



Review Paper

Examining Theoretical Foundations and Practical Implications of Continuous Professional Development

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ABSTRACT

Continuous Professional Development (CPD) plays a vital role for educators in improving their teaching practices, keeping them up-to-date, and creating a positive learning environment for students, as well as addressing the gaps in teaching needs. This study focuses on the theoretical foundation of CPD, including Adult Learning Theory, Reflective Practice, Experiential Learning, and Situated Learning. It critically examines the framework of CPD and discusses the findings of its implementation in educational settings. By reviewing key points of the research articles, this paper analyses the best practices and gaps in CPD, which highlight its major issues, including limited teaching support and sustainability. The paper also mentions personal growth ideas and recommendations to enhance CPD use and productivity. It assists in enforcing blended learning strategies as well as guided reflection. The findings indicate the significance of a cooperative and research-intensive process in ensuring that it can be maximised in terms of its effectiveness in teaching practice and student learning.

Keywords: *Adult learning theory, Continuous professional development, Experiential learning, Pedagogical advancement, Reflective theory*

INTRODUCTION

Continuous Professional Development (CPD) is a broad phenomenon, as it covers many activities that an educator can use to improve his or her skills and keep the quality of his or her practices high during his/her career. It is an important element of professional development of educators, and it was a container concept in the study (Lessing & De Witt, 2007). It ensures that teachers remain updated about teaching pedagogical strategies, curriculum advancement, and student engagement techniques in the classroom. This study presents different theoretical perspectives on CPD and links these theories with empirical research findings, identifies CPD frameworks in educational organizations, and suggests research-based improvements. This debate will also highlight the best applications and the challenges related to CPD execution. According to the researcher, CPD is a learning process resulting from meaningful interaction with the context (both in time and space) and eventually leading to changes in teachers' professional practice (actions) and in their thinking about that practice (Day & Sachs, 2005).

Research Objective

- To analyse the challenges of existing CPD programs in Pakistan by considering different theoretical perspectives, CPD frameworks, and evaluation models.

Research Question

- What challenges limit the implementation of CPD programs in Pakistan considering theoretical perspectives of existing CPD framework and evaluation models?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Several theories underpin the concept of CPD. Among the most important theoretical views, the following should be mentioned:

Adult Learning Theory

Knowles (1980) introduced the original concept of Adult Learning Theory (ALT). The ALT model is a method of adult learning that is different from children and based on their individual needs and styles (Knowles, 1978). According to Knowles (1980), this theory was developed to use some CPD programs that focus on five aspects, which are self-directed learning, adult learning experience, readiness to learn, orientation of learning, and motivation to learn to improve self-respect and career growth (Magwenya et al., 2023). There is a behaviourist learning theory that focuses on observable changes in learner behaviour and action (Chen, 2005). It emphasizes continuous practice of specific behaviour until it becomes a habit. In this theory, learning is a process based on measurable and visible behaviour, considering the human mind is a memory box where responses can be evaluated and examined without knowing the mental process internally. According to Quratulain et al., (2021), this theory is useful for instructional design, curriculum development, and educational technology as well.

Reflective Practice

Reflection is a dynamic approach to the perception of one's own participation on a deeper level. Reflective practice is a process of active thinking while facing hurdles and obstacles (Dewey, 2022). Reflection involves past and present experiences, learning, so a person can observe and plan for a better approach to similar situations in the future. Thus, according to Dewey,

when an educator is involved in reflective practices, he/she will be on a path of constant improvement. Reflective practices may assist the educators with the realization of the periods when some attitudes or cultural norms are even out of their reach. Reflection is a priority considered a valuable process that is likely to induce changes in teachers' educational practices (Griffiths et al., 2024). It is simply creating a habit or structure around examining experience. Practice is to find out how much, how frequently and why reflection is done. It is simply practiced at various frequencies and depths. Sometimes, a deep examination of an event and sometimes just a general experience in a week, a month, or years. It serves numerous purposes, including documentation, learning, outlines of thinking, rearranging values deeply, and many other purposes (Amulya, 2004).

Experiential Learning Theory

This theory was introduced by Kolb (1984) who defined learning by doing. This process is used to pilot life; individuals can practice this procedure for all forms of learning, development, and modification. The process of learning takes place everywhere and it is a lifelong exercise. The experiential learning process supports performance, enhancement, learning, and growth. This theory has 4 stages including a) concrete learning (It begins with the learner's senses to feel what is happening around now), b) reflective observation (after the experience, the learner reflects and develops ideas and links feelings about the experience), c) abstract conceptualization (at this stage, the learner develops a theory or concept and principles for hypothesis testing), and d) active experimentation (at this last stage, the Learner tests and creates a new experience).

The first two stages of the cycle involve grasping an experience; the last two focus on transforming an experience. Kolb argues that effective learning is seen as the learner goes through the cycle, and that they can enter the cycle at any time (Miettinen, 2000). The learner must know to understand which learning skills to continue using in a particular situation. Direct experience is the first stage of learning in which the learner observes things around them and uses their senses in real situations, which is known as concrete learning. The second phase is reflective observation, in which the learner observes and evaluates other experiences and analyses the state, instead of jumping into the matter. There is another approach to learning in which he approaches abstract conceptualization. This learning is not a direct experience. It requires thinking, analysing, and planning. This is to remember that a learner can start learning at any stage, depending on

their experiences, and thinking level (McCarthy, 2010).

Social Learning Theory

Bandura and Walters (1977) presented Social Learning Theory. This theory is also known as planned behaviour theory, and it discusses how a person learns in steps. At first, there is observation, the second is imitation, and then the third is modelling. According to Bandura (1969), a person uses their observation about behaviour as a guide for other actions later. Everyone does not need to mimic others' behaviour after observation. At first, Albert Bandura did not believe that human has any cognitive control over their actions. He updated his theory and reintroduced "Cognitive Social Learning Theory" (Gibson, 2004). It has four key stages including Attention (noticing any kind of behaviour), Retention (after attention, retention is how well you remember the action), Reproduction (once you have given attention and retain the memory, at this stage you perform the same observed behaviour), Motivation (this is the final stage where you decided after experience either you adapt this behaviour or reject it based on other's experience). Hence, Social Learning theory is possible through a strong cognitive process.

According to researchers, it is also suggested that social learning processes are required to learn new skills and influence practices (Reed et al., 2010; Ladd & Mize, 1983; Wals, 2023). According to Wenger (2000), it describes learning as a contribution and practices the idea of societies when referring to learning. Wenger describes a community of practice as a 'social process of negotiating competence in a domain over time. It has 3 vital fundamentals: domain, community, and practice (Ahmad et al., 2023). Social learning theory revolves around participation, experiencing the world, and engagement (Allen et al., 2020). It also emphasizes the cognitive process that how learning happens through the environment and mind by using memory, attention, and motivation. Therefore, Social learning theory is defined as the "bridge" between rote learning theories (behaviourism) and the cognitive style.

Situated Learning Theory

This theory was introduced by Brown et al. (2005) and later explained by Lave and Wenger (1991). Since then, it explains how educators think about learning. This is basically an alternative to the traditional method of learning that focuses on mental process. According to this theory, People learn when they are in a real situation. This theory highlights that learning happens when you are a part of a practiced community. At the beginning, the Learner starts from a simple task and

then gains experience and moves towards a complex task. According to Lave and Wenger (1991), the learner starts with a scratch and becomes fully experienced with the passage of time (Ahmad et al., 2025). In this theory, Lave and Wenger (1991) introduced the new term Legitimate Peripheral Participation, which means a learner first performs a simple task, and then gradually develop their skills.

For instance, educators are involved in real-life experiences and manage the classroom situation. The benefit of this theory is to get real-life hands-on experience, and the dark side of this theory is the lack of foundation knowledge before jumping into the real-life situation. But the powerful influence of this theory is ultimately to place a learner into to real situation and experience in a meaningful context. It helps in problem-solving skills of educators to be present in real-life situations and adjust to unexpected challenges suddenly. Therefore, this theory is more helpful in professional development and in other fields such as art and creativity, engineering, and education.

Similarities & Dissimilarities in the Theories

Adult learning theory and Experiential learning theory, Reflective Practices (an instructional strategy or an approach), emphasize the importance of real-world application and promote individual learner independence. All believe that learning is not a passive process. Social learning theory also highlights the learning that happens through social interaction and observation. In all theories, a learner must engage in experience. Both theories emphasize continuous growth and experience is significant. The reflective practice emphasizes learning based on the reflection, and experiential learning defines a sequence of experience and reflection. Conversely, social learning theory deals with learning in a social context while the situated learning theory deals with being part of a real situation or experience.

Active participation is common in all the above theories. In every theory, the learner is participating, engaging, and interacting. All are promoting continuous development over time. All theories believe that all learning experiences occur due to the environment, whether it is related to social, situational, experiential, adult theory, or reflective practice. Taken collectively, these theories reinforce CPD which allows teachers to actively practice what they study in the training not merely attend passively. These all theories emphasize on learner's responsibility. They also espouse modified learning where teachers themselves establish their objectives, which they ponder their experiences and develop professionally depending on what goes on in

the classroom. All theories aim to improve and increase the scope of competency and professional practice. All theories facilitate collaborative learning, training as well as reflective activities.

Social learning theory is structured in a step-by-step process, but the source of observation is external, whereas experiential learning theory has four steps of the learning cycle, and the source is internal. Reflective practice is more flexible and situational and does not consist of any cycle or steps, and it deals with self-reflection. In Adult learning theory, the source is a person's past experiences or willingness to learn, and in situated learning theory, it focuses on real-life situations or experiences. In social learning theory Person's role is an observer and imitator, whereas in Experiential learning theory Person is actively participating, and in reflective practice Person is a Critical self-analyser and In Adult Learning theory, a Person is self-directed and responsible for their own learning, whereas in Situated learning theory requires participation in a community. In Social Learning theory, a Person gets reward and punishment or finds a role model, whereas in Experiential Learning Theory learner finds meaningful experience, and in Reflective Practice person gets self-improvement and personal growth. In Adult Learning theory, people become experts in immediate application and meet the needs of real life, whereas Situated learning theory strengthens learners' belonging to the community.

Adult learning theory focuses on the needs and styles of adults, whereas reflective learning theory is particularly for educators and focuses on self-reflection to improve future actions. Therefore, the focus of learning is different. Reflective practice encourages one's correction and improvement after self-assessment, whereas experiential learning develops deeper knowledge by practicing. The ideal learning environment for situated theory is the real-life situation where learning occurs naturally. The main difference also shows the usage of the following theories, for instance, the Adult Learning theory is used to train adults and in professional training, whereas the social learning theory is used for copying a mentor's styles of teaching. Experiential learning theory is used in classroom learning and management, and reflective practice is used as an improvement of taught lessons after teaching.

METHODOLOGY

This study provides a comparative summary to examine a long-term effect on classroom management by reviewing the findings of the research studies conducted by Davey and Egan (2021) and Naila et al.,

(2022). Both studies focus primarily on the importance of CPD. Davey and Egan, (2021) show the benefits of CPDs, and it's a continuous journey whereas Naila et al., (2022)

show the need and requirement, which ultimately highlights its importance for teaching quality.

Table 1
Comparison of Reviewed Studies

Components	Study Conducted by Davey and Egan, (2021)	Study Conducted by Naila et al., (2022).
Aims & Objectives	It focuses on the long-term impact of Teachers' professional development that how it affects classroom management, lesson planning, test development, and classroom assessment.	It is about professional development for teachers in the context of Pakistan. It impacts the teachers' dealings with assessment development, classroom assessment, and management.
Results & Findings	It finds that CPDs help teachers build their confidence and improve their classroom management.	According to this study, many teachers do not have support and resources for follow-up. They do receive basic training, but are unable to implement it.
	It discusses the reflective practice of teachers and adapts new skills which is provided by the Incredible Years Teacher Classroom Program (IY-TCP)	This study highlights that mostly teachers follow the traditional method of teaching due to no exposure to modern methods.
	Customized teacher training met the needs of the local school culture. It also led to better learning outcomes and planning.	All five hypotheses were accepted and showed a positive and strong bond between CPD and components of different pedagogies.
Recommendations	Teachers were recommended that CPD should be continuous and regularly done.	Teacher competence and confidence increased after the CPD training.
	Constructive and effective collaboration, reflection, and problem-solving of the teachers are also strengthened by CPD.	There is a finding of better understanding of Formative and Summative assessments by teachers, and they improve the evaluation of students.
	This study highlights how students changed their behaviour after classroom management strategies were implemented by teachers.	This paper draws attention to the requirement for more structured and regular CPDs in public schools.

Reflection

Reading both research studies and exploring different theories of CPD, it becomes clear that the effective professional development is comprehensive that it is an ongoing journey and continuous process of development, not a single day session. The very first research study explains that learning is not only about taking sessions and training, but follow-up and its implementation in the classroom is the fruitful outcome of these CPDs (Davey & Egan, 2021). In this article, teachers were not only told what to do but also reflected, mentioned impacts on students' behaviour and their confidence to grow. These were potent strategies that led a teacher to the realization that continued and contextualized support is critical towards professional development.

On the other hand, Naila et al., (2022) study is about CPD in Pakistan. It explains the challenges, which mention a lot of existing challenges. Teachers who attend CPD are not connected with the real classroom

environment. These kinds of CPD programs do not make changes in teachers' and students' lives. I have attended many workshops where the idea is not given for practical and after two or three days, it becomes useless. In case CPD is transformative, it provides the teacher with a voice to speak. Teachers should be partners in learning, not a listener to listen to the instructions only. Being a professional, we need to adapt strategies and support each other. However, Guskey's model also gives me a useful lens to see CPD as something that should give visible outcomes. Not just to create better students, but teachers, also, to make better professionals.

Therefore, CPD for educators should be continued, focusing on real classroom management, including collaboration and mentoring. In conclusion, it is all about a continuously changing mindsets, building confidence, and empowering teachers to become a better version of themselves. That is the kind of CPD I want to be a part of to bring change. The existing CPD frameworks and evaluation models describe the

effectiveness of overall CPD. However, after reviewing the theories and different models it is reflected that the differentiated models as well as differentiated evaluation need to be considered for teachers as per different requirements, abilities, and significance.

Competing Interest

The authors had no competing interests.

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