PRINCIPALS' AND DIRECTORS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE BARRIERS THAT INHIBIT FACULTY MEMBERS' PARTICIPATION IN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES: A QUALITATIVE STUDY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, LAHORE

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ABSTRACT

This study designed to investigate the perspectives of university directors and principals regarding the barriers that inhibit faculty members from participating in professional development activities. Gaining insight into these barriers is crucial for expanding teacher participation in professional development and uplifting the overall quality of education. The nature of this paper is Qualitative and adheres to the interpretive research paradigm. Using a purposive sampling technique, the researchers selected seven directors and principals from various divisions and campuses of the University of Education, Lahore, as participants. Moreover, following an extensive examination of relevant literature, researchers developed a semi-structured interview guide for the data collection, and interviews were conducted until saturation occurred. After that, the data were analyzed using thematic analysis and NVivo 11 plus software. The interview schedules were transcribed and then converted into a different script to carry out a thematic analysis of the data. Codes were assigned to the themes, and sub-themes were identified through the data analysis conducted on the interviews. Consequently, two significant themes emerged personal and professional barriers. The study's findings highlighted several critical barriers, including heavy workload, additional administrative and non-teaching tasks, less financial incentives, lack of physical facilities, and barriers to professional development opportunities. Considering the results according to the principles and directors' insights, institutional reforms are necessary to include reducing workloads and administrative work, increasing funding, improving institutional infrastructure, offering more consistent professional development (PD) opportunities, promoting research culture, and developing pertinent research-related professional development programs. Further, to create a more conducive environment for ongoing professional development, the University of Education, Lahore, can overcome these barriers. This would ultimately result in improved teaching and research quality and increased student educational achievements.

Keywords: Professional Development Barriers, Faculty Members, Principals /Directors, University of Education, Lahore, Qualitative Study.

INTRODUCTION

Educational institutions must prioritize the ongoing professional development of faculty members in higher education to uphold excellence in teaching and learning (Anane, & Kuranchie, 2022; Doeur, 2022; Richter & Richter, 2024). Professional development includes various activities to improve teachers' knowledge, skills, and attitudes, allowing them to stay up to date with the latest developments in their respective disciplines and implement innovative teaching strategies (Jaramillo-Baquerizo et al., 2019; Macfarlane, 2020). Enhanced instructional strategies, improved student outcomes, and the overall academic advancement of faculty members are all associated with effective professional development programs (Doeur, 2022; Duță & Rafailă, 2014; Efu, 2020).

Nevertheless, faculty participation in these activities frequently confronts substantial barriers, which may restrain their effectiveness and reach despite the acknowledged significance of PD (Gyamfi et al., 2023; MacPhail, & O'Sullivan, 2019; Tran, 2016).

The Higher Education Commission (HEC) has played a significant role in the substantial transformation of the higher education landscape in Pakistan over the past twenty years. The HEC, established in 2002, has been instrumental in improving the standard of higher education and research in the country. The professional development of faculty members has been one of its fundamental objectives, as it acknowledges its significance in enhancing teaching practices and fostering academic excellence (Dilshad et al., 2019; Nawab, 2020). The HEC, in collaboration with the Punjab Higher Education Commission (PHEC), has implemented various professional development initiatives. These include establishing teaching excellence centers, doctoral and postdoctoral research scholarships, and funding for advanced degrees. Despite these initiatives, implementing PD programs encounters barriers, including inconsistent execution, insufficient infrastructure, and inadequate financial resources. The studies conducted by Khan et al. 2021 and Nawab (2020), have emphasized the need for more structured and sustainable professional development programs that can be consistently implemented and evaluated.

Though the advantages of professional development are extensively documented, several barriers hinder faculty members from engaging in PD activities. The barriers can be classified into structural, personal, and institutional. Structural hindrances encompass limitations such as low financial resources, poor infrastructure, and ineffective time devoted to professional development activities. The study by Hobbs et al. (2021) and Zhang et al. (2020) reveals that financial constraints are an essential barrier to faculty engagement in professional development programs, especially in developing nations. In the same way, faculty members frequently encounter substantial teaching obligations and administrative duties, which result in limited availability for professional development activities (Hobbs et al., 2021; Tran, 2016).

While personal barriers incorporate a deficiency in motivation, the perception that professional development programs are irrelevant, and a reluctance to embrace change. Faculty members may hesitate to engage in professional development activities if they fail to perceive immediate advantages or if the content does not correspond with their field of study and needs (Nguyen & Ng, 2020). Moreover, the reluctance to embrace change can impede the acceptance of novel teaching methodologies and technologies. On the contrary, Institutional barriers circumscribe inadequate levels of support from the university administration, insufficient acknowledgment and rewards for engagement, and a lack of a nurturing environment for professional development. Research conducted by Khanal (2022) and Zugelder (2019) has demonstrated that the absence of robust institutional support and acknowledgment reduces the likelihood of faculty members participating in professional development activities. Institutions should establish a conducive climate that emphasizes and supports ongoing professional development.

The motivation behind this study is based on the need to understand barriers that impede faculty engagement in professional development activities at the University of Education, Lahore. By exploring these barriers from the perspectives of principals and directors, the research aims to provide insights into how the University of Education, Lahore can better support its faculty members in engaging in Professional development activities. As, principals and directors have a crucial responsibility in encouraging and enabling professional development within educational institutions. It is also believed that effective leadership can establish an environment that fosters ongoing education and advancement in one's professional life, as well as promoting an organizational culture. Therefore, it becomes essential to comprehend the barriers that teachers encounter to develop effective professional development programs that cater to the different needs of faculty members. Regarding the issues that higher education institutions in Pakistan confront about funding and infrastructure, it is crucial to identify and tackle the barriers that hinder teacher engagement in professional development.

The findings obtained from this study can provide valuable guidance for policy and implementation at the University of Education, Lahore, and other similar institutions, eventually resulting in enhanced teaching practices and educational outcomes.

Significance of the Study

This study holds great significance for manifold reasons. Firstly, the study offers a leadership perspective on the barriers to faculty engagement in professional development activities, frequently disregarded in PD research, by analyzing the viewpoints of principals and directors. Furthermore, the results of this study can provide valuable insights for shaping policies and implementing strategies at the University of Education, Lahore, and other similar educational institutions. The study also suggests practical recommendations for enhancing PD programs for faculty members by identifying particular barriers. Ultimately, the study emphasizes the significance of leadership in promoting professional development. Moreover, the findings obtained from the present research may help institutional leaders gain a deeper understanding of their responsibility in advancing professional development and cultivating an environment that encourages constant learning.

Research Question

What are the perceptions of principals and directors regarding the barriers that inhibit faculty members' participation in PD activities at the University of Education, Lahore?

Literature Review
Introduction to Profession Development

Professional development is integral to the mission of higher education institutions. It serves not only as a means of personal and professional growth for teachers but also as a strategic tool to ensure that academic offerings remain competitive and effective. In developed countries, the structure and implementation of professional development programs have been studied extensively in various dimensions. Guskey (2000) mentioned in his research that effective PD programs lead to substantial improvements in teaching practices and student learning outcomes. Similarly, Macfarlane (2020) emphasized that continuous professional education is essential for teachers to keep pace with changing educational demands and to foster an environment of lifelong learning. In addition to this, Desimone and Garet (2015) highlighted several key characteristics of successful PD which are: they are content-focused, incorporate active learning, support collaboration, use models and modeling, provide coaching and expert support, offer feedback and reflection, and are of sustained duration. These elements are crucial in ensuring that PD is effective and leads to meaningful improvements in teaching practices.

Professional development is essential to the mission of higher education institutions. It functions as a tool for teachers to enhance their personal and professional development while simultaneously serving as a strategic instrument to maintain the competitiveness and effectiveness of academic programs. Guskey (2002) asserts that well-designed professional development programs significantly enhance teaching methodologies and students' academic achievements. Similarly, Macfarlane (2020) highlighted the importance of ongoing professional development for teachers to stay updated with evolving educational requirements and cultivate a lifelong learning culture. The organization and implementation of professional development programs in advanced nations have undergone substantial research and analysis.

Barriers to Teacher's Professional Development

Despite the evident benefits, numerous studies have highlighted various barriers that inhibit faculty participation in Professional development activities and programs.

Lack of Time

A frequent barrier is the scarcity of time, as faculty members frequently have rigorous workloads that allow for minimal opportunity for additional training (Tran, 2016). The teachers surveyed in the Hobbs et al. 2021 study expressed being overwhelmed by their workload, resulting in heightened fatigue and anxiety. However, Pham (2012) refers to the teachers as teaching machines due to their work schedule of five hours in the morning, five hours in the afternoon, and an additional two hours in the evening. Mehmet et al. (2021) research also confirmed that time constraints pose severe problems for educators'

acquiring new knowledge and skills. Teachers complained openly about needing more time to educate themselves since they spent so much time on non-instructional activities like meeting with administrators and running daily operations in addition to their regular classroom duties (Lohman, 2006). Simply put, teachers' limited availability is a significant barrier to professional development (Drage, 2010; Leka, 2022).

Inadequate financial resources
The availability of financial resources is a significant motivator for teachers to engage in PD activities. According to Huong (2018), a lack of appropriate and pertinent courses hinders structured learning for adults, including training, workshops, seminars, and refresher courses offered by universities, other organizations, or the community that fit respondents' perceived needs and interests. Therefore, inadequate financial resources might prevent institutions from supporting extensive professional development programs (Borko, 2004; Hobbs et al., 2021). Financial regulations, support mechanisms, and the relevance of Professional development activities are all possible enablers of teacher PD. Many studies have shown that facilitators are crucial in encouraging teachers to participate in professional development opportunities. One of the most motivational forces for teachers to participate in professional development is the promise of financial support. Moreover, some studies have revealed that pay raises can encourage teachers to participate in PD sessions to a far greater extent.

Institutional challenges
Nguyen and Ng (2020) identified that institutional support is a critical factor influencing faculty engagement in PD. When institutions provide adequate support, such as funding, time off, and access to resources, faculty members are more likely to participate in PD activities. Conversely, a lack of institutional support can serve as a significant barrier, and they may be scheduling, and the venue of professional development sessions (Avalos, 2011). Nguyen and Ng (2020) discovered that institutional support plays a crucial role in promoting faculty participation in professional development. Faculty members are more inclined to engage in professional development activities when institutions offer sufficient support, including financial assistance, work incentives, and access to resources. Moreover, Logistical challenges are also created, such as the timing and location of professional training sessions, which can further limit participation (Avalos, 2011).

Impact of Leadership Style on the PD of Teachers
The leadership style is a significant determinant that impacts the professional development efforts of teachers. Despite the incentives or prizes being relatively minor, such as the opportunity to travel, implementing policies that recognize teachers with outstanding achievements in professional development can encourage their involvement in more PD events (Fang et al., 2021; Hargreaves, 2004). According to Mehmet et al. (2021), teachers are more inclined to engage in professional development activities, when they receive rewards for their efforts and their time. One thing that can discourage teacher professionaldevelopment is the decision-making that comes from being on top. According to the research presented by Alansari and Rubie-Davies (2021), teachers felt uneasy about the university's top-down approach to PD. Lohman (2006) discovered that teachers' limited autonomy in classroom management impeded their involvement in formal professional development. Conversely, Perry et al. (2022) revealed that teachers who experienced their intermediate outcomes and ideas being ignored exhibited a decline in motivation to collaborate for the rest of the year.

Leithwood et al. (2021) argue that effective leadership entails promoting professional development and ensuring faculty members have the appropriate support and tools to access it easily. Although, Fullan's (2015) research emphasizes the significance of leaders actively participating in the formulation and execution of professional development programs. When leaders prioritize professional development and show its worth, faculty members are more inclined to acknowledge its significance and actively participate in these activities. Furthermore, leaders who cultivate a collaborative culture within their organizations can improve the effectiveness of professional development by encouraging peer learning and the exchange of knowledge.

Methods and Material

The study employed a qualitative methodology and adhered to the interpretive research paradigm, which suggests that understanding and explaining reality can be achieved by analyzing it through the lens of participants' personal experiences and perspectives (Cohen et al., 2007; Creswell, 2017). Lydall et al. (2005) said that "Interpretivism is a philosophical approach that suggests individuals seek to understand and make sense of their experiences by cognitively processing information from the outside world". The researchers collected data from the seven directors and principals who belong to various divisions and campuses of the University of Education by using the purposive sampling technique.

Following an extensive examination of relevant literature, investigators developed a semi-structured interview guide designed explicitly for university directors and principals, and they were conducted until saturation occurred. The researchers ensured that study participants were provided with the benefits of confidentiality, voluntary involvement, and the freedom to withdraw from the study at any time. Furthermore, the study endeavor placed a high priority on ethical considerations. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis via NVivo 11 plus software. The interview schedules were transcribed and then converted into a different script to carry out a thematic analysis of the data. As stated by Cassol et al. (2018), transcription refers to the conversion of audio recordings of interviews into written statements. Therefore, the researchers used transcription to convert the audio recordings of the interviews into written statements. According to Braun et al. (2019), transliteration is the process of rephrasing words from one language to another without changing or aligning their meanings. This technique helped the researchers use the correct phrases in the correct context. After that, codes were assigned to the themes, and sub-themes were identified through the data analysis conducted on the interviews. Two significant themes emerged. The first theme emerged as a personal barrier, and the second as a professional barrier. Under the professional barrier theme, sub-themes emerged as heavy workload, additional administrative and non-teaching tasks, less financial incentives, lack of physical facilities, and barriers to professional development opportunities.

Findings

The results and findings of the data are presented below. There are two major themes explored, Personal and Professional.
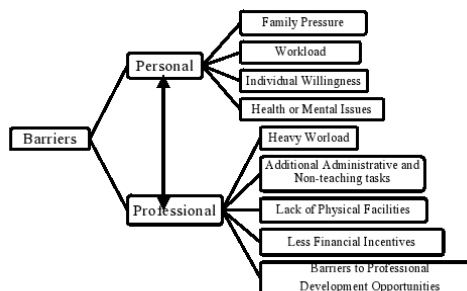
1. Personal Barrier

In the personal barrier, there are various sub-challenges found such as family pressure, workload, individual willingness, and health or mental issues. Most principals and directors believe that teachers have personal struggles that they need to work through. It is also observed that some teachers get exhausted from doing everything around the house independently. Therefore, they were restricted from participating in professional development activities because of this problem. Also, few teachers have had health problems that make it difficult to participate regularly in professional development opportunities.

According to one of the principals,

Female faculty members face additional difficulties and are located hundreds of kilometers from academic conferences and other venues for professional advancement. Sadly, they are not permitted to participate in professional development activities owing to the family's lack of support. (p1)

The opinions of different principals supported this conclusion. Long journeys have inhibited female faculty members from taking part in professional development opportunities. As a result of family obligations, they are often discouraged. It is also noticed that most principals and directors believe that a tiny portion of their faculty is unwilling to participate in professional development opportunities. Neither their internal nor external factors motivate them. Thus, their participation in professional development activities is meaningless. This lack of enthusiasm is a significant barrier to taking part in professional development opportunities.

2.Professional Barrier

The sub-themes of professional barriers are heavy workload, additional administrative and non-teaching tasks, less financial incentives, lack of physical facilities, and barriers to professional development opportunities. Each sub-theme details are mentioned below:

I. Heavy Workload

According to most principals and directors, heavy workloads are one of the most serious obstacles for teachers, as all lecturers must teach 15 credit hours per week, which equals three classes per day. University lecturers are overburdened with academic classes. Assistant professors also have an extremely high workload of 12 credit hours with other teaching obligations. They also supervise the M.Phil and Ph.D. students' research work and the research projects of students participating in the B Ed Honors Program. It is undeniably a serious barrier to their involvement in professional development activities. One of the directors voiced his opinion**:**

Teachers' timetables are overloaded, and the course outlines are lengthy, making it difficult to attend training courses. Even though the average number of teaching credit hours varies from one university to another, this university is occupied with a heavy workload of 15 credit hours, which causes a significant barrier to participation in professional development activities. (p7)

II. Additional Administrative and Non-teaching tasks

In university, non-teaching assignments are frequent; according to most principals and directors they are expected to be part of the profession. There is already too much to do, such as making a timetable and working on admissions. It is a major obstacle to taking part in professional development opportunities frequently. It is not the task of the teachers to inspect the cleanliness of classrooms and the campus, but we do not have enough personnel to handle these administrative duties. Faculty members are responsible for serving as invigilators, administering exams, preparing results, and entering them into UMS. Additional administrative duties are also placed on their shoulders. When can they get their professional development activities in, like research?

Another principal has added support for the position, as mentioned earlier, by stating:

Because they have such a heavy workload, they feel compelled to take on responsibilities unrelated to teaching. Excessive work is required with other duties, such as UMS (University Management System) and admission. Sometimes they have to ask to complete non-teaching assignments within deadlines, which causes mental stress. Consequently, they are expected to devote most of their time to administrative responsibilities. As a result, they cannot participate in professional development activities frequently. (p6)

III. Less Financial Incentives

Most principals and directors reported that the university offers fewer financial incentives than other universities and that medical and housing services are inadequate. Teachers must teach part-time at other universities. Thus, they cannot participate in professional development activities due to budgetary constraints. According to one of the directors,

Sometimes we lack financial support to host professional development activities such as seminars, workshops, etc. We are sometimes ashamed, and it is not easy to organize professional development activities. (p3)

IV. Lack of Physical Facilities

Most principals and directors claimed that some labs on campus are not well equipped with the most up-to-date software. Teachers confront difficulties since adequate and up-to-date software is not deployed. According to one of the principals,

The library has fewer current E-journals for teachers and Ph.D. students. As a result, without digital labs on campus, teachers and students cannot develop a research culture. (p5)

According to most principals and directors, there are some concerns with extremely slow internet access. Teachers and students experience difficulties and cannot complete tasks owing to slow internet speeds and a lack of electricity. This is a significant impediment to participating in professional development activities.

V. Barriers to Professional Development Opportunities

Most principals and directors reported that induction and mentorship training is not provided

to all new faculty members. Professional development opportunities and training programs are not listed on the university calendar annually. Teachers also have academic duties, and it is not easy to attend professional development programs haphazardly whenever they are called to participate. These obstacles make it difficult for them to participate in professional development activities. One of them stated:

Induction training is not given to all new faculty members, and professional development opportunities and training schedules are not annually mentioned. So, teachers have their academic responsibilities, and it is not easy for them to attend professional development activities in a haphazard way whenever they are invited to participate. These factors cause a barrier to their participation in professional development activities. (p1)

The overwhelming majority of directors and principals revealed that training sessions, seminars, and workshops are tailored to the needs of teachers, and the available professional development activities are, to some extent limiting and irregular for far-of-campus faculty members. However, professional development training is not provided to them in appropriate areas. A few directors and principals also expressed concerns about the absence of research and innovation collaboration activities at the campus level. One of the principals raised a similar concern;

The quality of the research conducted on campus by academics with Ph.D. students and faculty is not inspiring. (p5)

Several directors additionally raised concerns and identified a lack of research culture in this university. Research-related activities are lacking here. Teachers must obtain research projects for professional development. Therefore, teachers must work on it. They seek and receive research grants.

Discussion

The study's findings showed the University of Education, Lahore principals' and directors' perspectives on the barriers inhibiting faculty members from participating in professional development. The qualitative findings exhibited that most of the University of Education principals and directors supposed that the most significant barriers to teachers' professional development are heavy workload, additional administrative and non-teaching tasks, less financial incentives, lack of physical facilities, and barriers to professional development opportunities. Alzahrani (2019) found that financial problems, heavy workloads, rigidly enforced work schedules, lack of administrators' support for PD, poor self-motivation, difficulty accessing literature in the specific field, and a lack of interaction among colleagues were significant barriers to the professional development of teachers. According to other research by Kacan (2004), and Oeamoum and Sriwichai (2020), the most significant barriers to teachers' professional development were a heavy workload, financial difficulties, and political pressure. It was found that UE faculty members have insufficient time to focus on professional development activities due to heavy workloads and administrative work which require considerable time.

The present study findings aligned with research by Zhang et al.(2020) and Leka (2022) found that time constraints and lack of professional advancement opportunities were the main barriers. In addition, several studies highlighted inadequate PD opportunities as a significant barrier to professional development (Buissink et al., 2017; Dilshad et al., 2019). According to the present study findings, several principals and directors specified that family commitments sometimes inhibit female teachers from participating in PD activities. Usually, Pakistani women are responsible for family obligations, including domestic responsibilities and childcare. In modern-day Pakistan, when women serve as the primary wage earners and caretakers for their families, the importance of women's responsibilities is increasing. Even though gender roles have evolved significantly, women still accomplish most housework. Thus, some principals and directors in this research agreed that it is difficult for female faculty members to participate in professional development activities due to their domestic obligations and chores. The findings of this study are consistent with the findings of Nguyen's (2012) study.

Conclusion

This qualitative research has provided a comprehensive understanding of the barriers that inhibit faculty members' participation in

professional development activities at the University of Education, Lahore, from the perspectives of principals and directors. The study's findings underline several critical barriers, including heavy workload, additional administrative and non-teaching tasks, less financial incentives, lack of physical facilities, and barriers to professional development opportunities. Financial constraints emerged as a prominent barrier, with limited budgets and funding for PD activities restricting faculty members' access to essential training and development opportunities. This finding aligns with the broader literature on PD in developing countries, where financial resources are often a significant limiting factor. Heavy teaching loads and additional administrative and non-teaching tasks also hinder faculty members' ability to participate in PD activities. This finding is consistent with global studies that emphasize the importance of providing faculty with sufficient time and flexibility to engage in professional development. The lack of physical facilities and barriers to professional development opportunities further exacerbate the challenges faced by faculty members. Moreover, the study found that many PD opportunities are perceived as limited and irregular, leading to low participation and engagement. This highlights the need for more decisive leadership and commitment from the university administration to prioritize PD and allocate necessary resources. Administrative policies that do not adequately support PD also need to be re-evaluated to create a more enabling environment for faculty development.

Recommendations:

In the light of findings of the study, the stated recommendations can be generated:

- The university administration needs to reduce teachers' workloads and administrative responsibilities, as they need additional time for research pursuits and enhance their teaching and learning skills.
- The university administration needs to offer additional resources and monetary support for research. In this regard, the University, HEC, and PHEC may provide faculty members with logistic and financial resources to facilitate their participation inprofessional development

activities.

- Further, university administration might provide each discipline with need-based, equal access, and frequent PD opportunities. Applying a one-size-fits-all approach to all faculty members of different disciplines regarding professional development is less useful. It is necessary to identify their needs according to their discipline and provide them with appropriate and relevant opportunities.

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