

Teachers' Professional Development Strategies in Higher Education Institutions of Ethiopia: Practices, Challenges and Future Prospects

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Abstract

This study examines the practices, challenges, and prospects of teacher training strategies in Ethiopian higher education institutions. It employs trend analysis using secondary data from sources such as policy documents, research findings, development plans, and program reports. The findings indicate that the major professional development strategies currently practiced in Ethiopian higher education are the Higher Diploma Program and the English Language Improvement Project. The challenges hindering the effective implementation of teachers' professional development strategies include inadequate content and poor delivery, insufficient follow-up and support, lack of teachers' involvement and ownership, limited research and not evidence-based research, limited incentives, and the absence of a well-organized and comprehensive training curriculum. Finally, it explores prospects for improving teachers' professional development strategies in Ethiopia, focusing on evidence-based approaches, technology integration, and collaborative partnerships.

Key words: Challenges, practices, prospects

Introduction

In educational institutions, having experienced and well-trained teachers is just as vital as having high-quality teaching resources and solid student-teacher interactions. Good professional development is continuous and consists of in-depth instruction, ample practice opportunities, constructive feedback, sufficient time for implementation, and ongoing support. Effective programs such as collaborative lesson preparation, interactive teaching simulations, and peer observation sessions, which mirror teacher-student interactions and cultivate teachers' learning communities, are crucial for engaging teachers in experiential learning. There is a

growing interest in transforming schools into learning organizations and developing methods that facilitate educators' systematic sharing of knowledge and experience.

Professional development strategies and activities include implementing educational plans by schools or departments as task force members, reflecting on personal practices, consulting with professional bodies, participating in educational panels, sharing experiences with other teachers, and striving to meet national qualification or quality standards (Tilahan, 1990). Enhancing the value and productivity of human capital necessitates substantial investments in training and educational initiatives. According to Workneh and Tassew (2013), an economy's productivity is primarily influenced by the quantity and quality of human capital accumulation. Tangible characteristics such as credentials, experience, training, pay, subject specialty, and incentives can serve as indicators of quality, even though evaluating teachers' quality is difficult (Rockoff, 2004).

The importance of the teaching profession is widely acknowledged in the literature on education, particularly in higher education. According to Yalew (2006), teaching is a social practice with undeniable value, although the specific attributes contributing to its worth remain subject to debate. A well-known proverb emphasizes the dual role of a teacher as both a leader and a servant to society. Teaching continues to face challenges in status and prestige, exemplified by instances where its recognition as a fully acknowledged profession is questioned. Enguall (1996) emphasized the critical role of effective instruction, particularly when delivered by skilled educators capable of achieving desired outcomes.

The Role of Teacher Professional Development in Education

Teacher professional development plays a crucial role in addressing these challenges. By equipping teachers with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to effectively teach, professional development can:

- *Improve teaching practices*: Professional development can help teachers adopt innovative and student-centered teaching methodologies, such as inquiry-based learning, cooperative learning, and the use of technology in education (Guskey, 2000).
- *Enhance pedagogical content knowledge*: Professional development can deepen teachers' understanding of subject matter and how to effectively teach it to diverse learners (Shulman, 1987).

- *Boost teacher morale and motivation:* Engaging in meaningful professional development can enhance teachers' sense of professional growth and job satisfaction, leading to increased motivation and commitment (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003).
- *Foster a culture of continuous learning:* Professional development can create a culture of continuous learning within the education system, where teachers are encouraged to reflect on their practice, experiment with new approaches, and collaborate with colleagues to improve teaching and learning (Fullan, 1993).

Statement of the problem

Teacher professional development (TPD) is widely recognized as a crucial factor in enhancing teaching quality, improving student learning outcomes, and ultimately achieving national educational goals. The Ethiopian government has made significant strides in expanding access to education, but challenges persist in ensuring quality teaching and learning. This necessitates a critical examination of current TPD practices, identifying existing challenges, and exploring promising avenues for future improvement.

This study aims to delve into the multifaceted landscape of TPD in Ethiopia. It tried to explore the diverse range of strategies currently employed, analyze their effectiveness in addressing the needs of Ethiopian teachers, and identify the key challenges that hinder their successful implementation. Furthermore, the study would investigate promising future prospects for TPD in Ethiopia, drawing upon best practices from both within the country and internationally. By synthesizing existing research and insights from Ethiopian and non-Ethiopian scholars, this study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of TPD in the Ethiopian context and provide valuable recommendations for policymakers, educators, and researchers.

The Ethiopian education system has long struggled with challenges such as inadequate infrastructure curriculum issues, and teacher shortages, impacting the quality of general education. Moreover, teacher training programs in Ethiopia have been marred by a lack of resources, ineffective methodologies, and insufficient professional development opportunities. Research has shown that Ethiopian higher education institutions struggle to implement TPD modalities, as indicated by numerous studies underscoring the significance of TPD, the urgent need for it, and the obstacles encountered in applying it effectively in primary and secondary schools. The purpose of this research is to provide a general review of teachers'

professional development modalities, related practices, and future prospects in Ethiopian higher education institutions. To this end, this study aimed to address the following research objectives:

- To identify and analyze the existing professional development strategies utilized by higher education institutions in Ethiopia.
- To examine the challenges faced by educators in accessing and benefiting from these opportunities.
- To propose actionable future prospects for improving professional development frameworks within Ethiopian higher education.

Research Methods

This study employed a descriptive design, allowing researchers to summarize and analyze existing data to identify patterns and trends over time without manipulating any variables. Descriptive research helps researchers understand the characteristics and patterns within a specific phenomenon. By collecting data through surveys, observations, or existing records, researchers can identify trends and relationships that may not be immediately apparent (Creswell, 2017). As sources of data, the researcher used secondary sources from various materials such as policy documents, research findings, development plans, and program reports.

To analyze the collected data, trend analysis was used, which is essential for evaluating past and current practices to effectively inform future strategies. Trend analysis involves examining data over time to identify patterns or trends. It helps researchers understand how certain phenomena evolve over time (Hyndman & Athanasopoulos, 2018). By identifying existing trends within the data, researchers can make informed predictions about future developments (Chatfield & Yar, 1988).

Teachers' Professional Development Practices and Trends in Ethiopian Higher Education Institutions

Historically, TPD in Ethiopia has been characterized by a top-down approach, often focusing on short-term, content-based workshops. However, recent policy reforms, such as the Education and Training Policy (2003) and the Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP), have emphasized a more holistic and sustainable approach to TPD. These policies advocate for a shift towards school-based, collaborative, and inquiry-based models that prioritize teacher agency and reflective practice.

Education, by creating skilled labor and increasing human capital for national development, significantly contributes to favorable conditions for the development process and supports technological advancements (MoE, 2009). Education Sector Development Programs I, II, and III were initiated in 1997, 2002, and 2005, respectively. These programs aimed to develop "trained and skilled human power at all levels who will be driving forces in the promotion of democracy and development in the country" (MoE, 2005).

The Ministry of Education implemented several Education Sector Development Programs (ESDP I, II, III, and IV) following the adoption of the new Education and Training Policy and Education Sector Strategy in 1994, aiming to improve the education sector. The General Education Quality Improvement Program (GEQIP), launched in 2010, focused on enhancing education delivery in several key areas after ESDP IV. The General Education Quality Improvement Program (GEQIP) was launched by the government in 2010 to enhance education delivery in key areas, including management and administration, curriculum, textbooks, assessment, teacher development, school improvement, and coordination, monitoring, and evaluation.

However, the Ministry of Education in Ethiopia highlights a substantial disparity in students' academic aptitude and educational achievement, linking it to the inadequate availability of facilities and resources (MOE & USAID, 2008). The Government of Ethiopia established the first five-year Education Sector Development Program (ESDP-I) in 1997 as part of a twenty-year education sector indicative plan, which has been converted into a series of national ESDPs under the context of the 1994 Education and Training Policy.

The program's objectives include raising educational standards, enhancing relevance, improving effectiveness, promoting equity, and increasing accessibility. These efforts are particularly focused on underprivileged and rural areas. It prioritizes girls' education as a strategic measure to achieve universal primary education by 2015, aiming to address gender disparities and promote inclusivity in education. The first Education and Training Policy (1997/98 to 2001/02) was directly aligned with the government's five-year plan, incorporating its goals and methods from the policy. The final two years of the first Education Sector Development Program (ESDP-I) and the following three years were characterized by aligning the Education and Training Policy with the government's plan. As a result, the term of ESDP II was

intentionally set at three years (2002/03 to 2004/05) to align with the government's five-year planning cycle for ESDP III.

ESDP III, the Education Sector Development Program III, aligns with the Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Program (SDPRP) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDG). It is planned to run for five years, from 2005/06 to 2009/10. ESDP III, similar to previous programs, is encapsulated in this Program Action Plan (PAP), a comprehensive document outlining the strategies and initiatives for education sector development. The PAP is formulated through a national planning process that engages both regional and central stakeholders.

Major Professional Development Strategies in Higher Education in Ethiopia

While professional training in higher education was previously inconsistent, some institutions in Ethiopia have offered qualitative and systematic training in areas such as educational tests, management, general teaching methods, and educational pedagogy. This program provided highly effective training services, significantly benefiting instructors who lacked pedagogical training and orientation in higher education institutions. In recent years, starting from the academic year 2003/04, the Ministry of Education (MOE) collaborated with higher education institutions to establish the new Higher Development Program (HDP) and Educational Leadership Improvement Program (ELIP) specifically for instructors in higher education institutions. During summer breaks in the late 1980s (1985–1990), instructors at specific institutions received systematic, short-term training from the MOE's Higher Education Commission. The program included pedagogical techniques, instructional methodologies, educational assessment, and management.

Higher Diploma Programme (HDP)

To improve teacher quality and student learning, educators must possess a high degree of competence, qualification, and education in the specific areas of their roles. The program offers customized training programs, educational resources, and one-on-one mentorship to support candidates' professional growth. In October 2003 (1996 E.C.), the HDP was established in Ethiopia with the intention of raising the standards for all teacher educators' certifications and making it a legal obligation. In other words, the program is essential for the qualification of teacher educators and university professors. By equipping students with useful teaching abilities, it seeks to create reflective practitioners who consistently refine their methods to produce better learning outcomes and flourish as educators.

Universities widely utilize the program, which can be tailored to individual candidates' interests, concentrations, and academic schedules. It is grounded in practical experiences from educational institutions, schools, and career and technical education (CTE) programs, enhancing its credibility. It primarily centers on the learning process, directly influencing teaching methods and meeting the criteria for practicum and pre-service programs. To align with Ethiopian educational policy promoting active learning and problem-solving, TESO initially aimed to develop modular curriculum content (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia [FDRE], 2004). Therefore, the HDP aims to enhance teachers' professional growth while also advancing their role as teacher educators, aligning with the emphasis on a student-centered approach.

Throughout an entire academic year, instructors undergo on-the-job training to ensure their proficiency in assessment methods, teaching and learning strategies, and essential aspects of their roles as educators, including preparation, adaptability, collaboration, and self-reflection. To achieve this, the HDP training incorporates crucial elements such as time management, active learning strategies, continuous assessment, school placements, reflective teaching practices, and action research. Consequently, successful completion of the one-year Higher Diploma Program Training is mandatory to acquire a teaching license and attain the necessary qualifications for starting or advancing in the field.

English Language Improvement Project (ELIP)

The major objective of ELIP is to improve the teaching skills and English language competency of primary, secondary, and postsecondary educators. At the request of the Ethiopian government, the British Council supported a new program to enhance teachers' English language skills across the country. In 2003, the large-scale ELIP initiative was established to meet the English language competence demands of educators. With the backing of the Ethiopian government and six European donors, ELIP smoothly transitioned in 2004 to become a significant initiative within the broader Teacher Development Programme, showcasing a broad support network. This achievement represented a significant step forward in aligning with the country's Education Sector Development Programme's third phase of execution, highlighting ELIP's contribution to broader educational goals.

The Ethiopian government launched the English Language Improvement Program/Teacher Development Program (ELIP/TDP) to improve the quality of

instruction and teachers' English proficiency in Ethiopian schools. The program's main objective is to increase the country's labor force for development.

Over 150,000 instructors from primary, secondary, and university education have undergone 120 hours of in-person language enhancement training since 2003. A crucial aspect of enhancing the professional development of educators throughout Ethiopia was the training of 1,200 Key English Language Trainers (KELTs) and 200 Key English Language Training Advisers (KELTAs) within the program.

The in-service program was initially managed by regional education bureaus and then adapted to align with the specifications of initial teacher education programs. To significantly enhance the overall quality of teacher education, more than 30 English Language Improvement Centers have been established in Teacher Education Institutes (TEIs). These centers play a vital role in providing language support to trainees and administrative staff, as well as offering technical aid to teacher educators. They offer language tutoring to trainees, assist administrative staff with language skills, and provide technical guidance to teacher educators.

Teacher Professional Development Policy in Ethiopia

Quality assurance, established as an autonomous organization by the Higher Education Proclamation (351/2003), plays a vital role in ensuring the quality and relevance of Ethiopia's higher education system. HERQA aims to ensure excellence and relevance by setting and maintaining high standards. Its responsibility is to disseminate information regarding the quality and relevance of higher education provided by all Ethiopian universities. Institutions in Ethiopia's higher education system are primarily responsible for fostering a culture of quality and continuous improvement. In order to guarantee educational standards and quality, the Ministry of Education (MOE) established a quality assurance section that reports directly to the Prime Minister's office.

The Higher Education Proclamation (351/2003) plays a pivotal role in guiding and overseeing quality assurance in Ethiopia's higher education system through the establishment of standards and regulations. HERQA conducts institutional quality audits for each Higher Education Institution (HEI). An institutional quality audit involves a detailed examination and evaluation of the quality and value of the academic programs offered by higher education institutions (HEIs) and the teaching and learning environment they provide. Moreover, it assesses the effectiveness of

internal reviews, adherence to accountability procedures, delivery of high-quality education, and compliance with quality standards as outlined by HERQA (2007).

Challenges Hindering the Implementation of Effective Teachers' Professional Development Strategies in Higher Education in Ethiopia

While the Ethiopian government has significantly invested in expanding access to education, ensuring quality teaching and learning remains a critical challenge. This challenge is intricately linked to the effectiveness of TPD strategies. Existing TPD initiatives in Ethiopia face several significant obstacles that hinder their impact on teacher practice and student learning outcomes.

Inadequate Content and Delivery:

- ***Lack of relevance:*** Many TPD programs fail to address the specific needs and contexts of Ethiopian teachers. The content often lacks relevance to classroom realities, focusing on theoretical concepts rather than practical skills and strategies (Hailu, 2013).
- ***Ineffective delivery methods:*** Traditional lecture-based approaches dominate many TPD programs, leading to passive learning and limited engagement. More interactive and learner-centered approaches, such as peer learning, coaching, and mentoring, are often underutilized (Woldeyes, 2016).
- ***Lack of qualified trainers:*** The quality of TPD delivery is significantly impacted by the expertise and skills of the trainers. A shortage of well-trained and experienced trainers poses a significant challenge to the effectiveness of many TPD programs (Hailu, 2013).

Inadequate Follow-up and Support:

- ***Lack of on-the-job support:*** Many TPD programs lack adequate follow-up support to help teachers translate their learning into improved classroom practice. This lack of support can lead to a rapid decline in the application of new knowledge and skills (Alemayehu, 2012).
- ***Limited opportunities for peer learning and collaboration:*** Opportunities for teachers to collaborate with colleagues, share best practices, and receive peer support are often limited, hindering the development of professional learning communities (Kassa, 2014).
- ***Inadequate monitoring and evaluation:*** Effective monitoring and evaluation systems are crucial for assessing the impact of TPD programs and identifying

areas for improvement. However, such systems are often inadequate or non-existent in Ethiopia (Amare, 2011).

Lack of Teacher Involvement and Ownership:

- **Limited teacher participation in program design:** Teachers often have limited involvement in the design and implementation of TPD programs, leading to a lack of ownership and buy-in. This can result in low levels of engagement and motivation among teachers (Yalew, 2006).
- **Inadequate recognition and incentives:** Teachers often lack adequate recognition and incentives for participating in TPD activities. This can discourage their active involvement and limit the long-term impact of TPD initiatives (Getachew, 2014).

Limited Research and Evidence Base:

- **Lack of rigorous research:** There is a limited body of rigorous research on the effectiveness of TPD programs in the Ethiopian context. This lack of evidence-based knowledge hinders the development of informed and effective TPD policies and practices (Melaku, 2011).
- **Limited dissemination of research findings:** Even when research is conducted, the findings are often not effectively disseminated to policymakers, educators, and other stakeholders, limiting their impact on practice (Assefa, 2017).

In line with Yalew's (2006) results, the researcher identified personal, situational, and institutional constraints as factors obstructing the professionalization process of teaching. For instance, the lack of incentives, the absence of a comprehensive and well-organized training program to advance the teaching profession, the lack of a fully operational, accredited, and independent training facility, and the absence of an independent teacher professional association to support professional development are all examples.

These challenges have significant implications for the quality of teaching and learning in Ethiopia. They hinder teachers' professional growth, limit their ability to effectively implement the curriculum, and ultimately impact student achievement. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach involving a range of stakeholders, including the government, educational institutions, teacher organizations, and researchers.

Conclusion and Future Prospects

TPD is a critical component of improving teacher quality and student learning outcomes in Ethiopia. By addressing the challenges faced in implementing TPD strategies, the Ethiopian government can create a more effective and equitable education system. While various strategies are implemented, it is essential to adopt a comprehensive approach to TPD that considers the specific needs and contexts of teachers. Effective TPD is crucial for improving the quality of education in Ethiopia. Although significant progress has been made in recent years, challenges remain in implementing and sustaining effective TPD strategies. By addressing these challenges and adopting evidence-based approaches, technology integration, and collaborative partnerships, Ethiopia can further enhance the quality of its teaching force and improve student learning outcomes. Several strategies can be adopted to improve the effectiveness of TPD in Ethiopia:

- **Increased investment in TPD:** The government should increase investment in TPD to ensure adequate resources for supporting high-quality programs.
- **Improved access to resources:** Efforts should be made to enhance access to technology and other resources for teachers in rural areas.
- **Increased teacher participation:** Incentives should be provided to encourage teacher participation in TPD activities.
- **Improved planning and implementation:** TPD activities should be carefully planned and implemented to meet the specific needs of teachers. Stronger follow-up support: Adequate follow-up support should be provided to help teachers implement what they have learned in their classrooms.
- **Evidence-based approaches:** TPD programs should be based on sound research and aligned with best practices in teacher education. This involves utilizing research findings to inform program design, implementation, and evaluation.
- **Technology integration:** Technology can be effectively integrated into TPD programs to enhance access, delivery, and effectiveness. This includes using online platforms for training, providing access to digital resources, and utilizing technology-based tools for classroom instruction. Collaborative partnerships between the government, teacher education institutions, schools, and other stakeholders are essential for effective TPD. These efforts can help pool resources, share expertise, and ensure that TPD programs align with national priorities. Empowering teachers to take on leadership roles in TPD can enhance ownership and sustainability.

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