

## **CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF MOROCCAN IN-SERVICE PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS: OSCILLATING BETWEEN THEORY AND PRACTICE**

**NOURELHOUDA BOUHAISSA & Professor NABIL MORCHID**

Laboratory of Language and Society, Ibn Tofail University,  
Kenitra, Morocco

### **ABSTRACT**

The imperative need for continuous professional development training for teachers to consistently improve their pedagogical performance is at the heart of reforms in the education worldwide. In the 21st century, indifference towards the role of education is no longer tolerated, especially since all societies, Morocco included, have become aware that economic, scientific, and social progress can never happen without valuing the magic power of education. Following this important catalyst, among the megatrends of Morocco's educational reforms that started with the introduction of the National Charter for Education and training in 2000 until the adoption of the Strategic Vision (2015-2030) as a new scenario of educational reform in 2015 is to enable Moroccan in-service public high school teachers from continuous professional development training throughout their entire teaching career. Therefore, this paper purports to discuss heavily the realization of continuous professional development training on grounds in Morocco.

Keywords: Continuous professional development, Strategic Vision, National Charter for Training and Education.

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Before the widespread of Information Technologies, Moroccan public high school teachers' initial training was considered the only internship to master the skills and the knowledge required for exercising the teaching profession throughout their entire careers. However, even before the emergence of Information Technologies, Moroccan students across history expressed dissatisfaction with the way they were being taught. This dissatisfaction was accompanied by the appearance of many approaches that urged the move toward learners-centeredness. Despite that call, the content of curricula, teaching modes, and teacher training programs remained stagnant.

#### **1.1 Background to the Issue of Continuous Professional Development**

The 20th century marked a turning point in the history of the world, in general, and education, in particular. An extraordinary shift happened in education with the advent of Information Technologies around the 90s. With the rise of Information Technologies, people were no longer able to bear learning through old-fashion techniques and methods and gradually things have changed. New teaching approaches were introduced to be in tandem with the technology era, and most of them were calling to center the teaching-learning

process around what learners need and what the job market requires. Consequently, the content of curricula had to radically change to match societies' aspirations of prosperity and growth.

The shift to 21st-century education had to step on the way teachers are trained as well. Based on that, the teacher training systems around the globe had to move from once in a lifetime to life-long training. In this context, educators urged the adoption of a Continuous Professional Development vision for rebuilding teachers' knowledge and training them in a way pertinent to the current time education requirements. As we all know, access to information, nowadays, has become easy and free for everyone. This means that the concern of education is more than providing learners with content, the real worry is how to transmit this information in a creative and innovative way to others. More importantly, the central focus is on the ability of teachers to help learners use the mix of knowledge and skills they acquire at school in solving real-life situations. In other terms, teachers' success is determined by the extent to which they are able to present the content in a way that learners approve. This task of steadily looking for novel ways to make their teaching content and environment desirable and innovative thus leaves no room to argue regarding the importance of Continuous Professional Development training in the education field.

From a more generic view, it could be claimed that Continuous Professional Development (CPD, henceforth) for teachers is a viable process to constantly expand their knowledge and improve their teaching skills to render their performance effective and fruitful in class. CPD training has an effective role in increasing the efficiency of school performance by improving the skills and capabilities of teachers and helping them keep pace with the developments taking place at the local level and internationally. More pressing, regular CPD training help teachers develop skills and abilities through which they can keep abreast with developments in the field of higher education and most importantly, respond to the needs of learners on a regular basis. In this regard, most of educators have started providing definitions for this critical educational issue. For instance, Srinivasacharlu (2019) defines CPD as:

“ the one involves ongoing divergent activities (formal, non-formal, and informal) that aim at developing the teacher educator's intellectual abilities (cognitive domain), self-confidence, attitude, values, and interest (affective domain) and skills and competencies (psychomotor domain) for improving personality and to carry out the responsibilities of the teaching profession properly in accordance with the changing times and needs of the prospective teachers and society" (Srinivasacharlu, 2019, p.30)

In the same vein, years before Srinivasacharlu provides the above-mentioned encompassing definition, Day (1999) contends the following:

“Professional development consists of 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. It is the process by which, alone and with others, teachers review, renew and extend their commitment as change agents to the moral purpose of teaching; and by which they acquire and develop critically the knowledge, skills, and emotional intelligence essential to good professional thinking, planning, and practice

with children, young people, and colleagues throughout each phase of their teaching lives.” (Day, 1999, p.4)

Given this plethora of definitions, CPD refers to all the efforts made either formally or informally, individually or collectively to provide teachers with the knowledge and skills needed to perform their work in a newer and better way, or to develop their existing teaching experiences, skills and knowledge in order to increase their efficiency in performing their work currently and in the future. Queries have been put forward regarding the sudden attention to CPD of teachers. Researchers, and educators, among others, therefore, reacted to their wonders with compelling replies, for example, Meijer, de Graaf, & Meirink, 2011; Yayli, 2008 in Allen & Wright (2014) explain that “there is often a huge disparity between the types of skills and knowledge taught in pre-service programs and the realities of workplace practice”. This response is a powerful drive to hasten the application of CPD training on real grounds. As claimed by Meijer, de Graaf, & Meirink, 2011; Yayli, 2008 in Allen & Wright (2014), being a changeable environment at all times, teachers in the classroom settings cannot exclusively rely on their initial training’ knowledge and skills, rather they have to constantly improve them based on the needs of learners and the demands of the labor market. Not only that, but teachers must be willing to discard some learning approaches, techniques, and pedagogies and replace them with others that fit certain classroom situations. CPD training can take many forms (Srinivasacharlu, 2019). Participating in conferences, workshops, seminars, study days, organizing extra-curricular activities, micro-teaching, and laboratory work in addition to others, are all ways for teachers and educators to professionally develop (Srinivasacharlu, 2019). The objective, however, remains the same which is to build and guarantee societies’ economic and social progress through education. Similarly, Darling (2006) states that the merits of CPD are numerous, to name but a few: First, teachers build strong relationships with other teachers and educators who share with them the same interests. Second, they broaden their knowledge base on educational issues pertinent to their areas of concern. Third, attending CPD teacher training is considered a golden opportunity for exchanging points of view, experiences, and expertise among teachers while discussing or engaging in workshops. Last but not least, CPD is one way to encourage the research spirit. In education, research is part and parcel of the teaching-learning process, and getting engaged in action research to deal with and provide solutions to classroom problems would, undoubtedly, improve teachers’ pedagogical performance and help them develop professionally. At this point, it is worth mentioning that Byrne's (1983) perspective regarding the effectiveness of teachers bolsters the paramount importance of CPD training in the professional life of any teacher. For him, teachers’ efficiency in classes is heavily dependent on their ability to decide on which knowledge and pedagogical strategies are appropriate for different types of learners and situations.

## 1.2 Continuous Professional Development within the Moroccan Context

Through an in-depth examination of the Moroccan National Charter for Education and Training (2000), which is considered a constitutional document for reforming the Moroccan education sector, it seems clear that the implementation of CPD training is among the motives that have led to speed up the activation of the reforms in the system of the education and training. The National Charter for Education and Training has indicated in several stations that the success of the Moroccan school depends entirely on the learners’ excellence

in linking their learning within the school to their external environment, which would guarantee an easy and quick inclusion in the labor market. Through reform, the Moroccan school can create highly skilled individuals capable of competing and obtaining interesting job opportunities at a time when knowledge alone is no longer sufficient. Rather, the job market needs flexible, innovative members able to readjust themselves according to the market requirements and act their roles to the fullest. Given the awareness that empowering Moroccan learners with skills and abilities that would ensure their easy access to the workforce can happen only through education, the Moroccan Ministry of Education realized that achieving the abovementioned envisaged goals is possible only if it takes serious steps towards the implementation of solid life-long training.

15 years later, the Strategic Vision arrived to strengthen the National Charter for Education and Training's perception regarding educational reform in Morocco. The Strategic Vision (2015-2030), is but an additional scenario of reform that aims to fix all the blunders, which have led to the non-actualization of many educational reform projects, among which is the CPD. The first step towards the actual start of CPD training happened in 2020 when the Moroccan Ministry of Education expressed its intention to launch the training process through the issuance of memoranda detailing how to execute the plan allocated for this purpose. According to the Ministry's plan, the CPD training is divided into different modules that aim at improving in-service teachers' knowledge of teaching content, didactics, and assessment techniques. Each module is 30 hours and all the module's content should be suggested by teachers through a need analysis checklist. More importantly, the content should not contain information that teachers have already tackled in their initial training, but novelty should be a point of distinction. The mission of training in-service Moroccan public schools teachers is assigned, according to the document that sets an outline of how to organize CPD training, to inspectors and professors working at institutions specialized in education and teacher training such as ENSs and CRMEFs. CPD training takes place at flexible time formats on school holidays so that teachers' absence would not affect learners' educational time.

In like manner, immediately after his appointment 'Chakib Benmoussa', the new minister of the education sector in Morocco, has devoted greater attention to CPD training. For him, empowering human resources in the education sector, including teachers, educators, and administrative agents with appropriate and up-to-date knowledge is the sole means to improve the quality of education in Morocco. As a result, his ministry allocates a huge budget that is considered about 6 billion dirhams to CPD training, a budget that could be said to be the largest in all the ministry attempts at reform.

## **2.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1 Statement of the Problem**

For many years, in-service public high schools Moroccan teachers' excessive dependence on their initial training has been an issue of concern, especially with the adoption of approaches that promote learners' centeredness and the use of Information Technologies. Given the status quo, Moroccan in-service public high school teachers find themselves stuck between the Scylla of the learners' needs and the workforce demands and the Charybdis of their insufficient knowledge and skills to be on the same rhythm with the prerequisites of the

present and future requirements of learners and the job market. Here, teachers' voices have risen to demand urgent and effective solutions that would help them confront these challenges. Consequently, in a similar fashion as other international educational systems, Morocco has started thinking about providing teachers with life-long training that would accompany them through their whole professional path. In this respect, CPD training has been suggested since the introduction of the Moroccan National Charter for Education and Training in (2000) until the Strategic Vision (2015-2030) has come to light in 2015. Therefore, this study seeks to find out whether or not Moroccan in-service public high school teachers have benefited from CPD training and to what extent this training has helped them overcome all the challenges of the current era of teaching.

## **2.2 The Study Objective**

Given all the promises, successive reforms, and measurements taken by the Moroccan ministry of education to start the actual execution and implementation of CPD training for all Moroccan teachers to enhance their pedagogical performance and turn it into a performance that takes the educational field in Morocco out of mediocrity and stagnation to a performance that would foster innovation and competitiveness. This scrutiny, therefore, seeks to determine the importance of CPD training from in-service public high school teachers and the extent to which this training is realized in reality.

## **2.3 The Study Research Questions**

This study revolves around two main questions. First, what are the perspectives of Moroccan in-service public high school teachers regarding the importance of CPD training for their professional growth? Second, to what extent CPD training has been put into operation since the introduction of the National charter for Education and Training until the advent of the Strategic Vision (2015-2030)?

## **3.0 INSTRUMENTS AND PARTICIPANTS**

To answer the above-stated questions, 50 Moroccan in-service public high school teachers from different schools were interviewed individually. The interview guide consisted of 12 questions, mostly triggering information about CPD training in practice and how they can improve teachers' pedagogical performance. In the first part of the interviews, participants were asked questions regarding their age and educational level. The core purpose behind acquiring the personal information of participants was to identify whether or not these variables have an effect on the extent of teachers' need for continuous training to optimize the quality of their educational presentation in the classroom. The idea, in simple terms, is that perhaps young teachers with higher educational degrees have a better chance to keep themselves updated with the current teaching pedagogies, are more able to deal with learners' different styles, and can effectively respond to learners' needs thanks to their advanced academic knowledge.

The second part of the interview questions was about information concerning Moroccan in-service public high school teachers' initial training, mainly they were interrogated about how long did their initial training last. Were they satisfied with it? And whether or not it covered all the areas they need to teach for their entire career. These questions were addressed with

two main goals in view. First, to get an idea about the participants' level of satisfaction with their initial training, especially in terms of the acquisition of skills and knowledge pertinent to their needs inside real classroom settings. Second, to get an idea of if Moroccan in-service public high school teachers can still rely on and benefit from what they learned in their initial training in the 21st-century classrooms.

The third part included questions that help answer our main study questions, for example, how many times the population of this scrutiny has attended CPD training after their initial appointments in high schools, in what forms of internships, and who was responsible for those training. Individuality in enhancing their performance is one key way for teachers to professionally develop, that is why, they were asked about the extent to which they make personal efforts to get acquainted with novel ways and strategies of teaching, and of course in what way. Finally, the researcher tried to elicit from the population involved their perspectives about the importance of CPD training for their professional development while exercising this noble job.

#### **4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The results obtained from the interviews revealed that although the National Charter of Education and Training along with the Strategies Vision (2015-2030) have emphasized that all Moroccan in-service public high school teachers should benefit from CPD training programs on a yearly basis, respondents' answers contradict what has been stated in these official documents that represent the mainstay of the Moroccan educational reforms. As far as the correlation between age, educational level, and the need for CPD trainings, all the participants made it clear that none of these variables, especially the educational level of teachers can replace or compensate their adherence to start the enforcement of the Moroccan Ministry of Education vision regarding CPD training. For them, having higher educational degrees or being young do not necessarily imply that they are able to modify their teaching according to the requirements of the situation and the needs of learners. By way of illustration, they mentioned that even if a teacher is may be obtaining a Ph.D degree in cultural or literary studies, he/ she still be unable to deal with educational issues that may rise in his or her classroom. Differently put, they believe that only regular CPD training programs can help teachers boost their delivery in the workplace.

The answers for the second part of the interview clarified thoroughly the dissatisfaction of teachers with the content of their initial training, which does not amount to their professional aspirations. Most of the respondents expressed disappointment in the lacuna they encountered between the areas they tackled during their initial training and the reality of the classroom requirements. In this regard, they wondered with astonishment how they can prepare learners to use their education to deal with real-life situations and enhance their employment opportunities if their teachers, regrettably, were not trained to do so. This study' participants contended that the way they were trained was totally incompatible with the current era teaching trends and challenges. For them, they were initially prepared for the teaching profession through old ways that favor the theoretical part at the expense of the practical part. Therefore, to compensate for this gap in their initial training it has become compulsory for the Moroccan Ministry of Education to enable them to life-long effective professional training.

Concerning how many times Moroccan in-service public high school teachers have attended CPD training after their first appointment, in what forms of internships, and who was responsible for them, a significant number of the respondents contended that they have not benefited from any CPD training program so far, or they had the chance to get it once in five to ten years time. According to many of the responses, the CPD training was organized by the Moroccan Ministry of Education while a very limited number of teachers said that their schools took the responsibility for this type of training. The majority of the answers confirmed that if they were called to attend training, it was most of the time in the form of meetings with inspectors who lecture or present theoretical educational issues. What makes the situation even worse is that the teachers' professional needs are not taken into account on the inspectors' part. Most teachers express their rejection of the way the meetings with inspectors were organized, especially since they did not take part in such training. As for the teachers' perceptions regarding the effect of CPD training on their professional career, a considerable number assured that the CPD training they attended and any future training would really help them develop professionally at various levels notably, to:

- Rectify their methodologies and stay updated with all that is related to teaching processes;
- Monitor and manage their classes;
- Broaden their knowledge concerning learning and teaching styles;
- Get familiar with current teaching strategies;
- Be able to overcome the challenges and impediments they encounter in the course of teaching;
- Enhance their abilities to apply novel pedagogical ideas or adjust old ones to the classroom settings;

From the foregoing, one can deduce that the Moroccan Ministry of Education suggested CPD training does not satisfy the expectations of in-service public high school Moroccan teachers, particularly since most of the respondents' answers reveal that there is a lack or rather absence of the renovation aspect in such training. Teachers strongly believe that benefiting from life-long professional training is a right that is guaranteed by the National Charter for Education and Training and the Strategic Vision documents, however, it seems that is not a priority for the Moroccan educational sector stakeholders.

## 5.0 CONCLUSION

All teachers at some point in their professional path feel that they are in need of novel and effective ways to deal with classroom issues that they have never encountered before. Here, appears the obligatory need for CPD training to help teachers overcome emergent teaching challenges and obstacles to perform their tasks efficiently.

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**NOURELHOUDA BOUHAISSA:** Is an instructor of English as a foreign language in Morocco. She obtained her Master's degree in Language and Linguistics in 2015 from Mohammed V University, Rabat, Morocco. She is currently affiliated with the Faculty of Languages and Arts, the department of English at Ibn Tofail University, Kenitra. She is presently working on a doctoral dissertation entitled "Quality in EFL Teaching Training Programs in Morocco (The case of CRMEF)". Her major interests include teachers' professional development, teaching in the 21st century: trends, issues and challenges, innovation in EFL classrooms, the morphology of Moroccan Arabic, and discourse analysis.

**Dr. NABIL MORCHID:** An assistant professor of Applied Linguistics in the School of Education and Training at Ibn Tofail University. Dr. Morchid is a highly cited researcher in Applied Linguistics with 25 citations by researchers from Europe, Asia, America and Africa according to the Google Scholar Index. He is also a self-reflective university professor who taught through the modules of Spoken English, Reading Comprehension, Oral Communication, Public Speaking, Introduction to Language, Educational Research and Introduction to Literary Studies and Cultural Studies. Dr. Morchid is practitioner of education who annually chairs the International Conference on Quality Education and Sustainable Development in Morocco.