

The Influence of Online CPD on EFL Secondary School Teachers' Instructional Practices

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Received 6 August 2024; accepted 10 September 2024
Published online 26 September 2024

Abstract

Continuous Professional Development (CPD) constitutes a valuable source of training for language teachers to enhance their teaching-related knowledge and skills and update their instructional practices, with online CPD activities playing a fundamental role in facilitating in-service teachers' accessibility and participation. In response to the recent call to understand how teachers continue their professional development in teaching and considering the significant dearth of studies on teachers' participation in online CPD activities in Moroccan EFL secondary schools, this study aims to investigate the extent to which teachers participate in online CPD activities and examine the role of their participation in these activities in enhancing their instructional practices. This study adopts a cross-sectional quantitative research design. An online self-report questionnaire was administered to 120 EFL Moroccan secondary school teachers to collect data. This study yields interesting findings. First, most EFL teachers participate in online CPD activities using mainly Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), E-mail, and YouTube. Second, online CPD activities play a crucial role in supporting teachers in implementing innovative teaching strategies, using differentiated instruction, integrating ICT tools, facilitating constructive feedback provision, and encouraging their engagement in reflective practices. This study concludes with several implications and research recommendations for EFL teachers.

Key words: Online participation; CPD activities; Teachers; Teaching practices

Boulaine, K. (2024). The Influence of Online CPD on EFL Secondary School Teachers' Instructional Practices. *Higher Education of Social Science*, 27(1), 35-42. Available from: URL: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/hess/article/view/13531>
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/13531>

INTRODUCTION

In all educational contexts worldwide, teaching is characterized by complexity, mobility, and contextual particularity. Teacher education has always been present at the heart of educational policies and reforms, increasing the demands on teachers' training and emphasizing the need for high-quality professional development opportunities that expand their knowledge and enhance their innovative teaching methods (Borko, 2004). Essentially, effective teaching requires not only a sound pre-service knowledge base but, more importantly, a commitment to ongoing professional development training to meet the qualification demands and overcome context-specific challenges. Yet, there is insufficient knowledge about the quality of online CPD activities and the extent to which they contribute to enhancing teachers' professional practices (Meyer, Kleinknecht & Richter, 2023).

With the rise of technology, the availability of online CPD activities for teachers has increased over the past decade (Poole, Fitzgerald, & Dann, 2020; Meyer et al, 2023). Accordingly, the accessibility to online CPD activities has increased tremendously. In the Moroccan EFL context, teachers participate in CPD activities. However, Ouardani (2020) argues that the majority of the CPD activities available for Moroccan EFL teachers are in-person 'traditional' activities that disregard teachers' interests and expectations. Notably, despite the plethora of research conducted in the field of CPD (Broko, 2004; Guskey, 2000; Njenga, 2023) there is a lack of empirical

work on teachers' participation in online CPD activities as well as its role in supporting their instructional practices (Poole et al., 2020; Meyer et al., 2023), the Moroccan EFL context is no exception.

Given the dearth of studies on online CPD, this study aims to investigate the Moroccan EFL secondary school teachers' participation in online CPD activities. Specifically, it explores primarily the extent to which Moroccan EFL teachers participate in online CPD activities. It also aims to examine the role of participation in these activities in enhancing the quality of their classroom instructional practices. In this study, online CPD activities denote all the online formal and informal professional development activities Moroccan EFL secondary school teachers participate in, including MOOCs, as well as other CPD activities delivery platforms (eg., Zoom and Google Meet). To realize the objectives of this study, the following research questions are addressed:

Research Questions

RQ1: How often do Moroccan EFL secondary school teachers participate in online CPD activities?

RQ2: To what extent does Moroccan EFL secondary school teachers' participation in online CPD activities support the quality of their classroom instructional practices?

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This section provides an overview of the current literature on online Continuous Professional Development (CPD) and its influence on classroom teaching practices. It will focus particularly on CPD within the Moroccan EFL context, highlighting its impact on improving instructional practices among Moroccan EFL secondary school teachers.

Continuous Professional Development

Teachers' education deserves much attention given its impact on improving teachers' knowledge and skills. The main issue is that formal teacher education typically concludes at the pre-service phase. However, prospective teachers can continue to develop their knowledge and skills through autonomous study and online CPD opportunities, allowing them to enhance their teaching expertise beyond formal training. CPD could also be defined as 'those processes and activities designed to enhance the professional knowledge, skills, and attitudes of educators so that they might, in turn, improve the learning of students' (Guskey, 2000, p. 16). Having good experiences while taking part in certain CPD activities can influence a teacher's perspective towards their profession. Furthermore, cultivating a positive attitude towards teaching can significantly enhance teachers' confidence and self-esteem. This, in turn, is likely to result in

improved performance, particularly within the classroom setting.

Proceeding with in-service CPD, teachers need to keep educating themselves by participating in CPD activities. Njenga (2023) states that CPD is a complex, context-bound, and goal-oriented activity with multiple goals, diverse content, and a broad range of learning methods. In this sense, CPD could be restricted to subject matter knowledge for teaching, understanding of student thinking, and instructional practices (Broko, 2004). For instance, based on the researcher's academic experience, it can be argued that in the Moroccan context, subject matter knowledge required for effective teaching often differs from the academic knowledge acquired at the university level. For teaching purposes, teachers are required to make this academic knowledge teachable, context-specific, and responsive to learners' differences. Effective teaching extends beyond mere proficiency in subject matter content, such as mastery of English language aspects (grammar, syntax, phonology, morphology, etc.). It also involves understanding learners' characteristics, including their developmental stages, varying abilities, and learning styles. In essence, it requires a holistic understanding of the learner as an individual. Consequently, teachers must equip themselves with the essential tools and skills to effectively address their students' needs and manage their profession adeptly.

CPD in the Moroccan EFL Context

Continuous professional development in Morocco was targeted in several if not all the educational reforms including various decrees, circulars, and official bulletins issued by the Ministry of Education related to teacher professional development (TPD), such as the National Charter of Education and Training (October 1999), the ministerial decree of December 2nd, 2005, the ministerial decree of July 7th, 2009, Circular NO 173, September 10th, 1976, Circular NO 12XC 36, February 2012, and the 2008 Analytical Reported issued by the Supreme Council for Education (Ourdani, 2020). In addition to these official documents, there are others like the Emergency Plan (2009-2012), the Strategic Vision (2015-2030), Framework Law number 51.17 (رأطال انوناقلا), and the recent one is the Fundamental System for Employees of the Ministry of Education (2024) in which Teacher Professional Development (TPD) was given much emphasis. All these reforms and documents stress the importance of teacher education in Morocco.

According to Ouardani (2020), the forms of TPD that are most common in Morocco indicate that traditional practices, such as short training and programs that often consist of talks, workshops, and presentations, remain prominent. However, there are many challenges that Moroccan teachers encounter while taking part in these structured CPD activities. Consequently, online CPD

activities could be a better alternative for Moroccan EFL secondary school teachers, especially novice in-service teachers. This is particularly the case given the rise of digital platforms and ICT tools after the COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, EFL teachers could adopt online CPD activities as a supplementary resource to extend their professional competencies learned during the pre-service training.

Online CPD in the Moroccan EFL Context

In the Moroccan EFL context, ICT integration constitutes a salient aspect of the target CPD competencies. The integration of ICT in the classroom, besides focusing on language skills and components, was also a subject of the CPD opportunities provided by the Ministry of Education in Morocco. Related official data showed that within the Emergency Plan (2009-2012) the state allocated 43.1 billion MAD for educational reforms which included a massive implementation of teachers' professional development training programs, mainly on the integration of ICTs in teaching. However, Later the ministry was constrained to stop all sorts of trainings for unknown reasons. (Ouardani, 2020). This means that the stakeholders in the education field including teachers, practitioners, educational researchers, school administrators, and policymakers, admit the importance of integrating technology into education. These attempts laid the foundation for incorporating technology in Teacher Professional Development, especially with the development of online CPD after the COVID-19 pandemic.

With the new digital technology, numerous opportunities emerged for EFL teachers to make use of as part of their online CPD. The amount of online CPD activities available for teachers has increased over the past decade (Meyer et al., 2023). In a study conducted by Muhammad Irfan Arif, Syeda Samina Tahira, and Maria Sohaib Qureshi (2022), Teacher Professional Development (TPD) can benefit from open and distance learning by making use of the new technology. To clarify, teachers can take part in several online CPD activities remotely anytime anywhere by joining them using their computers and mobile phones. At the beginning of the 21st century, technology brought many opportunities for online CPD. For example, Elmabruk (2009) mentioned several technological means and platforms that can be used, such as e-mail, which is the foundation of all forms of online interaction. Among its advantages: they are easy to use, cheap, fast, and reliable. Another tool is online forums. These are helpful because teachers can use them through online discussions to improve their classroom teaching quality, exchange their experiences with other teachers, and enhance their teaching knowledge.

In addition to the above technological platforms, the evolution of digital tools such as Web 2.0 and beyond, and the spread of AI applications, online CPD has gained a robust reputation. Among these, we can find MOOCs, which have revolutionized the field of education. They foster collaboration and innovation and strengthen the relationship between students and their teachers and mentors. These online platforms have grown into a disruptive force in the global, offering flexible and often accessible educational opportunities (Barman & Das, 2023). Therefore, online courses are likely to support teachers' collaborations as a community, allowing for the development of their soft skills, problem-solving, technology literacy, autonomous learning, and networking.

The Effect of Online CPD on the Quality of Teachers' Classroom Practices

Numerous research has been conducted on online CPD. For example, Meyer et al., (2023) state in their study that it is unclear how good online professional development activities are. According to Poole et al. (2020), it is crucial to determine the components of online professional development that are most successful in facilitating teacher learning and its transfer to the classroom, considering the growing availability of online CPD. Therefore, teachers are required to have rich and flexible knowledge of their subject matter to enhance their students' understanding. They also must understand the major facts and concepts in their discipline. Moreover, they need to be familiar with how these ideas are connected, the processes used to establish new knowledge, and determine the validity of claims (Anderson, 1989; Ball, 1990; Borko & Putnam, 1996; McDiarmid, Ball, & Anderson, 1989, cited in Broko, 2004)

Furthermore, teacher attitude is a vital variable that a teacher could acquire while engaging in CPD activities as argued by Guskey (2000) who put this variable among professional knowledge and skills. According to Guskey, teachers who have these skills will improve their classroom teaching quality and as a result, have a positive influence on their student's achievement. In the same vein, Poole et al., (2020) see that effective online CPD is more likely to increase the impact on students' learning. On the other hand, it was reported by Bouaissane and Mourchid (2022) that CPD has been an object of research. It has attracted considerable interest from scholars and researchers. Besides, it is believed that teachers' learning, among other variables, directly impacts students' learning, school performance, and the educational system. This means that any CPD activities could positively influence teachers' workplace, especially their classroom teaching quality. The more qualified a teacher is, the better their classroom teaching quality is. Online CPD activities could equip teachers with the necessary skills and tools to make their jobs easier and more efficient.

METHODOLOGY

This section presents the research design, participants, data collection, and analysis procedures.

Research Design

This study adopts a cross-sectional quantitative research design, given its focus on numerical data and its attempt to meet the requirements of the scientific method (Mills & Gay, 2016). More specifically, this design measures variables 'so that numbered data can be analyzed using statistical procedures' (Creswell, 2009, p. 4).

Participants

The participants (n=120) are in-service Moroccan EFL secondary school teachers who voluntarily responded to an online self-report questionnaire. They were sampled based on their convenience and availability during the data collection process (Mills & Gay, 2016). 63.3% of them are males and 36.7% are females, with 48.3% of them having less than 5 years of teaching experience, 28.3% between 6 and 10 years, and more than 23.3% having experienced at least 11 years of teaching.

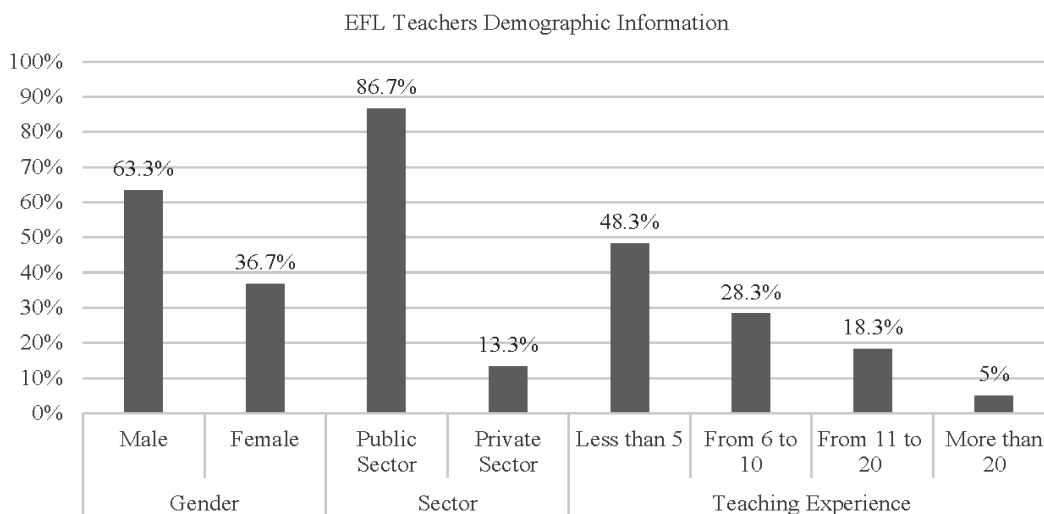


Figure 1
Background information of the participants

Data Collection Instrument and Procedure

To collect data, an online self-report questionnaire with mostly close-ended items was designed and administered using Google Forms®. Notably, the survey questionnaire is characterized by the easiness of construction and efficiency in administration (Dornyei, 2007). It consists of three main sections. The first one addresses the participants' background information; the second section targets the participants' involvement in online CPD activities, and the last section sheds light on the role of teachers' participation in online CPD activities in enhancing their teaching practices. Ethically, the current study, given its nature, does not impose any potential threat on the participants. Besides, they were informed about the purpose of the study and their anonymity was granted in advance.

Reliability and Validity Issues

After constructing the instrument, it was shared with experts in the field of educational research to check both its face and content validity. Additionally, it was also piloted with 10 EFL teachers to overcome ambiguity and ensure the clarity of items. Moreover, Cronbach's Alpha was checked using IBM SPSS to test the reliability of the online CPD scale. The Cronbach's Alpha value of

the Likert scale is as follows: 0.953 indicating that the reliability of the scale is quite good.

Table 1
Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Test

	Cronbach's Alpha	N
Online CPD Activities and Teachers' Professional Practices	0.953	6

DATA ANALYSIS

The data collected was analyzed using SPSS. Initially, the data was downloaded from Google Forms® and extracted to a Microsoft Office Excel sheet before being sorted and labeled. Subsequently, it was coded into numbers using Excel before being uploaded to SPSS. The analysis included generating frequencies, graphs, and contingency tables.

RESULTS

Teachers' Participation in Online EFL CPD Activities

Upon enquiring about teachers' participation in online CPD activities, 66.7% of them indicated that they participate in these activities, and 33.3% of them do not participate in such activities.

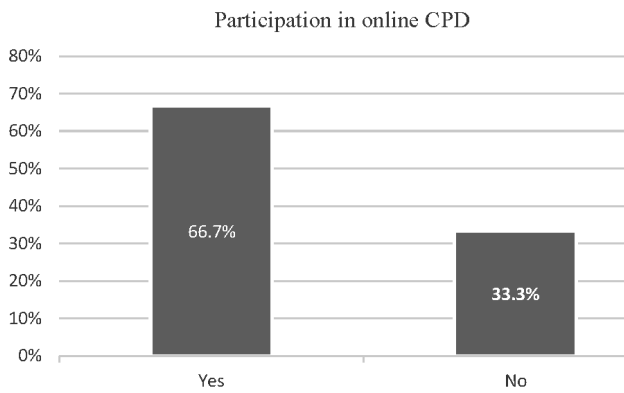


Figure 2
Moroccan EFL Teachers' Participation in Online CPD Activities

The Frequency of Teachers' Participation in Online EFL CPD Activities

The figure below displays the frequency distribution of teachers' participation in online CPD activities. 11.7% of teachers never participate in Online CPD activities, 35.8% rarely take part in such activities, 35.8% of them sometimes do, and 14.2% usually do. Finally, only 2.5% always participate in these activities.

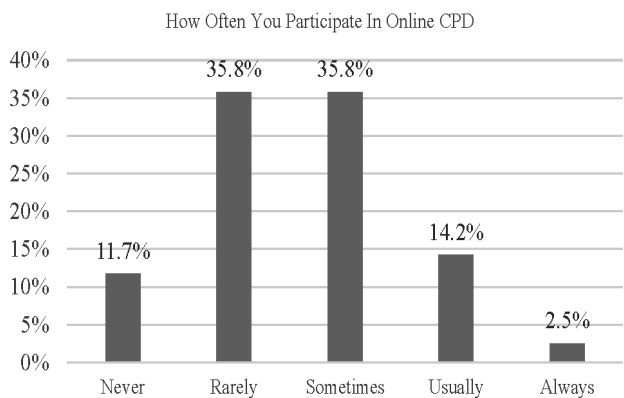


Figure 3
The Frequency of Teachers' Participation in Online CPD Activities

Table 2
The Role of Online CPD Activities in Enhancing EFL teachers' instructional practice

Participation in online CPD activities enables me to:	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Implement innovative teaching strategies	9.2%	2.5%	12.5%	54.2%	21.7%
Differentiate instruction to meet my students' learning styles	7.5%	4.2%	14.2%	53.3%	20.8%
Integrate ICT tools into my classroom	8.3%	3.3%	12.5%	45.8%	30%
Provide constructive feedback to my students in the EFL classroom	9.2%	3.3%	19.2%	46.7%	21.7%
Engage in reflective practices to improve my teaching practices	9.2%	5%	15%	36.7%	34.2%
Balance workload and time effectively in the EFL classroom	8.3%	4.2%	25%	44.2%	18.3%

The table shows that the majority of teachers (75.9%) report that they agree or strongly agree that online CPD activities help them in implementing innovative teaching

Online Platforms for Participating in CPD Activities

Moroccan EFL secondary teachers were asked to choose from a list of five items the platforms they use to take part in online CPD activities, along with a comment section for additional ones.

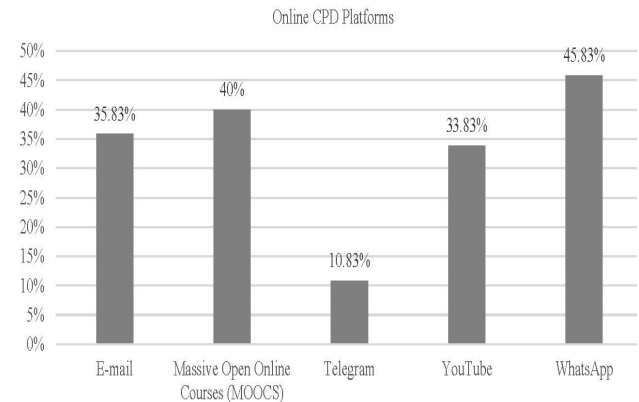


Figure 4
Online Platforms Moroccan EFL Teachers Use to Participate in CPD Activities

As Figure 4 displays, 45.83% of the participants use WhatsApp, 40% use Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), 35.83% use E-mail, 33.83% rely on YouTube, and only 10.83% use Telegram. Additionally, some of the participants added additional types of platforms. These include Zoom, Google Meet, Google Classroom, Facebook, Microsoft Teams, and Canvas LMS.

Online CPD Activities' Role in Enhancing Teachers' Instructional Practices

To enquire on the role of EFL teachers' participation in online activities in supporting their instructional practices, the participants completed a six-item frequency Likert scale. The table below provides the frequency distribution of their responses.

CPD activities allow them to differentiate instruction to respond to their students' learning styles, 14.2% are neutral and only 11.7% of the participants report that they disagree or strongly disagree.

On the other hand, 75.8% of the participants agree or strongly agree that online CPD activities facilitate the integration of ICT tools into their classrooms, 11.6% disagree or strongly disagree, and 12.5% neutral. Besides, 68.4% indicate that online CPD activities assist them in providing constructive feedback to their students, 12.5% disagree or strongly disagree, while 19.2% are neutral. Similarly, 70.9% agree or strongly agree that online CPD activities encourage their engagement in reflective practices to improve their teaching, while only 14.2% disagree or strongly disagree. Moreover, 62.5% agree or strongly agree that online CPD activities facilitate the effective balancing of their workload and time, while 12.5% disagree or strongly disagree.

DISCUSSION

Most Moroccan EFL secondary school teachers take part in online CPD activities using a variety of online platforms, such as WhatsApp, MOOCs, Email, and YouTube. This study indicates that WhatsApp and MOOCs are particularly dominant tools for teachers pursuing online CPD, reinforcing Barman and Das (2023) view that these platforms have revolutionized the field of education. The preference for online CPD activities can be attributed to their numerous benefits, including quality education and self-paced learning. EFL teachers are continually seeking more efficient ways to enhance their pedagogical knowledge and teaching practices (Poole et al., 2020). Consequently, they regard online CPD activities as efficient and more practical alternatives thanks to their flexibility and user-friendliness, which save time and money. The results of this study suggest that Moroccan EFL secondary school teachers are open to professional development, possibly due to the lack of updated CPD programs and training (Ouardani, 2020).

Aligned with the aim of this study to determine whether Moroccan EFL secondary school teachers believe online CPD activities impact the quality of their teaching practices, the results showed that the majority of participants agreed that these activities positively affect classroom teaching quality. This includes the implementation of innovative strategies, differentiation of instruction, the integration of ICT tools, provision of constructive feedback, and engagement in reflective practices. These findings corroborate Guskey's finding (2000) assertion that CPD activities enhance teachers' knowledge, skills, and attitudes, which in turn improves students' achievement. However, a small percentage of teachers remain neutral or dissatisfied with the effectiveness of online CPD in certain areas, particularly

in balancing workload and time. This indicates the necessity of providing appropriate conditions for teachers to participate in online CPD activities.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study explored the Moroccan EFL secondary school teachers' participation in online CPD activities, including the role of these activities in enhancing the quality of their teaching practices. To collect data, an Online questionnaire was administered to 120 Moroccan EFL secondary school teachers via Google Forms® and analyzed using SPSS. The finding revealed that most Moroccan EFL teachers participate in online CPD activities using WhatsApp, MOOCs, Email, and YouTube. These activities positively influence the participants' classroom and the quality of their instructional practices by helping them develop innovative teaching strategies, integrate ICT tools, engage in reflective practices, and tailor their instructions and feedback more effectively.

The non-probability convenience sampling adopted in this study poses certain limitations, primarily concerning generalizability. Convenience sampling does not inherently support generalizability. To address this limitation in future research, a mixed methods research design is recommended. Employing probability random sampling would enhance the representativeness of the sample and incorporating interviews alongside the questionnaire would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the research topic. Additionally, future research should address the significant effect of teachers' participation in online CPD activities on the quality of their teaching practices.

The field of ELT is constantly evolving, requiring teachers to continuously update their pedagogical knowledge to enhance their teaching practices. Given the rapid advancement in digital technologies and current research findings, it is crucial for the Ministry of Education and all the stakeholders to invest in online CPD activities. Moroccan EFL secondary school teachers generally hold positive attitudes towards online CPD activities. However, a significant number of teachers do not engage in online CPD activities. This reluctance could be attributed to several factors, including the extensive working hours of Moroccan EFL teachers, which may deter them from pursuing additional professional development. Another reason could be the lack of incentives from the Ministry of Education. Future research needs to address the true sources behind this reluctance.

To fully leverage the benefits of online CPD opportunities, more attention and support are necessary. Considering Morocco's collectivist culture, many teachers prefer in-person CPD over online options. Therefore, the Ministry of Education could implement a blended

learning approach, alternating between in-person and online learning. With the explosion of AI, Moroccan EFL teachers are called upon to take part in training facilitated by AI tools to develop their knowledge and hone these professional skills.

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APPENDIX

Questionnaire for EFL Secondary School Teachers

Dear participant,

This study is intended to collect data for research on Moroccan EFL secondary school in-service teachers' participation in online Continuous Professional Development (CPD) activities. Please note that your participation in this study is voluntary. Your responses will be kept anonymous and will not be used for any other purposes. Completing this questionnaire will not take more than 5 minutes. Your contribution is highly appreciated.

1. Background information

Q1: I am: (please Check X)

Male

Female

Q2: I teach in (please Check X)

Public Secondary school

Private Secondary school

Q3: My Teaching experience is (please Check X)

1-5

6-10

11-20

more than 20

Q4: I prefer to participate in: (please Check X)

Online EFL CPD activities

In person EFL CPD activities

2. Participation in online CPD activities

Q5: Do you participate in online CPD activities? (please Check X)

Yes

No

Q6: Please check (X) to express how often you participate in online CPD activities.

Never

Rarely

Sometimes

Usually

Always

Q7: Please check (X) the online platform(s) you use to participate in online CPD activities:

E-mail

Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs)

Telegram

YouTube

WhatsApp

Others:

The role of online CPD activities in enhancing teachers' teaching practices

Q8: Check (X) one box for each item to express the degree of your agreement or disagreement with the following:

Participation in the online CPD activities enables me to:	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Implement innovative teaching strategies					
Differentiate instructional to meet my students learning styles					
Integrate ICT tools into my classroom					
Provide constructive feedback to my students in the EFL classroom					
Engage in reflective practices to improve my teaching practices					
Balance workload and time effectively in the EFL classroom					

Q9: If you have any additional comment(s), please write it here:

Thank you for your time and participation!