

Chapter 6

Perceptions and Initiatives of Teachers Toward Continuing Professional Development: A Study at the Tertiary Level



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Abstract Investing concerted efforts in continuing professional development (CPD) is the hallmark of a committed teacher. Teachers may engage in CPD activities at their own initiative or at the behest of the institutions they work in. This chapter aims to investigate the following aspects of CPD: (a) awareness about CPD, (b) motivation for CPD, (c) avenues for CPD, and d) assessment of CPD. It attempts to design an inventory of ideas for professional development and explore the ways in which these ideas, when practiced in reality, not only result in teacher's own development but also lead to improved student learning. Twenty teachers from the English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad, participated in the study. A semi-structured questionnaire and informal interviews were used to capture teacher awareness of CPD, and the initiatives they take to stay updated. The responses of the participants were analyzed qualitatively. The data reveal that the urge for professional development emerges from the teachers' passion for the profession and the innate belief that teachers are lifelong learners. Teachers demonstrate willingness as well as ability to assess the outcomes of their CPD. The study presents substantial evidence for the claim of improved student learning emerging from teacher initiatives through CPD.

Keywords Continuing professional development · Tertiary education · Teacher initiatives · Assessment of CPD · Improved student learning · English language education

Introduction

Teachers are lifelong learners. They learn from varied sources—through training and development opportunities, from colleagues, from students, and through reflection on their own practice. Such constant teacher learning is at the heart of continuing

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professional development (CPD). CPD implies an innate will and urge to develop professionally among teachers. It involves realigning of existing knowledge to suit changing demands of the profession as well as developing new understandings, new attitudes, and new orientations on the go toward improving practice. Thus, in language teaching, as in other disciplines, CPD denotes consistent updating of knowledge and skills. In fact, CPD is the key to “optimizing a person’s career opportunities, both today and for the future” (CIPD cited in Harding, 2009: 5). Wan and Lam (2010) comment that CPD implies teacher learning in an ongoing way. It is also imperative that the knowledge gained through CPD activities guides and is reflected in everyday classroom experiences of teachers as well as students. Todd (1987) contends, “If CPD is to be judged successful, it should ideally satisfy two criteria: (a) that learning occurs and (b) that learning is implemented to the benefit of practice standards” (n.p). CPD, therefore, is not to be viewed as a “token add-on to general practice” (Harding, 2009: 5). On the contrary, it is a process whereby teachers’ “professionalism and/or professionalism may be considered to be enhanced” (Evans, 2002: 131). Investing efforts in one’s continuing professional development is thus an attribute of a devoted teacher. Especially in the face of ever-changing students’ needs, ever-expanding knowledge, and ever-shrinking world, enhancing one’s abilities as well as acquiring new skills has become imperative. In such a context, it would be of interest to investigate how a set of teachers teaching at the tertiary level apprehend CPD and what initiatives they undertake for their CPD.

Hypothesis and Research Questions

The present study hypothesizes that university teachers are aware of the need for CPD, and they undertake initiatives for ongoing CPD. It attempts to investigate the following four aspects of CPD: (a) awareness about CPD, (b) motivation for CPD, (c) avenues for CPD, and finally (d) assessment of CPD. The following research questions guided the study:

- i. Are university teachers aware of the construct of CPD? How do they understand it?
- ii. Are university teachers motivated to engage themselves in CPD activities?
- iii. What avenues do university teachers have/ seek for CPD?
- iv. How do university teachers assess their CPD initiatives? What parameters do they use to gauge professional growth?

Review of Literature

The construct of CPD has merited significant research attention. This section discusses some of the salient research works in the area. Davies and Preston (2002) conducted a study evaluating the impact of CPD on personal and professional lives

of final-year MA Education students in the UK. Findings show that CPD has positive effects on professional life. The impact on personal lives was more varied, diverse, and difficult to summarize. The time commitments of CPD caused guilt and resulted in stress and strain in family life. However, it could ultimately have a positive effect on personal and intimate relationships and personal development. Kwakman (2003) conducted two studies on teacher workplace learning. The first study showed that teacher learning was conceptualized as participation in professional learning activities (PLA). The second study explored the extent to which teachers participate in PLA and the factors that affect their participation. Results showed wide discrepancies between theory and practice in opportunities for professional learning at the workplace. Collinson et al. (2009) examined three emerging trends intended to broaden teachers' learning and enhance their practice through CPD: glocalization, mentoring, and rethinking teacher evaluation. They explore how these trends are unfolding in Australia, England, Latvia, the Republic of Ireland, Scotland, Taiwan, and the US. They suggested that transforming schooling in the twenty-first century depended on, among other things, collaborative, differentiated models for career-long continuing professional development.

Jensen (2007) explored the knowledge-seeking processes among professionals—nurses, accountants, teachers, and computer engineers—highlighting three core questions: What induces professionals to engage in continuous learning? What makes them strive for something beyond the immediate obvious goal or situation? How can we theorize practice in a way that allows for engagement and engrossment—the emotional basis of expert work? Padwad and Dixit (2008) conducted a related study which investigated the impact of the participation in a professional learning community called English Teachers' Clubs on teachers' thinking about and attitudes toward classroom problems in the Indian context. Findings reveal that participation in ETCs has led to better performance in terms of contextualization of the problems, critical approaches to the problems, belief in self-agency, and pragmatic approaches to finding solutions.

Hoekstra and Korthagen (2011) examined how systematic support makes a difference to teacher learning when compared to informal learning. In a longitudinal mixed-method study, they documented the learning of one teacher in a year in which she had no systematic support but had to adjust herself to an educational innovation and in the consecutive year where she received individual supervision. Findings suggest that professional learning will occur only if a teacher is supported in learning how to deal effectively with personal factors involved in the learning process. The implication here is that teachers need scaffolding mechanisms that support and sustain their efforts at CPD. Wan and Lam (2010) explored factors affecting teachers' participation in CPD. The facilitating factors included school factor, personal factor, financial factor, time, CPD provider, family factor, relationship with others, and government factor. The inhibiting factors consisted of time, heavy workload, financial factor, CPD provider, school factor, and personal factor. Van Eekelen et al. (2006) investigated the teacher's "will to learn." Results showed three different manifestations of the will to learn in teachers: Those who did not see the need to learn; those who wondered

how to learn; and those who were eager to learn. Kraft et al. (2018) conducted meta-analyses to evaluate the effects of teacher coaching programs on teacher instruction and student achievement. Findings affirm the potential of coaching as a development tool.

The next section attempts to build the theoretical perspective from which to view the present study.

Theoretical Support

This section attempts to discuss the construct of CPD in a detailed manner with a view to arriving at a theoretical base for the present study. Whether voluntarily sought as an individual initiative or undertaken at the behest of the institution, the aim of a CPD activity is to develop the knowledge and skills and this can happen in many ways. While Richards and Farrell (2005) conceptualize teacher learning as skill learning, as cognitive process, as personal construction, and as reflective practice, Cetina (cited in Jensen, 2007: 497) contends that the desire to learn emerges as a result of productive interplay between frequent encounters with knowledge and the steadfast commitment that arises from being a member of an innovative-orientated community.

Evans (2002: 131) conceives teacher development as consisting of attitudinal development (the process whereby teachers' attitudes to their work are modified) and functional development (the process whereby teachers' professional performance may be improved) each with a specific foci of change. According to Borko (2004: 4), to understand teacher learning, we must study it within these multiple contexts, taking into account both individual teacher-learners and social systems in which they are participants. As in the case of student learning, situative perspectives provide a powerful research tool, enabling researchers to focus attention on individual teachers as learners and on their participation in professional learning communities (Putnam & Borko, 2000 cited in Borko, 2004: 4).

Sachs (2003: 9) describes current approaches to CPD through three building metaphors, namely retooling, remodeling, and revitalizing, and adds a fourth one, namely reimagining to indicate the need for teachers themselves to have some agency in identifying priorities and needs for their own professional learning. She argues that CPD needs to incorporate all four of the elements in order to have two inter-related effects: first to ensure that the goal of improving student learning is achieved and second that strong and autonomous teaching profession is supported. Sachs (2016: 413) further contends, "... the time for an industrial approach to the teaching profession has passed. I make the case for systems, schools, and teachers to be more research active with teachers' practices validated and supported through research."

Mann (2006: 103) states that implicit in the notions of "reflective practice," "exploratory teaching," and "practitioner enquiry" is the view that teachers develop by studying their own practice, collecting data, and using reflective processes as the basis for evaluation and change. Such processes have a reflexive relationship

with the construction of teacher knowledge and beliefs. Collaborative and cooperative processes can help sustain individual reflection and development. Fraser et al., (2007: 7) suggest that professional learning can be analyzed in terms of three aspects. The first is the domain of influence (where the impact of the professional learning is felt on an individual basis). The second is the capacity for professional autonomy and transformative practice (the potential impact of the professional learning both on individual and profession-wide bases). And the third is the sphere of action (where/how the professional learning takes place).

According to Kennedy (2005:235), it is possible to explore the extent to which CPD is perceived and promoted either as an individual endeavor related to accountability or as a collaborative endeavor that supports transformative practice, and there is a need for greater interrogation of both the purpose and the potential outcomes of CPD structures. Kennedy (2016) characterized professional development (PD) programs in terms of their theories of action—defined in terms of the content teachers should learn—and how programs facilitate teacher’s *enactment* of the content. According to Kennedy’s typology of enactment facilitation, PD programs range from being highly prescriptive to simply provide a body of knowledge that teachers may choose to react to or not. Highly prescriptive programs clearly limit teacher discretion, and there may also be a tension between prescription and motivation. The effects of any PD program will depend on teachers’ motivation to learn and to change their practice, mandatory assignment of teachers to programs may not have much effect on learning (Kennedy, 2016). Thus, contextual aspects such as the workplace environment and organizational support can influence the impact that CPD can have. Egert et al. (2018) and Kennedy (2016) posit that when teachers are coerced into a CPD activity, it may not garner personal engagement.

Darling-Hammond et al. (2017), Egert et al. (2018) and Pianta et al. (2008) contend that a CPD initiative can be effective if it concerns specific content, for example a new curriculum or content. This could take the form of example lesson plans, unit plans, sample student work, observations of peer teachers, and video or written cases of teaching, thereby providing teachers with a clear vision of best or desired practices. Collaboration with and feedback from fellow teachers can facilitate reflection and help learning in addition to providing opportunities for changing teacher practices at the organizational level (Buisse & Hollingsworth, 2009).

These various theoretical propositions point to the diverse ways in which CPD is conceived and implemented and contribute to understanding and interpreting the data gathered for the present study. The next section presents the methodology adopted for the study.

Methodology

As already stated, the scope of the study spans four aspects of CPD: (a) awareness about CPD, (b) motivation for CPD, (c) avenues for CPD, and (d) assessment of CPD. The study attempts to build an inventory of ideas for professional development and

explore the ways in which these ideas, when practiced in reality, result not only in teacher's own development but also lead to improved student learning. The study was carried out at The English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad, India. EFLU offers academic freedom and choice to the teaching faculty to experiment and explore new ways of transacting learning. The teacher agency afforded by the setting enables teachers to undertake robust initiatives toward professional development. Twenty teachers who guide research alongside teaching on the graduate and post-graduate programs offered at the university participated in the study. A questionnaire was designed to capture teachers' perceptions about CPD and their efforts toward professional development. An attempt was made to garner evidence for improved students learning that can be attributed to teacher CPD initiatives. The data gathered from the questionnaire were further enriched and supported by semi-structured interviews which consisted of the narrative accounts of teachers of specific initiatives that lead to rewarding experiences of professional development in terms of personal growth as well as enhanced student achievement.

Data Presentation and Interpretation

The data gathered are qualitative in nature and are presented in terms of the following four aspects of CPD: (a) awareness about CPD, (b) motivation for CPD, (c) avenues for CPD, and (d) assessment of CPD.

Awareness about CPD

Teacher awareness about CPD was captured through the first question in the questionnaire. Teachers were requested to verbalize their thoughts about CPD, what it meant for them and how they perceived it. The following are some of the statements made by teachers. It must be mentioned here that for ease of presentation the views of teachers are summarized in dyads.

Teacher 1 and 4: To me CPD means keeping up-to-date professionally. It is the continuous professional growth requiring to keep in touch with innovations and shifts in theory and practice in one's own field; keeping track of one's experiments in class—failures and successes; sharing experiences and notes with other teachers.

Teacher 3 and 7: Professional development is, in my view, the opportunity to upgrade my knowledge base. I see this as happening through research projects, publishing papers as well as attending academic seminars, conferences, etc. Last, though not least, I believe I enhance my professional skills as a teacher through designing and offering new courses every semester.

Teacher 2 and 18: CPD means constantly redefining oneself professionally to meet the changing needs of students and the prevailing academic atmosphere. It therefore

means updating oneself in content areas as well as finding new and appropriate teaching methodologies.

Teacher 6 and 14: CPD is keeping oneself abreast with the latest developments in one's research area, i.e., to update one's knowledge and skills from time to time. CPD is a commitment of the professional to continually update knowledge, hone the skills to remain competent, and making an effort to utilize the potential to the fullest extent to achieve the results. It is a lifelong process of learning.

Teacher 9 and 13: It is a developmental process born out of the teacher's / policy-makers' / administrators' desire to be better equipped not only academically and pedagogically, but also socially and culturally, because pedagogical practices originate from societal and cultural norms about the role, function, nature of and expectations from education, institutions, government bodies, policymakers, parents, students, and teachers.

Teacher 10 and 15: Teachers have to understand their role and function in the developments that constantly take place in policies, changes in instructional materials, developments in the field of their own respective subjects, and advances in pedagogical practices. The needs of students change depending upon the social and individual factors. Very often teachers find themselves isolated. CPD helps teachers to create and foster an atmosphere of collaborative development, where they can share their problems, innovations, ideas, solutions collectively and help each other grow. The same is applicable to the designers of instructional materials, policymakers, educational administrators, and other professionals.

Teacher 5 and 12: Teacher CPD is integral to professional life. It refers to the several ways in which an individual strives to improve oneself in order to achieve career growth and recognition in one's professional sphere.

Teacher 11 and 19: A commitment to the profession one is pursuing and the urge within one to develop oneself, so that one can become better. CPD also refers to possessing a self-awareness of the job one is doing, which often may leave one dissatisfied with the feeling that there is so much more to learn and do, and put in the right foot forward to fill the gaps.

Teacher 16 and 20: For me, CPD means working toward betterment of self. It means growth in all areas, with our career, social networks, etc. It simply means any kind of continuous learning and development toward ourselves to excel in life in all the spheres.

Teacher 8 and 17: CPD means being committed to one's profession. It implies staying motivated, sustaining one's passion and zeal which sometimes might include uncomfortable discoveries about one's own inadequacies and this is where courageous reflection on ones' own practice plays a significant role. Through reflection and self-observation, one can improve teaching, the ultimate goal of which is student learning.

Discussion

As we can see, teachers were quite articulate about what CPD entails. Teachers' views about CPD can be analyzed and organized in terms of three themes: commitment to profession, commitment to students, and commitment to self.

Commitment to Profession

The idea of CPD as commitment to profession is expressed when teachers state that CPD implies sustaining one's motivation despite sporadic incidents of professional dissatisfaction (T8 and T17). This idea is further supported by the view that CPD develops and strengthens communities of practice wherein teachers can communicate and collaborate regarding several issues such as materials, methodologies, assessment, and policymaking (T10 and T15). What is perceived as paramount in professional growth is the will and effort to keep oneself abreast with the latest developments in the field which also involves sharing of knowledge and skills with colleagues across the board (T1 and T4). In other words, CPD is a lifelong commitment to stay competent, setting standards, and achieving results (T6 and T14).

Commitment to Students

The ultimate goal of all teaching is improved student learning, and this view is expressed when teachers state that through their consistent efforts at CPD, teachers can enhance student achievement (T8 and T17). While offering ideas for enhancing one's knowledge base, T3 and T7 suggest that designing new courses and exploring new methodologies will lead to professional growth. This initiative will not only expand the knowledge horizon of the teachers, but also provide opportunity for students to explore new fields of study. Teacher 2 and 18 echo these views when they state that CPD means constantly redefining one's own self in order to meet the changing needs of students as well as the academic setting in which one is placed. This constant reconfiguration is the hallmark of a committed teacher.

Commitment to Self

CPD means the betterment of self, which is reflected in one's effort to excel in life (not just in the profession, T16 and T20). It is characterized and guided by an internal urge to develop oneself for which reflection and self-awareness are mandatory. It is possible to grow only when we experience a certain amount of dissatisfaction about

our current level of knowledge and skills (T11 and 19). These views are reiterated by T8 and 17, who state that CPD necessitates reflection on practice involving identifying and overcoming inadequacies. T5 and T12 perceive CPD as an integral part of professional life—a means toward achieving career growth and recognition.

The data thus reveal that teachers are aware of the construct of CPD and have pertinent views about what it entails, as the first research question envisages.

Motivation for CPD

Having established that teachers are aware of CPD and what constitutes it, it would be of interest to explore what motivates them to constantly strive for professional growth. This information is gathered through the second question in the questionnaire. Given below are some of the statements made by teachers specifying the compelling force behind their CPD initiatives.

- My own requirement, demands in the profession,
- My commitment to my profession/job—which is expressed in its three manifestations: love for my learners, love for my subject, and love for my job,
- To be a better practitioner, to keep abreast of the latest developments in the field, and to connect better with learners' needs,
- Innate joy in improving my professional skills and the desire to do better and the wish to be an effective classroom teacher,
- To derive greater fulfillment from one's work,
- The clientele—the students, the teacher-trainees, the teachers and my own colleagues and their activities for their own professional development push me to be up-to-date with things in the area of my interest,
- The outside world which demands a lot from us,
- The desire to contribute to teaching and research; urge for professional recognition; urge to do justice to my job,
- Natural interest in professional growth/ self-motivation, curiosity to explore new research topics and areas,
- The working environment: When the working environment gives you freedom to experiment and grow, it enables you to be “professionally active,”
- Research students who need to work on newer avenues of knowledge and who have to be properly guided.

Discussion

It is evident that several factors motivate teachers to undertake activities for professional growth. One can observe a two-pronged motivational structure here: institution-driven and individual-initiated. Some teachers involve themselves in CPD activities because of external forces, such as the demands made by the profession,

the institution in which one is placed, or the achievements of their fellow teachers in the field. Some others engage in CPD purely for the joy they derive in keeping themselves up-to-date, thereby contributing to the growth of self, students, and the institution at large. Thus in addition to the tangible benefits of enhanced professional image and recognition and improved student performance, CPD contributes to innate professional satisfaction and fulfillment that a teacher passionate about the profession aspires to experience. To put it in a nutshell, as a teacher states, it is the love for the students coupled with the love for the subject and topped with the love for the job that motivates teachers to seek professional development opportunities. It clearly answers the second research question positively. A point that merits mention here is the fact that teachers acknowledge the role of the institution in facilitating their professional growth. A conducive workplace environment can go a long way in building communities of excellence.

Avenues for CPD

We understand that teachers are aware of CPD and are highly motivated to engage themselves in professional development activities. Let us now explore what opportunities teachers seek for CPD. The third question in the questionnaire requests teachers for this information. The avenues teachers look for CPD are presented below:

- Reading the latest literature in the area,
- Gaining awareness of innovations in the field,
- Applying innovative ideas in everyday work,
- Seeking fresh opportunities to teach,
- Enhancing professional knowledge through training,
- Collaborating with colleagues, students, and other professionals,
- Using the internet and the social media as a resource,
- Attending and presenting at conferences and seminars,
- Reinforcing learning and commitment through sharing knowledge,
- Networking with colleagues across the globe,
- Seeking and using library resources,
- Enrolling in teacher development courses (both offline and online courses),
- Membership in professional bodies,
- Taking part in research projects,
- Attending orientation and refresher courses,
- Publishing research in the areas of interest,
- Offering reading courses to students,
- Observation of other professionals in practice.

Discussion

The list above shows that teachers seek a wide range of opportunities for professional development. What is interesting to note is that teachers not only look for avenues to update their knowledge and skills but also are geared toward learning through experimenting with their own teaching. They are aware of the importance and role of the Internet and the social media in facilitating professional growth. They believe in the power of knowledge sharing and hence are keen to explore opportunities for networking with colleagues globally. Documenting one's research through publications, undertaking collaborative projects, being part of professional bodies, attending and presenting at conferences—all are a plethora of opportunities that teachers seek for professional development.

Assessment of CPD

While the earlier section presented the information regarding the professional development opportunities that teachers wish to engage in, this section attempts to gauge teachers' perceptions about their own professional growth. How do teachers assess their growth? What are some of the indicators of growth? This information is sought through the fourth question of the questionnaire. Some of the responses of the teachers are presented below.

- Training others/ passing on the training or learning to students and others,
- Acceptance and recognition from students and colleagues and other institutions,
- Supervising research scholars in newer areas of mutual interest,
- Designing new courses and tailoring them to suit specific needs,
- Presenting/ publishing research in seminars and conferences,
- The indicator of my growth as a teacher lies in my students. If they have been able to apply or use what I have taught them, then that is the biggest indicator of my effectiveness.
- Number of research students guided,
- Fast career growth,
- Being assigned greater academic and administrative responsibilities,
- I feel I have come a long way from the first year of teaching—skill-wise, attitude-wise, ability to handle situations and people, and, of course, in terms of subject knowledge.
- Even at this age, I'm motivated to register for courses and develop competencies in offering online programs. This is an indicator of growth—I'm willing to take RISKS and gear up for challenges. I've become less angry, and more patient while dealing with students!
- I can definitely attribute my own growth as a teacher to exposure to CPD programs; they broaden the vision, bring in new insights and perspectives for teaching and learning.

- Rather difficult to reflect on it at a personal level. Perhaps my peers, my students, and some of my bosses can talk better about it. One thing I perhaps can say is that over the years I have often felt humbled. If this is any indicator of growth, that is how I perceive it.
- Growth is reflected in the small perceptible changes that one experiences. The ability to reflect on one's teaching practices and strive for improvement, the ability to think and formulate a critical perspective on teaching, the willingness to participate actively in discussions and to accept new ideas, and the motivation to forever seek opportunities for one's professional development are all indicators of growth. These are the parameters for assessing the growth of a teacher.
- I think I have grown as a teacher/ researcher/ materials producer. My interests have become more interdisciplinary. I find more and more issues to engage with in order to develop myself as an ELT professional. Initially, I did not favor the use of mother tongue in the classroom, was more rigid about the classroom pedagogy, used to have high standards of English as the goal for students, and depended more on engaging with theoretical issues rather than looking at their practical relevance and usefulness. Now I have discovered the multilayered weave of the needs of students and deprived sections of the society, and my understanding of the effectiveness of diverse pedagogical practices and implications of theoretical perspectives at different levels has considerably widened. The lesson I have learnt is: The more one strives to learn and know, the more continents of ignorance one realizes within. Every bit of more knowledge launches me onto another voyage of discovery.

Discussion

The data above reveal that teachers assess their professional growth in terms of three parameters or indicators of growth: cognitive, pedagogic, and affective. While acquiring and sharing knowledge and skills, publishing, wielding academic and administrative responsibilities are categorized as indicators of cognitive growth, pushing one's own self to experiment and innovate in teaching, garnering student respect and affection, shaping oneself into an enabling teacher rather than a mere transmitter of knowledge can be labeled as indicators of pedagogic growth. The ability to reflect on and assess one's practice itself is an indicator of growth. The ability to shape oneself into an accepting human being, being able to manage emotions, developing facilitative attitudes are categorized as indicators of affective growth. A teacher is definitely not separate from an individual—growth as a professional is intertwined with development as a person. As one teacher muses, growth cannot always be assessed in observable and measurable terms—at least not all aspects of it. Being valued and respected by colleagues and being appreciated and loved by students is indeed a humbling experience and is sufficient indicator of professional and personal growth.

Evidence of the Impact of CPD

While the earlier sections focused on teacher awareness of CPD, motivation for CPD, avenues for CPD, and assessment of CPD, this section attempts to document the experiences of teachers where their efforts at and initiatives of CPD brought in tangible change in their thinking or in their practice or in both. The following are some of the instances that teachers shared:

Instance 1: An online course on critical thinking helped me to plan and also conduct my lessons in a more learner-centered manner involving them in critical thinking as they learnt the subject area that I taught.

Instance 2: I browse journal articles online and that helped me to quickly put together the references and literature reviews for small-scale studies I conducted usually for paper presentations in conferences.

Instance 3: Researching in newer areas (other than my existing knowledge base) increased my exposure as also allowed me to think of different disciplinary formations and epistemological frameworks.

Instance 4: Working with students from a variety of socioeconomic and pedagogical backgrounds enabled me to fine-tune my teaching skills as well as allowed me to think through my existing conceptual categories (for instance, about what constitutes “a good student,” testing and evaluation).

Instance 5: Being awarded the Chevening British Council Scholarship to do postdoctoral research in linguistics opened new avenues of research in language acquisition and applied linguistics for me.

Instance 6: Being the chief coordinator of the Centre for English Language Teaching (CELT) project at the University for English Language Training in Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka taught me administrative skills.

Instance 7: My effort to offer a Course in “Teacher Development” at the M. Phil level was one of my CPD initiatives. Beginning as a “reading course,” it evolved into a full-length taught course with constant modifications based on student feedback, adding to my own fresh insights.

Instance 8: My active participation in proposing, designing, and coordinating the B. Ed (English) program offered in my university.

Instance 9: I had the opportunity to attend the Teaching of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) Convention in New York in 2008. It was an eye-opener in many ways and helped me reflect on my own teaching practices. It was also reassuring because people from all over the world were discussing familiar issues and that helped me identify with the TESOL community. My participation in ESP SIG discussions deepened my understanding of the discipline and triggered new ideas for the courses that I offer at EFL University.

Instance 10: The online Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL) course that I did at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC) opened up new vistas for professional growth by providing fresh insights on online teacher development programs. It helped me connect with people from other parts of the world and share

ideas, and introduced me to an entirely new virtual experience. I am now convinced that online training programs are the best option for CPD for practitioners.

Instance 11: I go prepared to the classes. I am received better by my learners. The classroom acquires a less formal atmosphere allowing learners to discuss the concepts freely. This change in my teaching I consider is a contribution of CPD.

Instance 12: I provide a detailed feedback on my learner assignments and any work they do. They appreciate it and improve. They are left with little confusion and look forward to similar feedback. This has resulted in a sense of trust between my learners and me and I perceive this as a great change.

Instance 13: It is difficult to pinpoint with any accuracy. It is not always a case of “Input A produces Output A.” The changes in thinking and practice do not always follow immediately after exposure to a CPD “event.” It is really many such “events” followed by analysis and reflection that—over a period of time—change one’s practices and thinking.

Instance 14: One such change could be my realization that focusing on what my students can do rather than pointing out what they can’t is a better way to approach their problems.

Instance 15: Reading journals and attending seminars help in teaching of advanced-level courses and in discovering new avenues of research and reflection for me as well as my students.

Discussion

The benefits that teachers accrued owing to the CPD activities they engaged in are many and diverse. These can be understood in terms of enhanced teacher learning, improved student learning, and increased institutional cumulative knowledge base. The CPD initiatives undertaken by teachers enabled them to expand their pedagogic content knowledge (instance 1 and instance 15). Teachers are able to develop a classroom ecology that is conducive to learning with shared power and responsibility enhancing mutual trust and respect between them and their students (instance 11 and instance 12). The knowledge base is expanded, and newer areas of expertise are acquired (instance 2 and instance 3). New insights are gathered, new courses are designed and new networks are formed which act as an impetus for further CPD activities (instance 9 and instance 10). Existing conceptual categories (teacher beliefs, ideologies, and attitudes) are readjusted based on critical reflection of current practice—a means by which CPD is implemented (instance 4). Academic awards and administrative rewards not only boost teachers’ morale but push them to discover and realize the potential they are endowed with (instance 5 and instance 6). It is immensely satisfying to the soul of a teacher to conceive new courses and programs, thereby contributing to the cognitive caliber of students as well as the intellectual stature of the institution (instance 7 and instance 8). Despite these tangible evidences of the benefits of CPD for teachers, students, and institutions, it must be remembered that the benefits are not always immediate and measurable. Engaging in CPD activities

does not follow a linear path nor does it subscribe to a stimulus–response structure of the behaviorist approach. A considerable amount of latent learning occurs which surfaces only when the need arises (instance 13 and instance 14).

Findings

This section discusses the findings of the study. University teachers are aware of the need for and the importance of CPD activities. They understand CPD as commitment to profession, commitment to students, and commitment to self and as an integral part of professional life which is ongoing and lifelong. They are highly motivated to engage themselves in CPD activities. While in some cases such motivation emerges from external factors (e.g., demands made by the profession and upward career mobility) and is institution-driven, in the case of others, the innate urge for personal and professional growth acts as the impetus for engaging in CPD.

University teachers seek several avenues for professional growth. Designing new courses/ programs, networking with colleagues, undertaking collaborative projects, exploring publication opportunities are a few among these. They assess their professional growth in terms of three parameters: cognitive, pedagogic, and affective. CPD activities afford them growth in all the three arenas. Professional development of a quantifiable nature (e.g., an academic award or an administrative position) goes hand in hand with personal growth as an individual which is fluid and not measurable.

The academic freedom, the expectations of students, and the achievements of colleagues, which form a part of the institutional culture, contribute in a significant manner to the motivation for and subsequent initiatives in CPD. Teachers are conscious of building and assessing their growth graph which in itself is an indicator of CPD. They are able to identify and document specific instances that contribute to their growth. These include instances that involve attitudinal changes, experimentation, and innovation in pedagogy, networking, and collaboration with colleagues across institutions and disciplines.

Implications

The primary finding is that teachers are aware of CPD and are highly motivated to engage in CPD activities, and it implies that it is important to undertake agency for one's own professional growth and when this happens both individuals and institutions can excel. The next finding is that teachers seek a plethora of opportunities for professional growth and it suggests that (a) plenty of avenues for development are available and possible and (b) individual teachers can try out what best suits the needs of the specific contexts they are placed in. Further, it has been observed that collaboration and congenial professional atmosphere lead to consistent and rewarding CPD efforts. Institutions, therefore, need to foster and sustain a culture wherein teachers

are motivated and encouraged to undertake CPD activities. They can facilitate CPD through teacher-friendly procedures (e.g., granting leave of absence). Finally, since it is neither possible nor advisable always to assess professional growth in quantifiable terms, parameters may be developed to measure growth in qualitative terms.

Limitations

The limitations of the study are detailed here. The study was carried out at an institution that offers academic freedom and flexibility. Teachers working in such a setting have more opportunity and scope for engaging in a variety of professional development opportunities than those who work in restrictive settings. Therefore, the findings obtained from the study may not be generalized. The study focuses only on teacher perceptions of what entails CPD and what constitutes growth. It does not measure these against standard definitions. This may be perceived as a limitation. The teachers in the study are both knowledgeable and articulate about the construct of CPD. If conducted with a different set of teachers who are not articulate enough to share their views about and experiences of CPD, such a study may not yield similar results.

Further Research

This section offers a few suggestions for further research. First, it may be interesting to document the not so successful stories of CPD (along with success stories) to investigate what lessons teachers have learnt from these and what measures they have taken to continue to stay motivated. Then it is possible to undertake a case study of one/two teachers in terms of tracing their growth as perceived by them over a period of time with a view to identifying the most satisfying and rewarding sources/tools of CPD. Last, it would be interesting to carry forward these insights to teacher developers in in-service teacher training programs and explore how they can transform some of these instances as cases to train teachers in other contexts/institutional settings.

Conclusion

Continuing professional development is a journey to undertake, not a destination to reach. It is helpful to travel with a co-passenger such that the journey is made less tedious and more rewarding. In other words, a well-structured path with signposts might help prevent detours as well as disillusionments. This view is voiced by Harding (2009: 8) when he states, "It's all very well talking about self-development, but we all need a bit of help, commitment, and structure." Moreover, as we explore deeper and learn more, we realize that we are reshaping and restructuring ourselves in order

to mould ourselves to the changing scenarios, and in this constant change lies the key for the growth of our students, our institutions, and ourselves.

Appendix 1

Questionnaire

Dear Colleague

This questionnaire is part of a research study on continuing professional development. The data obtained will be kept confidential and will be used purely for research purposes. Your cooperation in filling in the questionnaire is solicited and appreciated. The questionnaire has five items, and it may take about 45 min to fill it in.

With thanks and warm regards

Padmini Shankar

EFLU, Hyderabad

Part I

1. Name:
2. Age:
3. Teaching experience (no. of years):
4. Levels at which you taught:
5. Average class size:

Part II

6. What is continuing professional development (CPD) for you? How would you define it?
7. What motivates you to strive for CPD?
8. What avenues do you have or seek for CPD?
9. How would you assess your own growth as a teacher? What are some of the indicators of growth for you?
10. Narrate two instances where your efforts at CPD brought in tangible changes in your thinking or in your practice or in both.

Instance 1

Instance 2

Thank you for your time and cooperation.

Appendix 2

Sample Filled-in Questionnaire

Dear Colleague

This questionnaire is part of a research study on continuing professional development. The data obtained will be kept confidential and will be used purely for research purposes. Your cooperation in filling in the questionnaire is solicited and appreciated. The questionnaire has five items, and it may take about 45 min to fill in.

With thanks and warm regards

Padmini Shankar

EFLU, Hyderabad

Part I

Personal Profile

1. Name: XXXX
2. Age: XXXX
3. Teaching experience (no. of years): 40 years
4. Levels at which you taught: Undergraduate: Postgraduate: Research:
5. Average class size: XXXX

Part II

6. What is continuing professional development (CPD) for you? How would you define it?

A commitment to the profession you are pursuing and the urge within you to develop yourself, so that you can become better. CPD also refers to possessing a self-awareness of the job you are doing, which often may leave you dissatisfied with the feeling that there is so much more to learn and do, and put in the right foot forward to fill the gaps.

7. What motivates you to strive for CPD?

My commitment to my job, which is expressed as love in its three manifestations—Love for my learners, love for my subject, and love for my job. Once I am sure of these three things, it is often difficult either to cheat myself or someone else. This is the driving force behind my strife for CPD.

8. What avenues do you have or seek for CPD?

One of the best avenues I have found for myself is reading. God has blessed with me good reading habits, and books come my way on their own. I supplement my reading with implementing some of my learning in my own profession and also advocate it to my students. Besides reading, I am a keen listener and an observer. Whenever I

attend conferences and seminars, I take down copious notes and try to disseminate them among my peers and learners. This process of summarizing and talking about what I have learnt reinforces my learning as well as commitment.

9. How would you assess your own growth as a teacher? What are some of the indicators of growth for you?

Rather difficult to reflect on it at a personal level. Perhaps my peers, my students, and some of my bosses can talk better about it. One thing I perhaps can say is that over the years I have often felt humbled. If this is any indicator of growth, that is how I perceive it.

10. Narrate two instances where your efforts at CPD brought in tangible changes in your thinking or in your practice or in both.

Instance 1: I go prepared to the classes. I am received better by my learners. The classroom acquires a less formal atmosphere allowing learners to discuss the concepts freely. This change in my teaching I consider is a contribution of CPD.

Instance 2: I provide a detailed feedback on my learner assignments and any work they do. They appreciate it and improve. They are left with little confusion and look forward to similar feedback. This has resulted in a sense of trust between my learners and me and I perceive this as a great change.

Thank you for your time and cooperation.

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