

From Concept to Practice: A Multi-Stakeholder Exploration of Continuous Professional Development in the Pre-tertiary Sector

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Abstract

Continuous learning in response to global challenges and technological advancements call for investments in teacher professional development that recognizes the unique needs of teachers in the 21st century. Effective professional development for sustaining teacher growth and lifelong learning incorporates both traditional and non-traditional elements shifting away from traditional conceptions of professional development. This paper explores pre-tertiary teacher's conceptualization of CPD within existing policy framework and its impact on teacher professional practice. Using a mixed methods approach, this paper relied on the sequential exploratory design to gain insights into teacher conceptions of CPD, existing implementation framework for CPD and its impact on professional practice. Using multiple sampling techniques data was solicited from 435 participants in 67 public senior high schools. An interview protocol and TPD questionnaire were used to collect data which was subsequently analyzed using SPSS. It emanated from the study that pre-tertiary teachers' conceptions of CPD are primarily formal initiatives which are supported by existing implementation frameworks through structural arrangements that heavily rely on such initiatives. It was also discovered that existing professional development impact teachers' knowledge and skills more than their efficacy. It is recommended that teachers, policy makers and CPD stakeholders embrace a more balanced and collaborative approach to professional development that promotes lifelong learning for teachers.

Keywords: Continuous Professional Development, Teacher Professional Practice, Pre-tertiary teachers, teacher knowledge, teacher skills, teacher efficacy, lifelong learning.

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1.0 Introduction

Enhancing the quality of education has received global attention from educational stakeholders and governments over the years as worldwide challenges necessitate the need for change, a change that requires continuous learning. Expectations of educational institutions, as well as teachers are evolving as the world continues to change and improving educational quality has gain global attention among governments and educational stakeholders. Globally, educational reforms and programmes have focused on enhancing classroom instruction, with special focus on the teacher's role as a change agent for improving learning outcomes (Brown, White & Kelly, 2021). As a result, many nations have made significant investments in teacher quality by expanding continuous professional development for teachers (Abakah, Addae & Amuzu, 2023).

Continuous professional development has become even more apparent today as technological advancements continue to influence educational standards and teacher learning has become relevant to improve teachers' skills and competencies. As teachers have been identified as a relevant school-based factor that influences student outcomes, this accentuates the cruciality of professional development for teachers today (Ohlson, Swanson, Adams-Manning, & Byrd, 2016). In the 21st century, many educational reforms have focused on aligning educational systems with global standards which emphasize student-centred learning and the use of technology in the classroom and to meet these standards institutions recognize the need to equip teachers with requisite knowledge and skills. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in the United States and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) for instance placed emphasis on providing highly qualified teachers to directly impact student performance (Klien, 2015). The prominence of CPD in such reforms have set the bar high for professional development recognizing its relevance in enhancing educational outcomes. In Ghana, the Teacher Education Division of the Ghana Education Service (now National Teaching Council) in 2012 implemented the Pre-Tertiary Teacher Professional Development and Management (PTPDM) policy to manage issues of teacher quality in its educational system. It provided a national framework for enhancing teaching through practical in-service training. Using a competency-based approach for the professional development of teachers, this policy emphasized CPD activities and programs that prioritized teacher knowledge and skills to address the evolving requirements for the teaching profession.

The National Teaching Council (NTC) in 2020 went on to develop a Framework for Continuous Professional Development for pre-tertiary teachers in Ghana which served as reference for CPD initiators to develop programmes for teachers. The introduction of this system was intended to improve participation of teachers in CPD activities but it has been argued to have promoted an overreliance on CPD programmes for points and not to

improve classroom and teaching outcome (Abakah & Wellington, 2023). The policy appears to have created a flood of CPD Service Providers with a variety of interests in promoting CPD programs for teachers who are unsure how points for participation in such activities will accrue to advance their careers (Ibid, 2023). While these policy attempts have made significant strides in promoting teacher participation in CPD, it appears to have shifted from the theoretical basis of recognizing CPD as a lifelong process. Teacher professional development appears to be considered as an event that teachers need to participate in rather than continuous learning and, it appears pre-tertiary teachers lack the theoretical and analytical framework to guide their conception of CPD as an ongoing learning process. This study therefore explores teacher's conception of CPD within prevailing arrangements for professional development for teachers. It goes on to explore the impact of such conceptions on professional practice of teachers. The objectives of this paper are reflected in the ensuing research questions:

1.1 Research Questions

1. How do pre-tertiary teachers conceptualize Continuous Professional Development?
2. What characterizes existing Continuous Professional Development for pre-tertiary teacher?
3. What is the perceived impact of existing CPD on the professional practise of pre-tertiary teachers?

2.0 Review of Literature

2.1 Continuous Professional Development for Teachers

Education like many professions consider Continuous Professional Development (CPD) important for employee advancement. As professional development for teachers often vary depending on educational traditions and circumstances, there is no one definition of professional development for teachers, so what does CPD for teachers look like? Darling-Hammond (2005) defines Teacher Professional Development (TPD) as the process of improving teachers' status through enhanced awareness and knowledge base. Rogan and Grayson (2003), also consider Continuous Professional Development for teachers to fundamentally include activities that support teachers to grow in their careers. Professional development is a long-term, carefully thought-out process that improves the ability of teacher to instruct, monitor classroom activities and assess students (Saleem, Gul & Dogar 2021) Through teacher professional development, teachers are empowered to identify issues in the classroom and devise workable solutions.

Continuous professional development as process is not linear and must be well planned and long term. It is must help teachers to adopt new roles and provide opportunities for teacher career progression (Purdon, 2003). TPD must enable teachers to take charge of their learning and development through an ongoing cycle of introspection and action (Wilton, 2016). Any activity that involves reflective actions for enabling the opportunity for learning and re-learning among teachers to improve their professionalism, beliefs, values, attitudes, and understandings may therefore be considered as TPD (Creemers, Kyriakos & Antoniou, 2013; Darling-Hammond, Newton, & Wei, 2013; Guskey, 2010; Morgan & Neil, 2004;). In this way, TPD encompasses all learning forms ranging from individual to institutional experiences both intended and unintended that seek to educate (Goodall, et al., 2006). Continuous Professional Development (CPD) has become an integral part of many educational reforms worldwide, driven by the significance of teacher quality in improving student outcomes (Darling-Hammond, 2017). CPD for teachers comprises a variety of learning activities to improve teaching practices, mastery and competencies of teachers and scholars have argued that CPD not only improves teaching practices but also enhances the adaptiveness of teachers to the evolving needs of 21st century education (Avalos, 2011).

2.2 Conceptualization of CPD

CPD conception for teachers have progressed over the years moving away from traditional models to more collaborative and reflective models. Early models of CPD promoted episodic workshops and seminars disconnected from the day-to-day realities of teachers (Guskey, 2002). Research has highlighted the minimal impact of short-term initiatives on improving teacher growth and their classroom practices (Desimone, 2009). For CPD to be effective it must be continuous, contextualized and connected to teachers practices to improve teacher instructional practices (Opfer & Pedder, 2011). CPD must also be content focus, encourage active learning ensure collective participation, coherent with institutional goals and have sufficient duration (Desimone, 2009). Content focus for CPD initiatives implies that teacher professional development should emphasize subject matter and pedagogical skills to improve student outcomes. Active learning underscores the importance of professional development for teachers to engage teachers in active learning strategies such as modelling, peer observations and collaborative inquiries; collective participation involves putting teachers from the same school in teams or departments to create a community of practice that supports shared learning and reflection (Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008); coherence involves aligning professional development with educational reforms and school improvement programmes to make teacher learning more relevant and increase chances of implementation (Borko, 2004); and duration involves sustaining teacher learning over a period of time for increased comprehension and recognized changes in teacher instruction (Wei, Darling-Hammond, & Adamson, 2010). A combined approach to professional development that incorporates both formal and informal CPD initiatives is important for engaging and sustaining

teacher growth.

Formal CPD initiatives involve structured learning such as seminars, workshops, conferences and educational programmes that are designed to enhance the knowledge, skills and competencies of teachers (Earley & Bubb, 2004). Informal CPD initiatives are more flexible and unstructured initiatives that involve activities such as peer collaboration, self-directed learning and reflective practices that contribute to the professional growth of teachers (Hai, Le Thach, & Linh, 2024). Reflective practice in CPD for teachers for instance has attracted a lot of interest. Schön's (2017) concept of the "reflective practitioner" underscores the need for teachers to look back on their teaching, question their philosophies and adjust their professional practices. Modern CPD models integrate this concept of reflection as a critical component where teachers collaborate to plan, observe and analyse lessons to promote a culture of ongoing inquiry and professional growth (Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace, & Thomas, 2006). Another emerging area of interest in teachers' professional development is connection between teacher identity and their professional development. CPD when sustained can significantly impact the teachers' professional identities, their efficacy, beliefs and dedication (Day & Gu, 2009). Despite the relevance of CPD, teachers often criticize these initiatives such as workshops to be misaligned with their interests and contexts often leading to less meaningful outcomes and instructional practices of teachers (Kennedy, 2014). To address these challenges scholars, call for more teacher-driven and school-embedded approaches where teachers have a say in determining what to learn and crafting their developmental pathways (Avalos, 2011).

2.3 Theoretical Underpinnings of the Study

2.3.1 Andragogy (Malcolm Shepard Knowles, 1968)

The Adult Learning Theory, or Andragogy, developed by Malcolm Knowles is premised on understanding that adults learn differently from children. Prior educational research was largely concerned with the idea of teaching which was primarily focused on children. Knowles observed notable distinctions between adult learners and young learners in their orientation and approach to learning that fundamentally set the two apart. Knowles identified in adults distinctive learning processes compared to younger learners, which underscores the relevance of leveraging such attributes to enhance adult education. This theory emphasizes the varied dimensions of adult learning experiences and the significance of incorporating such experiences into adult education to make it meaningful. Relying on this theory, adults' engagement in learning activities must reflect the fundamental ways in which they differ compared to children (Birzer, 2004). A typical example is adults unlike children often have responsibilities and time demands that may influence how they learn or how much time they can spend on learning activities.

As an early learning theory, Andragogy is founded on five key assumptions that remain relevant for contemporary adult education. The assumptions undergirding this theory include; autonomy and the self-concept or self-directed learning; past learning experiences which signifies accumulated life experiences of learners; learning driven by internal motivation also known as goal-directed learning; readiness to learn which reveals the relevance of learning and; practical reasons to learn which highlights problem-centred learning. The initial assumption accents the need to recognize that adult learners exhibit a strong sense of direction and independence which motivates them to take charge of their own learning. For effective learning, adult learners must be provided with avenues to chart their own path, set goals and progress with minimal supervision. Adult learners generally dislike learning situations that do not empower them but take their will from them (Pohland & Bova, 2000). Engaging them in a manner that they find empowering is important for fostering effective learning. The second assumption recommends that adults possess a wealth of life experiences that becomes evident in the learning process. Compared to younger learners who are beginning to gain life experiences, adults have accumulated life experiences that provides valuable resources for enriching classroom discussions and learning activities. Adult educators must recognize and integrate such experiences to structure meaningful and engaging learning activities for adult learners. The third assumption highlights how adults unlike younger learners are inherently goal-oriented. Adults are often intrinsically motivated and participate in learning activities with specific goals in mind. Adults select specific objectives to pursue and purposefully choose learning activities that align with their goals. According to Knowles (1980), adult education must focus on existential issues that people and organizations face and tailor learning experiences to effectively address such issues. Adults are often in early or advanced stages of their career and recognize the significance of further education, creating a sense of eagerness to learn. Adults will commit to learning goals that they find meaningful and realistic (Lalitha, 2005). Another important assumption of this theory is relevance of learning experiences. Adult learners often seek to establish a connection between what they learn and their work or life in general. Adult learners are drawn to practical learning experiences that align with their career and individual growth in and outside the workplace. Lastly, adult learners gravitate towards learning approaches that emphasize problem solving. Adult learners unlike younger learners look out for learning activities that allow them tackle and address real-world problems or solve simulated tasks, which enhances the relevance of their learning experiences making it more meaningful. Andragogy points out the distinct needs and learning styles of adult learners, advocating for learning strategies that prioritize these unique attributes and experiences to foster meaningful learner engagement.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Research design

This study relied on a mixed-methods approach using the exploratory sequential design to explore perspectives of pre-tertiary teachers on CPD and its influence on the professional practice of teachers. The study relied on the constructivist principle using a three-phase approach. The initial phase of the study explored teacher conceptualization of CPD, CPD characteristics and its perceived benefits using interviews. To generalize and extend the qualitative findings, the second phase of the study shifted to a post-positivist approach, which involved using qualitative themes to design a Teacher's Professional Development Questionnaire, which was subsequently used in the third phase to collect data on professional development activities and teacher professional practice. The choice of this design was situated in the need to explore the real-life experiences of participants and expand their views using quantitative measures to validate their experiences for a broader understanding of professional development for pre-tertiary teachers. This design also makes room for new and unanticipated discoveries for further research.

3.2 Participants

For the qualitative phase of the study, 3 headteachers, and 1 training officer and 12 pre-tertiary teachers were engaged for the study. 3 head teachers from each school category (A, B and C) and 1 training officer from the Ghana Education Service (GES) were purposively selected as information-rich cases. For the quantitative component of the study 435 pre-tertiary teachers from 67 public Senior High Schools (SHS) participated in the study. Participants in the survey were predominantly males, which illustrates the domination of male teachers in Ghanaian second-cycle institutions. The majority of the survey respondents (258, 59.3%) were aged between 27 and 42 and for the level of education, most of the respondents (70.6%) possessed a bachelor's degree. In relation to work experience, 121 (27.8%) respondents had work experience that spanned between 2-5 years and 103 (23.7) %, respondents also had experience spanning between 11-15 years.

3.3 Data collection

An extensive data collection strategy was designed to collect data from participants. Permission was sought from School Heads and GES. An interview was held with the training officer from GES. 3 School Heads from category A, B and C were also interviewed. 12 teacher (4 from each school category) at their convenience on different days were also engaged. The participants were engaged in conversations that lasted 20 to 30 minutes. These interviews provided in-depth information, on respondents' opinions and experiences regarding their professional development and practice which was expanded to develop a Teacher Professional Development questionnaire and subsequently administered to all respondents for the quantitative part of the study. To administer the questionnaire, together with respondents a convenient time was decided for the questionnaires to be distributed. The questionnaire was administered on the agreed dates and clarified to all respondents who were allowed 14 days to fill out questionnaires and returned through a liaison in their respective schools. For non-traceability and anonymity, pseudonyms and alphabets were used for the participants and schools. Voluntary consent was obtained from participant by requesting them to sign a confidentiality agreement administered together with the questionnaire.

3.4 Measures/ Instruments

Measurement instruments for teacher professional development has shifted from standardized measures to best practices that align with a study's research questions (Desimone, 2009). To collect data on pre-tertiary teachers' perspectives on their professional development and its influence on their professional practice, a semi-structured interview protocol was designed. Two separate protocols (1 for GES representatives and 1 for pre-tertiary teachers) were designed to collect data on the research questions from key informants. The key informants' protocols comprised 11 and 15 items each which measured existing features of CPD for teachers and its impact on their professional practice. This instrument was relied on to provide preliminary data that guided the development of the second measure and established the credibility of the qualitative findings. Based on the research design a Teacher Professional Development (TPD) questionnaire was developed to ascertain the generalizability of the qualitative findings. This measure was divided into four primary sections. Section A, covered the bio data for respondents and Section B to D explored teachers' conceptualisation of CPD, existing arrangements for teacher professional development and the perceived impact of CPD on teacher professional practice which was measured on a five (5) point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The scale was also coded as: neutral = 1; strongly disagree = 2; disagree = 3, agree = 4; strongly agree = 5. To establish reliability for this measure, a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.785 was obtained from our pre-test.

3.5 Data Analysis

To explore teacher conceptualizations about professional development, existing characteristics of professional development for teachers and teacher professional practice we employed thematic analysis and descriptive

statistics. For the qualitative data, thematic analysis was conducted using six phases as prescribed by Braun & Clarke's (2006). First, we familiarized ourselves with the data from our interviews. The transcript from the interview was read and re-read and our early impressions noted down. We then used theoretical thematic analysis to generate codes that reflected our research questions. After carefully examining the codes, we put them into broad themes. We reviewed themes to ensure that they do not overlap and decided on the final key themes. Key themes were assembled under each research question and grouped according to analytical categories as per our research questions. To demonstrate trends and patterns identified, narratives were drawn from our data. For the quantitative data the Statistical Product and Service Solution (SPSS) software was employed to edit, code and analyse the data. The demographics of respondents were analysed using frequencies and percentages. Our research questions were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

In adherence to ethical standards, clearance was obtained from the Institutional Review Board of the University of Cape Coast. We used alphabets and numbers for anonymity and non-traceability. A confidentiality agreement was attached to the research instruments to assure participants of confidentiality and guarantee that all participants will be treated with dignity and respect. No participant was coerced or pressured into participating in the study.

4.0 Results

4.1 Pre-tertiary Teachers Conception of Continuous Professional Development

Two dominant themes emerged from our engagement with participants; available professional development initiatives and what teachers recognize as professional development.

4.1.1 Available Professional Development initiatives

This theme highlighted participants thoughts about what qualifies as professional development. Most participants indicated further studies (academic programmes) as the main professional development initiative available. Other professional development initiatives identified included workshops, seminars and peer-peer discussions. Participant expressed that:

We have in-service training and at least every term we have some departmental workshops or seminars that we discuss issues that will improve our practise and sometimes we do personal research cos there are a lot of things changing today (CP2).

Here in our school, we have workshops to help the teachers in the various subject areas with challenges that they may have. There are also workshops that are sometimes organized by GES, one or two people go and come back to share what they learnt. We are also furthering our studies and yes sometimes seminars too we have workshops (API).

4.1.2 What Pre-tertiary Teachers Recognise as CPD

This theme highlights teachers' individual perspectives about what teachers recognize as CPD. Participants reiterated similar views in line with available CPD initiatives. Most participants again indicated further studies, workshops and seminars and peer-to-peer discussions. Some participants indicated that:

For me I believe what counts as CPD is the workshops because we are able to learn a lot from such workshops (CP4).

For me I think what counts is the further studies, that helps you to learn and increases your chances of getting promoted too. Seminars mostly focus on what we do in the classroom or in the school and does not count in terms of your rank so I think going to school counts (CP3).

Other participants also went on to identify the usefulness of mentorship and peer-peer discussions as professional development initiatives. One participant hinted;

I think workshops are helpful and sometimes too we can learn from senior colleagues here in the school. That helps us to know what we should do and what we should not in relation to teaching. Sometimes too we discuss issues in the staff common room about our subject areas, I teach maths so sometimes if students are struggling or I don't understand something then they help me a lot and I learn a lot. Sometimes too I think the INSET is very good. when they come back, we learn new things (AP3).

To expand the qualitative reflections, responses from the professional development survey were analysed using frequencies and percentages. Figure 1. presents the results

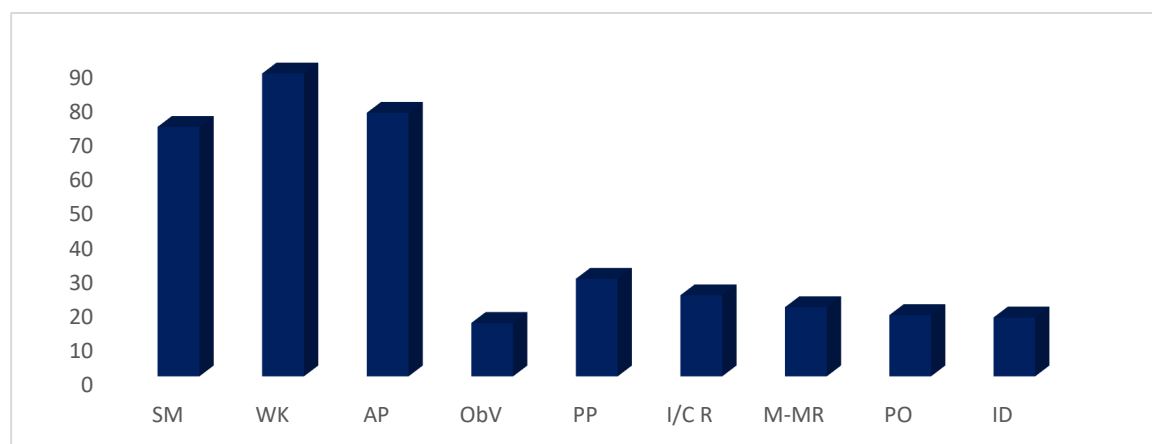


Figure 1: Components of Teacher Professional Development

(SM=Seminars, WK=Workshops, AP=Academic Programmes, ObV=Observational Visits=Peer-peer discussion, I/CR=Individual/Collaborative Research, M-MR=Mentor-Mentee Relationship, PO=Peer Observation, ID=Informal Dialogue)

From figure 1, workshops (88.5%) are commonly recognized as CPD. Seminars (72.9%) and academic programmes (77.0%) are also recognized as professional development components. Observation visits, peer-peer discussions, Individual/collaborative research, mentor-mentee relationship, Peer observation and Informal dialogue to improve teaching were given very little recognition as professional development components.

4.2 Characteristics of Existing CPD for pre-tertiary Teachers

Three main themes were identified from our engagement with participants; structure of CPD initiatives, frequency, nature and focus of CPD.

4.2.1 Structure of CPD initiatives

This theme highlights the shared views of participants on CPD as mandated by the governing institutions. Majority of the participants indicated further studies, workshops, seminars and INSET as mandated CPD activities. They indicated;

We have from the very beginning relied on the University of Education and Cape Coast University, the department of Institute of Education Planning and Administration (IEPA) to have had some form of career build up for our teachers..... these come in the form of workshops, seminars and a full time one year top up to their academic qualification. We focus much on workshops and we encourage teachers to take up to educational programmes at higher levels because the workshops sometimes because of duration doesn't give the teacher the in depth understanding of the concepts we want to imbibe in them. So, our focus mainly as GES is focused on workshops and seminars. (TO)

Participants also indicated that the school drives all CPD activities. They revealed:

It is the school that is responsible but because they are not frequent, we take it upon ourselves, we pay ourselves so we can participate in some workshops, otherwise we will just be there (CP4).

The head is the one who is in charge of ensuring teachers receive training in fact it is the school. The HOD's provide us with the information we need so we can help our people (BHT).

The lead is GES in collaboration with some interest groups because there are times where we have to write proposals to some interest groups soliciting for their financial support in making sure we are able to (TO)

Largely, participants revealed that further studies, workshops, seminars and INSET are mandated CPD activities and the school on behalf of GES initiates these activities.

4.2.2 Frequency of CPD initiatives

This theme highlights participants shared views about the frequency of CPD activities. According to some participants CPD activities were held once a year and one participant indicated that despite such activities being held annually, they had not participated in any CPD activities in years. A few participants revealed that;

It is organised annually, when I came to the school first, I think for the first two years we did something, but I have not been to any for five years now (CP2).

It is organised yearly, but I have not gone in a while (AP2).

I think it is quarterly, every term or now semester (BHT)

The collective views of participants revealed that CPD initiatives are organized at random for pre-tertiary teachers.

4.2.3 Nature and focus of CPD activities

This theme underscores the nature and focus of CPD activities for pre-tertiary teachers. Most participants indicated lectures led by experts in specialized fields and demonstrations by expert speakers for classroom implementation. Participant expressed that;

Yeah, for most of the programmes I have attended we observe the expert who walks us through some new topics. It's quite educative (CP1)

For the focus of professional development activities, participants indicated that such activities have primarily focused on dealing with subject areas, assessment for students, methods of teaching and use of technology in teaching. Professional development activities were identified to predominantly focus on subject-content areas for pre-tertiary teachers. From the participants;

Most of the activities we have engaged in usually focus on helping us with topics in our field and how to assess students. Sometimes too we are taught some issues on school leadership (CP1)

The focus is on our subject areas, we learn new methods of teaching and how to engage students better (BP1)

We focus more on our subject areas and sometimes we discuss among ourselves what is relevant for teaching.

We learn new things from departmental discussions. (BP2)

The focus is mostly on lectures and discussions during departmental meetings, we also have a lot of discussions on how to teach business subjects (BP3).

Quantitative metrics were employed to examine the existing framework for the professional development of pre-tertiary teachers. Participants were asked to respond to statements on participation in CPD and nature of professional development activities. The data was analysed using frequencies and percentages. Figures 2, 3 and Table 1 presents the results.

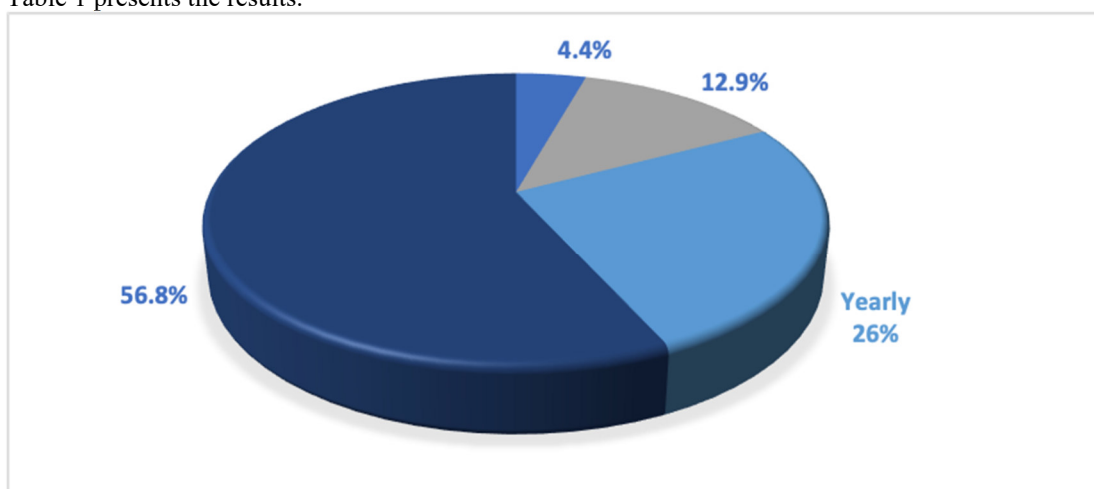


Figure 2: Organization for CPD activities

It can be observed from figure 2 that most respondents (247, 56.8%) agreed that CPD activities are organised at random. Figure 3 also depicts participation of respondents in CPD activities.

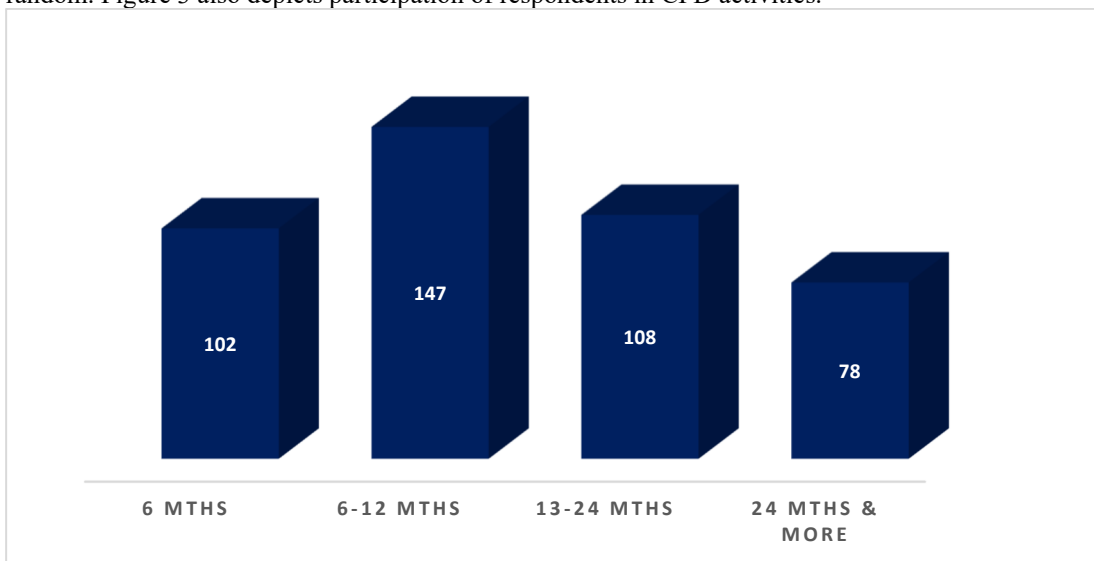


Figure 3: Pre-tertiary teachers most recent participation in CPD activity

From figure 3, most respondents (147, 33.8%) indicated that their participation in CPD activities was within the last 6 - 12 months. A few respondents (78, 17.9%) however indicated that their last participation in CPD activity was 2 years and overs. This indicates that while some CPD activity may occur annually, it could in some instances take more than a year for pre-tertiary teachers to be engaged in any CPD activity.

To explore the nature of CPD activities, means and standard deviations were utilized to analyse the data. On a five-point Likert-type scale, the mean scores were interpreted as strongly agree - 5, agree-4, disagree-3, strongly disagree-2 and Uncertain -1, with a mid-point of 3.00 as baseline. Table 1 presents a summary of the results.

Table 1: Nature of CPD activities

Statement	Mean	SD
Most CPD activities I have participated involved listening and observation of speakers	3.01	0.96
Most CPD activities I have engaged in required active participation and hands-on activities	2.95	0.89
CPD activities I participated in required that I observe and learn to reteach my colleagues	2.78	0.89
I often engage in other CPD activities such peer-to-peer observation and mentor-mentee relationships	2.65	0.99
Grand Mean/Average Standard Deviation	2.85	0.93

From Table 1 participants generally have positive views about the nature of CPD activities and their responses are homogeneous (M=2.85, SD=0.93). Participants agreed to participating in professional development activities that involves listening and observation (M = 3.01, SD = 0.96) Participants however failed to agree that they participate in activities that involved active participation and hands-on activities (M=2.95, SD= 0.89), observation to reteach their colleagues (M=2.78, SD=0.89), and peer-to-peer observation as well as mentor-mentee relationships (M=2.65, SD=0.99).

4.3 Perceived impact of existing CPD on teacher professional practise

Regarding teacher's professional practice, three broad themes emerged: teacher knowledge, skills and efficacy. Most participants were confident that CPD was helpful and had influenced their professional skills and knowledge. A few participants were however doubtful about how their professional development had influenced their professional practice. A participant indicated that, "I think it is beneficial somehow", and another also intimated that "not really in totality". Notwithstanding their disagreements, participants were largely positive in their responses. In relation to teacher knowledge, most participants indicated it improved their content knowledge. According to the participants:

It has helped to improve my content area; some topics have been made less difficult to teach (CP1)

It has helped to give me new ways of structuring/packaging content to make subject more appealing to students, yeah (BPI)

Oh, we've learnt some new ways of teaching in my subject area, I didn't know some things before but now I do and I find it very interesting. (BP4).

Oh yes it really does. I think it has broadened their knowledge and what they do in the classroom. It has also helped them to improve their teaching and learning improves generally. I think it has really helped our teachers, but the truth is that I think more teachers are more concerned with students passing their exams and their promotion (CHT).

Yes. The few available have been so helpful. I think we've learnt a lot that teachers appreciate but Implementation is often a problem, but we learnt a lot (AHT).

Our programmes have helped to address many issues teachers have. Issues in relation to teaching methodology, their subject areas, assessment and even how to use technology to teach (TO)

For teacher skills, participants reported that their involvement in professional development activities had enhanced their abilities in classroom instruction, student engagement and general delivery. A participant remarked that yeah it has improved my skills in assessment of students. *Assessing students through varied means (AP1)*. Other participants indicated;

It has improved my teaching delivery; I have been able to engage my student more (AP4).

Yes, I believe it is very helpful for the teacher in teaching because they learn a lot from such programmes. I know at least in the areas of assessment, delivery in class, maintaining discipline and improving student behaviour our teachers here have all attended programmes that help them to be very efficient in such areas.

At least these ones I'm sure most of my teachers are good at so yes, it has really helped their teaching delivery (BHT).

For the teacher efficacy theme, some participant reported that their participation in professional development activities had boosted their confidence and enthusiasm for teaching. A participant intimated that "*oh it has improved confidence from participation and it has increased my passion for teaching*" (CP4). From the participants' responses, existing CPD initiatives has improved their knowledge, skills and efficacy. Quantitative measures were used to ascertain the perceived impact of continuing professional development (CPD) on teacher professional practice (teacher skills, knowledge, and efficacy). Data gathered on a five-point Likert-type scale were analysed using descriptive statistics. The mean scores were interpreted as; strongly agree-5, agree-4, disagree-3, strongly disagree-2, uncertain -1, with a mid-point of 3 as baseline. Tables 2-4 presents the results.

Table 2: Perceived Impact on Teachers' Skills

Statement	Mean	SD
I can resolve classroom conflicts on my own because of my CPD	3.93	1.01
I am able to handle classroom situations better after going through CPD	4.00	0.85
My delivery in the classroom has improved tremendously from participating in CPD	4.16	0.78
I can manage my instructional time better after some CPD sessions	4.22	0.84
I work better with other teachers knowing what I know now from being part of CPD activities	4.00	0.76
I am able to engage my students better after some CPD sessions	4.11	0.74
I discipline my students appropriately using strategies I have learnt from participating in CPD	3.86	0.87
I have become more creative with my subject matter after being exposed to CPD	4.11	0.81
Available CPD has enabled me to teach at a steady pace	3.81	0.87
I am able to deal with classroom issues more effectively after my CPD	3.97	0.80
CPD activities have helped me to communicate better with my students	4.06	0.86
Average Mean/Average Standard Deviation	4.02	0.84

The average mean score indicates that generally participants have positive views about the impact of professional development on teacher's skills ($M=4.02$, $SD=.84$) and their responses were homogeneous. The results indicate that CPD for teachers enables them to manage their instructional time better ($M = 4.22$, $SD = .84$), work well with other teachers ($M=4.00$, $SD= 0.76$) and engage with students better ($M=4.11$, $SD=0.74$). The least mean value ($M = 3.81$, $SD = .87$) also shows participants agree that they can teach at a steady pace from participating in CPD. Table 3. provides information on impact in relation to knowledge of teachers.

Table 3: Perceived Impact on Teachers' Knowledge

Statement	Mean	SD
Through existing CPD I have come to appreciate the goals of learning in my subject area	3.98	0.85
Through available CPD, I appreciate concepts in my area of expertise better	3.99	0.79
I understand better how to get my students to learn after participating in CPD	3.97	0.78
I understand how to use varied assessment techniques to get the best out of my students as a result of some CPD activities I have participated in	4.09	1.62
Through existing CPD, I understand how to structure my lessons to ensure student learning	4.07	0.85
CPD has helped me to know how to apply different teaching methods in the classroom	4.15	0.71
Available CPD have helped me to understand theories and concept in my subject area better	3.96	0.76
I understand how to structure my learning objectives from available CPD	3.97	0.74
Available CPD has helped me appreciate individual differences in the classroom	4.04	1.18
CPD has helped me know when to apply different teaching methods	4.06	0.75
Available CPD has helped me to understand how to maintain clear directions in my lessons	3.93	0.80
Average Mean/Average Standard Deviation	4.01	0.89

The average mean score ($M=4.01$, $SD=. 89$) shows that generally participants share positive views about the impact of professional development on teacher knowledge and their responses were uniform. Participants agree that CPD allows them to implement different teaching methods in the classroom ($M = 4.15$, $SD = .71$), comprehend lesson structures ($M=4.07$, $SD=0.85$) and appreciate individual differences in the classroom ($M=4.04$, $SD=1.18$). The least mean value ($M = 3.93$, $SD = .80$) also indicates that participants agree that professional development has been helpful in equipping them with knowledge on how to maintain clear instructions in lessons. Table 4 presents the results on the perceived impact of professional development on teachers' efficacy.

Table 4: Perceived Impact on Teachers' Efficacy

Statement	Mean	SD
Available CPD has made me enthusiastic about teaching	3.84	.91
I have become more confident about what I teach after engaging in CPD	3.97	.94
Through CPD I have become more dedicated to my profession	3.85	.96
Available CPD has helped me to become more reflective of my teaching	3.96	.84
I have a positive outlook on teaching after engaging in CPD	3.97	.78
Through available CPD, I have been motivated to do more in the classroom	3.93	.88
Engaging in CPD has helped me to become more committed to getting work done	3.96	.89
Through available CPD, I am able to conduct myself in a professional manner at all times	3.99	.97
Average Mean/Average Standard Deviation	3.93	.90

The average mean score ($M= 3.93$, $SD = .90$) indicates that generally participants are in agreement about the impact of CPD on teacher efficacy and participants' responses were uniform. Participants agree that available CPD has improved their professionalism ($M=3.99$, $SD=0.97$), commitment ($M=3.96$, $SD=0.89$), motivation ($M=3.93$, $SD=0.88$) and enthusiasm about teaching ($M=3.84$, $SD=0.91$). The average mean scores for the components of teacher professional practice were ranked. Figure 4. presents the results of the ranking.

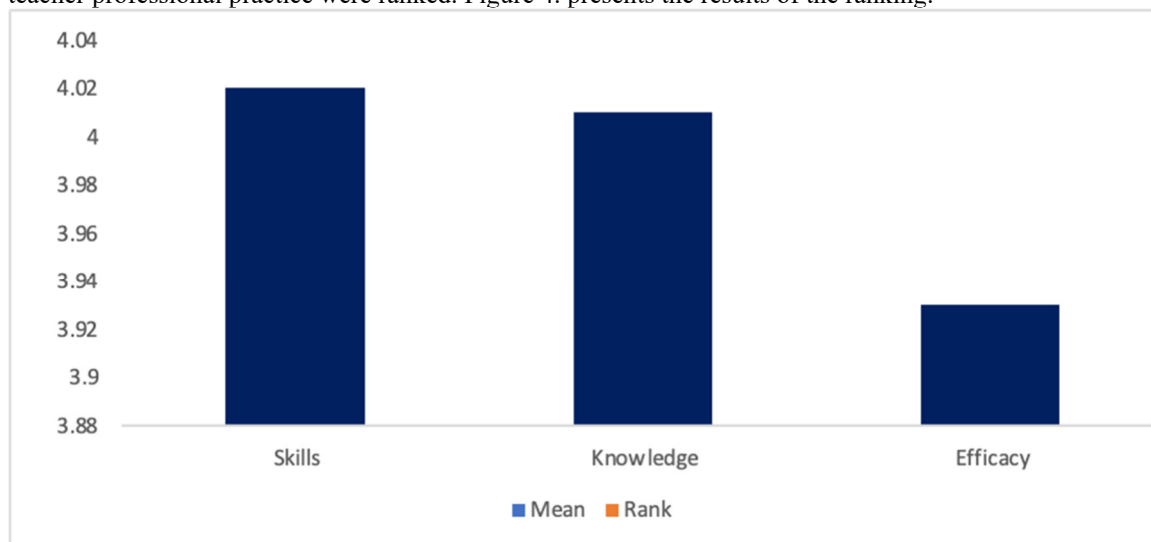


Figure 4: Ranking for Elements of Teacher Professional Practice

In figure 4, the ranking for elements of teacher professional practise reveals that teacher skills ($M= 4.02$) and teacher knowledge ($M= 4.01$) are ranked higher than teacher efficacy ($M= 3.93$). This finding is indicative of respondents' positive views about the impact of existing CPD on teacher professional practise; teacher skills, knowledge and efficacy. Respondents agreed that the element of teacher efficacy was however less impacted compared with teachers' skills and knowledge.

5.0 Discussion of results

Evidence from our study revealed that teachers' conception of CPD were predominately workshops, further studies (academic programmes) and seminars. Other CPD initiatives such as observation visits, peer-peer discussions, Individual/collaborative research, mentor-mentee relationship, peer observation and Informal dialogue to improve teaching were given very little recognition as CPD components. These findings are consistent with the body of research on professional development for teachers which points to traditional professional development strategies such as workshops, conferences, INSET, short courses and formal academic training as teacher professional development (AL Balushi, 2018; Alibakhshi & Dehvari, 2015; Atta & Mensah, 2015; Ngala & Ordebero, 2009; Yates 2007; Hustler, McNamara, Jarvis, Londra & Campbell, 2003). This conceptualization of professional development situated within traditional models is worrying given that these models have been criticized for failing to sustain any real change in the classroom. Ball & Cohen (1999) have long described traditional learning programmes as "style shows," unlikely to result in any significant modifications in teaching. Several researchers have pointed out how learning activities that require presentation and memorization is less likely to improve teaching outcomes (Wayne et al., 2008; Desimone et al., 2002; Garet, et al., 2001; Birman et al., 2000). Teachers in many schools become isolated from one another and focused on what Fullan (2016) refers to as "the daily press" of completing their everyday routines and upholding national standards, which prevents them from finding or experimenting with new routines that could be appropriate and reliable substitutes for existing classroom practices. This is the inherent risk of making formal CPD activities a central component of teacher professional development. An important consideration in how teachers conceptualize their CPD is how governing institutions such as National Teaching Council (NTC) and GES have promoted professional development over the years. The reality is that teachers' perceptions of professional development, may largely stem from formal mandates regarding professional development. Over reliance on such mandates is likely to limit teachers' understanding and appreciation for professional development steering them towards an overly rigid interpretation of their professional growth which excludes the full range of valuable professional development experiences.

It also emanated from our study that existing structural arrangements for the professional development of teachers rely heavily on workshops, seminars, further studies and INSET and these initiatives are driven by schools and governing institutions. It also emerged that these initiatives were organized randomly and mostly involved lectures led by experts in specialized fields. These activities prioritize subject content areas, student assessments, instructional strategies, and the use of technology in the classroom. This reliance on formal CPD activities aligns

with our initial findings on how teachers conceptualise their professional development. These findings are fairly consistent with research that has identified formal CPD initiatives like workshops, INSET, further studies, and seminars as important professional development activities for teachers (Şener & Çokçalışkan, 2017; Alibakhshi & Dehvari, 2015; Atta & Mensah, 2015; Amoako-Gyimah, 2015; Ngala & Odebero, 2009; Yates, 2007). Şener and Çokçalışkan (2017) for instance found in study that the most common CPD strategies adopted by teachers were mostly webinars, workshops, seminars, and courses. Atta and Mensah (2015) also identified conferences, in-service training, workshops, and seminars as recognized teacher professional development activities. It is fair to say that there is heavy reliance on formal CPD activities over informal CPD activities and this is largely promoted by governing institutions. Also, it was found that CPD activities are passive and randomized. These findings are fairly consistent in literature. Similar findings (AL Balushi, 2018; Kennedy, 2017; Macheng, 2016; Ridley, 2016; Atta & Mensah, 2015; Mtetwa, Chabongora, Ndemo & Maturure, 2015) have emphasized such randomness and highlight teachers' belief that CPD is not a personal initiative. For instance, a study by Ridley (2016) identified that national programs dominated teachers' CPD, leaving little room for school-based or individual initiatives. In such situations, teachers are led to believe that Continuous Professional Development is a vertical approach overseen by school administration, with head teachers deciding on what constitutes professional development for them. In relation to our finding on CPD activities relying heavily on lectures and expert presentations with specific attention on addressing subject content areas, Moore and Shaw (2000) for instance also discovered teachers' professional growth frequently depended on outside specialists and teachers were not acknowledged as active participants in the learning process when such approaches to teacher learning are employed. Although subject matter is an important aspect of professional practice, it is equally important to recognize that teaching is a multifaceted and evolving profession that calls for far more than subject matter knowledge. Teachers are expected to develop competence in other professional areas such as leadership, use of technology, teamwork and collaboration. Exclusively focusing on subject-content matters neglects other pertinent professional demands for teachers. It is relevant to recognise that in order for professional development activities to remain effective, they must align with teachers' present and future professional needs.

Finally, it came to light that existing CPD activities impact teacher's professional practice; their knowledge skills and efficacy. Compared with teachers' skills and knowledge, the professional aspect of teacher efficacy was lower. Literature (Calleja, 2018; Gore et al., 2017; Sintayehu, 2016; Getnet & Prasad, 2019; Ravhuhali et al., 2015; Postholm, 2012; Neuman & Cunningham, 2009; Harris et al., 2006; Powell et al., 2003) provides strong support for this conclusion. This finding that teacher efficacy is least impacted by professional development activities reveals the lack of priority for this component of teacher professional practice. Although research has not found a link between the amount of professional development and teacher efficacy (Lee, 2013; Amanulla & Aruna, 2014). It is nearly impossible to overstate the importance of this component of teachers' professional practice. By emphasising leadership conduct as a critical component of teacher professional development, Bolam (2002) reiterates the importance of teacher efficacy. It is essential to prioritise teacher efficacy for teachers to motivate their goals and conduct at work, which often leads to significant improvements in teaching delivery. To drive teachers' behavior and conduct, it is also relevant to prioritize teacher efficacy as an important element of teacher professional development which is recognized to improve teaching outcomes. According Ahn and Bowers (2024), there is a correlation between higher levels of teacher self-efficacy and teaching outcomes such as implementation of equitable teaching strategies and instructional quality.

6.0 Contribution of this paper

Within the discourse on teacher professional development, this paper makes important contributions by examining teacher conceptualization of CPD within Ghana's national policy framework. Although CPD is largely recognized as a mechanism for enhancing teaching quality and student outcomes, very little attention has been given to how teachers comprehend and engage with CPD in practical terms. This paper foregrounds evidence on perspectives of teachers in the design and execution of CPD adding to emerging research on teacher professional development. It sheds light on the disconnection between policy driven models of CPD and the lived experiences of teachers. It explores teacher conception of CPD and its influence on their professional practice which helps to refine existing practices regarding teacher learning and professional growth within low-and-middle -income countries such as Ghana. Our paper provides context-specific evidence on the implementation and impact of CPD for teachers highlighting the shortfalls of the existing framework for policymakers, educational planners and CPD service providers to provide a more responsive and impactful CPD initiatives to promote teacher agency and sustained engagement in teacher professional learning. The results of this study advocates for institutions, particularly NTC and CPD stakeholders to shift from event-based CPD and embrace a holistic, teacher-centered, and competency-driven approach for responsive, coherent, quality and engaging CPD provision that align with the 21st century needs of the teacher. Ultimately, our paper contributes to broadly enhance education quality and teaching outcomes by highlighting the unique experiences of teachers which is foundational for designing and implementing effective and transformative professional development for teachers today.

7.0 Implications for policy, theory and practice

- Per-tertiary teachers should move away from formal CPD initiatives to more flexible and reflective practices that promote lifelong learning.
- Policymakers should establish a clear and well-structured CPD framework and continuously implement as well as monitor CPD activities for teachers to enhance their professional growth.
- Policy adjustments should focus on including a broad spectrum of professional development activities and integrate into the national CPD strategy, informal CPD activities such as observational visits, mentoring, action research and collaborative work that are noted for bringing about real change in the classroom.
- Policymakers should encourage teacher-led CPD initiatives such as learning communities, self-directed learning, and reflective activities that provide teachers with autonomy in their professional development
- The theoretical assumptions underpinning andragogical education should be central in shaping CPD frameworks for flexible, self-directed and goal-oriented learning that serves the needs of teachers as adult learners.
- For enhanced teacher engagement, practical strategies such as a self-directed learning, peer-to-peer discussions, mentoring and real-time classroom observation may be employed to ensure practical changes in teacher professional practice.
- Institutions should strengthen peer learning and collaboration as part of professional development by creating a culture that promotes collaborative professional development. Teachers should be encouraged to adopt reflective journals, peer learning, collaborative research and mentorship which benefits both teachers and the broader teaching community.
- CPD must be developed to focus not only on subject content but on other critical professional skills such as managing student issues, classroom management, assessment, use of technology, school leadership, managing students' behaviour and use of technology to improve teaching. CPD must be designed to address the multi-faceted role of teachers in modern classrooms.

8.0 Conclusion

It is relevant to acknowledge the pivotal contribution of Continuous Professional Development for enhancing teachers' skills, competencies, professional relationships, collaborative networks, sharing ideas, and boosting their confidence to execute their professional mandate. A more refined conceptualization of CPD for teachers that considers an appropriate mix of traditional and non-traditional strategies is necessary to improve teaching outcomes. Teachers must possess a clear understanding of CPD as a lifelong learning process that extends their knowledge, refines their professional practices, and caters to diverse learner needs. Effective professional development in this vein requires meticulous planning with governing bodies, to shape what teachers learn and how they engage with the learning process, thereby personalizing the professional development experience. Governing institutions must work towards operationalizing CPD frameworks that are well-structured, to ensure that teachers benefit from the full range of valuable developmental experiences that enhance their teaching competencies, sharpen their skills, and contribute to their overall efficacy and growth as professionals. To achieve optimal teaching outcomes, teachers must remain committed to continuous professional learning to advance their practice and promote growth within their careers.

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