

Exploring Continuous Teacher Development in Higher Education: Abroad Experiences, Peer Support, and Self-Directed Growth. The Case of EFL University Teachers in Departments of English in Algeria

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ABSTRACT:

The study aims to explore the teachers' continuous professional development (CPD) at the tertiary level through in-house learning, training abroad and autonomous learning. The study sample consists of 190 teachers from 37 universities in Algeria. A semi-structured questionnaire, administered online, was used to collect data which were analysed. The findings show that (CPD) is a key factor in promoting teachers' performance, innovating teaching practices along with developing self-satisfaction and work commitment. While in- house learning, international training and self- directed learning were all effective forms, most teachers favoured learning autonomously. Based on these findings, it is recommended that higher education institutions (1) promote autonomous learning through providing accessible digital resources to their staff, (2) strengthen in-house professional development via workshops, peer collaborations and communities of practice, and (3) expand international training opportunities. Finally, future research should explore the long-term impact of different CPD modes using qualitative and longitudinal approaches.

KEYWORDS: Continuous professional development, In-house learning, Training abroad, Autonomous learning, Tertiary level

استكشاف التطوير المستمر للمدرسين في التعليم العالي: الخبرات في الخارج، الدعم الزملائي، والنمو الذاتي. حالة مدرّسي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في أقسام اللغة الإنجليزية بالجامعات الجزائرية

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ملخص البحث

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى استكشاف التطوير المهني المستمر للأساتذة في التعليم العالي من خلال التعلّم المؤسسي الداخلي، والتدريب في الخارج، والتعلّم الذاتي. وتتكوّن عيّنة الدراسة من 190 أستاذًا من 37 جامعة جزائرية. ولجمع البيانات، استُخدمت استبانة شبه مُنظّمة وُزعت إلكترونيًا، ثم جرى تحليل البيانات المستخلصة منها. وتُظهر النتائج أن التطوير المهني المستمر يُعدّ عاملاً أساسيًا في تحسين أداء الأساتذة، وتطوير الممارسات التدريسية، وتعزيز الرضا الذاتي والالتزام المهني. وعلى الرغم من فعالية التعلّم المؤسسي الداخلي، والتدريب الدولي، والتعلّم الذاتي، فقد فضّل معظم الأساتذة التعلّم الذاتي. وبناءً على هذه النتائج، توصي الدراسة مؤسسات التعليم العالي بـ(1) تعزيز التعلّم الذاتي من خلال توفير موارد رقمية متاحة لأعضائها، و(2) دعم التطوير المهني الداخلي عبر تنظيم ورشات عمل، وتشجيع التعاون بين الزملاء، وإنشاء مجتمعات ممارسة، و(3) توسيع فرص التدريب في الخارج. وأخيرًا، توصي الدراسة بإجراء بحوث مستقبلية تستكشف الأثر طويل المدى لأنماط التطوير المهني المستمر المختلفة باستخدام مناهج نوعية وطولية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التطوير المهني المستمر، التعلّم المؤسسي الداخلي، التدريب في الخارج، التعلّم الذاتي، التعليم العالي.

1. INTRODUCTION

Whatever job one exercises, he is expected to possess the valuable qualifications to achieve career success. Continuing professional development (CPD) is the most suitable method to meet those standards. Higher education is no exception; it is, in fact, a field that requires ongoing progress. In Algeria, university teachers are aware that failing to update their professional learning will not only affect them negatively, but also harm the education sector as a whole. Specifically, foreign language teachers should keep in touch with the native environment where the language they teach is spoken. Additionally, professional development fosters educators' engagement with the latest researches in language acquisition; it also allows a better understanding of the cultural heritage along with adapting new digital tools and educational platforms.

In the current article, the concept of continuing professional development combines both on-the-job training and continuous professional learning through the diverse resources accessible today. Though professional learning tends to be more personal and self-directed, the objective of professional development within workplace and personal learning for professional growth remain congruent and complementary.

This paper emphasises the significance of professional development exploring three potential methods university teachers in Algeria use to develop their professional learning and teaching skills. Hence, peer collaboration, overseas training, and independent learning are the valuable approaches to the present study. Accordingly, the research aims to investigate the present views and attitudes of university teachers of English regarding lifelong professional growth; it also seeks to evaluate the three key foundations for effective teaching career progression, namely overseas training, collaborative learning among peers, and self-guided learning. In this regard, the research focuses on answering the following questions:

- 1- In what ways does international training expand teachers' career growth?
- 2- How significant is collaborative working in improving teamwork effectiveness in the educational context?
- 3- To what extent does self-directed learning support teachers' lifelong learning?
- 4- Which professional development opportunities do teachers consider most impactful?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Continuing Professional Development Concept

Continuing professional development (CPD) refers to the process employees maintain to improve their knowledge, skills and capabilities throughout their whole career. Continuing professional development is not restricted to any profession; it is applicable to workers in all sectors. Accordingly, CPD is an ongoing learning that helps professionals to be more skilful, more knowledgeable and more competent so that they perfectly perform their duties according to the positions they occupy. Lorrimer's definition covers the different dimensions of the term providing a holistic understanding of the general meaning. He maintains that "the systematic maintenance, improvement and broadening of knowledge and skill, and the development of personal qualities necessary for the execution of professional and technical duties throughout the practitioner's working life" (Lorrimer 1997, p. 3).

In fact, the ultimate goal of continuous professional development is to involve recent knowledge and personal attributes to adapt to new situations updated with advancements according to professional responsibilities.

2.2 CPD for Teachers

Expanding knowledge and fostering personal skills in teaching is not new in the educational field; teachers have always sought better methods and strategies tailored to different classroom settings. Besides, they not only needed to provide their students with updated educational content but they have also changed their behaviour, techniques and methods hoping their courses would be more affective. Still, the impact of the changing economic and social context has brought new dimensions to the teaching/learning process.

These new aspects mostly include the integration of technology with the availability of online platforms and educational applications that have transformed the traditional classroom into hybrid or virtual space. Consequently, to access to worldwide resources and collaborate with international peers, educators focus on digital literacy focussing on information and skills to address the global challenges in education.

CPD in teaching includes a set of activities, training programs, and approaches that promote teachers' professional skills and knowledge during their careers. According to Allen (2009), CPD implies "the process of tracking and documenting the skills, knowledge, and experience that teachers gain both formally and informally as they work, beyond any initial training. It is a record of what they experience, learn, and then apply". Indeed, professional development is an ongoing journey, investigating integrated strategies and techniques to suit specific goals and aspirations.

Clearly, teaching English in Algeria is increasingly gaining significant importance, yet Algerian teachers of the target may lack qualifications and skills, which can only be gained through active engagement in formal and informal learning experiences.

2.2.1 Abroad training

To ensure impactful teaching, teachers require pedagogical training that align with societal changes and rapid technological progress. In this context, the Algerian Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research provides opportunities to help university teachers enhance their teaching expertise overseas as declared as follows: Vu le décret n° 74-200 du 1^{er} Octobre 1974 portant création du diplôme de doctorat en sciences médicales, - Vu le décret présidentiel n° 14-1 54 du 05 Rajab 1435 correspondant au 05 Mai 20 14 portant nomination des membres du Gouvernement. - Vu le décret présidentiel n° 14-1 % du 08 Ramadhan 1435 correspondant au 06 Juillet 2014 portant organisation et gestion de la formation et du perfectionnement à l'étranger.

In a non-native English environment, engaged learning is confirmed through professional development overseas. Additionally, educators; teachers and stakeholders are fully aware of the nature of language that never ceases to develop and change; teacher trainers should explore the native environment where the language has evolved shaping human thought and expression. Richards and Farewell (2005) highlight the necessity for teachers to foster their roles and responsibilities through time to keep pace with the dynamic feature of language which enable them to be effective instructors.

2.2.2 In-house Continuing Professional Development

In-house CPD occurs at workplace; any employee gains insights and expertise that are relevant and suitable to their jobs. Teaching is subject to the same challenges; it is actually in the classroom that it is easier for the instructor to ameliorate his pedagogical strategies as well as the subject matter without the constraints of time. The educational setting, namely the classroom is the ideal space for teachers to pursue continuous professional growth throughout their careers. Moreover, on- the -job training, as it is called in the human resource field, remains outstanding and significant since it strengthens peer collaboration. More skilful teachers offer guidance to novice ones; thus, the members of the team exchange ideas and share different procedures and knowledge. As DuFour (2000) states, providing teachers with time to collaborate in teams and engage in

collective inquiry is the most crucial resource schools can offer for high-quality staff development. In addition to school climate factors, facilitating collaboration and involving teachers in decision-making significantly influence the ability to attract qualified and skilled educators.

Peer collaboration is often associated with attending courses, conferences, workshops and seminars. Professional opportunities such working in workshops, laying out and organising lesson plans with peers and participating in seminars not only provide knowledge about the subject matter and new methodology but they also strengthen the educators' relationships, which create job satisfaction.

2.2.3 Autonomous Learning for Teachers' Professional Growth

As previously highlighted, CPD is gained not only through workplace learning or overseas training; self-directed-learning is a key component to achieve this goal. EFL teachers in Algerian universities are completely conscious that to have language competencies can never be achieved by participating in scientific events or visiting other countries for short-term trainings. In reality, such opportunities are not often available to educators who must continuously involve in language learning to ensure a non-stop professional growth.

Holec (2001) one of the proponents of autonomy in language teaching defined autonomy as "the ability to take charge of one's own learning" (p. 48). Teachers are in a constant need to improve their professional knowledge and expertise to keep motivated and take the initiative shaping in structural content using different teaching techniques as noted by (Bustingorry, 2008; Steh & Pozarnik, 2005).

The obsolete teacher must evolve so that he persists in the dynamic classroom; keeping pace with educational advancement is not possible without daily efforts. The obsolete teacher must evolve so that he persists in the dynamic classroom; keeping pace with educational advancement is not possible without daily efforts. International trainings and in-house peer exchange of knowledge stimulate innovation, creativity and fresh information; however, it is only the teacher personal curiosity and dedication to engage in lifelong learning which ensure his success as an educator. Teachers' continuous professional development implies an ongoing process of self-exploration rather than occasional events. Training opportunities are seldom provided and scientific events are not taking place every day at the working environment.

Furthermore, teachers' preoccupations about their teaching inadequacies and educational gaps are not often considered since they are not directly involved in training programmes; consequently, self-directed learning is the best clue to consider their proper pedagogical needs and teaching content. Their role as being merely receivers of knowledge shift to be active decision-makers to shape their own professional progress. It has been noted that educators lack contribution in the teaching/learning process as decision-makers; accordingly, their requirements remain ignored (Louws et. al 2017). Identifying their own weaknesses, educators easily select tasks and activities which match their specific goals.

3. Methodology

This article intends to uncover the impact of training abroad, peer collaboration along with autonomous learning on teachers' continuous professional progress. Additionally, there is a focus on examining teachers' preferences regarding the professional development strategy they consider most beneficial.

This qualitative study using a semi-structured questionnaire aimed to report the multiple attitudes, views, and arguments of the informants based on their individual daily experiences, collective insights, shared tacit knowledge, and their personal needs and concerns. The study was conducted across thirty-seven (37) universities across Algeria (Table 1). The research method used included a semi-structured questionnaire, which was mailed to a sample of one hundred and ninety

(190) university teachers in Algerian departments of English in the four regions of the country: North, South, East, and West. The sample included University teachers of English with varied years of experience, different academic specialities regardless of gender, and a variety of teaching experiences, both novice and senior skilled educators, enriched the study with a set of multifaceted information.

Table 1. Respondents' Affiliations

Respondents' affiliations		
ENS Laghouat	University of Jijel	University of Oum el Bouaghi
University Centre of Aflou	University of Khenchela	University of Relizane
University Centre of Barika	University of Laghouat	University of Saida
University of Adrar	University of Mascara	University of Setif 2
University of Algiers 2	University of Médéa	University of Sidi Bel Abbes
University of Annaba	University of Mostaganem	University of Skikda
University of Batna 2	University of Oran	University of Souk Ahras
University of Bechar	University of Ouargla	University of Temouchent
University of Bejaia	University of Guelma	University of Tiaret
University of Biskra	University of El Bayadh	University of Tlemcen
University of Blida	University of El Oued	University of Djelfa
University of Bouira	University of Constantine	University of Chlef
University of Boumerdès	University of Annaba	University of Bouira

Moreover, the respondents specialised in different academic discipline taught at the Departments of English since the goal of the research was collecting data to examine how professional development models shape teachers' progress irrespective of the modules they taught.

The rationale behind the study was clearly communicated to the participants and their decision to engage in the process was taken as an indication of consent. Additionally, the researcher ensured respondents' anonymity not requesting names or any other personal information.

A semi-structured questionnaire was adopted to collect both qualitative and qualitative data; the open-ended questions it included allowed the respondents to elaborate in order to explain their views, thoughts and experiences. In fact, the study main aim was to highlight the outstanding concerns and beliefs which may not have been indicated while employing a structured format. (Appendix, p)

Continuous professional development shaped the formulation of the questionnaire presenting three fundamental patterns peer collaboration, international training and self-guided learning. Accordingly, aside from the initial part dealing with some basic information about academic background, teaching experience and workplace district, the second remaining one is devoted to the different directions of the university teacher professional growth.

As an initial step, the section examined university teachers' continuous professional development through abroad training. The purpose was investigating the reasons that led educators to pursue abroad training, the specific opportunities they engaged in such as attending conferences or joining research projects. Further questions were asked to evaluate the relevance and the

effectiveness of the training programme and whether the acquired knowledge and the quality of instruction aligned with their expectations. To gain insight into how international training influenced professional development, an open-ended question inviting the participants to reflect on whether training abroad contributed to their career progress.

The second core component of teachers' professional development is peer collaboration; the informants were invited to indicate whether they contributed in exchanging teaching strategies with their peers. A list of activities like workshops, coaching, participating in seminars, etc. was provided to emphasise their adoption of team work.

Furthermore, a set of collaborative opportunities among them collective review of course programs, study days and conferences attendance or presentation and others were presented to identify the respondents' preferences. Indeed, eliciting teachers' responses and different views was needed to provide qualitative insights.

This final part of the questionnaire also included autonomous learning; it was designed to evaluate the frequency, strategies and the benefits of independent learning. Illustrations concerning the most valuable type of professional growth among educators would provide rich data to the study.

3. Data Analysis and Interpretation

The choice of a semi-structured questionnaire was used to complement each set of close-ended questions with an open-ended question to enable teachers' reflections which are crucial for the study. Indeed, the mixed-methods study allowed mixing both numerical data and open-ended responses to deeply explore the issue. To maintain clarity and organization, the basic answers were presented in tables, then analyzed and discussed.

3.3.1 Close-ended questions

Question1: Abroad training

- How satisfied were you with the professional development opportunities provided by the universities abroad?

Table 2. Teacher Views on CPD abroad

Satisfaction factor	Number of teachers	Percentage (%)
research-based programs relevant and applicable to teaching practice	98	51.6%
Up-to-date programs relevant to current educational needs	52	27.4%
Effectiveness of instructors leading to engagement and satisfaction	40	21.1%
Total	190	100%

The majority of teachers (51.6%) showed the greatest satisfaction with tailored, research-based programs, indicating the importance of practical and context-relevant content while 27.4% appreciated programs aligned with current educational needs. 21.1% only valued the role of instructor effectiveness in fostering engagement and satisfaction.

Question2: Did training abroad meet your expectations?

Table 3. Teachers' feedback on the impact of training abroad

Statement	Number of teachers	Percentage (%)
Training has improved your teaching practice	84	44%
Sharing current knowledge with peers	31	16.21%
Incorporating new techniques in the university course syllabus	75	39.32%
Total Number of Teachers	190	100%

84% of the total number (190) responded that overseas training fostered their teaching practice; thirty-one teachers representing 16.21% claimed that they seized opportunity to share the knowledge gained with their peers. Seventy-five (75) informants 39.32% declared that they implemented some new techniques in the course syllabus.

Question 3: In your opinion, which collaborative opportunity is the most valuable?

Table 4. Teachers' Opinions on the Most Valuable Collaborative Opportunities

Collaborative Opportunity	Number of Teachers	Percentage (%)
Study days and conferences attendance or presentation	91	47.89%
Coordination meetings of teachers of the same module	41	21.58%
Collective review of course programs	29	15.26%
Collaboration with colleagues to perform exam papers	19	10.00%
Model lessons delivery	10	5.26%
total	190	100%

The majority of respondents 47.89% showed a preference to study days and conferences attendance or presentation followed by 21.58% representing teachers who saw that coordination meetings of teachers of the same module were more advantageous. Collective curricular review was prioritised by 15.26% while collaboration with colleagues to perform exam papers and model lessons delivery combined together constitute 15.26% only.

How frequently do you engage in self-directed learning and professional growth?

Table 5. Frequency of Engagement in Self-Directed Learning and Professional Growth

Frequency	Number of teachers	Percentage %
Always	180	94.74%
Often	20	5.26%
Sometimes	00	0.00%
Never	00	0.00%
Total	190	100%

Table 5 indicated a remarkable number of teachers (94.74) who said they always engaged in self-directed learning and professional growth; the remaining 5.26% acknowledged that they often did so. Categorically, none of the participants selected sometimes or never as their responses.

Autonomous learning offers numerous benefits in personal progress. Do you feel that you have developed any of the following autonomy skills?

Table 6. Teachers' Perceptions of Autonomy Skills Developed Through Autonomous Learning

Autonomy Development	Skill	Number of Teachers	Percentage (%)
Development of lifelong learning skills		53	27.89%
Adaptation to technological changes		51	26.84%
Enhanced problem-solving skills		49	25.79%
Job satisfaction		21	11.05%
Flexibility and adaptability		11	5.79%
Enhancing creativity and innovation		5	2.63%
Total		190	100%

Development of lifelong learning skills, adaptation to technological changes, enhanced and problem-solving skills ranked at the top as the most developed skills through autonomous learning. 27.89%; 26.84% 25.79% are respective percentages for each skill. Job satisfaction was related to autonomous learning by a minority of informants demonstrated by a percentage of (11.05%). Flexibility and adaptability together with enhancing creativity and innovation presented by 5.79% for the former and 2.63% for the latter were given the least emphasis.

3.3.2 Open-ended Questions

Respondents' feedbacks to the close-ended questions were tabulated and analysed accordingly; furthermore, the open-ended responses added more support and completeness to the study.

Importantly, the findings of the open-ended questions were discussed based on the following headings that align with the key objectives of the study.

- Career growth through abroad training experiences

- Teachers' justifications of collaborative opportunities preferences.
- Teachers' selection criteria for a specific professional development opportunity:
- Peer learning
- abroad learning
- autonomous learning.

3.3.2.1 Abroad Training

- Question 5: In What Ways has international training expanded your career growth?

Table 7. Teachers' Career Growth through Abroad Training Experiences

Response	Number Teachers	of Percentage (%)
Improving knowledge and gaining experience	165	86.84%
Cross-cultural communication	25	13.16%
Total	190	100%

The respondents' feedbacks to this question were generally common the majority (86.84%) emphasised "improving knowledge and gaining experience through getting in touch with other educators". Some responses (13.16) highlighted the cultural dimension: "It improved cross cultural communication".

3.3.2.2 Peer collaboration

- Question 3: In your opinion, which collaborative opportunity is the most valuable?
Could you please justify your preferences?

Table 8. Teachers' justifications of collaborative opportunities preferences

Response	Number Teachers	of Percentage (%)
Study days and conferences	65	34%
Meetings with colleagues	49	26%
Peer observation	40	21%
International training and exchanges	36	19%
Total	190	100%

Study days and conferences ranked as the top collaborative learning activities as indicated by (34%) of the total number of respondents. Meetings with colleagues were the second choice represented by (26%) while (21%) of teachers opted for peer observation. International training and exchanges received the least selection with (19%) of responses.

3.3.2.3 Autonomous learning

- Question 6: Which types of professional growth opportunities do you find most valuable?
Could you share the factors you took into account to make your selection, please?
- International training experiences
- Peer collaboration at workplace
- Self-directed learning

Table 9. Teachers' Selection Criteria for a Specific Professional Development Opportunity

Professional Growth Opportunity	Number of Teachers	Percentage (%)	Common Justification Factors
Self-directed learning	156	82.11%	- independence and responsibility in learning - suitable for individual objectives - Continuous, lifelong learning - self-evaluation
Peer collaboration at workplace	20	10.53%	- sharing of ideas - Reinforced professional relationships
International training experiences	14	7.37%	- Exposure to diverse systems - Cross-cultural understanding - Innovative teaching methods
Total	190	100%	

A significant number of informants (82.11%) selected self-directed learning for different reasons; less interest was given to peer collaboration represented by (10.53%) of teachers. International training experiences was the least favoured chosen by (7.37%) of teachers.

3.4 Discussion of the Findings

The research aimed to examine how international training contributed to the development of teachers' careers. It also aimed to determine the significance of collaborative work within the educational setting. A third focus was on investigating autonomous learning and its contribution in promoting lifelong learning. Naturally, these varied learning experiences led to an exploration of which type of professional development - international training, workplace peer collaboration, or self-directed learning- was regarded as the most impactful.

The findings revealed that teachers who had the chance to experience abroad learning focussed academic enrichment while selecting programs which matched their classroom requirements. In fact, knowledge growth is the main factor to professional development compared to cross-cultural competence which still remains implicitly embedded within the international training considered as

a supplementary goal.

As shown in Table 3, the informants' feedbacks showed the international CPD had a positive influence on their teaching methodologies; they regularly benefited from innovative practices and strategies. The different responses are not distinct one of the respondent said: "International training exposed me to implement innovative practices in my classroom". Another stated: "I had relationships with international educators, which encouraged me to work collaboratively using digital tools" while another mentioned: "Training abroad helped to rethink my own teaching and used a student-centered method.

Concerning collaborative learning and collective work, tables 3 and 7 exposed a large participation in conferences and study days; the common feedback describing these educational meetings as cited by respondents: "The best opportunities for teachers to meet other academics and share experiences". Similar responses like: "Working with peers is the best way to share educational goals and teaching techniques"; "Engaging in collective work either on the national or international level exposes the educator to innovation and improvement"; "Team work allowed me to gain professional confidence leading to better classroom management". Being a presenter or an attendee, the informant exchanges ideas, takes profits from valuable academic, debates which promote his professional development. Self-directed learning gained the interest of the great majority of the respondents; the personal initiative to learn alone offered flexibility and convenience, the learner selected his own resources at his own pace and at convenient times. Many responses shared similar feedbacks as their peer who declared: "Autonomous professional development could potentially solve problems of motivation for teachers because a teacher who takes initiative in developing himself/herself is someone by default motivated". Similarly, another informant put it as follows: "I believe in this age digital media are optimal for me due to their ease of access and variety."

The findings demonstrate that teachers relate autonomy with lifelong learning, technology adaptation and problem solving skills. Indeed, learning on one's own is the best opportunity to master skills through consistent practice.

There is a flagrant dominance on self-directed learning over the other ways of continuous professional development as different responses indicated it; one respondent declared: "While all the opportunities mentioned above are valuable, I believe that self-directed learning is what makes the difference because it is the long-lasting one". Another teacher said: "I believe that all three options above are good. But if it wasn't for self-directed learning, we wouldn't have conferences in the first place". This preference is bound to the capacity and the opportunity to tailor learning to individual goals ensuring the required professional growth.

Obviously, the position autonomous learning occupies is due to its permanent availability and everlasting practice leading to efficient professional progress. Collaborative and international experiences though appreciated remain externally planned learning programs. Therefore, teachers' participation is often limited.

3.4.1 Interpretation of the findings

Through examining the data, I observed that EFL teachers at the tertiary level in Algeria do not primarily rely on overseas training to improve their CPD. Although the participants showed interest in exploring foreign universities, they still believed that such opportunities had limited practical impact on their professional progress.

One reason is that university teachers do not frequently have the chance to attend international training programs. Additionally, teachers only submit reports concerning the training sessions they attended to the administration; however, they do not share the knowledge acquired with their colleagues. The other outstanding reason is related with paperwork issues, administrative procedures and travel funding prevent university educators from participating in international training on a

regular basis.

No one denies that teachers should be equipped with knowledge such as theories, methods; etc. to enrich their subject matter; however, the know what alone cannot contribute in CPD. In fact, content knowledge must be integrated into the daily practice to actively enhance continuous professional growth. Accordingly, international training remains limited because educators lack time and support to interact with peers and together develop their skills, change their attitudes and contextually adapt the information obtained. The results explained the first research which explored the way overseas training could contribute to teachers' career development.

Research question two invited teachers to determine the significance of collaborative working in improving teamwork effectiveness within the educational setting. Indeed, the participants' responses proved a commitment to cooperative work; collaboration promotes professional learning, boosts motivation and self-confidence. Learning from peers was recognised as a significant component of professional development since sharing the same challenges, collectively reflecting on them and finding suitable solutions and suggestions fosters mutual growth. Nevertheless, collaborative activities lack diversity, educators often attended conferences, study days or workshops. Other scientific events such as peer observation, coaching, routable debates are rarely observed.

The teachers shared the same vision as far as self-directed learning is concerned; all of them confirmed they were consistently involved in their ongoing professional growth. This implies that personal learning is the core factor to build professional skills and abilities and undertake continuous professional development. Due to its flexibility, autonomous learners progress at their own pace ensuring an effective ongoing process.

There is no doubt that independent learning is widely appreciated because it is always accessible in real-life settings or through digital platforms enabling learners to take benefit from it whenever the conditions are suitable.

3.4.2 Limitations and Recommendations

Despite the insightful findings, the study is subject to some constraints. A notable limitation had to do with a low response to the mailed questionnaire; the researcher sent email-reminders to obtain a sufficient number of completed questionnaires. Consequently, the required population sample took a long time waiting for late responses.

The study paves the way to deeper future research about university teachers' training abroad; namely the development of intercultural awareness. A balance between content knowledge and intercultural competence should be emphasised in the EFL classroom. Algerian higher education, the implementation of cultural content in all modules in EFL programs is still restricted. Exposure to overseas training is the best opportunity to nurture cultural growth.

In Algerian higher education, the implementation of cultural content in EFL programs is still restricted. Exposure to overseas training is the best opportunity to nurture cultural growth. Unfortunately, EFL teachers in Algeria cannot afford visits abroad or participation in international training because they are financially demanding. Without institutional assistance, which is not regularly offered, educators lack cultural growth, an integral component of continuous professional development.

Future researchers should investigate the conditions that could enhance the accessibility of abroad training. Respondents acknowledged the values of international learning, but the access to participate in such programs is not yet a reliable way for continuous professional growth.

Moreover, more studies should be devoted to explore the positive effect of peer collaboration on educators' professional growth. In-house training and peer learning is limited to recurring scientific

events; instead, educators need to plan programs dealing recognising gaps to foster the students' educational level, analysing curricula and collectively planning lessons and courses. Teachers' scientific meetings should go beyond presentations in conferences, workshops or seminars to include peer classroom observations and reflective debates which align with their teaching contexts.

4. CONCLUSION

The results of the study highlighted that the Algerian EFL university teachers expressed a keen desire to engage in abroad training while they often complained of barriers like

administrative and financial pressures. Additionally, the lack in exchanging knowledge prevented its collective academic contribution. Alternatively, educators perceived peer collaboration and autonomous learning as more practical and productive. They declared that both strategies served as long- lasting methods for a successful continuous professional advancement.

Independent learning remained; however, the most adaptable process, which provided the instructor with a variety of sources to keep informed and updated.

It was; therefore, evident that the Algerian university instructor is experiencing different procedures to develop his professional capacities since he deeply believes that CPD reinforces the conviction that teaching is a limitless lifelong journey.

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Appendix A

Dear teachers,

You are invited to take part in a research study as EFL Algerian teachers in higher education. The article entitled: Investigating Teacher Development in Algerian Higher Education: Abroad Experiences, Peer Support, and Self-Directed Growth. The purpose of this study is to explore professional development practices in Algerian universities. The article highlights three emerging trends that seek to enrich teachers' learning experiences and enhance their practices through continuous professional development; namely, collaboration with peers at work place, overseas training and autonomous learning.

Your participation is strictly helpful, your thoughts, insights and responses serve as the cornerstone of my study.

Please note that your responses will be used for research purposes only and will be strictly confidential.

Please read the following semi-structured questionnaire; tick the appropriate box and give your views when necessary.

Section one

1- Demographic Information:

a- Academic Qualifications/ titles

- Assistant Professor (Maître-assistant)
- Lecturer (Maître de conférence)
- Professor

b- Years of teaching experience

- From 1 to 6 years
- From 6 to 10
- From 10 years onwards

c- Workplace district

- Wilaya :

Section two

2- Professional development

a-Abroad Training

5- What motivated you to apply for training abroad?

- The objectives of the training program
- The content of the training sessions
- New knowledge, skills, or perspectives of the training

6- What specific training or professional development opportunity did you participate in abroad?

- Attending international conferences

- Presenting at an international conference
- Joining research projects with international institutions.
- Being granted a short-term course
- Being granted a long-term course

7- How satisfied were you with the professional development opportunities provided by the universities abroad?

- Tailored research based programs relevant and applicable to your teaching practice.
- Effectiveness of the instructors leading to engagement and satisfaction.
- Up- dated programs relevant to current educational needs.

8- Did training abroad meet your expectations?

- Training has improved your teaching practice.
- Sharing current knowledge with peers.
- Incorporating new techniques in the university course syllabus.

9- In What Ways has international training expanded your career growth?

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10- What challenges did you encounter during training program abroad?

- Language Barriers.
- Cultural Differences
- Technological Challenges
- Funding and financial constraints
- Support and guidance

Please, mention possible other obstacles

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b-Peer collaboration

1-Have you collaborated with colleagues or exchanged best practices with them during your professional development?

- Yes
- No

2-What types of professional development activities did you take part in?

- Workshops
- Mentoring/Coaching

- Peer observation
- Qualification Programs
- Conferences or seminars

3- In your opinion, which collaborative opportunity is the most valuable?

- Coordination meetings of teachers of the same module.
- Collaboration with colleagues to perform exam papers.
- Collective review of course programs
- Study days and conferences attendance or presentation.
- Model lessons delivery

Could you please justify your preferences?

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c-Autonomous learning

1- How frequently do you engage in self-directed learning and professional growth?

- Always
- Often
- Sometimes
- Never

2- What strategies do you rely on for independent learning and career development?

- Academic Research, publications and scholarly articles
- Media Networks

3- What format do you believe is more beneficial for enhancing your personal skill?

- Digital media
- Printed materials
- Both

Could you please, justify your choice?

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4- Autonomous learning offers numerous benefits in personal progress. Do you feel that you have developed any of the following autonomy skills?

- Flexibility and adaptability
- Enhanced problem-solving Skills
- Development of lifelong learning skills
- Adaptation to technological changes
- job satisfaction
- Enhancing creativity and innovation

5- What advantages do your autonomous working practices bring to your teaching effectiveness?

- Innovative approaches or techniques
- Motivation and enthusiasm
- Classroom management
- Integration of technology

Could you illustrate your response, please?

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6- Which types of professional growth opportunities do you find most valuable?

- International training experiences
- Peer collaboration at workplace
- Self-directed learning

Could you share the factors you took into account to make your selection, please?

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Thank you for your collaboration