



Continuous professional development: Assessing teachers' experiences with the cascading training model

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Abstract

Continuous professional development (CPD) is integral in educational reform; developing and enhancing teachers' pedagogical skills and knowledge. In Malaysia, the cascade training model is often preferred for CPD programmes in public secondary schools. This may be due to cost effectiveness and reach, where many teachers can be trained in a short timeframe. Critics of the cascade model of training tend however, point to a risk of knowledge being diluted as it is transferred from the trainers to the attendees and then to teachers in schools. This paper focuses on documenting the experiences of Malaysian secondary school English teachers attending school-based assessment (SBA) CPD training courses using the cascade training model. Adopting a qualitative research approach, through the use of in-depth semi-structured interviews, data was collected from 14 English teachers from 14 public secondary schools. The findings indicate that there were mixed experiences of teachers attending cascade training programs and that of subsequent trainings that were conducted by attendees of the programmes. These experiences were affected largely by the quality of the training programme (i.e. design of program curriculum and materials), trainer quality, participants selected, and follow up support afforded to participants. This paper culminates with recommendations for further CPD improvements.

Keywords: cascade training model; continuous professional development; English language teaching; school-based assessment

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The education system in Malaysia has been undergoing significant transformations in recent years to meet the needs of the 21st-century learner. As a result, the demands on teachers are greater than ever, necessitating continuous professional development (CPD) to keep pace with new educational theories, pedagogical techniques, and technology. Drawing on in-depth semi-structured interviews teachers from across two local education districts of Kuching and Samarahan in the state of Sarawak, the research aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the effectiveness of the cascade model in facilitating CPD of the implementation of School-based Assessment (SBA) in the state.

While the cascade model has been studied and found popular in various contexts for its cost-effectiveness and ability to train many teachers quickly, there is a lack of research specifically targeting its application and effectiveness in East Malaysia and in particular, Sarawak. Furthermore, an extensive search of the literature yielded no recent findings on the effectiveness on the SBA training. The most recent and extensive research on this came from Talib et al. (2014) of 400 teachers in the state of Johor, where she found that only 50 percent of her participants felt that they were confident in implementing school-based assessment practices. The teachers highlighted that there was insufficient time for training, not enough opportunities to conduct practical training, and that the trainers themselves were not adequately versed in school-based assessment practices. Another study by Nair et al. (2014) indicated a need for teamwork and collaboration among teachers to be improved as they faced a number of issues such as time constraints, lack of effective materials and methodologies and facilities.

CPD is a cornerstone for enhancing teaching quality and student learning outcomes. Professional development encompasses activities ranging from initial training to various continuous training initiatives. Hargreaves (2010) as cited in Ifanti (2011), emphasizes the significance of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) in assisting teachers to navigate the ever-changing landscape of educational demands. Research has shown that CPD helps in equipping teachers with the necessary knowledge and skills to adapt to changing curricula, technologies, and methodologies (Alene & Prasad, 2019). Teachers play a critical role in influencing student achievement (Hattie, 2009, cited in Pang & Wray, 2017). A recent analysis by Razali et al. (2021) revealed that, while many teachers give detailed feedback on student essays, several others rely heavily on generic marking guidelines. Additionally, there's a noticeable gap in offering constructive suggestions or setting clear objectives for student improvement, indicating potential shortcomings in teacher training and development.