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Assessing the Challenges of Continuous Professional Development Among Teachers in Selected Districts of Central Province, Zambia

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Abstract

This study examined the implementation of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) among teachers in selected districts of Central Province, Zambia, with a focus on identifying key challenges affecting its effectiveness. Guided by a pragmatic paradigm and an exploratory sequential mixed methods design, qualitative data were first collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis involving head teachers, School In-Service Coordinators, Education Standards Officers, and a Provincial Resource Centre Coordinator, followed by a quantitative survey of 130 teachers. Descriptive statistics and thematic analysis were used to analyse the data. The findings revealed that while CPD is widely recognised as essential for improving teaching practice, its implementation is constrained by multiple interrelated challenges, including inadequate funding, time constraints arising from heavy workloads, lack of trained CPD facilitators and mentors, absence of structured and standardised CPD content, weak

teacher involvement in planning, low teacher motivation, limited district-level support, donor dependence, and pronounced logistical barriers in rural and hard-to-reach areas. The study further found that CPD is often treated as a compliance requirement rather than a transformative professional learning process, with weak policy enforcement and limited monitoring of its impact on classroom practice. The study concludes that without deliberate institutionalisation of CPD through sustainable financing, strengthened leadership support, trained facilitators, teacher ownership, and context-responsive policy implementation, CPD will continue to fall short of its potential to enhance teaching quality and learner outcomes. The study recommends stronger alignment of CPD with career progression, improved funding and coordination mechanisms, capacity building for facilitators, and the localisation of CPD initiatives to ensure relevance, sustainability, and equity across diverse school contexts.

Keywords: Continuous Professional Development, Teacher Professional Learning, Implementation Challenges, Financial Transformations

Introduction

CPD has become a central feature of contemporary education systems worldwide, driven by rapid curriculum reforms, technological change, and increasing accountability demands placed on teachers (Darling-Hammond *et al.*, 2017) ^[10]. However, despite its widespread recognition in policy and practice, the implementation of CPD continues to face persistent challenges that undermine its effectiveness, particularly in resource-constrained contexts.

Globally, studies reveal that teachers' participation in CPD is often constrained by structural and organisational barriers rather than a lack of willingness to engage in professional learning. Large-scale surveys such as the Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) report that teachers frequently experience limited time for CPD due to heavy workloads, inadequate funding, and insufficient institutional support (OECD, 2019; 2021) ^[22, 23]. Additionally, CPD activities are often criticised for being fragmented, episodic, and weakly aligned with teachers' classroom realities, resulting in minimal impact on instructional practice (Opfer and Pedder, 2011; Darling-Hammond *et al.*, 2017) ^[25, 10]. These challenges suggest that CPD implementation remains uneven and, in many contexts, largely symbolic rather than transformative.

In sub-Saharan Africa, CPD challenges are further intensified by systemic constraints such as limited teaching and learning resources, overcrowded classrooms, insufficient professional support structures, and weak school leadership capacity (Ogunniyi, 2020) ^[24]. Empirical studies conducted in countries such as South Africa, Ghana, Kenya, Zimbabwe and Malawi

indicate that while collaborative CPD models such as teacher clusters and professional learning communities are promoted, their implementation is often inconsistent and poorly coordinated (Jita and Mokhele, 2014; Akyeamong *et al.*, 2011; Chikoko, 2007; Muwonge and Kadzamira, 2022) [16, 2, 5, 19]. Teachers in these contexts frequently report challenges related to irregular CPD scheduling, inadequate facilitation, lack of follow-up support, and misalignment between national CPD policies and school-level realities. As a result, CPD initiatives often fail to address teachers' immediate professional needs or translate into sustained changes in classroom practice.

In Zambia, CPD is formally guided by policy instruments such as the Education and Training Policy (1994), the Teaching Profession Act No. 5 of 2013, and the National Teacher Professional Standards (2022), all of which emphasise lifelong professional learning as a professional obligation. Despite this strong policy orientation, emerging literature suggests that teachers continue to face substantial challenges in engaging meaningfully with CPD activities (Mulenga and Kabombwe, 2023; Muyunda, 2023) [18, 20]. These challenges include limited access to well-resourced CPD programmes, inadequate time allocation within the school timetable, insufficient incentives, and weak monitoring and support mechanisms at district and school levels. Moreover, CPD activities are often perceived as externally driven, compliance-oriented, and insufficiently responsive to teachers' contextual and subject-specific needs.

In Central Province of Zambia, anecdotal evidence and limited empirical studies suggest that CPD implementation varies significantly across districts and schools, with disparities in access, quality, and relevance of professional learning opportunities. Teachers reportedly encounter challenges related to logistical constraints, limited facilitation capacity, inconsistent participation, and poor coordination between schools and education authorities. These challenges raise concerns about the extent to which CPD contributes to meaningful curriculum development and improved teaching practice within the province.

Despite the growing emphasis on CPD at policy level, there remains a paucity of empirical research that systematically examines the specific challenges teachers experience in implementing continuous curriculum development through CPD, particularly at district and school levels in Central Province. Understanding these challenges is critical for informing context-responsive CPD strategies that move beyond policy rhetoric to effective practice. It is against this background that the present study assesses the challenges of continuous curriculum development among teachers in selected districts of Central Province, Zambia, with a view to generating evidence-based insights for strengthening CPD implementation.

Methodology

Research Paradigm and Approach

The study adopted a **pragmatic research paradigm**, which allows the use of multiple methods to address practical research problems and generate actionable knowledge (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) [8]. Pragmatism was appropriate because the study focused on understanding real-world challenges of continuous curriculum development through CPD as experienced by teachers in school contexts. A **mixed methods approach** was

employed, combining qualitative and quantitative data to provide a comprehensive understanding of CPD challenges. This approach enabled triangulation of findings and enhanced the credibility of the results (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2009).

Research Design

An **exploratory sequential mixed methods design (QUAL → quan)** was used. The study began with qualitative data collection to explore teachers' and education stakeholders' experiences of CPD challenges. Findings from the qualitative phase informed the development of the quantitative questionnaire administered in the second phase. This design was suitable for generating context-specific insights and strengthening instrument relevance (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017) [9].

Target Population

The target population comprised **1,350 education stakeholders** in selected districts of Central Province, Zambia, including teachers, head teachers, School In-Service Coordinators (SICs), Education Standards Officers (ESOs), and the Provincial Resource Centre Coordinator (PRCC). These groups were selected due to their direct involvement in the planning, implementation, and supervision of CPD activities.

Sample Size and Composition

A total of **176 participants** took part in the study. Quantitative data were collected from **130 teachers** using semi-structured questionnaires, while **46 participants** contributed qualitative data through interviews (Kalimaposo *et al.*, 2025) [17]. The qualitative sample included **20 head teachers, 20 SICs, 5 ESOs, and 1 PRCC**. This sample size was adequate for an exploratory sequential mixed methods study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017) [9].

The quantitative sample size was guided by **Yamane's (1967) [36] formula**, with a 95% confidence level. Although 143 questionnaires were targeted, 130 valid responses were obtained, representing a response rate of approximately **91%**, which is acceptable for educational research (Creswell, 2014).

Sampling Techniques

Both **probability and non-probability sampling techniques** were used. **Purposive sampling** was employed to select head teachers, SICs, ESOs, and the PRCC based on their roles and experience with CPD. **Stratified random sampling** was used to select teachers to ensure representation across school levels and districts.

Data Collection Instruments

Multiple instruments were used to enhance triangulation: **Semi-structured interview guides** for head teachers, SICs, ESOs, and the PRCC. The **semi-structured questionnaires** were used to the teachers. **Document analysis** of CPD records and policy documents were used for secondary data. Also, **observation checklists** during CPD sessions were employed.

Data Collection Procedures

Ethical clearance was obtained from the University of Zambia Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee before data collection. Permission was also

sought from relevant provincial, district, and school authorities. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and provided informed consent.

Qualitative data were collected first through face-to-face interviews, observations, and document analysis. Insights from this phase informed the design of the quantitative questionnaire, which was then administered to teachers using a self-administered format.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data from interviews, open-ended questionnaire responses, observations, and documents were analysed using **thematic analysis**, supported by **NVivo software** (Chileshe *et al.*, 2025) [6]. Data were coded and organised into themes reflecting CPD practices and challenges (Braun & Clarke, 2006) [4]. **Quantitative data** from closed-ended questionnaire items were analysed using **SPSS (Version 20)** to generate descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. These analyses were used to examine patterns in teachers' perceptions and challenges related to CPD.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to established ethical standards. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, participation was voluntary, and anonymity and confidentiality were

maintained throughout the research process. Data were securely stored and used strictly for academic purposes.

Findings

Challenges in Implementing CPD activities

Despite the importance of CPD for teachers, several challenges hinder its effective implementation. These challenges range from individual, institutional and system based. In this study, table 10 shows the responses of teacher participants as given in the questionnaire. The analysis was conducted using the mean score as primary statistical measure. For the interpretation of the results, intervals were determined based on the five point likert scale used in the study. The range was first calculated using the formula below:

$$\text{Category width} = \text{Range/number of response} = (5-1)/5 = 0.80.$$

Based on this computation, the following intervals were established for interpreting responses: 1.00-1.80: *Strongly disagree*; 1.81-2.60: *Disagree*; 2.61-3.40: *Neutral*; 3.41-4.20: *Agree*; 4.21-5.00: *Strongly Agree*. The results of the study were analysed and interpreted in accordance with these predefined intervals.

Table 1: Major Challenges Reported by Teachers in Implementing CPD activities

S. No	Challenges of CPD implementation	Frequency	Extent of challenges in CPD implementation					Mean
		Percentage	SA5	A4	U3	DA2	SD1	
1	Lack of finances and support from school management	F	60	35	10	20	5	3.9
		%	46.2	26.9	7.7	15.3	3.8	
2	Time constraints	F	53	27	30	17	3	3.85
		%	40.8	20.8	23.1	13.1	2.3	
3	Mentors and facilitators lack of required training skills	F	70	30	10	15	5	4.11
		%	53.8	23.1	7.7	11.5	3.8	
4	Lack of structured content or materials	F	55	35	20	10	10	3.8
		%	42.3	26.9	15.3	7.7	7.7	
5	Lack of action research	F	72	36	16	3	3	4.32
		%	55.4	27.7	12.3	2.3	2.3	
6	Lack of teacher engagement in planning CPD activities	F	60	25	16	20	9	3.82
		%	46.2	19.2	12.3	15.4	6.9	
7	Absence of commitment due to high workload	F	27	40	32	10	11	3.63
		%	28.5	30.8	24.6	7.7	8.5	
8	Low teacher motivation	F	55	45	14	10	6	4.02
		%	42.3	34.6	10.8	7.7	4.62	

Source: Field data, 2024

In table 10, item 1, teachers were asked to respond by giving their opinions about CPD finances and the support school management gives towards the implementation of CPD activities. Out of a total of 130, 95 teachers representing 73.1% agreed that the support from school management was inadequate whereas 25 (19.1 %) said the support was adequate enough while 10 (7.7 %) were uncertain. The school management did not provide adequate support to meet CPD implementation to the required level. This is further supported by the 3.9 mean score of this item which lies within the scope of agreement (3.41-4.20) on this item. This shows that lack adequate support from school management towards implementation of CPD activities is indeed a serious challenge.

This quantitative finding was equally supported by one head teacher during the interview who acknowledged this challenge as he reported that:

Sometimes as Head teachers, we are usually under pressure to balance limited resources amidst various demands that range from academic, co-curricular and administrative. This is perceived by our teachers as not being supportive to the implementation of CPD activities. Sometimes we cancel CPD activities due to examination preparation demands or visitation by officials from district, province or national level (Head teacher 2, District B)

It was further heard that lack of finances down played the significance and quality of CPD activities carried out in the Central Province of Zambia. CPD activities are underfunded even in the face of school grants received from the central government. The percentage allocated to CPD is far below enough as revealed during document analysis and indicated

by the mean score of 3.9 and standard deviation of 5. This proved that lack of adequate finances was really a challenge that watered down CPD planning, implementation and management as it equally lied within the 'agree' range (3.41-4.20) on the likert scale.

This was further cemented by the report given by one head teacher as she reported that:

In the school grants, CPD falls under technical services category with a budget allocation of 50% and under sub theme open and distance learning (ODL) which is only allocated 5% of the 50% making it difficult for schools to administer and manage CPD activities effectively well due to limited funding (Head teacher 2, District A)

Furthermore, another head teacher echoed limited financial resources as a hindrance to the management and execution of CPD activities as he said;

CPD as a programme requires sufficient resources that are both financial and material in nature. It requires finances for refreshments, stationary and incentives to support teachers in the case of external CPD activities. Supply of these resources is a challenge to our school and many others as schools are not in a position to consistently supply these basic requirements (Head teacher 3, District C)

Item 2 of table 10 brought out responses on time constraint as a challenge towards implementation of CPD. On this one, 80 (81.6%) teachers agreed that they had no time to implement CPD activities and only 20 (15.3%) said time was not a factor while 30 (23.1%) were uncertain. The mean score of this item is 3.85 which lie within a high level of complexity or the 'agree' bracket (3.41-4.20). This indicated that time constraint was really a challenge in the implementation of CPD activities within the schools in central province.

This finding was further supported by the qualitative data as provided by one SIC through interviews who asserted that;

We usually have challenges in allocating time to CPD activities due to overcrowded school timeline. Our teachers are always busy with academic, co-curricular and managerial responsibilities. Hence finding appropriate time for CPD activities out of the teachers' busy schedule and demand of the revised curriculum is really an obstacle (SIC 4, District C).

Furthermore, teachers indicated that their participation in CPD was compromised by competing school demands. Teachers reported that academic workloads, examination preparations, lesson planning, co-curricular responsibilities, and staff shortages often interfered with CPD schedules. For instance, one teacher noted,

On paper, we have CPD every Wednesday afternoon, but in reality; we are always rushing to mark papers, prepare lessons, or attend meetings (Teacher 31, District D)

From table 10 above, item 3 stated lack of trained CPD mentors and facilitators as a challenge to the implementation of CPD activities. A total of 100 teachers out of 130

representing 76.9% agreed that mentors and facilitators used during CPD activities lacked necessary training knowledge and skills in CPD implementation, an aspect that compromised the quality of CPD activities. This was confirmed by the mean score of 4.11 on this item which was heavily tilted towards 5, an indication of agreement as it lies within the 'agree' range of 3.41-4.20. This implies that lack of trained CPD mentors and facilitators is a very serious challenge in the implementation of CPD implementation.

This is further supported by one SIC who reported that:

Facilitators are picked on assumption that they have experience or required knowledge on the topic of discussion. The facilitators used have not undergo any training to sharpen their facilitation skills (SIC 2, District A)

With regard to item 4 of table 10, indicating lack of structured content or material to be used during the implementation of CPD activities in school as a challenge. A substantial number of teachers 90 (69.2%) revealed that the content and materials used were not updated, unstructured and unstandardised with great variance from one school to another. whereas only 20 (15.4%) did not agree with another 20 (15.4%) being uncertain. This was further confirmed by the mean score of 3.8 that falls within the 'agree' bracket which covers the range 3.41 to 4.20. This finding showed that lack of structured and standardised content or materials during CPD activities really stood out as a challenge.

Teachers reported that CPD activities often lacked depth or practical relevance. Teachers described scenarios where sessions were repetitive, generic, or poorly facilitated. Some respondents noted that the absence of formal CPD syllabi or reference materials led to ad hoc topics with limited pedagogical value.

Absence of structured content and material was confirmed further by one SIC who commented that;

We try to make CPD relevant, but we don't have any curriculum or materials from the ministry. So we just decide what to discuss based on our own judgment and perceived demand (SIC 3, District A).

Furthermore, one standard officer expressed the following concern that;

While the Teaching Council of Zambia (TCZ) had mandated CPD participation and attached its participation to teacher licensing, actual practice does not much their policy. This lack of implementation and coordination led to fragmented efforts, with each school improvising based on its own capacity. (ESO, District B)

From table 10, item 5 was intended to check the absence of action research as a challenge in the implementation of CPD activities in the schools in Central Province, Zambia. A total of 108 teachers representing 83.1% agreed that lack of action research had a negative effect on the quality of CPD activities. Only 6 teachers (4.6%) disagreed whereas 16 (12.3) were uncertain. This item had a strong mean score of 4.32, which is a high level of complexity indicating that teachers were not involved in action research that was to

support the implementation of CPD activities as this mean lies in the *strongly agree* (3.41-4.20) bracket. This therefore strongly indicated that lack of action research to inform CPD implementation is the most challenging factor that needs redress.

This was further supported by one head teacher who said that:

CPD activities are supposed to be centred around the needs of teachers and learners but unfortunately our teacher and all stakeholders inclusively do not carry out action research to ascertain the current trends and demand that link to classroom practices and revolving demands of teaching (Head teacher 3, District D).

Regarding item 6 of table 10 on lack of teacher engagement in planning CPD activities as a challenge, 85 teachers (65.7%) agreed that teachers are not involved in planning CPD activities. Teachers did not feel ownership of CPD activities as content is not planned and generated by them. Only 29 (22.3%) disagreed while 16 (12.3%) were uncertain. The mean score of 3.68 that lie within the *'agree'* range further showed that teachers were not adequately engaged in planning CPD activities. This is probably because many teachers had only participated as passive learners rather than active learners hence a challenge to CPD implementation.

This quantitative finding was further supported by revelations of one participant who reported that:

The district and provincial education offices do organise some external CPD activities but the challenge is that we are not usually involved in the planning more especially us in rural schools. My observation is that these higher offices usually organise CPD activities as a way of making money for themselves or creation of minutes that they submit to their superiors. They do not care about our professional development as teacher at all. A practice we fail to understand (SIC 8, District, B)

Item 7 of table 10 asked whether absence of teacher commitment to CPD activities due to high workload was a challenge. The study revealed that 67 teachers representing 59% were in agreement while 29 (22.3 %) did not agree while 16 (12.3%) were uncertain. This was further supported by the mean score of 3.63 that lies within the *'agree'* range. This was further reported by one standard officer who reported that;

The low staffing levels in our schools especially the rural school sometimes acts as a barrier to teachers' poor participation in CPD activities as they have little or no time to attend to these equally important professional activities. Even when they participate, they input is minimal because they are tired (ESO, District D).

Item 8 of table 10 was intended to find out if lack of teacher motivation was a challenge affecting the implementation of CPD activities. The majority of the teachers 100 (76.9%) agreed that lack of teacher motivation negatively affected CPD implementation while 16 (12.3%) disagreed whereas 14 teachers representing 10.8% were uncertain. The high

mean score of 4.02 that lie within the *'agree'* range further confirms that lack of teacher motivation is indeed a challenge to the implementation of CPD activities in Central Province, Zambia as one participant asserted that;

There is nothing motivating about attending CPD activities as the activities do not speak to what we value as teachers. CPD activities in our school, district and province is generic. It does consider the various needs of teachers at different levels of their career. For example, newly recruited teachers has different priorities compared to the long serving teachers (SIC13, District D).

Additionally, another participant reported that;

Some of our CPD activities do not match with our professional and local aspirations because they are donor driven and crafted. Us a ministry, our major weakness has been adapting such donor driven programmes to our local conditions. This has seen discontinuity of such programmes when donor funding is cut or the programme comes to an end. We are really moving in cycles without proper direction as if we don't have a policy direction as a ministry (Head teacher 2, District C).

Another participant also reported that:

Our conditions of service are usually infringed on when asked to attend CPD activities outside our district or province. This is because we are usually underpaid or asked to sacrifice due to limited financial resources (Teacher 9, District B).

Interview data suggested that CPD participation was sometimes treated as a compliance issue rather than a genuine opportunity for growth because teachers did not appreciate the activities lined up for them. Some SICs described low attendance rates or lack of enthusiasm among staff. For instance, one SIC shared that:

Some teachers only come to CPD to sign the register and then leave. They don't contribute much or apply what we discuss. There is nothing driving them to value CPD activities (SIC 7, District B).

Another systemic challenge was the inconsistent involvement of district education offices and teacher resource centres. Several SICs and head teachers reported that while CPD was expected to be decentralised, support from district officials was infrequent and mostly compliance-oriented. One SIC lamented;

We are on our own most of the time. The DEBS office only comes when there is a monitoring exercise or if they are pushing us to submit reports (SIC 14, District A).

Similarly, one ESO admitted,

Our role should be to support CPD implementation, but due to transport, funding issues and limited staffing, we rarely visit schools unless there's a complaint or standards monitoring trip that is funded.

This compromises on the quality provision of our CPD as its monitoring is just taken as a by the way activity (ESO 2, District A).

These gaps in external support weakened the feedback loops between schools and district-level authorities and limited opportunities for cross-school learning, resource sharing, or capacity building.

The study further found that logistical barriers were more pronounced in rural and hard to reach areas. Teachers from remote schools described difficulty accessing external training opportunities, limited internet connectivity, and poor road infrastructure that made travel to cluster centres or district events challenging. One Head teacher explained that;

We hear of CPD workshops in town, but our school is too far from town, hence we usually miss out on centralised CPD activities organised by the district or province due travelling challenges. (Head Teacher 2, District D).

Qualitative data from interviews also revealed donor dependence as a challenge in the implementation of CPD activities. The findings of this study indicate that donor dependence presents a significant challenge to the sustainability and effectiveness of CPD activities in the selected districts of Central Province, Zambia. Teachers reported that while donor funded CPD programmes often provide essential training, resources, and technical support, these interventions are typically **externally driven, short-term** and promote foreign needs at the expense of the local teacher needs. The donor driven CPD activities cease abruptly once donor funding concludes. One participant noted that:

The workshops stop once the donor project ends, and we are left without support or follow up. This leaves us as academic orphans as the CPD programmes end abruptly (Head teacher 9, District D)

This donor driven model also limits **teacher ownership and engagement**, as programmes are frequently designed and standardised to meet donor priorities rather than local educational needs, reducing their perceived relevance and applicability in local classroom practice as local teachers have no input into such activities. One participant from this end revealed that:

We usually have no say on the type of CPD activities or programmes. Donor CPD programmes are structured, rigid and biased towards certain study areas such as numeracy, science, technology and literacy while social sciences study areas receive little or no attention at all (ESO 3, District D)

The study further revealed that schools and districts struggle to maintain CPD activities after the donor funding cycle ends due to **limited domestic financial resources and insufficient institutional structures**, which compounds the cycle of dependence on external agencies. One participant reported that:

Donor funded CPD programmes are good but the challenge is how to continue funding them when

donors pull out as our school budgets cannot support such activities (Head teacher 13, District B)

In summary, the implementation of CPD faces multiple interrelated challenges. Financial constraints, time limitations, inadequate school management support, lack of content guidance, minimal district support, inconsistent teacher motivation and engagement at planning level, donor dependence and rural logistical barriers that all undermine the potential of CPD to enhance teaching quality and learner outcomes. While some schools have found ways to adapt within their means, the majority continue to struggle with systemic and institutional bottlenecks that limit the scope, frequency, and effectiveness of their CPD efforts.

Discussion

Challenges in Implementing Teacher CPD

The findings of this study revealed that the implementation of CPD was beset by a wide range of challenges. These challenges were structural, material, and attitudinal in nature, and they collectively undermined the ability of schools to institutionalise meaningful professional learning for teachers. Although the Ministry of Education's policy framework identifies CPD as a compulsory and career-long activity for teachers (MoE, 2024), the practical environment in which this is to be implemented remains fragile and unevenly regulated.

One of the most frequently cited barriers in this study was inadequate funding. Teachers and school leaders consistently pointed to the lack of financial support for CPD activities, whether at the school, cluster, or district level. This challenge is widely documented in the literature. For instance, Moon, *et al.*, (2013), in their review of teacher professional development in Sub-Saharan Africa, argue that most school systems struggle to institutionalise CPD due to insufficient and unsustained public financing. Similarly, Westbrook *et al.* (2013), in a rigorous evidence synthesis commissioned by DFID, found that the lack of structured funding channels remains a key constraint on the scalability and effectiveness of teacher learning in low-income countries. Without predictable and targeted funding for essential CPD inputs such as training materials, refreshments, travel, and facilitation, professional development often defaults to informal gatherings with minimal pedagogical impact.

In the current study, several head teachers explained that even when CPD sessions are planned, schools often lack money for logistics such as stationery, refreshments, transport, or external facilitators. Without this basic funding, CPD is reduced to talk sessions or informal group meetings that are seldom followed up with instructional change or documented outcomes. This resonates with earlier observations by Mulenga and Kabombwe (2019), who argued that for CPD to contribute meaningfully to teacher quality; it must be financially anchored within school improvement planning and budget cycles.

Closely related to funding is the issue of time. Teachers frequently reported that the demands of classroom teaching, supervision duties, and administrative workloads leave them with little time to engage meaningfully in CPD. For schools operating with limited teaching staff, releasing teachers for workshops or cluster meetings becomes almost impossible without disrupting the teaching timetable. This time-

pressure challenge reflects a global trend. Darling-Hammond *et al.* (2017) ^[10] found that across many Sub-Saharan African contexts, CPD is often scheduled during term time without sufficient consideration of teachers' classroom obligations, which compromises its quality and reach. This finding is equally in contrast to Desimone (2009) and Kang, *et al.* (2013) who alluded that effective CPD activities require sufficient duration regarding the span of time over which the activity is spread and the number of hours in the activity. In the Zambian case, the absence of protected time slots for CPD further signals a policy-practice gap, where professional development is mandated but not operationally integrated into the working calendar of schools and the ministry in general. It is therefore imperative that CPD activities be well timed to avoid rushing through them as such practices defeats its intended purpose.

Another major challenge revealed in this study was limited access to structured CPD programmes. While school-based activities such as mentoring and peer observation were widely practised, they were often unstructured, undocumented, and lacking in pedagogical depth. This challenge defeats the attributes by Kennedy (2016) who opines that teachers who participate in well-structured CPD programmes not only acquire new content knowledge but also develop pedagogical strategies that can be applied in classrooms. Moreover, sustained engagement in structured CPD activities helps reinforce positive attitudes towards professional growth, increasing teacher efficacy. Cluster and zonal CPD sessions were rare, primarily due to the cost and logistical burden involved. In many cases, decentralized CPD, though conceptually supported in policy, failed to materialize in practice due to weak facilitation, inadequate coordination, and lack of transport support at district level. These findings mirror those of DeJaeghere *et al.* (2009), who found that in resource constrained systems, CPD often becomes a "symbolic activity" without meaningful learning outcomes unless accompanied by strong leadership and institutional scaffolding. Similarly, Westbrook *et al.* (2013) note that in Sub-Saharan African contexts, even when policies promote decentralized CPD, implementation frequently falters because of fragmented delivery systems, under-resourced training structures, and limited monitoring of actual practice. This situation resonates well with Muynda (2022) and Borko (2004) who warned that fragmented CPD landscape limits coherence and sustainability thereby diminishing the transformative potential of CPD by scattering efforts across disconnected initiatives.

In addition to funding, time, and structural weaknesses, the study also identified weak policy communication as a critical barrier. Many teachers and even some SICs were unaware of the content or intent of the CPD model (MoE, 2024). There was confusion regarding what qualifies as formal CPD, who is responsible for coordination, and how CPD activities are to be monitored and evaluated. In some districts, SICs reported that no induction or orientation had ever been offered to support their role. This lack of clarity not only affects implementation fidelity but also undermines teacher motivation. Teachers who perceive CPD as vague, repetitive, or irrelevant are less likely to take it seriously or commit to long-term participation (Opfer and Pedder, 2011) ^[25].

Technology-related constraints also emerged as a significant

issue. While participants acknowledged the potential of online learning and virtual CPD platforms, especially in light of the adaptations necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic, most rural schools in the study lacked reliable internet access, digital devices, or adequate ICT training. This challenge is well documented in the literature. For instance, ZANEC (2023) found that although digital integration is increasingly emphasized in national education policies, widespread infrastructure limitations, especially in rural areas continue to impede meaningful use of educational technology. Similarly, in many low-income contexts, including Zambia, the use of ICT for teacher professional development is hampered by inadequate connectivity, lack of electricity, high data costs, and insufficient digital competencies among educators. As a result, promising innovations such as virtual learning communities, video-based lesson reflection tools, or open-access resource hubs often remain inaccessible to the majority of teachers, thereby exacerbating the digital divide between urban and rural settings. Teachers' technological proficiency and digital literacy strongly mediate the success of online and blended CPD programs. Teachers who are confident with digital tools tend to engage more deeply, collaborate effectively, and apply learning directly to classroom practice. Conversely, gaps in digital skills or insufficient support structures limit participation and reduce program impact. This aligns with findings from Banda and Kapalu (2023) in the Zambian context, suggesting that digital CPD initiatives require targeted capacity-building and infrastructure support to be equitable and effective. Addressing these competency and access issues is critical for leveraging digital CPD to enhance teaching quality globally.

Lack of or inadequate strict policy adherence and administrative support was yet another challenge encountered during CDP activities. Lack of coordination between policy directives and school level practices hinder the effectiveness of CPD activities on teacher professional development and student learning outcomes due to inconsistency implementation across individuals, schools and districts, ineffective use of resources and teacher frustration and demotivation. Teachers are more likely to engage in professional development when it is meaningful, relevant and supportive to their practice. Furthermore, inadequate administrative or leadership support towards CPD activities was a push factor towards effective implementation of CPD activities. Teachers indicated that school leaders who actively supported professional development, provided resources and integrated CPD goals into school improvement plans created more conducive environments for meaningful learning. This observation aligns with global and national evidence (Darling-Hammond *et al.*, 2017 ^[10]; MoE, 2021) that leadership and institutional support are pivotal for maximizing the effectiveness of professional development. Therefore, integrating strong leadership support, policy guidance, and teacher input is essential to enhancing CPD's transformative potential in Zambia.

Despite the existence of Teaching Council of Zambia (TCZ) CPD policy framework and the ministry of education's strong emphasis in key national policy documents such as *Educating Our Future and the Zambian national curriculum framework*, this study revealed persistent challenges in the implementation, adherence and monitoring of CPD policy

issues. The policy attaches teacher licensing to attendance of CPD activities but this is not adhered to in practice.

Guided by Educating Our Future and the Zambia National Curriculum Framework, this study revealed persistent challenges in the implementation, adherence, and monitoring of CPD policy provisions. Notably, although national policy links teacher licensing and professional accountability to participation in CPD activities, this requirement is weakly enforced in practice. In addition, while existing CPD policy frameworks emphasise compliance and attendance, they provide limited guidance on evaluating the actual impact of CPD on classroom practices and learner outcomes. These findings align with recent empirical studies in Zambia and Sub-Saharan Africa, which report weak policy implementation, inadequate monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, and limited post-training follow-up support, resulting in CPD being treated largely as a procedural obligation rather than a transformative professional learning process (MoE, 2021; Mulenga & Kabombwe, 2023^[18]; UNESCO-IICBA, 2022). Consequently, CPD remains insufficiently linked to instructional improvement and learner achievement, reinforcing concerns raised in contemporary African teacher development literature.

The study further established that CPD activities were frequently perceived as one-off events, often driven by donor or NGO initiatives rather than being embedded within school-based improvement plans. Teachers expressed scepticism regarding the sustainability and contextual relevance of externally funded CPD programmes, noting that such initiatives often cease once donor funding cycles end. This concern underscores the importance of institutionalising CPD within the routine operations of schools and districts, rather than treating it as a project-based add-on. Recent studies in Zambia and comparable Sub-Saharan African contexts similarly report that over-reliance on externally supported CPD initiatives weakens continuity, ownership, and long-term impact when such programmes are not fully integrated into national and school-level systems (Moono *et al.*, 2019; Lungu, 2022; UNESCO-IICBA, 2022).

Furthermore, regional and global evidence reinforces the view that donor-driven CPD interventions, although often well-intentioned, tend to be fragmented and short-lived unless anchored within government planning, budgeting, and monitoring structures. UNESCO-IICBA (2022), UNESCO and the International Task Force on Teachers (TTF) (2024), and UNESCO (2023) consistently observe that many Sub-Saharan African countries continue to depend heavily on external financing for teacher professional development, a practice that compromises sustainability and alignment with local priorities. Similarly, Pasique and Maguete (2023) argue that CPD initiatives achieve greater and more lasting impact when they are aligned with national education strategies, supported by institutional leadership, and owned by schools and teachers themselves. In the Zambia context, the Global Partnership for Education (GPE, 2020) country-level evaluations further emphasise the need to strengthen the sustainability of teacher development by embedding CPD into Ministry-led budgeting frameworks, monitoring systems, and school-based planning processes. The persistent underfunding of CPD within domestic education budgets has therefore left professional development vulnerable to external agendas,

undermining teacher ownership, policy coherence, and long-term effectiveness.

Related to the challenge of over dependency on donor support is failure to adapt donor driven CPD activities such as lesson study cycle to the local needs, pedagogies, environment and resources. Cultural differences, availability of resources, teacher capacity and support and sustainability have significantly affected the implementation and management of adapted CPD activities in Africa and Zambia specifically. This finding reflects those of ADEA (2025) who documents that external funding often dictates both the thematic and operational modalities of professional development programmes as they prioritise internationally popular agendas such as literacy, numeracy and competency based curriculum reforms that may not fully align with the local needs of the local teachers at that time. Additionally, the challenge resonates well with Stigler and Hiebert (1999) who noted that teaching is a cultural activity, and what works in one culture and environment may not work in another due cultural differences. It is therefore a limitation for the Zambian teacher to adopt foreign CPD activities such as the lesson study cycle as the Zambian culture, social, economic, classroom and work environment are different from the originating country in this case Japan. It is therefore imperative that the Zambian education system should invest in capacity building of its teachers and embrace collaborations and adaptation of foreign CPD concepts to local needs and environment if such foreign CPD practices are to be effective in the local context.

Inadequate teacher consultation and involvement at planning and framing stage of CPD activities stood firm as another constraint. Teachers expressed frustration about this practice as they have no sense of ownership for the activities. Teachers are passive recipients of CPD programmes that in most cases do not fit in the personal, professional and institutional needs. This finding re-echoes those of Schwillé and Dembélé (2007) and Avalos and Valenzuela (2016) who acknowledged the importance of teacher agency in CPD as they argue that many African programmes position teachers as passive recipients of training rather than active co-constructors of knowledge. This finding contradicts Knowles *et al* (2015) who opines that for teachers as adult learners, learning becomes more meaningful if they control their learning with some degree of ownership. Furthermore, teachers are adult learner hence the finding stifles the principles of adult learning and reflective learning as Gregson and Sturko (2007) and Schon (1983) explains that when principles of adult learning inform and shape professional development experiences for teachers, teachers are able to reflect on their practice, construct professional knowledge with their peers, and develop more collaborative relationships with their fellow teachers. This finding suffocates the purpose of CPD as teachers are reduced to mere consumers and passive receivers of knowledge. Therefore, it is high time that CPD in Africa must shift from transmission-based models to participatory ones that value teacher voice and experience. Teacher engagement levels at all stages of CPD activities improves their perception and view CPD as a relevant practice to teaching content and pedagogical needs hence the likelihood of meaningful instructional change.

The study revealed that mentors and facilitators responsible for CPD activities lacked the requisite training, knowledge, and professional competencies. This implies that individuals

tasked with facilitating CPD were inadequately prepared to fulfil critical roles such as promoting CPD as a core element of school improvement, sustaining inclusive CPD arrangements for all staff, monitoring and evaluating the quality and impact of CPD activities, and keeping abreast of emerging CPD policies and practices at both national and local levels. Recent literature emphasises that effective CPD facilitation requires specialised pedagogical expertise, leadership capacity, and continuous professional updating to ensure relevance and coherence of professional learning initiatives (UNESCO-IICBA, 2022; Pasique and Maguate, 2023).

As a result of inadequate facilitator preparation, teachers in this study reported receiving fragmented and inconsistent guidance, which negatively affected the implementation and transfer of CPD outcomes into classroom practice. This finding aligns with Abakah *et al.* (2022), who found that poorly prepared CPD facilitators often deliver superficial and disconnected professional learning experiences, limiting teachers' ability to translate CPD content into meaningful instructional change.

Overall, the findings are consistent with recent evidence from Ethiopia, where Tulu (2019) established that the lack of trained CPD facilitators in government secondary schools significantly compromised the quality, coherence, and effectiveness of CPD implementation. Similar conclusions were drawn by Wondimu (2020), who reported that insufficient facilitator capacity undermined mentoring, follow-up support, and reflective professional learning among teachers. Collectively, these studies reinforce the argument that facilitator competence is a critical determinant of CPD effectiveness and that inadequately trained mentors weaken the potential of CPD to function as a sustainable school improvement strategy.

Conclusion

The study examined the practices, challenges and prospects of CPD among teachers in central province, Zambia. Guided by the pragmatic paradigm and an exploratory sequential mixed design, the study generated evidence on how CPD is perceived, implemented and practice within the Zambian education context. The conclusions drawn are aligned with research objectives.

The study revealed several systemic, location and school-level challenges affecting CPD participation. Time constraints, financial limitations, time constraints due to heavy workload insufficiently trained facilitators and mentors, lower teacher motivation and insufficient school management support were among the most frequently cited barriers. Teachers in rural and remote schools were particularly disadvantaged due to long travel distances and limited access to CPD opportunities. In addition, there was a lack of clear incentives or progression mechanisms to reward sustained engagement in CPD. Many teachers also reported limited support from district education authorities, both in terms of material resources and technical guidance. At the school level, competing priorities, large teaching loads, and insufficient planning time further constrained meaningful CPD engagement. Collectively, these barriers reflect deep-rooted structural and organisational limitations that must be addressed to make CPD more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable if the system is to benefit from CPD activities.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance the effectiveness of continuous professional development for teacher in meeting its primary mandate in Central Province of Zambia, national and regional level and globally.

1. Link CPD Participation to Career Progression and promotion

To improve teacher motivation and long-term commitment to professional development, CPD participation should be more visibly linked to career progression and promotion pathways. The Teaching Council of Zambia should collaborate with the Ministry of Education and the teaching service commission (TSC) to develop and operationalise a credit-point based CPD tracking system. Teachers who consistently engage in high-quality CPD should be eligible for recognition, promotions, or leadership roles. Such a system should also recognise informal and non-traditional forms of CPD such as peer mentoring, lesson study, and reflective practice, especially when these are documented and evaluated. This approach will help to shift the perception of CPD from being an administrative obligation to a meaningful professional pursuit.

2. Improve Financing Mechanisms for CPD

The successful implementation of CPD initiatives requires predictable and adequate funding at both central and decentralised levels. The Ministry of Education, in partnership with cooperating partners and local authorities, should explore the establishment of a dedicated CPD fund, with clear guidelines for allocation and disbursement. Schools should be empowered to budget for CPD within their annual work plans and encouraged to mobilise community-based support through Parent Teacher Committees (PTCs) or school boards.

Additionally, CPD activities that require travel, materials, or certification fees should be subsidised for rural and low-income schools to reduce inequities. Schools should be encouraged to leverage on partnerships with other education stakeholders to supplement CPD resources. With substantial funding to CPD activities, some funds can be reserved for action research and reflection practice so that CPD practices are informed by actual teacher needs. Additionally, some funds can be channelled towards capacity building of stakeholders such as Head teachers, SICs and facilitators to improve their leadership and facilitating skills. The CDF may also be explored as a possible financing channel for school initiated CPD activities, where aligned with district education priorities.

3. Leverage Digital Technologies and Distance Modalities

The Ministry of Education, in collaboration with relevant stakeholders should accelerate efforts to digitise CPD delivery and expand access to teachers in remote and underserved areas. This includes developing interactive, mobile-accessible CPD modules, establishing district-level e-learning hubs, and integrating CPD content into existing e-government platforms. This will assist to address the disparities in CPD provision and quality between school despite the rural or urban location. In-service teacher training should also include digital literacy components to

equip teachers with the skills necessary to navigate virtual learning environments. Where digital CPD is introduced, care should be taken to blend it with in-person support and mentoring to maintain a balance between accessibility and quality.

4. Align CPD Content with Curriculum Reform and Classroom Needs

There is need to ensure that CPD is responsive to both national curriculum priorities and the practical realities of classroom teaching. CPD programmes should be aligned with the 2023 Zambia Education Curriculum Framework (ZECF), particularly the career pathways and the increased focus on competencies such as critical thinking, entrepreneurship, digital literacy, and environmental sustainability. Training materials should also be localised to reflect contextual challenges and opportunities within different school environments. Thematic areas such as formative assessment and subject specific pedagogies should be prioritised. In doing so, CPD becomes not only a vehicle for curriculum dissemination but also a platform for meaningful pedagogical reflection and adaptation.

5. Foster Collaboration across Schools and Stakeholders

The Ministry of Education should support the establishment of cluster-level professional learning communities (PLCs) and subject associations that bring together teachers from different schools to share experiences, co-develop resources, and solve shared instructional challenges. Such collaborative forums can also serve as incubation spaces for innovation and peer mentorship. District education boards and resource centres must play a facilitative role in convening and sustaining these networks in order to ensure that they operate regularly and are integrated into broader CPD systems. Partnerships with teacher education institutions, NGOs, and development partners can further enhance the reach and quality of CPD by pooling resources and expertise.

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