

## **School Based Continuous Professional Development Practices at a Selected General Secondary and Preparatory School in Bahir Dar Town**

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**Abstract:** Since 2004 School based Continuous Professional Development (CPD) has been implemented in Ethiopian schools with the aim of improving the classroom practices of teachers and consequently improving the achievement of students. However, different reports have revealed that CPD in these schools is not achieving its intended purposes. This necessitates the need to reflect on the CPD practices in our schools so far vis-à-vis the review of the literature on what constitutes successful school based CPD so as to draw lessons for improvement. This study is an attempt to analyze the CPD practices of a selected Secondary and Preparatory school found in Bahir Dar city in light of this review. The study employed a qualitative methodology guided by the interpretive paradigm. Two groups of teachers, the school principal, the cluster supervisor and the school CPD facilitator were purposely selected as sources of data for the study. Interview, focus group discussion and document analysis were used as data gathering tools. Data were analyzed thematically. The analyses of the data revealed that the CPD practices at the selected General Secondary and Preparatory school do not have the basic features of successful teacher professional development programs. Though the administrative structure to run the CPD program is set at school level, the school context is not supportive enough to run the program; the CPD program is not strongly linked with the school improvement program and students' achievement; and it is not engaging the teachers. So, serious consideration should be given mainly to the capacity development of all the actors involved in the delivery of the program.

**Keywords:** Continuous professional development, teacher learning, Ethiopia

### **Introduction**

Educational institutions at all levels throughout the world are in a period of rapid change (Collis & Moonen, 2001). They are in a continuous struggle to provide their students with the appropriate knowledge and skills for evolving marketplaces and complicated living environments, and preparing citizens for lifelong learning (Haddad & Jurich, 2002). There have been large-scale educational reforms at all levels of education aimed at meeting specifically the needs of students in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and, generally enhancing the quality of education. The reforms mostly aim at major changes in curriculum development, teaching methodology and assessment (Kwakman, 2003 cited in Minale, 2006).

Teachers and teaching are arguably the strongest school-level determinants of student achievement (Schwille & Dembele, 2007). Researchers, policy makers, and program

designers, implementers, and evaluators, therefore are looking for ways of understanding teacher quality and teacher learning focusing on effective and promising teacher improvement programs. There is a consensus that teachers should be involved in various professional development programs which are aimed at improving their knowledge, skills and attitude that could effectively address the needs of their students (Villegas-Reimer, 2003).

There have been various justifications on why teacher professional development programs are given great emphasis. For instance, Smylie and Conyers (1992) cited in Dilworth and Imig (1995) mentioned rapid changes in the characteristics, conditions and learning needs of students, development in knowledge about teaching and learning, and ongoing pressures for accountability and reform on schools as reasons for lack of emphasis on professional development programs. Moreover, Guskey (2000) has discussed that the current educational reform are intending to achieve new levels of competencies such as critical thinking, problem solving and new cultures of teaching and learning. Promoting these cultures of teaching and learning require teachers to adapt new pedagogical approaches. Fullan (2007) also asserted that effective staff development is an essential and indispensable process without which schools and programs cannot hope to achieve their desired goals to improve students' achievement. Overall, it has become quite obvious that every proposal to reform, restructure, or transform schools should emphasize teachers' professional development as the primary vehicle in bringing the needed change (Guskey, 1994 in Minale, 2006).

Generally, faced with rapid change, demands for high standards and calls for improving quality, teachers have now an immense need to update and improve their skills through professional development. Although, since the mid-1980s, professional development has been the focus of considerable research, most of this literature provides compelling evidence that a significant number of schools have not implemented effective professional development programs (Craft, 2000; Schulle & Dembele, 2007). After analyzing different models of professional development, Schrum (1999) summarized that there is very little evidence that those staff development made a difference on teachers' practice. Moreover, Fullan and Stiegelbauer (1991) in Schrum (1999) asserted that attempts made to bring change have been so frustratingly wasteful because thousands of workshops and conferences led to no significant change in practice when the teachers returned to their classrooms.

The failures of the teacher professional development programs to bring a change in the classroom have caused a shift in the approach (Craft, 2000; Surgue, 2004). There is a shift of funding and responsibility for professional development of teachers on to schools and on to the individuals within them. Craft (2000) relates this change with the idea that being a professional means taking responsibility for identifying and attempting to meet the professional development needs of oneself and one's institution. The shift is generally from the individualistic focus on professional development, through the dominant apprenticeship and course-based models of learning to that of the group focus on professional learning based in and/or focused on the school and its collective needs.

Generally, this new approach to professional development indicates a trend towards a broader view of what constitutes professional development, and towards a greater emphasis on what happens before an in-service training event (needs identification) and afterwards (evaluation and follow-up) (Craft, 2000; Schewille & Dembele, 2007). In this approach, the professional development activities mainly take place in schools. The leadership, in this regard, is responsible to design, implement, follow and evaluate the professional development activities taking place in the school.

The international experiences tell us that well-structured and properly designed professional development programs can influence teachers' classroom practices and help to improve students' achievements. High ranking countries in international exams (such as Program for International Student Assessment, PISA) are known to have strong teacher professional development systems that contribute to their rank (Darling-Hammond & Lieberman, 2012; Wei, Andree & Darling-Hammond, 2009). The major features of the professional development programs of these countries include: building ample time for professional learning and team work into teachers' work hours; providing ongoing professional development activities that are rooted in teachers' contexts and focused on the content to be taught; arranging extensive opportunities for both formal and informal in-service development which includes both school-based activities and off-site courses; implementation of well supported induction programs for new teachers; and having school governance structures that involve teachers in decisions about curriculum, instruction, assessment, and professional development.

In the reviews of successful professional development experiences of the high achieving nations in the world (e.g. Darling Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Gulamhussien, 2013), some distinct characteristics have emerged. In these programs, the primary goal is deepening teachers' knowledge of specific curriculum content and the skill of how to teach it to students. It also helps teachers to understand how students learn that specific content. Teachers are engaged in the process and the programs enable them to acquire new knowledge, apply it to practice, and reflect on the results with colleagues. It is predominantly collaborative, collegial, intensive and sustained over time. Moreover, from the successful experiences of Japan and China, it has been learned that the best place for teachers to learn about new practices is the classrooms (Schewille & Dembele, 2007). In other words, teachers in these countries use their classrooms as laboratories for their professional development.

Schools in countries with successful professional development programs also get professional support from outsiders like university researchers and other educational leaders during the design and implementation of the CPD programs including direct support to teachers in trying out new ideas and practices into their classrooms (Schewille & Dembele, 2007; Gulamhussien, 2013; Goodwin, 2012). The schools are systematically networked with teacher support centers and higher education institutions. This helps the teachers in grappling with the real challenge of practicing new ideas in the actual classroom. Modeling is also

found as a highly effective way to introduce new concepts to teachers and help them apply it (Gulamhussien, 2013).

Context, process and content can be taken as a conceptual framework to look at CPD implementation at school level. In this regard, successful school based professional development programs require establishing conducive school culture, choosing appropriate CPD approaches or processes, and choosing appropriate contents (Eston, 2004; Villegas-Reimers, 2003; Chappuis, Chappuis, & Stiggins., 2009; Nieto, 2009). A collaborative rather than a competitive school culture is basic to run successful CPD programs. A belief that 'everyone in the school is a learner' should be reflected among the school community's day to day activities. The leadership should provide sufficient professional as well as material support to CPD programs in the schools including arrangement of adequate amount of time and resources so that teachers would feel that CPD is seriously taken as an integral part of the school's mission.

In choosing relevant contents or topics for CPD activities in the schools, Deojay & Pennigton (2004a), emphasize the need to begin with the analysis of students' achievement. They argue that the contents that teachers should learn through CPD should be directly linked to the learning gaps of students. This is related to the fact that the ultimate goal of CPD is improving students' overall performance. This would also enable teachers see the link between their professional growth to measureable student results. Teachers take CPD seriously when they feel that it is strongly linked to their students' learning as they are accountable to the achievement of students who are currently enrolled in their classrooms.

The CPD processes refer to those possible strategies that will help teachers learn and help them make changes that affect student achievement. The literature reveals that the CPD process should be diversified and engaging to the teachers (Easton, 2004; Gulamhussien, 2013; Darling-Hammond, 2009). The selection of the CPD strategies should primarily consider the selected contents as well as the available human and material resources in the school, and teachers should be given the opportunity to follow different alternatives. Moreover, the methods should encourage the teachers for conversation and critical reflection on their practices in the light of their colleagues' views and new developments in the academic discourse (Schewille & Dembele, 2007; Brookfield, 1995). They must involve classroom application of the contents to be learned. In this regard, collaborative and team approaches like collaborative planning, lesson study, and action research of various kinds are mostly applied in schools with successful CPD programs (Darling Hammond & Lieberman, 2012). These approaches are also usually accompanied by increasing opportunities for teachers to share their expertise with one another.

Careful planning and implementation of collaborative or team based CPD processes in schools always pay off in the end. In this regard, Chappuis, et al., (2009) has emphasized the important role of facilitators. The facilitators in each team should have the skills to ensure that everyone in the team is engaged in a meaningful way. They should be able to establish a team environment in which all members feel safe and supported. They should know how to

keep the focus of the discussion to its main objective of improving teachers' classroom practices and consequently improving students' achievements. For this to happen, CPD team facilitators should be able to get adequate support so that they could be able to maintain their knowledge base, level of enthusiasm, and facilitation skills to be effective in their roles. It is also suggested that in team based approach clearly articulated protocols would help to create community of learners who work respectfully and efficiently (Eston, 2004).

This study is an in-depth analysis of the CPD implementation at a selected school in Ethiopia. The experiences of different countries in the implementation of school based CPD as well as the conceptual reviews presented above are the bases for this study.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The Ethiopian education and training policy gives due emphasis to teacher professional development as one area of special attention and action priority (MoE, 1994). While discussing the previous teacher education practice in Ethiopia, the TESO document (MoE, 2003) indicated that many teachers at different levels of the education system received only the minimum of initial training. Even from those teachers who have upgraded their knowledge in a variety of ways, very few have the skills and knowledge required to deliver the modern, child-centered, dynamic education experiences envisaged in the Policy. Regarding teacher education and classroom practices, the following is stated:

... large amount of money and other resources have been invested in the education and training of teachers in both colleges and schools, yet it is abundantly clear that this investment has been largely ineffective in that it has not been matched by any great changes in the classroom practice of most teachers throughout the country (MoE, 2003; p.105).

This mismatch can be a major obstacle in bringing about change in the quality of education being offered at schools in Ethiopia. In an attempt to address the mismatch, in addition to the common pre-service and in-service trainings given to teachers to upgrade to another grade-level, CPD has been highly recommended by the Ministry of Education. The CPD of teachers was considered as essential in maintaining and enhancing the quality of the achievement of the educational mission countrywide (MoE, 2003). As a result, a national staff development guideline that focuses on national priorities which includes the topics derived from the needs analyses, formats, patterns and modes of provision were prepared. Modules that included different issues of CPD were centrally prepared and the schools all over the country were required to implement it.

The CPD programs being implemented in the Ethiopian schools show that the government is following the shift from the course-led model to that of group-focused and school-needs based model. At policy level, it is issued that every teacher should accomplish a 60 hour CPD activities annually (MoE, 2006). Since 2003, except newly employed teachers, all the

teachers in the primary and secondary schools of Ethiopia have participated and completed the four CPD modules that are nationally prepared. These CPD modules are developed based on the national assessment result on the efficiency and effectiveness of teachers in Ethiopia (MoE, 2003). Each school takes the responsibility of facilitating the training based on the modules. These all mark the introduction of the new school-based model of CPD which gives schools the major role of designing and running the professional development of their teachers.

Currently, schools are running their own CPD programs. As the nationally designed modules are already completed, schools are now in charge of designing, implementing and evaluating the CPD programs which are tailored to their particular needs. To support this, MoE has also developed a CPD framework and toolkit that could guide the school based CPD program and distributed them to all the schools. However, different government reports are showing that the performance of the schools so far in this regard is not satisfactory (MoE, 2013; MoE, 2014; Haromaya University, 2007). The CPD programs in the schools are not achieving the desired objectives of helping the professional development of the school teachers and consequently improving students' achievement. International experiences in this regard tell similar stories of different countries in their attempt to introduce school based CPD with the aim of improving students' learning. So what is vital now is to reflect on the school based CPD program implementation in our schools so far and draw lessons from the strengths and weaknesses in the light of best experiences of a few countries in the world.

This research is then designed to evaluate the CPD practices at a selected Secondary and Preparatory School in Bahir Dar town against the international best experiences. Specifically, it is designed to answer the following research question:

- How is the CPD program organized and being implemented at the selected Secondary and Preparatory Schools?

Unlike the previous studies conducted about CPD in Ethiopia which are predominantly survey, this study is an in-depth analysis of CPD implementation in a selected secondary and preparatory school. Accounts of the research can benefit teachers, supervisors, principals and educational officers, who are involved directly or indirectly in the program, to revisit or strengthen their practice on the issue under study. The results could also give an opportunity for all stakeholders to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of the CPD programs in Ethiopian schools vis-à-vis international best practices in the area. By and large, the results may help these stakeholders to further strengthen the good sides and to find solutions to the challenges schools face in practicing school based CPD in the effort towards ensuring quality education. The focus on one school only could be taken as one of the limitations of the study. The study also focuses only on the analysis of the CPD process and the views of the stakeholders on its impact rather than on the ultimate goal of CPD which is the impact it has on the students' achievement. This could also be another limitation.

## **Research Design and Methodology**

The main purpose of this research is to evaluate the CPD system at the selected Secondary and Preparatory School in the light of international best practices described in the review of the literature. To achieve this objective a qualitative methodology guided by the interpretive paradigm is employed.

The target School for the study is found in Bahir Dar city. The data sources include principals, supervisors, teachers and CPD facilitators. These people are assumed to be the major actors as leaders and participants in the CPD program in the school. A total of 16 participants (1 cluster supervisor, 2 principals, 1 CPD facilitator, and 12 teachers) have been participated. Teachers in the schools are normally grouped into 29 CPD teams on the bases of the subject matter they teach. Each team has got three to six members. There is a shift system in the school. One teacher only teaches in one shift that is either in the morning or in the afternoon. Two groups of teachers, each having eight members from the two shifts, were selected for focused group discussion. The eight members were selected from each of the eight randomly selected CPD teams in each shift. The principal, the cluster supervisor and the school CPD facilitator were selected using purposive sampling technique for interview. These respondents are believed to have a strong link to the implementation of the CPD program in the school. Documents were also other sources of data.

Focused group discussion, document analysis, and interview were applied in order to collect the necessary data for the study. Focused group discussions were held with selected teachers of the school. Some guiding questions that instigate the teachers to reflect on their CPD experiences were used. In-depth interviews were also held with the supervisor, principal and the school CPD facilitator mainly on the design and management aspect of the CPD program in the school. The focuses of the interviews and the focus group discussion were on those CPD implementation aspects such as school context related factors, process related factors, content related factors as well as factors related to professional support. Documents like the CPD framework and toolkit, the school CPD annual plan, minutes of teachers' CPD meetings, and teachers' portfolios were reviewed.

To maintain the credibility of the instruments, the researcher made an effort to confirm whether the guiding interview questions could answer the leading questions proposed or not. Experts in the area were also consulted in order to make sure that the interview items were valid. As a result, the 15 interview items that had been formulated first were refined and reduced to 12 items. Similar procedure has been followed with regard to the items for focused group discussion. Moreover, the transcribed data was checked with translated text to enhance credibility of the data.

Discussions were made in Amharic and all parts were tape-recorded. The researcher transcribed and analyzed the data to check whether the status of the school CPD practice is high or low using the criteria derived from the international best school based CPD practices.

In addition, extracts obtained through document reviews were incorporated into the analysis. Thus, the data were analyzed using qualitative descriptions specifically using narration, categorization and thematic analyses.

### **Data Presentation and Analysis**

This section presents the results of the study. The presentation is organized around the main themes that are derived from the international best CPD practices. Predominantly, the leading questions guide the analysis part of this section.

### **Organizational Structure and Support to CPD**

The school has a CPD policy that is derived from the National Policy (MoE, 2006). Accordingly, the school has adopted the policy and set up a structure to run the 60 hours CPD program. The respondents have confirmed this during the focus group discussion and the interview. A teacher in the focus group discussion mentions this saying “...every year it starts in September and continues throughout the year for a total of 60 hrs....” According to the principal, the school commits one teacher to fully engage in the facilitation of the program. This person has the responsibility of liaising between the school principals and supervisors with the teachers in designing and running the CPD program. He coordinates the CPD needs assessment process at the beginning of the year and prepares the school CPD plan in consultation with the school principal. He has also the responsibility of following up the day to day progress of the program throughout the year.

The principal further explains that structurally, at the school level there is a CPD committee chaired by the CPD facilitator. Teachers at the bottom are grouped on the basis of the kind of subject matter they teach. Each group has 5-6 members and there are around a total of 20 such groups in the school. In each group, one member works as a facilitator. The facilitators of the groups form the members of the school CPD committee. The committee meets once in a month or so and discuss about the progress of the CPD program. According to the CPD facilitator, this is one mechanism of following up the implementation of the program in the school. The principal and the vice principal for academic affairs oversight the overall CPD process in the school. The cluster supervisor also was supposed to work in parallel with the principals to provide technical support to the CPD program.

But none of the data show if there is a link between the school and other academic institutions (like universities or colleges) in running the program. But the experiences of Japan show that academic institutions are also engaged with the schools in support of the CPD programs through their expertise and researcher (Schewille & Dembele, 2007).

Apart from the national CPD framework and toolkit, the school doesn't have the access to different reading materials. Talking about reference materials, the principal say that:

“the books in the school library focus more on subject matters than on pedagogy. Teachers in this school have served as teachers for more than 10 years. Due to the lack of access to reading materials related to pedagogy, their readings in the area are limited.”

This situation may deny them the chance of looking on their practices and assumptions in the light of new developments in the field of pedagogy related to their subject (Brookfield, 1995). Moreover, with regard to the practicality of follow up and support, the CPD facilitator and the supervisor claim that they follow up and give support to the program. The CPD facilitator has explained the follow up and support as follows:

All the teachers are expected to meet for two hours weekly and do their CPD according to their annual CPD plan on the selected priorities. I also use checklist to follow up whether the teachers are actually implementing their plan or not. There is also a reporting system to me from the CPD groups. The group facilitators are expected to report to me about their weekly meetings in written form. They also file their reports... with regard to support I myself visit some groups during their CPD meetings and also those who have questions come to me and we discuss.

But still they also admit that teachers are reluctant and there is a tendency of one to copy the work of the other when developing their portfolios.

Teachers on the other hand argue that even if the structure through which teachers could get professional support on CPD is there in the school from the CPD facilitator, the supervisor and the principal, practically it is nonexistent. During the focus group discussion, one of the participants said that:

... there is no single person who understands CPD deeply ...there is not one who follows up the program, we simply write false reports and put them in our ‘portfolio’ for the sake of fulfillment.

Another participant also says:

... for the teacher to be seriously engaged in CPD, there must be someone, who understands CPD very well, to closely follow up and give support to the teacher in every step of the process.

The teachers have argued that if there was someone who cares about the program, the program could have been started on September 2013, which is the beginning of the academic year as it was planned, instead of January 2013. These could all imply that the follow up and the professional support system to the CPD program in the school are at least unsatisfactory to the teachers who are supposed to be the primary beneficiaries. This looks against the international best experiences which indicate that school leaders should take part in the CPD

program as both learners and facilitators (Eston, 2004; Nieto, 2009). This could also indicate the fact that teachers are not getting the proper professional support when they needed the most during CPD, particularly in their struggle to change their practices during implementation (Christie, Harley, & Penny, 2004; Gulamhussein, 2013).

Another aspect of the CPD structure in the school is whether or not the school allocates appropriate time and place for its CPD program. The school has allocated two hours weekly for CPD program so that each teacher will be able to have a 60 hour CPD activity annually. Every teacher is expected to meet within the CPD group and do the professional development activity every week for two hours. But teachers themselves are supposed to arrange the time and place for their meeting. There is no time off from their teaching assignment for the purpose of the CPD meeting and sometimes they are forced to come out of working hours. A teacher has complained that:

...the CPD program should not be conducted out of the working hours as every teacher in this school is engaged in part time job in his/her extra time....

With regard to space, there is no as such an arranged place for holding the CPD meeting. It is observed that some teachers meet at the lounge and others meet in their offices and still some others meet under the trees for their CPD.

Teachers have also claimed an incentive for the work they are doing in the CPD program. They have said that they have not got any incentive for their participation in the CPD program so far. As a result, they said, they are not motivated to actively participate in the program. A teacher has affirmed this saying:

... the school based CPD has been started eight years ago, however, there is no single teacher who has got promotion or any benefit because of his/her participation in CPD.

They do not even have refreshment during their meeting for two hours a week. During the focus group discussion, one participant said:

if we are expected to sit for two hours a week and for 120 hours a year, at least tea and coffee should have been served.

Another participant has highlighted the need to consider compensating the time they spend for the extra time they spend for CPD. He said that;

...every teacher wants his/her children to go to good school and get good education so that they will be competent and successful in the future. As a result most of the teachers take second part time job in their free time in order to generate income to cover the school fee and related costs. Given this situation, if we are going to use our extra time for CPD, the government should pay compensation.

The participants of the focus group discussion strongly argue that unless the program takes this situation into consideration, it is unlikely that the teachers could voluntarily participate in the CPD programs.

Generally, even if there is a mandatory CPD policy and structure at the school level, it looks like that the teachers who are the main beneficiaries of the program do not find the actual context motivating and supportive. Although the design is also in the form that sustains throughout the year, there are problems like lack of incentives, lack of appropriate place and time, and lack of professional support which could cause dissatisfaction for teachers in the school CPD context.

### **Relationship between CPD and school improvement programs**

The interview result shows that the school based CPD is designed by first identifying CPD needs of teachers. According to the CPD guideline, these needs can be school based or individual teacher's needs based. Regarding this, the CPD facilitator explains the process as follows:

At the beginning of the year, we collect CPD needs from all the teachers of the school. These needs are listed down and prioritized. The CPD committee that I chair selects the first three needs for the given year. Accordingly, each and every teacher prepares his or her own annual CPD plan.

Both the school director and supervisor have confirmed the response of the CPD facilitator. This shows that the school CPD plan mainly relates to the immediate needs of the teachers. Although the school has a three year long-term school improvement plan, none of the respondents have mentioned the plan as a basis for the identification of the CPD needs.

The CPD framework and toolkit do not also exhaustively articulate the need to link CPD with the school improvement plan. Although the guideline states that CPD should be linked to the school improvement program of the school, the procedures that are indicated in the guideline do not clearly show how schools should actually implement it. It does not advise schools to consult their long term school improvement plans in deriving their CPD needs and priorities. It rather suggests schools to consult students, teachers, parents and the local community for their views about what should be the CPD priorities of the school each year. From the above data one can then see that the school has translated these suggestions into a form of asking these stakeholders to list down school related problems and choosing the first three problems as CPD priorities of the year.

However, the literature shows that professional development is more effective when schools approach it not in isolation but rather as a coherent part of a school reform (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009). In order to avoid disparities between what teachers learn in professional development work and what they actually implement in their classrooms,

schools seamlessly link curriculum, assessment, standards, and professional learning opportunities. In the case of the target school, even if the school has got a school improvement plan, there is no indication that this plan is being consulted during the design of the CPD program.

### **Selection of CPD Contents**

CPD contents or topics are those areas of study that the teachers need to learn in order to improve students' achievement. As one can see from the table below, the priorities identified by the schools look generic and broad. The teachers also mentioned that most of the priorities are in one way or the other similar to what they had in the previous years. The CPD priorities of the school for the year 2013/14 were professional ethics and student counseling, developing teachers' academic knowledge and teaching skills, and classroom management.

Table 1: CPD priorities of the school for the year 2013/14

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professional Ethics and Student Counseling</li> <li>• Developing Teachers' academic knowledge and Teaching Skills</li> <li>• Classroom Management</li> </ul>
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*Source:* school teacher professional development plan

Regarding the content, what matters is the degree to which the activity focuses on improving and deepening teachers' content knowledge (e.g. mathematics or science) instead of focusing on generic methods of teaching (Schewille & Dembele, 2007; Gullamhussein, 2013). The reviews of best CPD practices by Darling-Hammond & Richardson (2009), in this regard, also shows that professional development that focuses on student learning and helps teachers develop pedagogical skills to teach specific kinds of content has strong positive effects on practice. However, the three priorities the school has identified above are too generic, and one can see that they are less connected to students' learning of a specific topic and the improvement of teachers' pedagogy.

The contents teachers need to learn must be directly related to students' learning. Teachers are required to question about their students' academic performance, gather data to pinpoint individual or group academic or social behavior, and use the information to modify their classroom practice. Then they should evaluate the results. At each step, "...*teachers decide what knowledge and skills (professional development) they need to be able to modify their practice*" (Easton, 2004, p. 32). However, the interview results and the document analysis show that the CPD contents at the target school are selected without a close consultation to the performances of the students. Moreover, given the absence of appropriate reference materials, professional support and modeling in the school context, there is less probability of adapting the topics by the teachers to specific subjects and specific groups of students (Gulamhussien, 2013; Brookfield, 1995; Schewille & Dembele, 2007).

Moreover, the teachers have reported that the topics that they are now working on are the same as that of the last year or before. They are repetitions; as a result, they are feeling bored discussing on them. A teacher during the focus group discussion explains this as follows:

I did on these topics six, seven years ago and got certificate from the region education bureau. But we are now asked to repeat it ... there is no value doing this ...if it was related to our day to day practice we would have loved it and get engaged.

They also feel that it is an imposition. One participant explains this saying:

the school threaten us to participate in the CPD saying that if we don't do CPD, we are not be able apply for career development ... they are also using it as a criterion to select teachers for some part time jobs like invigilation, that come through the school.

In principle, the design of any CPD program should consult teachers' past experience in terms of formal training and CPD (Schwille & Dembele, 2007). This could save the school from unnecessary repetition of contents and wastage of time and resources. Systematic repetition of contents year after year with increasing depth and maintaining relevance to the teachers' daily practices and students learning could be acceptable by the teachers. These could in turn motivate the teachers to commit themselves to their own professional development and consequently help to improve students' achievement. But one can see from the expressions of the teachers that this does not look the case in this school.

The CPD framework and toolkit could be one reason for the above problems regarding the choice of CPD contents. In the framework it is stated that CPD needs are identified as individual, school, woreda, regional and national. It is further stated that schools should attempt to address the needs of all these bodies in designing and implementing their CPD programs. Neither in the CPD guideline nor in the toolkit is clearly mentioned the need to start planning the school CPD program from the analysis of actual students' achievement and their overall characteristics. The examples included in the guidelines also look misleading the schools. They are more of generic and not clear about how they are derived from the analysis of students' achievement. Given the fact that these two resources are the sole references for schools in running their CPD programs and the demanding nature of the new school-based CPD approach, the guidelines should have been more comprehensive than they are now. From the above discussion, therefore, one can conclude that the link between the CPD contents to student learning is not seriously considered in the design and implementation of the school CPD program. Moreover, the CPD contents selected at least the given year are too generic and not related to the immediate needs of the teachers.

### **How engaging is the CPD process for the teachers?**

The school has developed annual action plan for the CPD program. Modules are also supposed to be prepared for each CPD priority either by the CPD coordinator and/or by

individual teachers. The main approach being used in the CPD program is a kind of cooperative learning or team approach. As mentioned above, the teachers are grouped based on the kind of subject area they teach. Sometimes, they are also grouped by the grade level they teach. Every week every group is supposed to meet for two hours and discuss the progress on the three priorities set at the beginning of the year. At the end of the meeting, each teacher in the group is required to write a reflective journal on his/her learning and keep that report in his/her portfolio. A minute is also prepared for each meeting and the group leader is expected to submit it to the CPD facilitator every week. Structurally, the CPD arrangement looks engaging.

However, the practice seems quite different. Even if teachers meet every week for the CPD program, the meeting is nominal. They meet because it is a must to meet and write a report. In the words of a participant:

...we just meet for a few minutes and report as if we have done the two hours CPD  
...sometimes we also copy the works of others.

As it is mentioned in the above section, the teachers feel that the topics selected for discussion are not relevant to their actual teaching. They have also revealed that discussing on these topics feels like an imposition.

The CPD facilitator also confirms the problem of teachers' reluctance to engage themselves in the program. The facilitator said:

There is resistance from the teachers. Some teachers say CPD is not useful ... some others also say whether we do CPD or not, nothing will be changed.

The supervisor also affirms the resistance of the teachers to engage themselves in the program. He said that

Teachers do not believe in that CPD would help them improve their knowledge and teaching skills, rather they participate in the program not to miss any opportunity that may take CPD into consideration.

He also further explains his doubts about the active engagement of teachers in the program as follows:

...all the teachers have submitted their individual annual CPD plans. We also observe some teachers having weekly meetings. However, it is very difficult to say that they are really actively participating in the program.

The literature appreciates the active participation of the teachers in their own professional development. In this regard, Feiman-Namser (2001, as cited in Schwille & Dembele, 2007) supports the role of teacher talk on their classroom practice as talk is the central vehicle for

sharing and analyzing ideas, values and practices. Through critical talk and thoughtful conversations, teachers develop and refine ways to study teaching and learning. However, according to Feiman-Namser (2001, as cited in Schwille & Dembele, 2007), the kind of conversation that promotes teacher learning differs from usual modes of teacher talk which feature personal anecdotes and opinions and are governed by norms of politeness and consensus.

In the light of this overview, although teachers at the target Secondary and Preparatory school meet every week at least briefly, they don't feel that they are really gaining something out of the discussion. Rather they seem to do it to fulfill their administrative responsibilities. One of the reasons for this situation could be the lack of a kind of discussion protocol that could guide their conversation in such a way that everyone in the group would benefit out of it (Easton, 2004). Unless their discussions are rich in descriptions of practice, give attention to evidence and help to examine alternative interpretations and possibilities, it is likely that their meeting would become routine. The interview result indicates the existence of this kind of situation in the target school. Teachers say that they meet for the sake of meeting and there is no rule that could guide the discussion. One participant also mentioned this about the facilitators: "...the facilitator of the group is also just one of us, no difference."

In response to the question about whether or not the teachers in each group observe each other while teaching, the CPD facilitator confirms that this is not happening. He said that the teachers in the school do not have the culture of inviting their colleagues to observe their teaching. However, the literature about effective CPD suggests that teachers must be engaged actively in their own CPD through observing each other and give and receive feedback to each other. In this regard, then, there is a gap in the CPD practices of teachers in the target schools.

Moreover, there seems to be a very limited choice of CPD approaches. As it is explained by all the respondents, it is only a weekly group discussion that is available for the teachers to go through. This by itself could make the practice monotonous for the teachers. Teachers must be provided with a variety of CPD methods and approaches so that they could choose the best one for the given need at a given time (Easton, 2004).

The teachers have admitted the fact that they copy the 'reflection' of other teachers and put it in their portfolio. They do that because developing portfolio is one of the criteria to be considered at the end of the academic year performance evaluation. But part of the reason for them to do this could be because of the irrelevance of the topics in terms of the priorities they set pertaining to their actual teaching problems and experiences. It could also be related to their low motivation towards the program due to lack of incentives and ownership.

The literature (e.g. Bruns & Luque, 2014; Craft, 2000; Darling-Hammond, 2009; Darling-Hammond & Lieberman, 2012; Guskey, 2000; Villegas-Reimers, 2003) strongly appreciates the active engagement of the teachers in their own professional development. It also

highlights the need to relate CPD topics and methods to the real needs and interests of the teacher. But from the above data, one can see that teachers at the target Secondary and Preparatory School look passive and very reluctant to engage themselves in the CPD program. They do not feel that the program really considers their real concerns in the teaching and learning process.

## **Conclusion and Implications**

### **Conclusions**

The CPD context at the target Secondary and Preparatory School lack basic arrangements. The school applies the national policy that every teacher should engage in a 60 hour CPD activities annually. There are also structural arrangements set to implement this policy. The principal, the cluster supervisor and the CPD facilitator are people who are in charge of managing the program in the school. There are CPD frameworks and toolkits to guide the school based CPD. However, the teachers are not getting the necessary professional support and follow-up from the CPD facilitator, the principals and the supervisor as envisaged in the framework. They are not happy with the time arrangement as well as the place they have for the CPD meeting. Refreshments and incentives and compensations to their commitment in the CPD program are absent. Supplementary reading materials in the area of pedagogy are also a problem in the school. The school does not collaborate with other institutions in running its CPD program as well. This implies that the CPD context in the school is not as conducive as it should be. This situation in the school may in turn cause teachers' negative attitude towards the program and affect their commitment to the program.

There is a consensus that CPD and school improvement program should be integrated. However, in the case of the target school, there is no clear link between the CPD program and the school improvement program. None of the data shows that the CPD priorities are derived from the school priorities as outlined in the school improvement plan. They are simply identified on the basis of prioritizing the immediate problems listed down by the teachers in the school. The CPD guidelines and CPD toolkit contribute for the problem in this regard. This could indicate the fact that the people who are responsible in designing the CPD program in the school lack the awareness about the significant relationship between CPD and school improvement program in the school.

The starting point of school based CPD should be the analysis of students' achievements in different subjects and their overall performances at school level. However, none of the data shows that the analysis of student data have been used as the basis for designing the school based CPD program. The three CPD topics identified by the school are generic and broad. None of them are related to the specific nature of the subjects each teacher teaches in the school. Teachers also complained that the CPD topics identified by the school are repetitions of the past years and not relevant to their current situation. The absence of strong link between CPD and teachers' day-to-day practice and students' performance could lead to

teachers' loss of trust in CPD. This is counterproductive to the efforts that the government as well as the schools is exerting in promoting CPD as a major tool for quality improvement.

In principle the CPD program must be engaging for the teachers. It should give the chance for the teachers to try out new ideas into their classrooms and reflect back on it with their colleagues. The CPD practices at the target Secondary and Preparatory school, however, lack the major intent of teachers' engagement. The teachers who are arranged in different CPD groups are supposed to meet weekly and engage themselves in critical conversations. However, the actual practice is simply nominal. They meet every week briefly just for the sake of fulfilling the requirement by the school. There is no explicit protocol that guides their conversation. All the data sources have shown that there is almost nothing they take to their classroom from their conversation. There is no culture of conducting classroom observation and giving and receiving feedback among the teachers. As a result, the teachers cannot see the relevance of the CPD program for the improvement of their teaching. In general, they are so reluctant to engage themselves into the school CPD program. This situation in the school is against the principle that teachers should be active participants in every step of their professional development activities.

The data shows that there is a problem of ownership and proper orientation about the CPD program in the school. The teachers have not owned the program. They feel that it is imposed upon them by external others. They also claim that the program has no owner. Absence of appropriate orientation for all those who are involved in the management of the school based CPD is evident from the data. Those who are supposed to engage in the management of the CPD program in the school have attended only a one or two day orientation training on the topic. Moreover, visible collaboration between the school and higher education institutions, that could help to fill this gap in running the program, is also absent.

At least in the eyes of the teachers and others who are involved in the program, the impact of the program on the teaching and learning process in the school so far is nil. The teachers consider participating in the program as wastage of time. This situation is paradoxical given the fact that CPD has been introduced to the education system in Ethiopia with the ultimate purpose of improving the quality of education in the country through changing the actual practices of teachers in the classroom. This necessitates the need to question the way we manage the introduction of educational innovations like school based CPD into our school system and the extent to which our schools have the capacity to properly run school based CPD.

### **Implications**

CPD is expected to foster meaningful change in the classroom. When it fails, not only we waste valuable time and resources, but also we lose our teacher's trust that time engaged in professional development is well spent (Chappuis, et al. 2009). This looks what has happened in the case of the target Secondary and Preparatory School. Hence, a lot has to be done in

order to reverse the unfavorable consequence of the CPD practices in the school so far. In this regard, the following issues need to be considered.

**Intensive capacity development:** provision of appropriate training to all the people who are engaged in running the CPD program at school level and developing their capacity of providing appropriate professional support to the teachers should be a priority. Given the innovative nature of the school based CPD program to our schools, the school leaders should also be well equipped with all the necessary skills in change management.

**Conducive school context:** although there is a clear CPD policy in the school, there needs to be an appropriate context for its implementation. School leaders should promote the culture of collaborative learning on a continuous basis through the actual engagement of themselves in the process. There also needs to be a supportive culture in the school. The school needs to consider the situation of teachers in terms of their socio-economic status and professional demand. If the teachers are engaged in a second job out of working hours, the CPD program should consider that in setting up the time. Moreover, there is a need for compensation if teachers are to use their spare time for CPD activities. Necessary resources to run the CPD program including reference materials should also be available in the school.

**Partnership with institutions:** establishing partnership between higher education institutions would help to alleviate the problem of the lack of expertise in the schools in the area of teacher learning and in the facilitation of CPD. Researchers from universities may collaborate with CPD leaders in the school on on-going basis so that both parties will eventually benefit. For instance, the school can collaborate with Bahir Dar University and get the necessary expertise support from staff in the university while at the same time serving as an apprenticeship cite for trainees of the university.

**Teacher Ownership:** CPD should be owned by the school community. The community must believe that CPD is integral to the work of teaching and it is a way of dealing with the complex and dynamic nature of student learning from time to time. School principals and supervisors should give teachers the room to engage themselves in the CPD process in a more flexible way.

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