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## Cambodian English as a Foreign Language Teachers' Perspectives on Continuing Professional Development of a Non-Governmental Organization in Cambodia

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### Abstract:

*This study explored the perspectives of Cambodian teachers who teach English as a foreign language (EFL) on continuing professional development (CPD) of a non-governmental organization (NGO) in Cambodia. This study was motivated by two research questions: (1) what is Cambodian EFL teachers' perception of CPD and the CPD provided by the NGO? (2) What is Cambodian EFL teachers' perception of how to develop CPD to be an effective teacher training program? This study advances our understanding of the practice of CPD in Cambodia and of teachers' perceptions towards their CPD. In this qualitative study, data were collected by means of interviews. Eight Cambodian EFL teachers were deliberately selected to take part in semi-structured interviews. The findings indicated that the participant teachers showed a good understanding of CPD and acknowledged that CPD is essential to their teaching career and contributes to better students' learning performance. However, there is a significant concern regarding the time for CPD and the response to the teachers' CPD needs. The participant teachers were of the view that there is more to be done, and they provided several suggestions that are potentially helpful to improve the effectiveness of CPD provision at the NGO.*

**Keywords:** English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers, perspectives, continuing professional development (CPD), non-governmental organization (NGO), Cambodia

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Rationale

Today's fast-changing world creates more challenges and demands for the work of teachers. This means that teachers must continuously develop themselves to respond to the changing needs and meet new standards of teaching practices. Guskey (2000, p. 4) advocates that "Every successful instructional improvement program, curriculum revision project, school restructuring design, or systemic reform initiative has at its center the provision of high-quality professional development." As can be observed, a greater emphasis has been placed on education reforms aimed at enhancing the quality of classroom teaching and professionally developing teachers who play a critical role in the teaching and learning process (Steyn, 2009). Steyn (2009, p. 257) further supports that "The effectiveness of reform initiatives depends on the quality of teachers and as a result, the professional development of teachers has become a major focal point of such initiatives." Thus, teachers' continuing professional development (CPD) plays an essential role in achieving such reform. What CPD does is to improve teachers' performance, and the improved performance of the teachers will also improve the students' learning outcome (Craft, 2000; Day & Sachs, 2004; Guskey & Huberman, 1995).

In Cambodia, not many educational institutions, including private schools, public schools, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), have significantly focused on teachers' CPD because CPD arrangement, regardless of its forms, will involve costs, efforts, and time. Therefore, Cambodia's education is confronted by a severe shortage of qualified teachers due to insufficient pedagogical training, unsystematic and irregular provision of CPD (Phin, 2014a), and the lack of teachers' commitment to making CPD happen within their working environment (Phin and Kubota, 2016). Studies by Phin (2014a; 2014b) and Phin and Kubota (2016) showed considerable concern about inadequate CPD provision for Cambodian teachers. It is evident that feasible and well-structured CPD programs for teachers are urgently needed. In Cambodia, the concept of CPD is perhaps not clearly understood by many teachers. Therefore, understanding teachers' perceptions of their CPD is vital so that the development of CPD programs can be effective. In the context of a developing country like Cambodia, research looking at such perception is still limited. This situation necessitated this study.

### 1.2. Research Questions

- What is Cambodian EFL teachers' perception of CPD and the CPD provided by the NGO?
- What is Cambodian EFL teachers' perception of how to develop CPD to be an effective teacher training program?

The first research question seeks to explore a range of EFL teachers' perception of: what CPD is, sorts of activities they consider as CPD, the importance of CPD for their teaching career, the organization/arrangement of CPD activities at the NGO, factors influencing their participation in CPD and impact of CPD on their teaching and students' learning. The second research question is to gain teachers' opinions about what makes CPD an effective teacher training program.

## 2. Review of Relevant Literature and Studies

### 2.1. Definition of CPD

CPD has been seen as essential in enhancing teacher performance and has drawn considerable attention in recent years. Several CPD-related terms are found in the literature, including teacher development, in-service teacher training, career development, professional development, continuing education, and lifelong learning (Day & Sachs, 2004). However, many scholars, for example, Craft (2000), Day and Sachs (2004), and Glover and Law (1996), tend to use those terms interchangeably.

There have been many debates regarding the definition of CPD; unfortunately, no single and agreed definition is reached (Glover & Law, 1996). Guskey (2000, p. 16) defines CPD as "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." In line with Guskey (2000), Day and Sachs (2004) consider CPD as all activities in which teachers get involved during their teaching career, designed to improve their work. Craft (2000) simply defines CPD as all types of professional learning undertaken by teachers during their teaching profession.

### 2.2. Purposes of CPD

CPD serves a number of purposes that understandably focus on improving teachers, students, and schools. Blandford (2000) asserts that the purposes of CPD are to expand the knowledge, skills, understanding, and abilities of teachers and teaching institutions to develop and adapt new teaching practices that meet student needs collectively and individually and to stay up-to-date with new educational trends and policy.

Day and Sachs (2004) mention three interconnected purposes of CPD, which are extension, growth, and renewal. The extension is developed by introducing new knowledge and skills to teachers, while growth is ensured through higher expertise of teachers. Finally, renewal is attained through enhanced knowledge, skills, and practice of teachers leading up to students' better learning outcomes.

It can be observed that educational practice and policy keep changing, for example, new curriculum, new teaching standards, and growing technological advancements. Therefore, the role of teachers is directly affected. That is when on-time CPD needs to come in to help teachers respond to those new changes.

### 2.3. CPD Activities

A variety of activities can be considered as CPD, and they are ranged from formal to informal and structured to unstructured activities. Those activities are taken by and provided to teachers in an attempt to upgrade teachers' knowledge and skills, leading up to improved students' learning outcomes through the enhanced performance of teachers. The Irish Institute of Training and Development (n.d.) provides a comprehensive list of CPD activities with five broad categories: work-based learning, professional activities, formal education, self-directed learning, and others. Those activities are presented in Table 1.

1. Work-based Learning	2. Professional Activities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning by doing</li> <li>• Case studies</li> <li>• Reflective practice</li> <li>• Assessment of students/colleagues</li> <li>• Being coached by others</li> <li>• Discussions with colleagues</li> <li>• Peer review</li> <li>• Learning by experience</li> <li>• Work shadowing</li> <li>• Secondments</li> <li>• Journal club</li> <li>• In-service training</li> <li>• Supervising staff or students</li> <li>• Visiting other departments/schools and reporting back</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Involvement in a professional body</li> <li>• Membership of a specialist interest group</li> <li>• Lecturing or teaching</li> <li>• Mentoring</li> <li>• Being an examiner</li> <li>• Being a tutor</li> <li>• Chapter meetings</li> <li>• Organizing journal clubs or other specialist groups</li> <li>• Maintaining or developing specialist skills (for example, musical skills)</li> <li>• Giving presentations at conferences</li> <li>• Organizing accredited courses</li> <li>• Participating in or supervising research</li> </ul>

3. Formal Education	4. Self-directed Learning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accredited courses</li> <li>• Further education</li> <li>• Research</li> <li>• Attending conferences</li> <li>• Writing articles or papers</li> <li>• Attending seminars</li> <li>• Distance learning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reading journals or articles</li> <li>• Reviewing books or articles</li> <li>• Updating knowledge through the internet or television</li> <li>• Keeping a file to record personal progress</li> </ul>
5. Others	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public service</li> <li>• Voluntary work</li> </ul>	

*Table 1: Examples of CPD Activities*

#### 2.4. Evaluation of CPD

Research literature has consistently confirmed that CPD is an essential element of school improvement and teacher growth (Day & Sachs, 2004). Therefore, it is necessary that CPD provision be evaluated systematically and adequately in order to ensure its effectiveness and impact. The evaluation should be an integral part of any process of CPD (Miller & Watts, 1990).

In recent years, there is a growing interest in the evaluation of CPD. According to Guskey (2000), there are four crucial reasons. The first reason is that educators have started to understand the dynamic nature of CPD. They no longer see CPD as just something done to them three or four times during a school year; instead, it is perceived as extended, enhanced, and job-embedded learning experiences. Increased recognition of CPD as an intentional process is the second reason. Regardless of the form CPD takes, it attempts to improve teaching and learning, and the school level. The third reason lies in the need to collect the necessary information to guide CPD reform. To achieve a successful CPD reform, schools need more accurate, timely, and detailed information about the effects, conditions of success, and costs of CPD. The last reason is the increased demand at all levels of education for better accountability. Teachers and school administrators must show that they make adequate efforts to provide the best education possible to their students.

Miller and Watts (1990, p. 159) suggest that the evaluation of CPD should attempt to answer a broad range of questions, which include the following:

- How well were the CPD needs identified?
- To what extent were these needs met by the development activities?
- How could the process of planning the learning experiences be improved?
- Does the CPD program result in an improvement in service delivery?
- Do the outcomes justify the time spent?
- Are the participants satisfied?
- Does it influence general policy, service organization, and delivery, etc.?

Dean (1991) and Guskey (2000) stress the importance of determining clear purposes of CPD evaluation because it will give an explicit focus in the evaluation process. Dean (1991) and Miller and Watts (1990) suggest a range of methods that can be used to evaluate CPD. These can include one or more of the following:

- Rating scales and questionnaires,
- Discussion,
- Documents analysis and evidence from pupils,
- Observations and interviews, and
- Self-reporting.

Even though the evaluation of CPD is not a new topic in education, so many evaluations of CPD in the past were found ineffective because they did not provide sufficient information required to make significant changes to enhance its effectiveness and efficiency (Guskey, 2000). With reference to Todnem and Warner (1994), Guskey (2000) mentions three critical mistakes in past evaluations of CPD. The first mistake is that evaluations of CPD focused too much on documentation that only gave information on what sorts of activities were conducted and how much money was spent. Instead, they should give information on issues related to effectiveness or results. The second mistake concerns the little depth of the evaluation. The measurement of CPD success should not depend mainly upon how much teachers are satisfied with their CPD experience. It should consider the impact of CPD on teachers' perceptions, attitudes, knowledge and skills, and students' learning. The third mistake is that evaluation efforts are usually too brief and done in a short period of time. On the contrary, evaluations of CPD effectiveness are a long-term process, so meaningful support for change and implementation of CPD needs to be continuous.

#### 2.5. Effective CPD Program

A simple but hard-to-answer question, "what makes effective CPD," has long been discussed. Many studies and reviews of the literature have been done to find answers to this critical question. Until now, a number of characteristics of effective CPD have been identified. Birman, Desimone, Porter, and Garet (2000) and Garet, Porter, Desimone, and Birman

(2001) studied a number of literature and survey data and were able to identify some key characteristics of effective CPD as follows:

- Forms of activity: Traditional forms of CPD, such as workshops, courses, and conferences, are seen as common but are generally criticized as being ineffective in developing teachers' knowledge and skills and increasing positive changes in their classroom practices. Therefore, new forms of CPD, such as peer teaching, study groups, mentoring, and coaching, have emerged and are regarded as more effective.
- Collective participation: CPD is potentially advantageous when it is designed for groups of teachers who come from the same characteristics, for example, the same school, department, or grade level.
- Duration of activity: CPD activities must be sustained over time because it allows teachers to discuss contents in depth, try out new practices in their classroom, and receive feedback on their teaching.
- Content focus: Effective CPD must focus on expanding teachers' content, pedagogical knowledge and skills, and teaching practices.
- Active learning: Teachers should have opportunities to actively engage in providing and receiving feedback and analyzing students' work.
- Coherence: CPD activities should be consistent, build upon one another, and align with school beliefs and educational policies.

Day and Sachs (2004) point out a critical factor that ensures effective CPD; it is to match appropriate CPD provision to individual CPD needs of teachers. This fit between the professional needs and CPD activities offered is significant to bring about enhanced knowledge and skills of teachers and improved students' learning outcomes. Any CPD opportunities that show no concerns for individual professional needs and do not respond to real workplace conditions will only make a minor impact on teachers and students.

A study conducted by Brown, Edmonds, and Lee (2001, p. 53) identified a number of themes for effective CPD. They are:

- The identification of CPD needs (individual, school),
- The delivery of CPD (accessibility of venue, style, and approach),
- The impact upon teaching and learning, and
- The role of the school (their approach, follow-up, support).

However, several aspects have been found to influence CPD effectiveness and should be carefully taken into consideration. According to Steyn (2008), those aspects include teachers' learning differences, teachers' commitment, quality leadership, school context, and characteristics of provided CPD.

## 2.6. Impact of CPD

CPD is believed to enhance the quality of teaching and learning through the improved performance of teachers. Many studies and reviews of the literature were conducted to explore its impact.

Hustler, McNamara, Jarvis, Londra, and Campbell (2003) conducted a study on teachers' perceptions of CPD. The study asked teachers to rate how much impact CPD activities had had on their teaching and students' learning over the last five years prior to the study. Teachers were given a set of responses, namely professional development, teaching skills, desire to learn more, pupils' learning outcomes, self-confidence/self-esteem, leadership skills, and promotion prospects. The result revealed that teachers gave the highest rate on professional development and the lowest rate on promotion prospects.

Another study conducted by Brown et al. (2001) asked teachers to express their views on the impact of CPD on their teaching and students' learning. From a range of responses that included changes of teaching styles, greater professional confidence, more flexibility in using resources, better planning and assessment, etc., teachers expressed their views that teaching styles were the most significant impact of CPD on their teaching. As a result, students showed greater enjoyment and enthusiasm towards their learning in addition to their improved achievements/grades.

Cordingley, Bell, Rundell, and Evans (2005) conducted a systematic review to examine whether and how collaborative CPD affected teaching and learning. The review found that collaborative CPD had a significant connection with enhanced teaching and learning. The impact on teachers reported in the review included greater professional confidence and self-esteem, progressive enthusiasm for collaborative working, improved commitment to trying new things and changing teaching practice, and enhanced knowledge and skills. For students, the impact included more motivation to learn, enhanced performance, more active responses, better work organization, and collaborative working.

## 3. Research Methodology

### 3.1. Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design to answer the two research questions by combining the phenomenological and grounded theory approach in order to explore teachers' CPD experience at the NGO and generate theory from their experience and perspectives. According to Gray (2014) and Kumar (2014), qualitative research design enables the researcher to understand participants' thoughts, opinions, feelings, perceptions, attitudes and behaviors, values, and experiences in context-specific settings or specific issues through descriptively collected data. Gray (2014) also emphasizes that qualitative research design is suitable in situations where relatively little is known, so the employment of this research design, if not entirely but significantly, suited the study.

### 3.2. Data Collection

This study conducted one-on-one semi-structured interviews with eight Cambodian EFL teachers. Creswell (2014b) and Kumar (2014) describe the interview as a popular and commonly used approach in educational research and social sciences. Dikko (2016, p. 523) mentions that “The semi-structured interview allows for flexibility within each interview so that optimal information is obtained from participants.” Miller and Glassner (2011) also support the use of qualitative interviews as a data collection instrument because it allows the researcher to collect rigorous and rich descriptions of experiences in social worlds in order to provide significant insights into the research problems being studied.

Guided by literature, for example, Dikko (2016) and Drever (2003), a pilot interview was conducted with one EFL teacher before official interviews were held. According to Dikko (2016), a pilot interview helps researchers to identify ambiguities (burdensome and unnecessary questions), record time taken and determine the appropriate time, test each question whether it can collect enough responses, check whether responses can be adequately interpreted, examine if essential questions have been included, and practice interviewing techniques. The teacher for the pilot interview was selected from the same population but not among the eight teachers. Drever (2003, p. 56) firmly suggests that interviewees for the pilot interview need to be “similar to people in your study, ideally from the same population, but not individuals you intend to interview.”

All interviews were audio-recorded for the purpose of transcription for analysis.

### 3.3. Sampling Technique

Kumar (2019, pp. 311-312) firmly states that “As the main aim in qualitative inquiries is to explore diversity, sample size and sampling strategy do not play a significant role in the selection of a sample. If selected carefully, diversity can be extensively and accurately described on the basis of information obtained even from one individual.”

Carefully considering the nature of the study, a non-random sampling or judgmental sampling, namely purposive sampling, was used. Creswell (2014a) points out that the idea behind the qualitative study is to intentionally select participants that will help the researcher to understand research problems and questions. Kumar (2019) agrees that in a qualitative study, the selection of participants should be based on the researcher’s discernment and judgment as to who is likely to have diversely needed information and is willing to participate in the study.

For this study, eight Cambodian EFL teachers were deliberately selected. The selection criteria were that they had to be an EFL teacher at the NGO for at least three years and had to have participated in CPD activities for at least twelve months prior to the interview.

### 3.4. Data Analysis

Data analysis is a crucial process in any research. It is when the researcher endeavors to make meaning of the collected data. In qualitative research, the analysis requires a thorough understanding of how to make sense of texts, images, notes, and observations so that answers to research questions can be formed (Creswell, 2014b). Because qualitative data show a great diversity; they are, however, essentially meaningful because they are forms of human communication (Gibbs, 2007). Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2011, p. 537) point out that “There is no one single or correct way to analyze and present qualitative data; how one does it should abide by the issue of fitness for purpose.” For this study, all collected data were analyzed following a linear, hierarchical approach suggested by Creswell (2014a, p. 197). This approach is presented in Figure 1.

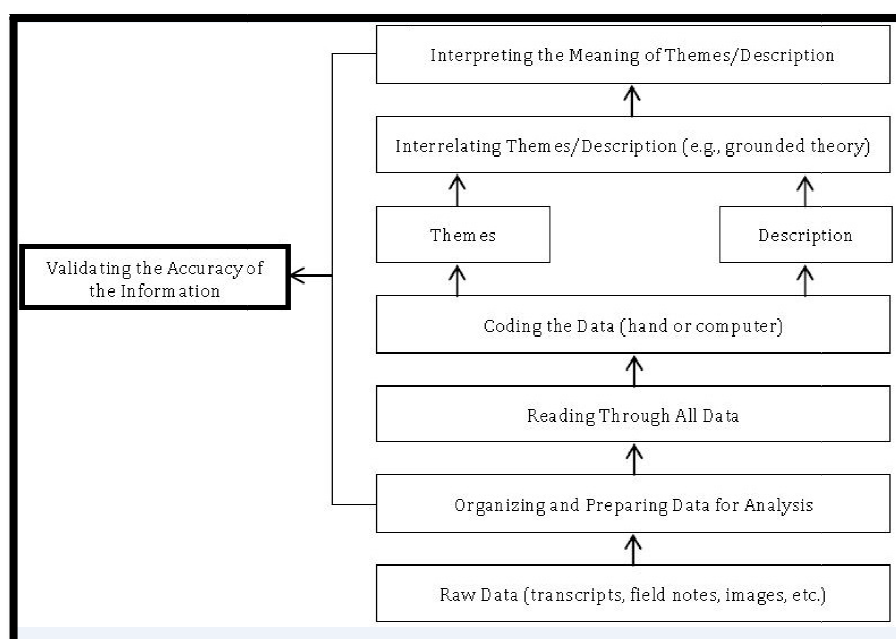


Figure 1: Data Analysis in Qualitative Research

Collected data were first transcribed and entered into a Word document so that it could be uploaded into Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) for analysis. Regarding CAQDAS, this study used a qualitative analysis software called “NVivo” to help the research with organizing, analyzing, and finding insights from the collected data. After all the collected data were transcribed, the reading through all the data was conducted. According to Creswell (2014a, p. 197), this step “provides a general sense of the information and an opportunity to reflect on its overall meaning.” Then all of the data were coded using the selected CAQDAS. After that, codes were scrutinized in order to generate themes and their categories and/or descriptions. Finally, themes and/or descriptions were presented and discussed with examples of verbatim quotations from the interviews and, where possible, comparing the results with the literature, theories and/or previous studies.

### *3.5. Ethical Considerations*

According to Gray (2014), ethics are the standards of conduct and value that impact both the researcher and research subjects. Because this study involved human participants, some ethical issues were thoroughly considered. Gray (2014) suggests four ethical principles that were strictly implemented in this study. The four ethical principles consist of the need to (1) avoid harm to participants, (2) ensure the informed consent of participants, (3) respect the privacy of participants, and (4) avoid the use of deception.

Before commencing the study, ethical clearance was granted by the university. Written permission from the selected NGO was also received. Informed consent was obtained from all the participant teachers to show that they agreed to voluntarily participate in the study and for their interviews to be audio-recorded. All the participant teachers were ensured that their identity would be anonymous, and supplied information would be stored securely and treated with confidentiality. Moreover, they were made aware that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time during the data collection process without any consequence to themselves and that all collected information from them would be destroyed.

### *3.6. Limitations and Issues*

As opposed to quantitative research, qualitative research raises criticisms around its validity and reliability due to being less scientific and precise. Gray (2014) stresses that:

One of the criticisms leveled at qualitative research is that it is unscientific, anecdotal, and based upon subjective impressions. It is also claimed that qualitative research lacks reproducibility – the researcher is so based in or confined to one context that it lacks generalizability. (p. 181).

Another issue is the purposive sampling technique. The purposive sampling technique is sometimes regarded as biased and almost always subjective because the selection of participants is firmly based upon the researcher’s judgment. In addition to the sampling issue, because qualitative research usually studies a small sample size, there is also a limitation to the generalization of findings.

The lack of consistency and replicability of findings might be another issue because it is believed that qualitative research is so personal to the researcher, meaning that another researcher might use the same data and come up with different conclusions (May, 1995 cited in Gray, 2014).

Even though there are some limitations and issues, the researcher had endeavored to take an appropriate position guided by literature in order to counteract any bias in every process of the study.

## **4. Presentation and Discussion of Findings**

This section begins with brief background information about the selected NGO and participant teachers. Then, findings from interviews are presented and discussed as guided by the predetermined data analysis procedure.

### *4.1. Background Information*

#### 4.1.1. Selected NGO

The selected NGO for this study is an international not-for-profit organization working with thousands of impoverished and vulnerable children and families from Cambodia’s most disadvantaged communities by providing six core programs, namely education, leadership, community outreach, healthcare, childcare, and career and life skills. The NGO’s education program provides those unprivileged children with access to formal and non-formal education from the early years until university. It has a strong focus on developing English, Khmer (the language spoken by Cambodians), and STEM education (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics). The children undertake public school education for half of each day and classes at the NGO for the other half of the day. Because education is the most important program, a significant emphasis has been placed on teachers’ quality. This emphasis led to the establishment of the Teacher Development Team (TDT). The team works closely with teachers to ensure the quality of teaching and learning by providing a range of CPD activities and training opportunities both internally and externally.

#### 4.1.2. Selected Participant Teachers

Eight Cambodian EFL teachers were individually interviewed between June and July 2017. Among the eight participant teachers, six were male, and two were female with an average age of 30. Half of the teachers were relatively new to the teaching career and had been teaching between three to four years, while the other half had been teaching for more than five years. The majority of them had participated in CPD activities between three to four years, whereas a few

teachers had been involved in CPD activities for more than five years. The participant teachers taught English to students across different levels ranging from primary to high school students. The teaching hours of the participant teachers ranged from two to eight hours per day, with the class size of 20 - 25 students. However, they equally have two hours break from 12:00 pm to 2:00 pm, which TDT usually uses to conduct CPD-related activities or events. The qualifications of the teachers who participated in the study were ranged from Bachelor of Arts to Master of Arts in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). In the last 12 months prior to the interview, they had participated in various CPD activities such as seminars and workshops, internal and external training courses, coaching, teacher team meetings, online courses, teaching conference and school exchanges, project-based learning, school visits, and peer observations.

#### 4.2. Findings and Discussion

After a careful analysis of the collected data, five main themes with their categories shown in Table 2 emerged and will hereinafter be discussed in detail.

Themes	Categories
Theme 1: Teachers' understanding of CPD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Definition of CPD</li> <li>• CPD activities</li> <li>• Importance of CPD</li> </ul>
Theme 2: Provision of CPD at the NGO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time for CPD</li> <li>• Teachers' needs</li> <li>• Being practical</li> <li>• Learning community</li> <li>• External CPD opportunities</li> <li>• Quality of presentation</li> </ul>
Theme 3: Factors hindering teachers' participation in CPD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unsuitability of time</li> <li>• Irrelevant topics</li> <li>• Quality of presenter/trainer</li> <li>• Lack of support and motivation</li> <li>• Teachers' own reluctance</li> </ul>
Theme 4: Impacts of CPD on teaching and learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved knowledge and teaching skills</li> <li>• Improved teaching confidence and self-esteem</li> <li>• Enhanced learning performance of students</li> </ul>
Theme 5: Teachers' perspectives on effective CPD program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meeting teachers' needs</li> <li>• Effective delivery of CPD (time, duration, accessible venue, resources, presentation)</li> <li>• Continuous follow-up and support</li> <li>• Focusing on knowledge creation</li> </ul>

Table 2: Themes and Categories Emerged from the Data Analysis

##### 4.2.1. Teachers' Understanding of CPD

###### 4.2.1.1. Definition of CPD

It was interesting that all the participant teachers demonstrated a similar understanding regarding the definition of CPD. They described CPD as all sorts of activities and opportunities that help teachers develop their knowledge and skills in order to improve their teaching performance. Some of the typical responses from the participant teachers were: "For teachers, CPD is about improving knowledge and skills in relation to teaching through participation in various learning activities such as training, workshop or seminar" and "CPD is any activities that help teachers to perform their job well and to improve their knowledge." These views are in agreement with Day and Sachs (2004) and Guskey (2000). Day and Sachs (2004) view CPD as all activities in which teachers participate during their course of teaching career to improve their work, while Guskey (2000) emphasizes the enhancement of the professional knowledge, skills, and attitudes of teachers so that they might, in turn, improve the learning of students.

###### 4.2.1.2. CPD Activities

The data analysis indicated that the teachers' understanding of what is regarded as CPD activities seemed to vary from one teacher to another. Perhaps not surprisingly, many participant teachers were confident to think of formal/structural activities such as training, courses, conferences, and workshops or seminars as CPD and were most likely to think of activities in which they had participated, whereas a few participant teachers showed a considerable understanding of CPD activities which range from less formal/structured to very formal/structured activities. These results seem to be consistent with a study conducted by Hustler et al. (2003), which found that teachers tended to think of more structural ones as CPD activities.

The following is a list of CPD activities identified by the participant teachers:

- Internal and external training (pedagogy, English proficiency, ICT, and child development),

- Workshops/seminars,
- Teacher meetings (sharing good teaching practices and activities),
- Online courses (Coursera, FutureLearn, Eliademy, E-teacher programs and webinar),
- School visits and exchanges,
- Mentoring and coaching,
- Peer observation,
- University courses, and
- Personal research (watching Youtube videos, reading online materials, and books).

#### 4.2.1.3. Importance of CPD

All the participant teachers perceived CPD as playing an essential role in their teaching profession. Typical responses from the participant teachers included improving knowledge and skills, enhancing teaching confidence, and coping with current practices and standards.

Some of the remarks voiced by the participant teachers were: "CPD not only improves my knowledge and skills but also helps me find and figure out the best way to teach," and "If we are not skillful enough in our teaching, we might not be confident, so CPD helps build up our confidence in teaching." Steyn (2008; 2009) supports that CPD expands teachers' teaching skills and knowledge and abilities and enhances teachers' professional confidence.

A participant teacher commented that "everything keeps changing day by day; we cannot stick to traditional teaching techniques, so we cannot stop learning." Blandford (2000) advocates that CPD helps teachers keep in touch with current educational thinking in order to maintain and develop good practices, particularly in the ICT age.

#### 4.2.2. Provision of CPD at the NGO

##### 4.2.2.1. Time for CPD

All the participant teachers were of the same thought that time for their CPD was not decided appropriately and suggested that TDT must be more mindful of the time issue and make sure it is suitable for teachers. Most CPD activities at the NGO take place during lunchtime (12:00 pm to 1:30 pm), which was described by the participant teachers as unproductive and inconvenient. One of the many similar comments was, "The time for CPD should be changed as it is usually conducted during lunchtime; teachers work full-time and have only 2 hours break during lunchtime, so we feel tired." Nelson, Spence-Thomas, and Taylor (2015) suggest that great CPD should provide teachers with the necessary conditions to encourage a learning culture. The number of teaching hours was found to influence teachers' perception of time. If a teacher has less teaching hours, time is less likely an issue.

##### 4.2.2.2. Teachers' Needs

A note of caution is due here since there was a contradictory view on whether so far the provision of CPD activities at the NGO meets teachers' needs. More than half of the participant teachers complained that the provision of CPD did not fully meet their needs, whereas a few other teachers were satisfied with their CPD experience in terms of meeting their needs. A participant teacher expressed that "The CPD provision does not fully meet teachers' professional needs. In the teachers' performance plan, they proposed their professional needs, but CPD activities provided do not fully respond to their needs." One of the contradictory comments was, "TDT knows the needs of teachers, and they support us and provide us with what we need." It was hard to explain the reason behind this conflicting view because the experience description was very personal to each teacher. However, there was a general acknowledgment that TDT had put considerable effort into responding to teachers' needs. As mentioned in the literature review, Brown et al. (2001) and Day and Sachs (2004) assert that any provision of CPD should meet teachers' professional needs; otherwise, only a minor impact will be made.

##### 4.2.2.3. Being Practical

OECD (2009) advocates that a successful CPD program must be practical; it involves teachers in learning activities that they will use in their classrooms. Even though there was a little concern about not classifying teachers for certain CPD activities, many participant teachers viewed CPD activities provided by TDT as being practical to them. Some of the typical responses were: "The provision of CPD is practical – transforming traditional teaching to active learning," and "They provide us with practical topics, like how to get feedback from students, asking good questions or using assessment report." However, some participant teachers suggested that for particular CPD topics/activities, TDT should target only a concerned group of teachers because sometimes they find some topics only relevant to a particular group of teachers. Birman et al. (2000) and Garet et al. (2001) propose that CPD is potentially helpful when it is designed for groups of teachers who come from the same characteristics.

##### 4.2.2.4. Learning Community

There was a general recognition from the participant teachers that TDT had endeavored to establish a learning community by providing teachers with opportunities to collaborate on learning through a variety of CPD activities. The participant teachers commented that "Teachers can learn from each other like peer observation and sharing sessions that allow teachers to share their good teaching practices with each other." OECD (2009) and Nelson et al. (2015) recommend



that a successful CPD program needs to encourage the development of teachers' learning communities so that they can get involved critically in learning.

#### 4.2.2.5. External CPD Opportunities

The participant teachers were happy with the opportunities they were given to access external knowledge through international and local school partnerships, external English language training, and participation in international conferences. One of the typical remarks voiced by the participant teachers was, "The positive thing is that they have partnerships with international schools like the United World College in Singapore and Christ Church Grammar School in Australia." Nelson et al. (2015) strongly advise that CPD must ensure that teachers can be exposed to knowledge both outside and inside.

#### 4.2.2.6. Quality of Presentation

Steyn (2009) believes that quality presentation will contribute to the effectiveness of the CPD program. To some extent, the participant teachers were contented with the quality of the presentation. However, they were concerned with the quality of presenters or trainers. A participant teacher pointed out that:

Most CPD activities/topics are led and contributed by internal staff; if they are well trained and knowledgeable, we will learn a lot from them, but some are not skillful enough. It's just a waste of time joining CPD activities, but just very little learning is made.

### 4.2.3. Factors Hindering Teachers' Participation in CPD

#### 4.2.3.1. Unsuitability of Time

Undoubtedly, time appeared to be the undeniable factor influencing teachers' involvement with their CPD because it affects them directly. The findings of this study showed that the participant teachers regarded time as a potential issue that affected their commitment to taking part in their CPD. A typical response from the participant teachers was that "Time is not suitable because CPD activities are usually conducted during lunchtime." As suggested by Nelson et al. (2015), teachers should be provided with necessary conditions that allow them to fully engage with their learning. Therefore, if time is not suitable for them, they will most likely not participate in their CPD meaningfully.

#### 4.2.3.2. Irrelevant Topics

The participant teachers were of a position that they would hesitate to attend if CPD topics/activities are irrelevant to them. That means if any CPD does not respond to their needs, they will not be enthusiastic about getting involved. Some of the comments raised by the participant teachers were: "Topics are not relevant, so we hesitate to attend," and "To be honest, if we are not interested, we just go and attend, but we don't learn much because we are not open to learning, I can say like that." Previous studies and literature, such as Brown et al. (2001), Day and Sachs (2004), and Steyn (2008), noted the importance of meeting teachers' professional needs, so if these needs are not met, CPD is most likely unsuccessful.

#### 4.2.3.3. Quality of Presenter/Trainer

As maintained by Steyn (2009), quality presentation plays an essential role in conducting CPD. Steyn suggests that trainers should be experts and well-prepared and know teachers' learning styles. The participant teachers pointed out that the quality of presenters/trainers could affect their willingness to engage in CPD activities. A participant teacher constructively criticized, "Sometimes presentation was too difficult to understand but not always. That is to do with presenters/trainers; they should know the best way to make sure their audiences understand what they deliver." Another participant teacher said, "Another factor is about trainers – some trainers are not skillful; we want experts to train us or those who are skillful and knowledgeable about their topics."

#### 4.2.3.4. Lack of Support and Motivation

Most participant teachers marked the absence of support and motivation from the management level as another factor that could hinder their enthusiastic involvement in CPD activities. Brown et al. (2001) and Steyn (2008) advocate that it is crucial that those in charge of CPD provide teachers with continuous follow-up and support and actively get involved in teachers' learning process.

#### 4.2.3.5. Teachers' Own Reluctance

To meet the needs of this changing world, individual teachers should be accountable for their own professional and personal growth. This study found out that some teachers see CPD as a pressure, not a learning opportunity. Therefore, they are not open to learning new things. This finding is consistent with a study conducted by Geldenhuys and Oosthuizen (2015). They found out that teachers' attitudes towards their CPD do influence their enthusiasm to engage in CPD. Steyn (2008) also points out that teachers' attitude and commitment are at the center of change.

#### 4.2.4. Impacts of CPD on Teaching and Learning

##### 4.2.4.1. Improved Knowledge and Teaching Skills

The participant teachers proclaimed that enhanced knowledge and skills were the results of their engagement in CPD. Many comments stressed the impact of CPD on expanding teaching-related knowledge and skills such as ICT knowledge and new teaching activities and techniques. A participant teacher said that "I have gained a lot of new knowledge and skills. Take ICT as an example; I don't know much about ICT before, but now I am able to use several ICT tools in my teaching". Another typical response voiced by the participant teachers was, "After getting involved in CPD, I have learned new teaching techniques and activities." This claim is consistent with Blandford (2000) and Day and Sachs (2004), who stress that improving teachers' knowledge and skills is one of the core purposes of any CPD efforts, so it is explainable that the participant teachers came up with this perspective.

##### 4.2.4.2. Improved Teaching Confidence and Self-Esteem

Several studies and reviews of literature, such as Brown et al. (2001), Cordingley et al. (2005), Hustler et al. (2003), Steyn (2008; 2009), and OECD (2009), claim that CPD promotes teachers' professional confidence and self-esteem in teaching. The participant teachers were of the same view that CPD has a significant impact on their teaching confidence and self-esteem. A common view held by the participant teachers was, "The impact of CPD on my teaching is that it makes me feel more confident to teach. I feel more prepared and successful as a teacher."

##### 4.2.4.3. Enhanced Learning Performance of Students

Apart from the impact that CPD has on teaching, the participant teachers also commented positively about the impact of CPD on students' learning as the result of their enhanced teaching performance. They emphasized the increase in students' engagement, motivation and interest, knowledge, and grades. Some of the remarks voiced by the participant teachers were: "Students are more actively involved in the classroom, and they improve their English level," and "Because lessons are more interesting, students become more engaged and motivated." Several previous studies, such as Brown et al. (2001) and Cordingley et al. (2005), also confirmed the impact of CPD on student learning.

#### 4.2.5. Teachers' Perspectives on Effective CPD Program

##### 4.2.5.1. Meeting Teachers' Needs

The participant teachers firmly expressed that teachers' professional needs must be identified before any CPD takes place. They also suggested that CPD topics/activities need to be relevant to what teachers will use in their classrooms. A participant teacher pointed out that "To make CPD effective, the topics or activities for CPD should be carefully selected and planned to make sure they are relevant and respond to teachers' needs." Another participant teacher offered a conceptual view of effective CPD:

CPD should meet not only the organizational needs but also meet the teacher's needs. It is essential that teachers are happy with what will be provided to them because teachers are the ones who put it into practice at the end of the day. Successful CPD does not need to be like what the world needs, but the NGO.

It is broadly recommended that an effective or successful CPD program must meet teachers' professional needs, and learning activities should be similar to ones they will use with their students (Brown et al., 2001; Day & Sachs, 2004; OECD, 2009; Steyn, 2008).

##### 4.2.5.2 Effective Delivery of CPD (Time, Duration, Accessible Venue, Resources, Presentation)

The participant teachers felt that CPD could not be effective unless some necessary conditions are ensured. Those included suitability of time, duration of CPD, accessibility to the venue, sufficient training resources and materials, and quality presentation. Brown et al. (2001) identified several themes for effective CPD in which the delivery of CPD (accessible venue, style, and approach) was perceived to have a vital role. Moreover, effective CPD needs to be sustainably provided over time (Birman et al., 2000; Garet et al., 2001) and allows necessary conditions for a learning culture to occur (Nelson et al., 2015).

##### 4.2.5.3 Continuous Follow-Up and Support

The participant teachers suggested that ongoing follow-up and support are essential components of an effective CPD program. A typical view expressed by the participant teachers was that "Those in charge of CPD program should be aware of and follow up on what teachers need and the challenges they are facing and should provide ongoing support." OECD (2009) advocates that an effective CPD program is ongoing, including training, practice, and feedback, and provides sufficient time and follow-up support. Moreover, Brown et al. (2001) and Steyn (2009) acknowledge the importance of continuous support for an effective CPD program.

##### 4.2.5.4. Focusing on Knowledge Creation

Many participant teachers believed that an effective CPD program should be knowledge-based. They stressed the significance of knowledge creation as the result of their involvement in CPD. Meanwhile, CPD should be motivating and encouraging to teachers. Some typical comments from the participant teachers were: "CPD program should provide something that teachers can take away and use in their classrooms," and "CPD program should be seen as motivating and

encouraging not as pressure." This perception confirms the assertion from the study of Birman et al. (2000) and Garet et al. (2001). They advocated that an effective CPD program must focus on expanding teachers' content, pedagogical knowledge and skills, and teaching practices.

## 5. Conclusion

This study explored the current perspectives of Cambodian EFL teachers on CPD of an NGO in order to provide insight and gain a better understanding of their perceptions into the current CPD in Cambodia. This study provided research-based evidence to enhance the effectiveness of CPD provision as a meaningful teacher training program and contribute to future planning and development of the CPD program at the NGO and beyond. Moreover, this study created an opportunity for the participant teachers to voice their experiences and perspectives about different aspects of their own CPD and how effective CPD should be.

The findings explicitly showed that the participant teachers demonstrated an excellent understanding of CPD and accepted that CPD plays a vital role in enhancing their knowledge and skills and improving their students' learning performance. While it is believed there is more to be done, most of the participant teachers commented positively about the provision of CPD at the NGO. At the same time, several factors, especially time and meeting the needs of teachers, appeared to hinder their active involvement in CPD. However, teachers should be accountable for and receptive to their own personal and professional growth. While TDT is committed to developing their professionalism, teachers should see themselves as lifelong learners and be reflective practitioners.

Even though most participant teachers expressed general satisfaction, some issues need to be tackled collectively and systematically from the management level. The findings indicated that the unsuitability of time selection for CPD was the most common complaint expressed by the participant teachers and potentially affected their commitment to CPD. It might be a bit tricky to deal with everyone's time issue, but this issue cannot be ignored. CPD is not all about face-to-face training and workshop/seminar; it takes different forms, so TDT should consider promoting self-directed or independent learning and prioritizing only crucial CPD topics or activities for face-to-face learning. Another critical issue was concerned about meeting teachers' professional development needs. TDT should seriously consider teachers' CPD needs and endeavor to identify and appropriately respond to their needs, along with continuing support. No one solution is perfect for all these issues. However, TDT should actively involve teachers in the process of planning, implementation, and evaluation of their CPD so that teachers have a sense of being accountable.

To ensure the effectiveness of the CPD program, TDT should make sure that a systematic and long-term evaluation plan is in place and should be an integral part of any CPD process. The evaluation of CPD should focus on the impact of CPD on teachers, students, and the NGO. Moreover, collaborative feedback should be promoted and made clear to teachers so that they can be confident to talk about issues surrounding their CPD. At the same time, TDT should treat their feedback as vital, respond appropriately to their concerns and suggestions, and continue to support them.

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