

Significance of Professional Development: Implications for Cambodian Teachers

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Professional development (PD) is a vital element in any practices of work as it allows practitioners to get specialized training, formal education, and advanced professional learning (Winton & Snyder, 2015). PD aims to help practitioners improve their professional knowledge, competence, skill, and effectiveness. Many professions have been affected by dynamism experiences in many sectors of the world (Lyons, Schweitzer, & Ng, 2015). Therefore, employees are expected to undergo professional development to help them keep up with the new and emerging global trends. Teaching profession is among the heavily affected occupations; hence, there is a growing need for teachers to keep up with the needs of learners and professional expectations (Gardner, Glassmeyer, & Worthy, 2019). Integration of technology into professional teaching has further increased the need for teachers to undergo more specialized training. This practice seeks to equip them with the necessary skills to handle learners with various expectations (Hawera & Taylor, 2011). Therefore, this commentary paper will analyze the views of teachers regarding the significance of PD in their teaching and its implications for teachers in Cambodia.

Requirements for Development and Implementation of Effective PD

There are some requirements for an effective development and implementation of PD among Cambodian teachers. Firstly, it requires that the PD takes a particular initiative that fits the needs of teacher and student population. For Cambodian

teachers, the focus of PD should be the incorporation of digital technology into the classroom practices. The focus should be carried out for at least five years to assess the effectiveness and the need for change. Another requirement for effective PD is to ensure that it supports the curriculum guidelines. Teachers' PD is conducted to benefit the teachers and learners under teachers' guidance. Therefore, a collaborative PD creates favorable interaction between learners and teachers. Finally, an effective PD should offer feedbacks and reflection. Since digital technology is newly incorporated into the Cambodian education system, the PD should be able to give consistent and reliable feedbacks, and should also allow teachers to undertake reflection on what they teach in the lessons and how to apply them.

A study by Konopko et al. revealed that nearly all teachers agreed that modern society demands high-quality teaching and training from them (2019). Teachers are expected to have top-notch knowledge and skills in teaching and assessment practices. Possessing those will help teachers meet the demands and standards of modern quality education. Traditional teaching practices involved passing knowledge from the books to the learners, with teachers being the facilitator. However, changing tides in practice has introduced new requirements for teachers, including problem-solving, critical thinking, innovation and creativity, teamwork, and collaborative and cooperative work (Soe, 2018). Teachers who underwent the old-fashioned training

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confirmed that they experienced hardships keeping up with these new needs (Turan & Göktaş, 2018). They might find it overwhelming trying to balance their knowledge with the needs of their learners. Therefore, they believed that PD opens doors for them to acquire the skills needed for an effective and efficient teaching (Karimi & Zade, 2019).

Significance of PD in the Context of Cambodia

Modern Cambodian education sector has been on the rise in recent years. Higher education institutions (HEIs) may be used to indicate the growth in this sector where such institutions increased from 51 in 2005 to 130 in 2021 (MoEYS, 2022). However, this increase created a huge gap in the number of available teachers and learners seeking higher education (Heng, 2020). The rapid growth in HEIs also led to a low-quality level of education in Cambodia that caused skill mismatch among graduates (Chet, 2009). This is the point where the PD of teachers is greatly needed. The challenges in Cambodian education system were linked with access, equity, relevance, financing and governance, and management. Teachers in these institutions claimed that they had been inadequately prepared to handle the great influx (Heng, 2020). It would become practically impossible to produce quality graduates who can pose adequate competition to those from other overseas institutions, with the absence of PD.

Stakeholder collaboration was identified to be the best key to promoting academic research in Cambodia (Heng, 2020). The study by Corrado et al. (2019) revealed that teachers would identify some challenges faced in classrooms and use collaborative means to find solutions. The challenges include limited utilization of information and communication technology (ICT) in classrooms, pervasive graduate skill mismatch, limited stakeholder involvement, brain drain, low academic salary, and inequality in accessing government funding for research (Corrado, Flinn, & Tungjan, 2019), some of which align with the

current issues of Cambodian higher education. Teachers are expected to be at the forefront in solving the challenges found in the education sector (Heng, 2020). According to them, these challenges require policy-based solutions from the administrative units. However, if the teachers are offered proper PD, they can offer solutions for some challenges, such as integrating ICT and technology used in the classrooms. Teachers play a vital role in ensuring classroom operation, which determines the outcomes of the graduates.

PD is critical in intensifying the teachers' qualities, personal characteristics, and responsibilities (Em, Nun, & Phann, 2021). Teachers are key players in education alongside learners, school heads, and administration staff. The importance of teachers cannot be ignored, and hence, the need for continued learning to ensure that they can fulfill the needs of learners. The twenty-first century teachers must undergo PD to equip them with value-added qualities and responsibilities. The learning process becomes a basic responsibility that must be spiced up by shaping the habits and qualities of learners. Teachers believed that PD keeps them updated with the new educational concepts and knowledge (Alvarez et al., 2020). Attending the PD seminars increases a sense of commitment to teachers. It makes them feel devoted and passionate about their teaching practices. Teachers also said that PD equips them with knowledge of technology and pedagogy (Em, et al., 2021), which is vital in producing valuable materials used in the classrooms.

Role of Teachers in University Ranking

Teachers in HEIs play a role in determining their institutions' national and global ranking and status (Schleicher, 2018). They shape the quality of learners produced by their universities. Therefore, in the quest to become world-class universities, Cambodian universities have to ensure that PD for teachers is available on the table. A university could admit highly qualified learners and have

world-class equipment yet fail to achieve the world-class status (Ros & Sol, 2021). Teachers in such institutions must work collaboratively with learners and available equipment to acquire a better ranking. The efforts taken to improve teaching quality standards should mainly be focused on the PD of the teachers. This allows them to acquire necessary skills and qualities to propel HEIs to global ranks. This PD, in addition, must acquire the most modern science and technology skills.

Teachers of foreign languages also shared their opinions regarding PD to promote language learning. Seom (2021) stated that PD greatly impacted teachers' teaching quality and students' learning outcomes. PD can occur within the learning environment or in specialized occasions such as planned seminars. PD related to language learning involves activities such as general English courses, regular in-service workshops, teaching methodology courses, and informal collaboration in teaching and learning (Pharis et al., 2019). Since English is rapidly evolving, teachers have to ensure that they are updated with the new changes. Teachers claimed that they do not necessarily need to undergo training every few months to update them on the new changes (Alt, 2018). However, by training them on ICT and technology, they are able to carry on their own PD as they continue with teaching. These teachers claim that some schools have suffered from the lack of qualified English teachers, leading to poor teaching quality (Labba et al., 2019). Therefore, it would be difficult to take the already few English teachers for PD training seminars. Rather, they preferred taking in-house professional development activities (Pharis et al., 2019). This idea should work well in the HEIs in Cambodia within their limited resources.

It is very important to note that the training given in teachers' PD should end after the sessions, but its impacts should be felt in the classrooms. The most fundamental indicator of its effectiveness is helping the learners develop skills to facilitate discussion

on sensitive topics. Cambodian teachers must show their commitment to PD by helping learners with the content learned from the sessions. This will enhance the preparation of learners to enact pedagogy for solidarity. Effective teachers' PD should focus on helping Cambodian learners to acquire digital skills for supporting this development in the classes as one of the main purposes is to ensure that anyone benefitting from teachers has acquired all or some of the lessons learned during the training sessions.

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In conclusion, this commentary paper analyzed the views of teachers regarding the implementation of PD. Teachers agreed that Cambodia's modern educational environment demands high-quality teaching (Konopko et al., 2019). PD has been the only way of keeping up with the dynamic education sector. With the help of PD, teachers would be able to acquire skills for effective and efficient teaching. They also claimed that professional development has been a factor in the rapid increase in HEIs in Cambodia (Heng, 2020). To eliminate the skill mismatch among graduates, teachers have to be properly trained with new academic requirements to match the changing needs of learners. Finally, PD is vital in increasing the qualities, personal characteristics and responsibilities of teachers.


Teachers strongly agreed that PD keeps them updated with the new educational concepts and knowledge.


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


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