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Examining the Influence of Teachers' Academic Qualifications on Beliefs Regarding the Importance of Continuous Professional Development Programs

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This study looks into how teachers' views about the value of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) programs are influenced by their educational background. The study looks at how teachers with Intermediate, Bachelor, Master, M.Phil. and Ph.D. degrees perceive CPD as a crucial tool for improving professional knowledge, instructional quality, career growth, and adaptability to educational innovations. A structured questionnaire measuring beliefs across four CPD dimensions was used to gather data from 517 teachers using a quantitative, descriptive-comparative design. The results show that teachers of all qualifications have favorable opinions about CPD, and that their strength and concentration grow in tandem with their academic achievement. Across all groups, professional knowledge and skill development were given the highest priority, while more qualified teachers placed a higher priority on adjusting to changes in the educational system. The findings indicate that academic preparation has a significant impact on teachers' engagement, capacity for reflection, and motivation for lifelong professional learning. They also highlight the need for differentiated CPD programs that are tailored to teachers' qualifications.

Keywords: Teachers' Academic Qualifications, Beliefs, Professional Development Programs, Professional Learning

Introduction

It is well known that teaching quality is one of the most important factors of educational success and student performance. The level of professional competence, instructional decision-making, and classroom practices of teachers have direct effects on students in terms of cognitive, social, and emotional development (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Hattie, 2009). With the education systems across the globe experiencing an acceleration in curricular changes, the use of technology, and an ever-growing diversity of students today, the necessity of teachers to undergo Continuous Professional Development (CPD) is more urgent than ever before. CPD is the process by which teachers constantly improve their professional knowledge, pedagogical skills and instructions methods throughout their career (Day, 1999).

Although much agreement has been achieved in recognizing CPD as one of the pillars of the educational improvement process, the degree to which teachers perceive its relevance and significance varies significantly. It has been shown that teacher beliefs are central to determining the level of teacher involvement in professional learning opportunities (Borg, 2003; Pajares, 1992). Beliefs are cognitive filters which affect the way in which teachers perceive experiences, embrace innovations and react towards the professional development

programs. Educators who have a strong belief in lifelong learning tend to be more active participants in CPD, as well as utilize the newly gained knowledge in the classroom (Guskey, 2002).

The academic qualification of teachers is one of the factors that impact these beliefs, which is not explored seriously. Academic credentials- bachelor degree, master degree and subject related professional qualifications- are formal preparation that influences the theoretical knowledge, pedagogical focus and professional identity of the teacher (Darling-Hammond, 2006). Increased levels of academic education tend to expose educators to educational research, reflective inquiry and evidence-based practice, which can develop positive perceptions about the need to engage in continuous professional learning (Avalos, 2011).

The beliefs of teachers concerning CPD are not shaped in a vacuum. They get influenced by previous educational experiences, institutional culture, leadership support and professional growth opportunities (Opfer and Pedder, 2011). Nevertheless, a formal academic preparation is a background experience that shapes the perceptions of the teachers regarding the process of learning and the development of the professional self. The teachers who possess a high level of academic achievement might be more willing to consider CPD as an inherent part of professional competence instead of a compulsory measure (Villegas-Reimers, 2003).

The association between academic qualifications and CPD beliefs is especially topical in the creation of the education system because most teachers are usually in the profession with different levels of formal education. Under these conditions, the qualification-based disparities might cause a variation in the beliefs regarding professional development, the level of participation in CPD activities, and the receptiveness to educational changes (OECD, 2019). It is necessary to understand this association and tailor the effective CPD programs responsive to the background and belief systems of teachers.

The proposed study is thus an attempt to explore how academic qualification of teachers affects their beliefs about the significance of continuous development as a teacher. The research will use a case study of the perception of CPD among teachers with varying degrees of qualification in order to bring forth empirical data to the debate on teacher learning and professional development. This kind of evidence can guide teacher education facilities, policymakers, and school administrators in coming up with CPD frameworks that facilitate equal and long-term professional growth.

Literature review

Teacher beliefs refer to psychologically carried beliefs, assumptions and propositions regarding the teaching and learning that influence instructional behavior (Borg, 2003). Pajares (1992) says that beliefs are closely related predictors of behavior in comparison to knowledge due to the fact that they shape the interpretation of information and experiences by the individual. Within the framework of CPD, the beliefs of teachers define whether professional learning can be viewed as significant, relevant, and worth continuing activity.

A number of the research revealed that the attitude of teachers in regards to CPD practices is a major reason as to why they are willing to engage in the practice, and how they can transfer the professional learning to classroom practice (Guskey, 2002; Opfer and Pedder, 2011). When teachers imagine that teaching competence is dynamic and can be improved, they are more likely to participate in the professional learning opportunities (Timperley, 2008).

Academic qualifications play an important role in professional identity and self efficacy of teachers. According to Darling-Hammond (2000), qualified teachers are more qualified in their reasoning in pedagogy and the extent to which they are prepared to reflect on their practice. Higher levels of academic preparation tend to promote critical thinking, an inquiry-based

approach to learning, and innovation receptiveness, which are highly linked to the positive beliefs about CPD (Avalos, 2011).

Empirical studies show that professional learning and reflective practice is more likely to be appreciated by teachers who are highly qualified in school (Villagas-Reimers, 2003). Education on the masters level, specifically, has been connected to higher participation in professional inquiry as well as long-term professional development (Day and Sachs, 2004).

Significance of Continuous Professional Development

CPD has become common knowledge as a systematic and long-term process that ensures the enhancement of professional competence and teaching effectiveness of teachers (Day, 1999). Relevance to classroom practice, collaboration, reflective inquiry and alignment with the professional requirements of teachers are the hallmarks of effective CPD (Desimone, 2009). The high-quality CPD proved to have a beneficial impact on teacher knowledge, teaching practice, and student performance (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Timperley, 2008). Nonetheless, CPD is mostly effective based on the beliefs of the teachers concerning its worth and usability (Guskey, 2002).

The beliefs of teachers regarding CPD do not only determine the participation but the levels in which learning and adoption of new strategies is done. Those teachers who view CPD as something forced or unnecessary are less likely to make learning a part of the practice (Opfer and Pedder, 2011). On the other hand, educators who feel CPD aids in professional development are more motivated, have long-term involvement, and enhanced instruction (Avalos, 2011). Despite the lack of direct research on academic qualifications and CPD beliefs, some studies indicate the strong indirect correlation. Teachers possessing more academic qualification tend to be more research literate and reflective in their beliefs, and this has a positive impact on their attitudes regarding on-going professional learning (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Day and Sachs, 2004).

Additionally, according to the reports provided by OECD (2019), the teachers possessing higher qualifications are more prone to taking part in CPD on a voluntary basis and view it as a necessary step towards professional competence. This implies that the academic qualifications can act as a background force that helps influence the beliefs of teachers on the need to engage in life-long learning.

Although the topic of CPD effectiveness and teacher belief has a broad literature, there has been hardly any study that explicitly researches the effect of academic qualification on beliefs about CPD. Such gap is most pronounced in the education system that is developing. It is important to fill this gap to inform the policy of teacher education and to develop differentiated CPD models that match the educational backgrounds of the teachers.

Research Objectives

1. To compare teachers' opinions about the value of CPD programs for improving professional knowledge and skills at various levels of academic qualification.
2. To look at how different academic qualifications affect teachers' perceptions of how CPD programs can improve classroom practices and instructional quality.
3. To examine how different academic qualification levels affect teachers' perceptions of the value of CPD programs for career advancement and professional motivation.
4. To look into how teachers' views about the value of CPD programs for adjusting to innovations and changes in education are influenced by their educational backgrounds.

Research Questions

1. What differences exist between academic qualification levels in teachers' perceptions of the value of CPD programs for professional knowledge and skill enhancement?

2. How do teachers with different academic backgrounds perceive the role of CPD programs in enhancing classroom practices and instructional quality?
3. How much do teachers' opinions about the value of CPD programs for career advancement and professional motivation differ depending on their level of education?
4. What impact do teachers' educational backgrounds have on their opinions about the value of CPD programs for adjusting to innovations and changes in education?

Methodology

In order to investigate variations in teachers' perceptions of the significance of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) programs across different academic qualification levels, this study used a quantitative, descriptive-comparative research design. Convenience sampling was used to select the 517 teachers in the sample, who were then grouped based on their educational background: M.Phil. (n = 73), Ph.D. (n = 7), Master (n = 299), Bachelor (n = 135), and Intermediate (n = 3). A self-created structured questionnaire was used to gather data in order to gauge teachers' opinions on four aspects of continuing professional development (CPD): professional knowledge and skill enhancement, instructional quality and classroom practices, career growth and professional motivation, and adaptation to innovations and changes in education. A five-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree, was used to record responses. Both in-person and online administration of the questionnaire were used. To compare belief patterns across qualification levels, descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) were used to analyze the collected data.

Table 1

Teachers with Intermediate Qualification Beliefs Regarding the Importance of Continuous Professional Development Programs

Category of Continuous Professional Development Programs	N	Mean	Std. Dev.
Professional Knowledge and Skill Enhancement	3	3.92	.878
Instructional Quality and Classroom Practices	3	3.83	.764
Career Growth and Professional Motivation	3	3.75	.661
Adaptation to Educational Changes and Innovations	3	3.42	.722

Table 1 is a table showing what teachers of Intermediate qualification believe about the use of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) programs on four major dimensions. The results show that these teachers have moderately positive perceptions towards CPD in general. Professional knowledge and skill enhancement (M = 3.92, SD = 0.878) has the highest mean score, which indicates that the teachers who have Intermediate qualifications think that CPD is especially relevant to their knowledge of the subject and their teaching skills. In the same way, the perceptions concerning the quality of instruction and classroom practices (M = 3.83, SD = 0.764) are positive, which means that the participants acknowledge the role of CPD in the classroom effectiveness.

The trend of beliefs associated with career development and professional motivation is also positive (M = 3.75, SD = 0.661), which demonstrates a perception of CPD as a tool of professional development. Nevertheless, the smallest mean is given to the adaptation to changes and innovations in education (M = 3.42, SD = 0.722), indicating that less focus on CPD is assigned to coping with the new educational reforms. On the whole, the findings suggest that the academic qualification has an impact on teacher beliefs, and Intermediate-qualified teachers are more concerned with the skills development rather than with the innovation-oriented professional development.

Table 2**Teachers with Bachelor Qualification Beliefs Regarding the Importance of Continuous Professional Development Programs**

Category of Continuous Professional Development Programs	N	Mean	Std. Dev.
Professional Knowledge and Skill Enhancement	135	4.23	.478
Instructional Quality and Classroom Practices	135	4.06	.682
Career Growth and Professional Motivation	135	3.99	.654
Adaptation to Educational Changes and Innovations	135	3.93	.695

Table 2 represents the perceptions of teachers that have attained Bachelor qualifications on the significance of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) programs in four dimensions. The findings demonstrate that there are highly optimistic views about CPD in this group. Professional knowledge and skill improvement obtained the highest mean score ($M = 4.23$, $SD = 0.478$) which serves as the evidence that the teachers with Bachelor qualification are convinced in the importance of CPD as the method to enhance their professional competencies. On the same note, there is evidence of positive beliefs on the role of CPD in improving the quality of instruction and classroom practices ($M = 4.06$, $SD = 0.682$), which can be interpreted as appreciation of the fact that CPD is a helpful tool in improving the teaching effectiveness.

Career development and professional motivation beliefs have also been found to be positive ($M = 3.99$, $SD = 0.654$), indicating the view that CPD not only helps in career development but also permanent motivation. Moreover, the agreement levels are relatively high regarding the adaptation to changing educational changes and innovations ($M = 3.93$, $SD = 0.695$) and point to openness to CPD as the support mechanism that helps to cope with changing educational requirements. In general, the results indicate that, teachers that have a Bachelor qualification have a higher appreciation of CPD, in comparison to teachers with lesser qualification, which shows how academic qualification has an impact on the professional beliefs of teachers.

Table 3**Teachers with Masters Qualification Beliefs Regarding the Importance of Continuous Professional Development Programs**

Category of Continuous Professional Development Programs	N	Mean	Std. Dev.
Professional Knowledge and Skill Enhancement	299	4.11	.627
Instructional Quality and Classroom Practices	299	4.12	.616
Career Growth and Professional Motivation	299	4.07	.631
Adaptation to Educational Changes and Innovations	299	3.89	.651

Table 3 displays the perceptions of the teachers holding Master qualification on the significance of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) programs in four crucial dimensions. On the whole, it is possible to note that positive beliefs regarding the value of CPD in this group are quite stable and strong. In the case of teachers having Master degrees, the average instructional quality and classroom practices ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 0.616$) and professional knowledge and skill development ($M = 4.11$, $SD = 0.627$) are high, which means that they are

extremely aware of CPD as a mechanism that plays a crucial role in enhancing pedagogical performance and subject-related skills.

Career growth and professional motivation are also quite favorable in nature ($M = 4.07$, $SD = 0.631$) and indicate the belief of the Master-qualified teachers that CPD helps to facilitate career development and further involvement in their profession. Compared to them, however, the mean scores remain favorable, but are observed to be comparatively lower in terms of adaptation to educational changes and innovations ($M = 3.89$, $SD = 0.651$), which means that comparatively less focus is placed on CPD in the process of managing educational changes and innovations. All this evidence proves that higher-acquired teachers are more likely to have strong and more sophisticated beliefs about the significance of CPD, which supports the role of academic achievement in shaping the perception on professional development.

Table 4

Teachers with M. Phil. Qualification Beliefs Regarding the Importance of Continuous Professional Development Programs

Category of Continuous Professional Development Programs	N	Mean	Std. Dev.
Professional Knowledge and Skill Enhancement	73	4.10	.603
Instructional Quality and Classroom Practices	73	4.19	.544
Career Growth and Professional Motivation	73	3.95	.598
Adaptation to Educational Changes and Innovations	73	4.09	.529

The beliefs of teachers who have M.Phil. qualification in terms of the significance of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) programs are depicted in Table 4 within four dimensions. In general, the results show that there are very high positive beliefs towards CPD in this group. Instructional quality and classroom practices have the highest mean score ($M = 4.19$, $SD = 0.544$), indicating that M.Phil.-qualified teachers that hold a rather high opinion on CPD as the means to improve the level of teaching effectiveness and classroom performance. Likewise, professional knowledge and skill development ($M = 4.10$, $SD = 0.603$) and coping with changes and innovations in education ($M = 4.09$, $SD = 0.529$) also get high ratings, indicating a high level of perception that CPD can assist in enhancing professional skills, as well as, responding to the demands of evolving education.

The perceptions connected with career development and work motivation are a bit less ($M = 3.95$, $SD = 0.598$) yet also positive, which demonstrates the awareness of CPD in the professional development. All in all, the data indicate that teachers who have M.Phil. degrees have more balanced and strong appreciation of CPD in terms of knowledge improvement, instructional improvement, career improvement, and innovation adaptation, which confirms the impact of higher academic degrees on professional beliefs.

Table 5

Teachers with Ph. D. Qualification Beliefs Regarding the Importance of Continuous Professional Development Programs

Category of Continuous Professional Development Programs	N	Mean	Std. Dev.
Professional Knowledge and Skill Enhancement	7	4.36	.497
Instructional Quality and Classroom Practices	7	3.96	.488
Career Growth and Professional Motivation	7	3.96	.466

Adaptation to Educational Changes and Innovations	7	3.86	.429
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The table 5 gives the beliefs of teachers who hold PHD qualifications about the significance of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) programs on four dimensions. The data show that the Ph.D.-qualified teachers have a very strong positive belief especially on professional knowledge and skill growth ($M = 4.36$, $SD = 0.497$), the highest of all the dimensions of CPD. This implies that such teachers view the CPD mostly as a channel through which they can broaden their knowledge base and improve on their professional skills.

The attitudes towards the quality of instruction and the classroom activities ($M = 3.96$, $SD = 0.488$) as well as the career development and the professional motivation ($M = 3.96$, $SD = 0.466$) are positive, meaning that they are aware of the role that CPD plays in enhancing the effectiveness in teaching practice and the professional growth. Adaptation to changes in education and innovations has the lowest mean ($M = 3.86$, $SD = 0.429$), however, it is also positive, and it indicates that the suggested teachers who are highly qualified also find CPD relevant in order to stay up-to-date with the changing educational environment. On the whole, these findings indicate that teachers whose academic qualifications are the most advanced are more inclined to focus on knowledge improvement without losing the balanced awareness of the increased professional value of CPD, which supports the effect of academic achievements on CPD perceptions.

Discussion

The current research investigated the role of the academic qualification of teachers on their assumptions of the significance of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) programs. At all the levels of qualification, whether at Intermediate or Ph.D, teacher shared positive beliefs regarding CPD and this was based on the perceived impact of the practice on professional knowledge and quality of instructional methods, professional development and the adjustment to the changes in the educational system. Nevertheless, the intensity and attention of these beliefs were also systematically connected with the academic achievement, which proves the hypothesis of the research that the greater the qualifications, the stronger and more refined the perception of CPD.

Intermediate teachers expressed rather positive beliefs, being more concerned with professional knowledge and skill development ($M = 3.92$) than with meeting the changes in education ($M = 3.42$). This is in line with conclusions made by Avalos (2011) and Villegas-Reimers (2003) which indicate that teachers who are less formally educated might view CPD as more of a direct skill acquisition, as opposed to a wider innovation or reform adaptation.

Conversely, the Baccalaureate and Master-qualified teachers had stronger positive beliefs in all the dimensions of CPD and especially those related to professional knowledge gaining and improvement of instruction. The relative decrease in the focus on adaptation to educational change in teachers of the Master's ($M = 3.89$) is somewhat indicative of the fact that they may know the value of CPD, but may need even more exposure to the systemic or innovation-driven level of it, which is also supported by other studies that focus on the importance of reflective practice in the development of CPD engagement (Guskey, 2002; Day & Sachs, 2004).

Teachers with M.Phil. qualification showed a moderate and strong appreciation of CPD in all the dimensions, and with regard to adaptation to changes in education ($M = 4.09$). It shows that high levels of academic preparation help in the establishment of wider professional viewpoints, which incorporates skill development, quality of teaching, career development, and sensitivity to educational innovation. The results of this study are not isolated as Darling-Hammond (2006) and Opfer and Pedder (2011) emphasize the role of formal academic preparation in teacher reflective and strategic participation in professional learning.

The emphasis on professional knowledge and skill development was the strongest among Ph.D.-qualified teachers ($M = 4.36$) and keeping the positive but a bit less intense beliefs about the innovation adaptation ($M = 3.86$). It implies that teachers who are highly specialized are more inclined to focus on knowledge enhancement without downplaying but yet relatively less important, the role of CPD in enhancing education as a whole. This correspondence is supported by OECD (2019), which states that highly qualified teachers are more selective in the focus of CPD in prioritizing research-based information and mastery of the subject.

All in all, the results indicate that there is a positive correlation between academic qualifications and the beliefs of teachers regarding CPD. Increased qualifications do not only increase the perceived significance of CPD but also increase the breadth of work, including instruction enhancement, career development, and change. These findings are congruent with existing studies that show that the formal preparation of academic programs leads to reflective capacity, professional identity, and the willingness to engage in lifelong learning (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Avalos, 2011; Timperley, 2008).

Conclusions

- Educators of any level of qualification appreciate CPD, although the intensity and emphasis of beliefs grows as academic level rises.
- Existing evidence demonstrates that professional knowledge and skill improvement is always given the top priority in any group, which indicates the key role of CPD in competency development.
- The facilitation of learning in educational changes and innovations is less appreciated by less qualified teachers but becomes prevalent among more qualified teachers, which suggests that academic preparation also produces openness to systemic and pedagogical innovation.
- The results indicate that CPD programs are to be varied based on the level of qualification of the teachers, with specific needs to be addressed, i.e., skill development of the lower-qualified teachers and reflective practice and innovation-oriented learning of the higher-qualified teachers.
- The role of academic qualifications as a support element in determining the CPD beliefs of teachers proves that the investment in teacher education may have a long-term effect on the interest toward professional learning activities.

Recommendations

- *Differentiated CPD Programs:* Personalize CPD based on the qualification of the teachers- use basic skill-building in teachers with lower qualifications, and reflective and innovation-thinking with research-based practice in those with higher qualifications in order to optimize professional development.
- *Foster Change Adaptation:* Develop CPD modules that focus on education reforms, digital pedagogy, and curriculum change especially to lower qualified teachers to become more responsive to changes on teaching and learning.
- *Combine Career Development:* Interconnect CPD engagement with career advancement and career recognition and professional motivation, which promotes life-long learning and professional engagement at all levels of teacher qualification.

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