

Factors Influencing Teachers' Engagement in Continuous Professional Development (CPD): A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

Teachers in modern education face significant work challenges and must commit to continuous learning. Disruptive technological advancements require teachers to be digitally nimble and adaptive to constant changes. Educational institutions and schools must provide teachers with relevant resources for continuing professional development (CPD). Numerous past studies have shown that CPD is related to improved teaching practices and student learning outcomes. However, the success of CPD programs lies in teachers' engagement in the process. This case study explores the types of CPD activities available and investigates the factors influencing a Malaysian teacher's engagement in CPD. Malaysian teachers can access various CPD activities, including workshops, seminars, reading, and informal conversations with colleagues. The study also found that contextual and personal factors contribute to teachers' decision to participate in CPD activities. Contextual factors include available CPD opportunities, administrative and collegial support, and barriers to participation. Personal factors include teachers' preferences in learning approaches and their interest in particular topics. The features of CPD activities will affect teachers' perceptions of CPD and influence their engagement levels. These findings suggest redesigning CPD activities that promote a favourable perception of CPD and encourage engagement.

Contribution/Originality: This study contributes to the literature on teacher CPD, focusing on teacher engagement in the process. Its findings shed light on teachers' views on CPD in Malaysian schools and the factors that influence engagement, and it offers a direction to redesign future CPD programs that foster engagement

1. Introduction

Teachers in the 21st century encounter more significant challenges in their work. Disruptive technology caused constant rapid changes in the market, which require schools and educators to adapt and respond accordingly. The environment placed a higher demand on teachers to prepare the knowledge workforce that the market demanded. Hence, teachers must commit to continuous learning and schools are

expected to provide teachers with continuing professional development (Abakah et al., 2023).

According to Abakah et al. (2023), teachers' continuing professional development (CPD) refers to a wide range of supporting learning activities to develop teachers' professional knowledge, abilities, and disposition, contributing to their teaching practices and student learning outcomes. While there are numerous CPD frameworks, such as lesson study, that help "study and research on teachers' teaching process in the classroom by concentrating on student learning" (Rashadi & Ahmad, 2019, p.276), the determining factor of the CPD program's success lies in teachers' engagement in the process. There are past studies related to teachers' CPD, such as Distance Education as teachers' CPD (see Abakah et al., 2023), teachers' beliefs on CPD improving students' learning (see Kotuláková, 2021), CPD in preparing Society 5.0 (see Yulianto, 2021), lesson study as CPD framework (see Fox & Poultney, 2020; Rashadi & Ahmad, 2019), CPD and teaching performance (see Abdullah et al., 2018), factors influencing teachers' participation (see Adu & Okeke, 2014; Njenga, 2022), teachers' involvement in CPD (see AlMutlaq et al., 2017), teachers' views on CPD (see Mansour et al., 2014), and teachers' engagement in CPD (see Ying, 2021; Ying, 2023). Ying's (2023) study provides a point of reference to the present study; her study was conducted in China, where the educational policies and CPD process differ from those in Malaysia. Hence, there is a need to investigate the factors influencing Malaysian teachers' engagement in CPD.

The research objectives of the present study are to:

- i. Identify the types of CPD activities available for Malaysian public school teachers.
- ii. Identify the factors that drive Malaysian teachers' engagement in CPD.

Hence, the research questions are developed accordingly:

- i. What are the types of CPD activities available for Malaysian public school teachers?
- ii. What factors influence Malaysian teachers' engagement in CPD activities?

2. Literature Review

2.1. CPD and Teaching Efficacy

Change is inevitable, especially in the 21st century, where disruptive technological development often invites change and reform in many sectors, including education. Teachers must change accordingly, particularly in innovative teaching practices (Ramanan & Mohamad, 2020). Hence, teachers' CPD offers an opportunity for teachers' readiness to change and enhance their teaching performance (Abdullah et al., 2018; Ramanan & Mohamad, 2020). Teachers' CPD refers to ongoing divergent activities for professional growth through increased experience and systematic examination of their teaching practices that develop skills, knowledge, and expertise that enhance teaching performance (Abakah et al., 2023; Jamil et al., 2011; Srinivasacharlu, 2019; Widayati et al., 2021). CPD activities could be formal (attending professional workshops, in-service training, and mentoring) or informal (reading professional publications and watching videos) activities that can develop the teachers' three main domains, including cognitive, affective and psychomotor for the enhancement of job performance (Jamil et al., 2011; Srinivasacharlu, 2019).

As outlined in the annual report of Malaysia Education Blueprint (2013-2025) by the [Ministry of Education Malaysia \(2015\)](#), the education system is expected to shift towards transforming teaching into the profession of choice, aiming at recruiting the top 30% of graduates in the country. One of the aims of the fourth educational shift stated that the ministry aspires to upgrade the quality of teachers' CPD through 1) supporting teachers in achieving their full potential, 2) developing individualised CPD programs through collaboration between teachers and supervisors, 3) providing CPD that combine compulsory and elective courses, and 4) leveraging collaborative learning through networking.

Studies have shown that teachers must commit themselves to continuous effort in professional development as the curriculum or teaching practices constantly change to meet societal needs (see [Abdullah et al., 2018](#); [Jamil et al., 2011](#); [Srinivasacharlu, 2019](#)). [Srinivasacharlu \(2019\)](#) enumerates the types of CPD activities for teachers to improve themselves in meeting society's needs, which include institutional-based or school-based learning, orientation programs and refresher courses, content courses, seminars and conferences, workshops, symposiums, brainstorming sessions, training programs, talks or demonstrations, examinations, formal education, funded projects, action research, evaluation work, publications, editorial work, faculty exchange visits and fellowships, membership in professional associations, and attending public lectures.

The complexity of the 21st century requires teachers to commit to continuous professional development to keep up with technological advancements and educational reform. However, various factors impede teachers' professional development, which requires the attention of policymakers, educators, and society.

2.2. Challenges and Issues in CPD

The challenges in teachers' CPD include learning time conflict with work schedules, lack of incentives, costly programs, lack of relevant professional development opportunities, time constraints due to family or personal commitments, lack of administrative support, failure to meet pre-requisite for CPD programs, lack of ICT facilities, lack of pre-requisite training, and old age ([Njenga, 2022](#)). [Tyagi and Misra \(2021\)](#) identified the challenges in Indian teachers' participation in CPD: 1) not given unpaid leave to practice CPD, 2) lack of suitable CPD opportunities, 3) time constraints due to heavy workload, 4) conflict between work schedule and CPD activities, 5) financial constraints to practice CPD, 6) teachers unwillingness to practice CPD outside working hours, 7) family commitment, 8) view CPD as irrelevant in career development, 9) status quo, 10) oblivious to the need for CPD.

Likewise, [Jamil et al. \(2011\)](#) listed the challenges the Ministry of Education (MOE) Malaysia faced in CPD. The first challenge is that the MOE must increase the number of teachers with appropriate degrees and, at the same time, supervise and monitor their performance. Secondly, the MOE must ensure that teachers constantly update their ICT skills and knowledge to integrate ICT into teaching and learning effectively. Time constraint is another challenge Malaysian teachers face in participating in CPD activities, which creates a massive barrier to implementing CPD effectively. In addition, the MOE must overcome several challenges to make teachers' CPD effective, including 1) hiring and retaining STEM subjects specialised teachers, 2) improving the quality of preschool teachers, 3) providing pre-service teachers training on numeracy and literacy programs, and 4) ensuring teachers' proficiency and mastery of the English language. Some

challenges [Jamil et al. \(2011\)](#) proposed a decade ago are still prevailing in today's Malaysia schools, such as the language proficiency among Malaysian teachers is still worrying as only 52% of English subject teachers had reached Level C1 in the Common European Framework of Reference for Language (CEFT) that indicate their proficiency in the language ([Rajaendram et al., 2024](#)).

The panacea to this problem is not CPD alone but teachers' engagement in the learning process. As [Ying \(2021\)](#) observed, "there is a reciprocal relationship between teachers' engagement in PD and teaching practice" ([Ying, 2021, p.55](#)). Thus, it is essential to understand better what drives teachers' engagement in the CPD process to ensure that CPD serves its purposes.

2.3. Factors Driving Teachers' Engagement in CPD

[Per et al. \(2018\)](#) posit that teachers, especially VET teachers, have dual identities: they must be knowledgeable in a subject and, at the same time, have occupational competence in teaching. Furthermore, [Jamil et al. \(2011\)](#) argue that teachers are both the subjects (the people who need to change) and objects (the change agents who initiate change) of change in educational transformation. Given the constant changes in the environment, teachers are expected to keep updated through CPD activities.

Past studies found that teachers' perceptions of CPD affect their participation in CPD activities. Teachers view CPD as teachers' performance assessment, personal development activities, career development activities, and personal beliefs ([Widayati et al., 2021](#)), and they should voice their perceptions about CPD and practices which reflect their professional needs and provide a roadmap for development ([Mansour et al., 2014](#)). Likewise, [Per et al. \(2018\)](#) found that CPD activities that could contribute to teachers' knowledge, teaching competence, and networks are perceived as critical factors in teachers' personal development. [Njenga \(2022\)](#) found that teachers' aims and desires affect their participation in teachers' CPD programs. [Njenga \(2022\)](#) asserts that teachers' CPD is a complex learning activity driven by multiple factors and, therefore, can be "reconceptualised as a context-bound and goal-oriented learning activity, characterised by multiple aims, diverse content and a broad range of learning methods" ([Njenga, 2022, p.7](#)).

Besides teachers' perceptions, [Ying \(2023\)](#) found four factors for teachers' professional development engagement, which are 1) cognitive factors, 2) instrumental factors, 3) self-actualising factors, and 4) CPD culture-related factors. [Ying \(2021\)](#) found a reciprocal relationship between teachers' engagement in CPD and their teaching practice, and the researcher proposed four types of teachers' engagement in the context of teachers' CPD, see [Table 1](#).

Table 1: Types of teachers' engagement in CPD

Teachers' Engagement in Professional Development	
Behavioural engagement	referring to teachers' involvement in CPD learning, including behaviours such as effort, persistence, concentration, attention and contributing to discussion.
Emotional engagement	referring to teachers' affective reactions in CPD, including interest, enthusiasm, enjoyment and belonging.
Cognitive engagement	referring to teachers' psychological investment in learning, including valuing, self-efficacy, self-regulation, and goal setting.

Social engagement	referring to teachers' moral value and social value, including the pursuit of professional identity and professional vision.
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Note. Reprinted from "Does teacher engagement matter? Exploring relationship between teachers' engagement in professional development and teaching practice" by Ying (2021).

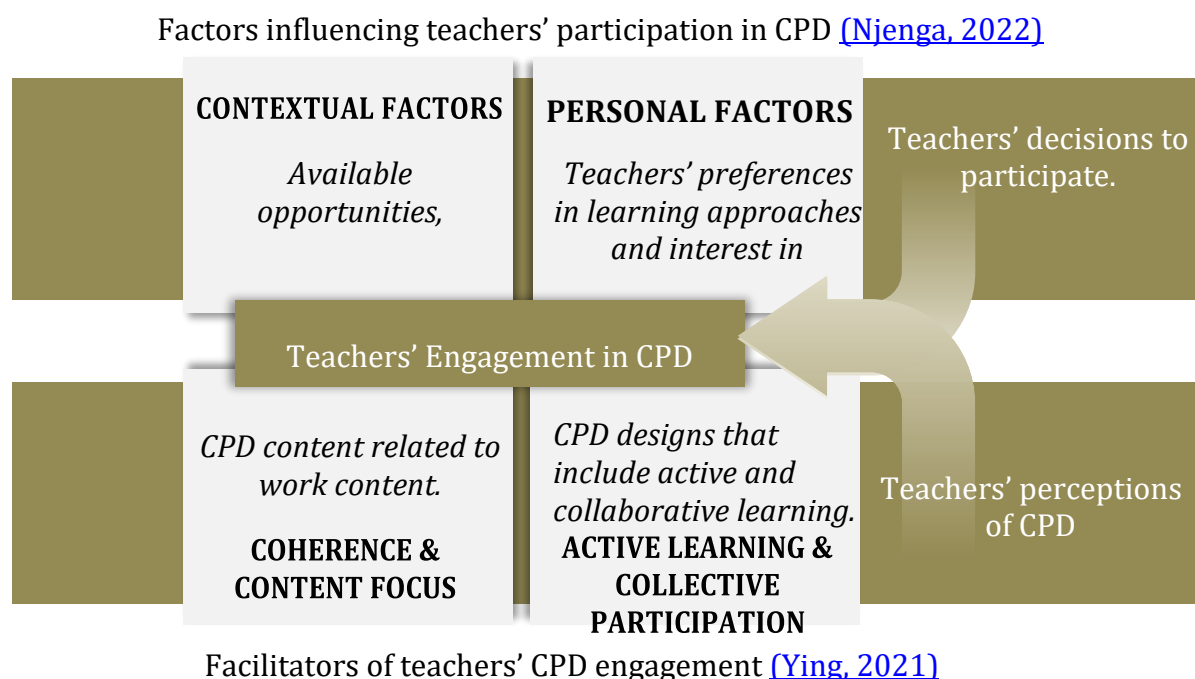
Hence, we must pay attention to teacher engagement in CPD while investing time and effort in preparing more CPD programs, as Ying (2021) asserts that teachers' engagement is a critical mediator of "effective teaching and effective learning" (Ying, 2021, p.46).

2.4. Conceptual Frameworks

Ying (2021) found that the prime contributors to teachers' engagement in CPD include 1) coherence, 2) content focus, 3) active learning, and 4) collective participation. Coherence and content focus described the strength of the connection between CPD content and teachers' teaching practices; active learning and collective participation refer to teachers' learning approaches (Ying, 2021). On the other hand, Njenga (2022) found that contextual and personal factors contribute to teachers' aims and desired outcomes of CPD. Contextual factors such as available CPD opportunities and learning methods, policies and professional guidelines, barriers to participation, organisational attributes, and institutional practices, and personal factors, such as teachers' identity as adult learners, rational actors, reflective practitioners, and individuals, impact teachers' aims and choices on their learning (Njenga, 2022).

For the present study, the researcher adopts Ying's (2021) model of teachers' engagement in CPD and Njenga's (2022) framework of teachers' perception of CPD. The conceptual framework is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Conceptual framework of the present study



The framework proposed that contextual and personal factors will influence the teacher's decision to participate in CPD. Contextual factors, such as available opportunities to attend CPD, administrative support, and barriers to participation; personal factors, such as teachers' preferences in learning approaches and interest in learning particular subjects, will contribute to teachers' decisions to participate in the CPD activities. In addition, the CPD activities' features include coherence and content focus to teachers' teaching practices, and the learning approaches suitable for the activities, such as through active learning and collective participation, will impact teachers' perceptions of the CPD activities. Both teachers' decision to participate and perceptions of CPD will affect their engagement in the CPD activities.

3. Methodology

The present study is qualitative and uses a case study approach. [Priya \(2021\)](#) asserts that case studies are one of the most extensive qualitative approaches to investigating a real-life phenomenon. The present study explores the factors influencing teachers' engagement in it. It is an explanatory case study that "answers the questions of 'how' and 'why' of the existence of a social reality" ([Priya, 2021, p.104](#)). The objectives of the present study are to identify the types of CPD available for public school teachers and the factors that influence their engagement in CPD. The present study is a single case study, which is common in case study research design with the conditions that the case under study is unique, the case used to test a hypothesis, and the case is a classic example of a particular phenomenon under investigation ([Priya, 2021](#)). In selecting a participant for the single case study, the researcher applied the purposive sampling technique to select an individual who could provide rich information related to the present study ([Creswell & Guetterman, 2019](#)). The participant is a science teacher who also holds the position of disciplinary teacher. The participant has 14 years of teaching experience and serves in a public secondary school in Penang, Malaysia.

The researcher collected the data using a semi-structured interview. The questions were formulated based on the research questions of the present study: 1) what are the types of CPD activities available for public school teachers? 2) What factors influence teachers' engagement in CPD activities? The researcher applied interview strategies suggested by [Smith and Osborn \(2017\)](#) that start with "the most general possible questions" ([Smith & Osborn, 2017, p. 62](#)) that might get the respondent to talk about the subject. However, the researcher will move to a more specific prompt if the respondent does not comprehend the question or replies with a short or tangential reply. The semi-structured questions are as follows:

- a) What are the CPD programs you have attended? Are they mandatory or self-initiated?
- b) Can you share the CPD programs you wish were offered? Why?
- c) On a scale of 1-5 (one is the lowest and five is the highest), rate your engagement and involvement in CPD programs. Please explain your rating.
- d) How has CPD affected your job as a teacher? Please provide examples.
- e) What are the most challenging parts of learning through CPD?
- f) In your view, what can the school principal and colleagues do to help you with the challenges?
- g) In your opinion, what are the characteristics of a successful CPD program?
- h) Are you willing to invest (in terms of money, time, and effort) in CPD programs? Please elaborate.

Data collected through the semi-structured interview is then analysed. [Creswell and Guetterman \(2019\)](#) suggest that data analysis involves first “developing a general sense of the data” and then “coding the description and themes” accordingly ([Creswell & Guetterman, 2019, p. 273](#)). [Creswell and Guetterman \(2019\)](#) suggest six steps in the coding process, which include reading the text data thoroughly and then dividing the text into different information segments where the researcher could label each segment with codes. Then, the researcher could reduce overlapped and repeated codes along the way. The final step involves collapsing codes into themes.

4. Findings and Discussions

4.1. Types of CPD Activities and Its Impacts on Teaching

The participant in this case study shared the types of CPD activities she had attended in her service, including the volleyball referee course and the Education Data Management program, which is closely related to her job. The participant also shared that she has attended In-service Training (LADAP, Latihan Dalam Perkhidmatan), which in-service teachers must attend at least seven days per year. The participant has attended a cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) course, stress management, examination management course, eyesight protection course, and emotions management course. The participant also categorises the types of CPD activities into online programs and offline, face-to-face programs, where she commented, *“I prefer face-to-face... physical... hands-on kind of learning”*. When asked what type of CPD activities or programs she wishes were offered, she mentioned that she prefers to attend CPD programs related to her role as a disciplinary teacher, especially in counselling, because she wants to learn to handle students effectively. The researcher asked in the prompt if most CPR activities are in the form of workshops or seminars, and the participant confirmed that she has joined workshops and seminars, both face-to-face and online.

The present study observed that teachers view CPD as a valuable tool for their job. When asked how CPD has affected her job, she mentioned that some courses are helpful, such as the emotions management course, where she learns to control her emotions effectively, because she believes it is relevant to her job as a teacher. She also shared an incident during an assembly where a student fainted and lost consciousness, and that is time she realised that it is essential for teachers to learn to handle emergencies; she believes that *“all teachers should go for training or courses like... CPR, or handling emergency.”* This is consistent with the findings of [Abdullah et al. \(2018\)](#) and [Ying \(2021\)](#) that teachers’ CPD is related to teaching practices and performance.

4.2. Teachers’ Engagement in CPD

When asked how she rates her engagement in CPD on a scale of one to five, with one being the lowest and five being the highest, she rates “3” on the scale and comments *“just moderately engaged.”* This can be due to several factors described in detail in the following sections

4.2.1. Factors Influencing Teacher’s Decision to Participate in CPD

The present study found that contextual factors, such as the availability of CPD opportunities, administrative and collegial supports, and barriers to participation,

influenced the teachers' participation in CPD activities. The participant in the present study mentioned that her principal would send her to CPD based on the needs of her job; for instance, she was instructed to attend a volleyball referee course to fulfil her role as the person in charge of the volleyball team of the school, and another program called Education Data Management System which she oversaw the system management. The availability of the CPD and her principal support has increased her participation in the CPD activities. In addition, she has mentioned that learning with colleagues helps her deal with work problems. According to the participant, the type of courses offered and the online learning mode are the barriers that reduced her interest in learning, influencing her participation in CPD.

In addition, personal factors, including her preferences in the type of activities and the mode of delivery, were also found to influence teachers' participation in CPD activities. The teacher in this case study emphasised her preference for face-to-face and hands-on learning over online and listening to lecture mode. Besides, she has mentioned that she prefers CPD activities that can help her in her job but not teaching practices because she believes that she could improve her teaching through activities like reading and having conversations with colleagues. In her view, she can find solutions to her work problems with collegial support because she believes that *"everyone is an expert in some area"*.

This is consistent with [Adu and Okeke's \(2014\)](#) findings that contextual factors, such as the availability of CPD programs relevant to their job and administrative support that produce structured and focused CPD activities, as well as personal factors, such as CPD programs that match teachers' self-identified needs and their preference for hands-on learning, contribute to a higher level of participation in CPD.

4.2.2. Facilitators of Teacher's Engagement in CPD

This study observed that teacher engagement in CPD is influenced by teachers' perceptions of the CPD activities, including the coherence and content focus of the activities and the learning approaches suitable for them, such as active learning and collective participation. In the interview, the participant claimed she is more inclined to engage in CPD activities relevant to her position as a disciplinary teacher, including counselling and emotions management courses that improve her classroom and student management skills. When asked if she is willing to invest in CPD, she claims that she would invest in courses that *"provide the opportunity for career development"* and emphasises that she wants CPD that is in coherence with her job as a disciplinary teacher. The finding is consistent with [Utami et al.'s \(2019\)](#) finding that teachers' professional enthusiasm is a decisive factor in their engagement in professional development.

Secondly, the study found that the approach to CPD activities, such as active learning and collective participation, affects how teachers view CPD and eventually affects their engagement. The participant mentioned that she enjoys the CPD programs like counselling and stress and emotions management courses but *"prefer it to be conducted face-to-face"*. In addition, she believes that her principal plays a role in her engagement in CPD, which includes providing her with more active learning activities or, as she puts it, *"more hands-on type of learning"*. Furthermore, she commented that *"learning with colleagues"* is essential in her CPD because collective participation is *"much better than just lecturing and listening"*, where teachers could exchange ideas and information. The participant also agreed that teachers' involvement characterises a successful CPD.

However, she believes active learning allows teachers to learn better than merely presenting the ideas during the CPD, as she commented: *"I don't like those programs... where the trainer gives us a mahjong paper, put us into group and ask us to present the idea. It sounds fun, but... it's useless."*

This finding is consistent with [Ying's \(2023\)](#) result, where collaborative activities, including informal teaching conversations, are related to a higher level of teacher engagement in CPD. Likewise, [Teslo et al. \(2023\)](#) found that active learning in CPD can support teacher learning in the longer term, improving their teaching performance. Furthermore, [Teslo et al. \(2023\)](#) assert that CPD activities should facilitate interactive processes that "gave rise to experiences, discussion, and critical reflection in a myriad of ways" ([Teslo et al., 2023, p.7](#)), suggesting that CPD activities that involve collective participation improve teachers' engagement.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

Teachers in the 21st century must cultivate a mindset that they "will never be done with their education" ([Penprase, 2018, p.224](#)), and CPD is one of the most effective ways to ensure teaching quality. However, CPD will be less effective without teacher engagement in the process. This study explores the types of CPD activities available for public school teachers in Malaysia, which include workshops, seminars, reading, and informal conversations with colleagues. Secondly, this study explores the factors influencing teacher engagement in CPD activities, and it found that contextual and personal factors contribute to teachers' decisions to participate in CPD activities. Contextual factors include available CPD opportunities, administrative and collegial support, barriers to participation, and personal factors, including teachers' preferences in learning approaches and interest in particular topics, which will form the basis for participation decisions. In addition, the features of CPD activities will affect teachers' perceptions of CPD, eventually influencing teachers' engagement levels. CPD activities that are coherent and relevant to teachers' career development are favourable, as well as CPD designs that include active learning and collective participation. This study observed that teachers tend to engage in CPD activities that are coherent and relevant to their careers, encourage active learning, and enable collective participation.

The findings suggest that we should reconsider the design of CPD activities that promote a favourable perception of CPD and encourage engagement. Educators should ditch the idea of "one-size-fits-all" and redesign CPD activities to align with the teachers' individual career development. In addition, educators should never dismiss the impact of various contextual and personal factors that affect teachers' decisions to participate in CPD. Teachers should be given adequate time and resources to access CPD opportunities with administrative support that diminishes barriers to participation, such as the allocation of time for attending CPD activities, forming task groups that allow the exchange of ideas and information about CPD, and empowering teachers to apply what they have learned in their teaching routines. As [Teslo et al. \(2023\)](#) suggest, CPD is a process of "becoming" rather than "being", and so CPD should be viewed as a continuum that requires teachers' active engagement.

6. Limitations

The study explored the factors influencing teacher engagement in CPD. However, it is not without limitations. This single-case study makes it impossible to generalise the

result to a larger population and draw a more comprehensive conclusion on the factors influencing teacher engagement in CPD. In addition, there is a possibility that social desirability bias is a limitation of this study. Social desirability bias is “the tendency to present oneself and one’s social context in a way that is perceived to be socially acceptable” (Bergen & Labonté, 2020, p.783). For further research, it would be relevant to carry out with a more diverse and inclusive sample, such as teachers with different levels of education, years of experience, and teaching different subjects.

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

Informed consent was secured for the participant before the interview protocols were sent out. The participant was reassured that her participation was entirely voluntary and that she could withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequence. The participant’s identities were kept confidential.

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Conflict of Interest

The author reported no conflicts of interest for this work.

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