

TEACHERS' PERCEPTION OF CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT "CPD" EFFECTIVENESS IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN KURDISTAN

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Abstract

This research project is a case study conducted to investigate "Teachers' perceptions of CPD effectiveness in Higher Education in Kurdistan". This will show the impact of CPD at the institutional and individual level, as well as to highlight the current CPD policies at the selected organization. The participants of this study were 120 teachers. The research took a quantitative approach and data were collected using close-ended questionnaires. For data analysis the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used. The findings indicate that CPD has a crucial role in the delivery of teaching. However, practitioners note that the sector dynamic is not organized. In other words, findings revealed a mismatch between individual needs and CPD policy, for instance, lack of ICT. In addition, it might be that policy makers are not addressing issues that have the potential to impact upon the higher education sector.

Keywords: CPD, Higher education, Technology.

The lifelong learning sector consists of those educational institutions that exist outside of normal, compulsory educational services (Ingleby, Joyce, & Powell, 2010). It mostly aims at an adult group which is looking to continue education at some point during their life or for those young people who seek to attend further education following completing compulsory educational service. Moreover, Peter (2013) States that the lifelong learning sector generally consists of educational services provided by organizations that focus on particular areas of practice. In other words, it includes community learning and work based learning in higher educational systems, such as colleges and universities. Furthermore, it is also possible to find additional voluntary and community based services in facilities, for instance, libraries and other public sectors (UKCES, 2010). Further, Clarke & Newman (1997) acknowledge that the level of the transfer of powers to the local level has increased across the Western world and some Eastern countries by liberalist ideologies. This has probably resulted in the lifelong learning sector having increased independence over courses and different teaching and styles. That is, via the lifelong learning sector, different teaching practices have increased autonomy over the education periods, and the style of teaching practices (Armitage, et al., 2012). However, this outcome has been matched by professional teaching qualifications and sector-based standards are considered. This study assesses that it is these professional standards that give the lifelong learning sector the professionalism that makes it different from the compulsory educational sector. Moreover, this part of this assignment focuses on the dynamics of the lifelong learning sector and also explains how the sector of higher education responds to the needs of the group which accesses its services to improve and achieve social change. Further, it described the sector as being an autonomous agent that can change a course of direction of life, based upon the needs of society, commerce and the individual. Moreover, this part also discusses the opportunities that continuous professional development (CPD) can offer the lifelong learning sector in seeking to achieve these outcomes and at the end there will be a discussion on how the sector is heavily structured.

Significant of the research

This study aims to provide an insight into Kurdish educational policies towards CPD as a tool for developing and adding value to its educational provision and practice, also aims to make a series of recommendations for improvement in order to attempt continuous improvement of service and achieve organisational success. So as to achieve these outcomes, this paper has developed four main aims, which are

- To review theories relating to CPD and identify advantages and disadvantages of the methods
- Analyse the impact of CPD on individuals and the organisation
- Identify different methods for the delivery of CPD intervention and describe the reason for my choice
- Conclude by reviewing the outcomes of my report and how this will benefit the organisation

In responding to these aims, this study will provide a greater insight into the question of “Teachers’ perceptions of CPD effectiveness in Higher Education in Kurdistan”.

Lifelong learning theory

The concept of lifelong learning is not a new concept; it began in 1970 and currently has become an important topic on the European agenda (Tjepkema, Horst, & Mulder, 2002). The lifelong learning sector is a different kind of education institution, which offers choice over the type and style of courses that adult learners can access when seeking to continue their educational experience. The teaching practitioners who operate within the sector carry out numerous roles and are suitably qualified. Moreover, these include teachers, lecturers, instructors, trainers and coaches, all of whom are qualified to deliver their subjects in slightly different ways (Boyatzis, 2001, cited in London, 2011). In fact, what binds this varying mix of educational practitioners to a common identity is the level of subjectivity in the sector, particularly in relation to whom and why some of these professionals should be considered as being related within the lifelong learning sector. Ben, Kariba, & Njuguna (2013, p. 297) state, a profession “is a vocation founded upon specialised educational training, the purpose of which is to supply disinterested counsel and service to others, for a direct and definite compensation wholly, apart from expectation of other business gain”. It can be seen that this definition is based on Webb and Webb (1977). Further, Webb and Webb (1977, cited in Accell, 2012, para. 3) essentially highlight some components, which are vocation, training, counsel, service and compensation. Based on these components it can be argued that the lifelong learning sector is based upon an approach that seeks to train others for particular work roles in order to they can gain sufficient knowledge and experiences in order to achieve an improved working role that is sufficient to provide an increased income. Also this perspective is revealing of Taylor’s model of scientific management. Furthermore, based on Taylor’s model of scientific management, education should be a tool for economic or industrial gain. Further, clearly can be realise that Taylor was arguing for education to become an extension of the commercial world where learners were taught subjects that would benefit the possible increase of private capital (University of Michigan state, 2014). In fact, there is a level of similarity with this belief and the association with vocational subject delivery within the lifelong learning sector. However numerous other theories, such as human fulfilment, exist to explain the why the lifelong learning sector exists and important. Moreover, Curle (1973) argued that educational services could deliver a good equality and removing barriers to learning and making the classroom a more inclusive environment, and that this could result in education being a tool for personal liberation (Ibid).

Furthermore, Friere’s, (1968, cited in Torres, 2014, p. 5), which saw education as being a tool for social and political advancement of the people. Depending on Curle (1973) and Friere (1968), education could play a crucial role to help society build its shape through educational dialogue and habits in order to understand the world better. As a result, education was considered as a central tool to

change society shape. In addition, social and economic progressions can also be taken into consideration. And it can be argued that these theories play their parts in societal progression, from an educational perspective. Thus, the lifelong learning sector will have a role to achieve these outcomes. One such example, which exists in the lifelong learning sector, is the delivery of ICT courses. In fact, with the delivery of ICT, technological innovation, the information within society and the role that ICT plays in society and the ICT curriculum should be relevant to the needs of both individuals and also the society as a whole. This perspective could be evidenced by Dewey (1902, p. 44), that all curricular activities engage a number of social, “constructive, expressive”, and artistic concepts in order to benefit the individual and also the society. This point of view serves the earlier discussions in relation to personal advancement and social change.

Furthermore, Smith (2000) states four main basics that contribute to a curriculum, which are a transmission of knowledge, the creation of a product, the educational process and the use of praxis. Regarding this approach, it can be recognised that there are matches to Aristotle’s theories in relation to education as being “theoretical, practical and productive” (ibid, para. 6, 22 and 31), and also, lifelong learning can be regarded as a long and historical process. Further, Null (2011) acknowledges that the first element of a curriculum is the idea of a body of knowledge. Within this perspective, it can be noticed that the curriculum is simply a process when knowledge is transferred from scholar to pupil, and is heavily linked to a programme (Smith, 1996, 2000). Moreover, experiential learning can be taken into account as a key role of learning and this process supports academic tutoring and mentoring, and should be heavily linked to Kolb’s learning cycle (Smith, 2001, 2010). Further, accreditation bodies might become relevant when the creation of a product is being considered. In the lifelong learning sector, the product can be treated as the learner who has acquired the appropriate level of skill and knowledge and become a sufficiently qualified person in a particular subject area.

Moreover, it can be possible to say that the lifelong learning process produces a product. Therefore, a curriculum is not a physical or touchable thing; instead it is the interaction of teachers, students and knowledge. Further, Mednick (2012) discusses that the educational processes that take place in a curriculum consist of little more than a set of documents for implementation. Finally, the last element that needs to be discussed is praxis. Educational approaches can be supported by praxis, which consists of actions and interactions of the components that happen in the classroom during the learning process inside the class, also this includes the tutor, the learner, the subject, the curricular process that has been adopted, assessment processes and the outcome, or the product (Smith, 2000). Generally, it could be possible to say that praxis is a flexible system of education process whereby knowledge is transferred by using a series of supporting philosophical ideas. However, in order to become proficient educators, practitioners need to develop their skills sufficiently in order to recognise the various components that have been highlighted in this section, which is the main purpose of CPD (Kennedy, 2005).

Lifelong learning sector

The lifelong learning sector has been described in the United Kingdom (UK), as being one of the widespread educational sectors, which concerns a host of divergent organisations that provide services to the mentioned group of scholars (Lingfield, 2012). The organisations and establishments which provide services in the lifelong learning sector tend to consist of a mixture of public, private and voluntary organisations, and are united by the advantage of the regulations that they receive in terms of educational output, quality and standards. Probably, unlike the compulsory sector, the lifelong learning sector does not conform to the national based curriculum in which core subjects are taught as part of an extension of government policy. Moreover, James, et al., (2011) acknowledge that the lifelong learning sector is largely free to plan its own curricular approaches and deliver course training that is based on different curricular theories or models. It also adopts organisations that are suitable for the local policies

of each particular establishment. Further, Knust&Hanft (2009) reported that in the United Kingdom, and two other successful countries, France and Finland, a number of competing accreditation bodies can be seen which seek to encourage individual lifelong learning establishments to adopt their particular brand of courses and certified qualifications. Furthermore, each of these bodies may have an impact on individual establishments through their accreditation, quality control systems, inspectorates, and have the potential to cause further differentiation between establishments (Friedman, 2012).

What is Continuous Professional Development?

Continuous Professional Development (CPD) or Continuing Education (CE) is “a way of meeting this need for education 'on the job", the former term is preferred by the author, with its emphasis on meeting professional needs” (Hinchliff, 1998, p. 38). Similarly, Kennedy (2014) acknowledges that CPD allows teachers to continually refresh their skills and provides a means of showing their competence. An expert normally delivers the training and determines the curriculum for the training. Moreover, Friedman (2012, p. 14) states that CPD consists of three main facets, which are “maintaining knowledge and skills, improving abilities and developing personal and professional skills”. Concerning these definitions, it can be seen that the main common points are to improve skills and gain knowledge which means CPD does not have only a single goal. Also CPD has some different aims, such as to obtain knowledge and update skills, “at the same time, is an opportunity to develop new skills and extend the knowledge base” in order to enhance a person’s individual abilities in order to be more active and creative (Stuart, 2013, p. 8). Furthermore, based on the view point of Kennedy (2014), CPD is an educational instrument and through CPD training courses practitioners can improve their skills in particular areas, and their essential training course would take place and as a result the capabilities of practitioners can be enhanced. Moreover, CPD is not just a vehicle for benefitting the professional work environment; it can also be beneficial to a person’s individual learning as part of a wider form of “self-directed learning” (Schostaka et al., 2010, p. 84).

Significant of CPD

Stuart (2013) states that in education, and specifically the lifelong learning sector, CPD helps educational practitioners take control of their own careers, and can be done via the adoption of the Assessment for Learning “AfL” educational strategy. Moreover, AfL is an educational learning strategy that can provide clear and informal checks on the achievement of a number of preset personal achievements gained, also identify what needs to be developed in order to achieve a form of professional self-actualization (McDowell, Sambell, & Montgomer, 2013). Generally, it might be possible to say that AfL can be used as crucial tool or instrument to improve learners’ abilities by highlighting what they have learned and what they need further to learn.

Understanding CPD, Individual Benefits and Sector Benefits

It can be considered that CPD acts as a professional requirement for practitioners in order that they maintain current and up to date subject knowledge and current knowledge of praxis and regulation (Schostaka et al., 2010). These can include further retraining and information in different areas, such as practice awareness; developments in teaching philosophy, such as the AfL and alternate educational philosophies such as co-operative practices. Furthermore, it can be seen that CPD is beneficial to both the individual and educational establishment, since it allows for the prospect of membership of professional bodies. Professional bodies can be institutes, for instance. In the United Kingdom the professional body is the Institute for Learning. It gives formal recognition of what constitutes a sector related leadership system, (Browne, 2013). Further, individuals also benefit from CPD training courses by updating their knowledge and learning new skills (Stuart, 2013). As a result individuals can “Build confidence and credibility, Earn more by showcasing your achievements and cope positively with

change by constantly updating your skill set” (CIPD, 2010, para, 1). What is more, membership of this body means that establishments may recruit staff who have maintained CPD and who are current in their approaches to educational delivery. It is also beneficial to both individuals and establishments, since career progression steps can be based on a CPD plan.

In addition, it consists of a system, can manage professional development and career progression and can be done through a mixture of educational practice experience, capabilities, formal and informal training, coaching and mentoring and can be directly linked to the amount of time spent practicing.

METHOD

In research methodology quantitative and qualitative approaches can be used. There is nothing right or wrong with the use of either of them, since it depends upon the research project and time available (McKinne, 2007; Sawyer, 1999). Therefore, in order to ensure that the aims of this study were met, the approach used for this study is based on a quantitative approach. In relation to the quantitative aspect of the paper, an exploratory approach has been taken by the use of close-ended questions.

Data collection procedure

Questionnaire forms were sent to teachers via social media, at five universities, private universities and public universities, all universities were located in Erbil district. Within fourteen days, all questionnaire forms send back to the sender’s social media account. Furthermore, the main purpose for using social media was to access the perspectives of professionals within the chosen educational establishment. The social media aspect included a series of closed questions which participants were required to complete. Social media was used as the main source of contact with participants. This proved beneficial since participants were able to return the questionnaires speedily. Moreover, other advantage of the use of online questionnaires is “cost, time and the removal of geographical and temporal boundaries” (Wright, 2005; O’Neill, 2004, p. 293). An online questionnaire was used because of the aforementioned advantages.

Sampling and Participants

Sampling has been defined as being “the deliberate choice of a number of people to represent a greater population” (Anderson, 2004, p. 35). The benefit of this knowledge helped this research to select a group of participants that was representative of the higher education population at the chosen establishment, such as participants consisting of staff from a number of ranks, and whose educational disciplines were from different schools or departments of thought within one campus.

Case Study

A case study was undertaken in this study as the best strategy to inspect "Teachers’ perception of CPD effectiveness in Higher Education in Kurdistan". Moreover, the reason behind choosing a case study is to link the situation with real life, as Yin (2003, p. 228) acknowledge that the case study is “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context”. Real life is represented by one sample institution in Kurdistan. The second reason for choosing a study is that most research about CPD has chosen a case study, for instance, a case study was conducted by Hustler et al, (2003) for the same reason. Furthermore, choosing a case study for this research helps this study to take a small sample instead of a large sample, which is useful in terms of low cost and time saving.

Data analysis

In the literature review a number of cross sector phenomena were highlighted, such as that the lifelong learning sector is based within a versatile environment, and that CPD is a crucial tool for helping develop practitioners’ careers and skill sets, and enhance the effectiveness of teaching practice. Such as, these are areas that this study sought to build upon in order to examine the effectiveness of CPD within the Kurdish higher education sector. Moreover, in relation to the efficacy of teaching practice, the responses from participants confirmed accepted thinking that CPD is beneficial, as well as an overall positive educational experience for learners.

DISCUSSION

Table 1 reveals that in order to achieve this outcome, the planning of CPD at the participant’s educational establishment is 60% effective. However, this outcome did not receive the expected agreement from participants, and suggests a weakness within the strategic planning of educational policies by both the institution and different Ministries. Further, it is noted that raising educational standards is a long-term strategy of the Ministry (Khailany&Linzey, 2011). Further, this is still questionable and should be assessed.

Table 1. CPD is planned effectively at my university

			CPD is planned effectively at my university		Total
			Yes	No	
University 1.00	Count	72	48	120	
	% of Total	60.0%	40.0%	100.0%	
Total	Count	72	48	120	
	% of Total	60.0%	40.0%	100.0%	

Moreover, as discussed in the advantages of CPD in the literature review, this clearly revealed that educational practitioners appear to express a benefit to educational delivery through improved ICT capabilities and access to equipment. Thus, there is a sign that the Ministry is failing in its policies toward CPD and needs to invest further into the educational system, as well as consider adopting CPD polices which are beneficial to practitioners (see Table 2).

Table 2. Which skills do you need to be improved (please select from the list below)

		Which skills do you need to be improved (please select from the list below)			Total
		Language	managing	IT training	
University 1.00	Count	12	36	72	120
	% of Total	10.0%	30.0%	60.0%	100.0%
Total	Count	12	36	72	120
	% of Total	10.0%	30.0%	60.0%	100.0%

Furthermore, the findings from the research also highlight that 90% of educational practitioner participants recognize the importance and continuous lifelong learning sector. At the same time, as it is not expressly highlighted it is still arguable that the technological advances of recent years have resulted in a changed attitude to the usefulness of information technology within the classroom as an educational tools. This is could be an issue that was discussed within the first part of this study and highlights further practitioners’ ambitions of improving their professional practice (see Table 3).

Table 3. CPD is important we all need to adapt to changing situations

		CPD is important we all need to adapt to changing situations		Total
		Yes	No	
University 1.00	Count	108	12	120
	% of Total	90.0%	10.0%	100.0%
Total	Count	108	12	120
	% of Total	90.0%	10.0%	100.0%

Table 4. My university provides enough courses to enhance my career
Cross tabulation

		My university provides enough courses to enhance my career		Total
		Yes	No	
University 1.00	Count	36	84	120
	% of Total	30.0%	70.0%	100.0%
Total	Count	36	84	120
	% of Total	30.0%	70.0%	100.0%

Table 4 shows the disapproval rates (70%) of respondents of the CPD that participants have to undertake within their educational establishment. Further, this possibly reveals the lack of effectiveness of the CPD policies in the selected institution, and also further emphasizes the inappropriateness of the CPD subject areas. It may be necessary as an example to remember that 60% of participants requested that more ICT related CPD courses are made available (see Table 2).

Furthermore, this outcome could be revealing of this particular ambition. However it also highlights a lack of discussion with educational practitioners over the types of CPD that can be provided in order to enhance educational practice and learner experiences. In terms of best practice, this outcome

is not a positive sign for the potential of current CPD policies to meet the strategic aspirations of the Kurdish Ministry. This is again stressed in Table 5, which reinforces the need for improved ICT related CPD courses. For instance, 75% of participants felt that their establishment had not provided sufficient ICT courses. Again, it needs to be re-emphasized that the Ministry responsible needs to take note of these findings. Additionally, this approach will help provide practitioners with the skills they need in order to be more efficient and effective in their practice.

Table 5. My university has provided enough ICT courses. Do you agree?

			My university has provided enough IT courses		Total
			Yes	No	
University 1.00	Count		30	90	120
	% of Total		25.0%	75.0%	100.0%
Total	Count		30	90	120
	% of Total		25.0%	75.0%	100.0%

CONCLUSION

The research conducted for this study reveals that CPD can have a positive impact on the delivery of teaching practitioners and improve the effectiveness of the teaching establishments where education is taking place. However, it also notes that CPD programmes are not as relevant as it would appear. Furthermore, this represents a gap between policy ambitions, practitioner needs and the reality of policy outcomes conducted by the highlighted institution. Moreover, this outcome has been realized in an environment where CPD has been recognized as being crucial to the delivery of quality lessons and where the fluidity of the lifelong learning sector serves to impact on the delivery of lessons, and also being a response to societal change. In fact, at the same time as practitioners note that the sector dynamic is unsolidified it would might be appears that policy makers are not addressing issues that have the potential to impact upon the higher education sector. Generally, it can be seen that the Kurdish policy makers are not consulting with practitioners when developing CPD programmes generally and the highlighted organization particularly. Similarly, it can be noticed that where practitioners recognize that CPD can be beneficial to career progression, as well as enhancing the delivery of lessons and lectures, it is also important to produce CPD resources that utilize technology which is already available to the wider society (See table 4)

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