

## Lifelong Learning in Action: A Study of Professional Development Activities Among Libyan EFL Secondary School Teachers

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التعلم مدى الحياة في ميدان العمل - دراسة حول أنشطة التطوير المهني  
لدى معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في المدارس الثانوية الليبية

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### الملخص:

يُعدُّ التطوير المهني المستمر (CPD) للمعلمين محور اهتمام التعليم لسنوات عديدة. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى استكشاف تطبيق مبادئ التعلم المستمر بين معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية (EFL) في المدارس الثانوية الليبية بمدينة العجيلات من خلال مشاركتهم في أنشطة التطوير المهني. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، تسعى هذه الدراسة إلى التحقق من وجود اختلاف بين المعلمين الذكور والإناث في طرق تنفيذهم لهذه الأنشطة التنموية. باستخدام منهج كمي، تم جمع البيانات من خلال استبيان إلكتروني وُزِع على 114 معلمًا ومعلمة. أظهرت النتائج أن المعلمين، سواءً كانوا ذكورًا أو إناثًا، يميلون إلى الانخراط في الأنشطة التطويرية غير الرسمية أكثر من الأنشطة الرسمية. بينما تميل المعلمات إلى التطور من خلال الخبرة والتدريب عبر إعداد الدروس والإجابة على أسئلة الطلاب، كانت أكثر الأنشطة ممارسة من قبل المعلمين الذكور هي قراءة الكتب والمقالات. وفيما يتعلق بأقل الأنشطة ممارسة، كانت تقديم العروض في الندوات وورش العمل للمعلمين الذكور والسفر إلى بلد يتحدث اللغة الإنجليزية بالنسبة للمعلمات. علاوة على ذلك، تم استخدام اختبار "T" لفحص الفروق المحتملة بين الأنشطة المنفذة من قبل المعلمين الذكور والإناث؛ وأظهرت نتائج الاختبار عدم وجود فروق ذات دلالة إحصائية بين المعلمين في الأنشطة التي يشاركون فيها من أجل التطوير المهني. وبالتالي، تبرز هذه الدراسة الأنشطة التي

يتبعها المعلمون لتعزيز مهاراتهم التدريسية والتكيف مع احتياجات الفصول الدراسية المتنوعة، مما يؤكد على أهمية النمو المهني المستدام في تحسين النتائج التعليمية.

### **Abstract**

Continuous professional development (CPD) for teachers has been the concern of education for many years. This study examines the implementations of lifelong learning principles among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers in Libyan secondary schools in Ajelat city through their engagement in professional development activities. Moreover, this study is devoted to investigate whether male and female teachers vary in their implementation of their developmental activities. Adopting a quantitative approach, data were collected through online questionnaire which was distributed among 114 male and female teachers. The results indicated that both male and female teachers tend to engage in informal developmental activities more than the formal ones. While female teachers tend to develop more through-experience and teaching by preparing lessons and answering students' questions, male teachers' most frequently practiced activity was reading books and articles. The least practiced activities were presenting presentations in seminars and workshops for male teachers and travelling to an English-speaking country for female teachers. Moreover, A T-test was employed to investigate potential difference between male and female teachers implemented activities; the results of the test indicated that there is not any significant difference between male and female teachers in the activities they engage in to develop professionally. Thus, this study highlights the activities teachers employ to enhance their pedagogical skills and adapt to diverse classroom needs, emphasizing the importance of ongoing professional growth for improving educational outcomes.

### **Introduction**

In our swiftly developing world, technology, globalization, climate change, and social polarization are reshaping every aspect in our lives; therefore, education is also undergoing a profound transformative journey. Education has evolved from being limited to traditional schooling to embrace lifelong and life-wide learning. Lifelong learning is not a brand-new concept; it has become a widely discussed in the field of adult education. Thus, improving the quality of education become a must.

To be updated with these advancements and to help students overcome the obstacles they face in their learning journey, teachers should continuously improve their professional knowledge, skills, and expertise throughout their careers. Therefore, teachers should involve themselves in a lifelong process of learning, reflection, and enhancement by implementing continuous professional developmental activities. Teacher continuous professional development has been the concern of educational research for many years. A considerable number of stakeholders, educators, administrators and policy makers agree that it is essential to the teachers' professional success and for the benefit of their students' learning to practice professional development activities (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). As CPD enhances teaching skills and effectiveness, it is essential for all teachers across various fields and specialties. However, it would be more vital for EFL teachers who face unique challenges in educating students from diverse cultures and linguistic backgrounds. This study will contribute to the literature of continuous professional development by providing research-based data reporting the practices of Libyan EFL secondary school teachers. Moreover, Libyan authorities may rely on the findings to organize workshops and seminars stressing the importance of professional development activities.

This study is devoted to investigate the practices that Libyan EFL secondary school teachers at Ajelat city engaged in and the extent to which these practices are varied by gender. Consequently, the current study aims to answer the following research questions;

1. What activities do Libyan EFL secondary teachers in Ajelat city implement to develop professionally?
2. Are there any significant differences in the CPD activities implemented by male and female Libya EFL secondary school teachers in Ajelat city?

### **Literature Review**

Teachers are constantly in direct and close contact with students; they influence what is taught and how it is taught; therefore, they must be equipped with the necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities to promote and enhance learners' performance and the learning process as a whole (King & Newman, 2001). However, is the initial teacher education and training sufficient to enable teachers to fulfil the high expectations placed on the

teachers' shoulders to contribute to the educational process? Overtime, with the constantly changing educational demands, teachers' knowledge and skills are susceptible to decline and could be outdated and ineffective (Campbell, 1997). Therefore, teachers are required to constantly renew, update, and enhance their teaching knowledge and skills through engaging in professional developmental activities.

Development and growth have been widely discussed under different concepts; including teacher education, teacher development, teacher learning, staff development, career development, continuing education, lifelong learning, and continuous 'continuing' professional development CPD. Continuous professional development 'CPD' is defined by (Day, 1999: 4) as "the process by which, alone and with others, teachers review, renew and extend their commitment as change agents to the moral purposes of teaching; and by which they acquire and develop critically the knowledge, skills, planning and practice with children, young people and colleagues through each phase of their teaching lives". Avalos (2011:10) defined it as "teachers' learning, learning how to learn and transforming their knowledge into practice for the benefit of their students' growth".

Day (1999:4) believed that Professional development includes all natural learning experiences and those conscious and planned activities which are intended to be of direct or indirect benefit to the individual, group or school, which contribute, through these, to the quality of education in the classroom. Thus, CPD encompass various types of formal and informal learning experiences and activities that teachers are engaged in to enhance and improve their knowledge, skills, and practices thus improving the quality of education (Craft, 2000 and Borg, 2006).

Hargreaves & Fullan (1992) proposed three approaches through which teachers' professional development is formulated:

1. Teacher development as knowledge and skill development: it is based on equipping teachers with knowledge and skills about the teaching strategies and subject matter required via top- down training process administered and directed by experts. Support and coaching directed by colleagues are also included.
2. Teacher development as self- understanding: Relying on the fact that teachers are more knowledgeable of their needs, and of what is going on

in their classrooms. This approach highlights the teachers' autonomy in their development as persons and as professionals as well through reflecting on personal and practical knowledge of teaching.

3. Teacher development as ecological change: The nature of the context in which teacher professional development is implemented is seen as crucial for its success. The ecological perspective of this approach can be understood in two main ways. The first is that professional development efforts initiated by teachers might succeed or fail depending on the context of their working environment. The second is that the instructional environment itself can serve as a development process focal point such as practicing peer observation, and group discussion.

Strategies and activities for teachers' CPD are organized and categorized by different scholars in a number of different ways. Lieberman (1996) provided a classification for activities that teachers engage in to develop professionally. She identified three types of CPD; *direct teaching* (such as courses, workshops and so on), *learning in school* (such as peer coaching, critical friendships, mentoring, action research, and task-related planning teams), and *learning out of school* (such as learning networks, visits to other schools, school-university partnerships and so on). Friedman (2012:5) has classified CPD programs into *formal "structured"* activities, such as courses or organized activities, and *informal "unstructured"* activities such as reading and discussions at social gatherings.

Therefore, various professional developmental models and activities were introduced in the literature. Richards & Farrell (2005) have introduced a range of professional development activities that can be carried out at different levels. i.e., activities are done individually, with a colleague, with a group of colleagues, or within the programs and events organized by the institution.

Individual	One-to-one	Group-based	Institutional
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-monitoring</li> <li>• Journal writing</li> <li>• Critical incidents</li> <li>• Teaching portfolios</li> <li>• Action research</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peer coaching</li> <li>• Peer observation</li> <li>• Critical friendships</li> <li>• Action research</li> <li>• Critical incidents</li> <li>• Team teaching</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Case studies</li> <li>• Action research</li> <li>• Journal writing</li> <li>• Teacher support groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workshops</li> <li>• Action research</li> <li>• Teacher support groups</li> </ul>

Table 1.2 Activities for Teacher Development (Richards & Farrell, 2005: 14)

Different scholars proposed various theoretical frameworks for teachers' development. Kennedy (2005) proposed an analytical framework based on the delivery style of the activities. Kennedy categorized the developmental activities into; *transmissive* (controlled and delivered externally, without taking teachers' values and experiences into considerations); *transitional* (directed by external guides or autonomously by teachers)' or *transformative* (entirely and autonomously controlled by the teacher). Fraser et al. (2007) classified professional learning opportunities into quadrants, known as Reid's quadrants, which were combined based on two dimensions. Formal-informal and planned-incidental. Formal (arranged by an agent other than the teacher), informal (established by the teacher), planned (formal or informal pre-arranged practice), and incidental (accidental and spontaneous activity).

### CPD in Libya

"With the explosion in language teaching there has been an increasing demand for language teachers and consequent need to train these teachers" (Wallace, 1991:2). As teaching English is considered to be an essential part in this century, research in the field of EFL and ESL stresses the importance of searching about techniques and methods to develop and enhance English language teaching and learning. Thus, effective teaching requires well-educated and skillful teachers. Reviewing the literature indicated that investigating Libyan EFL secondary school teachers' CPD is limited. However, findings from related studies have been synthesized in order to reach to fruitful insights about Libyan EFL secondary school teachers' CPD.

In Libya, teaching English has been integrated within the educational system for many years. According to Shihiba (2011), Libyan EFL teachers are graduated either from faculties of Arts or Education. ‘Faculties of teachers’ training- education’, where teachers study many different subjects for four years including; reading comprehension, writing, speaking, listening, grammar, and phonetics. They also study some psychological and other subjects in Arabic language. However, according to my experience and after visiting and working with other faculties, recently, many other different courses related to language teaching methods and assessment, linguistics and some subjects related to literature were included. Moreover, faculty of education graduates are provided with opportunities to have teaching training in schools, pre-service training, under the supervision of specialists. Faculty of Arts graduates are prepared for further studies and research. During the four years of education, those teachers study subjects like literature and theoretical linguistics; moreover, some of the subjects are taught in Arabic.

However, Hamdy (2007) argued that this preparation is not regarded as sufficient to prepare EFL teachers, and leaves English teachers unqualified to perform different roles. Alkhaboli (2017) added that those teachers lack subject knowledge, language proficiency, and competence in foreign language teaching methodology. Elkhaboli (2017) added that developing the content knowledge of the student teachers without providing opportunities for practice is the main concern in many countries. Thus, to enhance the quality of education, Libyan EFL teachers must constantly develop themselves professionally.

Based on the available literature, research specifically focusing on the CPD activities of Libyan EFL secondary school teachers is limited. However, synthesizing findings from related studies on Libyan EFL teachers’ beliefs, practices of CPD revealed a landscape marked by significant challenges and a clear gap between policy intentions and classroom realities.

Elgarid (2020) conducted a study to investigate the beliefs that Libyan EFL university teachers hold and the activities they practice to develop professionally. The study employed mixed-methods approach to collect the required data. A questionnaire was distributed among 53 teachers from faculties of Janzoor, Al-zawia, Abi issa, Subratha, and Ajelat. Moreover, 5 teachers from the same sample were interviewed. The results indicated that

the participants strongly believe in the importance of developing professionally; however, their reported practices were not as high as their beliefs yet they try to develop themselves through informal activities more than the formal ones.

Al-Arif (2024) conducted a study to investigate the challenges encountered by EFL university teachers at Azzaytuna university regarding their CPD activities. Employing a mixed-methods approach, 44 participants filled a questionnaire and 6 teachers answered semi-structured interviews. The results revealed that although teachers acknowledged the importance of CPD, they encountered some significant challenges related financial and infrastructure resources. Additionally, issues of poor collaboration within their work environment are highlighted, whereas personal skills and qualities are seen as less challenging

However, despite the urgent need to support Libyan EFL teachers through providing them with developmental opportunities, still, the existent developmental activities provided in the Libyan context are rare, fragmented, incoherent, and do not fulfill teachers' needs, interests, and requirements (Elgarid, 2020). Moreover, even the arranged and conducted programs did not get huge number of attendances. Hassan (2008) argued that the vast majority of the teachers are not willing to attend and participate in such programs. Brock and Grady (2001) reported that, in developing countries, most teachers complain that their training programs did not prepare them sufficiently for real teaching in the real world. Due to the lack of managed training programs in Libya, Hamdy (2007) believed that training programs for school teachers face many organizational and managerial problems. Therefore, encouraging Libyan EFL teachers towards developmental activities will assist teachers to discover the best approach to CPD or training ideas (Elmabruk, 2009).

### **Methodology**

Given that the current study was concerned with the activities that Libyan EFL secondary school teachers are engaged in to develop themselves professionally and whether those activities are varied by gender, the study adopted a quantitative approach through employing an electronic questionnaire designed to address the research questions and objectives. The questionnaire consisted of 16 items related to different CPD activities

adopted from (Elgarid, 2020; Al-Arif,2024) and modified with what suits the requirements of the current study. To guarantee the extent of the suitability of the questionnaire with the Libyan context, face validity test had been used. This type of validity is "the easiest to achieve and the most basic kind of validity" (Neuman, 2006:192). It has been also stated by the same author that face validity refers to the evaluation and the judgment of the scientific committee that the measurement instrument really measures what it is intended to measure. Therefore, the questionnaire had been judged by four Libyan EFL university staff members. In this questionnaire, the teachers were required to determine the extent to which they implement developmental activities.

114 Libyan EFL male and female secondary school teachers in Ajelat city were involved in fulfilling the questionnaire, yielding a 100% response rate. The participants were 20 males and 94 females. The participants were with varying levels of professional experiences ranging from one year up to 30 years. The collected data were subsequently analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 26.

### **Results and discussion**

In order to obtain answers for the research questions, make sense of the collected data, and achieve the objectives of the study, and to provide a condensed picture about the phenomenon under investigation, descriptive statistics, mean scores and standard deviations are employed. The quantitative data gained from the questionnaire was statistically analyzed by Statistic Package for Social Science SPSS.

The questionnaire is intended to investigate Libyan EFL secondary school teachers' implementations of developmental activities; therefore, they were asked to rank the extent to which they have practiced different formal and informal CPD activities. The obtained data were analyzed statistically based mainly on mean scores and standard deviations. To measure the most and the least practiced activities, mean scores were calculated and measured. Mean is the most commonly used measure of central tendency. The higher the mean score, the more the teachers practice the activity. Moreover, to investigate whether the teachers practice similar activities, the standard deviation for each statement was measured. Standard deviation is a measure of spread; it measures how diverse a set of data

around the mean is (Babbie, 2007:453). If the scores of the standard deviation are high, this means that the data are more spread. This indicates that the teachers' responses towards the activity vary widely. If the scores are low, this means that the data are more bunched together; thus, the teachers practice similar activities.

Tracing the results indicates that the most and the least practiced

N	Questionnaire items		Mean	Std
1	Learning through teaching, such as lesson preparation and answering students' question	M	4.10	1.021
		F	4.59	.679
2	Utilizing the internet when facing any linguistic or teaching problems, such as understanding grammatical rules.	M	4.15	.875
		F	4.41	.822
3	Collaborating with colleagues, such as preparing lessons with other teachers.	M	3.05	1.099
		F	3.14	1.043
4	Reading and exploring English books to enrich vocabulary, for example.	M	4.25	.851
		F	4.35	.813
5	Pursuing higher studies and getting qualifications	M	3.70	1.174
		F	3.74	1.269
6	Following the guidance of senior teachers and inspectors.	M	4.05	.999
		F	3.96	1.036
7	The ability to evaluate and reflect on your personal performance; through checklist, for example.	M	3.90	.968
		F	3.67	1.177
8	Travelling to English-speaking countries	M	2.70	1.559
		F	2.40	1.547
9	Developing a form containing a set of questions about the teachers' performance in classes and giving students the opportunity to answer them.	M	3.00	1.076
		F	3.18	1.406
10	Attending conferences related to language and teaching methodology.	M	2.75	1.251
		F	3.04	1.414
11	Attending workshops about language and teaching methodology.	M	2.90	.968
		F	3.31	1.328
12	Participating in organizing workshops at school focused on developing teachers' skills.	M	2.65	1.226
		F	2.89	1.425
13	Delivering lectures at workshops and seminars	M	2.40	1.429
		F	2.59	1.394

activities are similar for both genders. Both male and female teachers *Learn*

*through teaching*, with female teachers scoring (4.59) and male teachers (4.10) mean scores which in turn indicates that female teachers value lesson preparation and answering students' questions. However, female responses are more homogenous around the mean and this can be evident in female standard deviation low score which is (.679) and (1.021) for males. This indicates that there is a tendency towards teaching methods which value students' interaction and interactive role in learning.

*Reading and exploring English books* was practiced highly by both genders. Female teachers scored slightly higher mean score (4.25) and (4.35) for males. However, this activity was the most practiced by male teachers. Moreover, the standard deviation for both genders were low which indicates that the responses of both genders are homogenous. This reflects the commitment of both genders to develop themselves personally through reading. Also, both male and female teachers rely strongly on *utilizing the internet when facing challenges*, with (4.15) mean score for male teachers and (4.41) for female teachers. Furthermore, the standard deviation for both genders is low which indicates that the responses are centered around the mean score. This reliance on the internet indicates that Libyan EFL secondary school teachers are adapting to using technological tools in education.

The results of *Following the Guidance of inspectors and Senior teachers*, indicate that male teachers seek guidance from seniors more than female teachers, with (4.05) mean scores for males and (3.96) for female teachers. The standard deviation for the responses is (.999 and 1.036) for male and female teachers respectively. Regarding *Self-evaluation and Reflection*, the results indicated that male teachers are more able to reflect on and evaluate their performance, with (3.90) mean scores for males and (3.67) for female teachers. Moreover, male teachers' responses are more homogenous and centered around the mean and this can be reflected on the low score of the male standard deviation (.969) for male teachers and (1.177) for female teachers.

Both male and female teachers showed moderate interest in *further education and pursuing higher studies*. Mean scores and standard deviation scores are relatively close with (3.70) mean score for male teachers and (3.74) for females and (1.174 and 1.269) standard deviation scores for both

respectively. This in turn reflects the teachers' interest in continuous learning and personal growth. Also, the teachers' responses to *Collaborative Work* indicate that the teachers share a moderate engagement in teamwork activities with (3.05) mean score for male teachers and (3.14) for female teachers.

The modest mean scores are for developing *feedback forms* that seek students' evaluation of teachers' performance with (3.00) for male teachers and (3.18) for female teachers. Although the standard deviation scores for both teachers are high, still female teachers' scores higher than male scores, with (1.076) for male teachers and (1.406) for female teachers. This indicates that female teachers' responses are more spread.

Both male and female teachers have limited *Opportunities to Travel* to English speaking countries. The mean scores for female teachers are (2.40) and (2.70) for male teachers. Moreover, the standard deviation scores are high for both genders which indicates that the response are varied. Thus, there is a lack of exposure to immersive language experiences.

The mean scores for attending conferences and workshops about teaching methodology are low reflecting teachers' poor engagement in formal pre-arranged developmental activities. The mean scores for female teachers regarding *attending conferences* are (3.04) while male teachers are (2.75). Attending *workshops about teaching methodology's* female mean scores are (3.31) whereas for male teachers is (2.90).

Organizing and delivering lectures in workshops were the least teachers' practiced activities. The mean scores for male teachers' *Participation in Organizing Workshops* is (2.65) while for female teachers is (2.89). While the mean scores for delivering lectures in workshops is (2.40) for male teachers and (2.59) for female teachers. Thus, the teachers do not take the leadership roles for their formal professional development activities.

To sum up, while the results indicated that both male and female teachers develop more through informal unplanned developmental activities, female teachers reported that they were developed more through *practicing teaching through preparing lessons and answering students' questions* whereas male teachers developed more through *reading and exploring English books*. Moreover, the least implemented activities were those which

require formal planning and participants' participation for male teachers-*delivering lectures at workshops and seminars*. Female teachers' least practiced activity was *travelling to English speaking country*. The results align with (Elgarid, 2020) who found the Libyan EFL university teachers practice informal developmental activities more than the formal ones. Although the results agree with Al-Aref (2024) to some extent; both of them agreed that the most practiced activities are informal, Al-Aref results indicated that the amongst the least practiced activities were '*Mentoring and observing Peers' lessons*'.

To investigate the variation in the developmental activities between male and female teachers, *Independent Samples Test* was employed.

Independent Samples Test		t-test for Equality of Means		
		t	Df	Sig.(2-tailed)
VAR00004	Equal variances assumed	-.474-	24	.640
	Equal variances not assumed	-.474-	23.970	.640

Based on a significance value (Sig) of 0.640, which is greater than 0.05, it can be concluded that there are no statistically significant differences at the 5% significance level between male and female teachers' practices of developmental activities. The difference in their mean scores is small indicating that it is not a real, systematic difference between male and female teachers.

### Conclusion

Given the constant improvement of educational landscape and the diverse needs of students, teachers are required to update their knowledge, skills, language proficiency, and teaching methodologies, thus continuous professional development for Libyan EFL teachers is a must. CPD not only

helps teachers to improve their teaching, but also contributes to the quality of education in Libyan EFL secondary schools. This study aims to investigate the activities that Libyan EFL secondary teachers implement to develop professionally; moreover, this study is devoted to report the different activities implemented by male and female teachers in Ajelat secondary schools. The data were collected from 114 secondary school teacher through online questionnaires. The results reported that both Libyan EFL male and female secondary school teachers develop more through implementing informal unplanned activities. The results indicated the male teachers develop more through reading and exploring English books and utilizing the internet when facing difficulties whereas their least practiced activities were delivering lectures at workshops and seminars and participating in organizing workshops at schools. However, female teachers most reported implemented activities were learning through teaching and reading and exploring English books whereas female teachers least practiced activities were travelling to English-speaking countries and delivering lectures at workshops and seminars. Data obtained from the T-test to investigate the differences between male and female implemented activities revealed that there is not any significant difference between male and female teachers.

### **Implications and recommendations**

Based on the results and the conclusion the following implications and recommendations can be highlighted

#### **Implications**

CPD plays a crucial role in educational reform. Therefore, it is essential to reflect this in reality. CPD is a lifelong activity that teachers must be aware of and that teachers' education is essential for enhancing the educational system. Thus, it is important for the ministry of education to organize awareness-raising programs for teachers' CPD. Moreover, encouraging the spirit of collaborative work among teachers through seminars and workshops is essential.

#### **Recommendations**

- 1- This research employed quantitative approach only; therefore, to study the phenomenon deeply, mixed-methods approach should be conducted to grasp a more comprehensive picture.
- 2- CPD plays an important role in reforming and enhancing the educational system; therefore, various CPD activities must encouraged, systematically planned, and funded.

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