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Navigating continual progress: Insights into teacher professional development in Uzbekistan***

Summary

This study investigates the landscape of teacher professional development (TPD) in Uzbekistan, focusing on the experiences and perspectives of educators within the country's dynamic educational context. Utilising qualitative research methods and drawing on secondary data on global trends and ongoing reforms in teacher professional education in Uzbekistan, the study explores the experiences and challenges of school teachers within a prominent educational institution in Uzbekistan. Participants, predominantly female, expressed enthusiasm for CPD training programs but cited limitations in accessing relevant courses and balancing heavy workloads with personal responsibilities. Despite these obstacles, there was widespread recognition of the importance of CPD for career advancement and the cultivation of teaching skills. The findings underscored a nuanced understanding of work-life balance among Uzbek female teachers, who strived to juggle professional commitments with household responsibilities. This

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study anticipates that its findings will inform policy decisions and enhance Uzbekistan's Public Education System. By highlighting practical challenges, particularly in time management, the research aims to offer valuable insights for improving the educational landscape in the country.

Keywords: school teachers, teacher professional development, Uzbekistan

Introduction

In the age of globalisation and information technology, in which a country's level of development is not only determined by socio-economic and cultural indicators, but also strongly depends on its intellectual potential, the field of education is of particular importance worldwide. After all, scientific and technological progress, the foundations of which are laid in the educational environment, is the central link for a country's sustainable development and prosperity. Globally, the significance of education for both individual and societal success has experienced a rapid escalation, coinciding with the emergence of a knowledge-based economy. Consequently, nations worldwide have actively undertaken substantial reforms within their education systems, with a particular emphasis on enhancing teacher education. This emphasis stems from the acknowledgment that the cultivation of adept educators capable of proficiently instructing diverse learners to elevated standards is imperative for both economic viability and political resilience.

According to global surveys, educators dedicate an average of 10.5 days annually to participate in various professional development activities such as courses, workshops, conferences, seminars, observation visits, or in-service training (Sellen, 2016). The rationale behind this considerable commitment to professional development (PD) is evident: advancements in student achievement correlate with enhanced outcomes in terms of income, well-being, and health (Chetty et al., 2014; Hanushek, 2011; Lochner, 2013). Nevertheless, the optimal design for such professional development remains somewhat ambiguous. Furthermore, teacher professional development (PD) is commonly acknowledged as a pivotal factor in elevating student achievements and fostering increased equity. Consequently, governments on a global scale allocate substantial financial resources, totalling billions annually, towards teacher PD endeavours, aiming to augment the knowledge and pedagogical skills of educators (Birman et al., 2000; Bowe & Gore, 2017).

This article provides a comprehensive analysis of the present landscape, advancements, and challenges in Teacher Professional Development (TPD) within Uzbekistan. Through a thorough examination, it addresses the evolving state of TPD, highlighting both progress and areas requiring further attention. By delving into the complexities of TPD within the Uzbek educational context, this article

offers valuable insights into the strategies and initiatives aimed at enhancing the professional growth of educators. It outlines the country's educational landscape post-independence in 1991, with a particular focus on reforms initiated since 2017. Despite concerted efforts by the government to enhance teacher education and CPD, existing systems require further refinement. Drawing on qualitative research methods and secondary data, the study delves into the experiences of school teachers within a prominent educational institution in Uzbekistan.

Literature review

The importance of continuous professional development

... persons who wish to reform educational practice cannot simply tell teachers how to teach differently. Teachers themselves must make the design changes. To do so, they must acquire rich knowledge of subject matter, pedagogy, and subject specific pedagogy; and they must come to hold new beliefs in these domains. Successful professional development efforts are those that help teachers to acquire or develop new ways of thinking about learning, learners, and subject matter, thus constructing a professional knowledge base that will enable them to teach students in more powerful and meaningful ways.

(Borko & Putnam, 1995, p. 60)

Recent studies have affirmed that the provision of high-quality education to students is intricately linked to the dedication and resilience of well-informed and skilled teachers (Day, Sammons, Stobart, Kington, & Gu, 2007). However, professional development is characterised by non-continuous progress and lacks a uniform trajectory (Huberman, 1993). Moreover, expertise growth is not solely dependent on age and experience. To effectively engage and retain teachers, it is imperative for employers to offer continuous professional development (CPD) that aligns with teachers' cognitive and emotional needs, addressing their concerns and commitments across various stages in their professional journey, and adapting to diverse school, classroom, departmental, and organisational contexts (Day et al., 2007; Huberman, 1993). Continuing Professional Development (CPD) remains an essential requirement for individuals employed in educational institutions. Nevertheless, the nature and speed of CPD vary across countries and within diverse policy frameworks. Various nations have formulated distinct policy documents with specific objectives. In England, the General Teaching Council for England (GTCE) has devised a professional code centred on the concept of teachers as "reflective practitioners." The OECD (1998) has proposed a policy that sees teachers as role models for lifelong learning for their students, as discussed by Day and Leitch (2007).

What is teacher professional development

Day (1999) defines professional development as purposeful and organised learning opportunities and actions designed to bring about direct or indirect advantages for individuals, groups, or educational institutions, ultimately enhancing the quality of education in the classroom. Teacher training is increasingly viewed through the lens of lifelong learning. While initial education establishes the foundation, ongoing professional development serves as a vital mechanism for enhancing workforce quality and retaining effective staff. It facilitates the seamless integration of new teachers into their roles and addresses gaps in their initial preparation. Given the demanding nature of teaching and evolving expectations, a lifelong learning approach to teacher development is imperative (Madalińska-Michalak, 2018). This is particularly crucial in adapting to the growing diversity of learners, increased inclusion of students with special needs, and the rising significance of information and communication technology (ICT) in schools. In vocational education, teachers and trainers must stay current with the evolving demands of the modern workplace (OECD, 2023).

A lifelong learning approach necessitates continuous professional development (CPD) opportunities and incentives throughout one's career. These initiatives aim to allow staff to refresh, develop, and broaden their teaching knowledge, enhance skills, and improve practices. CPD activities may include formal courses, seminars, conferences, workshops, online training, mentoring, and supervision. Institutions or external providers, such as training institutes and higher education institutions, can offer professional development, with funding from governments, employers, or individuals, sometimes through co-funding arrangements. Governments can implement various requirements and incentives to encourage staff participation in CPD, such as funding training costs, providing financial support, tying training to higher qualifications, or making CPD a prerequisite for salary increases and career development. The effectiveness of CPD depends on the quality of programs and the feedback and follow-up support they offer (OECD, 2023).

The concept of “continuous professional development” (CPD) may elicit varied interpretations among key stakeholders in education. Potential areas of divergence encompass:

1. An individual teacher's perspective on CPD, reflecting their personal perception of professional needs.
2. The school's interpretation, encapsulating the policies and mechanisms governing CPD implementation.
3. Official regulations and recommendations outlined in documents from responsible entities.

4. Diverse interpretations among fellow teachers, both within the same school and across different educational institutions.

In essence, divergent understandings of CPD exist among teachers, schools, and official bodies, influencing how professional development is conceptualised and pursued (Morgan & Neil, 2003).

Professional development for school teachers is a crucial aspect of ensuring that they are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to provide quality education to their students (Cohen & Hill, 2001; Madalińska-Michalak, 2019). It involves ongoing training and learning opportunities that enable teachers to stay up-to-date with the latest teaching methods, technologies, and best practices. In numerous nations, engaging in continuous professional development (CPD) is considered obligatory. Teacher advancement is mandated either as a criterion for promotional considerations (e.g. in Poland) or as a requirement to attend a specified number of training hours annually (e.g. Bulgaria, Spain, Italy). Nevertheless, the efficacy of CPD is significantly curtailed when teachers participate without genuine interest (Reynolds et al., 2014).

The challenge in education lies not in the lack of teacher participation in Continuing Professional Development (CPD) but in its frequent ineffectiveness. Ineffectiveness is not primarily due to teachers' knowledge gaps, which can be addressed through methods like lectures to impart new methods, strategies, or content. Rather, the difficulty arises in the application of this newfound knowledge or approach within the classroom setting. Additionally, a prevalent issue is the persistence of deeply ingrained yet outdated or inaccurate teachers' beliefs, which can only transform when educators observe the positive impacts of changes in their students' learning (Quattlebaum, 2012).

According to Madalińska-Michalak (2019), teacher education needs to be forward-thinking and equip educators with the skills to be lifelong learners. It should encourage teachers to consider the type of education that is valuable and applicable to the evolving needs of students in modern learning settings. The effective integration of 21st-century skills by teachers, both for personal application and imparting them to students, relies on their attitude, awareness, and willingness to learn and apply these skills. Additionally, the ease with which teachers can incorporate these skills is a determining factor (Reynolds et al., 2014).

Compulsory education system in Uzbekistan

It is imperative to underscore that the educational policy undertaken by Uzbekistan is inherently directed towards the consistent and systematic realisation of the principles enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

At its core, this policy is aligned with the constitutional commitment articulated in Article 41, which affirms the right to free universal education for all citizens. The strategic pursuit of this constitutional mandate reflects a resolute dedication to providing equitable and accessible educational opportunities, thereby reinforcing the foundational values embedded within the legal framework of the Republic of Uzbekistan. (Muminov, 2019). Since gaining independence in 1991, the Republic of Uzbekistan has undertaken a comprehensive overhaul of its public education system. Under the leadership of Shavkat Mirziyoyev in 2017, a series of significant reforms were implemented to further enhance the educational landscape.

The structure of Uzbekistan's education system follows a systematic progression. It initiates with pre-school education designed for children aged three to six years. This is succeeded by a continuous phase of general secondary education spanning from six to fifteen years. Following this, the educational trajectory extends to vocational secondary education, targeting individuals aged fifteen to eighteen years. The culmination of this educational journey is marked by higher education offerings tailored for individuals embarking on primary and secondary education from the age of eighteen. This structured delineation reflects a nuanced and multifaceted approach aimed at addressing the varied educational needs and developmental stages of the populace within the Republic of Uzbekistan (Shaturaev & Bekimbetova, 2021).

Table 1. Number of public educational institutions in Uzbekistan per academic year

	2017–2018	2018–2019	2019–2020	2020–2021
Total	9691	9942	10008	10130
Urban	2830	2709	2739	2722
Rural	6861	7233	7269	7408

Source: State Agency of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Statistics.

In accordance with data compiled by the National Statistics Agency, a discernible trend in the expansion of public education infrastructure has been observed over the past two consecutive academic years, specifically during the 2021/2022 and 2022/2023 periods. The reported figures indicate a notable increase, reaching a total of 10,522 public education institutions. This statistical augmentation underscores the dynamic evolution and growth within the educational landscape during the specified timeframe.

By the beginning of the 2022/2023 academic year, the number of students studying in public education institutions in Uzbekistan was about 6.5 million. This was reported by the Statistics Agency.

Table 2. Number of students in public education institutions (in thousands)

	2017–2018	2018–2019	2019–2020	2020–2021
Total	5237.3	5819.7	6137.5	6255.0
Urban	2768.3	3069.9	3256.3	3300.2
Rural	2469.0	2749.8	2881.2	2954.8

Source: State Agency of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Statistics.

Table 3. Student school ratio in the academic year 2020–2021

	Number of students		Number of schools		Students/ School
Total	6255000	100%	10130	100%	617.5
Urban	3300200	52.8%	2722	38%	1212.4
Rural	2954800	47.2%	7408	62%	398.9

Source: State Agency of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Statistics.

The presented statistics indicate a notable surge in student enrolment at schools, notwithstanding concerted governmental efforts to establish new public education institutions. The Ministry of Public Education, as reported, underscores that despite these endeavours, the student-to-classroom ratio remains consistent, with no discernible reduction. Specifically, each classroom continues to accommodate 35 students, as outlined in the ministry's report. This observation underscores the ongoing challenge of effectively managing the burgeoning student population within the existing educational infrastructure, necessitating continued attention to optimise the learning environment.

In the educational framework of Uzbekistan, secondary education is bifurcated into two distinct segments. The initial phase comprises a mandatory nine-year education program. Subsequent to the completion of this initial phase, a second tier ensues, strategically designed to cater to the requisites of both general and vocational education. This phase encompasses conventional secondary education alongside specialised secondary education.

Notably, during their tenure in the tenth and eleventh grades, students work towards the attainment of a general secondary school certificate. Successful completion of the prescribed curriculum culminates in the issuance of a certificate of completion of secondary school. It is noteworthy that, as of 2017, a significant adjustment was made in the duration of schooling in Uzbekistan, transitioning from 12 to 11 years. The mandatory period of primary and secondary school

education spans eleven years, commencing at the age of seven. This academic restructuring reflects a conscientious endeavour to align the educational system with the evolving needs and preferences of both parents and students within the Uzbekistani context (Ismatullayeva, 2021).

Employment and pedagogical personnel

The evolving socio-economic landscape of Uzbekistan has necessitated a re-evaluation of the Republic's education system. The modernisation process of the transitioning economy, coupled with the demand for highly educated personnel to adapt to modern forms of work organisation, underscores the importance of education and training. This aligns with the adopted Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On Education" and the National Program for Education, which emphasise the need for professional development and improvement of skills. In response, Uzbekistan's higher educational institutions are actively engaged in formulating and executing a strategy for enhancing teacher training in the country. (Khamidova & Safoeva, 2018)

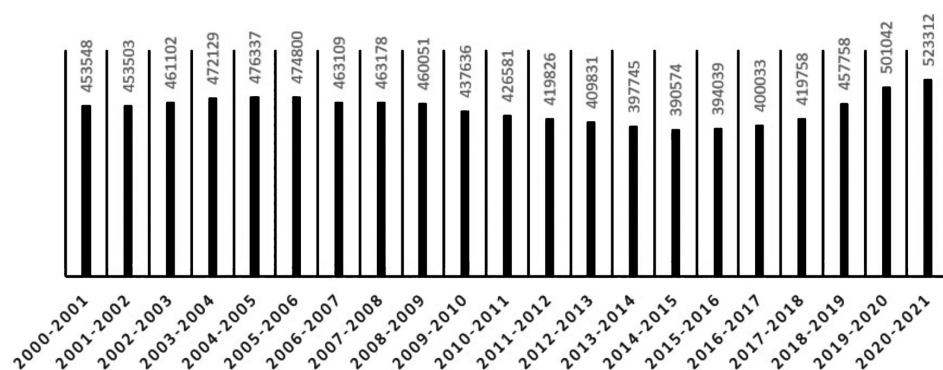


Figure 1. Number of teachers in public educational institutions.

Source: State Agency of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Statistics.

Continuous professional development of teachers in Uzbekistan

The Former Director of the Department of Teacher Training and Re-training at the Ministry of Public Education of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Mr. Makhmudov Miraziz (cited in Shaturaev & Bekimbetova, 2021), articulated that the enhancement of public education quality in the country confronts a spectrum

of challenges. These challenges encompassed inadequate funding, inefficiencies and ineffectiveness within the financing system, issues of corruption, outdated curriculum frameworks, obsolete methodologies for student assessments, a dearth of highly qualified educators, and antiquated teacher training and re-training programmes. This comprehensive overview delineates the multifaceted hurdles that warrant strategic attention and systemic reform to fortify the quality of public education in Uzbekistan.

Previous continuous professional development system in Uzbekistan

In the realm of Teachers' Professional Development, a myriad of challenges stemming from both objective and subjective origins has persisted throughout the years as it was claimed by Bakhramov (2021). The organisational principles governing advanced training, established during the Soviet era, particularly for public education workers and teaching staff, have given rise to inherent issues. According to these principles, administrators of educational institutions were mandated to undergo qualification improvement every three years, while teaching staff were required to engage in a 144-hour training program every five years. (Bakhramov, 2021; Radjiev, 2021; Shaturaev & Bekimbetova, 2021). Notably, this training often necessitated a temporary departure from their professional duties and residential locales, as the courses were conducted by advanced training institutes situated in regional centres. This approach has presented significant challenges, including the logistical complexities of replacing teachers during their training periods, the disruption to teachers' family and home life, and the imposition of additional financial burdens (Bakhramov, 2021; Davronov, 2023). Consequently, the reluctance of teaching staff to participate in advanced training courses has become a noteworthy concern.

Recent research has brought to light subjective challenges within the realm of teacher competency, particularly stemming from deficiencies in knowledge and skills among certain educators (Bakhramov, 2021; Davronov, 2023). This highlights a discernible absence of autonomous efforts directed towards enhancing professional expertise. The suboptimal performance observed among teachers and school principals can be attributed not solely to a lack of inclination for self-improvement but also to the inadequacies inherent in the current frequency of advanced training for personnel within public education institutions.

The prevailing model of conducting training sessions at intervals of 3–5 years proves insufficient in keeping abreast of the contemporary pace of knowledge evolution within the field of education (Bakhramov, 2021; Radjiev, 2021; Shaturaev

& Bekimbetova, 2021). This temporal misalignment renders the knowledge acquired during these courses swiftly outdated. Consequently, educators find themselves lagging behind the progress curve and remaining uninformed about innovations pertinent to their respective disciplines, teaching methodologies, and educational technologies. The discernible result is a noteworthy gap between the evolving educational landscape and the proficiency levels of educators.

In response to the aforementioned challenges and their underlying causes, the country's leadership has instituted a series of normative documents outlining the restructuring of the advanced training system (National Legislation Database — lex.uz). This restructuring entails a shift from the conventional periodic model to a more dynamic and continuous framework, thereby ushering in an era of continuous professional development for public education workers.

At the initiative of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Sh.M. Mirziyoyev, the following were adopted: 6 November 2020 Decree “On Measures for the Development of Education and Science in Uzbekistan in a New Development Period”, 25 January 2021 Resolution “On Measures to Support Research Activities in Public Education and the Introduction of a System of Continuous Professional Development”, which set concrete tasks for further improvement and scientific support of reforms in the system of public education. These documents also pay special attention to issues of retraining and continuing education of managers and teachers of public education and set the task of creating the necessary conditions for the continuous improvement of professional skills and efficiency of teaching staff and improving the system of continuing education according to the principle of “education throughout life” (Radjiev, 2021).

In accordance with the Presidential Decree, the Institute for the Retraining and Advanced Training of Public Education Managers and Specialists, named after Abdulla Avloni, has been transformed into the Research Institute for the Study of the Problems and Determination of the Prospects of Public Education, named after A. Avloni.

Pursuant to recent regulatory mandates, a fundamental reconfiguration of the professional development framework for public education practitioners is underway. Departing from the erstwhile practice of periodic advanced training, the contemporary approach espouses a system of continuous development. In adherence to the revised directives, public education professionals are now obligated to augment their skills annually, committing a minimum of 36 hours to this endeavour (Bakhramov, 2021).

In order to introduce a needs-based CPD system, the practice of training public education employees in differentiated CPD programs that correspond to their level of qualification, knowledge, scientific and pedagogical potential, professional

experience, psychological preparation and individual professional development paths are introduced (Radjiev, 2021). Distance learning and other forms of professional development are offered in addition to traditional harmonised training, which is conducted simultaneously with the work process (Radjiev, 2021).

It is noteworthy that henceforth, public education practitioners will no longer be restricted to improving their skills solely within training institutions overseen by the Ministry of Public Education. Instead, they will have the option to pursue skill enhancement opportunities in higher education institutions situated across various regions or in non-governmental educational establishments. This transformative measure aims to dismantle the existing training monopoly, fostering a conducive environment of healthy competition and offering greater autonomy of choice to educators. Moreover, this training initiative will be rendered entirely cost-free and will be facilitated through an electronic platform – “onlinedu.uz”, affording flexibility in scheduling and accessibility (Radjiev, 2021).

Thus, as mentioned above, an online platform was created called “Continuous Professional Education” (onlinedu.uz) to help employees with their professional development. This platform assesses their knowledge and training needs, and then creates a personalised plan for each employee to improve their skills (onlinedu.uz). The platform offers training modules for employees, which they can complete to earn credits. This personalised approach caters to the different professional development needs of individuals in the public education sector. A credit system has been established to measure and validate skills and knowledge. A set number of credits is required to earn a certificate of advanced training. This system allows for individual progress and ensures that achievements are recognised within the professional development framework (onlinedu.uz). Electronic portfolios are also created for each public education employee, which include information on individual learning paths, professional development outcomes and curricula mastered by employees (Radjiev, 2021).

The training sessions in continuous professional development courses encompass a diverse range of activities aimed at fostering professional growth among public education workers. These activities include, but are not limited to (lex.uz):

- Authoring and publishing scientific and methodological articles in indexed journals.
- Developing educational textbooks by individual employees.
- Successfully completing professional development courses available on open educational platforms.
- Actively participating in training programs that contribute to the preparation of champions for international and national Olympiads for schoolchildren.

Each of these endeavours represents valuable opportunities for educators to enhance their skills and contribute to the advancement of education within Uzbekistan. Under this innovative system, the noteworthy achievement of an employee in any of these alternative forms is deemed equivalent to the successful completion of a traditional advanced training programme. This approach not only incentivises diverse avenues for professional growth but also establishes a comprehensive and inclusive framework for acknowledging and rewarding the multifaceted contributions of educators within the continuum of continuous professional development (Bakhkramov, 2021).

Challenges in the system of teachers' continuous professional development in Uzbekistan

While strides have been made in the realm of continuous professional development for teachers in Uzbekistan, significant areas for improvement persist. According to the findings of the “Adapting and Scaling Teacher Professional Development Approaches in Uzbekistan” Research Project conducted by UNESCO in 2023, a cadre of experts, including tutors, district officials, and methodologists, is available to support teacher professional development initiatives. However, a critical issue highlighted in the reports is the competencies and skills of many of these experts. It was noted that a considerable number lacked recent classroom experience, exhibited limited proficiency in digital skills, and demonstrated limited recent engagement in professional learning activities themselves. This underscores the pressing need to address these deficiencies to ensure the efficacy and relevance of teacher professional development programs in Uzbekistan (unesco.org). A notable observation from the research findings suggests that school leaders, comprising principals, head teachers, and school directors, are not widely recognised as pivotal figures in Teacher Professional Development (TPD). Moreover, there appears to be a prevailing tendency among school leaders to perceive the leadership of TPD as peripheral to their role, resulting in limited involvement in ongoing initiatives. This phenomenon was particularly pronounced in Uzbekistan, where a significant proportion of school leaders indicated a lack of awareness regarding the programs offered through online platforms. Such a disconnect between school leaders and TPD initiatives significantly curtails the potential contributions of TPD to enhancing teaching and learning outcomes at the school level. Addressing this disparity is essential for fostering a more integrated and effective approach to TPD that fully leverages the leadership capacity of school leaders to drive improvements in educational quality and outcomes (Wolfenden, 2023).

As highlighted in the report, various factors play a role in teachers' active participation in Information and Communication Technology (ICT)-mediated Teacher Professional Development (TPD). Specifically, in Uzbekistan, the language used in TPD materials is a key concern for educators. Many express a preference for materials in languages other than Uzbek, emphasising the importance of addressing linguistic diversity. This linguistic aspect is identified as an equity issue, indicating the necessity for inclusive approaches to accommodate educators' diverse linguistic preferences. Moreover, another equity concern arises regarding the suitability of TPD activities for teachers' classroom realities. Teachers stress the significance of ensuring that TPD activities are relevant to their everyday teaching experiences. They highlight mismatches between TPD content and classroom contexts as obstacles to meaningful engagement. Besides, teachers voice dissatisfaction with TPD initiatives characterised by an excessive emphasis on theoretical underpinnings, coupled with a dearth of practical examples illustrating the application of theory in the planning of teaching and learning activities. This theoretical orientation, devoid of practical applicability, engenders a sense of disillusionment among educators, who perceive TPD opportunities as disconnected from their professional learning needs and classroom exigencies. Addressing these concerns is imperative for fostering a more inclusive, relevant, and engaging TPD framework that resonates with teachers' professional aspirations and instructional realities (Wolfenden, 2023). On one hand, teachers demonstrate a keen appreciation for opportunities to engage in collaborative discourse with their peers and access expert support through digital platforms, as underscored in a study by UNESCO (Wolfenden, 2023). Notably, social media platforms have emerged as popular avenues for such interactions among educators.

Conversely, the ubiquity of computer technologies imposes new imperatives upon the contemporary educator. Gorshkova (2022) posits that a modern teacher must possess a robust IT competence, proficiency in navigating the latest technologies, and adeptness in managing the influx of information within the digital sphere. Such competencies are imperative for leveraging online platforms effectively to cultivate and enhance professional skills. While it was previously noted that school leaders often do not play a significant role in organising Teacher Professional Development (TPD) activities, it is essential to acknowledge that this is not uniformly the case. As highlighted by Khayretdinova & Narkulov (2020), school leaders encounter a myriad of challenges in facilitating and providing professional development opportunities for their staff. One prevalent obstacle is the difficulty in finding adequate time during the school day for teachers to engage in professional development activities. Additionally, securing sufficient funding, particularly amidst constrained or reduced school budgets, remains a persistent challenge. The allocation of funding for professional development can vary significantly across

states, districts, and schools, with some institutions having surplus funds while others struggle to secure necessary resources.

Furthermore, common challenges include inadequate support for professional development from administrative leadership, lack of interest or motivation among teachers, and excessive workloads for educators. These multifaceted challenges underscore the complex landscape in which school leaders navigate the provision of effective professional development opportunities for their staff (Khayretdinova & Narkulov, 2020). Amidst the comprehensive reforms underway across various sectors in Uzbekistan, with particular emphasis on the realm of education, noteworthy insights have emerged from Professor Pirnazar Davronov, affiliated with the Regional Centre for Retraining and Professional Development of Public Education Staff in the Samarkand region of Uzbekistan. In a recent article, Davronov (2023) offered valuable suggestions aimed at further advancing the educational system. These insights hold promise for informing and enhancing ongoing efforts to bolster the educational landscape in Uzbekistan. Davronov's collaboration with teachers seeking to enhance their qualifications has led him to the conclusion that "the implementation of teachers' qualifications should occur directly within their respective workplaces" (p. 210). It has been observed that many educators who undergo training courses and acquire new teaching methodologies often fail to apply these newly acquired skills in practice. For instance, in a particular school where the administration actively supported and motivated teachers to take initiative, only three out of 27 subject teachers were able to effectively integrate modern teaching methods. The remaining 24 science teachers persisted in utilising traditional approaches despite the opportunities for professional growth and development.

Another example is that the team of experts conducted master classes at an institute in the Samarkand region for schools, lyceums, and colleges affiliated with the institute. While all participants acknowledged the importance of implementing the demonstrated new methods in their educational practices, they ultimately failed to do so. This reluctance to adopt modern teaching techniques can be attributed to a resistance to change among trainees who are entrenched in traditional methods. These examples underscore the critical need for not only continuous professional development for educators in public education, but also a state policy that supports the practical implementation of modern educational methods. Without the application of innovative teaching approaches in school settings, quality education will remain elusive. By implementing a training program for pedagogues within the schools they are employed in, significant savings can be achieved in the state budget allocated for their professional development. This approach not only allows teachers to enhance their skills and knowledge directly in their work environment but also ensures that the acquired expertise is immediately

put into practice. Additionally, it is essential to incentivise pedagogic scientists and innovative teachers who have contributed novel methods to the field. Recognising their valuable contributions through appropriate financial rewards will further motivate them to continue their groundbreaking work, as it is unrealistic to expect one individual to generate a multitude of innovative methods throughout their career (Davronov, 2023).

In summary, ongoing decrees and reforms underscore the dynamic evolution within the domain of teachers' continuous professional development, with notable acceleration catalysed by the COVID-19 pandemic towards digital integration. Beyond the confines of training institutions administered by the Ministry of Public Education, teachers now enjoy expanded avenues for professional growth, including participation in workshops and training sessions, alongside online platforms tailored for enhancing teaching skills. While the value of peer collaboration is acknowledged, it is pertinent to acknowledge that not all educators possess proficient computer skills, thus impeding their ability to fully leverage online courses, as indicated by existing literature. Moving forward, a deeper examination of primary data collected by the authors promises to provide additional insights into the current landscape and challenges surrounding teachers' professional development in Uzbekistan.

Methodology and data

In this section of the article, we present the methodology and findings derived from a pilot study involving interviews conducted among teachers in one of Uzbekistan's esteemed high schools, commonly referred to as lyceums. The primary objective of this study was to elucidate the experiences and challenges encountered by teachers within this prominent educational setting. The research questions guiding the pilot study were as follows:

- Are teachers in Uzbekistan motivated to participate in Continuous Professional Development (CPD) training programs?
- Do teachers perceive CPD programs as beneficial and engaging for their career advancement?
- What are the primary obstacles hindering teachers from attending PD courses or impeding their ability to participate in such programs?

Through a rigorous analysis of interview data, we aimed to provide insights into the motivations, perceptions, and challenges experienced by teachers regarding their engagement with CPD initiatives in the context of Uzbekistan's lyceums. The researchers opted to conduct brief face-to-face interviews with high school teachers,

selecting a prestigious educational institution located in the capital city of Tashkent for investigation. Due to ethical considerations, the name of the high school remains undisclosed. The chosen high school is renowned for its esteemed reputation and commitment to delivering quality education within Uzbekistan. To initiate the study, a pilot phase was implemented, targeting approximately one-third of the teaching faculty. With a total of 32 teachers at the high school, 11 teachers volunteered to participate in the interviews. Qualitative data collection took place in May 2023, providing a snapshot of the teachers' perspectives and experiences regarding CPD initiatives within the educational context of Uzbekistan. The eleven participants in the study represent diverse age ranges and geographical regions. Notably, all participants are female, reflecting the predominant demographic composition of the teaching staff at the high school under investigation. Each participant is highly qualified, having graduated from universities in Uzbekistan. The interviews were conducted in the Uzbek language, notwithstanding the fact that some respondents were proficient in English. This decision was made to ensure a seamless and fluent conversation, allowing for a more natural exchange of ideas and insights. By utilising the native language, the interviews aimed to foster a comfortable and conducive environment for effective communication and expression of thoughts among all participants. The subject areas of expertise among the participants encompass mathematics, physics, philology, IT, and history, showcasing a broad spectrum of academic disciplines. Moreover, the teaching experience of the research participants spans from 5 years to 31 years, indicating a range of professional backgrounds and levels of tenure within the education sector.

Findings and discussion

The findings from the pilot study indicate that the teachers are seasoned professionals who exhibit a genuine passion for their vocation. They demonstrate a strong commitment to enhancing their professional competencies, driven by a desire for continuous improvement. However, challenges arise primarily from the heavy workload and constraints on time, coupled with limited availability of training courses. Consequently, despite their fervent motivation, teachers perceive constraints that inhibit their ability to fully capitalise on professional development opportunities.

When queried about their participation in Continuous Professional Development (CPD) training programs, all research participants affirmed their engagement in such initiatives. Several respondents provided the following insights regarding their experiences with CPD programs:

“It is unimaginable not to participate in continuous professional development training programs and time does not stand still. New students come and it is important to learn new methods and apply them.”.

“Of course, I attend. I attend the basic training course, previously I was attending once every three years, now every year, especially I attend Foxfort online training courses. I also attend foreign courses, I like to work on myself.”

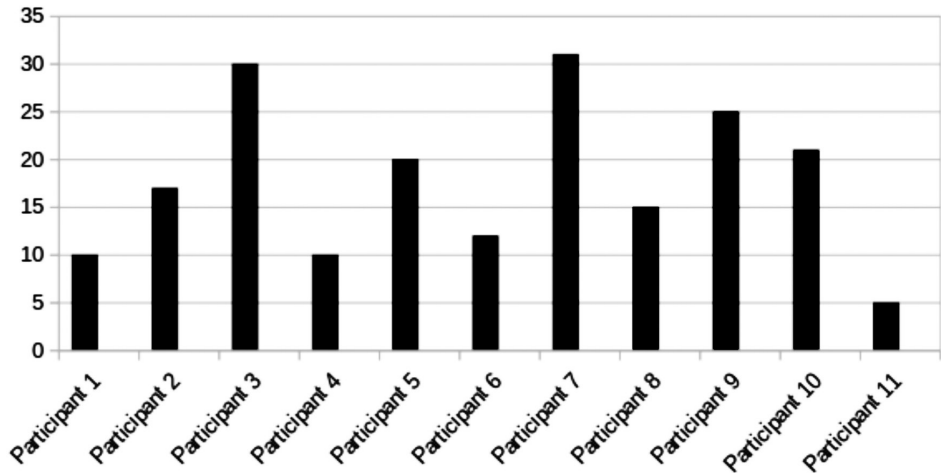


Figure 2. Years of teaching experience of research participants.

We sought to discern the aspects of CPD courses that participants found appealing. The responses were predominantly affirmative, with participants highlighting the following favourable aspects of the courses:

“I communicate with colleagues. I learn the latest news. But I don’t think I get much news in general”.

However, a subset of respondents expressed concerns regarding the applicability of certain course contents or teaching methods. In response to inquiries about their preferences in CPD training programs, participants conveyed mixed sentiments. While acknowledging their regular participation, some noted a lack of novelty in the material presented, indicating that the primary benefit lay in fostering communication among colleagues and providing a mental refreshment. One participant lamented a perceived lack of new insights gleaned from recent training courses, while another highlighted the value of engaging in discussions and gaining diverse perspectives on pertinent issues. Despite these reservations, positive feedback emerged regarding online learning platforms such as Coursera, with participants citing the acquisition of new and engaging teaching methods.

Additionally, favourable remarks were made about incorporating practical activities alongside theoretical instruction, emphasising a preference for a balanced approach to teaching methodology. Furthermore, one participant expressed appreciation for learning about changes and reforms within the education system, particularly in conjunction with normative documents.

Subsequently, participants were queried about the extent to which CPD training courses influenced their motivation in their teaching career. Approximately half of the respondents responded affirmatively, indicating a positive impact on their motivation levels. Conversely, one participant asserted a lack of motivation following the courses, stating, “The current training courses do not provide any meaningful benefits. We are only burdened with paperwork.” This sentiment underscores the divergence in experiences and perceptions among participants regarding the efficacy and motivational influence of CPD training courses. Please refer to the graph below for a visual representation.

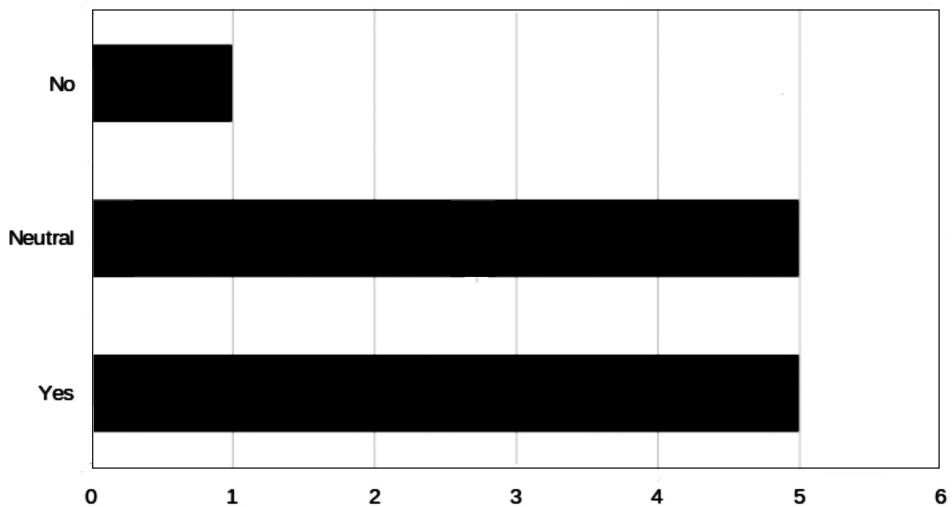


Figure 3. Motivation of teachers after receiving CPD training courses.

Additionally, several respondents highlighted the positive impact of receiving certificates for their achievements upon completing a course, noting that it instils a sense of accomplishment and motivates them to pursue further professional development opportunities.

Next, our focus shifted towards online courses to gauge interest and participation levels among participants. While the majority expressed enthusiasm for online learning, three participants expressed difficulty in finding suitable

courses within their subject areas. Specifically, teachers of history and Uzbek philology cited a lack of available courses tailored to their disciplines. Another participant cited language barriers, noting that most online courses are conducted in English, thereby hindering their ability to participate in additional online learning endeavours. These insights underscore the nuances and challenges associated with accessing online educational resources within specific subject domains.

Recognising the importance of foreign language acquisition, particularly English proficiency, within the educational landscape of Uzbekistan, we sought to explore participants' experiences and engagement in learning English or other foreign languages. The responses revealed that while many participants are fluent in Russian as a second language, the pursuit of English language proficiency poses significant challenges, primarily attributed to their demanding workloads. Specifically, older participants aged around 50 years and above expressed difficulty in acquiring a new language at their age. Despite initiating and completing beginner-level courses, they found it challenging to sustain their language learning endeavours amidst their professional responsibilities. The participants underscored their recognition of the significance and potential benefits associated with acquiring proficiency in the English language to advance their teaching practice. However, they lamented that the substantial workload they encounter impedes their ability to devote sufficient time and energy to language acquisition endeavours. This finding underscores the prevalence of English language learning aspirations among educators and professionals in Uzbekistan, tempered by practical constraints and age-related considerations. While government support and encouragement for foreign language learning are evident, navigating the logistical and cognitive demands of language acquisition presents notable hurdles for some individuals, particularly those in later stages of their careers.

Uzbek female teachers voiced challenges in maintaining a balance between their professional responsibilities and personal life commitments. Their perception of balance revolved around reconciling household duties or traditional women's roles with the demanding workload at their workplaces. Many respondents indicated that they dedicate extensive hours to their jobs, often surpassing typical working hours, while others emphasised the importance of delineating boundaries between work and home life by refraining from bringing work-related tasks home.

When asked about their aspirations for professional development, all participants expressed a desire to engage in online courses offered by foreign universities. Additionally, some articulated a keen interest in pursuing advanced degrees and enhancing their research skills. These insights underscore the aspirational goals of Uzbek female teachers to augment their knowledge and skills

through diverse avenues of professional development, particularly through online learning platforms and academic pursuits.

In conclusion, research participants demonstrated a keen interest in professional development initiatives, underscoring the significance of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) training programs. Moreover, they expressed a willingness to not only partake in such programs but also to contribute to organising them for their colleagues. Recognising the pervasive influence of technological advancements and globalisation on the contemporary education landscape, participants affirmed their awareness of the myriad opportunities available for learning and development within this dynamic context.

Conclusion

When comparing the results of our data analysis with the conclusions drawn from the literature review, a clear alignment becomes apparent. Indeed, there is evident acknowledgment among educators at all levels regarding the ongoing changes and advancements within the education system and teacher education domain within Uzbekistan. While it is encouraging to witness their active engagement in these developments, it is equally apparent that further reforms and enhancements are warranted. The common sentiment emphasises the need for ongoing progress and enhancement in the education sector. It is worth noting the proactive efforts of the government in focusing on education and teacher training, which is praiseworthy. This instils a sense of optimism about the direction of educational reforms and the shared commitment to creating a vibrant and effective education system that benefits all stakeholders. As endorsed by Davronov, a more strategic approach to teacher education is recommended, emphasising the benefits of conducting educational sessions within the teachers' workplace, organised in small groups tailored to address their individualised needs. This targeted approach not only enhances effectiveness but also optimises government budget allocation. Additionally, he proposes incentivising innovation in teaching methodologies by offering financial rewards to teachers and academics who introduce novel approaches. Professor Davronov emphasises the importance of implementing a robust monitoring and evaluation system for CPD training programs to ensure their effectiveness in achieving quality education outcomes.

However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of the current study, which was conducted as a pilot study with primary data collected on a limited scale. To address this, future research endeavours should employ both quantitative and qualitative methods on a larger scale, encompassing diverse regions of the

country. Furthermore, the perspectives of school administrators and CPD program organisers should be incorporated to provide a comprehensive understanding of the current state of CPD in Uzbekistan. These recommendations highlight the need for further investigation and collaboration to enhance teacher professional development practices in the country.

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