

Understanding CPD Providers' Perceptions and Practices About Continuing Professional Development (CPD) For Physical Education (PE) Teachers in Oman

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Abstract

This paper explores the perceptions and practices of CPD providers for Physical Education (PE) teachers in Oman. Based on qualitative research in-depth semi-structured interviews with total of ten CPD providers who conducted to examine their perceptions and practices regarding existing CPD provisions in Oman. The purpose of this paper is to contribute the development of the knowledge base on ways CPD providers conceptualize and practice CPD in various national contexts. In addition, as research on teachers' CPD is increasing, there is no research on PE teachers' CPD. The results of the study showed that CPD providers believed that to improve the quality of provision, professional developers should be supported forward to learn and grow. The paper also address insight on the concerns regarding the repetitive content of opportunities and the limited number of CPD programmes offered to teachers. There was a consensus that CPD providers were also in need of more preparation courses, especially at the beginning of their career, to build their knowledge and skills effectively and deliver CPD programmes for teachers.

Keywords: PE-CPD; professional development; CPD providers; Specialized Centre for the Professional Training of Teachers; CPD programmes.

Introduction

It has been widely recognized that teachers can play a key role in improving wider educational goals, including improving the quality of teaching and learning and raising

academic achievement. These important goals or outcomes, although prominent in many educational initiatives around the world, ultimately rely on teachers changing and improving how they teach, if their current practices do not work. Sometimes, to achieve the desired positive outcomes, this process necessitates deep as opposed to surface change. It could be argued that any kind of change requires a great deal of learning and improvement on the part of the teachers. Hence, teachers need access to high quality continuing professional development (CPD) throughout their careers (Makopoulou, 2018) as it is considered a tool to support professional learning.

There is ongoing debate about the true value of CPD. At the beginning of the century, the positive relationship between CPD participation and improvement in students' achievement levels was emphasized (Villegas-Reimers, 2003, Powell and Bodur, 2019). Most of the publications at the time were however based on rhetoric rather than scientific evidence. More recent publications report mixed results, with some large scale, university led, and evidence based CPD programmes finding no significant CPD impact on student achievement (Hill et al., 2013). This body of work, and the mixed results reported across different studies, reveals some of the challenges CPD researchers encounter in their endeavors to measure CPD impact on students. Even though these results have led some leading researchers to question the validity of the existing consensus about the features that make CPD effective (Hill et al., 2013), the importance and value of CPD participation is still acknowledged. Researchers argue that CPD must be an integral part of teachers' careers (Patton and Parker, 2014) but they highlight that the quality of CPD itself is a very important factor (Powell and Bodur, 2019).

Improving the quality of education is a priority internationally, and teachers are expected to engage in CPD programmes to improve their practices. Research into teachers' CPD – i.e. what works well and what needs to change to maximize teacher and pupil learning outcomes – is, therefore, an important field of inquiry. In the context of Oman, investment in education, including teachers' CPD, has increased substantially since the 1970s. Despite this, emerging research examining CPD structures and possibilities (mainly for teachers of English) has identified several limitations in terms of existing CPD provision in Oman. Although research on teachers' CPD is increasing, there is no research on PE teachers' CPD. Questions thus remain about the nature and effectiveness of CPD provision for PE teachers in Oman.

The meaning and importance of CPD

Reviewing the relevant international literature, it is important to acknowledge that definitions of CPD are vary among them (Ganser, 2000; Evans, 2011; Collin et al., 2012; Armour et al., 2017; Grant, 2017). However, in recent years, many studies indicated broad, inclusive definitions have that encompass many types of professional learning that occurs in a range of contexts (Kennedy, 2007; Makopoulou and Armour, 2011b; DFEE, 2001; DFE, 2010; Desimone, 2009; Gatt, 2016). CPD can range from formal CPD which taking place in organized and structured environments with explicitly identified learning outcomes and qualifications (Malcolm et al., 2003; Makopoulou, 2008) to informal CPD which occurs in daily activities at work or in other contexts (Prestridge, 2019; Colley et al., 2002; Kyndt et al., 2016). CPD should lead to professional learning and support teachers in enhancing their knowledge

and skills. Moreover, it improves the quality of teaching and learning to ultimate raising the standards of student achievement in schools (Ryan, 2019; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Armour and Yelling, 2007).

In terms of the notion of CPD, it is important to note that various notions with similar meanings can be found in the literature. These include in-service education, teachers' learning, staff development, and teacher training (Evans, 2002). It is frequently understood that the case of CPD related to formal course (Fraser et al., 2007) that happens through formal and structured courses and normally outside schools (Rösken-Winter and Szczesny, 2017). Conversely, professional learning, according to Fraser et al. (2007) often 'represents the process that, whether intuitive or deliberate, individual, or social, result in specific changes in the professional knowledge, skills, attitudes, beliefs, or actions of teachers' (p.157).

Another body of literature seeks to capture the effectiveness or impact of CPD by collecting evidence on teachers' perceptions and experiences of CPD (Lunenberg et al., 2017). Researchers draw upon case-study designs (teachers or schools are the cases) or cross-sectional evidence, such as teacher self-report surveys, to aim to understand what teachers think is important, relevant, and effective CPD. Researchers explore not only what teachers think is effective but also identify the limitations of current provision in terms of CPD organization and implementation (Armour and Makopoulou, 2012; Armour and Yelling, 2007; Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Darling-Hammond and Richardson, 2009a).

Therefore, some studies are primarily concerned with the impact of CPD (i.e. which outcomes can be reported in relation to teacher and student learning outcomes) (Borko,

2004). Other studies seek to examine what kinds of experiences, activities and tasks do teachers need to engage to maximize the possibility of impact? (Garet et al., 2001; Wayne et al., 2008). In early 21st century it was reported that some consensus about certain features seems to exist (Borko, 2004; Garet et al., 2001). There is a consensus, for example, that CPD is likely to be effective when it supports teachers in developing a better understanding of the content which they teach. Focusing on the content and how students learn specific content is recognized as an effective feature of CPD programmes (Kennedy, 2016). In terms of the process of learning, CPD is believed to bring better outcomes if it involves teachers as active learners, is grounded in theoretically driven practical experiences, and enables teacher interaction and collaboration (Cordingley et al., 2015; Desimone, 2009). It has also been suggested that it is important for teachers to attend programmes that encourage them to reflect upon their existing perceptions and practices to participate in new, innovative approaches for teaching and learning (Vangrieken et al., 2017; Stoll et al., 2012).

CPD providers' role in effective CPD

Creating a successful, meaningful, and relevant professional - learning experience is a complicated process regards to many factors influence teachers' improvement (Makopoulou and Armour, 2011b; Cordingley et al., 2015). It has been argued that external CPD providers (e.g. tutors or facilitators) are one of the most important factors in stimulating new thinking and offering challenges and support to teachers to improve their practices (Stoll, 2012).

It is widely recognized that CPD providers play a central role in supporting teachers' learning. Therefore, the views

and the experience of CPD providers are important for teachers' learning as they can offer their unique perspectives on how CPD provisions are delivered, what works well, and how the existing system of CPD could be improved. It has been argued that external partners can stimulate new thinking and support to practitioners to improve their practices (Stoll 2012). CPD providers are also recognized as a critical factor in the context of professional learning (Le Fevre and Richardson, 2002). It is expected that CPD providers – whether school staff with CPD responsibilities or external experts – play a central role in supporting teachers to learn (Patton et al., 2012; Makopoulou, 2018).

In some cases, CPD providers are responsible for working individually with a small group of teachers with the aim of helping them change and improve their teaching practice (Le Fevre and Richardson, 2002; Patton and Parker, 2014; Makopoulou, 2018). In other contexts, they have the responsibility of designing and implementing a workshop or course for a wider audience. Among these contexts, being good providers or facilitators is not an easy work. Research suggests that CPD providers face a range of challenges, including practical constraints (time and resources), building the necessary trust with teachers, dealing with other powers involved in shared teacher leadership (Patton and Parker, 2014; Le Fevre and Richardson, 2002) and supporting teachers' individual needs (Makopoulou and Armour, 2011b). Moreover, as previously noted, CPD providers should not just focus on providing knowledge and skills for teachers but should also encourage teachers to construct knowledge and, with the right guidance, be independent learners (Patton et al., 2012). It has been suggested that asking questions and

listening to teachers are key elements of effective CPD providers (Hunuk, 2017).

It is, therefore, important to examine and understand the perceptions and practices of those responsible for the professional development of teachers, as they appear to play an important role in the process (Patton et al., 2012). It was important to listen to CPD providers to understand their perceptions and develop a holistic understanding of the CPD process in Oman.

CPD in Oman

With the bulk of existing research originating in specific national contexts (mainly the US and the UK), it is important for research to begin to unpack the perceptions and practices of professional developers in various national contexts to develop an international knowledge base upon which CPD programmes and initiatives can be informed. In the context of Oman, investment in education (including teachers' CPD) has increased substantially since the 1970s. Despite this, emerging research examining CPD structures and possibilities (mainly English teachers) has identified several limitations in existing CPD provisions in Oman. Although research on teachers' CPD is increasing, there is no research on Physical Education teachers' CPD, and questions thus remain about the nature and effectiveness of CPD provision for PE teachers. To address this gap, the present study sought to examine the nature, quality, and perceived effectiveness of CPD opportunities for PE teachers in the Sultanate of Oman.

It is important to note that in Oman, raising the standard of professional development for teachers was not separate from the process of reforming and improving education.

The importance of improving teachers' professional development was acknowledged with the realization that a few problems prevailed in schools and that these affected the improvement of learning outcomes. One problem was that the quality of teaching varied due to variations in initial preparation programmes from one institute to another. Another reason was a lack of motivation among teachers to remain in the profession. This continues to be a significant issue today (Al Jabri et al., 2018). However, the key issue facing teachers – be they novices, veterans, or experienced – is how institutes prepare them for the real world. In Oman, specifically, there was for decades a widely held perception that many teachers were not well prepared to deal with the challenges of teaching (e.g. classroom management). It could be argued that this was the case because initial teacher training programmes relied on theory, and student teachers had limited opportunities to develop practical tools to cope with everyday situations in the classroom.

Aims and study questions

The aim of the study was to examine key aspects of the existing government funded CPD system in Oman from the perspective of CPD providers. These CPD providers are based in higher-education institutions, local directorates, and the MoE. As argued in this paper, CPD providers can play a central role in supporting teachers in their learning (Makopoulou, 2018; Patton et al., 2012b). Collecting evidence on these CPD providers' perceptions is therefore vital to develop a holistic understanding of the CPD process in each national context. Specifically, the study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What are CPD providers' perceptions about the meaning and importance of CPD for teachers?
2. Which opportunities and barriers do CPD providers identify in their endeavors to support teachers in their learning?
3. How should future CPD provisions be improved according to these CPD providers?

The results can thus contribute to the development of the knowledge base on ways CPD providers conceptualize and practice CPD in various national contexts. Evidence can also offer insights into the applicability, relevance, and perceived effectiveness of specific CPD approaches adopted in Oman with the potential to inform CPD policy and practice in this country.

Methods

A series of individual and in-depth semi-structured interviews with CPD providers were conducted to examine their perceptions and practices regarding existing CPD provisions in Oman. To select case studies and to develop a comprehensive understanding of CPD in Oman, it was decided that CPD providers working in the main four different organizations responsible for teachers' CPD should be recruited. A total of ten CPD providers were invited to participate in the study. The number of CPD providers participating was both practical in terms of what was possible within available resources and defensible in terms of the different CPD providers' experiences covered. The study did not set out to achieve a 'representative' sample, as traditionally understood, but instead focused on getting in-depth understandings from providers working in different PE-CPD contexts in Oman.

To select providers, a combination of convenience and snowballing sampling was employed. The providers recruited included five academic members of staff (three males and two females), with experience ranging from 18 to 30 years, who worked in the main university. These were previously known to the researcher and had a significant track record of involvement in CPD for PE teachers. The other CPD providers were recommended to the researchers by university staff members (snowballing sampling) and were based in the local directorate ($n=2$; 16 and 23 years of experience), the MoE ($n=2$; 27 and 23 years of experience), and the Specialized Centre for the Professional Training of Teachers ($n=1$ and 18 years of experience).

Once an agreement was given, data collection took place at a time and location convenient to the participants. To gather in-depth, detailed data to answer the main research questions of this study, interviewing was the main data-collection tool employed.

All the participants of this study were invited individually for a face-to-face interview. The duration of the interview with each CPD provider ranged from 40 to 50 minutes and was recorded on audio cassettes. All the interviews were in Arabic, with the transcriptions then translated into English for analysis purposes. A total of approximately 400 pages of transcribed interviews in English were analyzed. The interview protocol consisted of four parts. In the first part, the aim was to obtain evidence on CPD providers' perceptions of the meaning, purpose, and importance of CPD as they understood this at the time of the research. Example questions included the following:

- Can you please tell me what is your understanding of the concept of CPD?
- Is CPD important for PE teachers or not, and why?
- In your opinion, what needs to be done to improve the quality and the process of CPD activities?

Data analysis

A version of the constructivist approach to grounded theory (GT) was used to analyze data from the interviews (Charmaz, 2006). GT is defined as an approach to data analysis that ‘consists of systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories from the data themselves’ (Charmaz, 2014, p. 1). By using a GT approach, researchers can do coding, compare data, and group codes into a category to develop a theory (Charmaz and Belgrave, 2007). Moreover, GT is used by researchers who aim to ‘investigate individual and collective actions and social and psychological process such as everyday life in a particular social setting or organization changes’ (Thornberg and Charmaz, 2014, p. 154). Since the researcher of the present study sought to investigate CPD providers’ perceptions about CPD, GT was a useful method to be used for analyzing the data.

The data-analysis process involved several steps. The first step involved the postgraduate researcher reading each Arabic transcript to get a better sense of what the research participants were saying and meaning. The second step was to translate all the relevant parts of the interview transcripts to English for more elaborate analysis. Once all interviews were translated, all the transcripts were input into NVivo 12 (i.e. software that the university got permission to use to

analyze interviews and other data) which conducted as third step. The fourth step, a detailed coding process started once all data was inputted into the software. According to Corbin and Strauss (2008), coding is recognized as a core concept in analyzing data in GT. This involved open or initial questioning that helped to capture important information that contributed to answering the research questions. The coding process also helped the researcher to compare different codes and to identify similar information or points of disagreement (Cohen et al., 2011). Therefore, the coding process was a significant one to begin making sense of key issues identified by the research participants. Some examples of initial coding were structured programmes and courses, practical and theoretical learning processes, and programmes to improve teachers' performance. The fifth step was to enable the start of the analytical and interpretation stage. While coding, the researcher also engaged in what is known as memo writing (Hadjimatheou, 2017). The sixth step was to create categories by grouping all relevant codes together (i.e., grouping codes that belong together under one category) – for example, 'short courses, practical and theoretical, compulsory programmes' were all grouped under the 'CPD is formal' category. Then, a thematic approach was adopted by creating themes, most of which were organized around the main research questions. For example, the category ('CPD is formal') was grouped with other categories (e.g., 'Informal is also CPD'; 'Continuous learning') to answer the first research question (theme: the meaning of CPD).

Result

Regarding CPD providers' perceptions of the meaning and importance of CPD, most CPD providers interviewed appeared to understand CPD as a formal, structured process that should be designed with the aim of improving teachers' practices.

In this section, quotes from interviews are identified by means of individual numerical codes given to each CPD provider (e.g. Provider 1 = P1, and Interview 1= In1). For example, CPD was described as a 'process that could improve the employees' (P4, In1), especially when 'specially designed programmes that aim to support teachers improve their performance in the field' (P2, In1) were offered. Another CPD provider mentioned that engaging in different forms of CPD was not just beneficial for teachers but could also improve and enhance students' learning: 'CPD can not only improve the quality of teachers' practices, but it can lead to important improvements in students' learning and achievements too.' (P2, In1)

Despite these positive perceptions about the importance of CPD, the CPD providers shared some concerns regarding the repetitive content of opportunities and the limited number of CPD programmes offered to teachers. Most CPD providers attributed the limited CPD opportunities available to the financial crisis. In this section, quotes from interviews are identified by means of individual numerical codes given to each CPD provider (e.g. Provider 1 = P1, and Interview 1= In1). For example, you could start by presenting what the CPD providers said about whether CPD was important.

Regarding difficulties, overall, all CPD providers interviewed believed they were doing a good job: 'I do not think it is perfect. However, it is good.' (P5, In2). As previously noted, it was difficult for them to be certain that their work had a positive impact on teachers and students because of a lack of evaluation structures in place. They were, however, confident overall that they offered a quality experience. It was also evident that they were very eager to share barriers they encountered when planning for formal CPD, as well as their overall observations of wider issues with CPD provision in Oman at the time of the research. All providers believed that the process of applying to run a CPD course for teachers was unnecessarily complicated. Consequently, getting approval was very difficult. There was, however, a paradox. The CPD providers interviewed felt that staff in key positions in the new training center 'restricted them with a million rules', but they appeared to approve programmes proposed by external providers – such as coaches – relatively easily (P10, In2). Another tutor explained that 'the procedures become more complicated year by year'. (P7, In2). There was some agreement that the MoE requests too many trivial details about each workshop before approving it. The whole process was described as 'pointless and time-wasting', as the level of detail required left one provider wondering whether this was like the process of 'writing a master's thesis' (P1, In1). This complicated and lengthy process seemed to have prevented some of these CPD providers from running CPD opportunities with the aim of introducing new ideas.

The CPD providers also raised concerns about other CPD providers. They explained that the MoE often employed

sports coaches to deliver CPD workshops in various sports, such as volleyball, basketball, etc. The CPD providers had serious concerns about the quality of delivery in such programmes. Their main argument was that the sports coaches had no teaching experience. They were thus treating teachers as players, and most of the knowledge/skills covered were presented in a way that was not relevant to teaching PE in schools. As a result, according to all the providers interviewed, these workshops did not teachers' needs: 'I have observed that even warm-ups were not suitable for teaching.' (P7, In1)

To improve the quality of provision, three further important aspects needed review and reconsideration according to these providers: the professional development of CPD providers, how CPD content was decided upon, and how PE teachers were targeted to attend. In relation to the former aspect, supporting CPD providers with relevant and meaningful CPD was paramount. There was a consensus that CPD providers were also in need of more preparation courses, especially at the beginning of their career, to develop knowledge and skills to effectively design and deliver CPD programmes for teachers. Moreover, there was agreement that the process of identifying teachers' need to inform the content of CPD programmes should be revisited. One provider implied that the process is superficial and suggested a necessity to 'determine the right needs, learning from the lives of physical education teachers' (P4, In1). Other providers suggested that the MoE needs to ensure that the same topics are not addressed in the same way, year in, year out, and further opportunities and freedom to tailor provision according to local teachers' needs were needed:

‘The MOE should not order the same topics to be covered in all CPD programmes in all the governorates because teachers do not all have the same problems. This wastes time and resources.

‘Sometimes, we are required to hold a workshop on a topic that is not an area of concern in our governorate. This should change.’ (P1, In1)

There was also some discussion over who should be invited to attend. For some providers, the right professionals with the right attitudes and motivation should be invited. These are professionals who want to make changes and have a desire to transfer this knowledge to other teachers in their schools. According to one provider, teachers should not be encouraged to ‘take part in a course merely to relieve the boredom of the daily routine!’ (P7, In1) Teachers’ abilities should also be utilized by inviting them to run programmes themselves (from teachers for teachers) (P3, In1; P10, In1), as ‘being a supervisor does not mean being better than anyone else’ (P3, In1). Supervisors believed that some teachers were willing to cooperate and to co-deliver a range of workshops based on their expertise.

Non-formal, social ways of learning were also advocated. One provider proposed that teachers should gather at least once a month to discuss issues regarding teaching with the intention of sharing the wealth of knowledge and experience they have:

‘This would be a great way to learn. It does not have to be something formal or approved centrally – they could just do it in a friendly way in their own schools.’ (P1, In1) This was in line with the importance of establishing a ‘self-

improvement' and 'self-learning culture' (P7, In2) as teachers relied on themselves and their colleagues to learn and grow professionally (P7, In2).

Evidence of teachers' needs could be determined via regular visits from supervisors. Teachers themselves should be consulted as they are more aware of their own needs than others:

'The Ministry of Education has made a great deal of effort to improve the area of professional development, but this is not enough, so I think we still need more things to change and more effort [to put into CPD].' (P5, In2)

CPD providers concluded that to improve the current state of CPD provision, a number of important steps needed to be taken. These included reducing bureaucratic requirements in submitting CPD proposals and making the process less complicated but more transparent. The process of selecting providers is paramount and avoiding sports coaches that deliver programmes targeting coaches rather than teachers should be prioritized. It was also proposed to establish high-quality CPD for newly appointed teachers. Providers felt that the quality of teachers with different initial qualifications varied significantly and that these issues needed to be addressed through a systematic and sustained programme targeting newly appointed teachers. Establishing clear, detailed evaluation processes – including teacher feedback on the quality of CPD – was also paramount. As one provider explained, 'teachers' feedback can help me to do better next time that I prepare a workshop' (P2, In1). Although some evaluation (post-CPD) is taking place, the providers rarely became aware of teachers' views (e.g. 'The MoE did evaluate the

programme as a whole, but I do not know the result of this evaluation'; P2, In1). The evaluation evidence collected should inform existing and future provision: 'The ministry's role is to monitor provision... and to make sure to never move to subsequent, more programmes' without ensuring the benefit of the first.' (P7, In2) There was indeed recognition that the quality of what was available should be prioritized, instead of a persistent focus on teacher numbers: 'All we need in the coming period is to focus on the quality of the programmes rather than the quantity; we should offer more quality programmes rather than programmes that involve a large number of participants, which means it is difficult to monitor what is happening as well.' (P9, In1)

Discussion

Regarding CPD providers' perceptions of the meaning and the importance of CPD, most CPD providers interviewed appeared to understand CPD as a formal structured process that should be designed with the aim of improving teachers' practices. For example, CPD was described as a 'process that could improve the employees, especially when it's structured to support teachers in improving their performance in the field'. Hence, CPD providers are not conflicted with most of the literature reviews regarding the meaning and importance of CPD, whereas Ryan (2019), Darling-Hammond et al. (2017), and Armour and Yelling (2007) also agreed that CPD should lead to professional learning and should support teachers to enhance their knowledge and skills, to improve the quality of teaching and learning. It is frequently the case that CPD is understood as a formal course (Fraser et al., 2007) that happens through formal and structured courses and

normally outside schools (Rösken-Winter and Szczesny, 2017). To counter this, professional learning, according to Fraser et al. (2007), often ‘represents the process that, whether intuitive or deliberate, individual or social, result’ in specific changes in the professional knowledge, skills, attitudes, beliefs, or actions of teachers’ (p.157).

There is a consensus, for example, that CPD is likely to be effective when it supports teachers in developing a better understanding of the content they teach. Focusing on the content and how students learn specific content is recognized as an effective feature of CPD programmes (Kennedy, 2016). In terms of the process of learning, CPD is believed to deliver better outcomes if it involves teachers as active learners, is grounded in theoretically driven practical experiences, and enables teacher interaction and collaboration (Cordingley et al., 2015; Desimone, 2009). It has also been suggested that it is important for teachers to attend programmes that encourage them to reflect upon their existing perceptions and practices with the aim of reviewing and transforming what they offer through meaningful interactions with others and access to new, innovative approaches to teaching and learning (Vangrieken et al., 2017; Stoll et al., 2012).

However, for a long time, traditional, formal CPD programmes have been criticized in the international literature for failing to address participants’ individual learning goals and needs (Keay et al., 2019). Due to their diverse profiles and professional-learning needs, teachers should be expected to have different learning goals at different stages in their careers (Louws et al., 2017c), and CPD should be organized alongside this diversity. This did not appear to be the case in Oman. On the contrary – one of

the main criticisms from many providers was that teachers are not involved in shaping the content of the programme in a meaningful way; hence, as explained in other publications grounded on evidence collected in different national contexts (Makopoulou & Armour, 2011b; Louws et al., 2017b), most of these programmes failed to address teachers' goals and needs. It was clear that these providers sought greater control over CPD provision with a less complicated bureaucratic process and expressed a desire to ensure that teachers are consulted so that CPD is personalized. In this way, the provision would be less repetitive. Personalizing CPD provision, however, is a complex objective since it is difficult to design a CPD programme that can meet all teachers' needs (Makopoulou and Armour, 2011b; Armour et al., 2017). Teachers who teach in secondary schools have different needs from teachers who teach in primary schools, and the needs of novice teachers vary according to the stage in their career they find themselves at (Griffiths et al., 2016). This outcome is not so surprising, since the literary review discussed that teachers differ in terms of their aims for participating in CPD and what they want to learn, as well as how and why on account of being at different stages in their professional lives (Day et al., 2007; Olsen and Anderson, 2007; Anderson and Olsen, 2006; Rolls and Plauborg, 2009; Louws et al., 2017c).

The CPD providers in this study believed that to improve the quality of provision, professional developers should be supported to learn and grow. Some providers were concerned that they were not adequately prepared and supported, and this might have had a negative effect on the quality and impact of CPD. Researchers have consistently

argued that the knowledge and experience of CPD providers are important components of CPD provision (Makopoulou, 2018). There seems to be a consensus in the international literature that when external experts are involved in facilitating teachers' CPD, they need to be skilled, competent specialists (Sabah et al., 2014) as they mediate in a significant way how teachers engage with an educational issue or process and the knowledge they develop as a result (Harris et al., 2006; Goodall et al., 2005). In this context, it has been argued that teachers are not the only professionals with a need to sometimes rethink their teaching practice radically; even experienced professional developers have also updated their learning and knowledge (Patton and Parker, 2014). These CPD providers were also concerned that the quality and relevance of existing CPD provision was sometimes compromised when non-teaching specialists such as sports coaches or players were running programmes. They explained how the CPD was not appropriately targeting teachers and failed to support them in developing their pedagogical content knowledge. This CPD failed, in other words, to serve the needs of teachers. There is evidence in the international literature that the presence of external experts in CPD endeavors does not guarantee its success (Timperley et al., 2007). These experts need to have more appropriate training and knowledge to tailor the provision to the needs and interests of teachers (Timperley et al., 2007).

In Oman, as in most other countries, the availability of CPD is relatively limited (Hadjimatheou, 2017; Al-Balushi,

2017; Makopoulou, 2008). Based on the findings of the present study, CPD providers believe that the number of CPD programmes is insufficient to improve teachers' pedagogy and practice. However, they believe that teachers should take more ownership and control of their CPD and learn to rely on their own ability to learn rather than wait for specialized and centralized support. The CPD providers emphasized that teachers have to be self-directed learners in order to update and develop their knowledge and that they should strive to learn, individually and collaboratively, to solve problems in relation to their teaching and learners. Another crucial finding is a lack of thorough evaluation of CPD provision. In Oman, as in other countries, the manner of evaluating the impact of any CPD programme is still questionable. It has been argued by providers that questions about CPD impact are as important as – and related to – questions about how and who designs and delivers CPD.

Capturing CPD impact, alongside evidence on the extent to which objectives are met, is also acknowledged in other publications (Sabah et al., 2014). In Oman, the system of evaluation is still at an embryonic stage of development, and it is a top-down process (Al Jabri et al., 2018). To address this, it is important that the evaluation process is reviewed thoroughly to ensure that evidence about the different levels of impact is collected, especially – as evaluation researchers suggest (Guskey, 2002a) – evidence about the impact on teachers' knowledge and practice, as well as pupil achievement and whole school development, needs to be collected to provide a clear picture of CPD impact.

Conclusion

Overall, the CPD providers acknowledged the importance of CPD for all teachers. They all agreed that teachers can benefit greatly from CPD participation and that CPD has an important role to play in meeting teachers' professional learning needs and in offering support so that teachers cope with rapid changes in the work environment, especially in relation to the modernization of the curriculum. Despite these positive perceptions about the importance of CPD, the CPD providers shared some concerns regarding the repetitive content of opportunities and the limited number of CPD programmes offered to teachers. Most CPD providers attributed the limited CPD opportunities available to the financial crisis. It appears that in Oman, some efforts have been made to improve teacher satisfaction, but to develop the system further, more sophisticated methods and approaches need to be employed to have an impact on these other levels in a more sustained way. Finally, the culture of CPD programmes needs a change by listening to teachers' and CPD providers' voices and designing CPD based on their needs and their suggestions.

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