FACULTY INSIGHTS ON PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES AND THEIR EFFECTIVENESS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, LAHORE: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Professional development of faculty members is considered an important aspect of ensuring academic excellence. It ensures that teachers are skillful, innovative, and capable of delivering outstanding teaching. This study investigated the perspective of university faculty members on the professional development opportunities available to them and their effectiveness. The purposive sampling technique was used to select faculty members from the University of Education, Lahore. A total of forty-six faculty members were selected as a sample for the study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather detailed information from the participants till achieving the saturation point. These semi-structured interviews were transcribed verbatim and translated into English. The data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis. Most of the faculty members mentioned that professional development opportunities were provided to them in the form of workshops, seminars, webinars, training sessions, conferences, induction training, Ph.D. and Postdoc scholarships which were significant contributors to enhancing their teaching and learning experiences. However, some faculty members showed their dissatisfaction by considering professional development activities as less effective due to their irrelevant content, inexperienced master trainers, and provision of basic knowledge by resource persons rather than introducing something new to their fields. Some faculty members perceived that professional development opportunities were infrequent and limited to fulfill their needs. It is recommended that professional development opportunities be provided by conducting a proper need analysis that can bridge the gap between the perceived needs and actual needs of faculty members. Additionally, professional development programmes might be improved by promoting a collaborative learning environment, providing continuous feedback mechanisms, and enhancing induction and mentorship.

Key words: Professional Development Opportunities, Perceived Effectiveness, Faculty Members, University of Education, Lahore, Qualitative Study

INTRODUCTION

Faculty members' professional development is essential for maintaining academic success, as it ensures that teachers are knowledgeable, skillful, and creative in providing top-notch instruction (Doeur, 2022; Richter & Richter, 2024). Furthermore, the needs of higher education institutions are constantly changing. Thus, faculty members are expected to advance their knowledge and skills (Alhoussawi, 2022; Anane & Kuranchie, 2022; Tonga et al., 2019). Moreover, organised and adequately supported professional development programmes substantially impact teachers' professional development (Al-Shammakhi, 2020; Gyamfi et al., 2023; Popova et al., 2022). Internationally, professional development for teachers in higher education is widely acknowledged as an essential element for achieving institutional success (Jaramillo-Baquerizo et al., 2019; Macfarlane, 2020). Universities worldwide allocate significant resources to professional development programmes to ensure their faculty

members remain current in innovative teaching approaches, technology breakthroughs, and research skills (Doeur, 2022; Duță & Rafailă, 2014; Efu, 2020).

Nations like the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia have implemented extensive professional development frameworks that provide a diverse array of choices, including training sessions and informal learning communities (Fohlin et al., 2021; Gyamfi et al., 2023; MacPhail & O'Sullivan, 2019). Professional development programmes are commonly incorporated into the academic culture in the United States. Higher Education Institutions offer continuous assistance through workshops, seminars, and collaborative learning settings. Researchers explored in their studies that successful professional development programmes in the United States prioritised long-term, collaborative, and experiential approaches (Bayram & Canaran, 2020; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Garet et al., 2016; Macfarlane, 2020). In the United Kingdom, the Higher Education Academy provides fellowships and certified courses to improve academic members' teaching and research abilities. Australian institutions prioritise the development of reflective practices by implementing professional development programmes that promote self-assessment and gaining new insight. The Australian Learning and Teaching Council has emphasised the significance of matching professional development opportunities with the goals of the institution and the specific requirements of faculty members. This approach aims to foster a culture of continuous learning throughout one's life (Gumanová & Šukolová, 2022; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Polskaya, 2022).

Over the past two decades, the higher education sector in Pakistan has experienced significant growth and transformation. The Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan, founded in 2002, has played an essential role by aiming to enhance the quality of higher education and research quality. The HEC emphasises the professional development of faculty members as a crucial aspect of improving teaching practices, promoting research skills, and ensuring academic advancement (Ilyas & Zamir, 2020; Subhani et al., 2017). However, the analysis of the PD situation in Pakistan concerning global practices reveals both the advancements achieved and the areas that need improvement. Although Pakistani higher education institutions have started acknowledging the significance of professional development, there is a need for effectively organised and enduring programmes that can be consistently executed and assessed (Dilshad et al., 2019; Nawab, 2020). International models of teachers' professional development can provide valuable insights to improve the effectiveness of professional development programmes in Pakistan. By incorporating these reforms, PD programmes can become more accessible, relevant, and efficient in handling the various needs of faculty members (Dilshad et al., 2019; Subhaniet al., 2017).

Though universities in Pakistan are making great efforts to provide professional development opportunities to their faculty members, which include structured training sessions, workshops, conferences, and advanced degree programmes, they are facing many challenges in the execution of professional development programmes, such as limited financial resources, inadequate infrastructure, and inconsistent programmes implementation (Khan et al., 2021; Nawab, 2020). Among these universities, the University of Education, founded in 2002, also aims to provide an ideal academic achievement and innovation environment, promoting faculty members' engagement in continuous professional development. The PD programmes offered by the University of Education, Lahore, enhance faculty development by focusing on teaching skills, research capabilities, and leadership traits. These programmes strive to provide faculty members with the essential resources to flourish in their positions, adjust to new teaching approaches, and make meaningful contributions to the academic community.

The motivation and participation of faculty members strongly influence the effectiveness of professional development programmes. Faculty members who view professional development programmes as meaningful and relevant are more inclined to actively engage in them and incorporate new information and skills into their teaching and research methodologies.

On the other hand, if professional development options are perceived as irrelevant or unimportant, faculty members may be less motivated to participate, which might impede their professional development and the general standard of education (Nawab, 2020).

Thus, the investigation of faculty members' perceptions of the available PD opportunities and their effectiveness can provide insight into the usefulness of these programmes. Therefore, the study aims to explore faculty members' perspectives and experiences regarding PD at the University of Education, Lahore. Gaining insights into faculty members' perspectives regarding professional development opportunities is of utmost importance for multiple reasons. Firstly, it can provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of current initiatives from the viewpoint of faculty members who are directly concerned about these activities and administrators, policymakers, and stakeholders involved in the design and implementation of professional development programs. Secondly, the input from faculty members can identify both the strengths and limitations of the current professional development opportunities, thereby providing valuable insights for making improvements and adjustments. The study seeks to provide insights into ways to optimise the effectiveness of professional development opportunities, hence fostering the professional advancement of faculty members and enhancing the standard of education delivered to students.

Research Question of the Study

The following was the research question of the study:

1. What types of professional development opportunities are being offered to the faculty members by the university, and what is the perceived effectiveness of these professional development opportunities by faculty members?

Literature Review

Faculty members' professional development is fundamental to achieving academic success in higher education. It guarantees that teachers maintain proficiency, creativity, and the ability to provide excellent instruction. Professional development in higher education is based on many theoretical frameworks and models. Malcolm Knowles's theory (2014) of andragogy highlights that adult learners are self-directed, who draw upon their life experiences in the learning process, and are driven by internal rather than external incentives. This theory serves as the foundation for numerous professional development programmes, emphasising the significance of the relevance of PD activities, practical application, and active participation of the learners. Kolb's experiential learning theory elaborates on learning as a transformative process in which experience generates knowledge (Kolb, 2014). This model facilitates professional development activities encompassing interactive learning methods, such as workshops, seminars, and practical training. Wenger's (1998) concept of communities of practice emphasises the significance of social contact and shared practice in learning. This approach is the basis for professional development programmes that promote collaborative learning and peer mentorship. Mezirow transformative learning theory refers to a profound and fundamental change in an individual's beliefs, emotions, and behaviours. Professional development programmes that aim for transformative learning prioritise critical reflection and cultivate a change in attitudes among teachers (Taylor & Mezirow, 2011).

However, based on different professional development models, professional development programmess differ around the world. They aim to enhance teaching efficacy, foster research skills, and promote ongoing improvement (Polskaya, 2022). Professional development programmes in the United States are frequently incorporated into the academic environment, focusing on collaborative and experiential learning. The study carried out by Desimone and Garet (2015) highlights essential elements of effective professional development, including a focus on content, active learning, coherence, appropriate duration, and group participation. There is a common strategy of providing regular support for workshops, seminars, and cooperative learning groups.

The Higher Education Academy (HEA) in the United Kingdom offers well-organised professional development programmes, such as

fellowships and recognised courses. According to Sims et al. (2022), these programmes markedly raised instructors' ability for research and increased the quality of instruction. Moreover, Popova et al. (2022) state that Australian universities prioritise reflective practice through professional development programmes that promote self-assessment and continuous improvement.

Forms of Professional Development Opportunities

Higher education institutions worldwide offer a range of professional development programmes for faculty members. These programmes aim to inform teachers about the most recent teaching approaches, technological breakthroughs, and research trends. Joint professional development opportunities encompass workshops, seminars, webinars, training sessions, and conferences (Doeur, 2022; Fohlin et al., 2021). Workshops and seminars are engaging programmes concentrating on particular subjects or abilities. The findings of research studies conducted by different scholars explore that experiential learning promotes peer collaboration (Garet et al., 2016). Webinars provide a flexible and accessible way for faculty members to engage in professional development activities without being limited by geographical constraints. Researchers have explored that webinars efficiently distribute knowledge and cultivate professional networks (MacPhail & O'Sullivan, 2019; Richter & Richter, 2024). Moreover, training sessions primarily focus on refining particular abilities, such as integrating technology or using research methodology. Training sessions offer a comprehensive understanding and hands-on expertise that can be directly applied to teaching and research (Macfarlane, 2020; MacPhail, 2019). Academic conferences allow faculty members to showcase their research, interact with colleagues, and stay informed about the most recent advancements in their respective areas of expertise. Conferences significantly benefit professional development and establishing professional connections (Polskaya, 2022).

Induction training, Ph.D., and Postdoc fellowships play a crucial role in enhancing the professional development of faculty members.

These programs aim to facilitate the integration of new faculty members into their positions and provide them with a comprehensive understanding of institutional norms and expectations. These programmes are crucial for ensuring that new teachers are adequately equipped to satisfy the requirements of their positions (Anane & Kuranchie, 2022; MacPhail & O'Sullivan, 2019). Ph.D. and Postdoc fellowships offer academic members the chance to engage in advanced research and cultivate specialised knowledge in their respective areas of specialisation. These possibilities are essential for cultivating a culture that prioritises research and improving the academic qualifications of faculty members (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Macfarlane, 2020).

Professional Development in Pakistan

The professional development landscape in Pakistan is transforming, propelled by the Higher Education Commission's (HEC) endeavours. The HEC, founded in 2002, has made a substantial contribution to raising the standards for research and higher education in Pakistan (Ilyas & Zamir, 2020; Khan et al., 2021). The commission's policies prioritise professional development for faculty members, acknowledging its critical role in enhancing teaching techniques and fostering research excellence. However, specific challenges hinder the successful execution of professional development programmes in Pakistan. Financial limitations, insufficient infrastructure, and inconsistent programmes implementation are major obstacles (Dilshad et al., 2019; Nawab, 2020). Nevertheless, the University of Education, Lahore, is leading the way among many other universities in providing a myriad of options for professional growth, including conferences, workshops, structured training sessions, and advanced degree programs. Thus, the evaluation for determining the effectiveness of professional development opportunities is essential to guarantee their pertinence and influence. Guskey (2002) highlights the significance of employing a methodological approach to evaluation, encompassing the examination of participants' responses, knowledge acquisition, support from the organisation, and modifications in professional

practices and student achievements. Researchers have indicated that when faculty members regard professional development programmes as pertinent and advantageous, they are more inclined to participate in them and implement newly acquired information and skills in their teaching (Desimone & Garet, 2015; Garet et al., 2016;Jaramillo-Baquerizo, 2019). Consequently, effective evaluation provides insightful viewpoints for continuous development by assisting in recognising the benefits and limitations of professional development initiatives.

Methods and Material

Researchers utilised a qualitative research approach, employing a phenomenological approach to explore the perspective of faculty members regarding the provision of professional development opportunities and their effectiveness. According to Creswell and Poth (2016), phenomenological research design is extremely beneficial for examining complex phenomena and experiences to acquire a comprehensive grasp of participants' subjective experiences. The researchers employed a purposive sampling technique to select the participants of the study. The purposive sample technique involves selecting participants who have directly experienced phenomena, such as the particular perspective of faculty members in the context of their professional development (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Forty-six faculty members were selected as participants for the study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect the data from participants till the point of saturation. The researchers contacted the participants personally and requested them to fill out the Google form to provide their consent to participate in the study. The researchers individually conducted interviews with the participants at their selected locations and over the telephone at scheduled times, utilising an established semi-structured interview guide to gather data. The guide was prepared by keeping in view the distinct concepts and topics identified during the process of literature review. The data were obtained via an audio recording device and a cell phone, with the informed consent of the faculty members. Furthermore, the researchers meticulously documented observations throughout the interviews to ensure comprehensive data collection. The interview data were transcribed verbatim and analysed using reflexive thematic analysis. This method enabled identifying and exploring themes and patterns in the data. The study involved a smooth and continuous process of thoroughly engaging with the material, categorising it, and developing overarching themes. The analysis employed an iterative method proposed by Dibley et al., (2020), wherein themes are refined and developed as the research continues. The researcher identified noteworthy themes and patterns in the data relevant to the faculty members' views of their professional development opportunities and their effectiveness.

Findings of the Study
1. Seminars/Webinars/Workshops/Training Sessions/Conferences

Some university faculty members (such as P7, P8, P21, and P42) stated that the Canadian Educational Development Authority (CEDA) and Higher Education Commission (HEC) provided opportunities for them to participate in training and workshops. One of the faculty members stated:

The university nominated me to participate in some HEC training programs, contributing to my professional development. I did work as a master trainer and organiser. CEDA was an external donor agency that conducted many workshops relevant to teaching and research, such as teachers 'assessment and curriculum development needs. I participated in those workshops. I worked as a master trainer under this platform. CEDA started another project titled Canada Pakistan Basic Education Project (CPBEP). It also contributed to teachers 'professional development and capacity-building of university teachers. The university conducted a need analysis of its faculty's requirements. The donor agency provided training according to this analysis, such as helping us to develop research manuals and implementing them in classes. United States Agency for International Development (USAID) was another donor agency that provided many opportunities for training and workshops and played a pivotal role in my capacity building. (P42)

The overwhelming majority of the faculty members (including P16, P20, P38, P39, and P41) mentioned that the university had offered them some workshops, seminars, and conferences nationally and internationally. One of them specified that:

I went to Thailand for 25 days training course. It was a good experience to learn about my area and deeply observe their culture. It provided me with much confidence and improved my teaching skills. I collaborated with foreign experts in my field also. The opportunities I participated in and the university made available to me were aligned with my needs. I expanded my knowledge, which affected my students. These professional development opportunities also affected my classroom practices. (P39)

Another faculty member indicated that:

I participated in five days of training conducted by HEC on English Language Teaching. In training, they trained us about computer-assisted language learning. I learned many apps which I used in my teaching. I still incorporate those apps in teaching and research. (P5)

Some faculty members (P3, P5, P8, P39, P14, P31, and P45) have mentioned that the university recently offered a training session conducted by the University of Veterinary & Animal Sciences (UVAS). We participated in it and learned how to use different research-related software to help research publications, such as IBM SPSS Statistics, NVivo, and Endnotes. This workshop was on general topics, not content-related because all disciplines faculty members participated in it. However, it helped us better understand and learn the related software and apply it in our research classes. One of the participants mentioned the experience in the following manner:

I participated in a workshop that was conducted with the collaboration of UVAS. In this workshop, I learned about research-related software and their operating mechanism. These software included Endnotes, NVivo, and SPSS. I conducted my research studies using software that I had learned. Therefore, it played an important role in my research endeavours. (P7)

Another faculty member stated that:

I participated in a summer workshop conducted by HEC related to research-related activities. It supported my professional development. (P23)

Some faculty members (P7, P21, and P46) revealed that the workshops were organised by the headquarters located in Lahore, and faculty members from all the campuses were invited to participate. We learned new material since Agha Khan University provided computer-assisted courses, which were unfamiliar to us previously in the field of information and communications technology (ICT).

Another member of the faculty backed the same viewpoint and stated that:

I was inducted as a lecturer in IT at the university; I was nominated for professional development activities such as workshops, seminars, and conferences by the university many times in my 16 years of teaching experience. At the start of my career, in 2008, I was nominated for training conducted at Agha Khan University, Karachi. Their Institute of Education organised the training. Their teachers were well-disciplined and experts in Education and research. Through collaboration, I learned new instructional technologies from them. Additionally, I acquired new management skills through collegiality. (P46)

Some faculty members (including P2, P3, P5, and P14) said that in 2021, we participated in a Qasim Ali Shah Foundation workshop conducted with the collaboration of HEC. Its theme was related to Teacher Education. It was a teacher training programmes comprising all elements related to teacher education, such as communicating with students, classroom management, and assessment techniques. Due to Covid-19, we could not get so much benefit from it because we had to attend it in physical mode previously, but this workshop was shifted to online mode. Face-to-face interaction was important for learning in these workshops. Most of the faculty members shared the same sentiments.

Some faculty members (P16, P14, P27, P31 and, P44) mentioned that Online webinars are tremendously prevalent these days. The university has provided many PD opportunities in the form of webinars; this practice began with the Pandemic Covid-2019, and there is no doubt that online webinars are necessary. It is a

more convenient and practical exercise that helps teachers improves their knowledge, abilities, and attitudes. One of them stated that:

In recent years, the university frequently hosted online webinars. However, I did not contribute as much as I would have preferred due to my Ph.D. studies. (P3)

Another faculty member who agreed with the previous faculty members' viewpoints expressed his thoughts and stated that:

The university provides online webinars regularly these days. I didn't take part in it too much, though. Still, the few webinars that I attended and that the university provided were useful. Whatever I learned had an immediate impact on how well my pupils performed in my classes. (P11)

Some faculty members (such as P24, P39, and P46) stated that the university has offered some research-based professional development opportunities such as workshops, and training sessions on how to write and win research projects and about the funding process at the national and international levels. One of the experiences was mentioned as follows:

I was nominated by the university to take part in an HEC training programme, which helped me learn about the national and international funding processes as well as how to write and secure research projects. It was a fantastic experience that guided how to obtain research projects and apply them to further my career. (P24)

Another faculty member shared the experience related to professional development in the following way:

I attended the National Accreditation Council for Teacher Education (NACTE) workshop in Islamabad. I got NTS training from Allama Iqbal Open University Islamabad. The university also provided training on the University Management System (UMS) and Learning Management System (LMS). UE Librarian has conducted training on how to use the digital library effectively. The activities/opportunities that I took part in and that the university provided for me were quite sufficient. I gained knowledge that had a direct impact on my students and me. These opportunities for professional development that

I took advantage of indirectly positively impacted my university. (P8)

Another participant mentioned.

I participated in the workshop conducted by Aga Khan University at the Marriot Hotel. It was based on research-related activities. University has provided several valuable opportunities to participate in professional development activities. I participated in many professional development activities during my first decade of teaching and research. The training helped me better understand the latest content knowledge and pedagogy. It helped me to develop as a good teacher. With the change of administration in the university, I observed that more and more frequent opportunities had been provided to the faculty. These days, the administration is very concerned with teachers' professional development. Therefore, PD opportunities have been increased. (P7)

One of the female faculty members stated:

The English department has started faculty development programmes, which is effective. I am the secretary of this program. We conducted various activities under this platform. I conducted a" session on "How to maximise learning in class" and presented field-based ideas. It was quite a practical session, and we related it to previous research studies. The knowledge I have gained helped me better understand how to involve students in the learning process. (P32)

Another faculty member mentioned that:

I attended an IBA Institute of Business Administration training course. I learned the most up-to-date techniques for managing people. As a result of this session, I have decided to extend my knowledge in e-learning. (P46)

One of the faculty members shared the experience and stated that:

I participated in a workshop at the Township Campus of the university, which was also a good experience. I learned more from international experts. I learned how to do Bar Coding and DNA Bar Coding. Some workshops I attended were based on general topics rather than specific content/subject knowledge. Workshops were based on content knowledge. PD activities offered tome generally focused on deepening my understanding of science subjects and pedagogy.

I think these two PD activities increased my knowledge and teaching skills. (P4)

Several faculty members (P1, P34, and P40) revealed that various departments hold annual conferences to fulfill the needs of the university's faculty. Participation from overseas researchers is encouraged and welcomed at the conference. As a result of collaboration, we have developed innovative thoughts. One faculty member expressed his opinion and said:

The university has provided me with several opportunities to participate in conferences. Different university departments conduct international conferences. All over the world, researchers from international countries are invited to participate and present their research findings. Creativity and innovative ideas are discussed in conference papers through the collaboration of foreign and local experts. Our department has started conducting conferences yearly, which is beneficial for me. (P21)

It is significant to note that some faculty members (P3, P20, P41, and P43) expressed dissatisfaction with the effectiveness of the professional development options offered by the university. One of the faculty members expressed his dissatisfaction by saying that:

I attended a workshop conducted by HEC, and one foreign speaker from Finland came as a resource person in a training session, but she provided very basic level information. These offered opportunities that I took part in, and the university provided for me was insufficient. Somehow, I gained knowledge that impacted my students. (P21)

One of the faculty members showed dissatisfaction in the following words:

I participated in a workshop in Karachi. It was based on interactive learning. University has provided the opportunity to participate in professional development activities. Despite the high quality of the workshops and training courses I attended, I am dissatisfied with the few professional development courses/workshops available. (P5)

Another faculty member voiced his opinion by mentioning that:

The university has allowed me to participate in national and international conferences. It has been ineffective in helping to promote my professional development. Even though

conferences could not provide the detailed knowledge in the areas teachers require, this approach may be less effective. (P28)

Some faculty members shared the same opinions discussed previously. One of the faculty members stated:

I attended a three-day" workshop conducted by UVAS Lahore; I learned different software such as Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and qualitative data analysis software NVIVO. It was not a very good experience. However, more advanced training was missing in said workshops to compete worldwide. Despite the high quality of these seminars and training courses I have attended, I am unhappy with the limited number of offered professional development opportunities. (P14)

Some of the faculty members (P16, P18, P24, and P45) showed disappointment regarding the content of the workshops offered by the university. They mentioned that the content was related to some social issues. Being science faculty members, we need training related to our subject. The quality of training was not good. Regular seminars related to our subject are very important for our professional development, but we observed infrequent and fewer professional development opportunities in our careers. One of them specified that:

I was inducted as an associate professor of chemistry at the university, and I was nominated for professional development activities such as training sessions, workshops, and webinars by the University many times. It was not a good experience because the workshops were irrelevant and unrelated to my subject. These PD activities were not aligned with my PD needs. Therefore, these PD opportunities did not positively impact my personal and professional growth. (P24)

Several faculty members, including P17, P41, P31, P14, and P15, stated that the university's workshops, training sessions, and conferences did not emphasise content knowledge and research-related topics. We wasted our time participating in these courses because we were not motivated and did not learn anything in training sessions. Moreover, some trainers were inexperienced and did not possess mastery of the workshop and training session material. Occasionally, trainers taught very basic

information/knowledge about issues. This approach is regrettable. We require the training of professionals to improve our research skills. The university provides no incentive for us to attend these conferences. Therefore, we concentrate on publications because we believe that publishing is more beneficial than attending irrelevant PD sessions.

Another faculty member shared her experience by saying that:

I was hired as a lecturer at the university and was nominated for a few professional development activities such as workshops and seminars by the university. All of them were good, but none was relevant to my field. I received training in Quality Enhancement Cell (QEC) and provided service to the university in this field, but, because opportunities in my field were not available, I was unable to take advantage of them. Moreover, general training is beneficial for our university-related tasks, but it is not beneficial for subject-specific knowledge. As a faculty member of information technology, I missed training in my field. I noticed that the quality of some workshops was also subpar, which I found to be disappointing. (P46)

Another faculty member strengthened the viewpoint mentioned above of other faculty members and stated that:

During my two years of teaching experience at this university, I was appointed as assistant professor of zoology and nominated twice by the university for Participation in professional development activities. Both workshops I attended were useless and irrelevant to my subject. These activities did not conform to my professional development needs. As a faculty member of IT department, I require training in my discipline. In my two years of experience, I have witnessed fewer professional development opportunities for teachers. (P12)

Concisely, there have been positive and negative perspectives of the faculty members on the availability and effectiveness of university-based/ HEC professional development opportunities such as workshops, seminars, webinars, training sessions and conferences. Faculty members were highly critical of professional development quality issues and were concerned about the infrequent PD

opportunities. The majority of faculty members stated that workshops, seminars, webinars, training sessions, and conferences were essential for instructors' professional growth as they offer updated knowledge and ideas, so they must deal with the most recent advancements in the field. Some faculty members expressed their displeasure with professional development opportunities by claiming that it was unproductive because some courses simply covered the content they were already familiar with, so they did not learn anything new for teaching.

2. Ph.D/ Postdoc Scholarships

Some university faculty members (such as P8, P24, P38, and P39) stated that the university has provided us with an opportunity to pursue a Ph.D. in a foreign country. Obtaining a Ph.D. scholarship was a brilliant experience for us. It provided us with new knowledge and abilities, which we greatly appreciated. Studying new skills and knowledge is not a one-time event but a lifelong process. One of them stated that:

To complete my doctorate in a foreign country, the university has sponsored me. It was an honour for me to be awarded a Ph.D. scholarship. It gave me new skills and knowledge that I treasured greatly. Gaining new knowledge and knowledge is a never-ending process. Because of this, my students and the university have all enjoyed the benefits. (P38)

Another faculty member supported the same argument and said that:

I was awarded a scholarship to complete my Postdoc in the United States. Obtaining a Post-Doctoral Fellowship was a brilliant experience. I learned about the most recent information and emerging multicultural teaching and research trends. (P42)

Some faculty members (including P2, P4, and P27) on the other hand, provided a different aspect and mentioned that their request for a study leave was turned down. It was quite difficult to complete this assignment without study leave for doctoral studies. Nevertheless, not every teacher is awarded a Ph.D. scholarship by the university.

One of the faculty members stated his point of view in the following words:

I am doing Ph.D without study leave. This assignment is challenging without a Ph.D study leave. (P2)

Another faculty member presented the same perspective:

I could not take any study leave from the university while completing my Ph.D thesis. It was hard to finish this project without a Ph.D study leave. (P27)

3. Induction Training

Some faculty members (P2, P14, and P16) mentioned that HEC provided us with induction training. This training was crucial to our personal development, teaching, and research pursuits. One faculty member (P3) shared his insightful observations and reflections on the induction program that the HEC organized and stated:

In 2017, the university nominated me to participate in an HEC training programme called the Master Training Faculty Professional Development Program (MTFPDP) for induction purposes. The duration of the training was two months. It was a fantastic experience. The training was of exceptional quality. It was organized around topics/modules such as pedagogy and pedagogical skills, content knowledge [to some extent], curriculum development, and educational assessment. Additionally, overseas specialists were invited to speak at the event. Furthermore, it was a fantastic opportunity from the university that I took advantage of. When I returned to university to join in classes, I felt more capable and confident. (P12)

Another faculty member mentioned the same perspective:

I received induction training for 45 days by HEC, National Academy of Higher Education (NAHE). This training was based on a residential training program. I learned about collegial discussions and interaction. Allover Pakistan, different teachers came from different universities. I have learned a lot from them. I looked at things narrowly before, but I started looking at things broader after the training and collegial discussions. It was a wonderful experience. (P3)

Another faculty member expanded upon the view point mentioned earlier and claimed:

I was welcomed as an assistant professor of Zoology at the university; I was nominated for PD activities by the university two times in my 2 years of teaching experience. When I was inducted, I got induction training from HEC. It was a wonderful experience. Four new faculty members were selected for NAHE training. I am quite fortunate that I got this opportunity from UE. Due to the pandemic, this training was provided online via Google Meet. (P16)

Some faculty members (P14, P39, and P41) mentioned that the NAHE training provided by the university to the new appointees was quite advantageous. New faculty members from public universities around Pakistan joined this training. Due to limited seats, not every new appointee could attend the training.

Fifteen faculty members said they did not participate in any induction programmes. They were given a brief orientation by the department director about the rules for teachers and their responsibilities. It was also the consensus among faculty members (P2, and P14) that the university lacked a formalized system of induction support for fresh faculty members.

Discussion

Researchers explored that the University of Education Lahore, Pakistan, provides a range of professional development opportunities, including seminars, webinars, workshops, training sessions, conferences, Ph.D./Postdoc scholarships, and induction training. The ultimate goal of these programmes is to promote student learning by improving the professional knowledge, attitudes, and abilities of teachers. Research studies conducted by Al-Shammakhi (2020), Bayram and Canaran (2020), Efu (2020), and Macfarlane (2020), Jaramillo-Baquerizo (2019) also indicated that teachers perceived PD programmes were useful for improving their professional skills. The research findings of Desimone and Garet (2015), and Garet et al. (2016) showed that teachers' professional development significantly improved their content knowledge, instructional techniques, and academic performance. Additionally, Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) emphasised that effective professional development activities must be

sustained, intensive, collaborative, and directly linked to teachers' classroom practices. This underscores that well-structured PD programmes play a role in producing desired educational outcomes. The importance of induction training programmes was perceived to have a direct impact on the career progression and teaching effectiveness of new faculty members. Sánchez-Tarazaga et al. (2024) and Zugelder (2019) highlighted that structured induction programmes are vital for helping new educators transition into their roles effectively. However, the researchers revealed that induction training opportunities at the University of Education Lahore were limited. This finding is aligned with the study findings of Msuva and Mwila (2023), who noted a lack of formal induction and orientation phases for faculty members, with a limited number of mentors, relying more on informal interactions rather than formal induction programmes.

However, the researchers found that some of the professional development opportunities provided to university faculty members were perceived to be less effective, scarce, and infrequent. This finding is in line with Khanal's (2022) research study, which demonstrated that institutions frequently do not provide opportunities for teachers to participate in professional development activities to enhance their teaching practices. Khanal also indicated that sporadic and poorly structured PD programmes fail to meet the needs of teachers, leading to a limited impact on teaching practices. The disparity between effective and ineffective PD programs suggests the need for continuous evaluation and improvement of PD initiatives. Regular assessment of PD programmes, as advocated by Guskey (2002) and more recently by Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) and Macfarlane (2020), is essential to ensure their relevance and impact. Feedback from faculty members should be used to refine and enhance PD offerings, making them more aligned with the actual needs of teachers.

Conclusion
This qualitative study provides valuable insights into how faculty members at the University of Education Lahore perceive professional development opportunities and their effectiveness. The study's findings reveal widespread agreement among faculty members from all divisions and campuses of the university on the professional development opportunities provided by the institution. Their perceptions regarding the accessibility and effectiveness of these opportunities remained consistent. Most participants identified workshops, seminars, webinars, training sessions, and conferences as the most commonly offered professional development opportunities. Additionally, the importance of Ph.D. and Post-doc scholarships and induction training in enhancing the teaching and learning experiences of the faculty was emphasised. Most of the participants recognised that specific professional development opportunities were highly effective and positively influenced faculty members' instructional methods. However, some PD activities were seen as less effective due to a mismatch between perceived needs and actual needs. Therefore, the university can conduct more regular assessments to tailor these PD opportunities which are closer to the faculty's actual needs. Additionally, promoting collaborative learning environments, providing continuous feedback mechanisms, and enhancing induction and mentorship programmes are essential. These recommendations align with HEC and PHEC's objectives to foster academic excellence and innovation in higher education.

Recommendations
1. The university might conduct a need analysis to bridge the gap between perceived needs and actual needs of faculty members.
2. The university might provide more frequent professional development opportunities to faculty members to fulfill their needs.
3. Since faculty members perceive induction training as a missing element, the university may organise induction training for newly appointed faculty members rather than providing them with orientation about the roles and responsibilities of faculty members. The induction may provide insight to the faculty members about the improvement in their teaching-learning process.

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