

# Developing Continued Professional Development (CPD) Program For English Language Teachers: A Model For Future Action Research

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## **Abstract.**

*A Continued Professional Development (CPD) in the educational context is a continual program aimed to develop teachers' quality, including English language teachers, in their teaching practices to improve students' academic achievement. A traditional or teacher-centred CPD is criticized for its failure to provide teachers' active participation. Although this program may allow teachers to learn from outside experts, it still fails to meet teachers' and classrooms' needs. The program may not be in line with the challenges and experiences teachers face in their classroom's real teaching practices. Past researchers started to identify effective professional development which invites teachers' active participation. CPD through action research offers English teachers to get involved actively from planning to the program's evaluation so that they can improve their knowledge, English language proficiency and teaching skills that fit the condition and teachers' context. This paper offers a design to develop an action research model of CPD.*

**Keywords:** *Continued Professional Development (CPD), English language teachers, action research.*

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

Continued Professional Development (CPD) program is an opportunity for teachers to learn continuously teaching strategies through practices for the improvement of their quality of teaching and the success of student learning [1]. Traditional or teacher-centred professional development models, for example, workshops, seminar and the like, might not have been effective as expected because of leading to passive responses, failure to address teachers' professional needs [2] and unsuitable to real complexity of classroom's needs as well as shallow provision of knowledge and skills as the focus is mostly on content knowledge. In the search to identify programs of effective professional development, Clarke and Hollingsworth [3] note that the key is that teachers should not be considered passive participants, but that the program should be a complex, active and teacher-engaged process of learning [4]. Action research offers educators' active participation in the professional development

as they become actively involved in the program, from planning to reflection or evaluation. CPD using action research also can help improve the knowledge, competence and teaching skills that fit the conditions and needs of teachers in their context. This paper will offer a model to facilitate English language teachers in the development of their CPD using action research. This model consists of possible research questions that English language teachers can adapt to conduct their action research. This paper also includes a practical guide that suits action research principles: the identification of general idea, reconnaissance, general plan construction, the development of a plan and the implementation of action [5], appropriate methods and techniques for gathering data as well as ethical considerations.

## **II. CONTINUED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Continued Professional Development (CPD) in a broad context means a continual process of self-development and a commitment to a high quality of job performance [6]. In the educational context, professional development for teachers as a continual professional program aimed to develop the quality of teaching practices to increase student achievement. Similarly, Barnard [7] views professional development as giving opportunities for teachers to apply the techniques and strategies taught in the program to teaching practice, with the provision of feedback. Meanwhile, Guskey [8] describes programs of professional development as ‘intentional, ongoing and systematic’ activities to develop teachers’ knowledge and skills aimed to improve students’ learning. Jones and Lowe [9] support Guskey’s idea that professional development is a continuing process to change teaching practices. These definitions have similarities in terms of goals, namely, improvement in the quality of teaching and learning, and the programs as ongoing processes.

Therefore, it can be concluded that professional development is an opportunity to teachers to learn continuously teaching strategies through practices for the improvement of their quality of teaching and the success of student learning. Professional development is crucial; the knowledge base is growing rapidly, and educators should be ready with their refined skills in teaching to keep up with emerging knowledge [8]. Educators are required to be continually professional [10] prepare students for the most current workforce demands, and able to meet the diverse needs of students in their future work. Additionally, educational reforms challenge teachers to demonstrate accountability, where they must direct their teaching quality to improve students’ performance as teacher quality is in line with students’ learning improvement [11]. All these reasons provide a rationale for teachers to undertake a continuum of updating their knowledge and skills through teacher professional development programs. Teachers engage to work together to gain and practise the knowledge learnt, with the aim of improvement in student education. The following gives details of some research-based evidence of the positive impact of teacher professional development programs. They can build teachers’ confidence in teaching

and decision-making for their class [12] as they improve their knowledge base, and help them to become able to apply this [13].

Participating teachers also have opportunities to share professional experiences or models of teaching. They can also discuss their classroom teaching practices, which can encourage reflection and feedback [14]. Furthermore, teachers may have shared leadership, as the programs involve not only teachers but also school executives, who all collaborate to share responsibility during the programs [15]. The programs also can support teachers to perform and share their knowledge about research. All these benefits show how important professional development is to help teachers to extend their knowledge, so that they can be more familiar with the content they deliver in class, can practise how to deliver knowledge effectively through the application of effective teaching strategies, and can apply classroom teaching practices based on research. All of these help in teacher professional development. Nevertheless, although some professional development programs have had positive impact, others show that the program may not have been effective as expected, including, for example, traditional or teacher-centred professional development.

This model is ideal to transfer knowledge from experts to teachers so that the teacher can replicate ideal teaching in practice; this may lead to passive responses. Similarly, although this model was initially designed for teachers to master teaching skills, it fails to address what teachers need, as it does not involve teacher participation; therefore, it fails to meet real classroom needs and professional needs [11]. Although the model has benefits in terms of the provision of knowledge and skills, these are shallow, as the focus is mostly on content knowledge. Moreover, as this kind of program is conducted in the form of workshops or seminars that involve outside experts to transfer knowledge, it does not address the complexity of the reality in the classroom. These seminars or workshops are also not conducted in classrooms or teachers' working stations which leads to disconnection between the training and what teachers need. Therefore, this kind of professional development program does not appear effective for teaching improvement. In the search to identify programs of effective professional development, Clarke and Hollingsworth [3] note that the key is that teachers should not be considered passive participants, but that the program should be a complex, active and teacher-engaged process of learning [4].

It should regard teachers as active agents who shape their learning through reflection and through the inclusion of teaching practice and feedback [3]. Therefore, teachers' needs should be identified at the beginning of the program which can help to solve their real problems in classrooms [8] and help them to be active participants [3]. Next, the program should be viewed as an opportunity for learning that is embedded in teachers' real work in the classroom [16]. Example activities suggested by Clarke and Hollingsworth [3] are the use of videos to show the real situation of teaching and learning in the classroom and interviews with teachers to put professional development in a real classroom context. Another suggested way is through authentic assessments

such as observations, portfolios, interviews, feedback from students and action research embedded in real contexts, to capture challenges and strengths in the teaching and learning process. Teachers can discuss the results of these assessments and identify ways of addressing specific challenges or problem areas to improve their teaching practices [11]. Considering the importance of educators' active participation in the professional development, the writer suggests the CPD is conducted through action research which requires participants to be actively involved to develop a program of professional development for educators.

### III. ACTION RESEARCH

This paper suggests using action research to formulate an effective professional development program for English language teachers. Action research is a study that aims to improve the quality of action within a social context [17]. In learning through action and reflection [18], practitioners evaluate what are they doing, what they need to improve and how they improve the quality of projects. The evaluation is managed in 'cyclical planned intervention or actions', reviewed actions and revised actions [19]. In other words, action research is self-reflective enquiry by research participants [20]. Another aim of action research is to enhance justice in practice (*ibid*). Justice here means that action research enhances the democratic approach in research with the involvement of participants in decision-making; individuals are empowered through collaborative projects that show that action research values the emancipation of participants for improvement of conditions [21]. Therefore, to conclude, action research is an inquiry that aims to identify and solve specific problems in which the solutions are planned, chosen, and then evaluated by the individuals who are in that problem context. In other words, the central process of action research includes improvement in quality or making a change for the better [5], reflection, and collaboration [22].

In the educational context, action research has been used to investigate solutions to specific problems faced by teachers or educational practitioners [21]. The research design is a systematic procedure conducted by teachers or educational practitioners to gather information and improve educational practices to better student learning [23]. In detail, educators identify the problems they face and reflect on these by collecting and analysing data and implementing changes to overcome them. In another context, action research empowers individuals to collaborate and to release them from situations that limit their self-development and self-determination [21]. Educators regard action research as relevant and practical in the educational context, as it bridges the gap between research and day-to-day application [24]. In other words, educators find action research to be practical although it is managed through systematic research methods, with planning, action, and reflection processes [5]. It investigates individuals' own schooling programs to gain valuable information about what is known from teaching, learning, knowledge content and curriculum design [25].As

action research allows contribution from participants, the writer recommends using this research design to create effective professional development programs for English teachers supported by institution or schools [26].

The teachers can take part in the development of the program, so that they can decide on program activities relevant to their context, to the classroom and to their knowledge in terms of language proficiency and research skills. In other words, the CPD arranged by teachers through action research will match to their needs and solve problems that they face in their real works. This approach is more practical and effective than traditional CPD that is arranged by central institution. Ravhuhali et al. [27] found that teachers consider that professional development that is centrally prescribed by educational institutions offers irrelevant and unconnected solutions to their real everyday work, and is, therefore, not effective. Findings by Archibald, Coggshall, Croft, and Goe [28] show that teachers feel isolated if they are not involved in the planning of programs of professional development. Teachers further claimed that the one-fit-all professional development planned by the Ministry of Education or central educational institutions are standardized and may not match their actual problems in classroom practice. Darling-Hammond *et al.*, [2] further report that the content of these programs does not meet teachers' expectations and are not relevant to their professional needs. Therefore, action research, in which participants become actively involved in the program of professional development, from planning to reflection or evaluation, can help improve the knowledge, competence and teaching skills that fit the conditions and needs of English teachers.

#### **IV. RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

Examples of research questions that can be used to CPD through action research:

1. What is the effective professional development of English language teachers?
2. What are the strategies to enhance the quality of classroom practices?
3. What are teachers' attitudes toward the professional development that evolves from action research?

#### **V. PROCESS OF ACTION RESEARCH**

The following planned process of action research is adopted from practical guide of action research proposed by Elliot [5].

##### **a. Identifying and clarifying the general idea**

General ideas refer to general condition that participants want to change or improve. English language teachers may identify changes that fit their needs and develop their competence as English language teachers. Kemmis et al [20] provided several examples of general idea identification. They are as follows.

- Students are not satisfied with the way they are assessed. To solve the problem, English language teachers may raise the issue of how teachers can collaborate to improve the quality of assessment method.
- Students seem waste their time in class. English teachers might collaborate to set strategies how to increase students spend on the task.
- English language teachers might have no extensive reading materials for students. The teachers may discuss and compile materials that match to students need, interest and their specific knowledge.

In other words, general idea means that the teachers stated their condition, and they may contribute ideas how they improve the condition.

#### **b. Reconnaissance**

In the action research we aim to create an effective professional development program that engages the teachers in actively participating in the process. Participation begins from the process of diagnosis of the teachers' needs to improve and the diagnosis of problems we have encountered during our process of teaching. According to McNiff and Whitehead [29] action research consists of 'diagnosis, action and reflection', with the diagnosis identified by the participants [17]. Lewin [30] suggests that action research starts from general ideas, that data are required to present the situation, and that successful outcomes are when the plan is produced to achieve agreed objectives. Therefore, the researcher (one of teachers) together with the colleagues start with a diagnosis of the challenges that teachers have and gather them for discussion during the program to achieve the specific objectives that are to be accomplished (Week one). Data may be gathered using the Nominal Group technique [31]. Cohen, Manion and Morrison [32] propose that this technique is useful to gather ideas and share these with others to analyse priorities, differences, or similarities.

In this way, every individual has an equal chance to participate, so that their voice is given equal consideration. This technique is also in line with action research with democratic activity through participatory [33] and empowering activity [5]. The plan of this technique is as follows. Teachers are given time to write their ideas on paper on the challenges they have met or ideas for improvement in their teaching professionalism. The responses are attached to a board and then displayed for the others. Then, the researcher will ask the colleagues to cluster them into broad categories, for example: teaching strategies, improvement of English proficiency, or development of teaching materials. Then, the researcher will invite further discussion with teachers on what they want to have included in the program, and which model of professional development they think might be suitable to overcome the challenges. To anticipate any reluctance to contribute, for example, if teachers lack knowledge of the varieties of models of professional development, the researcher may offer certain models based on the literature. Sparks and Loucks-Horsley's models of professional development include: training, observation, involvement in development, study group, action research, self-guided activities and mentoring. The researcher may give a short

overview of the strengths and weaknesses of each model and ask the teachers to add any other points they may have. The researcher may invite teachers to mention other kinds of models of professional development that they think can be implemented in the program.

Then, the researcher will ask the teachers to choose the kind of professional development model that meets the challenges or problems they have written down on paper. Each problem might need more than one model of professional development and they will discuss why they chose these and combine them. As Guskey [8] reports, models have various orientations and expectations, and there may be some strong or weak points in their use for professional development. For example, the mentoring model, which includes cooperative learning between more experienced and less experienced colleagues, may work best if mentor and mentee are willing to allocate their time to work together [34]. This model is an individualized approach in professional development that is beneficial for both mentor and mentee and can foster problem-solving skills and improve lifelong professional relationships [35]. However, it might not be suitable for broader collaboration and sharing due to the nature of the individualized sharing [8]. Consequently, it might be beneficial to combine models of professional development to overcome problems, as teachers may have different ways to make sense of their experiences and feel that certain models might fit best for them [36]. Finally, it is suggested that the researcher may ask all the English teachers to make an order of priority for problems that they want to overcome in this professional development program, as well as the model that they might think the most feasible to apply. After they have decided the top priorities, they will reconstruct their previous general plan to make it more specific.

### **c. Constructing the general plan**

During the general plan construction, the researcher and his or her fellow English teachers may decide on the priority problem for action. Therefore, they will construct their plan and narrow it down to the one that they believe the most critical to overcome in their context. Hult and Lennung [37] and McKernan [38] suggest that action research is formative, which means that the problem definition and the aims and methodology may change during the process of research. There may be some areas that the colleagues agree on to develop in the program, so the researcher should be ready with some planned activities following the decision. The researcher will now give one example of a priority that might need to be solved through this program, that is, for example lesson plan development. As one of teachers, the researcher may find this is important, since the teachers may teach with their own materials that they think are in line with the curriculum, but there has not previously been any sharing of lesson plans among teachers. Therefore, through lesson plan development, the researcher and fellow English language teachers could create agreed lesson plans consisting of classroom objectives, learning materials, teaching methods and evaluation methods.

The participants will be encouraged to develop collective and collaborative designs with effective and creative means of teaching in the English classroom that conform to the national curriculum. This involvement will aim to enhance them as teachers in their ability to work collaboratively and develop their teamwork skills, where participants can be more appreciative of individual differences [8]. To develop collective lesson plans, the researcher will use the model of professional development that the teachers have decided on during our planning stage. It may be that what is adopted is in line with the orientation of improvement of instruction strategies. In this model, educators are involved in the development or review of a curriculum, instruction improvement or problem-solving. Davis and Krajcik [39] contend that although this involvement is intended to create better instruction for better learning for students, the activity also can enhance teachers' learning. Guskey [8] argues that the involvement of educators in the development of material not only increases their learning, but also enhances their ability to work collaboratively and share in decision making. However, this model might be restricted to only into small number of educators. There may also be a tendency for educators to prioritize past research or best practice [8]. Therefore, educators must be prepared with access to information and expertise so that rationale for the materials or techniques chosen for materials development can be justified [40].

The researcher may invite teachers to write down three topics or contexts to be used for learning materials for a general English class of sixteen meetings in a semester for example. Beforehand, the researcher will provide some English magazines, newspapers and various books or online learning materials that might trigger ideas for teachers to choose up-to-date topics in line with current situations and their learners' needs and abilities. Tomlinson [41] suggests that to create effective classroom environments, teachers need to evaluate and adapt extra materials and ensure they are suitable for their learners. Furthermore, teachers should provide additional teaching materials to supplement coursebook materials, so a variety of materials for language learning is needed to meet learners' needs and promote student learning. Then, with reference to the Nominal Group Technique [31], the researcher will ask the colleagues to put their ideas on the board, and then ask one of the participants to cluster the ideas based on their similarities. Finally, they will draw up an order of priority and decide together to choose eight topics to be taught in sixteen meetings for example. This means that there will be one topic in two class sessions. After that, the researcher will divide the twelve teachers into some groups. Members of each group will work together to develop two topics they have chosen, to include the learning objectives, learning materials, what language skills to include, teaching techniques and assessment. Schifter and Fosnot [42] suggest that embedded professional development is related to actual classroom activities; therefore, professional development activities may adopt and reflect activities of student work or instructional tasks, such as group discussions, presentations, and so forth [43].



This group discussion is intended to create active participation and to relate teachers to the real context of their students' situation; in this way, they become students in the program, which should eventually enhance their learning. Learning is viewed as an active process of individual construction and a process of enculturation into practices of society. The society in this context is the classroom. The following meeting (Week two) is shared sessions. Each group presents their materials development and the reasons why they have made their decisions. During the presentation, everyone is invited to ask questions and give suggestions on the possible improvement of quality of teaching material and techniques. In this way, they can have the opportunity to share their ideas and consider input from other colleagues which they can apply in their classroom practices. Garet et al. [44] say that one of features of effective professional development program is that the opportunity for teachers to have active learning and coherence with other activities. Presentation allows teachers to actively express the result of their group discussion which means that this will encourage teachers to be active. Also, presentation is in line with the previous activity, group discussion which means that these activities are coherent. Active engagement and coherence will eventually lead to effective professional development program.

**d. Developing the next action step**

After the presentations in the professional development program, the researcher and his/her colleagues will apply the teaching materials and strategies to their classroom (Week three). The researcher may be a teacher assistant as well as an observer in the classroom. During the process, the researcher may use video to capture real information from the classroom in whole or in part [5]. The results of video will be their reflection for their next professional development meeting to discuss the strategies applied and challenges that might have appeared in the real context. After the class, the researcher will ask students to write a short diary describing their feeling learning English, their comments on their participation in class and their opinion about teaching materials and strategies applied by teacher. At this time, the teacher will not be present, and students will write anonymous diary to keep the identity of the participants confidential. The diary should include date and topic of the lesson; this will facilitate the researcher to report the finding based on the date in action research. Teachers will also be asked to write diaries about their feelings, students' perceived feelings, and students' behaviour in class.

Kemmis *et al.*, [45] suggest that diary will include personal feelings, reactions, opinion and this is useful to compare teachers' and students' experiences and feelings in the same classroom situation. Elliot and Partington [46] call this as triangulation, collecting observations of the same situation from a variety of angles so that the researcher will be able to compare to have more valid data. The following session of professional development (Week four) is reflection on the agreed teaching practices. The videos will be shown, and teachers are asked to fill out observation notes consisting of teachers' teaching strategies, student participation as an effect of these

strategies, and students' attitudes during learning. After that, the researcher will collect the information from teachers' observation notes and triangulate it with the information from students' and teachers' diaries. The results of observation sheets and diaries will be coded and presented in the following session of professional development program [46].

**e. Implementing the next action**

The following two weeks (Week six) is the presentation of result. The researcher will report the main findings classified into several categories: students' activities or engagement, students' feelings, challenges occur during instruction, and teachers' feelings. These findings will be presented and evaluated to see whether changes are needed for improvement in teaching. Teachers are invited to share any suggestions they may have, following their practice in class. In this way, they can reflect on what they have learnt and practised and discuss any recommendations for subsequent practice in the classroom. This is the end of cycle one and the next phase is cycle two started with reconnaissance stating what failure or challenges occur during cycle one and then the revised general idea will be reconstructed based on finding on the cycle one.

## **VI. METHODS AND TECHNIQUES FOR GATHERING EVIDENCE**

To answer research question number one about the concept of effective professional development and research question number three regarding teachers' attitude toward professional development through action research, the researcher may use the structured interview in which the set of questions are discussed with participants (teachers). Meanwhile, for question number two regarding the strategies to enhance classroom practices, the researcher may use video, observation notes and teachers' and students' diaries.

## **VII. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Research that involves human as participants must ensure that the research does not harm them. A researcher must ensure to avoid potential risks of harm, discomfort, physical and psychological risk for the research participants [47]. In this section, the researcher may highlight the issues of collaboration, anonymity, and confidentiality. The collaboration of the colleagues in the professional development program and students' participation in class should be voluntary, autonomous and they can withdraw from the research anytime [48]. Teachers and students who will be included in the study are those who have signed their informed consent form. Zeni [49] suggested two kinds of consents: blanket consent and special consent. Blanket consent is an agreement to be included in the study while special one is willingness to include real information in the publication such as, students' diaries, paperwork, teacher's lesson profile and so forth.

In the action research of CPD study, the researcher may ask blanket consent from teachers in the beginning of program and students in the beginning of academic year. Furthermore, as action research will be developed well through collaboration, the researcher may ask teachers to review lists of questions that the researcher will use for interview. This is as precaution to minimize harm for participants by involving them to get a variety of different perspectives [49]. Moreover, action research needs full participation, therefore this research is rarely anonymous as educators know their students. Similarly, the participation of English language teachers and students in the action research are not anonymous, but the researcher may not give privileged chance; the study will give equal opportunity teachers as well as students and it is not be influenced by personal and professional relationship [48]. Teachers' and students' diaries will be anonymous, and all findings will be reported anonymously. In this way, the researcher can keep the confidentiality of teachers' and students' information.

### **VIII. PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATION**

This paper contributes step-by-step strategies for conducting action research model of CPD. English language teachers may use this guide to perform their action research model of CPD. Through an action research model of CPD, English language teachers may solve problems they encounter in class through collaboration with their fellow English teachers. In this way, they may have active participation in the professional development program to improve their teaching practices and their English language proficiency and enhance their students' learning.

### **IX. CONCLUSION**

Continued Professional Development (CPD) program offers an opportunity for English teachers to learn and practice to improve the quality of their teaching and students' learning. Traditional or teacher centred CPD, for example, workshop or seminar, is not in line with teachers' real problems. Therefore, past researchers suggested an action research model of CPD that allows teachers to collaborate with their fellows to solve their problems in the class to improve their teaching quality. This paper provides a guide for English language teachers to develop their action research model of CPD in line with the action research principle.

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