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## **Impact of Continuous Professional Development on Teachers' Professional Growth and Classroom Practices: A Study of Selected Primary Schools in Chingola District, Zambia**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Continuous Professional Development (CPD) is widely regarded as essential for improving teacher quality and student outcomes. This study examined the impact of CPD on teachers' professional growth and classroom practices in selected primary schools in Chingola District, Zambia. Using a mixed-methods explanatory sequential design, data were gathered from 120 primary school teachers via questionnaires, 18 in-depth interviews with teachers and school leaders, and structured observations in six classrooms. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and cross-tabulations; qualitative data were subjected to thematic analysis. Findings indicate that teachers perceive CPD as beneficial for improving pedagogical knowledge, lesson planning, and confidence; however, constraints such as time pressures, inadequate resources, and limited follow-up hinder the translation of CPD into sustained classroom change. School-based, job-embedded, and collaborative CPD models were reported as the most effective in facilitating practice change. The study recommends increased institutional support, allocation of dedicated CPD time, contextually relevant training, and systematic follow-up mechanisms to enhance the effectiveness of CPD in similar contexts. Implications for policy and practice are discussed.

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### **1. Introduction**

Continuous Professional Development (CPD) for teachers is increasingly recognized as central to educational improvement globally. CPD encompasses formal and informal activities—workshops, coaching, mentoring, action research, professional learning communities (PLCs), and online modules—aimed at sustaining teachers' knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions across their careers (Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner, 2017; OECD, 2019). In Zambia, curriculum reform and a shift toward competency-based education have amplified the need for effective CPD to support teachers in adopting learner-centered pedagogies and new assessment practices (Ministry of General Education, 2013).

Chingola District, located in the Copperbelt Province, presents a mix of urban and peri-urban primary schools with varied access to resources and CPD opportunities. While national policy frameworks promote CPD, school-level implementation faces challenges, including limited funding, time constraints, and uneven leadership support

(Mulenga, 2018; Phiri, 2016). This study investigates teachers' perceptions and experiences of CPD and its impact on classroom practices in selected primary schools in Chingola District to inform policy and practice.

### **1.1 Research Questions**

The study addresses the following research questions:

1. What are teachers' perceptions of CPD in selected primary schools in Chingola District?
2. What factors influence teachers' participation in and retention of CPD activities?
3. To what extent does CPD impact teachers' lesson planning, instructional strategies, and classroom management?
4. What contextual and institutional barriers hinder the translation of CPD learning into classroom practice?
5. What strategies can enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of CPD in Chingola District schools?

## **2. Literature Review**

The importance of CPD is well-documented: high-quality, sustained, and contextually relevant CPD contributes to improved teacher knowledge, instructional practices, and student outcomes (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Guskey, 2002). Models emphasizing job-embedded learning—such as coaching, PLCs, and action research—have stronger evidence for changing classroom practice than one-off workshops (Garet et al., 2001; Desimone, 2009). Barriers to effective CPD in low-resource settings include insufficient funding, lack of instructional materials, heavy teacher workloads, and weak leadership support (Mulkeen, 2010; Phiri, 2016). School-based CPD and blended approaches (face-to-face plus online support) can help mitigate access issues, but require reliable infrastructure and leadership to sustain change (OECD, 2019; UNESCO, 2020).

Theoretical frameworks underpinning CPD research include adult learning theory (andragogy) emphasizing relevance and self-direction (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2015) and Guskey's multi-level model which links teacher reactions and learning to organizational support and student outcomes (Guskey, 2002). Social constructivist perspectives highlight the role of collaborative communities in co-constructing pedagogical meaning and sustaining practice change (Vygotsky, 1978; Wenger, 1998).

## **3. Methodology**

### **3.1 Research Design**

An explanatory sequential mixed-methods design was used. The quantitative phase collected survey data from teachers to identify general patterns; the qualitative phase (interviews, focus groups, and classroom observations) explored and explained the quantitative results in depth (Creswell, 2014).

### **3.2 Setting and Participants**

Six primary schools in Chingola District were purposively selected to represent urban and peri-urban contexts. The sample comprised 120 teachers who completed structured questionnaires (response rate 92%). Purposive sampling identified 18 participants (12 teachers, 4 headteachers, 2 district CPD coordinators) for interviews. Classroom observations were conducted in six classes taught by teachers who had recently participated in CPD activities.

### **3.3 Instruments**

Quantitative data were collected via a structured questionnaire with Likert-scale items and demographic questions. The instrument measured perceptions of CPD relevance, perceived impact on practice, barriers to participation, and preferred CPD modalities. Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interview guides and an observation protocol focused on lesson planning, pedagogical strategies, learner engagement, and classroom management.

**3.4 Data Collection Procedure**

Surveys were administered in person. Interviews and focus groups were audio-recorded with consent and transcribed verbatim. Observations used a standardized rubric to document practices aligned with CPD content. Ethical clearance was obtained from the university; participants provided informed consent and confidentiality was maintained.

**3.5 Data Analysis**

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means) and cross-tabulations to explore relationships by experience level and school type. Qualitative data underwent thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2006), triangulating findings with survey results to enhance validity.

**4. Results**

**4.1 Participant Characteristics**

Table 1 summarizes participant demographics.

**Table 1.** Participant demographics (N = 120)

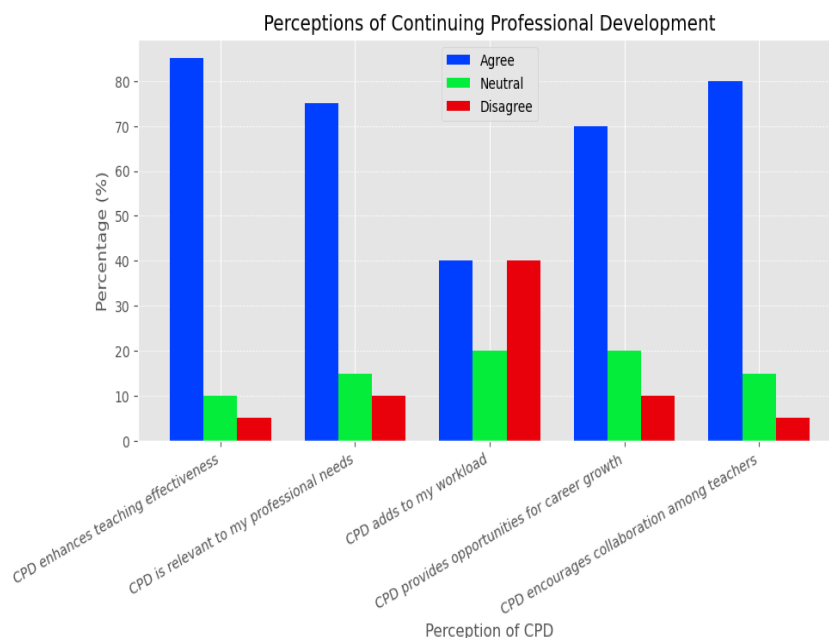
Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
<b>Gender</b>	Female	64	53.3
	Male	56	46.7
<b>Age (years)</b>	21–30	28	23.3
	31–40	46	38.3
	41–50	30	25.0
	51 and above	16	13.3
<b>Teaching Experience</b>	0–5 years	22	18.3
	6–10 years	36	30.0
	11–20 years	40	33.3
	21 years and above	22	18.3
<b>School Type</b>	Urban	70	58.3
	Peri-urban	50	41.7

**4.2 Teachers' Perceptions of CPD**

A majority (82%) agreed that CPD enhances teaching effectiveness and 76% viewed CPD as relevant to professional needs. The mean rating for perceived CPD relevance (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) was 4.0 (SD = 0.6). Table 2 presents select survey responses.

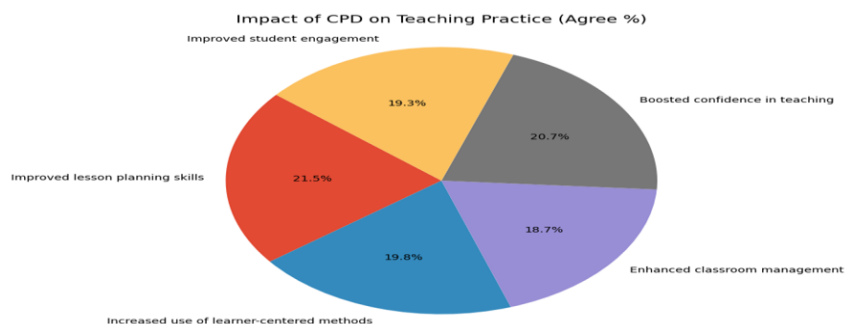
**Table 2.** Perceptions of CPD (selected items, N = 120)

Perception of CPD	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)
CPD enhances teaching effectiveness	85	10	5
CPD is relevant to my professional needs	75	15	10
CPD adds to my workload	40	20	40
CPD provides opportunities for career growth	70	20	10
CPD encourages collaboration among teachers	80	15	5

**Figure 4.2 Perceptions of continuing professional Development**

Most teachers had attended at least one CPD event in the past year (88%). Preferred modalities were school-based workshops (64%), coaching/mentoring (52%), and PLCs (48%); only 22% reported having meaningful access to online CPD due to connectivity constraints.

#### 4.3 Impact on Classroom Practices



Observation data and self-reports indicate improvements in lesson structure, use of formative assessment techniques, and increased student participation in classes where teachers participated in job-embedded CPD (coaching, PLCs). However, fidelity of implementation varied. Where follow-up support was present (peer coaching or leadership feedback), teachers more consistently applied new strategies.

#### 4.4 Barriers to CPD Effectiveness Key barriers reported included:

- Time constraints and heavy workloads (75%)
- Limited teaching materials and resources (60%)
- Insufficient follow-up and coaching (56%)

- Financial constraints and travel costs for external training (42%) Qualitative interviews emphasized a “practice–theory gap” when CPD was delivered as a one-off workshop without classroom application or mentoring.

#### **4.5 Qualitative Themes Thematic analysis yielded four dominant themes:**

1. Job-embeddedness matters: Teachers valued CPD that was directly linked to classroom tasks and included opportunities for immediate application and reflection.
2. Leadership and culture: Supportive headteachers who scheduled CPD time and encouraged PLCs fostered sustained practice change.
3. Resource constraints limit transfer: Teachers struggled to implement strategies that required materials or smaller class sizes.
4. Motivation and recognition: CPD tied to career pathways and formal recognition increased teacher engagement.

### **5. Discussion**

#### **5.1 Perceptions and Impact Findings align with broader literature:**

CPD is perceived positively and can improve lesson planning, pedagogy, and confidence (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Guskey, 2002). However, consistent with previous studies, one-off workshops produced limited classroom change absent sustained, contextualized follow-up (Garet et al., 2001; Desimone, 2009).

#### **5.2 Importance of School-Based and Collaborative Models**

Data underscore the effectiveness of school-based, collaborative CPD—PLCs, coaching, and action research—in fostering reflection and supporting implementation. These approaches align with social learning theories and research advocating for job-embedded professional learning (Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008; Knowles et al., 2015).

#### **5.3 Constraints to Implementation**

Systemic constraints—time, resources, and weak monitoring—undermine CPD’s potential. Even well-designed CPD may fail to translate into practice when teachers lack materials or when leadership does not allocate time for learning and reflection (Mulenga, 2018; Phiri, 2016).

#### **5.4 Policy and Practice Implications**

Effective CPD requires: (a) alignment with school priorities and classroom realities; (b) leadership that schedules and models professional learning; (c) job-embedded modalities with mentoring and peer support; and (d) allocation of resources and monitoring systems to sustain follow-up.

### **6. Conclusion**

This study found that CPD positively influences teachers’ professional growth and classroom practices in Chingola District when it is sustained, job-embedded, and supported by school leadership. Major barriers—time constraints, resource shortages, and inadequate follow-up—limit the translation of CPD into classroom transformation. Addressing these barriers through policy and school-level action can enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of CPD.

#### **6.1 Recommendations**

Based on the findings, the study recommends:

**Institutionalize school-based CPD:** Ministries and district offices should promote PLCs, coaching, and structured in-school CPD with allocated time in school timetables.

**Allocate dedicated CPD funding:** Ensure budget lines for materials, facilitation, and modest incentives to support participation, especially in peri-urban schools.

**Build leadership capacity:** Train headteachers in facilitating professional learning cultures and monitoring CPD implementation.

Emphasize job-embedded follow-up: Pair workshops with classroom coaching, peer observation, and reflective cycles to support transfer of learning.

Improve access to blended CPD: Invest in low-cost connectivity solutions and provide asynchronous materials to supplement face-to-face CPD.

Establish monitoring and evaluation: Develop simple indicators to track CPD participation, implementation fidelity, and classroom impact over time.

Link CPD to career progression: Create clear recognition pathways that reward sustained professional learning and demonstrated classroom improvements.

### **6.2 Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

Limitations include purposive school selection and cross-sectional design, which constrain generalizability. Longitudinal studies assessing sustained CPD impact on student outcomes and experimental designs comparing CPD modalities would strengthen evidence. Research into cost-effective scalable models for low-resource settings is also recommended.

**Author's Declaration** I declare that this manuscript is my original work and has not been submitted elsewhere for publication.

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