

# Continuing Professional Development: Perceptions of Elementary School Teachers in Saudi Arabia

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**Abstract:** This study focused on practical applications and examined the perceptions of elementary school teachers in Saudi Arabia concerning the effectiveness and facilitators/inhibitors of continuous professional development (CPD) activities. Professional development is a critical element that can ensure successful school change and development takes place within school systems. Professional and school development overlap and the common link relates to ongoing continuous improvement on the part of teachers and administrators. A specific objective of the study included ascertaining whether professional development programs were providing helpful knowledge and skills to teachers that could result in promoting student achievement. The results of this study reinforced the need to connect professional development efforts with relevant classroom topics and strategies that will allow teachers to gain and recognize the need for new knowledge and skills. Aligning the needs of teachers, administrators, and school objectives can promote teacher involvement, professional growth, and can lead the way to establishing mentoring relationships that can ensure continuous improvement occurs.

**Key words:** professional development, school change, teachers and administrators, Saudia Arabia

## 1. Introduction

In response to globalization, as well as higher accountability demands, expectations of teacher's roles are changing. Communities place lofty expectations upon their educators. Today's educators are expected to be knowledgeable of their profession, maintain high academic standards, teach all types of learners through a variety of teaching strategies, and be accountable for each student's academic progress. Teachers need to be knowledgeable of their respective areas and the content that encompasses their subject area. Due to greater demands on teacher's requirements, many academics have called for a reform of professional development as a precursor to educational reform (Glickman, 2002; Sparks, 2002).

The international research literature has consistently shown that professional development is an essential component of successful school level change and development (Day 1999; Hargreaves, 1994). Professional development can have a positive impact on curriculum, pedagogy, as well as teacher's sense of commitment and their relationships with students (Talbert & McLaughlin, 1994).

Modern views of professional development characterize professional learning not as a short-term

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intervention, but as a long-term process extending from teacher education at the tertiary level to in-service training in the workplace (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Putnam & Borko, 2000). Broadly speaking, professional development encompasses all formal and informal learning that enables individuals to improve their own practice. It involves reflective activity designed to improve an individual's attributes, knowledge, understanding and skills (TDA, 2007).

In Saudi Arabia, the overarching education policy is concerned with the education system responding to cultural demands. Continuous development of educational systems and regulations are used to keep pace with the rapid developments in educational activities. Eager to implement the recommendations of the Dakar Declaration, the Kingdom published its plans for Education for All for all regions of the country, leaving space for state sectors and civil society institutions to participate in the Education for All programs. Emphasizing the role of the teacher in fostering the concept of Education for All, the Kingdom has adopted the international "Education for All Week", scheduled by UNESCO (2011) each year to remind nations of their commitments. In 2006, the Kingdom pronounced the theme "Every Child Needs a Teacher", to affirm the role of the teacher and the importance of the teacher being suitably qualified pedagogically to implement the educational process and achieve its goals (Al Shaer, 2007).

In 2007, a project was sponsored by King Abdul Abdullah Bin Abdul Aziz for the development of public education. The Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia identified thirty-nine steps to implement this project which included curriculum development, professional development programs for teachers, improvement of the educational environment and the extra-curricular activities for students (Ministry of Education, 2008). Dillon (2010) revealed that teacher development can either play a critical role in meeting teacher's needs and wants, or it can frustrate teachers and keep them from reaching their full potential. Therefore, it is essential to understand teacher's perceptions and needs about their experiences in participating in Continuing Professional Development (CPD).

## 2. Background

Professional development for teachers has been studied and addressed in the literature in many different ways. Bless and Higson-Smith (1995) defined a literature review as "a process of reading background information that has been published and appears to be relevant to the research topic" (p. 22). In education, there are two views of CPD. The narrow view considers CPD as imparting/acquiring specific sets of skills and/or knowledge in order to deal with specific new requirements (for example, training teachers to implement a new textbook or using a new teaching aid). The broad view considers CPD as a much deeper, wider and longer-term process; in which professionals continuously enhance not only their knowledge and skills, but also their thinking, understanding and maturity. The teachers grow not only as professionals, but also as persons and their development is not restricted to their work roles, but may also extend to new roles and responsibilities (Padwad & Dixit, 2011).

In a survey of continuing education for the professions, Madden and Mitchell (1993) stated that CPD can fulfill three functions: (1) updating and extending the professional's knowledge and skills on new developments and new areas of practice — to ensure continuing competence in the current job; (2) training for new responsibilities and for a changing role (for example, management, budgeting, teaching) developing new areas of competence in preparation for a more senior post; (3) Developing personal and professional effectiveness and increasing job satisfaction — increasing competence in a wider context with benefits to both professional and personal roles.

There are a number of aspects that may influence the effective implementation of professional development for teachers. The major aspects include the following:

(1) *Meeting teacher's needs*: Studies show that teachers have a preference for professional development programs that are practical in nature and aim to meet their specific developmental needs (Robinson & Carrington, 2002).

(2) *Teacher's commitment*: Studies show that teacher's commitment towards professional development is required for their successful professional growth (Blackmore, 2000).

(3) *Leadership style*: Effective leadership that denotes a principals' commitment in identifying teacher's needs and facilitating suitable training to meet their needs (Penuel et al., 2007).

(4) *The particular school context*: There are certain variables in the school context which may either improve or hinder the professional learning of teachers (Lee, 2005).

(5) *Feedback on teacher's development*: The importance of feedback to teachers and monitoring their professional development is supported by research (Birman et al., 2000). Teachers need to know whether they are making any progress when implementing new teaching initiatives.

### 3. Continuing Professional Development

The Latin root of profession and professional is *professare*, to profess, a word that implies a declaration of one's beliefs, based on one's knowledge, experience and values. It also implies openness and exposure to scrutiny since one's pronouncements, beliefs, values and actions can be analyzed and evaluated for their validity (Farrugia, 1996).

The term professional development is often used interchangeably with terms like continuing professional development, continuing professional learning, staff development, and teacher development (Gravani, 2007). These terms are often defined with great variability and no single definition is universally accepted (Glover & Law, 1996).

Continuing professional development may be defined as:

- "The process by which teachers acquire the new knowledge, skills, and values that positively impact students" (Hoyle & John, 1995, p. 17).
- "A sustained collaborative learning process that systematically nourishes the growth of educators (individuals and teams) through adult learner-centered, job-embedded processes. It focuses on educators' attaining the skills, abilities, and deep understanding needed to improve student achievement" (Speck & Knipe, 2005, p. 4).
- "A planned, continuous and lifelong process whereby teachers try to develop their personal and professional qualities, and to improve their knowledge, skills and practice, leading to their empowerment, the improvement of their agency and the development of their organizations and their pupils." (Padwad & Dixit, 2011, p. 7).

Continuing professional development is a learning process resulting from a meaningful interaction (both in time and space) and eventually leading to changes in teacher's professional proactive behavior and in their thinking about practice as described using the following five components by Day and Sachs (2004):

(1) *Self-image*: Refers to the way educators typify themselves as educators.

(2) *Self-esteem*: Encompasses educators' personal evaluation of themselves. How well am I doing as an educator?

(3) *Cognitive*: It includes the personal motives that make educators choose their job, stay in it or give it up for another career.

(4) *Task perception*: It involves an educator's personal answer to the questions: What must I do to be an effective educator? What are the essential tasks I have to perform in order to do well? What do I consider as legitimate duties to perform and what do I refuse to accept as part of my job?

(5) *Future perspective*: The educator's articulated expectations about the future development of the job and the way they feel about it (p. 220).

#### 4. Teacher's Professional Development

Teacher's professional development (TPD) is a dynamic area of constant change. Fraser et al. (2007) suggested that "teacher's professional learning can be seen as the processes that result in specific changes in the professional knowledge, skills, attitudes, beliefs or action of teachers" (p. 157). According to Reid's quadrants (Fraser et al., 2007), teacher's professional learning opportunities comprise two dimensions: formal-informal and planned-incidental. Formal opportunities are those explicitly established by an agent other than the teacher, for example taught courses, whereas informal opportunities are sought and established by the teacher, for example, networking. On the other axis, planned opportunities may be formal or informal, but are characteristically pre-arranged, for example collaborative planning, whereas incidental opportunities are spontaneous and unpredictable, for example, teacher exchanges over coffee. These descriptions represent polarized positions that encompass the range of learning opportunities encountered by teachers. The quadrants are exemplified in Figure 1.

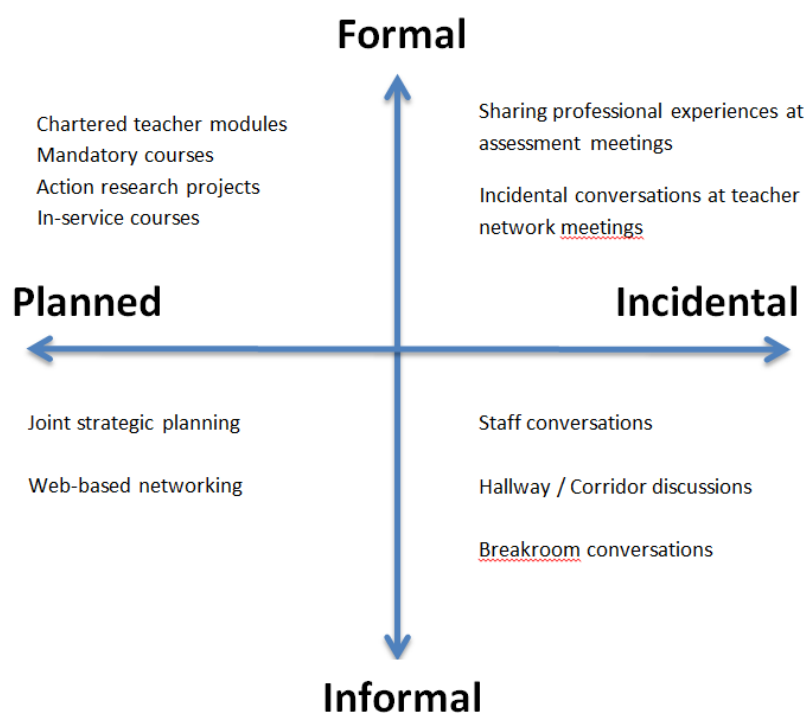


Figure 1 Teacher Learning Quadrants (Fraser et al., 2007)

Continuing Professional Development (CPD) can be regarded as the planned acquisition of knowledge, experience and skills and the development of personal qualities necessary for the execution of professional and technical duties throughout a constructional professional life, encompassing both technical and non-technical matters. Figure 2 outlines formal and informal activities (Wall & Ahmed, 2008).

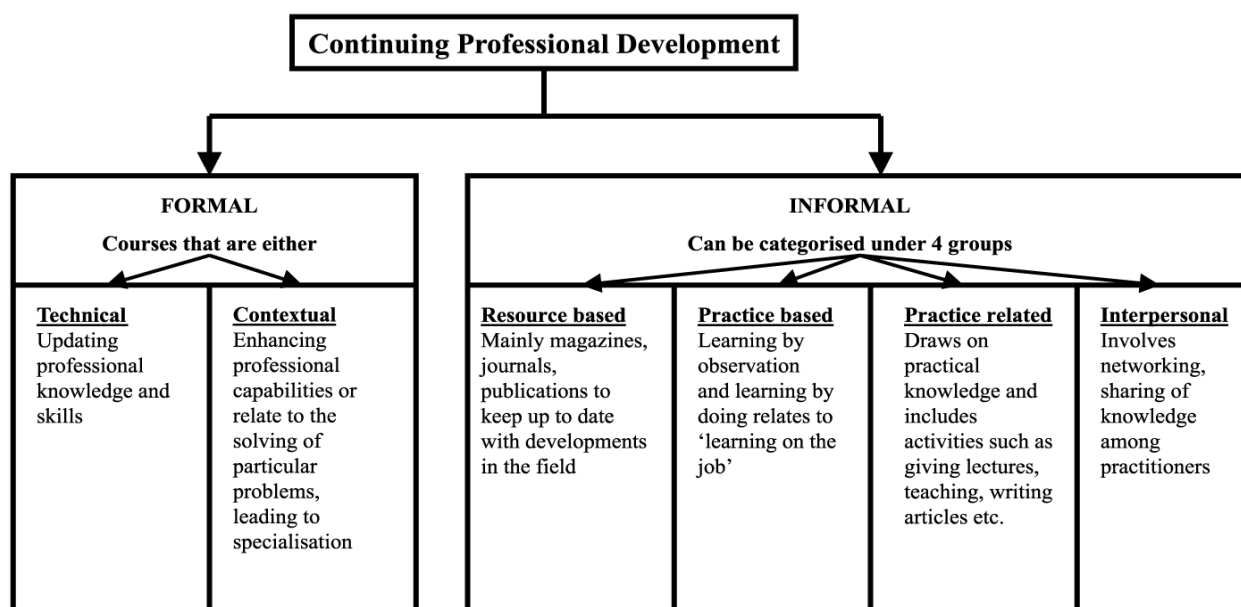


Figure 2 Continuing Professional Development — Formal and Informal Activities

Kennedy (2005) outlined nine models of continuing professional development (CPD), as follows:

(1) **The training model:** This model is universally recognizable, and supports a skills-based, technocratic view of teaching whereby CPD provides teachers with the opportunity to update their skills in order to be able to demonstrate their competence. It is generally “delivered” to the teacher by an “expert”, with the agenda determined by the deliverer, and the participant placed in a passive role.

(2) **The award-bearing model:** An award-bearing model is one that relies on, or emphasizes, the completion of award-bearing programs of study — usually, but not exclusively, validated by universities. This external validation can be viewed as a mark of quality assurance, but equally can be viewed as the exercise of control by the validating and/or funding bodies.

(3) **The deficit model:** Professional development under this model can be designed specifically to address a perceived deficit in teachers’ performance.

(4) **The cascade model:** The cascade model involves individual teachers attending “training events” and then cascading, or disseminating, the information to colleagues. It is commonly used in situations where resources are limited.

(5) **The standards-based model:** This model belittles the notion of teaching as a complex, context-specific political and moral endeavor; rather it represents a desire to create a system of teaching, and teacher education, that can generate and empirically validate connections between teacher effectiveness and student learning.

(6) **The coaching/mentoring model:** the defining characteristic of this model is the importance of the one-to-one relationship, generally between two teachers, which is designed to support CPD.

(7) **The community of practice model:** The essential difference between this model and the coaching/mentoring model is that a community of practice generally involves more than two people, and would not necessarily rely on confidentiality. This model depends on a clear relationship between communities of practice.

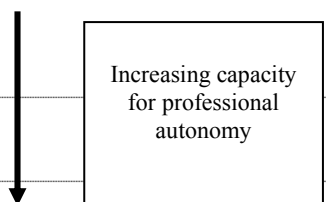
(8) **The action research model:** Action research as a model of CPD has been acknowledged as being

successful in allowing teachers to ask critical questions of their practice.

(9) **The transformative model:** The central characteristic of this model is the combination of practices and conditions which support a transformative agenda. In this sense, it could be argued that the transformative model is not a clearly definable model in itself; rather it recognizes the range of different conditions required for transformative practice.

Kennedy (2005) organized the nine models into these three broad categories: traditional, transitional and transformative (see Table 1). This categorization and organization of CPD models suggests increasing the capacity for teacher autonomy as one moves from transmission, through transitional to transformative stages.

**Table 1 Spectrum of Continuing Professional Development Models**

Model of CPD	Purpose of model	
The training model The award-bearing model The deficit model The cascade model	Transmission	
The standards-based model The coaching/mentoring model The community of practice model	Transitional	
The action research model The transformative model	Transformative	

## 5. Facilitators and Inhibitors of Continuing Professional Development

In reviewing the current literature, several researchers mentioned barriers to providing effective professional development. Novick (1996), Stout (1996), and Sparks (1997) focused on a lack of funding for staff development needs. Robson (2006) argued that standardized CPD does not take into account teacher's existing knowledge, experiences, and needs.

Along with a lack of autonomy, there is recurrent mention of the lack of release time to pursue CPD after work hours, inadequate resources, and inadequate financial support (Buczynski & Hansen, 2010); excessive workloads, unsupportive working conditions at school, and a lack of provision of relevant CPD courses (Flores, 2005).

Many school-based staff development activities do not assist teachers in enhancing their ability to improve student learning especially since principals may lack the skills required to facilitate adult learning (Stanton, 2005). Teachers tend to teach in the way that they are taught (Snow-Renner & Lauer, 2005) so if teachers do not receive professional development opportunities, they will continue to teach the same as they have always taught, without questioning their practices.

Loxley et al. (2007) identified several factors associated with institutional leadership that lead to successful CPD for teachers within the institution. These included belief in the overall purpose of CPD; ensuring that school policies support new teaching strategies; and creating an atmosphere that encourages innovation/experimentation. There was also a mention of providing teachers with time and opportunities to meet and share ideas; not overloading them with work; and ensuring sufficient availability of resources. Together these factors build the school environment and culture.

Effective CPD should address the specific needs of teachers (Muijs, Day, Harris & Lindsay, 2004). Professional growth in teachers occurs when a PD program acknowledges teacher's needs (Lee, 2005). Continuing professional development, as (Wheeler, 2001) highlighted, will only have a positive impact when it is

carefully designed to meet the contextual needs of the teachers involved and contains built-in monitoring and sustainable components through examination of their needs and perceptions.

## **6. Rationale for Continuous Professional Development**

Constant changes in the working conditions of teachers together with an increased impact of information and communication technologies lead to the need for teachers to engage in professional development activities. Teachers, in the process of change in school, generally and in classrooms specifically, play key roles. Therefore, they should participate in training and development programs to become ready to accept changes and implement appropriate methods in classrooms (Angelides, 2002; Gillies, 2004; Roux & Ferreira, 2005).

Craft (2000) stressed that teachers are under immense pressure to undertake specific development courses for improved quality teaching. CPD thus bears significance not only for the teachers involved but also for the learners, the institutions and subsequently for society at large.

Professional development is at the core of school improvement (Murphy, 2000). Heifetz and Linsky (2005) highlighted that there was evidence to suggest that attending professional development programs builds collaborative teaching staff and helps to meet student needs.

Another reason for the need for professional development of teachers is that teachers are often not fully or properly trained in teacher colleges (Seferoglu, 1996). Contemporary schools are facing complex and dynamic changes and challenges (Herrity & Morales, 2004). Continuing professional development is important to teacher's personal lives and career development and focuses on fostering individual competence to enhance practice and facilitate dynamic changes in education (Blandford, 2000).

Teachers can play a key role in making a difference in the quality of education. Investing in a teacher's development may have more positive effects than investing in other physical resources (Rodriguez-Campos et al., 2005; Steyn, 2010). Fullan (1991) emphasized that continuous development for all teachers is the cornerstone for meaning, improvement, and reforms. He pointed out that professional development and school development are inextricably linked and there was no single strategy that can contribute more to meaning and improvement than ongoing professional development.

The quality of teaching in Saudi Arabia is undergoing improvement efforts. Alaqueel (2005) noted several elements in this regard, including lack of skill, preparation and information on the part of teachers. He argued that this deficit is due to the inefficiency of teacher education at teachers colleges. Alsharari (2010) added that teacher's colleges in Saudi Arabia still teach students in traditional ways, as they have not kept pace with modern technology for preparing new teachers, the researchers also added that there is a clear disparity between what is taught in colleges and the reality of education in the field.

Al-Jarf (2005) claimed that the Saudi educational system, when compared to other countries requires development in many ways, specifically in the areas of teaching methods, updating the content of many curricula, increasing in-service teacher training programs and using technology in the classrooms. From the professional development view, Borko and Putnam (1995) argued that current educational reform recommends a shift toward a student-centered paradigm. This entails a substantial departure in teacher's approaches, from a traditional transmission of knowledge to a cognitive and social construction of knowledge.

In order to keep pace with globalization and technology, technology has been introduced in Saudi schools and universities; however, "many teachers still lack sufficient preparation regarding the use of the computer and

the Internet” (Alsharari, 2010, p. 50). In 2007, King Abdullah bin Abdul-Aziz announced the King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz Public Education Development Project (Tatweer), which was implemented in 2008. The beginning teacher standards framework forms part of that project. Tatweer aims to improve educational outcomes in Saudi Arabia by improving inputs. Teachers are one of such inputs and this project seeks to reduce the employment of individuals who lack the educational competencies required in the teaching profession (Australian Council for Education Research, 2011).

Professional development activities can also influence teacher satisfaction and subsequent plans to remain in the field of teaching (Parkes & Stevens, 2000). Furthermore, professional development activities are acknowledged to be centrally important in maintaining and enhancing the quality of teaching and learning in schools (Craft 2000) as they help teachers to be more confident, capable, and fulfilled (Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snowden, 2005).

## **7. Continuing Professional Development in Saudi Arabia**

The Saudi education system is centralized. The Ministry of Education is totally responsible for education in the country. Centralization influences the educational system in many ways, such as: the construction of buildings, the curriculum, teacher training and working conditions, in-service training programs and school equipment, which are all provided by government (Motoaly, 2004). Therefore; the centre (the Ministry of Education) is responsible for determining the training agenda and CPD activities which are available to all Saudi teachers.

Professional development programs in Saudi Arabia are designed nationally and delivered through Local Education Authorities (LEAs). It can be described as one size fits all (Alharbi, 2011, p. 53). Local Education Authorities schedule programs and details of the programs are sent to school principals. It is then up to school leaders to allow teachers access to professional development activities.

There are two types of teacher training programs in Saudi Arabia: pre-service and in-service training programs. Algarfi (2005) found that some graduates from the pre-service training programs, provided at Saudi universities and Teachers Colleges, considered their training to be insufficient and outdated. Studies have also identified the ineffectiveness of the content, the structure, and management of current in-service teacher training programs in Saudi schools (Aldkheel, 1992; Almazro, 2006; Alsounble et al., 2008). They argued that these programs lack strategic plans to develop teacher’s knowledge and skills.

Preparing Saudi teachers presents several problems that can potentially influence the entire educational system. Alnassar (2004) concluded that teacher preparation programs do suffer from many problems, such as failing to prepare teachers to effectively deal with classroom management, communicate with parents, and use technology in the classroom. Alhammed et al. (2004) outlined related issues, which were: (1) a large number of unqualified teachers teach at Saudi schools due to the lack of prepared teachers; (2) there is a lack of teacher’s knowledge regarding learners’ needs, whether educationally or psychologically; (3) the preparation of new teachers is conducted at multiple locations such as universities, Teachers Colleges, and the Ministry of Education. Each of these institutions uses different programs, which might lead to a wider range of outcomes. There is a gap between the theory of teacher training (at universities, Teachers Colleges and the Ministry of Education) and the application in the education field (practice in schools).

Due to these reasons, the “teaching profession is not a preferable job for Saudis, and many Saudi College students refrain from entering the teaching profession, or, even if they do enter teaching, they leave after a short



period of time” (Alharbi, 2011, p. 51). Therefore; the Ministry of Education has encountered great difficulties in its attempts to fill vacant teaching positions with qualified teachers (Algameedi, 2001).

Within the same context, Musalam (2003) claimed that the most common problems that face new Saudi teachers are the lack of appropriate professional support, the lack of teaching aids, materials and resources, difficulties in lesson planning, and choosing the right teaching methods. Alhajeri (2004) revealed that many school leaders did not support teacher’s development activities at their schools, and they did not support teachers in attending professional development activities because of the difficulties in covering teacher absences. Darling-Hammond (2003) commented that the lack of support is a particular factor that is likely to push teachers, especially novice teachers, to quit teaching.

A review of professional development literature revealed that positive efforts have been made by the Saudi Ministry of Education concerning teacher professional development. These efforts reinforce that the Ministry recognizes the importance of the quality of teachers (Alhajeri, 2004). The Ministry of Education recently attempted to provide tutorials and workshops for teacher training centers in all LEAs around the kingdom. However; a close review at these attempts reveals sustained professional support for teachers has not been forthcoming (Memar, 2009). While teachers were encouraged to participate in professional development activities, they were not usually involved in the planning and design of the CPD activities. As a result, such activities were likely to lack relevance to classroom practice (Colbert et al., 2008).

Although there are some CPD programs in Saudi Arabia, these programs tend not to equip teachers with suitable knowledge and understanding of other teaching and learning approaches (Aldeep, 2004; Alhammed, 2004; Alhogail, 2003; Alkanem, 2005). Several studies (Aljabur, 1992; Alsabagh, 1998; Badi, 1996), were conducted to investigate professional education courses in teacher education programs in Saudi Arabia, agreed that the number of professional education courses is insufficient as is the content of the current professional education courses. Thus, they strongly recommended increasing the credit hours and modifying content of such courses in teacher education programs.

CPD for teachers in the Saudi context is limited. In the education system there is no mentoring program available for newly qualified teachers and there seems to be little inclination to introduce formal mentoring programs. Therefore; there is a real need for CPD providers to consider a form of CPD available for new entrants that both acknowledges the effective features of CPD and “recognizes the potential contribution from a number of stakeholders with interests in in-service teachers” (Alharbi, 2011, p. 53).

## **8. Purpose the Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of elementary school teachers in Saudi Arabia toward the effectiveness and the facilitators/inhibitors of CPD activities provided by the Ministry of Education. Also the study was designed to determine if professional development programs are providing valuable knowledge and skills to educators’ classrooms that in return promote students’ achievement; to establish an understanding as to how improved professional development practices can supply teachers with the tools they need to establish more positive teacher-student relationships and in turn improve school climate. The study was designed to determine if there are differences between male/female teachers as well as less/more experienced teachers regarding their perceptions of CPD activities and programs.

This study attempts to achieve these goals by answering the following research questions:

(1) What are the perceptions elementary school teachers regarding the usefulness of CPD activities in Saudi schools?

(2) What are the perceptions elementary school teachers regarding the facilitators/inhibitors of CPD activities in Saudi schools?

(3) Are there significant differences between male and female teachers regarding the usefulness of CPD activities in Saudi schools?

(4) Are there significant differences between male and female teachers regarding the facilitators/inhibitors of CPD activities in Saudi schools?

(5) Are there significant differences between the less and more experienced teachers regarding the usefulness of CPD activities in Saudi schools?

(6) Are there significant differences between less and more experienced teachers regarding the facilitators/inhibitors of CPD activities in Saudi schools?

## **9. Methods**

### **9.1 Instrumentation**

The researchers designed a survey to collect data on perceptions of elementary school teachers regarding professional development opportunities and activities that exist in Saudi schools. The survey consisted of two sections. The first section included questions to retrieve demographic information about participants, such as the type of the school in which they work, their gender, their educational background and experience in teaching. This section was designed to collect information that will help the researchers to have a deeper understanding of the respondents and the trends that emerged from the study.

Section two of the survey consisted of 20 likert-type items. This section was designed to address teacher's perceptions regarding two main themes: the usefulness of CPD and the facilitators/inhibitors of CPD activities in Saudi schools.

### **9.2 Validity and Reliability**

**Validity.** The questionnaire was given to a panel of experts as part of the validation process. The core panel of experts consisted of seven Elementary School Principals from Jazan School System in Saudi Arabia, and eight faculty members from Jazan College of Education. The panel of experts were asked to review the items on the questionnaire and make suggestions and/or recommendations. The researchers reviewed the feedback from the panel of experts who made no recommendations for changes to the instrument.

**Reliability.** Cronbach Alphas were calculated for the instrument responses and calculated for each scale. The Cronbach Alpha coefficient for the entire instrument was ( $\alpha = 0.80$ ). The Cronbach Alpha coefficients for the items ranged in value from 0.77 to 0.79 for each scale. These reliability coefficients were determined to be sufficiently reliable.

### **9.3 Population and Sample Selection**

The population of this study includes elementary school teachers in the province of Jazan, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. A representative sample of (295) participants from 20 elementary schools were selected during the 2012–2013 school year. The following table provides the demographics.

Table 2 Demographics

	Items	#	%
<i>Gender</i>	Male	141	47.8
	Female	154	52.2
<i>Experience</i>	Less than 10 years	99	33.6
	More than 10 years	196	66.4
<i>Total</i>		295	100.0

N = 295

### 9.4 Data Analysis

The questionnaire was distributed to the teachers. The data collected through the questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as percentages, means, and standard deviations and an independent sample t-test technique.

## 10. Results

The findings of this study are presented in two sections. First, teacher's perceptions of the usefulness of current CPD activities that exist in the Saudi elementary schools are explored and then the facilitators/inhibitors of those activities are discussed. The results of teacher's perceptions, of the value of the CPD activities and the facilitators/inhibitors of those activities, are summarized in Tables 3, 4, and 5. For discussion purposes, "strongly disagree" and "disagree" were grouped together, as were "strongly agree" and "agree".

Seven statements in the survey questionnaire were designed to assess teacher's perceptions of the usefulness of CPD activities (see Table 3). Respondents' perceptions regarding the usefulness of CPD activities were measured by statements 1–7 in the questionnaire.

Table 3 Teacher's Perceptions Regarding the Usefulness of CPD Activities

Statements		SA	A	D	SD	Mean $\mu$	SD	Attitude
1. Professional Development programs provide teachers with new knowledge, skills, and understanding for their staff development activities	N	71	89	127	8	2.24	.850	Agree
	%	24.1	30.2	43.1	2.7			
2. professional development changed the way you teach at the classroom	N	66	94	128	7	2.26	.830	Agree
	%	22.4	31.9	43.4	2.4			
3. Professional development activities which I have attended are very useful in solving the difficulties that I had in the classroom.	N	62	95	131	7	2.28	.820	Agree
	%	21.0	32.2	44.4	2.4			
4. The training programs give the teacher all the necessary skills to be an effective teacher.	N	43	105	134	13	2.40	.788	Agree
	%	14.6	35.6	45.4	4.4			
5. Professional development activities provide ideas and strategies that are helpful with classroom management.	N	52	102	126	15	2.35	.828	Agree
	%	17.6	34.6	42.7	5.1			
6. In-service activities are not necessary; teaching experience helps teachers more.	N	7	72	150	66	2.93	.748	Disagree
	%	2.4	24.4	50.8	22.4			
7. There are enough in-service activities/opportunities available for elementary school teachers.	N	3	67	174	51	2.93	.661	Disagree
	%	1.0	22.7	59.0	17.3			

Almost half of the respondents indicated that participating in CPD activities helps teachers to gain new knowledge and skills (54.3% A or SA versus 45.8% D or SD), and to change the way of their teaching at the

classroom (54.3% A or SA versus 45.8% D or SD), and to solve the difficulties that they had in classrooms (53.2% A or SA versus 46.8% D or SD), and to be effective teachers (50.2% A or SA versus 49.8% D or SD). Nearly half of the respondents (52.2% A or SA versus 47.8% D or SD) believed that CPD activities provide teachers with ideas and strategies that are helpful with classroom management. These findings reflect that teachers are hesitant about their consideration of the usefulness of CPD activities. Half of the participants found these activities helpful, while the other half did not.

The majority of the participants (73.2%) indicated that the in-service training activities were necessary. The majority of the respondents (76.3%) also indicated that there were insufficient in-service activities/opportunities available for elementary school teachers.

Table 4 shows respondents' perceptions regarding the facilitators/inhibitors of CPD activities. Statements 8–14 were designed to display the facilitations/inhibitions related to the content and design of CPD activities. Most of the participants (81.4%) agreed that the instructors of CPD sessions were knowledgeable, enthusiastic, and well organized. The majority (86.8%) also agreed that the learning climate of CPD activities was collaborative, informal, and respectful, and during training sessions, teachers are given opportunities to share their ideas and experiences with others (91.9%), as well as to provide feedback on the professional development activities (82.3%). These findings reflect teacher's views regarding the facilitators of CPD activities in Saudi schools.

**Table 4 Teacher's Perceptions Regarding Facilitators/Inhibitors of CPD Activities  
(The Content and Design of CPD Activities)**

Statements		SA	A	D	SD	Mean $\mu$	SD	Attitude
8. The Professional development sessions are instructed by presenters that are knowledgeable, enthusiastic, and well organized	N	69	171	51	4	1.97	.679	Agree
	%	23.4	58.0	17.3	1.4			
9. The learning climate of professional development activities is collaborative, informal, and respectful	N	112	144	34	5	1.77	.715	Agree
	%	38.0	48.8	11.5	1.7			
10. professional development does take into account teacher's existing knowledge, experiences and needs	N	4	48	190	53	2.99	.631	Disagree
	%	1.4	16.3	64.4	18.0			
11. Participants in Professional development activities are involved in determining the topics and content.	N	3	47	173	72	3.06	.664	Disagree
	%	1.0	15.9	58.6	24.4			
12. The Professional development sessions are planned with the school and system goals in mind.	N	6	63	181	45	2.90	.662	Disagree
	%	2.0	21.4	61.4	15.3			
13. Teachers are given the opportunity to provide feedback on the professional development activities.	N	73	170	45	7	1.95	.703	Agree
	%	24.7	57.6	15.3	2.4			
14. During training programs, Teachers are given opportunities to share their ideas and experiences with other teachers.	N	133	138	20	4	1.64	.669	Strongly Agree
	%	45.1	46.8	6.8	1.4			

As for the inhibitors of CPD activities, Table 4 demonstrates that most of respondents believe that CPD activities do not take into account teacher's existing knowledge, experiences and needs (82.4%), and the planners of CPD sessions do not consider the school and system goals (76.7%), as well as teachers are not involved in determining the topics and content of CPD activities (83%).

Table 5 reflects the teacher's views regarding the facilitators/inhibitors of CPD activities. Statements 15–20 are designed to display the facilitations/inhibitions related to the educational climate at school. The findings indicate that most of the participants (73.3%) do not consider the school administration as supportive for them to

grow professionally, and most of them believe that they can't attend any workshops, seminars or courses as they would like (70.2%), as well as they do not have access to professional publications (70.5%).

Relationships amongst teachers inside the school might be either as a facilitator or inhibitor of CPD. The findings shown in Table 5 reflect teacher's views in this regard. Many participants (67.8%) believe teachers do not receive informal evaluations of their teaching performance from peers, and most of them (70.2%) see that teachers do not have opportunities to work together, observe each other in classroom teaching, and give each other constructive feedback. However; many of the participants (68.8%) considered administrators and supervisors' evaluation reports as a tool to enable them to grow professionally.

**Table 5 Teacher's Perceptions Regarding Facilitators/Inhibitors of CPD Activities  
(The Educational Climate at School)**

Statements		SA	A	D	SD	Mean $\mu$	SD	Attitude
15. School administration is supportive of a teacher's desire to grow professionally.	N	13	66	181	35	2.81	.695	Disagree
	%	4.4	22.4	61.4	11.9			
16. Administrators and supervisors' evaluation reports are very helpful in enabling teachers to grow professionally.	N	62	141	73	19	2.17	.831	Agree
	%	21.0	47.8	24.7	6.4			
17. Teachers in my school can attend any workshops, seminars or courses as they would like.	N	15	73	159	48	2.81	.762	Disagree
	%	5.1	24.7	53.9	16.3			
18. Teachers in my school have opportunity to work together, observe each other in classroom teaching, and give each other constructive feedback.	N	7	81	180	27	2.77	.640	Disagree
	%	2.4	27.5	61.0	9.2			
19. Teachers receive informal evaluations of my teaching performance from other teachers.	N	12	83	148	52	2.81	.767	Disagree
	%	4.1	28.1	50.2	17.6			
20. Teachers in my school have access to professional publications.	N	5	82	172	36	2.81	.658	Disagree
	%	1.7	27.8	58.3	12.2			

There were no differences or variations in terms of gender and experience (see Tables 6, 7, and 8). An independent sample t-test was conducted to see whether or not there are differences between male and female teachers regarding the usefulness of CPD. In Table 6, the t-calculated (.900) was higher than t-critical (.369) at df of 293 and .05 level of significance, and p-value (.107) > 0.05. This means that there were no significant differences between the male and female public primary school teachers in terms of their views regarding the usefulness of CPD provided by the Ministry of Education.

**Table 6 Differences Between Male/Female Teachers Regarding the Usefulness of CPD**

	Gender	N	x	SD	Df	t-cal.	t-crit.	P	Result
Usefulness of CPD	Male	141	17.60	3.68	293	.900	.369	.107	Not Significant
	Female	154	17.19	4.06					

Table 7 demonstrates that there were no significant differences between the views of male and female teachers regarding the facilitators/inhibitors of CPD related to content/design of CPD and the educational climate at school. For content/design variables, the t-calculated (2.937) was higher than t-critical (.004) at df of 293 and .05 level of significance, and p-value (.244) > 0.05. Concerning the educational climate variables, the t-calculated (-.906) and the p-value was (.088) > 0.05.

**Table 7 Differences Between Male/Female Teachers Regarding Facilitators/Inhibitors of CPD**

	Gender	N	x	SD	Df	t-cal.	t-crit.	P	Result
Content and design of CPD	Male	141	16.75	2.76	293	2.937	.004	.244	Not Significant
	Female	154	15.85	2.46					
The educational climate at school	Male	141	16.04	2.67	293	-.906	.366	.088	Not Significant
	Female	154	16.30	2.30					

Table 8 reveals that there were no significant differences between the less and more experienced teachers regarding the usefulness of CPD. As shown in Table 8, the t-calculated (-.589) was less than t-critical (.556) at df of 293 and .05 level of significance, and p-value (.982) > 0.05. This means that both the less and more experienced teachers have the same views or perceptions regarding the usefulness of CPD.

**Table 8 Differences Between the Less/More Experienced Teachers Regarding the Usefulness of CPD**

	Gender	N	x	SD	Df	t-cal.	t-crit.	P	Result
Usefulness of CPD	Less than 10years	99	17.20	3.93	293	-.589	.556	.982	Not Significant
	More than 10 years	196	17.48	3.86					

Table 9 indicates that there were no significant differences between the views of the less and more experienced teachers regarding the facilitators/inhibitors of CPD related to content/design of CPD and the educational climate at school. For content/design variables, the t-calculated (1.016) is higher than t-critical (.310) at df of 293 and .05 level of significance, and p-value (.073) > 0.05. Concerning the educational climate variables, the t-calculated (-.782) and p-value was (.120) > 0.05. This means that teachers in Saudi elementary schools have the same views concerning factors that may facilitate or inhibit their professional growth.

**Table 9 Differences Between the Less/More Experienced Teachers Regarding Facilitators/Inhibitors of CPD**

	Gender	N	x	SD	Df	t-cal.	t-crit.	P	Result
Content and design of CPD	Less than 10years	99	16.5051	2.36632	293	1.016	.310	.073	Not Significant
	More than 10 years	196	16.1735	2.77729					
The educational climate	Less than 10years	99	16.0202	2.64953	293	-.782	.435	.120	Not Significant
	More than 10 years	196	16.2602	2.40483					

## 11. Conclusions and Discussion

One of the important findings of this study was that participants did not recognize the importance and usefulness of CPD activities. Almost half of them believed that the in-service training activities were helpful in getting new knowledge and skills, solving the difficulties that they had in classrooms, and providing them with ideas and strategies that are helpful with classroom management, while the remainder disagreed. This finding affirms what Barnard (2004) found in that teachers place many barriers upon themselves in the area of staff development and many do not see the importance of staff development.

Reflecting teacher's views regarding the facilitators of CPD activities; most teachers agreed that the instructors of CPD sessions were knowledgeable, enthusiastic, and well organized; the learning climate of CPD activities was collaborative, informal, and respectful, and during training sessions, they were given opportunities to share their ideas and experiences with peers, as well as to provide feedback on the CPD activities.

The respondents felt that there are many inhibitors of CPD activities in Saudi elementary schools. Most of

the respondents considered that CPD activities did not take into account teacher's existing knowledge, experiences, and needs as well as the school and system goals. Related to these concerns, Ryan (2005) reinforced the need for professional development programs to align both the needs of the educator and the goals and objectives of the school district.

The majority of the teachers in this study expressed that they were not involved in determining the topics and content of CPD activities. This reinforces Alharbi's (2011) finding as he confirmed that "professional development programs in Saudi Arabia are designed nationally and delivered through Local Education Authorities (LEAs) with an absence of the voice of others" (p. 53). This was considered one inhibitor of CPD. Duke (1993) found that many teachers refuse to accept the top-down planning of staff development.

Another aspect that was mentioned as being an inhibitor was the school administration. Most teachers in this study agreed that the school administration was not supportive of them to grow professionally. They were not allowed to attend any workshops, seminars or courses as they would like and they did not have access to professional publications. In this regard, Alhajeri (2004) revealed that many school leaders did not support teacher's development activities at their schools and they did not support teachers in attending professional development activities because of the difficulties in covering teacher absences. Darling-Hammond (2003) commented that the lack of support is a particular factor that is likely to push teachers, especially novice teachers, to quit teaching.

Another aspect that was mentioned as being inhibitor was a lack of peer mentoring. Many teachers indicated that they did not receive informal evaluations of their teaching performance from peers, as well as, they did not have an opportunity to work together, observe each other in classroom teaching, and provide each other constructive feedback.

The results from this study indicated that there was a match between perceptions of male and female teachers and between less experienced and more experienced teachers regarding the usefulness, facilitators, and inhibitors of CPD activities. Being a centralized educational system, CPD activities and programs in Saudi Arabia are designed nationally and do not take into account teacher's experiences and needs. Robson (2006) revealed that the top-down CPD creates negative feelings about CPD among teachers.

The conclusions drawn from this study provide areas for consideration in the school districts when considering whether or not to continue with current professional development activities that focus on teacher-student relationships and improving school climate. Understanding teacher's perceptions and views of CPD may be helpful to facilitate and improve the CPD processes for teachers in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere.

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