



Perception of IB Middle Years programme Teachers on Continuous Professional Development

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Abstract

International Baccalaureate teachers in the Middle Year Programme often have challenges in providing the best learning experience for their learners and continuous professional development has become an important part of IB education. As such, this study is an attempt to identify, which aspects of the CPD proved most effective and their perception regarding the implementation and monitoring of the CPD's conducted in this school. Data were collected using mixed methods and this involved the MYP teachers, coordinators and assistant coordinators. The findings of this research show that more than half of the teachers have not attended many of the generic workshops as these workshops are conducted at the beginning of the academic year. Differentiation and interdisciplinary learning were teachers' first choice in guiding them to be better MYP teachers. Further, assessed curriculum, written curriculum, taught curriculum, concept based learning, learner profiles and Approaches to learning workshops were also equally viewed as important by the teachers

Keywords:

Continuous professional development, differentiation, perception, knowledge, skills

Introduction

Continuous Professional development is needed to make sure that teachers' knowledge and skills are updated constantly. The main issue in this CPD is that numerous CPD's are conducted and which one is

effective for teachers need to be identified. IB professional development (PD) has a specific department for the purpose of ensuring CPD for IB world school teachers and administrators to help educators develop a deeper understanding of what it means to be an internationally minded and effective teacher. In the context of this study, this research attempts to gather data regarding teachers' perception about continuous professional development (CPD) in the school, and identify how CPD aids in enhancing their teaching and learning in the Middle Years Programme (MYP) to become an IB teacher. This study also aims to identify which aspects of the CPD conducted proved most effective in enabling them to learn and their perception regarding the implementation and monitoring of the CPD's conducted in this school. Further, this study captures some of the theories of Ifanti and Fotopoulou (2011), who mentioned that, schools and consequently teachers face a broad spectrum of changes and reforms, which are designed to raise standards and demands and have impact on their roles and responsibilities. They also emphasised that investment in teachers' professional development programs and activities appear to be crucial for the teaching and learning process and for the teachers.

Background

The school implemented the International Baccalaureate (IB) programme five years ago namely the Primary Years Programme (PYP), the Middle Years Programme (MYP) and the Diploma Programme (DP). International



Baccalaureate is an educational foundation and it is focussed on the student. IBO (2013) provides a wide range of high-quality professional development opportunities to help new and experienced school leaders and educators understand, support and successfully deliver IB Programmes. Part of the school's vision is to instil a culture of continuous professional growth in a community of educators. The school has been conducting numerous Continuous Professional Development (CPD) workshops over the years to achieve this but on implementation of the IB programme there is an increase in the number of professional development workshops conducted and these were conducted in regular basis. According to the IBO MYP (2013) a school or group of schools, wishing to offer one or more IB programme must first be authorized to do so by the IB organization. IBO (2013) stated that one of the requirements is that the teachers, leaders, and staff must be trained in the IB programme and philosophy. Teachers teaching in the MYP programme attend a weekly staff meeting where CPD's are conducted by the coordinators and assistant coordinators. The teachers also attend workshops during break to meet the requirements of MYP. They attend initial induction CPD's to be prepared for their first days of school. Teachers' work becomes more demanding and restricted and teachers are forced to work, in ways they had never been taught. This school also invest heavily in teachers' professional development as teachers also attend either online or face to face workshops conducted by IB. Thus, this study would use the data collected from workshops and Seminars as the primary source for investigation to capture the MYP teachers' perception in Continuous Professional Development (CPD).

Problem statement

Conducting workshops and seminars for the teachers has been one of the on-going process in each academic year of the school.

This is provided with a good intention for the teachers to upgrade their skills in their respective areas. There is time and money involved in such conduction of workshop and seminars and there is a need to examine if teachers actually benefit from these workshops and seminars. Added to it, teachers perception is vital for the management to see if the training given is appropriate and in the right direction of the expectation of their teachers. As such, there is a need to examine if the teacher's preferences and participation in the workshops and seminars has empowered the teachers by providing them the necessary confidence, knowledge and skills.

Literature Review

The first part of literature review was to look at teachers perceptions of continuous professional development. Ifanti and Fotopoulou (2011) wanted to explore teachers concerns, thoughts, ideas and hopes regarding professionalism and professional development, and to reveal the factors that are perceived to sustain or diminish these notions. Ed Powell et al (2003) did a research project regarding Teachers' perceptions of the impact of CPD. The study aimed to provide teachers and head teachers involved in accredited CPD programmes with an opportunity to share their perceptions of the impact of participation at the individual, classroom and institutional level.

Further, Lessing and De Witt (2007) wrote that CPD is necessary to empower teachers by giving them the necessary confidence, knowledge and skills. Lessing and de Witt (2007) conducted a study where a workshop was planned and concluded that teachers indicated that the workshop had personal value for them and helped to improve their work lives, provided knowledge, developed excellence and efficiency, enhanced their critical thinking about their teaching methods, developed competence and made them aware of whole school development. This also



needs to be seen in the context of Ed Powell et al (2003), who concluded that most teachers involved in extended, accredited CPD programmes report positive experiences as their professional development needs are met. The term 'impact' has been used to refer to changes in professional knowledge, practices and affective responses as a consequence of CPD experiences.

Although researchers such as Lessing, De Wit and Ed Powell have stated that CPD helped them improve their work lives still Bolam (2000:278) makes it clear that the ultimate aim of CPD is to improve student learning but the issue is how to strike an appropriate balance between meeting the needs of individual professionals, on the one hand, and of the school and national policy on the other. Hailu and Jabessa (2010) confirmed that participants define school Based CPD in terms of skill training among colleagues and as a means of career development and teacher re-licensure. Teachers have to be motivated to engage fully in continuing professional and personal development in the school.

Schostak et al. (2010:589) Mentioned that Effective CPD involves 'learning' and being 'fit to practise', knowing both the 'why' and the 'how', and putting both into practice. Effectiveness is facilitated when professionals are able to determine their own learning needs, through reflection, within the totality of their practice. Nasser and Romanowski (2011:165) did a research to identify challenges facing teachers' PD and noted that Teachers thought that PD was beneficial in terms of the application of skills, organization, time management, planning and communicating with others. Also, teachers believed that PD was necessary to improve their pedagogical practice.

Tang and Choi (2009) wrote that the quality of the teaching force is crucial to the quality of education and different education systems invest a lot in continuing professional development (CPD) as it is a means to the end of developing a quality teaching force. Lessing

and de Witt (2007) commented that CPD workshops need to be improved to enhance teachers' enthusiasm for attending such workshops. Shumack and Forde (2011:1) wrote that the purpose of high quality professional development is to improve student learning by improving, enhancing, or updating classroom instruction.

Based on the literature review, there seems to be a need for research to be conducted to look at teacher professional development, as teachers' development of knowledge and skills is essential for them to build a quality teaching force. IB Teachers thus, need to know the best practice in the classroom and should be familiar with Teaching and learning methodologies that they imbibe from the Continuing professional development.

Research questions

The Research Questions will be:

- a) What are teachers' perceptions of continuous professional development at school?
- b) How and why do teacher's preferences and participation vary in different CPD activities?
- c) What aspects of the CPD do teachers feel have helped them to become better teachers in the Middle Years Programme (MYP)

Research Methodology

Both qualitative and quantitative research methods were incorporate in this study. 40 teachers who were teaching Middle Year Programme (MYP) were involved in the study. Data were collected using questionnaires and interview methods. Apart from the teachers the coordinators and the assistant coordinators input on CPD were also captured using interview.

Data analysis Results (Discussion and Findings)

Part 1 of the questionnaire provided some details regarding the teachers' background



and these data clearly showed 16 out of 35 teachers had less than 2 years of teaching in the Middle years programme and 14 of them have between 2 to 5 years. Teachers were new to the programme and it was compulsory for them to attend these workshops.

Part 2 of the questionnaire was divided into 6 sections. The data analysis was listed in six tables. A 6 point Likert Scale were used for sections A, C, D, and E. 1 being almost never to 6 being almost always. For analysis purpose the 6 points have been divided to two sections. 1, 2, 3 will be analysed from almost never to a slight increase and points 4, 5, 6 an increase in teachers' perception to almost always. Points 1, 2, and 3 were summed up as one group and 4, 5, 6 as a second group. These assumptions were used for section A, C, D and E. For section B and F the teachers need to rate based on their priority. These also were divided to two groups. 1 to 5 was the first group, and 6 to 10 the second group.

Table 1

MYP Teachers perceptions of CPD data analysis - 1 being almost never

What do you consider as factors that affect Teacher Professionalism	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
Large Class	6	4	6	8	4	7	35
Students behaviour	3	2	8	8	9	5	35
Parents behaviour	8	5	6	9	5	2	35
Teaching Load	1	2	3	6	15	8	35
Low salary	0	5	6	7	12	5	35
Relationship with colleagues	2	2	8	9	12	2	35
Work experience	3	3	3	8	12	6	35
Educational qualification	4	1	5	6	12	7	35

For section A, teachers were asked to comment on the factors that contributed to teacher professionalism. Although the project was not actually related to teacher professionalism data were gathered to understand what factors affect teacher professionalism. Teachers commented that teaching load affects teacher professionalism. Apart from this teaching load, they were also required to perform duties during school dismissal and were in charge of one co-curricular activity. Teachers also commented that work experience and educational qualification affects teacher professionalism. If a teacher does not have a degree or Masters that she/he would not be able to cope with the requirements

For section B, data were collected on the generic CPD's, which the teachers had attended. The findings show that only 15 teachers have attended all these generic CPD's. 10 of them have attended between 5 to 9 and 10 of them have attended only less than 5 CPD's. Teachers were asked to rate the workshops as to which were the most important workshop they attended and list it as their priority. From the responses received 21 of them felt that attending the organisations workshop regarding active learning strategies was their priority. The second priority was attending lesson planning workshops. 19 teachers have selected classroom management strategies as their third choice and 18 have chosen thinking skills workshops as the fourth option.

The generic CPD's include the vision and mission of the organisation, communicating learning goals, thinking skills, multiple intelligences, active learning strategies, classroom management strategies, lesson planning and assessment for learning. These



are generic CPD's that all teachers should attend as it provides the 21 necessary tools to plan their work, manage a class and teaching strategies. These data were alarming as most of the teachers have not attended many of the workshops. If teachers do not attend these CPD's then they may not perform as required. The analysis showed that the teachers were clear as to what was needed for them. They have similar preferences regarding the workshops. Teachers consider classroom management strategies as important. Nasser and Romanowski (2011:165-166) commented that the PD provided did not address the basic challenges of classroom teaching encountered by teachers. Teachers also find active learning strategies and lesson planning workshops as important.

For section C Teachers were also asked to rate which workshops had helped them to become a better teacher in the MYP programme. The majority of them mentioned that constructivism approach/differentiation helped them to become better MYP teachers. 27 teachers commented that assessed curriculum, written curriculum and taught curriculum workshops have also helped them to become better MYP teachers. 25 teachers felt that concept based learning, learner profiles and Approaches to learning skills have helped them. In this school we have mixed-ability class and the effective use of differentiation can give pupils the best possible chance of learning.

For section D the MYP specific workshops that were conducted for the teachers were listed and the teachers were asked to identify which workshops have helped them to become a better teacher in the MYP programme. There were nineteen MYP specific workshops conducted during the semester. 28 of 35 teachers selected interdisciplinary learning as a very important workshop followed by differentiation in MYP. 26 teachers found that Inquiry

strategies, collaborative planning and approaches to learning have helped them to be better teachers in the MYP. The overall analysis showed that majority of the teachers found most of these specific workshops useful and have helped them to be a better teacher in the MYP.

For section E Teachers were asked to comment on their perception of the CPD's conducted in School. 14 teachers found the workshops a chore, 16 found it enjoyable. 29 found it a natural part of professional life and 28 found it necessary for career progression. 20 found it rewarding. 16 teachers found these a change in attitude and 20 found a change in the departmental unit practice. 20 teachers have improved their teaching skills and 27 commented that these were knowledge acquisition. 18 of them said that there was learner satisfaction. 14 found it a chore and only five found it unnecessary.

Most of the MYP teachers found the workshops good for knowledge acquisition, natural part of professional life, necessary for career progression and have helped to improve their teaching skills. On the negative side only 5 found it unnecessary and 14 found these a chore.

From my findings, 25 teachers preferred workshop, followed by 24 teachers who selected training. 14 teachers chose online courses/conferences.



Table 5 - What is your perception of the CPD's conducted in school

MYP Specific workshops conducted in this school	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total	Sum
A chore	5	6	10	8	3	3	35	14
Enjoyable	3	4	11	4	1	1	34	16
Natural part of professional life	1	1	4	15	1	4	35	29
Necessary for career progression	1	1	4	11	1	5	34	28
rewarding	3	5	7	16	2	2	35	20
Change in attitude	3	3	13	9	4	3	35	16
Change in departmental/ Unit practice	2	4	8	13	5	2	34	20
Improved teaching skills	1	2	6	14	9	3	35	26
Knowledge acquisition	1	2	3	3	1	3	33	27
Learner satisfaction	1	0	1	1	6	2	30	18
Unnecessary	1	6	8	3	2	0	34	5

For section F Teachers were asked to comment on what they considered as most important type of CPD. From the findings workshop was the preferred type of CPD and the teachers second choice was training. On line courses and conferences was their third choice and the fourth was collaboration with teachers. Teachers do not consider personal reading/research and mentorship as important type of CPD's.

Open ended questions from the questionnaire

Question 1 was on what aspects of the CPD conducted proved most effective in enabling you to learn. The teachers mentioned that structured planned CPD, Differentiated CPD, ATL, Blooms Taxonomy, Multiple Intelligence, Thinking skills and Concept based learning were very effective.

The second question was on what workshops need reinforcement. The teachers commented that the workshop on Inquiry based learning, Differentiation, Concept based learning, interdisciplinary workshops and ATL needs reinforcement.

The third question was the perception regarding the implementation and monitoring of the CPD's conducted in this school. Some commented that the CPD's are good to enhance the professionalism and quality of teaching of IB and the frequency should be increased.

For the second phase interview was carried out to understand the coordinators perceptions. Interviews were conducted for six participants and for the sake of anonymity the teachers were identified as teacher 1 to 6. There were six questions posted to the coordinators. Qualitative responses from the interview taken from the coordinators, shows a clear perception of their CPD's conducted.

The 1st Question was "What would you consider as being very important CPD for the Middle Years programme?"

For this [T3IR3] and [T4IR3] had similar views and felt that concept based learning is important.

[T4IR3] also pointed out that classroom management is crucial and this is supported by [T1IR3].

Apart from this [T1IR3] mentioned that the theories like Blooms Taxonomy and Assessment workshops were considered important.

[T2IR3] quoted "the induction was the best and teachers go through a series of activities that can be applied in class".

[T6IR3] however had a different perspective where she felt that the taught, written and assessed curriculum must be understood



otherwise the MYP programme cannot be delivered.

Question 2 was used to capture, "Which of the CPD do you feel have helped you to become a better teacher in the MYP programme?"

Teacher [T2IR3] believes that the Induction to the MYP programme have helped otherwise she would not know what to teach.

[T3IR3] quoted that "Concept based learning, meaningful assessment and developing the interdisciplinary units for holistic learning made her a better MYP teacher".

According to [T5IR3] classroom management and differentiation was useful and said that we need to cater for student different needs.

Lastly [T6IR3] said "the MYP subject guide CPD helped and we need to see how this will help students beyond the, classroom".

Question 3 was on their perception of the CPD's conducted in this school and the teachers have similar views.

[T2IR1] felt that the CPD's should be continuous, informative and provide meaningful strategies for teaching and learning.

[T1IR1] said that all CPD's were relevant, however in the MYP there should be more frequency and should not combined with the staff meeting.

This is in line with [T4IR1] perception where she said that "some CPD's were repeated and the time frame for the CPD was not enough. We should only do during school holidays".

According to [T5IR1], most CPD's were carried very well but it was last minute and the teachers do not prepare prior to the CPD.

A good point mentioned by [T3IR1] was that the CPD's needs to be more intentional based on what the needs were and should be separated between the teachers' proficiency.

[T6IR1] said that the main objective was to develop the teacher professionally and the teacher must cope with the current technology.

In relation to question 4 on what aspects of the CPD conducted proved most effective in enabling you to learn, [T3IR3] commented that the weekly based VC's was really effective as it was continuous, collaborative and teachers were able to share ideas.

[T4IR3] and [T5IR3] commented that team discussion and the interaction between teachers in workshops was very effective in enabling them to learn.

[T2IR3] felt that the jigsaw reading and discussion not with own department was very effective and the teachers learnt from each other. It was clear that interaction and group discussion was really effective.

[T1IR3] said that "the MYP new chapter workshop was useful.

Findings of the study

The majority of the teachers had less than 2 years of teaching in the Middle years programme. More than half of the teachers had not attended many of the generic workshops. These workshops are usually within the first three months when a teacher joins the school. With regards to the MYP induction workshops and MYP specific workshops conducted in school, constructivism approach/differentiation and interdisciplinary learning were teachers' first choice in guiding them to be better MYP teachers. The effective use of differentiation can give pupils the best possible chance of learning. Assessed curriculum, written curriculum, taught curriculum, concept based



learning, learner profiles and approaches to learning workshops are equally important to teachers and finally Inquiry strategies, collaborative planning and, assessments in the MYP, had all made them better teachers. These are all part of the IB core elements that are in their workshops. Regarding teachers' perceptions of the CPD conducted in this school, the findings shows that teachers had consistent views. Teachers found the workshops good, for knowledge acquisition, natural part of professional life, necessary for career progression and have helped to improve their teaching skills. Workshops are the preferred type of CPD followed by training. On line courses, conferences and collaboration was also a preferred choice. Differentiated CPD, Approaches to Learning, Multiple Intelligence, Thinking skills, Concept based learning workshops were very effective and aided the learning process. Collaborative planning with teachers from different campus and sharing the examples from daily classroom situations was a good learning platform for new teachers and existing teachers.

Conclusion

This research will be an eye opener for all the institutions and practitioners who wish to consider Continuous Professional Development as a part of the IB education and to improvise their standards among the MYP programme teachers. Added to this the MYP teachers perceptions captured in this study may be a source for MYP teachers to explore while developing their professional, development plan.

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