



## A Qualitative Study on Practice and Awareness of Teachers Continuous Professional Development in Primary schools of Aleta Wondo town, Sidama/Ethiopia

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### Abstract

This study examined the practice and awareness of teachers CPD in primary schools of Aleta Wondo town. A qualitative research method was employed. The study was guided by three research questions. Interview and document analysis were used as the data gathering tools of this study. The data gathered through interviews and document analysis were analyzed via thematic description. The findings indicate that the primary school teachers in the sampled schools have good awareness on CPD practice. On the other hand, the findings of the study showed that the extent of teachers CPD practices was at moderate level. The study also found that heavy workload, time, and school factors are associated factors that affect teachers' practice in CPD activities. Thus, this study recommends that the zone and woreda education sectors in collaboration should hire additional teachers to reduce teachers' workload in order to let them to have much time to study effectively the CPD activities. The school principals try to create reward mechanisms and continually convince teachers about CPD advantages in order to sustain interest and commitment of teachers in the CPD practice.

**Keywords-** CPD. Awareness. Practice

### 1. Introduction

Education plays a significant role in establishing suitable conditions for development process by producing a skilled workforce and raising the human capital for national development, and it helps to foster changes in technology (Ministry of Education, 2010). According to Anderson and Planning (1991), Education plays the most significant role in the development of a nation, and it brings all rounded solution for economic, political, social and cultural problems of society.

The World is in the constant change in all aspects of life. Changes in the education system of a nation and global requirements demanded staff development in respective professions.



Haileselasse (2004) in this regard states that, while the world is evolving rapidly today, teachers like most other professional groups, must know the fact that their initial training will not fit them throughout the rest of their lives; they need to up-date and improve their own knowledge and techniques throughout their lifetime.

In the context of education, teachers as educators and professionals are required by policy in various countries to participate in continuous professional development activities. The purpose of this requirement is to enable teachers to meet the required standards of practice in educational institutions to which they are employed (Alibakhshi & Dehviri, 2015; Anyanwu, 2015). The number of professional development events that teachers are required to participate in annually varies from country to country; depending on that country's policy on continuous professional development for its teachers.

Continuous professional development is said to have been coined in the mid-1970's (Gray, 2005). Its notion is rooted in the constructivist philosophy, which claims that a person's constructions and views of the world are not stable, but are in continuous change. Accordingly, it is presumed that teachers have to engage themselves in planning and executing their professional development on continuous basis to cope-up with the rapidly changing world. In this regard, Amare and Temechegn (2002) noted that teacher development is an essential element to bring meaningful changes in addressing equity, quality, relevance and efficiency.

Thus, Continuous Professional Development is, therefore, dynamic for quality education and, teacher development is a not ever ending cycle of teacher learning that starts with initial teacher training and continuous for as long as a teacher remains in the profession. When looking at professional development, one must examine the content of experiences, the process by which the professional development will occur, and the context in which it will take place (Ganser, 2000).

In education, Continuous Professional Development is increasingly becoming a priority in most countries throughout the world. It is widely viewed as the most effective approach to prepare teachers adequately, and improve their instructional and intervention practices, for when they enter the work force (Fraser et al, 2007).

Teachers in the current Ethiopia are expected to be insightful and change oriented to meet the government and public demand for quality education. They are expected to consider the dynamic nature of learners and society. This situation signifies the importance of continuous teacher professional development aiming at improving the teaching learning process thereby improving the quality of education.

Guskey, (2002) describes professional development programs as systematic efforts to bring change in the classroom practices of teachers, in their attitudes and beliefs, and in the learning outcome of the students. This is also supported by Clarke and Hollings (2002) who argued that the most immediate and significant outcome of any successful CPD for teachers is a positive impact in changing teachers knowledge and practice. This in turn results in improved learner performance. Moreover, Boalm (2000) and Hargreaves (1994) also recognize CPD to have a positive impact on the curriculum and pedagogy as well as teacher's effectiveness and their relationship with students.



In support of this, teacher's professional development is a crucial driver of excellence in any school to contribute to not only teacher and school improvement but also the overall improvement of the education system (Dagnev and Asrat, (2016). Teachers face challenges in the classroom in the context of their daily practice. For example, delivering the subject matter they are hired to teach (Chen & Wang, 2015; Dingham, & Scott, 2003). This challenge has implications for the quality of their teaching.

Teacher development is the professional growth teacher achieves as a result of gaining increased experiences and examining his or her teaching systematically (Davies and Preston, 2002). According to the national strategy of the ministry of education (MoE, 2009) CPD program is intended to all school teachers, leaders and supervisors in all regions of Ethiopia so as to participate in high quality and effective CPD which impacts classroom practices to ensure improved learning. It allows all teachers to improve their knowledge, skill and attitudes in order that they became more effective classroom practitioners and contribute positively to community development

Moreover, the school management bodies, such as principals, vice principals, and department heads, are the main motivators in creating shared vision for the curriculum in the school and in providing inspirational curriculum leadership. The instructional activity of leaders determines the success of the school and provision of quality education. The school management bodies should take the initiative in working together with teachers in designing and implementing developmental programs including the determination of training needs, approaches to satisfy the needs and follow up activities (Spark, 2002)

Therefore, within the frame work of the education and training policy (TGE, 1994) the education sector development program (ESDP) is launched as a twenty-year education sector plan with quality improvement at all levels of educational system. Continuous professional development is put into practice to enable teachers update themselves with new outlooks, approaches and policy directions.

One of the researchers' of this study was secondary school principal; he had the opportunities in managing the practice of teachers CPD in primary schools for long time. As it was confirmed, that there was still a gap in the practice of teachers' continuous professional development. It is therefore, important to fill the gap and it needs a scientific study. So this study is aimed to investigate the practice and awareness of teachers CPD in primary schools of Aleta Wondo Town. The principal objective of this study is to examine the practice and awareness of teachers CPD in primary schools of Aleta Wondo town. To achieve this purpose the following questions were designed:

1. To what extent do teachers CPD has been practiced in primary schools of Aleta Wondo Town?
2. What is the level of teachers' awareness in practicing CPD activities in primary schools of Aleta Wondo Town?
3. What are the major challenges of teachers CPD practice in primary schools of Aleta Wondo Town?



## 2. Methodology

The purpose of this study is to examine the practice of continuous professional development of primary school teachers in Aleta Wondo town. To examine the phenomenon of teachers' practice of Continuous Professional Development the constructivist worldview was selected with a qualitative research approach, thus, the constructivist view claims that a person's constructions and views of the world are not stable, but are in continuous change. A qualitative approach allows a better understanding of people perceptions that are unique to circumstances within their particular social context (Esterberg, 2002).

### 2.1 Participants

The participants of this study were teachers selected from primary schools of Aleta Wondo town Administration. Participants comprised of eight primary school teachers were purposely selected.

### 2.2 Sources of Data

Data for this study was collected from both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources were primary school teachers who participate in CPD activities. The secondary sources were school records such as, portfolio documents of teacher's consisting of CPD plans, and feedback documents given on the basis of teachers' CPD performances.

### 2.3 Instruments

The instruments used for data collection were interview and document analysis.

#### 2.3.1 Interviews

Semi- structured interview questions were used as data collection method for eight teachers. According to Owen Doody and Maria Noonan (2013), semi- structured interview can be flexible with open-ended questions and the chance to explore issues that arise spontaneously in qualitative studies. They also can encourage depth and validity, which help new concepts to emerge in qualitative studies (Dearnley, 2005).

#### 2.3.2 Document analysis

For this study, the document analysis was focused on individual teachers' annual CPD plans, performance reports of teachers and feedbacks provided by mentoring teachers. It was believed that document analysis could provide the detail information on the extent of the practice of teachers CPD in primary schools of the study area.

### 2.4 Data analysis

The researchers analyzed and interpreted the qualitative data collected from different data sources thematically using description.

## 3. Results

The interview was conducted with eight participants from four CPD study groups (two teachers from each group) and the session lasted for 25 to 30 minutes. In answering each of the research questions, the interviewer posed a series of questions aimed at creating a mental set for participants around the awareness and practice of CPD activities.



The first question was intended to identify the extent to which teachers CPD has been practiced in primary schools of Aleta Wondo Town. Thus, the participants agreed that CPD had been practiced in their school and study groups. One of the interviewees reported that,

“Yes we are studying CPD in groups as well as in peers. I have my own semester and annual CPD plan. I am participating in CPD activities in my group as per the schedule. I believe CPD has a number of contributions. It helped me to share best practices with other teachers in the study group; I improved my skill of managing diversity in the classroom, increased my skill of planning a lesson, and increased love of the teaching profession (interviewee teacher 1).

Similarly, the second interviewee reported that practicing CPD is an important issue for teacher professionals, by saying,

“I always participate in School CPD activities, but the level of practicing is moderate. The activities are very effective and related to the teaching profession. I feel they are very practical for my teaching when I learned from school-based activities (interviewee teacher 3).

Another teacher expressed that:

“..Actually, we are exercising CPD in our school. For example, I have both annual and semester plan. I partitioned my plans in to hours: 60 hours per year, 30 hours per semester and three days per week. The activities that I focused are continues assessment and students miss behavior’s issues... (Interviewee teacher 7).

Teachers CPD practices were appropriate and effective due to their well-fitted teachers learning need and school settings or contexts. One of the interviewee participant provided detailed explanations. He said the practice of CPD activities in their group studies considered the real situation of school contexts, which were helpful for teachers to teach at schools. Additionally he reported by saying;

“I can say the practices of CPD activities in our school are more appropriate for our practical teaching learning process. As a teacher we should not ignore CPD. Exercising CPD is more helpful for us to solve teaching problems, however the extent of its practice couldn't be taken as the expected level (interviewee teacher 5).

The teachers placed higher values on teachers CPD practices in primary schools as they learn practical teaching methods in school context. In addition, the teachers look CPD as a basic need for improving learning and teaching processes in the education system. The seventh interviewee expressed,

“...I think CPD must be practiced, So that I am studying. This is essential. I couldn't see CPD independently from my classroom teaching. It is not an additional job...it is already integrated with the teaching practice. I am learning something new every day (interviewee teacher 7).

For teachers CPD is an ongoing activity to keep up with the latest information about pedagogy and teaching. Through CPD activities, teachers can get access to the latest news about teaching and



learning more easily. Attending CPD activities is also helpful for teachers to find the updated teaching materials. The three of interviewee reported that;

“CPD must be practiced at all schools in every class levels. It help teachers where to find the teaching materials, for example, when teaching we need to find the related materials to our topic of teaching, some of the materials can be directly or indirectly found during the CPD practice” (interviewee teachers 2,4 and 8).

In the second question of the interview, teachers were interviewed to share their level of awareness in practicing CPD activities. Majority of the interviewee have awareness regarding the practice of CPD in schools. One of the participants pointed out that,

“For me practicing CPD means a lifelong learning process. I understand from the term itself is a continuous activity. CPD means becoming engaged in different activities of the school. I think it is an ongoing learning process in teaching profession (interviewee teacher 1).

Similarly, one of the interviewee reported that CPD is continuous and lifelong learning process by saying:

“Yes confidently I can tell you more about CPD. For me it means keep up studying and learning. CPD helps me to build up confidence in teaching because we all have to know the knowledge we grasp is the latest or the qualification is new. I will do the continuous studies of CPD and this helps to inspire me in teaching my subject.” (interviewee teacher 7)

Hence, apart from being an ongoing process for fostering subject knowledge and pedagogical skills, CPD thus is a way to develop teachers’ self-confidence in teaching.

Indeed, teachers’ awareness of effective CPD practice is a professional duty that teachers need to get awareness and implement during the teaching learning process. One of the teachers expressed that,

“For the past six years, I’m teaching in this primary school. I had been participating in CPD activities. It is related to my current duty in the school. Not only duty, but also CPD is my professional responsibility (interviewee teacher 5).

The third question was intended to find out the major challenges of teachers CPD practice in primary schools. Some teachers regarded that a lack of time is a common problem that affect effective practice of CPD in primary schools. One the teacher stated that;

“It is very common in our schools. Time is always not sufficient for detailed study of CPD. The time allotted for group study is not sufficient. The most difficult part practicing CPD is it requires you to do a series of activities such as planning, presentations and report writings. As a teacher today, we do have a lot of work, for example, we are expected to conduct action researches to solve immediate problems and book evaluation is there, school co-curricular activities are waiting us, providing tutorials for our students, the actual teaching processes ....etc. So how time couldn’t be a problem? (Interviewee teacher 4)



Teacher's heavy workload is reflected as another challenge of CPD practice in primary schools. They explained that teachers had to handle different activities. One of the interviewees pointed out by saying;

“Due to shortage of time I am always busy. I have to prepare lessons and teaching aids, correcting student assignments, assessing students' performances.... Every week there are so many activities, school meetings, or parents' seminars. You cannot say it is simple task (interviewee teacher 8).

Therefore, teachers' job is not restricted to only teaching in the classroom but also outside classrooms that would consume a lot of time and they thus lack time to engage in CPD in their busy school life. According to the teachers, school factor could also be identified as an obstacle to CPD. Time clash between CPD activities and working hours is a common problem that teachers encountered when participating in CPD activities. For example, one of the teacher complained that,

“I think the real problem is about the clash with the time of the unplanned school meetings and class teaching hours... sometimes you cannot attend those unexpected school meetings which are within class teaching hours...” (interviewee teacher 2)

Teachers also felt struggled about the choice of participating in CPD activities due to workload and lack of time. For example, one of the teacher said that:

“Actually my workload is really very heavy. It may not be allowed for me to do much on CPD. I have my family and my children. I need to distribute time to my own family. I have to take care of them. Therefore, we always feel that time is not insufficient. So sometimes we feel that we cannot deal with the work although we really want to achieve the goals” (interviewee teacher 8)

Teachers expected their schools to create more time and space to allow them to participate in CPD activities. However, in the reality their expectation could not be fulfilled. One teacher said:

“It was always mentioned about creating space for teachers... however, even when doing so; there is still something else to ask us to do because the school thinks that we have more space to do that. Since workload is so heavy, there need of employing more teachers, if so there will be a reduction in the number of teaching lessons. If they could to do so, I hope we can have much time” (interviewee teacher 6).

The teachers also suggested that the school could provide financial support for effective practice of the CPD activities. The support could be for teacher's refreshment like preparing tea-coffee ceremonies during study time. So that teachers could get relaxed to participate in CPD group studies.

Support and follow up by school principals and mentors on teachers CPD practice helps to sustain interest and increase teacher's awareness. One of the interviewees reported that;

“I think each of us have different level of understandings. We are participating in different groups. So that differences in level of practice. I think to narrow the gap of practice problems short term trainings are very important (interviewee teacher 2).

In supporting this idea, seven of the interviewees reflected that,



There was no training provided by the school specifically regarding CPD practice. The support system was very weak and insufficient to solve problems related to teachers CPD. The school principals do not work closely with the teachers in setting and implementing the CPD activities.

Moreover, the interviewed teachers raised personal factor as one of the major challenge affecting teachers' participation in CPD activities. The teachers believed that personal factor such as their own goal, enthusiasm and belief could contribute to their CPD participation. During the interview, one of the teachers reported that,

“Interest can have two sides. It may be a favorable factor or an unfavorable factor. However, I think CPD should be continuing, beneficial to teaching and learning to bring about satisfaction and teaching better.” (interviewee teacher 3)

In supporting this statement almost all of the interviewee forwarded that, there are various personal factors that challenges the effective practice of teachers CPD in the schools, such as lack of a balance between personal needs and school needs, lack of commitment and motivation of teachers and health problems are some of the mentioned problems.

In short, seemingly, heavy workload, time and school factor and personal factors tend to be challenges that affect teachers' CPD practice in the study schools.

#### 4. Discussions

The primary objective of this study was to examine the practice and awareness of teachers CPD in primary schools. In order to accomplish this objective, the following three research questions were raised:

1. To what extent do teachers CPD has been practiced in primary schools?
2. What is the level of teacher's awareness in practicing CPD activities in primary schools?
3. What challenges do primary school teachers face during the practice of CPD?

To answer these three questions, two data gathering tools that were, interview and document analysis were used.

The analysis of teachers' interview responses showed that teachers had clear awareness about the practice of teachers CPD practices, thus teachers relate an effective CPD practice as a professional duty that teachers need to get awareness and implement during the teaching learning process. The results further showed that, the teachers placed higher values on teachers CPD practices in primary schools as they learn practical teaching methods in school contexts. And also the teachers look CPD as a basic need for improving learning and teaching processes in the education sphere.

The results of this study had indicated that for teachers CPD is an ongoing activity to keep up with the latest information about pedagogy and teaching. Through CPD activities, teachers can get access to the latest news about teaching and learning more easily. Attending CPD activities not only helps teachers to get more chances to be exposed to more updates about subject knowledge and pedagogical knowledge and skills and also it is helpful for teachers to find the updated teaching materials. This finding is in line with Haileselesse (2004) in this regard states that, while





the world is evolving rapidly today, teachers like most other professional groups, must know the fact that their initial training will not fit them throughout the rest of their lives; they need to update and improve their own knowledge and techniques throughout their lifetime

The results of this study showed that teacher's heavy workload and time are two of the major challenging factors of teachers' CPD practice in primary schools of Aleta Wondo Town. Teachers' job is not restricted to only teaching in the classroom but also outside classrooms that would consume a lot of time and they thus lack of time to engage in CPD in their busy school life. Moreover, time clash between CPD activities and working hours is a common problem that teachers encountered when participating in CPD activities in primary schools of Aleta Wondo Town. This finding in line with many empirical studies also indicated that time and workload are common critical factors that teacher encounter in CPD (for example, Carney, 2003; Day *et al.*, 2007)

Besides heavy workload and time constraints, interviewed teachers raised personal factor as one of the major challenge affecting teachers' participation in CPD activities. The teachers believed that personal factor such as their own goal, enthusiasm, health problems, need and interest could challenge their CPD participation.

It is found that teachers expected their schools to create more time and space to allow them to participate effectively in CPD activities. However, in the reality their expectation could not be fulfilled. The teachers also suggested that the school could provide financial support to enhance the CPD program. The support could be for teachers refreshment like tea coffee ceremonies during study time. So that teachers could get relaxed to participate in CPD group studies.

The results on the other hand indicate that, there were no trainings provided by the school specifically regarding CPD practice such as prioritizing school related issues and what to plan. Almost all of the interviewee reported that the school principals do not work closely with the teachers in setting and implementing the CPD activities. This implies that support system was very weak and insufficient to solve problems related to teachers CPD practice. Thus this finding contradicts with the basic role that school leader should exercise in their schools. For example, the school management bodies should take the initiative in working together with teachers in designing and implementing developmental programs including the determination of training needs, approaches to satisfy the needs and follow up activities (Spark, 2002)

On the other hand, the findings of the document analysis carried out in the school show that there is a trend of reflecting on the output of CPD practice but the observed limitation were the frequency of reporting is quite different within group member's portfolio. In addition, the researchers found only limited number of feedbacks given by the school principals.

Besides the questionnaires and interviews, document analysis was part of the data-gathering tool for the current study. It was carried out in the school from which the participants were selected for this study.

The researchers tried to conduct the document analysis based on the protocol prepared by ministry of education on teacher's CPD activities. As it can be seen from MOE (2009b) each teacher is required to keep a portfolio of CPD activities, the portfolio should include following.



individual CPD action plan, the individual CV (personal and professional data and qualifications), individual CPD action plans, evidence of all the CPD activities that have been undertaken by the individual teacher, feedback from mentors/facilitators, teacher's self-reflections on progress, annual appraisal reports and record of professional competencies achieved.

The findings of the document analysis show that, the portfolio consists of summer program trainer's information, examples of examination results with an analysis, sample lesson plans with evaluations etc. However, the portfolios of teachers show some documents in relation to the identified requirements regarding CPD activities. For instance, principals did not properly commented on the CPD plans as feedback to teachers work.

In addition to this the school head of the investigated school explained that due to covid-19 case starting from 2012 E.C the CPD pregame was not being effectively carried out.

### 5. Conclusions And Recommendations

From the results of this study concerning the practice and awareness of teachers CPD in primary schools, the following conclusions and recommendations were given

- Most of the primary school teachers in the sampled schools have good awareness on CPD practice. Thus, teachers believe that an effective CPD practice is a professional duty and lifelong learning that teachers need to get awareness and implement during the teaching learning process. Moreover, the teachers look CPD as a basic need for improving learning and teaching processes in the education system.
- Teacher's heavy workload, time clash between CPD activities and working hours, insufficient support from the school principals and personal factors such as lack of commitment and interest are the major challenging factors affect the effective practice of teachers' CPD in primary schools.
- The zone and woreda education sectors in collaboration should hire additional teachers to reduce teachers' workload and in order to let them have much time to study effectively the CPD activities.
- The school principals try to support; create incentive mechanisms, and continually convince teachers about CPD advantages in order to sustain interest and commitment of teachers in the CPD practice.

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