only then that Continuous Professional Development can transform itself into a cause of frustration into a true instigating action that will empower teachers, improve classroom practice and make students learn significantly.

### **Limitations and Transferability**

Although the design of this study has given a rich contextual insight, there are certain limitations that should be noted. There is a threat of social desirability bias in the interview that is alleviated by document analysis. Moreover, the suggested ecological model, despite being based on sound diagnostic evidence, needs to be empirically tested using action research. Regarding transferability, the results and model can be most applicable to other centralized, under-resourced educational systems typified by: (1) a high cost-of-living to teacher-salary ratio, (2) a history of top-down reform resulting in performative policy compliance, and (3) a linguistic ecology in which the target language (English) does not have much of a daily social currency.

### **Disclosure Statements**

#### **Contribution rate statement of the researchers:**

Both authors contributed equally to this study.

#### **Conflict of interest statement:**

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

#### **CRedit Authorship Contribution Statement**

**Yoseph Feleke SAHLE:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Formal Analysis, Data Curation, Writing – Original Draft, Project Administration.

**Abebe Gebretsadik WELDEAREGAWI:** Supervision, Validation, Writing – Review & Editing

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#### **Ethical Declaration and Committee Approval**

In this research, the principles of scientific research and publication ethics were followed.