

Teachers' Continuing Professional Development Programmes in the Kingdom of Saudi

Arabia

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Abstract

This article aims to review the historical development of continuing professional development programmes (CPDPs) for teachers, as well as the policies and objectives of such programmes in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) from the inception of these programmes until now. Styles of CPDPs that the Education Training Centres (ETCs) offer are discussed. Moreover, we explore CPDPs in the KSA in terms of their design, implementation, and evaluation. Finally, the article presents various suggestions and recommendations that might contribute to solving and controlling the problems and obstacles that confront such programmes.

Keywords: Continuing professional development, training and rehabilitation.

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Recently, most education systems in the world have been undergoing many reforms. These have taken into account the fact that CPDPs are a key element in reforming education systems, because educational reforms without CPDPs have not been successful (U.S. Department of Education, 1996). The term CPDP “encompasses the intentional, ongoing, and systematic processes and activities designed to enhance the professional knowledge, skills, and attitudes of educators so that they might, in turn, improve the learning of students” (Collins & O'Brien, 2003, p. 284). In the KSA, CPDPs have brought about remarkable developments in the education system. Hence, in the sections that follow, this article pays attention to reviewing these developments from different perspectives.

Historical Development of CPDPs

Historically, 1954 marked the beginning of CPDPs for teachers in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). In that year, the Ministry of Education (MOE) contributed to the training of 1,025 teachers by providing them with courses in various subjects, as well as psychology and teaching methods. The programmes were offered during the summer vacation (General Directorate of Training and Scholarship, 2002).

From 1955 to 1973, the MOE was directly responsible for designing and carrying out CPDPs, so these programmes were limited to some regions of the KSA. This meant that, in that period, most of the teachers could not benefit from those programmes. In addition, a general characteristic that distinguished these programmes was that they were designed and carried out through long-term scheduling, ranging between six months and three years. The reason for the length of these programmes was that most of the teachers were not fully

qualified for teaching, so these programmes were designed specifically to qualify them with respect to their subject matter and teaching methods (General Directorate of Training and Scholarship, 2002).

In 1974, The Ministry of Education (MOE) established the General Directorate of Training and Scholarship (GDTS), which aims to achieve continuous professional growth of educational incumbents, to rehabilitate national cadres in the disciplines needed by the MOE, and to develop methods and training systems in accordance with modern global trends (General Directorate of Training and Scholarship, 2011). This indicates that after 1974, the responsibility for training teachers shifted from the MOE to GDTS.

Three years later, in 1977, the Ministry of Civil Service approved the issuing of a *Guide to Educational Training and Scholarship* that was developed by the MOE. This guide, which consists of 32 items, aims to organise and control the training process for teachers in the GDTS. In addition, it emphasises that the MOE and its GDTS must provide teachers in all regions in the KSA with educational training programmes (General Directorate of Training and Scholarship, 2002). Hence, in 1980, the GDTS began executing the policies in this guide by extending its educational training programmes in most of the regions. In that year, the GDTS provided teachers in these regions with different training programmes, but it found that it was not able to continue providing teachers throughout the 13 regions with these programmes because the number of teachers had increased over numbers in previous years. Thus, the MOE decided to establish several educational training centres within these regions in order to expand the training of teachers.

In 1997, The MOE and its GDTS established 45 centres for educational training and scholarship that are dispersed in most of the regions of the KSA (Ministry of Education, 2010). Therefore, after 1997, each region in the KSA had its own centre for training its teachers. Besides, the role of the GDTS shifted from designing and implementing CPDPs to

managing and directing them via its Educational Training Centres (ETCs), which became directly responsible for designing and carrying out such programmes after 1997.

Finally, in 2006, the MOE adopted King Abdullah bin Abdul-Aziz's project for developing public education, which aims to develop different aspects of public education in the KSA (Aleasa, 2009; Alkatheery & Alnassar, 2010; Tatweer, 2010a). The first programme in this project concentrates on the rehabilitation and training of teachers, which indicates that this project pays considerable attention to teachers because they have a major effect on all elements of the education system. Additionally, this project adopts new policies and programmes designed for the rehabilitation and training of teachers; however, those who are responsible for this project state that the programmes of rehabilitation and training of teachers "are still under development" (Tatweer, 2011, p. 45). The following section explores some dimensions of this programme.

Policies and Objectives of CPDPs

The policies of CPDPs have resulted in remarkable development in the education system in the KSA. Based on these policies, there are two eras that can be distinguished during the period since CPDPs were introduced. In the first era, which lasted from 1954 to 2006, the policies of CPDPs were based on three pillars (General Directorate of Training and Scholarship, 2002, pp. 9-10):

1. CPDPs constitute a "strategic option" for developing all components of the education system. Therefore, training teachers in short-term programmes or rehabilitating them in long-term programmes can achieve this strategy. Furthermore, the training and rehabilitation programmes should include all employees in the education field, including those involved in school leadership, educational supervision, and teaching.

2. CPDPs are “compulsory”; this policy can be enforced through regulations requiring teachers to enrol in one programme at least for each five-year period, and by allocating 10% of the final grade in the annual evaluation of the teachers on the basis of their enrolment in such programmes.
3. The system must provide “financial and moral support” for CPDPs; this can be achieved by attaching reports to trainees’ files, containing detailed information about training or rehabilitation programmes in which they are enrolled. Besides, the enrolment in these programmes gives the opportunity to candidates to become qualified for administrative work such as school leadership, educational supervision, and training at the ETCs. It also makes them eligible to pursue their postgraduate studies both locally and internationally.

The second era started since 2006, when the MOE adopted King Abdullah bin Abdul-Aziz’s project for developing public education. Within the framework of this project, policies governing CPDPs are based on seven pillars (Tatweer, 2010b):

1. “Equal opportunity” is a right for all employees in teaching and administration jobs, without discrimination; each according to his/her needs.
2. CPDPs are characterized by “continuity” in order to keep teachers and administrators informed of new developments in education systems and teaching processes.
3. “Inclusiveness” is comprehensive, as the system involves all incumbents from the various educational categories.
4. “Effectiveness” is not achieved just through provision of remedial programmes, but suggests implementation of effective strategies to keep pace with developments in the fields of science and education.

5. The programmes are “participatory”; they are built on partnerships among all the elements of the educational process.
6. Programmes are to be “linked with the curricula” to achieve the aims of improving the quality of school education by ensuring that the process of training and the educational curricula meet the needs of the educational institutions.
7. “Continuous assessment” focuses on ongoing evaluation of training processes and outcomes, according to objective criteria.

Despite the previously mentioned developments that have occurred in CPDPs, their objectives have not experienced any change; rather, the change has been in CPDP policies. Hence, the objectives of CPDPs that have been adopted by the MOE, the GDTS, and ETCs indicate that CPDPs aim generally to facilitate continuous professional growth for educators by developing their knowledge, performance, and attitudes. More specifically, these programmes endeavour seriously to achieve the following specific objectives (General Directorate of Training and Scholarship, 2002, p. 42):

- To inform teachers of their and duties.
- To improve teachers’ teaching performance and capabilities.
- To develop positive attitudes among teachers toward their work and promote productive human relationships among them.
- To provide teachers with exposure to the latest scientific, technical, and educational theories, thus making them more able to cope with these domains.
- To give teachers the opportunity to implement the ideas, opinions, and solutions stemming from the results of studies, in order to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

- To avoid and minimize errors as much as possible and conserve time, effort, and money.
- To provide teachers with continuing education by developing their independent learning skills and, through the creation of positive attitudes toward continued access to training programmes, to develop their abilities and potential.

Indeed, the earlier objectives of CPDPs have undergone investigation and comparison with the objectives of some CPDPs in other parts of the world. For instance, Abdualjuad (1996) points out that the objectives of CPDPs in the KSA are adequate and consistent with trends in the contemporary world. Nevertheless, it seems that CPDP policies in the second era are generally characterized by comprehensiveness in terms of quantity and quality. In addition, the first era adopted the concept of “training” through short-term programmes or “rehabilitation” through long-term programmes, whilst policies in the second era reflect both these concepts, but also pay much attention to “continuing development”. On the other hand, various studies have been conducted during the first and second era, investigating the policies of CPDPs in the KSA (Alhajeri, 2004; Alharbi, 2008; Altrjmi, 2010; Roas, 2001). These studies have revealed clearly that CPDPs still are not mandatory, and also they do not provide sufficient financial and moral support for the teachers. Finally, they have not yet adopted the concept of “continuing development” in an effective manner in terms of design, implementation, and evaluation.

Styles of CPDPs

The MOE, GDTS, and ETCs in the KSA generally offer two styles of CPDPs, and various programmes are included in these two styles (General Directorate of Training and Scholarship, 2002, pp. 54-58).

1. The first style involves “educational training programmes” that are often carried out over periods ranging between one day and six months; they take place at four sites.

1.1. The ETCs: As mentioned previously, these centres are dispersed in most of the regions of the KSA. Furthermore, they provide three types of CPDPs, namely:

- a) “Short-term CPDPs” that are designed by the GDTS, and implemented by the ETCs. Additionally, these programmes last less than two weeks and they are offered in most of the ETCs in the KSA. These programmes are designed to cover different areas with respect to teaching and learning, such as the formulation of behavioural objectives, use of technology, measurement and evaluation of student performance, teaching competences, educational communication, and classroom management.
- b) “Local CPDPs” that are designed by the ETCs according to the specific needs of the teachers within their regions. This indicates that these programmes do not apply to all regions in the KSA. On the other hand, they do not exceed more than two weeks in their implementation.
- c) “Refresher CPDPs” that offer subjects suggested by the MOE, but their design and implementation are done by the ETCs. Moreover, they are offered at the beginning of each new academic year and range from three to five days in duration. These programmes are usually relevant to most of the ETCs.

1.2. CPDPs in “Teachers’ Colleges” that are dispersed in most of the regions of the KSA,

1.3. CPDPs in “local universities” that are dispersed in most of the regions of the KSA,
and

1.4. CPDPs in the “Institute of Public Administration” that is located in three regions of the KSA. CPDPs that are offered in “Teachers’ Colleges”, “local universities,” and the “Institute of Public Administration” extend from one week to six months.

Moreover, most of these programmes do not aim specifically to offer CPDPs for teachers, but rather, they are devoted to training of persons involved in school leadership and educational supervision, as well as trainers who are responsible for the implementation of CPDPs at the ETCs.

2. The second style of CPDP involves “educational rehabilitation programmes” that last for periods ranging from approximately six months to four years. They aim to provide programmes for three categories of teachers.

2.1. “Undergraduate programmes” in Teachers’ Colleges or colleges of education in Saudi universities. These programmes extend from one year to four years, and aim to rehabilitate teachers without educational qualifications by providing them with modules in subject matter content, teaching, and learning. These programmes usually include the award of a bachelor’s degree to successful teachers.

2.2. “Postgraduate programmes in Saudi universities”, and

2.3. “Postgraduate programmes in universities abroad”. The postgraduate programmes in Saudi, or at universities abroad give teachers the opportunity to complete their higher education, and receive qualifications such as postgraduate diplomas and master’s or doctoral degrees. However, this programme is only available to some outstanding teachers.

In fact, in recent years, “local CPDPs” have actually been implemented by the ETCs, while “short-term CPDPs” and “refresher CPDPs” have been ignored. Moreover, “local CPDPs” often are implemented over periods of between one and three days, rather than two weeks as administrators mentioned (General Directorate of Training and Scholarship, 2002). On the other hand, since 2006, there have been new CPDPs adopted by King Abdullah bin Abdul-Aziz’s project for developing public education (Tatweer, 2010c). The first

programme is designed particularly for “training mathematics and science teachers”, and seeks to develop the effectiveness of these teachers to enable them to deliver the new syllabuses of mathematics and science that the MOE has developed recently. The second programme is devoted to training “new teachers” and aims to cover the theoretical and practical aspects of education necessary for pre-service teachers to meet the requirements of teaching in a manner that is compatible with the vision and mission of the MOE.

Designing CPDPs

As mentioned before, since 1997, the ETCs within the regions of the KSA have been directly responsible for design, implementation, and evaluation of most CPDPs, according to selected criteria in the GDTS guide. Hence, the General Directorate of Training and Scholarship (2002, pp. 77-82) outlines essential steps that should be taken into account by the ETCs to ensure effective design of CPDPs. These steps include identifying and analysing the needs of teachers; formulating the objectives and expected outcomes; designing and constructing their contents and activities; determining methods for delivering them to teachers; and ultimately defining evaluation methods and instruments that will be used for assessing these programmes and their impact on teachers’ knowledge, performance, and attitudes. Moreover, the guide points out that the trainers, the target groups, and the duration of these programmes must be clearly identified in advance, and must be in keeping with the human and financial resources of the ETC in the region.

Many in-depth studies have concentrated on evaluating CPDPs in terms of their design (e.g., Aldkheel, 1992; Buteal, 2009; Hamrun, 2007; Meemar, 2007; Mosa, 1995). The findings of these studies have revealed that the contents and activities of CPDPs failed to take into account the different needs of teachers in terms of knowledge of subject matter and teaching strategies, methods, and skills. Instead, studies report, they aim to provide teachers

with some new information on specific parts of their work within a very short time frame. Moreover, the studies describe these programmes as having a focus on excessive theorization at the expense of the practical aspects of teaching. Finally, they report that the trainers at these centres are not fully qualified to implement such programmes, because most of them are teachers whom their ETCs nominate for training.

Implementation of CPDPs

The General Directorate of Training and Scholarship (2002, pp. 86-98) does not provide detailed information or procedural steps that should be followed by the ETCs for carrying out CPDPs, but it presents in detail, eight methods for delivering these programmes to teachers; these are: (a) lecture, (b) discussion (c) visiting other schools or classrooms, (d) workshop, (e) programmed learning, (f) brainstorming, (g) role playing, and (h) case studies.

In fact, some studies have found that most of the trainers in the ETCs have used lectures and discussions more than any other methods for delivering CPDPs (Abdualjuad, 1996; Alhindi, 2009; Mosa, 1995). In addition, Alhajeri (2004) conducted a study aimed to determine the problems confronting 300 teachers enrolled in in-service training programmes in the KSA. The study categorized these problems into three groups: (a) administrative, (b) training, and (c) individual—that is, related to the teachers. Finally, it uncovered different problems within each of these groups. For instance, there was a lack of practical activities while carrying out such programmes; training packages were not distributed to the trainees at the beginning of these programmes, and no refreshment was provided. Roas (2001) also investigated the views of 357 trainers and trainees regarding educational training programmes that were offered in their Educational Training Centre in the KSA. The study revealed remarkable findings regarding the implementation of CPDPs in that centre. For example, the participants indicated that the scheduling of the programmes was unsuitable; they referred to

only two methods used—lectures and discussions—out of 15 methods that are commonly used for delivering these programmes. Respondents also indicated that the Educational Training Centres were inappropriate in terms of buildings, location, library, technology, equipment, training rooms, resting places, and cafeterias.

Evaluation of CPDPs

According to the General Directorate of Training and Scholarship (2002, pp. 84-85), four types of evaluation should be employed in assessing CPDPs: (a) “formative evaluation” for diagnosing the different needs of teachers; (b) “construction evaluation” that should be used while formulating objectives as well as designing content, activities, and methods to deliver CPDPs; (c) “summative evaluation” to be done upon completion of programmes in order to determine whether to continue, cancel, or develop them, and (d) “follow-up evaluation” for identifying the programmes’ influence on teachers’ knowledge, performance, and attitudes.

Moreover, the GDTS guidelines indicate that evaluation should be concentrated on various aspects. For instance, CPDPs should be assessed in terms of their objectives, contents, activities, and ability to take into account the different needs of teachers. Moreover, the guidelines prescribe employing tests or observation during and after the programmes to measure their impact on the performance of teachers. Furthermore, the GDTS proposes using questionnaires, interviews, tests, self-evaluations, and reports from school leaders and educational supervisors as instruments for evaluation of these programmes. Moreover, it provides some forms consisting of different items that can be employed in evaluating the trainees, trainers, and CPDPs in regard to their objectives, contents, and activities.

In fact, there are no in-depth studies that concentrate on the investigation of methods for evaluating CPDPs in terms of the types, factors, and instruments that are used. Instead,

most of these studies have aimed at assessing such programmes in terms of their design and implementation. However, as mentioned earlier, studies have indicated that the objectives, contents, and activities of CPDPs do not always take the needs of teachers into account. That suggests that “formative evaluation” and “construction evaluation” are not employed effectively. As for “summative evaluation” and “follow-up evaluation”, some studies indicate that follow-up activities to measure the impact of these programmes on teachers’ knowledge, performance, and attitudes are not used as well as questionnaires, which are prevalent in evaluating them. (Alabdualateef, 2007; Alhajeri, 2004; Roas, 2001).

Conclusion

Administrators of CPDPs for teachers in the KSA, do not complain about the scarcity of human and financial resources, but rather, that programmes lack proper planning and serious follow-up by those who are responsible for designing, implementing, and evaluating them. Therefore, in order to solve the problems and control the obstacles that confront CPDPs in the KSA in terms of their design, implementation, and evaluation, we recommend the strategies discussed below.

Firstly, the GDTS and ETCs should properly enforce the seven policies of CPDPs in the second era, while taking on new objectives consistent with these policies; the reason is that the current objectives of CPDPs are not consistent with those instituted in the second era. Secondly, they should make use of the findings of local studies (e.g., Al-Abdualateef, 2005; Alabdualateef, 2007; Aldogmi, 2007; Alhindi, 2009; Alulan, 2010; Boglah, 2002; Buteal, 2009; Hamrun, 2007; Qesti, 2008), and of documented international experiences, to ensure that they design and implement effective CPDPs, as well as meaningful methods for their evaluation. They should also enter into a partnership with Saudi universities and other internal and external institutions that have considerable experience in this field, in order to

involve them in designing, implementing, and evaluating such programmes. Thirdly, with respect to teachers, the MOE and GDTS should adopt new strategies for enforcement that will require all teachers to enrol in CPDPs. Furthermore, they should provide teachers with financial rewards or bonuses based on their enrolment in these programmes. Fourthly, the design of CPDPs should be structured in accordance with the different needs of teachers in terms of knowledge of subject matter and teaching strategies, methods, and skills. Moreover, much attention should be paid to setting up CPDPs for teachers on a continual basis and adopting long-term CPDPs rather than short-term CPDPs based upon availability. Fifthly, in regard to implementation of CPDPs, the MOE, the GDTS, and the ETCs should select or develop efficient coaches for carrying out such programmes. As well, new approaches to implementing CPDPs should be employed, such as locating CPDPs within schools and activating electronic CPDPs through the Internet and its different applications. Sixthly, concerning evaluation of CPDPs, much attention should be paid to activating effective methods and instruments for evaluating these programmes before, during, and after their implementation. Additionally, new forms for evaluating them should be designed, based on the findings of local studies and on international experience in this field. Seventhly, the GDTS should issue a new guide for CPDPs containing detailed information and procedural steps that should be followed by the ETCs when designing, implementing, and evaluating CPDPs because the current guide does not provide adequate details consistent with modern global trends in the management of CPDPs. Finally, with regard to the ETCs, the MOE and GDTS should provide new independent buildings with all the necessary facilities and equipment such as libraries and appropriate access to technologies.

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