Effectiveness of TESOL Teachers Continuous Professional Development: Perspectives form Oman

Khadija Al Balushi*

Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation- Sultanate of Oman

Corresponding Author: Khadija Al Balushi, E-mail: khadija.b@moe.om

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	Teacher continuous professional development (CPD) is perceived as a significant way of improving schools, increasing teacher quality, and enhancing student learning (Vangrieken et al., 2017; Day, 1999). Therefore, educational scholars and policy makers demand CPD opportunities for teachers to help them enhance their knowledge and develop new instructional practices. However, the effectiveness of CPD initiatives and the impact they have on teaching and learning is questionable as reported by many research studies both locally in Oman and internationally (e.g. Al-Balushi, 2017; Antoniou & Kyriakides, 2013). This paper reports the findings of a study, which critically examined the effectiveness of the CPD activities run by the Ministry of Education-Oman for TESOL teachers and the impact of these activities in improving schools, increasing teacher quality and improving the quality of student learning. Data were collected using questionnaires, observations, semi structured and focus-group interview with EFL teachers in Oman. The findings revealed that a number of factors affect English teachers' CPD in Oman; some of these factors facilitate teachers access to CPD and its' success while others inhibit that. The data indicates that CPD timing and location can facilitate teachers' access to CPD while workload and family responsibilities are key inhibitors to CPD access. The findings further showed that suitability and relevance of CPD activity in terms of the topics presented in it and the ideas discussed was reported as an important factor to effective CPD whereas CPD done by unqualified teacher educators can hinder the success of CPD. The study further indicated that the centralised top-down nature of the current CPD system seems to negatively affect the success of CPD in the in-service TESOL context in Oman. The findings suggest that the role of teachers themselves in the provision of CPD is significant; the way teachers are currently marginalized and seen as grateful recipients of CPD do not provide the conditions for intelligent and responsive teaching profession.

INTRODUCTION

Educational reform movements in Oman and around the world are setting ambitious goals for students' learning. Many factors can contribute to achieve these goals. In fact, the changes in classroom practices demanded by the reform visions ultimately rely on teachers, their learning, and transforming their knowledge into practice (Vangrieken et al., 2017; Avalos, 2011; Borko, 2004). This realization has led educational scholars and policy makers to demand continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities for teachers to help them enhance their knowledge and develop new instructional practices (Borko, 2004). However, the effectiveness of these programmes and the impact they have on teaching and learning is questionable.

As the OECD TALIS (2009) study revealed, in most countries teachers' CPD is generally not meeting teachers' needs. Due to such concerns, studies in multiple international contexts focusing on diverse subject areas have

attempted to explore the effectiveness of teacher CPD programmes, why teacher CPD has failed to live up to its development potential and ways of improving CPD effectiveness in the future (e.g. Antoniou & Kyriakides, 2013; Lamb, 1995). In the Sultanate of Oman, the situation is no better than the international context despite the huge amount of money spent each year on the in-service education and training of teachers (here after INSET) and other forms of CPD for teachers. This has been reflected in a number of local research studies conducted in Oman questioning the real impact of some offered INSET courses on the classroom practices of teachers (for example, Al-Balushi, 2009). Besides, there appears to be a mismatch between teachers' beliefs and practices and the CPD system in Oman (AL-Lamki, 2009). Given this, this research project endeavored to examine the effectiveness of the CPD activities run by the Ministry of Education in Oman for teachers and the possible influences these activities might have to

improve schools, increase teacher quality and improve the quality of student learning.

Problematic Issue and Aims of the Study

The Ministry of Education in Oman spends a lot of money each year to provide many CPD opportunities for in-service TESOL teachers. However, the effectiveness of these initiatives and the impact they have on teaching and learning is questionable. Thus, the key aim of the present study is to investigate the effectiveness of CPD activities offered by the Ministry of Education in Oman to INSET TESOL teachers and the impact of these activities on English teaching and learning. This overarching goal is brought to fulfilment by several separate objectives which are:

- To explore the types of CPD activities offered by the Ministry of Education in Oman to in-service TESOL teachers.
- To investigate in-service TESOL teachers' views about the effectiveness of the CPD activities they participated in on their professional development.
- To investigate those teachers views about the impact of these activities on their motivation to teach and on their classroom practice.

Literature Review

In most countries, teachers are expected to continue learning throughout their career in order to adapt to the changing needs of their society and its children after their initial teacher preparation programmes (Vangrieken et al., 2017; Vries et al., 2013; Day & Sachs, 2004). Such kind of learning is called professional development (PD) or continuing professional development (CPD). PD or CPD has attracted increasing attention in recent years. Faced with rapid changes, demands for high standards and calls to improve quality, teachers have a need to improve their teaching skills and update themselves through PD (Craft, 2000).Ultimately, all teacher CPD is perceived as a significant way for improving schools, increasing teachers' quality, and enhancing students' learning (Vangrieken et al., 2017; Hargreaves, 2000; Day, 1999). In fact, every modern proposal to reforming, restructuring, or transforming schools and governments emphasise teachers' CPD as a main vehicle in efforts to bring about needed changes (Guskey, 1994).

However, many researchers around the world have questioned the effectiveness of CPD in delivering the desired changes. For instance, Meiers and Ingvarson (2005) argue that there is limited evidence-based research on the links between teachers' CPD and improvements in students' learning outcomes. In the same line of argument, Olson et al., (2002) highlight that in the US, for example, there is no national data that has examined CPD over time, or linked CPD participation to both changes in teaching practices and students achievement (cited in Antoniou & Kyriakides, 2013). Questions are always being raised regarding the effectiveness of all forms of CPD and with such questions and concerns have come an increased demand for demonstrable results. Funding agencies, policy makers, the general public and legislators all want to know if PD programmes and initiatives are really making a difference (Guskey, 1994) and if they do, what evidence is there showing that they are effective.

Garet et al., (2001) linked the concept of effective CPD to the positive effects on students' outcomes through three main stages: teachers' learning, teachers' practice and students' outcomes. Many educators have endeavoured to identify some principles and characteristics of effective CPD (e.g. Guskey, 2003; 1994; Garet et al., 2001; Loucks-Horsley et al., 1998). For example, effective CPD should improve the quality of teachers' work and should result in change in both individuals and organisations (schools) (Guskey, 1994). On the other hand, in reviewing the literature on quality in teachers' CPD, Caena (2011:4) states that the literature considers some CPD forms as more effective than others; the most favourable conditions for teachers' professional learning is through cooperation in school contexts such as professional communities. Such a perspective takes stock of past failures of CPD programmes informed by a deficit mastery model, consisting of 'one-shot' CPD approaches, advocating instead for a 'change as professional learning' perspective, inspired by adult learning and situated cognition theories, according to the paradigm of the teacher as reflective practitioner, and teachers taking responsibility for their own learning to improve the quality of their professional performance. Therefore, with regard to the construct of quality CPD, a shift can be detected from a technical rational top-down CPD approach (which is still a feature of the CPD system in Oman), towards a more cultural-individual interactive approach of teachers' CPD (Caena, 2011). For some researchers, discussions of quality and effective CPD are approached through a documentation of facilitating and inhibiting factors to effective CPD (e.g. Hustler et al., 2003; Lee, 2002).

Regarding the facilitating and inhibiting factors to effective CPD, both Hustler et al., (2003) and Lee (2002) examined effectiveness of CPD. For instance, in Taiwan, Lee (2002) examined the characteristics of effective CPD whereas Hustler et al., (2003) focused on CPD evaluation in England. They asked teachers to comment on what factors, in their experience, have contributed to effective or successful INSET and what factors have contributed to ineffective or unsuccessful CPD. In general, both studies found different factors that can facilitate or inhibit effectiveness of CPD. Lee's (2002) study indicates that matching the needs of teachers and collaborative opportunities of sharing as well as learning needs to be taken into account when planning CPD initiatives are important factors that facilitate effective CPD.

Conversely, Hustler et al., (2003) found that practical application was a key factor that facilitates or inhibits teachers benefit from CPD. Analysis of the data revealed that most teachers (26%) felt that the practical application of tasks was the most significant factor, which contributed to successful INSET. In addition, many teachers (16%) felt that a lack of practical application was the most important factor that contributed to unsuccessful INSET. Taking into consideration that both studies are conducted in different contexts

(one in Taiwan and the other in the UK), the differences in the findings from both studies could be related to Guskey's (1994) idea that effectiveness of CPD is context specific. In my context, several factors and challenges have been raised by a number of Omani researchers about effectiveness of the CPD opportunities offered by the Ministry of Education (hereafter MOE) for in-service TESOL teachers. The top-down approach to CPD applied in Oman and a lack of teachers' active involvement in this approach could be one of these factors (AL-Lamki, 2009). Another factor might be teachers' understanding and application of the CPD initiatives (AL-Hakmani, 2011). Other factors affecting the effectiveness of these programmes can be TESOL teachers' overload of work, lack of time and lack of courage (AL-Balushi, 2012; AL-Farsi, 2006). In addition, the role of teachers previously held beliefs about teaching and learning affecting them on how beneficial they find the offered CPD activities was found to be a factor (AL-Balushi 2009; AL-Lamki, 2009). As well as that, studies have shown that English teachers' training needs should be fulfilled through INSET (AL-Lamki, 2002). Accordingly, the current study investigates the factors facilitating and/or inhibiting in-service TESOL teachers' benefit from the offered CPD opportunities, and suggest ways for improving the Omani CPD system so it can contribute positively to English teachers' learning and growth.

METHODOLOGY

This study followed mixed methods in collecting data. It started with a questionnaire phase that investigated teachers' views and experiences of continuing their professional development. To dig deeply in their responses from the questionnaire, some participants were then interviewed via individual semi-structured interviews and a focus group interview with three Senior English teachers. Moreover, the interview participants were observed while they joined some CPD days represented by INSET days carried out by TESOL teacher trainers working for the Ministry of Education in Oman. For the questionnaire phase, a stratified sample of 379 participants was selected. The questionnaire was administered online and sent as a link to English teachers and Senior English teachers in schools in Oman. A total of 331 questionnaire responses were received from participants representing an 84% response rate (27.3% of males and 70.5% of females). Questionnaires were received and coded using numbers in order to protect respondents' anonymity as an ethical safeguard. As part of the questionnaire, participants were asked to provide their name and telephone number if they were willing to take part in the follow-up semi-structured and focus group interviews.

The Questionnaire

The design of the questionnaire followed mostly a mixed format of five-item-Likert-rating scale, multiple choices and open-ended questions. The questionnaire starts with an introductory section including information for participants about the study and instructions for completing the questionnaire. The questionnaire sought to collect the following:

- Participants' background data including (gender, job title (Teacher/SET), age category, teaching experience, educational phase teaching in, and qualifications). And
- Attitudinal data asking respondents about effectiveness of CPD they participated in and the impact of CPD on their motivation to teach and on their practice. Respondents were also asked about the factors affecting their access to CPD events and activities.
- A number of open-ended questions asking participants to specify any factors that contribute to successful/unsuccessful professional development (see the questionnaire in appendix 1).

Interviews

After analyzing the questionnaire data, both individual semi-structured interviews and a focus group interview were conducted to collect more qualitative data. The aim behind doing both semi-structured and focus-group interviews was to follow up individual participants' ideas, and dig deeply into them by investigating feelings and motives (Punch, 2014; Kvale, 2009). The selection of participants for the interviews was based on their desire to take part in this phase of this study when they were asked in the questionnaire about that. 18 participants agreed to take part in the interviews (15 English teachers and 3 SETs). Therefore, 15 individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers to follow up the online questionnaire data and dig deeply in responses to the questionnaire. This was followed by 1 focus group interview with 3 SETs that sought to obtain follow up information on individual teachers' comments in the semi-structured interviews. An interview schedule was designed with introductory comments followed by a number of questions, follow-up prompts and probes. All questions, prompts and probes sought English teachers' and SETs beliefs regarding effectiveness of CPD.

Observations

The observations I carried out focused on the aims of the training sessions and the input in relation to the session aims. It focuses on what knowledge and skills participants are expected to gain from the training session. Before conducting the observations, the teacher trainer and the course participants were informed about the training room observations after requesting their consent. The programme was a 5 day INSET course targeting all SETs in that governorate; each day consisted of 4 and half hours training and half an hour break. Sessions were observed and notes taken using the observation schedule specified for that for each observed training day. In total, I observed 22 and a half hours; four and half hours per day. The first two days focused on teaching Jolly Phonics, days 3 and 4 focused on teaching shared reading and day 5 focused on how SETs can cascade the training of these sessions to English teachers at schools.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data gathered from the questionnaires (e.g. the 5-item-likert-scale and multiple-choice questions)

were analysed numerically using SPSS (the statistical package for the social sciences). Each statement was given a number that matches the statement number in the online questionnaire. For instance, the first statement in the questionnaire was coded as Q1, the second as Q2 and so on. Within each 5-item-likert-scale statement, each of the five choices/answers to the statements was given a score of 1-5 where 1 corresponds to "strongly agree" and 5 to "strongly disagree". In the multiple-choice questions, each of the answers to the statement was given a number according to the number of answer statements provided. For instance, if there are 8 answers to a specific question, the first answer was coded as 1 and the last as 8. Analysis of the data was conducted using descriptive statistics (mode, frequency and percentage) which were calculated and presented in tables and bar charts to help develop an understanding of the patterns of the data. Qualitative data analysis involves preparing and organizing the data for analysis, exploring the data then reducing it into themes through a coding process, and finally representing the data in figures, tables or a discussion (Jamieson, 2016; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). These were the steps, which I followed in analysing the qualitative data from both semi-structured, focus group interviews and observations in this research.

Findings

Analysis of data identified two main themes: factors affecting CPD and the impact of CPD. Both themes seem to be crucial in the success of CPD as literature on CPD has highlighted (e.g. Hustler et al., 2003; Lee, 2002). Moreover, effective CPD is linked to the positive impact it has on teachers, students and schools (Vangrieken et al., 2017; Garet et al., 2001). The analysis of the data related to these two themes fed into the emergence of a number of sub-categories as illustrated in the Figure below.

The results of analysis revealed a number of factors that affect CPD; some of these factors are related to CPD access and teachers' participation in it while others are related to the effectiveness of CPD activities themselves.

Facilitating/inhibiting factors to CPD access

The factors that affect English teachers access to CPD in Oman were explored in the interviews and the questionnaire respectively. The interview data points out some factors that can facilitate teachers' access to CPD such as CPD timing and location. The data shows that it is better to have a variety of places including schools for CPD administration instead of always doing it in the training centres or in places that are not easily accessible for teachers. In my view, this might possibly inhibit teachers from participation in CPD events. The data shows that timing is also an important issue that positively facilitate access to CPD as Amal maintains in the following extract:

"I hope that (some) professional development events were done for teachers when we started the school year last week, it shouldn't be done when we are teaching and have lots of duties to do."

This probably suggests that some specific CPD events such as the local conferences at the educational governorates or the international ELT conference run by Sultan Qaboos University needs to be done at times that suit the majority of TESOL teachers in Oman, so many teachers can join these events. While this finding about timing as a facilitating factor to teachers' participation in CPD is in line with other studies (e.g. Wai Yan, 2011; Hustler et al., 2003), the other result on the need for the location of CPD to be varied seems more specific to the current study. Clearly, these results have implications for the scheduling and location of CPD activities which should be taken into consideration by the MOE in Oman.

Participants also reported a number of factors that can possibly inhibit teachers' access to CPD such as workload, lack of publicity for some CPD events/activities, and family responsibilities. Workload was indicated as a key inhibitor by almost all respondents. As Salima highlights *"...we are overloaded with lots of work and job duties, so you cannot participate in such events."* Moreover, workload sometimes negatively affects teachers' actual participation in CPD as they cannot continue attending a specific CPD programme. For instance, Ameera explains how she joined the online
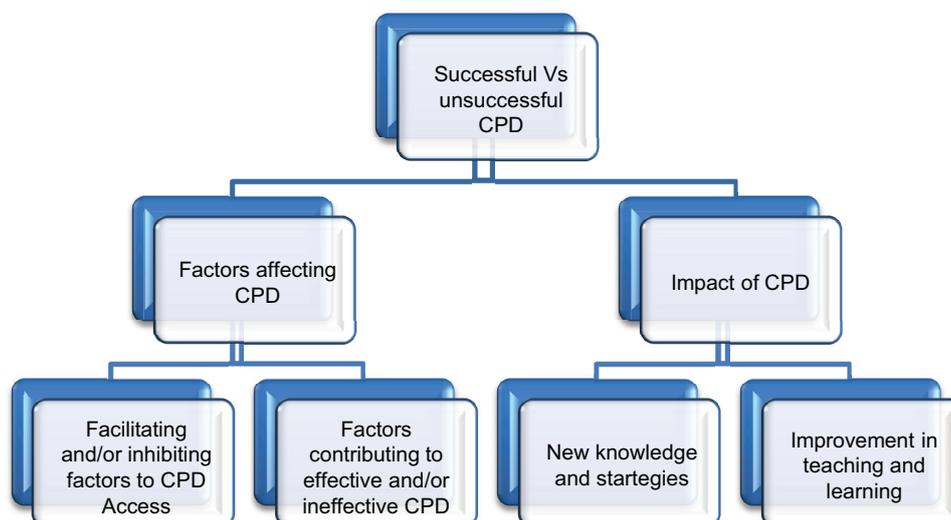
TKT course but was not able to complete it *"I had lots of workload I couldn't continue all sessions of the course...."* Other international studies also reported workload as an inhibiting factor to CPD access (e.g. Wai Yan, 2011 in Hong Kong; Hustler et al., 2003 in the UK).

Similarly, the questionnaire data brings to mind a number of factors that can facilitate or inhibit CPD access. In the questionnaire teachers were asked to rate a number of items which might affect their access to CPD. The scales were rated 1–5 with the extremes of the scale meaning 1 = most facilitating, 5 = most inhibiting.

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
-work load	327	3.05	1.472
-Location of professional development activity	327	2.61	1.164
-Timing of professional development activity	327	2.72	1.165
-Suitability of activity e.g. relevant content	327	2.42	1.137
-Personal circumstances	327	2.61	1.226
-Other factors- Yes	68	1.00	.000
Valid N (listwise)	68		

It can be seen from the above table that workload was the most likely to inhibit access to CPD whilst suitability of the activity and relevant content were the most likely to facilitate access. Similarly, examples of inhibitors specified in the 'other' category by a number of respondents are "administrative work at school", "No rewards" and "low quality of CPD". Standard deviations are quite large indicating a wide range of responses. This means that respondents seem to have different beliefs about facilitating and inhibiting factors to CPD access, but the majority of them seem to agree on workload as the most important inhibitor to CPD access.

Age and teaching experience showed differences in participants' beliefs about facilitating/inhibiting factors to CPD access. For instance, the majority of the older participants aged 42+ and more experienced ones 21 years of experience+ focussed on suitability of CPD tasks/activities and its' relevance as a key facilitator to their access to CPD. However,

very few of the younger teachers aged 22-26 and the least experienced ones with 1-5 years of experience agreed on that (see Figure below). This is an interesting result, and is worthy of deeper investigation in future studies.

All in all, most respondents (167 in total) felt that timing and CPD to be done at different locations including schools were the most likely to facilitate their access to CPD whilst; unsurprisingly, heavy workload was the most likely to be the cause of their non-participation in CPD activities. However, individual comments from the open-ended question in the questionnaire indicated that the offered CPD do not meet teachers' actual needs because the topics are suggested by the officials at the Ministry of Education and teachers have no say on choosing the topics of the INSET courses or any other form of CPD. This has resulted in some teachers being reluctant to leave their classrooms and join CPD activities/events because they simply felt that their presence in the classroom was more important than joining an event that do not meet their needs.

Factors contributing to effective/ineffective CPD

The qualitative data from the open-ended questions in the questionnaire indicates a number of factors that can positively contribute to the success of CPD. Suitability and relevance of CPD activity in terms of the topics presented in it and the ideas discussed was reported as an important factor to effective CPD. I think this means that teachers' value the CPD activity which involves some practical ideas that could be applied in their classrooms or help them find solutions to the challenges they are facing in the job. Therefore, suitability of CPD is a factor facilitating both CPD access and its success because if the activity is suitable in terms of its content and is relevant to teachers' work, then it encourages them to join and benefit from it. This finding is in line with other studies (e.g. Hustler et al., 2003; Lee, 2002).

What is more, some respondents think that CPD should be done by teacher educators that have good subject knowledge, and who are able to support them when needed. For
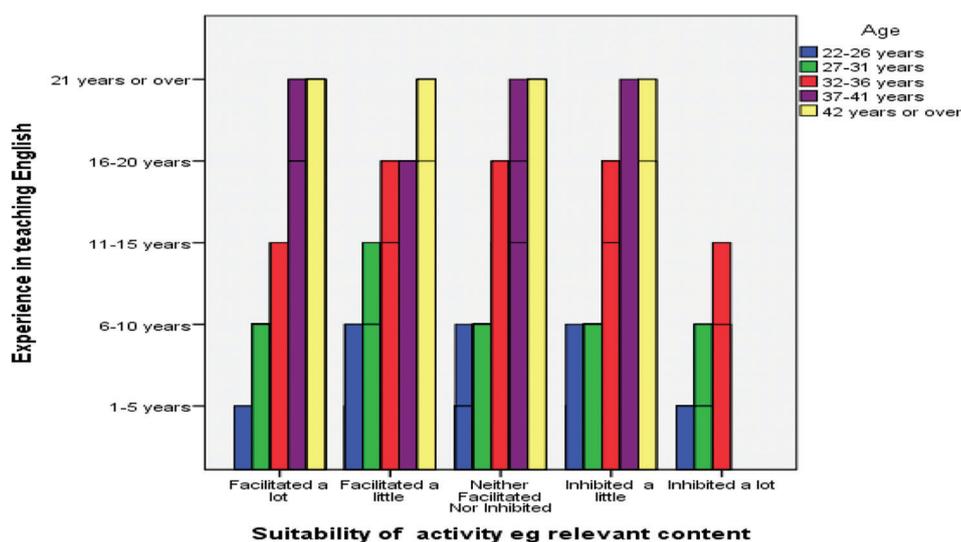
instance, Farida felt that the TKT course she joined was effective because *"...in the TKT course we have had an online supervisor who was present online every week and was always helping and supporting us..."* This result again matches Hustler et al., (2003) research findings, which disclose that the CPD provider is an important contributor to effective CPD.

Duration of CPD was also mentioned by many respondents as a significant factor to CPD success. It was found that longer CPD activities are more useful and beneficial for participants than shorter ones. From her own experience, Laila (a SET) noted: *"I also did the C1(primary teaching) course and it was very beneficial but the SET course was not that much beneficial because it was very short."* My personal experience of working as a teacher trainer does confirm that. This is because in longer courses participants have more chances to discuss issues, try out some ideas in their classes and reflect on them the next session in the course. In this way, the activity is directly connected to classroom practice and participants act as reflective practitioners. Thus, participants might notice that such CPD activities are more beneficial. Regarding factors contributing to unsuccessful CPD, unsurprisingly, the data shows that a number of these factors are similar to the factors contributing to CPD success but in a contradictory way. For example, irrelevance of CPD activity, CPD done by unqualified people and shorter CPD events were things highlighted that can hinder the success of CPD. Some other factors were also referred to as inhibitors to effective CPD such as the difficulty of applying some ideas suggested in CPD activities due to class size and workload.

Accordingly, it is clear from the data that similar issues were highlighted as leading to the success or the failure of CPD. While some of these factors are similar to those found in the literature (e.g. Wai Yan, 2011; Hustler et al., 2003; Lee, 2002) others are very specific to this study such as suitability of CPD in relation to age and teaching experience. Such differences could be related to Guskey's (1994) idea that effectiveness of CPD is context specific. The effectiveness of CPD and its success were not only considered from the point of view of influential factors but also with respect to the impact this was seen to have on improving schools, increasing teacher quality and improving the quality of student learning.

The impact of CPD

Question 34 in the survey sought to investigate the impact of the CPD activities offered by the MOE on teachers' professional practice, teaching and learning. The online questionnaire respondents were asked to select from ten different INSET courses and other CPD activities, and were invited to identify any other ones unlisted in the survey. The Table below shows that 45.7% of participants felt that the C2 (Cycle 2) course for preparatory and lower secondary teachers had the most impact on their professional practice. The research for professional development course was noted to have the least impact (18.2%) on teachers' professional practice.

	Responses		% of Cases
	N	%	
- C1 Course	118	13.2%	39.1%
- C2 Course	138	15.4%	45.7%
- Post Basic Course	89	9.9%	29.5%
- Curriculum support workshops	107	11.9%	35.4%
- Senior English Teachers Course	87	9.7%	28.8%
- Research for Professional Development Course	55	6.1%	18.2%
- Regional ELT conferences	96	10.7%	31.8%
- NET Course New English Teachers course	62	6.9%	20.5%
- Language course	74	8.3%	24.5%
- TKT online course	70	7.8%	23.2%
Total		100.0%	

The above notes show that the INSET workshops/ courses that focussed on methodology: (e.g. C2, a methodology course for lower secondary teachers, C1, a methodology course for primary teachers and curriculum support workshops) are seen by teachers as having more impact on their professional practice compared to other activities. I think the research course has the least impact because teachers need more support in doing it and they need lots of follow up after the course and these elements are missing in the current research course offered by the MOE. This finding is in line with Uysal's (2012) study, which investigated the impact of an INSET course for primary-school language teachers in Turkey. This study found that the main problem was the gap between the course and teachers' practices and suggested that follow-up monitoring and support should also be incorporated in future courses to bridge the course and the real context (Waters, 2006; Waters &Vilchez, 2000).

Furthermore, Question 35 in the survey asked participants about the ways in which the activities/programmes have an impact on their beliefs about their professional practice. The data revealed some interesting differences between teachers according to the age of teachers and their amount of teaching experience. With regard to the extent to which CPD activities were seen to transform their beliefs, interestingly 61.9% of the older teachers aged 42+ commented that CPD resulted in changing their beliefs towards teaching while only 4.8% of the younger teachers aged 22-26 stated that. Similar results were observed according to their views about how far the CPD changed their classroom practice with more experienced teachers reported more changes in their beliefs towards teaching compared to less experienced teachers. In my viewpoint, this might be explained by the fact that changes in teachers' beliefs are not easy to happen and take a lot of time to be observed. In fact, the literature has documented that change is highly complex and that changes in teachers' beliefs are dependent on a multitude of factors (Calderhead & Shorrock, 1997 in Phipps, 2009).

In addition, Question 36 in the survey asked participants to rate the impact of CPD on their motivation to teach over the last 5 years. The rating scale ranged from 1 (a very positive impact) to 5 (a very negative impact). The results reported in the figure below show that many participants think that CPD impacts positively upon their motivation to teach with 49.8% reporting a positive impact and 20.2% reporting a very positive impact. The minority of participants (22.6%) report no impact and only 2.8% report a very negative impact.
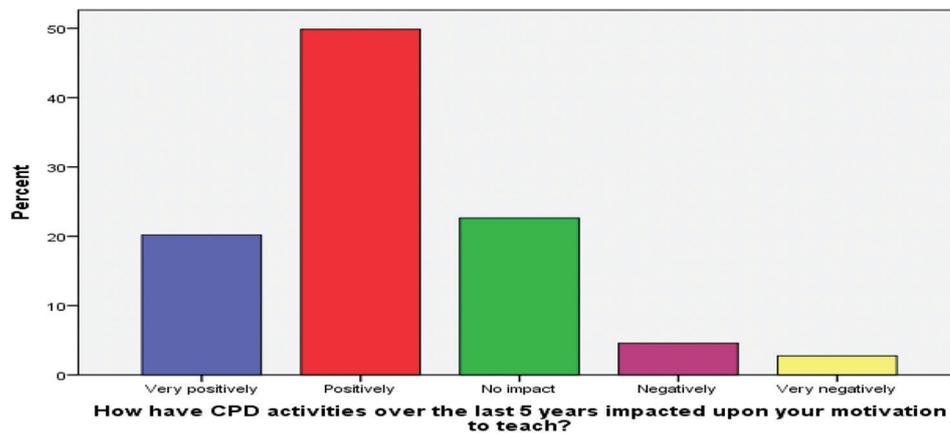
To sum up, taken together the findings reveal that some of the currently offered formal structured programmes/activities, especially the Cycle 2 methodology course, were perceived by participants to have some impact on their classroom practice. Yet, little change is reported in novice teachers' beliefs about teaching and on their motivation to teach though the majority of the formal structured activities run by the MOE are targeting those novice/less-experienced teachers. To delve more into the ideas indicated in the online questionnaire, participants were asked in the interviews about the specific benefits of the CPD activities they experienced and the data shows the following.

New knowledge and strategies

The qualitative data shows that respondents have gained some knowledge and strategies from participating in some formal structured activities. For example, some of the participants felt that the methodology courses they joined were beneficial as they added new ideas to them. Salima, for example, provides a specific example of how the C1 course for primary teachers helped her to learn new strategies:

"...the cycle 1 course showed us the teaching steps regarding each skill ... For example, how to teach vocabulary to young learners, how can I help a young learner at grade 1 to acquire the new vocabulary items that I teach, I have learnt many ways for example how to explain the word using other ways, saying synonyms for it, how to play games with children to support the learning of new vocabulary items."

Ultimately, I think that the knowledge and strategies participants gained from joining some INSET and other CPD activities might be related to Shulman and his colleagues' domains of knowledge, and the content and structure of the professional knowledge base of teaching (see e.g. Grossman, Wilson & Shulman, 1989; Shulman, 1986). This means that some of the formal structured activities offered by the MOE may achieve their aims since a central purpose of CPD is to bring participating teachers into contact with new ideas and knowledge (Eraut, 1994).

Improvement in teaching and earning

It is well documented in the literature that the importance of knowledge is that it is particularly relevant to understanding and changing classroom practices (Borko & Putnam, 1995). Some of the respondents elucidated that they used some of the ideas learnt from joining INSET programmes and other CPD events in their classes. For example the findings show that when the new projects were introduced at schools (e.g. Jolly Phonics), many teachers did not know how to teach these projects properly before joining these initiatives. Shamsa, for instance, complained that she felt lost before joining the workshop and having a group meeting with her Senior English Teacher(SET):

"At the beginning I was really lost and did not know how to teach the syllabus that have the Jolly Phonics parts, but when I joined this workshop and the group meeting with my SET it helped me a lot...."

Respectively, the data from the focus group interview also showed that the cascade carried out by SETs helped the new teachers cope with the syllabus such as Jolly Phonics innovation. For example, Badriya noticed this when she did a peer observation to one of her new staff after the cascade sessions:

"I also visited teacher Amna if you remember her, and because she didn't teach grade 1 before I was thinking how she will do the lesson, but her Jolly Phonics lesson was great and the students were actively engaged in the lesson and I felt she followed the steps that we discussed in the cascade session smoothly and intelligently."

In the long run, the findings indicate that some of the formal structured activities EFL teachers joined in showed them some ideas and helped them with their teaching. This result supports the literature in that teacher CPD is perceived as an important way to improve schools by increasing teacher quality, and thus enhancing students' learning (Vangrieken et al., 2017; Craft, 2000; Hargreaves, 2000; Day, 1999).

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The findings from this study revealed that a number of factors affect English teachers' CPD in Oman; some of these factors facilitate teachers access to CPD and its' success while others inhibit that. The data indicates that CPD timing and location can facilitate teachers' access to CPD while workload and family responsibilities are key inhibitors to CPD access. The findings further revealed that suitability and relevance

of CPD activity in terms of the topics presented in it and the ideas discussed was reported as an important factor to effective CPD whereas CPD done by unqualified teacher educators can hinder the success of CPD. The data further shows that with regard to the impact of CPD on teachers, some formal structured provision (i.e. INSET programmes and other CPD activities run by the MOE) seemed to have some impact on respondents, this impact was in some aspects only and was not mentioned by the majority of participants who undertook the questionnaire or interviews. So in comparison to the number of formal structured and other CPD activities offered each year for TESOL teachers by the MOE, I would argue here that such impact seem to be limited because the current CPD opportunities do not fully meet teachers' needs. This is because, respondents experienced different learning opportunities through participating in formal structured as well as informal CPD activities. All of these seem to be organised and/or funded by the MOE in Oman for English teachers. However, the findings indicated that out of all these initiatives, structured formal in-service training (INSET) courses seem to be the most dominant in the CPD system in Oman.

Rich et al., (2014) reported that structured formal INSET opportunities in Oman are seen as an important support mechanism to encourage EFL teachers to remain professionally invigorated and to appreciate the importance of ongoing professional development throughout their careers. To this end, early-career teachers are offered a number of workshops and courses to help them become familiar with the philosophy underpinning the curriculum and the effective ways of implementing it, and to help them maintain their English proficiency and develop their understanding of the English language system.

However, while such formal structured activities are needed for teachers especially the novice ones, they do not always respond to all teachers' needs. The research literature highlights the complexity of linking such programmes and activities to tangible outcomes such as changes in the quality of teacher practices and of student learning (Chalmers & Gardiner, 2015; Devlin, 2008). The findings from the current study also showed that although teachers' participated in a number of INSET courses and workshops, many of these failed to meet their needs. It is obvious from the results that the MOE is not following a systematic way in collecting, analysing and assessing EFL teachers' needs in Oman in order to meet these needs. Thus, these activities are not always seen by teachers as effective. This result lends support to a number of previous studies both in Oman and internationally.

For instance, some Omani researchers questioned the effectiveness of INSET courses in contributing to changes in EFL teachers' beliefs and/or their classroom practices (e.g. AL-Balushi, 2009; Al-Lamki, 2009). Correspondingly, in a study conducted in China, Yan and He (2015) investigated a cohort of 120 senior-school EFL teachers' perspectives about their short INSET course experience. The study found that the level of endorsement for the course among participants was rather low. The underlying reason for the low satisfaction level was found to be the course features resulting from the one-shot and one-size-fits-all mentality of course providers. This study confirms the drawback of limited impact caused by the nature of short INSET courses and reveals that such courses could hardly fulfil diverse needs of participants.

Theoretically speaking, this sort of approach to doing INSET contradicts Maslow's theory of hierarchical needs which moves from lower order needs (such as psychological needs, safety needs, belonging and love needs) through to esteem needs, need to know and understand, aesthetic needs and higher order needs (self-actualization and transcendence needs) (Maslow, 1970). Maslow argues that needs at the lower end of the hierarchy must be at least partially met before a person will try to satisfy higher-level needs. Although teachers must achieve the level of *need to know and understand*, ultimately the CPD goal is to aid them in self-actualizing or becoming 'all that one can be'. Yet, teachers have different needs and goals behind CPD which means that the one-size-fits-all approach to CPD will not meet the needs of all teachers. The self-actualisation need is to make actual what are potential for teachers regarding their personal growth and development by following their own passions and interests that help them meet their own needs.

The dominance of INSET in the Omani context reflects the centralised educational system and the top-down CPD system. In other words, policies are usually formed by outside experts and people at the upper level in the hierarchy of the MOE. In such systems, CPD takes place through increasing governmental interventions for the purpose of accountability and performativity. This could be related to the pressure of globalization which have universally shaped government policies for education provision generally and CPD in particular. The power of globalization is clearly defined by the Commission on Global Governance (1995) as "the shortening of distance, the multiplying of links, the deepening of interdependence: all these factors and their interplay, have been transforming the world into a neighbourhood" (in Day & Sachs, 2004:4). This has resulted in educational systems in many countries working towards delivering programmes for both students and teachers that are internationally comparable in terms of their efficiency, effectiveness and economic viability (Gleeson et al., 2017; Day & Sachs, 2004).

As regards teachers' professionalism, such governmental interventions in CPD content and form usually result in the development of an alternative form of teacher professionalism; namely 'managerial professionalism' (Day & Sachs, 2004:5-6). This is particularly the case with the consequences of reform initiatives related to organisational change, imperatives for teachers in schools to be more accountable and for systems to be more efficient and economically viable in their activities. This is not only specific to the Omani centralised educational context, as the CPD provision in other contexts like Europe and South America suggest that the latest policies within the education sector promoting devolution and decentralisation have provided sympathetic conditions for a discourse of managerialism to emerge and flourish (Sugrue, 2004; Day & Sachs, 2004). Such 'managerial

professionalism' reflects the corporate management model which emphasize that "The criteria of the successful professional…is of one who works efficiently and effectively in meeting the standardised criteria set for accomplishment of both students and teachers, as well as contributing to the school's formal accountability processes" (Brennan, 1996 in Day & Sachs, 2004:6). Yet, educational systems should seek for more than such management models.

Importantly, despite the significant investment in such structured formal training by governments, there is an uneven picture of how effective or efficient in economic terms many of these initiatives have been. Buchner and Hay (1999) maintain that national in-service training courses are often forced and not planned. They are not presented according to the needs of teachers, resulting in the teachers experiencing the training as demand, instead of needs-driven. According to Mashile and Vakalisa (1999), different school contexts were not taken into consideration and training was provided as if all schools are similar and all would benefit from the same 'blanket-fit-all' type of in-service training (in Makgato, 2014). These issues are also highlighted by Borko (2004) who emphasized that each year governments spend millions, if not billions, of dollars on in-service training and other forms of professional development that are fragmented, intellectually superficial, and do not take into account how teachers learn. The situation in Oman is no exception in this regard as policy makers in such top-down systems tend to underestimate the contextual realities in their planning of these formal structured training.

Overall, for dynamic teacher development, teacher education and training in the 21st century globalised world, there is a need to focus on learning from previous systemic initiatives. This may reveal future possibilities in terms of the purpose, function, design and delivery of such initiatives. In this respect, Day and Sachs, (2004) suggested that three major issues emerge. First, is how to develop a teaching force in which CPD is the core value for all teachers whereby governments' needs are achieved through such formal training and any other CPD initiative without ignoring the individual needs of teachers. Second is sustainability of CPD initiatives, entailing the development of networks and partnerships which requires significant levels of trust and the development of new types of relationships among teachers and between those who support teachers and teachers. Finally, the role of teachers themselves in the provision of CPD is significant; the way teachers are currently seen as grateful recipients of CPD does not provide the conditions for intelligent and responsive teaching profession. Writing about English language teaching (ELT) in particular, Kumaravadivelu (2012) has argued that the linguistic and cultural sensitivities triggered by cultural globalisation have prompted the ELT community to try to make a meaningful shift in policies, programmes, methods and materials governing English language teaching and the PD of teachers in order to address these. As he points out that there is also a growing realization that in order to make a meaningful shift, we need to first go beyond the transmission models of teacher support. That is to identify post-transition forms of CPD, such as more collaborative and participatory models of professional development.

CONCLUSION

This study critically examined the effectiveness of CPD activities run by the Ministry of Education-Oman for TESOL teachers and the impact of these activities in improving schools, increasing teacher quality and improving the quality of student learning. The findings revealed that a number of factors affect English teachers' CPD in Oman; some of these factors facilitate teachers access to CPD and its' success while others inhibit that. The study generally indicates that the centralized top-down nature of the current CPD system seems to negatively affect the success of CPD in the in-service TESOL context in Oman. The study recommends that the role of teachers themselves in the provision of CPD is significant; the way teachers are currently marginalized and seen as grateful recipients of CPD do not provide the conditions for intelligent and responsive teaching profession.

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APPENDIX 1

Part D: Factors Affecting Continuing Professional Development

34. Which of the following programmes/activities organized by the Ministry of Education you participated in and noticed it did have an impact on your professional practice (Tick all that apply)
*

- ☐ C1 Course
- ☐ C2 Course
- ☐ Post Basic Course
- ☐ Curriculum support workshops
- ☐ Senior English Teachers' Course
- ☐ Research for Professional Development Course
- ☐ Regional ELT conferences
- ☐ NET Course (New English Teachers' course)
- ☐ Language course (intermediate, upper intermediate...etc)
- ☐ TKT online course
- ☐ Others (Please specify) [_____]

35. In what ways, did the professional development activities you experienced have had an impact on your professional practice? (Tick all that apply) *

- ☐ Inspired me as a teacher
- ☐ Changes in my attitudes/views about teaching
- ☐ Changes in my teaching practice
- ☐ Improved my subject knowledge
- ☐ Self-confidence
- ☐ Increased collaboration with my colleagues
- ☐ Improved the standard of my pupils' learning/outcomes
- ☐ Improved my school performance generally
- ☐ Others (Please specify) [_____]

36. How have the continuing professional development activities over the last 5 years impacted upon your motivation to teach? *

- ○ Very positively
- ○ Positively
- ○ No impact
- ○ Negatively
- ○ Very negatively

*Please tick one box to indicate to what extent have the following factors affected your access to continuing professional development.

	Facilitated a lot	Facilitated a little	Neither Facilitated Nor Inhibited	Inhibited a little	Inhibited a lot
37. work load *	○	○	○	○	○
38. Location of CPD activity *	○	○	○	○	○
39. Timing of CPD activity *	○	○	○	○	○
40. Suitability of activity (e.g relevant content) *	○	○	○	○	○
41. Personal circumstances *	○	○	○	○	○

42. Are there any other factors which affected your access to continuing professional development? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ (Please specify) [_____]

43. In your experience, what factors contribute to successful continuing professional development? *

[   ]

44. In your experience, what factors result in unsuccessful continuing professional development? *

[   ]