

Faculty members' conception and practice of teacher professional development: Implications for quality instruction at the university of Gondar, Ethiopia

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Abstract

This study aimed to examine faculty members' perceptions and practices regarding teachers' professional development in enhancing instructional quality at the University of Gondar, Ethiopia. To achieve this purpose, a qualitative research approach using a descriptive case study design was utilized. Data were collected from teachers, department heads, the education quality assurance office coordinator, a dean, and the leader of the higher diploma program, of the university through semi-structured interviews, observations, and focus group discussions. Data analysis was conducted through interpretative methods emphasizing narrative description. The findings revealed that teachers hold misconceptions about professional development and exhibit reluctance to engage in professional development activities, such as workshops and meetings. Additionally, the level of academic dialogue among teachers was found to be insufficient, leading to the dichotomization of faculty into 'old' and 'new' categories, which negatively impacted their commitment to professional development initiatives. To address these challenges, it is recommended that teachers cultivate a sense of responsibility and intrinsic motivation toward their professional development while fostering collaborative relationships. Furthermore, the Ministry of Education is urged to redesign and develop professional development training programs that avoid, if not reduce, the one-size-fits-all and top-down approaches currently prevalent in professional development initiatives.

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Introduction

Nations around the world have emphasized quality education as a major goal of their educational reform initiatives (Borko, 2004; Desimone et al., 2006). There is a broad consensus that high-quality education is more critical today than ever before, given the increasing demand for advanced knowledge and skills that are requisite for thriving in the

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complexities of the 21st century. In response to this concern, many reform initiatives have focused on the quality of classroom teaching, more specifically on the teacher as the key to improving learner performance (Borko et al., 2010; Desimone et al., 2006; Guskey, 2002; Knight & Wiseman, 2005; Marcelo, 2009).

In contemporary educational discourse, lifelong learning has emerged as a pivotal concept for teachers, enabling them to discern the evolving demands of information and societal needs while simultaneously clarifying their professional roles. Professional development of teachers is more effective when teachers actively construct knowledge and learn together with colleagues ((Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Villegas-Reimers, 2003). By sharing knowledge and experience, giving each other feedback, and looking at knowledge by using varying perspectives, teachers can jointly construct knowledge influenced by the context in which it will be applied (Webster-Wright, 2009)

Professional development of teachers gets its roots from different learning theories. It is mainly related to adult learning theories which consider learning as a lifelong process. According to Swift and Kelly (2010), adult learners are highly motivated by their specific needs and interests. In addition to adult learning theories, professional development of teachers is also based on other learning theories such as transformational learning theory, self-directed learning theory, social learning theory, and constructivist learning theories which have great contributions for teachers' professional development (Cranton, 1996; Cranton & King, 2003; Trotter, 2006)

These theories emphasized that teachers as adult learners are developing their profession by learning from experience, self-reflection, active participation, and constructing meaning from what they confront while performing their teaching task (Riley & Roach, 2006). In the last decades education in Ethiopia has been experiencing rapid and multiple reforms. In line with these reforms, teacher education has got wider attention. In addition, the Ethiopian Education Development Roadmap draft indicated that there is still a need to add some provisions to the policy; ensure proper implementation of the existing provisions and develop new strategies (MoE, 2018). Hence, the purpose of this study was to examine faculty members' conception and practice of teachers' professional development and its implications in improving teaching.

Statement of the Problem

Recent literature recognizes that the quality of teachers is a crucial determinant of the educational experiences and achievements of learners (Mestry et al., 2009). The success of reform initiatives depends on the quality of teachers. As a result, professional development of teachers has become a major focal point of such initiatives (Boyle et al., 2005; Desimone et al., 2006; Steyn, 2008).

In Ethiopia, the history of teacher education dates back to the 1940s (Tesfaye, 2014). Since that time, the development and expansion of teacher education have progressed slowly, impeded by various constraints. In response to these challenges, the education sector has implemented significant reforms. Education had been prioritized on the national agenda (World Bank, 2013), culminating in the launch of a new education and training policy in 1994 (TGE, 1994).

According to the study conducted by the Reading for Ethiopia's Achievement Development Technical Assistance, Ethiopia's education and training policy incorporates many of the principles of commonly accepted good practices recognized in the literature, including an emphasis on "active learning, problem solving, and student centered teaching methods (MoE, 2004b; READTA, 2014). In Ethiopia, teacher professional development programs are designed to enhance the quality of education by advancing the skills and professionalism of teachers. These initiatives aim to develop reflective practice among teachers and elevate the standards of teaching and learning across the country (MoE, 2004a).

Despite the significant contributions of professional development (PD), many educators do not recognize the importance of PD activities. Some teachers even exhibit a lack of engagement with training, overlooking PD as a vital component of lifelong learning. Moreover, experienced teachers encounter substantial challenges each year, including changes in subject matter, the introduction of innovative instructional methods, advancements in technology, updates to laws and procedures, and evolving student learning requirements. Educators who do not partake in adequate PD opportunities are likely to stagnate in their professional growth, ultimately compromising student learning outcomes (Mizell, 2010).

Researchers have also identified the "one-shot" approach as one of the reasons for the ineffectiveness of some PD programs (Fullan, 2007; Sandholtz & Scribner, 2006). In a typical one-shot approach, an expert delivers knowledge on a particular topic to a large audience within a limited time period. Here teachers' attitudes toward the topic are not deemed relevant. This approach makes the PD of teachers' intellectually superficial, disconnected from deep issues pertaining to the curriculum and learning, and causes it to be fragmented, and noncumulative (Yoon, 2016).

Acknowledging the importance of the school context, Mohamed (2006) remarked that teacher development programs should not be of a "one-size-fits-all" nature, but rather the design and content of the program must take into account the context in which the program takes place. On the same issue, Richards (1991) and Schmoker (2006) further argue that teacher education must adopt a bottom-up approach, where the starting point is an internal view (arising from the teachers themselves) of teaching rather than an external one (imposed on them by an outsider).

Robinson (2002) stated that PD programs must have meaning for participants and it is important that they identify their role in the process of development. This is to mean that in their PD practices, university teachers are expected to assess their students on continuous basis, use different active learning strategies, collaborate with their colleagues and reflect systematically and rigorously based on evidence. This makes the PD activities contextual, flexible, collaborative, evaluative (including self-evaluation and continuous assessments) which allow them to be lifelong learners and improve their teaching.

To allow professional development proceed successfully, it should be a continuous process and contributing to the general improvement of education (Bredeson, 2002). The purpose of PD programs should be both to enable and support teachers to provide the best possible instruction so that they become excellent by gaining competence, confidence, commitment and a sense of the joy of teaching (Anderson, 2001; Day, 1999; Day & Sachs, 2004).

In the context of the aforementioned topic, professional development (PD) is regarded as a crucial aspect of teacher education in Ethiopia. However, the effectiveness of this lifelong learning strategy is hampered by various challenges related to conceptual understanding, management practices, leadership structures, and the working conditions of teachers (Gemedo & Tynjälä, 2015). These authors contend that there is an urgent need to reform educational management strategies, enhance teacher education programs, reinforce research-based practices, and improve the working conditions for educators.

Similarly, numerous local studies indicate a concerning deficiency in the implementation of professional development activities. For instance, a report by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education, which evaluated a series of workshops on the Higher Development Program (HDP), highlighted that the program was intended to enhance teachers' professional competencies, improve student learning outcomes, and elevate the overall quality of education (MoSHE, 2019). However, the report identified several gaps in the program's implementation. Supporting this assertion, the study conducted by Alemayehu and Solomon (2007) revealed that some instructors expressed dissatisfaction with the HDP, perceiving it as tedious, redundant, irrelevant to their current needs, and ultimately a waste of time. In addition, Hunde (2008), in his study on the application of HDP training skills in classroom instruction at Jimma university found that graduates were unable to apply the HDP training skills to the expected standard. He recommended that further research be undertaken to identify the barriers hindering the effective implementation of these skills.

Villegas-Reimers (2003) identifies several key factors—conceptual, contextual, and methodological—that contribute to the effectiveness of professional development programs for teachers. Conceptual factors pertain to how change, teaching, and teacher development are understood and interpreted. Contextual factors encompass the influence of school leadership, organizational culture, external agencies, and the degree of support for site-based initiatives. Methodological factors relate to the specific processes and procedures that are implemented to facilitate teacher PD.

Importantly, teachers must personally acknowledge the value of professional development. They must recognize, understand, and accept the necessity for their own professional growth. A teacher who views PD positively actively seeks to acquire new knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, and dispositions. Such dispositions include pride, self-esteem, teamwork, commitment, motivation, creativity, and vision. These attributes must be embraced by the teacher for meaningful development to occur (Moshia, 2006; Komba & Nkumba, 2008).

In light of this, this study seeks to examine the perceptions and practices of faculty members regarding teachers' professional development and its implications for enhancing teaching effectiveness at the College of Education, University of Gondar. The research is guided by the following fundamental questions: (1) how do faculty members conceptualize professional development? (2) What are the current practices related to teachers' professional development?

Methods

Research Approach

This study employed the qualitative research approach. In the realm of social science research, diverse forms of qualitative inquiry began to emerge in the late 1970s (Schwandt, 2000). Since that time, qualitative research has garnered growing recognition across various academic disciplines (Patton, 2015). Qualitative research seeks to understand phenomena in their distinctiveness within specific contexts and the interactions that occur therein. This methodological approach provides a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter by analyzing textual data, presenting nuanced perspectives of the participants, and conducting investigations in naturalistic settings (Creswell, 2012).

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive case study design. According to Yin (2003) case study allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events. As opposed to the natural world, the social world deals with the complex features of human thought and ideas, including their consequences which are very difficult to easily count and measure using numbers.

In light of this, the present study utilized a descriptive case study design, which facilitated a comprehensive exploration of the phenomena under investigation through detailed descriptions and narrative interpretations of the data. This design was useful to elucidate both the theoretical assumptions and the actual practices of teachers regarding their professional development activities.

Sampling

The participants in this study included teachers, a dean, quality assurance and audit officer, the HDP leader, and department heads from three academic units: Educational Planning and Management, Adult Education and Community Development, and Special Needs and Inclusive Education. Purposive sampling was employed to determine the research site and select participants, as recommended by Suri (2011) and Best and Kahn (2006). This technique allowed for the identification of participants who could provide deep insights into the issue at hand. According to Yin (2003), purposive sampling is particularly suitable for qualitative case study designs, as it facilitates the selection of individuals who are adept at uncovering and understanding the complexities of the research topic.

To ensure a representative sample, various criteria were established for participant selection. The criteria included: (a) diversity in academic disciplines; (b) gender representation; (c) varied levels of work experience; and (d) willingness to participate in the study. Given these criteria, the researchers selected two instructors from each of the three departments mentioned above. Additionally, three department heads, one dean, and the head of quality assurance and audit were purposively included for interviews. Consequently, a total of twelve participants took part in this research.

Data Gathering

The use of multiple sources of evidence is a hallmark of qualitative case study research (Yin, 2003). Qualitative data encompass direct quotations from individuals regarding their experiences, opinions, feelings, and knowledge (Patton, 2015; Merriam, 2009). Consequently, this study employed various data gathering methods; including observation, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions.

Interviews were conducted with department heads, the dean, the leader of the higher diploma program, and the officer responsible for quality assurance and audit. The teachers selected from the three departments served as subjects for observation. Additionally, six participants—comprising three department heads and three teachers—were specifically selected for the focus group discussion based on their expertise and knowledge relevant to the topic under investigation. This strategic selection aimed to ensure that the conversation would yield insightful and pertinent information.

Data Analysis

It is important to acknowledge that qualitative data inherently permits multiple interpretations, owing to the interpretative nature of qualitative analysis (Cohen et al., 2007). In this study, data derived from interviews, observations, and focus group discussions were meticulously examined by consulting field notes and audio recordings collected during the data gathering process. The gathered information was then transcribed, examined, and categorized into themes based on their shared characteristics. The themes were subsequently explored through interpretive and reflective analyses, framed within the perspectives of the participants.

Ethical Considerations

The primary purpose of ethical standards in research is to protect study participants from harm, deception, and unethical behavior, thereby safeguarding individuals, their communities, and their environments. Hence, the research process in this study was meticulously designed to comply with established professional and ethical guidelines.

In this regard, the researchers provided a comprehensive explanation of the study's objectives to the participants, ensuring that they received clear and accessible information regarding the research and its potential benefits. Confidentiality was rigorously maintained, with participants fully informed that their data would be utilized solely for research purposes. Furthermore, they were assured of their anonymity in the presentation and discussion of the study's results. Each participant was consulted individually, and all expressed their consent and willingness to participate. To further protect the anonymity of the participants, pseudonyms were used in the presentation and analysis of the findings.

Results

Academic Members' Conception of Professional Development

Differing views on Professional Development

The response of the participants showed that PD is conceptualized differently. In one way PD is considered as essential and valuable for teachers' teaching but in the other way it was reported as a burden imposed by the top management on teachers. The participants stated that taking part in PD helps them choose and employ appropriate teaching strategies, instructional materials, classroom management skills, student behavior, and assessment methods. During the interview, it was noted that teachers had various views on professional development. There were participants who regard professional development as focused short term training.

On the contrary there were others who consider PD as lifelong learning. As an illustration, one of the interviewees described PD as follows. "PD is any effort to develop a profession. It is a continuous process that helps us to exist in the teaching learning environment. A professional should develop his/her profession. PD is a lifelong learning process" (Abrham, 29/10/2022).

From the aforementioned statement, it is clear that PD is a continual learning process that is demanded by all professionals in order to adapt to the current environment. To be able to adapt to the dynamics of the teaching profession, teachers must engage in a continual learning process. To further emphasize this, a different interviewee added:

PD is a continuous practice of teachers' self-learning by identifying the gaps observed in knowledge, skills and attitudes that help us gain knowledge and skills when we interact with our friends and students. PD is a kind of capacity building activity which is continuous and lifelong learning throughout our life (Andarg, 18/12/2022).

As it can be depicted from the respondent's suggestions, PD is a continuous learning process for teachers to help them identify gaps in knowledge, skills and attitudes. It is further explained that they gain knowledge and skill while they interact with their friends and students. Through this interaction PD serves as a capacity building activity which continues throughout their life.

Other participants consider PD as a short- term training which is given formally with a specific schedule. In relation to this, one of the interviewees said that "the training is given only for one year" (Momina, 01/11/2022). In this case the interviewee considers PD as a short-term activity forgetting its continuous nature.

It was noted in the FGD that teachers were reluctant to acknowledge the significance of PD for enhancing teaching effectiveness as a result of their misunderstandings of professional development. Concerning the concept of PD among the academic staff, one of the participants in the FGD puts "some academic members consider PD as something which is not essential for teachers. Such wrong conception/understanding of PD could affect our activity/task" (Gelanesh, 26/03/2022). From the response of this FGD participant, it is possible to deduce that some academic members have misconceptions on PD while others capitalize its importance.

The researcheres found that certain academic members have incorrect conception of PD, which reflects their unfavorable views toward workshops and meetings. Some people view PD as formal and are more inclined to a type of PD that is beneficial for job advancement and better pay. However, PD goes beyond this and includes teachers' formal and informal activities.

Some academics agree with the aforementioned viewpoint and believe that all teachers should participate in professional development activities. During the FGD session, one participant mentioned this and said the following:

A Profession is like running water. It is clean unlike stagnant water which is full of unnecessary dirt materials. A knowledge gained at a one shot training and untimely is a one which will not go with the change that exists everyday (Abel, 14/03/2022).

From the above verbatim it could be said that a profession is like running water which continuously flows. As running water can clean the dirt materials, professional development can help teachers to have the expected knowledge, skills and attitudes which are timely, make teachers adaptive and competent to the changing world.

Consequently, it can be acknowledged that teachers' engagement in professional development activities is crucial for their competence in an ever-evolving educational landscape. The experiences gained through these professional development opportunities equip teachers with the contextual knowledge and skills essential for effective instructional practices, thereby enhancing the overall quality of education.

Current Practice of Professional Development

Practice goes out of the trajectory and malpractice progressed

When we see the practice of PD at the college it is not properly practiced as expected. In relation to this, one of the participants (interviewees) suggested the following: “honestly speaking PD is not effectively practiced in our college except the induction program which is given for 1-3 days by the university” (Gelanesh, 21/10/2022).

From the interviewee's response above, it is possible to say that PD is not widely practiced at the college, indicating that the college's PD culture is ineffective. Another interviewee backed this up by stating “it is difficult to say that PD is effectively practiced in the college. Of course, there are some activities which are done by few teachers” (Asfaw, 22/10/2022).

The department heads have also confirmed the low practice of PD at the college confirming that teachers are reluctant to participate in PD activities except in the HDP. Furthermore, one of the participants added that:

First and foremost, it is essential to have a strategy that outlines the roles and responsibilities of teams and individuals as well as a clear monitoring and assessment system. When we examine how our college operates in this area, we find that there isn't a unified strategy that holds everyone accountable for either their own performance or the shortcomings of the group (Abrham, 10/12/2022).

As it can be understood from the respondent's suggestions, the college has a low level of PD practice, and instructors' participation in PD activities was found to be low. One of the reasons for this, according to the respondents, is lack of a specific expert who can run PD as a system. There is no a planned and organized group in charge of planning, leading, supervising, and evaluating professional development at the institution in order to increase teachers' capability.

Another interviewee suggested that “Obviously, the college's quality assurance and audit is meant to adhere to the professional development of its teachers; however, its scope is restricted to overseeing teachers' performance evaluations” (Andarg, 22/10/2022). As suggested by the interviewee, the PD of teachers is not given due emphasis by different bodies. Even the concerned ones are simply doing their own routine tasks forgetting the role of PD in improving teachers’ teaching performance and professional competency. As a result of this, teachers are not strictly following different PD activities as expected.

For more evidence, let’s share an experience which the researcher faced during informal observation of Higher Diploma Leader who was correcting the portfolios of teachers. The Higher Diploma Leader was simply rushing by counting the pages of the portfolios without reading the detail contents of the portfolios. The researcher asked the Higher Diploma Leader why he is doing so and he replied that “teachers develop their portfolio carelessly for the sake of formality and have less devotion to the training. They even dislike to be commented by their trainers. What they need is to get the certificate of completion” (Yirdaw, 11/11/2022). The trainer also added that “much of the participants are passive during the training even some do not attend training sessions regularly” (Andarg, 11/11/2022).

The preceding data indicate that some teachers exhibited a passive engagement and minimal commitment to the higher diploma training sessions, demonstrating a lack of diligence in portfolio development. Furthermore, their capacity for reflective practice and willingness to accept constructive feedback from trainers appeared to be inadequate. Their participation in the training often seemed motivated solely by the desire to obtain the certification. However, it is essential to recognize that the primary objective of the HDP is to cultivate reflective practitioners and enhance the quality of instructional delivery.

Underlining the teachers’ low commitment and participation on professional development activities, one of the participants in the FGD puts the following: “By the way, a teacher who does not advance in his field is akin to someone who does not do the dishes. If so, it could be challenging for him or her to respond appropriately” (Eyob, 25/04/2022).

In this case it is possible to say that if academic members do not participate in PD activities they could not be able to have a knowledge which is timely and contextual. They could not be competent to perform their tasks effectively. Hence, teachers should engage in PD activities continuously to be effective in their teaching and be lifelong learners by making themselves capable of adapting the different changes in this dynamic and changing nature of teaching. In relation to this, one of the interviewees suggested that “Teachers' involvement in professional development activities is crucial and beneficial to enhance their subject matter expertise, pedagogical abilities, and attitude competency” (Asfaw, 09/12/2022).

As it can be understood from the idea of the respondent, teachers’ participation in PD activities can help them improve their subject matter knowledge, pedagogical skills and change in attitude which in turn helps them to improve their skills of using appropriate methods of teaching, motivating students and managing unexpected events which happened in their classroom. This can tell us that PD is essential in improving teachers’ classroom practices.

On the contrary an interviewee explained the practice of teachers on PD activities at the college as follows. “However, as a teacher, I did not consistently organize professional

development activities and assess my own gaps. Beyond my regular teaching duties, I did not fulfill any expectations placed on me” (Abrham, 10/12/2022).

From the above suggestion of the interviewee, it is possible to deduce that the practice of teachers on PD activities in the classroom is weak which is not planned, controlled and assessed by each other as expected. Teachers mostly do their teaching tasks as usual. Supporting the low participation of teachers and their lack of applying their PD training skills in to the actual classroom practices, the dean of the college added that "Teachers, of course, take part in a college-prepared training program, but they did not put the skills into practice" (Andarg, 08/11/2022).

From the above responses of the interviewee it is possible to understand that teachers' application of the skills in to their actual classroom teaching is poor. Furthermore, they did not share different training activities among each other except attending the trainings. Generally, the qualitative data obtained from the participants of this study suggest that the practice of PD activities was low at College of Education, University of Gondar.

Discussion

Teachers' Conception of Professional Development

It was found that there are differences among teachers in relation to their conception of PD activities. The participants suggested that PD is continuous and lifelong learning process for improving the capacity of a professional. On the contrary, others consider it as a burden imposed on teachers by management bodies which contradicts the reality in that PD is helpful for improving teachers' teaching performance skills by using or applying different teaching methods, skills of classroom management, time management and other skills of solving problems in the teaching learning process. This shows us that there exists a difference on the conception of professional development among teachers.

Concerning the different conceptions and understandings among teachers on PD, we can see the works of different writers. For example, Bredeson (2000) said that there appears to be a lack of consensus among the scholars on a working definition for teachers' professional development. This is evident from the various definitions of teachers' PD offered in the literature. Interestingly, as highlighted by Bredeson (2000), there are a plethora of terms such as in-service, staff development, continuing education, training, and self-improvement that are used interchangeably with the term PD with little regard for any conceptual and practical differences. Guskey and Huberman (1995) explain that this may happen as the concept of teachers' professional development can be viewed from several different perspectives, each with its own conceptual premise and is informed by different bodies of research.

Hargreaves and Fullan (1992, p. 2), who support the view that PD is a lifelong learning process, pointed out that "teacher development as knowledge and skill development" is essential for both teachers' and students' long-term success in learning. The growth of various interactions between educational institutions and their host communities has to do with lifelong learning. Everyone should be concerned about creating a learning environment where education is valued for both teachers and students. The professional development of

individuals who assist in delivering education at all levels must be part of this. Teachers should have opportunities to contribute at the individual teacher level through systems and authorities. It means that in order to make teachers competent in their teaching tasks, the authorities and the system in a particular organization should allow them the opportunity to grow professionally, even on an individual basis.

Professional development is defined by the OECD as the activities that increase a teacher's knowledge, skills, expertise, and other desirable teacher attributes (OECD, 2009). It is a protracted procedure that entails the methodical provision of opportunities for professional growth and development aimed at enhancing teacher competency (Villegas-Reimer, 2003). It entails analyzing instruction critically, participating in seminars, professional gatherings, mentoring, and reflection sessions, sharing ideas with other teachers, reading publications, and getting relevant job experience (OECD, 2009; Villegas-Reimer, 2003).

Additionally, Day (1999) views professional development as an amalgam of all natural learning experiences and conscious and planned activities, offers a broader understanding of the nature of the professional learning process. This wide definition emphasizes the deliberate nature of the learning process and highlights the necessity for participants to recognize and understand "natural learning" experiences as a component of the learning process. When learning occurs during the school day, there are several informal chances, such as casual conversations with a colleague in the staffroom, trying out various teaching methods and occasionally making mistakes, or the chance for a colleague to observe effective practice.

This makes it clear that professional development is a process rather than a one-time, universal event. Rather, it is an ongoing process of professional self-disclosure, reflection, and growth that produces the best results when continued over time in communities of practice and when concentrated on embedded job responsibilities.

Furthermore, it is possible to add that knowledge gained at a given time is not enough for teachers to be competent in their teaching. Hence, PD for teachers should be continuous which allows them to be lifelong learners because the process of teaching is always changing. i.e., the methods we use, the students' behavior, classroom management techniques and assessment mechanisms. Hence, to go with these changes and be effective in their teaching task, teachers should be involved in continuous learning process of PD which is mandatory in the changing and dynamic world of the 21st century.

According to the literature, which supports the participants' remarks, countries must adapt in order to maintain teachers' current abilities because the world is changing at an alarming rate. PD programs for teachers are regarded as having a key role since they allow educators the chance to learn and improve their jobs. Priority is given to learning how to learn and having the capacity to learn for life (Lowden, 2005).

In relation to the importance of teachers' participation on PD, it is possible to say that teachers' continuing professional development has become one of the most common central concerns in educational studies over the past several decades. As a result, ongoing research conducted in many countries has shown that PD activities within and beyond the school day affect teachers positively (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006). Hirsh (2001) has consistently found that the PD of teachers is the best way to affect their quality of teaching. Similarly, Birman et

al. (2000) have shown that PD activities play a key role in teacher preparation and improvement. Borko (2004) further supported this position by asserting, “teachers’ PD is essential to improve our schools (p.3). From these writers’ suggestions, it is possible to say that PD plays a paramount role in improving teachers’ professional capacity and developing their teaching skills. In general, it helps them to update and improve their teaching practice with the existing change of the education process and teaching.

Moreover, Benjamin (2019) explained that modern society demands high quality teaching and learning from teachers. Teachers have to possess a great deal of knowledge and skills with regard to both teaching and assessment practices in order to meet those demands and standards of quality education. There are a variety of pedagogical approaches, including group work and brainstorming, collaborative and co-operative work, and team-based problem solving; these educational strategies are often driven by an emphasis on providing students with the skills and attributes to become self-directed and highly autonomous lifelong learners (Ingersoll, 2003).

Teachers want to solve problem with their colleagues and learn things that are applicable in to their classroom practices. “Through these interactive situations, adults were able to reflect, grow and adapt throughout their teaching careers.” (Trotter, 2006, p.12). The experiential knowledge and insight that comes from teachers of all experience levels can prove to be exceptionally beneficial and educational for TPD. Hence, it is possible to conclude that teachers have different conception on PD in the study area.

Current Practice of Professional Development

Teachers’ practice or engagement in PD activities is very important to improve their professional growth and quality of education. As it is well known, PD is essential for teachers’ professional growth and improving their classroom teaching. As a result, they are advised to practice it in their usual teaching task. By creating a link between the PD and their classroom practice, teachers were able to grow in their knowledge, understanding, and classroom practice over time.

The findings of the study showed that the practice of PD at the college was found to be low. The participants of the study suggested that they are dominantly focusing on traditional methods of teaching like lecturing. Power point presentation is the most widely used way of presenting a lesson as it is pointed out by most of the respondents. In addition, they suggested that their actual practice of PD is not as expected because they lack the commitment and the ability to identify gaps observed in their classroom. Such problem of identifying gaps and poor planning for applying the PD activities lead teachers to adhere to traditional methods of teaching and poor preparation for teaching.

The classroom observation was also supportive of such activities in that most teachers were using lecture method of teaching focusing on course completion rather than using different teaching methods. Frequent use of lecture method could not allow students participation. Such activities of teachers in the classroom are contradictory to the idea of Benjamin (2019) who explained that PD is important to the growth and development of the contemporary educator. The goal of PD for educators is to go beyond maintenance and to create sustainability and professional longevity.

In conclusion it is possible to say that the practice of teachers on PD activities is low even some do not have commitment in the training programs provided in the college on different professional meetings. The researcher observed is that in any academic meeting prepared for teachers by the college, there is poor culture of professional dialogue among teachers which was one of the ways for the PD of teachers by developing two dimensions of learning for teachers-reflection and action which are helpful in making teachers to be reflective and action oriented.

In reality, however, it is known that teachers' practice or engagement in PD activities is very important to improve their profession and quality of education. PD is essential for teachers and they needed to practice it in their regular teaching task. By linking PD with their classroom practice, teachers would be able to advance their knowledge and classroom practice over time. In this situation, it is reasonable to assert that academic staff members who take part in PD activities will be better equipped to complete their responsibilities successfully, have information that is current and relevant to their field, and respond to inquiries about it. Therefore, it would be crucial for instructors to regularly participate in PD activities if they want to function effectively as teachers. By preparing themselves to adapt to the various changes in this dynamic and changing environment of education in general and teaching in particular, they will be able to be effective teachers while also being continual lifelong learners.

Conclusions and Implications

This study examined the perceptions and practices of professional development among academic staff at the College of Education, University of Gondar. The respondents generally recognize professional development as a vital and ongoing learning process that enhances their professional, academic, and technical skills. However, some participants view it as a short-term activity that is insufficiently supported and motivated by management bodies. Moreover, the coordination and budgeting for teacher professional development at various levels—department, college, university, and the Ministry of Education— were found to be notably inadequate.

The findings also reveal that some academic members hold misconceptions about professional development, perceiving it as an obligatory burden imposed by higher authorities. This perception has contributed to negative attitudes toward activities such as workshops, meetings, and academic dialogues. Consequently, some teachers exhibit reluctance to engage in professional development initiatives. This reluctance has been corroborated by the researchers' informal observations within the institution, as well as during several meetings and training sessions conducted for faculty. Additionally, it appears that even experienced faculty holds

The research findings have implications for theory, policy and further research. As far as theory is concerned, this study is a significant contribution to the understanding of teacher professional development in the country and college context where PD as lifelong learning takes over the short-term planned form of training. It will help practitioners to have clear understanding on professional development as lifelong learning process and the role of academic dialogue in sharing knowledge and experience among teachers through feedback.

As for policy, the research findings tend to suggest that continuous and sustained program for teacher PD largely depend on support that the teacher/practitioner receives at different levels. Therefore, while it is recognized that teacher PD requires the support of many stakeholders at various levels, there is a need for the different bodies to play their share. Hence, The Ministry of Education needs to redesign and develop PD training programs which are helpful to avoid if not to reduce ‘the one-size-fits-all’ and the top-down kind of PD program.

The deans, education quality assurance and audit officers and department heads are also expected to plan and adjust different programs for academic dialogue among teachers on a department or college levels. Teachers are also expected to actively participate in academic dialogues as well as meetings in a responsible manner. Finally, in relation to further research, studies similar to the present study need to be carried out in other colleges and universities.

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