

## Original Article

### The Theory Practice Nexus in continuous professional Development Programs in Ethiopia: Preparing EFL Teachers for work

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#### Abstract

This study explores the theory-practice nexus in Continuous Professional Development (CPD) programs for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher in Ethiopia, focusing on the alignment between the National Professional Standards for Teachers and CPD implementation. It addresses three key questions: (1) What are the National Professional Standards for Teachers in Ethiopia? (2) To what extent do CPD programs adhere to these standards? (3) What factors influence the alignment or misalignment between policy and practice? Using a mixed-methods approach, the study collected quantitative data through surveys and qualitative insights via interviews and focus group discussions with teachers and educational leaders. Findings indicate a significant gap between the intended goals of CPD and classroom realities. Many teachers view CPD as a bureaucratic formality rather than a meaningful professional growth opportunity. Contributing factors include limited practical application, weak institutional support, and minimal opportunities for reflection and collaboration. Although the standards emphasize community engagement and collegial collaboration, these components are often inadequately implemented, diminishing the impact of CPD initiatives. The study emphasizes the need for CPD programs to be responsive to teachers' contexts, prioritizing practical, classroom-oriented strategies. Recommendations include strengthening institutional support, creating structured opportunities for reflective practice, and ensuring contextual relevance of CPD activities. Addressing these issues can enhance CPD effectiveness and contribute to improved educational outcomes for students in Ethiopia.

Keywords: Continuous Professional Development, National Professional Standards, educational quality, theory-practice nexus

#### 1. Introduction

Thompson and William (2007) stress that teacher professional development significantly enhances student learning, thereby highlighting the critical role that continuous professional development (CPD) plays in improving educational outcomes. Scales et al. (2011) add that effective teachers are also continuous learners, citing research that links teacher quality—nurtured through CPD—as the most influential factor in student achievement. They assert that CPD should center on learning, as professional growth depends on acquiring new knowledge and skills.

Originating in the mid-1970s, CPD aligns with constructivist philosophy, which views learning as an evolving process shaped by experience (Gray, 2005). For CPD to be effective, it must be ongoing, strategic, and responsive to current educational needs (IfL, 2009c). At its core, CPD is about continually improving subject knowledge and teaching practices.

By doing so, educators enhance their ability to support student learning (Diaz-Maggioli, 2004). CPD is a lifelong process of refining teaching methods to meet students' changing needs, ultimately shaping the decisions teachers make in their classrooms.

The teaching profession in the 21st century is rapidly evolving due to technological advancements and other global shifts. In Ethiopia, teacher educators must recognize these changes and their implications to effectively prepare future educators. This requires continuous professional development (CPD) to help them maintain up-to-date skills and meet societal demands (Srinivasacharlu, 2019).

However, current professional development practices face several challenges (Diaz-Maggioli, 2004). First, they often follow a top-down approach where administrators dictate program content without input from teachers, undermining their professionalism and insights into student needs. Second, there is a flawed belief that underperformance stems from teachers themselves, leading to development programs that overlook teachers' expertise. Third, the lack of teacher ownership over CPD weakens its impact. Finally, universal strategies are often applied without considering the unique needs of diverse classrooms. These issues point to the need for examining how well CPD theory aligns with actual practice in Ethiopia.

Srinivasacharlu (2019) notes that CPD provides essential benefits: it keeps teacher educators current with educational developments, enhances professionalism, and builds digital competencies. CPD also improves instructional practices and scientific thinking, and strengthens their capacity to take on multiple roles—ultimately producing well-rounded, skillful teachers for today's world.

Despite its promising potential, Continuous Professional Development (CPD) in Ethiopia often falls short in practice, not because of its conceptual intent, but due to persistent implementation challenges. While CPD frameworks are grounded in sound educational theory, the extent to

which these principles translate into effective classroom practices remains underexplored in Ethiopian research. This study, therefore, aims to investigate the gap between CPD theory and practice with a view to enhancing its design and impact on teaching and student outcomes. Specifically, the research seeks to answer the following questions:

- (1) What are the National Professional Standards for Teachers in Ethiopia?
- (2) To what extent do CPD programs in Ethiopia adhere to these National Professional Standards in their implementation? and
- (3) What factors influence the congruence or misalignment between the guiding principles and the actual implementation of CPD programs?

This study employs a theoretical framework that integrates Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), Adult Learning Theory (Knowles, 1980), and Reflective Practice (Schön, 1983). These theories collectively help explain how CPD programs are structured, interpreted, and implemented, as well as the factors influencing their success or failure.

Social Learning Theory emphasizes learning through observation, imitation, and collaboration, making it useful for understanding how teachers and stakeholders interpret and apply CPD principles in real-world settings. Teachers often model practices based on their peers and professional communities, shaping their understanding of CPD through social interaction (Bandura, 1977).

**Adult Learning Theory** highlights that teachers, as adult learners, are motivated by relevance, autonomy, and practical application. It sheds light on the personal and contextual factors—such as alignment with goals or lack of ownership—that influence whether CPD principles are successfully implemented. (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2015; Merriam & Bierema, 2014).

**Reflective Practice** focuses on continuous self-evaluation and adjustment. It encourages teachers to assess their adherence to CPD principles and adapt their methods accordingly. This theory supports identifying both the degree of alignment and the barriers to effective implementation. (Schön, 1983; Brookfield, 2017).

## 2. Methods and Materials

This study on the theory-practice gap in continuous professional development (CPD) for EFL teachers in Ethiopia adopts a pragmatic research paradigm, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches. By prioritizing research questions over strict methodologies, it allows for a comprehensive exploration of how CPD programs connect theory to classroom practice. A mixed-methods framework uses quantitative data to evaluate program impacts and qualitative insights to understand contextual challenges, facilitating triangulation and complementarity in findings. (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

Employing a mixed-methods approach, the research began with a review of existing CPD policies in Ethiopia to identify guiding principles. Surveys were then administered to 40 EFL teachers and stakeholders to gather quantitative data on their experiences and perceptions. In-depth interviews and focus groups provided qualitative insights into participants' perspectives and challenges, enriching the research design.

The study utilizes a descriptive survey design to accurately document the current state of CPD programs in Ethiopia. This design focuses on evaluating the alignment between theory and practice, allowing for systematic documentation and analysis of CPD components and their effectiveness (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018; Kumar, 2019).

This study employed multiple data sources to investigate the theory-practice nexus in Continuous Professional Development (CPD) for English teachers in Ethiopia. Key documents outlining CPD theories and guiding principles were analyzed alongside empirical data collected from various stakeholders, including school directors, experienced English teachers, and officials from the Ministry of Education responsible for supervision and curriculum training. Participants comprised English teachers from two purposefully selected secondary schools—Wondirad and Millennium—located in Yeka Sub-city, chosen for their accessibility and relevance to the study. The inclusion of the chief English supervisor and teacher trainer advisor from the Ministry, along with senior zonal-level supervisors and trainers, provided a comprehensive view of CPD implementation across administrative levels. To ensure a diverse representation of perspectives, random sampling was used to select teachers for interviews and focus group discussions. Data collection methods included semi-structured interviews, teacher questionnaires, and focus group

discussions, aimed at exploring how CPD principles are perceived and applied in practice. Additionally, policy documents and teachers' professional portfolios were examined to assess the extent of alignment between theoretical frameworks and actual implementation. These methods are consistent with best practices in mixed-methods educational research, which advocate for triangulation and the integration of multiple data sources to enhance validity and depth of understanding (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Data were analyzed using a mixed-methods approach. Quantitative data from questionnaires were statistically analyzed, while qualitative data from interviews and focus groups underwent thematic analysis to identify recurring themes. Document analysis was also conducted to examine the alignment of policy documents with CPD implementation. This comprehensive analysis provides a nuanced understanding of CPD programs in an educational setting, similar to EFL settings in Ethiopia's context (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Bowen, 2009).

### **3. Results and Discussions**

This research investigates the alignment between the guiding principles and practical implementation of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) programs for teachers in Ethiopia. Ensuring that professional development aligns with established standards is crucial for enhancing teaching quality and student outcomes. The National Professional Standards for Teachers in Ethiopia provide a foundational framework, yet concerns remain about CPD adherence to these standards.

To address this, the study explored three major questions:

1. What are the National Professional Standards for Teachers in Ethiopia?
2. How well do CPD programs implement these standards, highlighting areas of alignment or divergence?
3. What factors contribute to the congruence or misalignment between guiding principles and the actual implementation of CPD programs?

### **3.1 The National Professional Standards for Teachers in Ethiopia**

The Ethiopian Ministry of Education launched the Continuous Professional Development (CPD) framework in 2009 to address the needs of the education system. This initiative aims to enhance teacher performance and student outcomes by providing structured opportunities for professional growth (MOE, 2010).

In 2011, the Ministry established the National Professional Standards for Teachers, which outline seven interconnected standards grouped into three domains: Professional Knowledge, Professional Practice, and Professional Engagement. Each standard includes specific elements across four career stages: Graduate, Proficient, Accomplished, and Lead, with expectations building upon previous stages.

### **3.2 CPD's Role and Challenges**

CPD is crucial for enhancing teaching by equipping educators with new skills and strategies. However, its effectiveness is challenged by various implementation issues (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Focus group discussions revealed key challenges categorized into distinct themes.

#### **3.2.1 Student-Related Challenges**

Student-related issues significantly affect CPD effectiveness. Teachers often struggle to implement CPD strategies due to students' communication barriers and lack of motivation (Desimone & Garet, 2015; Wang & Hale, 2021).

For instance, Participant T001 noted, "Teachers struggle to implement CPD activities effectively because students often lack basic communication skills," while Participant T006 stated, "Low motivation undermines teachers' efforts to apply new strategies." These insights suggest that without addressing these challenges, CPD programs may fail to enhance classroom effectiveness.

Furthermore, motivation is critical for student engagement. According to Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory, students engage more when they feel autonomous and competent. Low motivation impedes participation, limiting the effectiveness of CPD strategies.

Communication skills are also vital for student engagement. Participant T008 highlighted that "students often lack basic communication skills," which affects their ability to engage with

content and collaborate. This underscores the need for CPD initiatives to consider classroom realities, focusing on improving student communication and motivation.

In conclusion, addressing students' communication and motivation challenges is essential for enhancing CPD effectiveness. By aligning CPD with classroom realities, educators can create a more impactful professional development experience, ultimately improving student learning outcomes.

### **3.2.2 Time-Related Challenges**

A major barrier to participation in Continuous Professional Development (CPD) is the lack of time due to scheduling conflicts with demanding job responsibilities. Research by Ashton (2004) highlights that time constraints significantly hinder CPD engagement. Additionally, sufficient financial and institutional resources are essential for effective learning opportunities (Smith & Sadler-Smith, 2006).

Participant T003 noted, "Finding time for CPD is challenging because our teaching schedules are already full," while T001 added, "Even when CPD sessions are available, they often conflict with our teaching hours." These insights emphasize the need for flexible scheduling to accommodate teachers' workloads.

Ashton (2004) and Smith & Sadler-Smith (2006) both stress that inflexible scheduling limits participation. In Ethiopia, heavy workloads and administrative duties exacerbate these time constraints, suggesting a need for institutional policies that support adaptable CPD scheduling to improve teacher participation and educational outcomes.

### **3.2.3 Theoretical vs. Practical Disconnection**

A significant challenge in CPD is the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application in classrooms. Teachers often find that strategies promoted in CPD are not feasible in their unique contexts (Kennedy, 2016). T006 expressed, "CPD workshops introduce new methods, but I struggle to implement them due to different classroom conditions." Similarly, T002 noted, "I often have to adapt strategies to suit my students' needs, which isn't covered in training."

Contemporary literature supports these concerns, emphasizing that effective CPD must be context-sensitive (Avalos, 2011). Programs should align with teachers' realities to avoid alienating them and diminishing their engagement in professional development.

### **3.2.4 CPD Programs and Community Engagement**

Effective CPD programs foster teacher engagement with the community, positioning teachers as leaders who collaborate with parents and stakeholders to improve student outcomes (Desimone, 2009). However, T004 pointed out the lack of a formal system for engaging families, leading to sporadic interactions rather than proactive communication.

Research indicates that schools often lack structured frameworks for ongoing teacher-parent collaboration, despite its benefits (Epstein, 2011; Desforges & Abouhaar, 2003). This highlights the need for CPD programs to include training on community and parental engagement.

### **3.2.5 Importance of Collegial Collaboration**

The Ministry of Education emphasizes collaboration among teachers in its CPD framework (MOE, 2021). Research shows that collegial collaboration is vital for professional development (Avalos, 2011; Vangrieken et al., 2017). However, Teacher 009 noted a gap between theory and practice, stating, "I do not recall ever inviting colleagues into my classroom." This suggests that CPD programs lack the necessary training and opportunities for collaboration, limiting professional growth and educational quality.

### **3.2.6. Institutional Support for CPD Success**

Institutional support is crucial for the success of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) programs. Studies show that without adequate backing from school administrators, CPD often fails to achieve its goals (Borko, 2004). Teachers need structured support, time, and resources for effective implementation. When this support is lacking, CPD can become superficial (Van Driel et al., 2002).

Participant T008 expressed frustration about the lack of follow-up from school officials: "There is no meaningful engagement regarding our plans. Active support could significantly improve

educational outcomes." This highlights a gap in necessary institutional support, leading to a disconnect between planning and practice.

Teacher 007 noted that the Teacher Development unit's limited understanding of CPD complexities impacts its effectiveness. This knowledge gap hinders the unit's ability to provide essential guidance and support for successful CPD execution.

A recurring theme is the insufficient emphasis on CPD's importance. School Director SD 001 stated, "CPD could be more effective if integrated into the school's broader framework," emphasizing the need for leadership that values and supports CPD initiatives.

Inadequate institutional support leads to poorly structured CPD programs and reduced teacher engagement. Enhancing the Teacher Development unit's capacity through targeted training is essential for CPD's successful implementation.

Participants emphasized the need for structured support systems that prioritize CPD, as noted by T006: "Without proper backing, CPD becomes just another formality." Research by Boud and Hager (2012) supports the idea that effective CPD requires organizational commitment.

T004 echoed this sentiment: "There's a real lack of administrative support." This disconnection can hinder professional development. Strong institutional backing increases teacher engagement and the application of new knowledge in classrooms (Collin et al., 2012).

Overall, stronger institutional support is needed to transform CPD from a peripheral activity into a core component of professional development, fostering an environment where continuous learning thrives.

### **3.2.7 Reflection and Adaptation**

Reflecting on and adapting teaching practices is vital for effective CPD. Yet, opportunities for systematic reflection are often limited (Zeichner, 2010). CPD programs that lack reflective practices may fail to address the specific challenges teachers encounter.

T009 highlighted this issue: “We are always told to fulfill our responsibilities, but no feedback is provided, and there is no avenue to reflect on our challenges.” This lack of support undermines the potential benefits of collaborative planning.

T005 added, “We rarely get the chance to think critically about our teaching methods. CPD sessions are mostly theoretical.” This indicates a significant gap in the CPD framework, emphasizing theory over practical application.

T002 noted, “There is little focus on adapting to new teaching techniques, especially with technology.” This underscores the disconnect between theoretical discussions and the lack of hands-on experiences in CPD.

Effective CPD must create opportunities for teachers to reflect on their practices and integrate new strategies, fostering professional growth and enhancing teaching effectiveness.

Participant 3 emphasized, “Reflection on our practices isn’t emphasized enough. We’re expected to adapt our teaching styles to current trends, but there’s no guidance or time to evaluate our approaches.” This highlights a systemic issue in CPD programs, where the push for adaptation lacks proper support. McKinney (2006) notes that fostering a culture of reflection is crucial for improving professional standards; however, the lack of structured opportunities for reflection limits the potential for meaningful change. In summary, there is a disconnect between CPD’s theoretical promotion of reflection and the practical limitations teachers face in evaluating their methods. Addressing this gap requires CPD programs to incorporate structured opportunities for critical reflection, enabling teachers to adapt to new methodologies effectively. By providing dedicated time and guidance, CPD can enhance professional growth and teaching effectiveness.

### **3.2. Teaching Domains and Standards for Effective CPD**

Understanding the three domains of teaching: Professional Knowledge, Professional Practice, and Professional Engagement is essential for effective Continuous Professional Development (CPD). These domains guide teachers' growth and instructional improvement. The Ministry of Education (MoE.2021) outlines seven standards that teachers should know to enhance their competence . Research shows that a lack of awareness of these standards can lead to ineffective CPD experiences (Hattie, 2009; Timperley et al., 2007).

T005 stated, "I do not know these domains. I learned about them only during a course this summer. Our CPD is full of fake documents." This reveals a significant gap in teachers' knowledge of the MoE's CPD framework, undermining the integrity of CPD initiatives. The awareness that school officials tolerate discrepancies suggests a lack of accountability, indicating that without proper training, CPD may devolve into mere formalities, failing to enhance professional growth or improve student outcomes.

Overall, CPD is vital for educators' professional growth and can significantly enhance teaching practices. However, its effectiveness is often hindered by challenges such as student-related issues, gaps between theory and practice, insufficient institutional support, and limited reflection opportunities. Addressing these challenges requires a practical approach to CPD that aligns with the real-world needs of teachers and students.

### **3.2.9. Alignment of CPD with Classroom Realities**

Despite the intent to align CPD with classroom needs, there is often a disconnect between training and actual conditions. Educators feel that CPD is more about fulfilling bureaucratic requirements than genuinely enhancing teaching.

Teacher 10 (T10) remarked, "The CPD sessions often feel disconnected from our classroom realities. The topics sound good on paper, but they don't fit the needs of our students or the challenges we face daily." This highlights a critical concern that CPD content may not adequately address the specific demands of contemporary classroom settings.

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In summary, there is a disconnect between CPD's theoretical promotion of reflection and the practical limitations teachers face. Addressing this gap requires CPD programs to include structured opportunities for critical reflection, enabling teachers to adapt to new methodologies

effectively. By providing dedicated time and guidance, CPD can enhance professional growth and teaching effectiveness.

### **3.3 Data found from the 2021's Ministry of Education's *Teacher development program blueprint (TDP)***

The Ministry of Education has established national professional standards for teachers, consisting of three domains and seven standards:

#### **1. Professional Knowledge (2 standards):**

- Understanding students and their learning processes
- Mastery of subject matter and effective teaching methods

#### **2. Professional Practice (3 standards):**

- Effective planning and implementation of teaching strategies
- Creating and maintaining safe and supportive learning environments
- Evaluating student progress and providing feedback

#### **3. Professional Engagement (2 standards):**

- Participation in ongoing professional development
- Collaborative engagement with colleagues, parents, and the community

Continuous professional development initiatives aim to support these standards. To assess teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of CPD programs in meeting these standards, three statements for each standard were developed and presented on a Likert scale.

Table 1: Teachers' perception on the professional knowledge and the first standard within it: know students and how they learn.

No	Statement	Mean	Median	St. Dev
1	The CPD programs help me to have a critical understanding of the most effective teaching, learning, and behavioral management strategies.	2.93	3.00	1.501
2	The CPD activities enable me to apply my knowledge of student development, learning, and diversity to plan and	2.76	2.00	1.575

implement effective lessons.

3	The CPD training enhances my ability to identify and address the diverse learning needs of my students.	3.15	3.00	1.557
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In the study of EFL teachers' perceptions of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) programs in Ethiopia, the analysis of the statement "The CPD programs help me to have a critical understanding of effective teaching strategies" reveals important insights. The mean score of 2.93 indicates that teachers are slightly below neutral regarding CPD's effectiveness in enhancing their understanding of teaching strategies. The median score of 3 suggests that opinions are divided, with some teachers finding value in the programs while others do not. The standard deviation of 1.5 indicates considerable variability in responses, reflecting differing levels of engagement and satisfaction with CPD offerings.

This suggests that while some teachers perceive benefits from CPD programs, many remain indifferent or skeptical about their effectiveness in improving teaching methods. Reflective Practice (Schön, 1983) underscores the importance of considering teachers' actual needs in CPD design to enhance effectiveness.

The effectiveness of CPD in enhancing teacher competencies is well-documented. Desimone (2009) notes that effective CPD should be content-focused, incorporate active learning, and foster collaboration. If these elements are lacking in Ethiopian CPD programs, it may explain the lower mean score. Guskey (2000) emphasizes the need to evaluate CPD's impact on teachers' attitudes and practices; if CPD does not meet their professional needs, ambivalence can result.

Regarding the statement "The CPD activities enable me to apply my knowledge of student development," the mean score is 2.75, indicating that teachers feel CPD activities do not effectively support their ability to apply knowledge in lesson planning. A median score of 2 suggests a significant portion of respondents disagree, reflecting critical perceptions of CPD relevance. The standard deviation of 1.57 indicates considerable variability, with some teachers finding value while others do not.

Research shows that effective CPD should focus on teachers' specific needs and contexts (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). If Ethiopian CPD activities fail to address complexities of student development and diversity, negative perceptions may arise. Timperley et al. (2007) argue that professional development must be linked to teachers' practice and student outcomes. Without addressing real classroom challenges, teachers may struggle to see CPD's relevance, as reflected in the lower mean scores.

Overall, the findings suggest that many teachers perceive CPD activities as inadequate for applying knowledge of student development and diversity in practice. This highlights a critical area for improvement in CPD program design, emphasizing the need for contextually relevant activities that support teachers' professional growth.

Table 2: Teachers' perception on the professional knowledge and the second standard within it: Know the content and how to teach it.

No	Statements	Mean	Median	SD
1	The CPD programs provide me with sufficient knowledge and skills to effectively teach the subject content	2.85	3.00	1.520
2	The CPD activities help me to develop innovative teaching strategies to make the content engaging and accessible to students	2.50	2.00	1.393
3	The CPD training enables me to critically evaluate and select appropriate teaching resources to support student learning.	2.89	3.0	1.449

Analyzing teachers' perceptions of CPD programs reveals a mean score of 2.85, indicating slight disagreement with the statement that CPD provides sufficient knowledge and skills for effective teaching. The median score of 3 suggests neutrality, while a standard deviation of 1.5 indicates considerable variability in responses.

According to Darling-Hammond (2017), effective professional development is most impactful when it is ongoing, collaborative, and contextually relevant. The low mean agreement and high

variability suggest that the current CPD programs may not meet these criteria, prompting policymakers to consider revisions to better support teachers.

Regarding innovative teaching strategies, a mean score of 2.5 indicates teachers lean towards disagreement about CPD activities aiding in this development, with a median of 2 further reflecting this sentiment. The standard deviation of 1.32 shows moderate variability among responses.

Guskey and Yoon (2009) emphasize the need for continuous, relevant PD integrated into teachers' routines. The findings suggest that many teachers do not view CPD as significantly beneficial for developing innovative strategies, aligning with Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) on the necessity of relevance and collaboration in CPD.

Overall, the data indicates considerable variation in teachers' perceptions of CPD's effectiveness in fostering innovative teaching. This highlights the need for a closer examination of CPD content and delivery to better align with teachers' needs and enhance their practices.

Table 3: Teachers' perception on the professional practice and the third standard within it: Plan for and implement effective teaching and learning.

No	Statements	Mean	Median	SD
1	The CPD programs assist me in designing and implementing lesson plans that align with the curriculum and student learning outcomes.	2.87	30	1.320
2	The CPD activities enhance my ability to use a range of teaching strategies to engage students and promote active learning.	2.55	2.0	1.345
3	The CPD training helps me to effectively differentiate instruction to cater to the diverse needs of my students	2.96	3.0	1.333

Analyzing the data shows a mean score of 2.93, indicating that teachers in Ethiopia have a slightly below neutral perception of how CPD programs assist in designing lesson plans that align with curriculum and student outcomes. The median score of 3 suggests an even distribution of responses, with equal agreement and disagreement among participants. A low standard deviation of 1.50 indicates that responses cluster closely around the mean, reflecting some consensus.

These findings suggest opportunities for improvement in aligning CPD programs with national professional standards. There appears to be a gap between the goals of CPD and the actual support provided for lesson planning. Studies highlight the importance of continuous professional development to enhance instructional practices and improve student outcomes (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

Regarding the effectiveness of CPD in engaging students, lower average scores indicate that many educators feel inadequately equipped. This aligns with Chalchisa's (2009) findings that despite advocating for interactive learning, many teachers rely on traditional methods due to insufficient professional development.

With a standard deviation of 1.30, there is moderate agreement among responses, suggesting that while some teachers value CPD activities, many do not. This variability underscores the need for more tailored CPD programs for EFL teachers in Ethiopia.

For the statement on differentiating instruction, a mean score of 2.96 indicates teachers feel CPD training does not significantly enhance this ability. The median score reinforces this, suggesting a lack of confidence in CPD's effectiveness for diverse student needs. The standard deviation of 1.30 shows moderate variability, indicating differing experiences with CPD.

Overall, the findings highlight challenges in CPD implementation in Ethiopia, as noted by Gemedu and Tynjälä (2015), who point to barriers like inadequate training content. There is a clear need for CPD programs to focus more on practical strategies for differentiation and active learning.

Table 4: Teachers' perception on the professional practice and the fourth standard within it: create and maintain supportive and safe learning environments.

No	Statements	Mean	Media	SD
1	The CPD programs equip me with strategies to create a positive and inclusive classroom climate that supports student learning and well-being	2.71	3.0	1.410
2	The CPD activities enable me to establish and maintain clear	2.67	2.0	1.454

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	behavioral expectations and effectively manage student behavior.			
3	The CPD training enhances my ability to promote student safety, well-being, and physical and emotional security in the classroom.	2.93	3.0	1.425

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The data in Table 4 shows a mean score of 2.7, a median of 3, and a standard deviation of 1.40 regarding the effectiveness of CPD programs in helping teachers create supportive classroom environments. This indicates a generally neutral to slightly negative perception among teachers, suggesting they feel CPD programs do not significantly equip them with necessary strategies. The median of 3 confirms that half of respondents rated their agreement as neutral or lower, with a standard deviation of 1.40 reflecting moderate variability in responses.

The theory-practice nexus is crucial for CPD effectiveness, as noted by Chalchisa (2008), who emphasizes that effective CPD should be grounded in classroom realities and involve teachers in identifying their learning needs.

For the statement regarding CPD's support in establishing behavioral expectations, a mean of 2.6 suggests that teachers do not feel adequately supported, with the median of 2 indicating that more than half rated their agreement as "disagree" or lower. The standard deviation of 1.40 shows moderate variability, highlighting inconsistencies in effectiveness across educators.

Regarding the ability to promote student safety and well-being, a mean score of 2.6 and a median of 2 indicate that most teachers do not feel CPD enhances their capabilities in this area. The standard deviation of 1.40 also suggests variability in responses.

Abebe and Woldehanna (2013) argue that CPD should include practical strategies for enhancing student safety and well-being, such as training in classroom management and supportive learning environments.

Table 5: Teachers' perception on the professional practice and the fifth standard within it: assess, provide feedback and report on student learning

No	Statements	Mean	Media	SD
1	The CPD programs help me to develop and implement effective assessment strategies to monitor and evaluate student	3.09	3.0	1.456

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	learning			
2	The CPD activities enable me to provide timely, constructive, and meaningful feedback to students to support their learning.	2.89	3.0	1.383
3	The CPD training enhances my skills in using assessment data to inform my teaching practices and report on student progress.	2.76	3.0	1.453

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The data in Table 5 depicts a mean score of 3.0, a median of 3, and a standard deviation of 1.40 regarding the effectiveness of CPD programs in developing assessment strategies. These results indicate a neutral perception among teachers, with the mean score suggesting that educators feel generally indifferent about CPD's impact on their assessment strategies. The median also reflects this neutrality, while the standard deviation indicates variability in responses, highlighting differing experiences among educators.

To improve CPD, it is recommended to focus on practical applications of assessment strategies that teachers can implement. This approach can bridge the gap between theory and practice, as suggested by Korthagen et al. (2001). Promoting collaborative learning can also support effective assessment practices and mutual learning, as emphasized by Chalchisa (2010).

For the second statement, a mean score of 2.8 and a median of 3 indicate that teachers feel slightly below neutral about CPD's effectiveness in enabling constructive feedback. The standard deviation of 1.38 reflects moderate variability, suggesting that while some educators view CPD positively, many do not.

For the third statement, a mean score of 2.7 and a median of 3 indicate that teachers generally feel CPD training does not significantly enhance their skills in using assessment data. The standard deviation of 1.4 again shows variability in perceptions.

Desimone (2009) emphasizes that effective CPD should be relevant and engage teachers meaningfully to address their specific needs. This highlights the importance of fostering collaboration among educators to create a community of practice that promotes shared learning and professional growth, enhancing the relevance and impact of CPD.

Table 6: Teachers' perception on Professional engagement and the six standard within it: Engage in professional learning

No	Statements	Mean	Media	SD
1	The CPD programs encourage me to actively engage in continuous professional development to improve my teaching practice.	3.20	3.0	1.50
2	The CPD activities enable me to reflect on my teaching and identify areas for growth and improvement	2.60	2.0	1.514
3	The CPD training helps me to apply new knowledge and skills gained from professional learning to my teaching practice	2.71	3.0	1.42

The data in Table 6 shows a mean score of 3.2, a median of 3, and a standard deviation of 1.5 regarding the encouragement of active engagement in CPD. This indicates a generally neutral to slightly positive perception among teachers about CPD programs. While the mean suggests some positivity, the median indicates mixed feelings, and the high standard deviation reflects variability in responses, highlighting differing experiences among educators.

Timperley et al. (2007) emphasize that effective CPD should connect closely to teachers' practices, enhancing their pedagogical skills through sustained engagement. This underscores the importance of reflective practice and collaboration in professional development.

For the second statement, the mean score is 2.6, with a median of 2 and a standard deviation of 1.5, suggesting a generally negative perception of CPD's effectiveness in promoting reflection and identifying areas for improvement. This finding indicates that many teachers feel CPD does not significantly support their reflective practices.

Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) argue that effective CPD should align with classroom realities and actively involve teachers in identifying their learning needs, reinforcing the importance of reflective practice.

The third statement shows a mean score of 2.7, a median of 3, and a standard deviation of 1.4, indicating a neutral perception of CPD training's effectiveness in helping teachers apply new

knowledge and skills. While some teachers feel positively, a significant number do not, highlighting varied experiences.

Korthagen et al. (2001) suggest that CPD should emphasize practical applications of new knowledge to bridge the gap between theory and practice. The findings indicate that CPD programs in Ethiopia need to better align with the National Professional Standards for Teachers, particularly in supporting teachers in applying new skills effectively. By addressing these gaps, CPD can more effectively support EFL teachers in their professional development.

Table 7: Teachers' perception on Professional engagement and the six standard within it: Engage in professional learning

No	Statements	Mean	Media	SD
1	The CPD programs promote collaboration and communication with colleagues to share best practices and support student learning	2.61	2.0	1.43
2	The CPD activities enable me to effectively engage with parents/caregivers to support student learning and well-being	2.60	2.0	1.49
3	The CPD training enhances my ability to work with the broader school community to support student outcomes.	2.33	2.0	1.40

The data in Table 7 shows a mean score of 2.6, a median of 2, and a standard deviation of 1.4 regarding the effectiveness of CPD programs in promoting collaboration and communication. This suggests a generally negative perception among teachers, indicating that CPD programs do not significantly foster collaboration. The median reinforces this, with more than half of respondents rating their agreement as disagree or strongly disagree.

In a focus group discussion, teachers expressed frustration that current CPD programs do not equip them with the skills needed for effective collaboration and communication. Many viewed the sessions as ineffective and lacking in professional intent, suggesting a need for more interactive workshops and peer-learning opportunities.

For the second statement, the mean score is again 2.6, with a median of 2 and a standard deviation of 1.49, indicating a negative perception of CPD's effectiveness in engaging parents

and caregivers. The feedback highlighted that teacher meetings are infrequent and typically only occur in response to student misbehavior, with little effort made to actively involve parents.

Recognizing the importance of parental involvement in student success, it is recommended that CPD programs incorporate training on establishing effective communication with parents. Workshops or resources aimed at enhancing teachers' skills in parent engagement could foster a collaborative educational environment.

Finally, the data indicates a low mean score of 2.3 regarding the extent to which CPD programs enhance teachers' ability to work with the broader school community. This suggests a gap between current CPD programs and the National Professional Standards for Teachers, particularly in preparing EFL teachers for collaboration to support student outcomes.

Overall, aligning CPD programs with teachers' professional standards and needs, as noted by Dochy et al. (2012), is crucial for enhancing their effectiveness and impact on student learning outcomes.

#### **4. Conclusions and recommendations**

The findings of this research underscore the critical need for a more effective alignment between the National Professional Standards for Teachers in Ethiopia and the implementation of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) programs. The National Professional Standards delineate essential expectations for educators, organized into interconnected standards across three domains: Professional Knowledge, Professional Practice, and Professional Engagement. However, the study reveals notable gaps between these standards and the actual experiences of teachers, indicating that CPD programs often fall short of their intended goals.

Many educators perceive CPD as a bureaucratic obligation rather than a meaningful opportunity for professional growth. This perception stems from a significant disconnect between the theoretical content of CPD and the practical realities teachers face in the classroom. To address this issue, there is an urgent need for CPD programs that are tailored and context-sensitive, ensuring alignment with the established National Professional Standards.

Several factors contribute to the misalignment between CPD principles and their practical application. The lack of practical application of CPD content makes it difficult for teachers to implement new strategies effectively. Additionally, socio-economic challenges faced by students, communication barriers, and inadequate institutional support further hinder the effective application of CPD insights. The absence of structured reflection opportunities limits teachers' ability to evaluate and adapt their practices based on CPD learning, while the lack of community engagement opportunities diminishes the potential for strengthening connections between schools and their communities. Furthermore, fragmented collaboration among educators prevents the full realization of CPD programs' benefits.

It is recommended that addressing these challenges requires targeted improvements in the structure and support of CPD initiatives. By fostering an environment that encourages practical application, collaboration, and community engagement, alongside robust institutional backing, CPD programs can better align with the National Professional Standards. This alignment is essential for enhancing the quality of education in Ethiopia and ensuring that teachers are well-equipped to meet the diverse needs of their students.

## **5. Implications of the findings Based on the Theoretical Frameworks**

The study's theoretical frameworks collectively imply that effective CPD must be practical, collaborative, and closely aligned with teachers' real classroom experiences. Adult Learning Theory stresses the need for relevance and teacher involvement in designing CPD, while Constructivist Theory highlights collaborative knowledge-building through social interaction and reflection. Experiential Learning Theory calls for ongoing cycles of active practice and feedback to transform theory into effective classroom methods. Social Learning Theory emphasizes the importance of modeling and peer mentoring to facilitate skill acquisition. Overall, CPD programs should bridge the theory-practice gap by empowering teachers as active learners within supportive, context-sensitive environments that address both pedagogical and structural challenges.

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