

Teacher Educators' Perceptions about Continuing Professional Development

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Abstract

The present paper aims to study teacher-educators' perceptions about different aspects of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and also compares their perceptions with respect to teaching experiences and nature of serving institutions. The study was conducted on 97 teacher educators' serving in different aided and self-financed colleges of teacher education institutions and teaching to students of B.Ed. and M.Ed. Data was collected through a questionnaire developed and standardised by the researchers. Findings revealed that for majority of teacher educators, CPD is similar to INSET (In-Service Teacher Education) programmes and different INSET activities like workshop, seminars, and training programmes are main part of their CPD learning and experiences. Majority of the respondents also reported that they cannot practice CPD without institutional and governmental support. Besides, no significant differences were found in teacher educators' perceptions with respect to their teaching experiences and nature of serving institution.

BACKGROUND

Quality of education to a great extent depends on teachers' professional competence and commitment. Lifelong professional development of teachers has all the more become an essential part of their teaching

career. As a pre-requisite for their empowerment, it is a lifelong process which starts with their entry in the profession and continues throughout the career (Panda, n.d.). In general context, professional development of a person denotes how he or she

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goes about in his or her profession (Reimers, 2003) and teachers like other professionals are expected to choose the career pathway of life long learning. The research literature has consistently shown that successful educational change and development depends on the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) of teachers (Day, 1999; Hargreaves, 1994). It has been observed to be a key aspect of all the components that are required to advance the quality of teachers. It has been observed that curriculum, pedagogy, teacher's sense of commitment and their relationships with students are all positively influenced by their professional development (Talbert and McLaughlin, 1994).

The term 'Continuing Professional Development' (CPD) was coined by Richard Gardner who was in-charge of professional development for the building professions at York University, in the mid 1970s. As the term CPD does not differentiate between learning from courses, and learning 'on the job', Gardner named it so (Rahman and Borgohain, 2014). CPD is a wider term and a more complex process. It is a lifelong process of teachers' learning and development that begins after joining the profession and continues by the end of teaching career. It aims at acquiring knowledge or specific set skills which enable teachers to deal with some specific new requirements. In view of Padwad and Dixit (2011)—

CPD is 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 organisations and their pupils (p. 10).

As a process of life long learning, in CPD both voluntary teacher initiatives and programmes externally planned and mandated are recognised as professional development practices. And these practices are beneficial not only for the individual and groups but to improve the quality of education as well. Echoing the same intent, Day (1999) gives a comprehensive definition of CPD—

Professional development consists of all natural learning experiences and those conscious and planned activities which are intended to be of direct or indirect benefit to the individual, group or school, which contribute, through these, to the quality of education in the classroom. It is the process by which, alone and with others, teachers review, renew and extend their commitment as change agents to the moral purpose of teaching; and by which they acquire and develop critically— the knowledge, skills and emotional intelligence essential to good professional thinking, planning and practice with children, young people

and colleagues throughout each phase of their teaching lives. (p. 4)

TEACHER EDUCATORS AND CPD

Teacher educators play a key role in improving the quality of teacher education. Teacher educators are role models for many teachers, as from them the teachers acquire different competences, skills and values that they deploy further in their classrooms. Teacher educators not only maintain and improve the quality of the education system through their impact on student teachers and serving teachers but also develop it through their role as developers and mediators of knowledge about education, and as educational innovators (European Commission, 2013). The influence that teacher educators have on student teachers and teachers ensures the high quality and importance of their work (Snoek, Swennen, and Van der Klink, 2011), and suggests that raising teacher educators' quality can lead to wider improvements in education (Buchberger, Campos, Kallos, and Stephenson, 2000; European Commission 2012b). Therefore, continuing professional development of those who educate teachers is a prerequisite for raising the quality of teaching and developing a professional culture among would be teachers. But due to absence of professional learning culture, this expectation could not be fulfilled in India (Rahman and Borgohain, 2014). An important reason for it is the misconceptions

held about professional development of teachers, as argued by Bolitho and Padwad (2013):

The problem begins with the perception about Continuing Professional Development (CPD). Different agencies and stakeholders seem to hold different or narrow views of CPD. It is very common to see CPD equated with in-service training (INSET) programmes, which are normally one-off, isolated, short-term and infrequent training events. (p.7)

Generally, the concept of (CPD) has been ill-defined and is traditionally limited to attendance at courses, conferences and In-Service Teacher Education (INSET) programmes. With the existence of the separate notions of formal training and on-the job learning, professional learning, or "on the job" learning is often seen as separate from CPD (Edmonds and Lee, 2002; Hustler et al, 2003; Robinson and Sebba, 2004). However, the literature reveals several practices of effective CPD which are far removed from the commonly-held perceptions of one-off events. But, these practices are reported at a limited extent in Indian context and mostly, the term CPD is substituted with periodic attempts in terms of INSET programmes. Bolitho and Padwad (2013) illustrated—

Teaching in India scores very poorly as a profession...Ongoing professional development, i.e. CPD

can be seen in a very restricted, narrow sense and there are limited opportunities and support for the CPD of serving teachers... The broader notion of CPD as a lifelong process of learning, both formally and informally, based on teachers' conscious initiative and voluntary efforts and supported by schools and authorities is largely missing in Indian teacher education. (p. 7)

In fact, an INSET activity that is planned and delivered by external agencies are just a part of CPD. CPD is more comprehensive than it. But as discussed above, India is still stuck with the restricted notion of professional development i.e. INSET and report of Justice Verma Commission which is the latest policy document of MHRD (2012) on Teacher Education is a glaring example of this. In this report, the term CPD used by NCTE (2009) in the National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education (NCFTE), is replaced with INSET. It shows that apex authorities in our education system treat both terms as same and interchangeable. But to have such a narrow perception of CPD generates some serious problems in teachers' professional development. This narrow sense excludes all the informal and voluntary contributions of teachers in their professional development, and tends to negatively affect teachers' desire to learn by presenting authorities as the sole provider of CPD. In this notion any

possible role of teachers in their own CPD is rejected or ignored, and most probably under the impact of this view, teachers are unable to think beyond INSET programmes and take responsibility for their own development (Padwad and Dixit, 2013).

The other problem is relying on external agencies to plan and deliver CPD teachers have to depend on such avenues for their professional development as may turn out to be irrelevant to their needs and interests. The other major concern related to this issue is that India has vast population of teachers and to provide appropriate and equal provisions for their continuing professional development is a challenging task for the government. This is why a large part of the teaching community remains out of the orbit of government provisions for CPD. Tyagi and Misra (2017) argue that INSET programs are being offered to teachers working in government or government supported institutions but teachers teaching in private sector remain out of its orbit. Even policy documents tend to overlook this issue. NCFTE, a major policy document of teacher education by NCTE has overlooked the issue of CPD of teachers especially teacher educators. In backdrop of all these observations and arguments, present paper explores teacher educators' perception about CPD.

OBJECTIVES

1. To study teacher-educators' perceptions about the meaning of CPD, CPD practices, and responsibility for arranging it
2. To compare the perceptions of teacher educators about CPD in terms of their teaching experiences and nature of institution served

HYPOTHESES

1. Teacher-educators having different teaching experiences do not differ significantly in their perceptions about CPD.
2. Teacher-educators teaching in aided and self-financed colleges of teacher-education do not differ significantly in their perceptions about CPD.

METHODOLOGY

The present study was confined to teacher-educators teaching the classes of B.Ed. and M.Ed. in aided and self-financed colleges affiliated to Chaudhary Charan Singh University, Meerut. The data was collected only from five districts namely Saharanpur, Muzzafarnagar, Ghaziabad, Meerut, and Baghpat as these districts share more or less common geographical and cultural characteristics. For sampling purpose, stratified cluster random sampling was used. In the given districts, there were eight aided and 176 self-financed colleges of teacher education among which six aided and (13) self-financed colleges were randomly selected. The sample

consisted of 97 teacher educators teaching to B.Ed. and M.Ed. students in the selected colleges. The data was collected with the help of a five point scale (ranging from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree") developed and standardised by the researchers. The scale includes 29 items that mainly covers meaning of CPD, major practices of CPD, and who is responsible for creating a professional development environment for teacher educators. In order to ease the analysis and get a conclusion about their agreement with the given statements, "Strongly Agree", and "Agree" categories were merged together and then percentage was calculated for the composited categories as the statements were scaled along a five-point rating scale ranging from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree". 't' test was considered as the most appropriate statistical technique to compare the mean score of teacher educators' perceptions about CPD in terms of their teaching experiences and nature of institution served.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The summary of teacher-educators responses about meaning of CPD, its practices, and about who is responsible for arranging it, is presented and analysed in Tables 1, 2, and 3. While, comparison of teacher-educators' perception about CPD in terms of the nature of their serving institution and teaching experiences is presented in Table 4 and 5.

Table 1
Teacher-educators' perceptions regarding meaning of CPD

Statement	SA	A	Composite (SA+A)	%
CPD is a careerlong learning process	27	38	65	67.1
CPD is more comprehensive than in-service education	17	31	48	49.5
CPD includes both external and self-initiated efforts by teachers	12	36	48	49.5
CPD includes both formal and informal activities	17	40	57	58.8
CPD is a new term given to in-service education	41	33	74	76.3
CPD means only attending orientation programmes and refresher courses	20	21	41	42.3

Table 1 shows that 67.1 per cent of teacher educators agreed that CPD is a career long learning process. 49.5 per cent of them accepted that it is more comprehensive than in-service education and includes both external and self-initiated efforts by the teachers themselves; and 58.8 per cent agreed that both formal and

informal learning activities are the part of CPD. In other side, majority of teacher educators (76.5 per cent) agreed with the statement "CPD is a new term given to in-service education." And for 42.3 per cent teacher educators, CPD is nothing more than attending orientation programmes and refresher courses.

Table 2
Teacher-educators' perceptions regarding CPD practices

Statement	SA	A	Composite (SA+A)	%
Workshops, seminars, conferences and training programmes are kinds of CPD activities	45	34	79	81.4
Conducting action research to solve day to day classroom problems is also a part of CPD	17	36	53	54.6
Discussing with colleagues on educational issues is a CPD activity	22	30	52	53.6
Developing useful course content is a CPD activity	13	37	50	51.6
Conducting researches is also part of CPD activities	13	36	49	50.5

CPD includes involvement in formal studies and getting advanced academic degrees	14	35	49	50.5
Peer observation is very helpful for teacher's CPD	8	38	46	47.4
Becoming a member of professional communities and associations is a part of CPD	11	28	39	40.2
Giving resource lectures is also a part of CPD activities	11	24	35	36.1
Reading books and research papers is not a part of CPD	14	19	33	34.0

Table 2 makes it clear that for 54.6 per cent teacher-educators, action research was a CPD practice and for 53.6 per cent, it was to have educational discussions with colleagues. 51.6 per cent teacher educators agreed that developing course material was also a part of CPD and involvement in researchers and formal studies for getting further academic degrees appeared a professional development activity to 50.5 per cent of them. 47.4 per cent and 40.2 per cent teacher-educators accepted peer observation

and membership of professional communities/associations respectively as CPD activities. Giving resource lectures was the least (36.1 per cent) accepted CPD practice and majority of teacher-educators (81.4 per cent) agreed that workshops, seminars, conferences and training programmes are the most popular practices of professional development. Besides, 34 per cent teacher-educators were of the view that reading books and research papers is not a professional development activity.

Table 3

Teacher-educators' perceptions regarding responsibility for arranging CPD

Statement	SA	A	Composite (SA+A)	%
Government agencies are the sole providers of CPD for teachers	20	24	44	45.4
Institution of a teacher is also responsible for their CPD	16	41	57	58.8
Teachers cannot practice CPD without institutional support	32	28	60	61.9
Teachers and Government agencies both are equally responsible for CPD activities	15	41	56	57.7
Teachers cannot practice CPD if government fails to provide appropriate opportunities	25	27	52	53.6

As shown in Table 3, 57.7 per cent teacher-educators agreed that teachers and government are equally responsible for CPD and 58.8 per cent accepted that their teaching institution is also responsible for it. On a different note, a majority of teacher educators (61.9 per cent and 53.6 per cent respectively) accepted that they cannot practice

about CPD of teacher-educators teaching in aided and self-financed colleges. Teacher-educators teaching in aided colleges have a slightly higher mean score (66.41) in comparison to teacher-educators of self-financed colleges (64.47).

Findings reveal that there is no significant mean difference

Table 4
Mean score comparison of teacher-educators' perceptions about CPD in terms of nature of institution served

Nature of Institution	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard Error of Mean Difference	t-value	Level of Significance
Aided	37	66.41	12.06	2.66	.73	.05
Self-finance	60	64.47	13.69			

Table value with df (95) at .05= 1.98
 Calculated value = .73 < 1.98

CPD without institutional and governmental support. 45.4 per cent teacher educators were of the opinion that only government can make provisions for their CPD.

Findings revealed no significant mean difference between perceptions

between perceptions about CPD of teacher-educators by their teaching experience and the teacher educators having more teaching experience have almost similar perceptions about CPD as of those having lesser teaching experience.

Table 5
Mean score comparison of teacher-educators' perceptions about CPD in terms of their teaching experiences

Teaching Experience	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard Error of Mean Difference	t-value	Level of Significance
10 and more than 10 years	48	67.63	11.60	2.62	1.82	.05
Less than 10 years	49	62.86	14.10			

Table value with df (95) at .05= 1.98
 Calculated value = 1.82 < 1.98

DISCUSSION

On the basis of above presented analysis and results, it can be concluded that although teacher educators perceive CPD as a continuous and comprehensive process, but seem unable to differentiate between the terms CPD and in-service and see both from similar perspectives. There are a considerable percentage of teacher-educators who think that CPD means to attend INSET activities like orientation programmes, refresher courses, conferences, and training courses etc. This finding is similar to that of Bolitho and Padwad (2013), "Teachers too, seem to perceive CPD in terms of formal INSET programmes designed and delivered by external agencies" (p.7). INSET activities like workshops, seminars, conferences and training programmes emerged as most accepted CPD practices, while, peer observation, membership of professional communities, and giving resource lectures and termed as least accepted CPD practices. Other activities of professional development like conducting researches, action research, getting advanced formal studies, group discussion, and developing course content have also been accepted but fared nowhere in comparison to INSET practices. Majority of teacher-educators seem to believe that they are responsible for their CPD but only to the extent of showing willingness to do these things. Findings also revealed that teacher educators feel unable to practice CPD in the absence of governmental and

institutional support (similar finding was reported by Padwad and Dixit, 2013). The most probable reason for such an inability may be different challenges before teacher educators such as lack of time (Smith, 2003; Van der Klink, Kools, Avissar, White and Sakata, 2017) and financial issues.

CONCLUSION

This is an irony that little attention has been paid to the profession of teacher-educators and empirical evidences directly concerned with their professional learning is hardly available (Murray and Harrison, 2008). This research has attempted to void this gap. The findings lead us to conclude that culture of professional development among teacher-educators in India is in developing phase and requires special attention and efforts to develop it further. To be cautious against over generalising the findings of the study, as the study covers a small sample of the overall context, there is need for further extensive researches into teacher-educators' perceptions about participation in CPD activities. More exhaustive data will help in presenting a comprehensive and clear picture about how teacher educators perceive CPD and will help in validation of the findings of present study. Although, obtained findings helped to suggest following measures to improve continuing professional development programmes and practices targeted to teacher-educators—

- Teacher-educators need to be made aware about CPD and those teacher-educators who are well aware of CPD policies and practices must come forward and take initiatives to develop a clear understanding of CPD among the community of teacher-educators.
- The policy makers should change their approach and try to offer continuing professional development programmes as part of 'life-long useful learning' rather than organising these as one-off, isolated, short-term training events.
- Organisation of different interactive sessions during any type of professional development programmes will be helpful to make teacher-educators more informed and skilled to face real teaching-learning situations.
- Considering that professional development activities which form a large part of CPD are unrecognised and practicing teachers hardly get any incentive for them, developing a national online platform for recognising and rewarding these activities will be helpful. The teacher-educators may be invited to register and upload their initiatives on this platform, and some of the best initiatives among these can be rewarded to motivate others.

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