

RESEARCH ARTICLE



ASSESSING THE EFFICACY OF CPD TOOLS AND ACTIVITIES

(The Case of Eastern Zone of Afghanistan)

Zamark Shinwari^{1*}, Sanjay Kumar Jha²

^{1*}(Amity School of Liberal Arts, Amity University Haryana, India.)

²(Amity School of Liberal Arts, Amity University Haryana, India.)

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ABSTRACT



This study is a pioneering attempt to assess not only the effect of employing Continuous Professional Development (CPD) tools on the in-service EFL teachers of Afghanistan but also to see whether or not the teachers' acquired knowledge gained through CPD tools have positive effects on their students in terms of desirable learning outcome. To meet the stated objective, the study delves into experimenting how a set of formal and informal CPD tools may enable in-service teachers to hone their abilities and the abilities of their students in turn. As for the methods of data collection, the study used questionnaire to gather primary data from the ELT practitioners in the universities located in the Eastern Afghanistan, especially from the *Nanagerhar, Laghman, Kunar* University campuses, whereas the secondary data were collected through document analysis from different sources- especially library resources and research papers in the related field. As for the methods of data analysis, the study used descriptive statistics and analytical induction to analyse the collected data. The findings of the study are quite overwhelming on the front of using and acquiring CPD tools and functional competence respectively. This study also forwards some remedial measures to overcome the pedagogical lacunae found in the in-service EFL teachers to enhance learnability of EFL students.

Keywords: CPD, ELT Practitioners

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1. INTRODUCTION

From syllabus designers, textbook writers, teachers, evaluators to educational administrators, effective teaching is a life-long learning process for all the stakeholders involved in the processes of teaching-learning. Each educational system of study rapidly brings changes in terms of pedagogy, methods, curriculum, learning strategies, practice-issues, educational system, and a host of other areas to which competent teachers must adapt and renew their competence in the related field of study. This determines a teacher's willingness to develop and enhance the professional quality of teaching as well. Motivation for learning and reflective practice are the processes by which all professionals develop their expertise and move from being novice to expert teachers (James H. Strong, Pamela D. Tucker, 2004). Towards the end of the 20th century, CPD in ELT was generally conducted mostly by teachers working on reading methodology, books or magazines; attending conferences, talks and workshops – by engaging in communicating best practices developed 'in-house' by means of writing articles or presenting at conferences (Richardson & Díaz-Maggioli, 2018)

In the field of ELT, many teacher-centred activities cannot be considered CPD activities. Although, activities like organizing instruction, implementing instruction, classroom-management, preparing materials for the classroom, action plan are important in their own rights; however, this study focuses more on impactful CPD tools and activities like participation in conferences, workshops, seminars as delegates, speakers, panel members, or participants, action research, monitoring, collaborating learning, networking, portfolio, reflection on social media like Instagram live, Facebook, and WhatsApp, to hone the abilities of the ELT practitioners and improve the outcomes of the learners in the context of ELT in the Eastern zone of Afghanistan.

1.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The importance of continuing professional development (CPD) became more important and essential for both learners and teachers and is considered as an important skill of the 21st century as it contributes to the improvement of teaching and

learning process as well as provides superb opportunity for students to hone their outcomes and get their ultimate goals of learning. However, academic institutions in Afghanistan do not give due attention to CPD activities. As a result, a huge gap is surfacing in the ELT community of Afghanistan between what a teacher should teach and what a learner is supposed to learn in line with international best practices.

1.1 OBJECTIVES

The general objective of this research is to explore the perception and contextual importance of different CPD activities among ELT practitioners in the Eastern region of Afghanistan. As for specific objectives, they are as follows.

1. To understand the notion of CPD and its relevance to ELT
2. To elicit the perception of Afghan ELT practitioners towards different CPD activities
3. To identify the gaps between CPD activities practiced in Afghan scenario and global scenario.
4. To recommend remedial measures to overcome the lacunae found in CPD activities practiced by ELT practitioners in Eastern region of Afghanistan.

1.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Conforming to the stated objectives, this study frames the following questions:

1. What is the implication of CPD in ELT?
2. How ELT practitioners (in the Eastern Zone of Afghanistan) respond to different CPD activities in terms of their significance?
3. What are the gaps between CPD activities practiced in Afghan and global scenarios?
4. What are the remedial measures to overcome the lacunae found in CPD activities practiced by ELT practitioners in Eastern region of Afghanistan?

1.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

As the aim of ELT practitioners is to facilitate or provide the opportunities to students to excel their competency in English language through lifelong learning process called *continuous professional development*, this study is significant for



three important reasons. Firstly, this study will prove as pioneering work in Afghanistan in terms of spreading the awareness of CPD activities for ELT practitioners. Secondly, the findings of this study will help in policy making for the Ministry of higher education in adopting CPD as part of outcome base education (OBE). Thirdly, this research will hone the abilities of ELT practitioners in terms of overcoming the main challenges associated with using different CPD tools and activities in a systematic way.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

"Seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave," Prophet Mohammad had stated. In fact, Learning is a life-long process, and teachers are the best mediators in acquiring the knowledge one seeks. But those who join the profession of teaching are also required to constantly update their skill and knowledge both. It is erroneous to believe that once someone has assumed the role of a teacher, she or he has nothing more to learn further. This paper aims to help both novice and expert teachers to hone the learning abilities and bring positive results in the outcomes of the students. It is, therefore, vital to know how 'Continuing Professional Development' (in brief, CPD) and its components help teachers to improve the abilities of their teaching. The notion of CPD is also called 'Life-long learning' in literature on education. The notion of life-long learning come up with the revolution of extending technology and student-centered learning. As one is aware, "since the 1980s, the world's education development has entered a new era, with the education reform ushering the peak period "(Osterman and Kottkamp 1993). The OECD (2002) has already emphasized that "teachers are the key factor affecting the quality of school education", and that they "directly determine the success or failure of education." The society too has a very high expectation from teachers, because one is aware of their profound influence on students' growth (Jiang, 2016), and thus their value is enormous. In fact, the contemporary education has accelerated many-fold, forcing teachers to seek for self-improvement for both academic and professional growth. Like other professions teachers also need to renew what they had learned once - in both contextual and pedagogical terms, to hone the

abilities of the students. to update their knowledge, and to maintain regularity by paying a constant and meticulous attention to this process.

The real challenge lies in ensuring that this constant revision is done in a systematic manner and not haphazardly. Copper (2008) defines CPD as "a 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." (Cooper, 2008). As one can see, the aim is to enhance the quality of professional ability of the faculty members engaged in teaching. This professional development, as Francesca Bernardini argued, is an uptake of formal and informal learning opportunities that deepen and extend teachers' professional competence, including knowledge, beliefs, motivation and self-regulatory skills (Michael J. Warburton & Francesca Bernardini 2001). There had been several studies earlier and later in this direction. Baumert & Kunter (2006) had also talked about teachers' professional competence, and how to enhance it. Kunter et al (2007/2013) reported on the findings of the Professional Competence of Teachers in specialized areas such as in Mathematics where an experiment was conducted in Cognitively Activating Instruction, and in the Development of Students' Mathematical Literacy ability.

Lifelong learning requires an active learning style involving self-assessment, risk taking, self-discovery, and the ability to deal behaviorally with difficult situations, for example, situations requiring assertiveness, listening, conflict management, giving feedback, or delegation (Hopkins, 2012). Many empirical studies that follow lifelong learning theory believe that continuing means that one needs to commit oneself to a lifelong learning process. Achieving your initial professional qualification is just the start of the process of self-development (Cooper, 2008). Many language teachers like Jack Richard (2005) believe that in most schools and institutions today, language teachers are expected to keep up to date with developments in the field, to regularly review and evaluate their teaching skills, and to take on new teaching assignments according to the changing needs of the institution. He argued that



some teachers may also be expected to serve as mentors to new teachers, to plan workshops and other professional activities, to present papers at seminars or conferences, and to write for journals and teaching magazines. Thus, Richard asserted that institutions of Language teaching are expected to maintain high professional standards, to provide opportunities for their teachers as well as to pursue professional development, and to provide conditions where teachers cooperate to achieve higher levels of learning among their students (Richards, 2005).

Researchers have further revealed that CPD requires a dynamic learning style involving self-assessment, risk taking, self-discovery, and the ability to deal behaviorally with difficult situations, for example, situations requiring assertiveness, listening, conflict management, giving feedback, or delegation (Bigelow, 1996, p. 307). Pickering Jo and his colloquies quoted in the book of *Continuing professional Development in the Lifelong Learning Sector* that Continuing professional development means maintaining, improving and broadening relevant knowledge and skills in your subject specialism and your teaching so that it has a positive impact on practice and learner experience (Sector & Boulton, 2011). The outstanding characteristic of the extended professional is a capacity for autonomous professional self-development through systematic self-study, through the study of the work of other teachers and through the testing of ideas by classroom research procedures (Stenhouse 1975: 144).

A recent review of the literature on teachers' professional learning has centered on the effect of CPD on students' learning via enhancements in teacher learning – in other words, they have found that increasing teachers' ability of competence to teach well made a significant difference to students' cognition, progress and led to improved learning outcomes (Richardson & Díaz-Maggioli, 2018).

Drawing from the above research work and experiences in various fields of teaching, I would like to discuss the impactful CPD tools (activities) in the field of ELT in the context of Afghan English language teachers in higher level (college or university) in eastern zone of Afghanistan. This qualitative and quantitative research paper mainly focuses on

assessing of formal and informal activities in the context of continuing professional development of In-service English language practitioners.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 SUBJECTS OF THIS STUDY:

As for the subjects of this study, 32 in-service ELT practitioners from four academic institutions namely Nangarhar University, Kunnar University, Laghaman University, and Nangarhar Teacher Training Center were selected. The reason for selecting in-service ELT practitioners from these four institutions as subjects was that these four institutions have a large number of ELT practitioners and students who aspire to become prospective teachers after their graduation.

3.2 SAMPLING TECHNIQUES

For the primary data collection, a convenience sampling was chosen. The reason of choosing convenience sampling was research sites (Eastern part of Afghanistan) were geographically not accessible to the researchers at the time of research. To overcome the geographical gap, the researchers decided to distribute online questionnaire to 40 ELT practitioners through e-mail and skype. However, out of 40, only 32 were able to respond to the online questionnaire. Of the 32 participants 87% were male; whereas, 13 % were female. In addition, 52% of them had Master's degree in ELT, while 48% had BA degree in English.

3.3 METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

As for the methods of data collection, this study used questionnaire and unstructured interview as two major data gathering tools in online mode. The secondary data were collected through document analysis from different sources – especially, from the library and online sources.

3.4 METHODS OF DATA ANALYSIS

All the quantitative data were analyzed through descriptive statistics to find Mean, Frequency and Standard Deviation using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS); whereas, all the qualitative data were analyzed using analytical induction to interpret significance of different CPD activities.



4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Before we see the responses of four research questions, it is desirable to present first the demographic facts. In this study, total 32 ELT

practitioners were interviewed regarding their CPD professional development in the Eastern Zone of Afghanistan. The composition of the same has been shown in table-1 below.

Table-1: Gender Composition of Practitioners

	Frequency	Percent
Male	27	87.1
Female	5	12.9
Total	32	100.0

In addition, the majority of these practitioners had Master degree, while the remaining of these practitioners had only Bachelor degree (see table-2). Since, no Ph.D. holders figured in the target population, it implies that these practitioners also lack on the front of having desirable qualification as part of CPD.

Table-2: Education Distribution of Practitioners

	Frequency	Percent
Bachelor	15	46.4
Master	17	53.6
Total	32	100.0

In terms of experience, the surveyed practitioners had slightly different years of experiences. Majority of these practitioners had six or more years of experiences in teaching the English Language. Given the average experience of six years, these instructors can be called semi-experienced instructors.

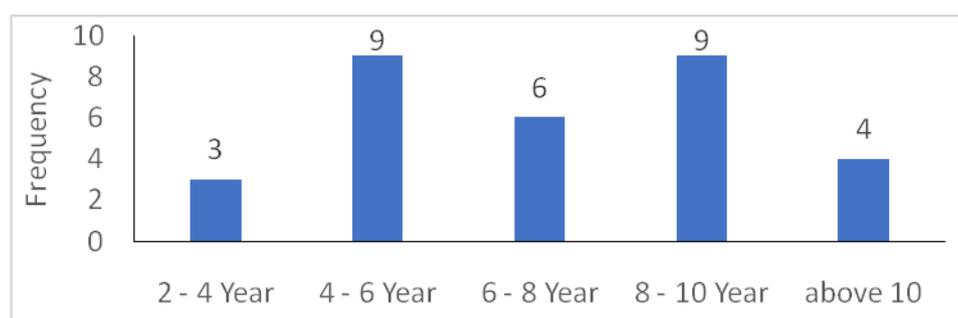


Figure 1: English Language Teaching Experience of Practitioners

In what follows, this section presents major findings by responding to four stated research questions under six sub-sections. The first one consists of observing good practitioner's experiences; whereas, the second one consists of the questionnaire of 13 different experiences regarding the extended CPD experiences. The third sub-section consists of the six

practices regarding their own CPD experiences in the context of Afghanistan; whereas, the fourth sub-section is dedicated to the evaluation of certain CPD practices. The fifth sub-section has dealt with acquired CPD training; whereas, the sixth sub-section highlights the demands of practitioners for CPD training.



4.1 OBSERVING GOOD PRACTITIONERS

The results of the variable under discussion indicate that practitioners realized and recognized the effectiveness of observing good practitioners to enhance their CPD skills. The results in table-3 show that all the four experiences were perceived highly effective with a very small deviation. Among the

listed experiences in this category "Observing and working with a visiting expert" considered highly effective in professional development with a mean of 2.62 out of 3 and with 0.49 standard deviation followed by "visiting and seeing another institute in action", "observing others teachings" and "shadowing a colleague", respectively.

Table 3: The Practitioners' Perception about the effectiveness of observing good practitioners scale (0-3)

CPD Experiences	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Observing and working with a visiting expert	29	2.62	0.49
Visiting and seeing another school in action	30	2.60	0.56
Observing other teachers teaching	28	2.57	0.57
Shadowing a colleague	23	2.09	0.51

The findings can be well justified in the context of ELT instructors considering their education and experiences. Since, in Afghanistan, there are no experts in this field, it makes sense that these ELT instructors recognized the importance and effectiveness of working with international expert either in Afghanistan or outside the country. Visiting another institute abroad and exposing to their CPD practices or shadowing a colleague is also equally important and are given weight by instructors. The implication of these findings is very simple and straightforward. In order to build CPD related professional skills of the ELT instructor, the most effective way is to extend collaboration with overseas EFL institutes through which instructors could exchange and share experiences as part of best practices of CPD.

4.2 EXTENDED PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCES

The way in which ELT practitioners engage in professional development is to depend on institutional and personal levels. According to Richardson & Díaz-Maggioli (2018), there is no robust

evidence to draw a holistic picture for the efficacy of the CPD activities in the field of ELT as there are considerable variations in how CPD is funded and structured at institutional and personal levels in different institutions, areas, and countries. The formal and informal effective CPD activities help ELT practitioners in honing their learning abilities and outcomes in order to bring positive changes in the potential and functional competence of learners. The results regarding the effectiveness of the extended CPD experiences are also very promising and it shows that all the experiences were considered effective in terms of professional development. Among these experiences, three of them are recognized highly effective. The most effective experiences are *action research* and *networking* followed by developing professional profile. As for *peer mentoring*, *working with other professionals*, and *coordinating*, they are considered highly effective by ELT practitioners in Eastern zone of Afghanistan. The least effective experiences are *servicing on professional committee* and *being reviewed by others*.

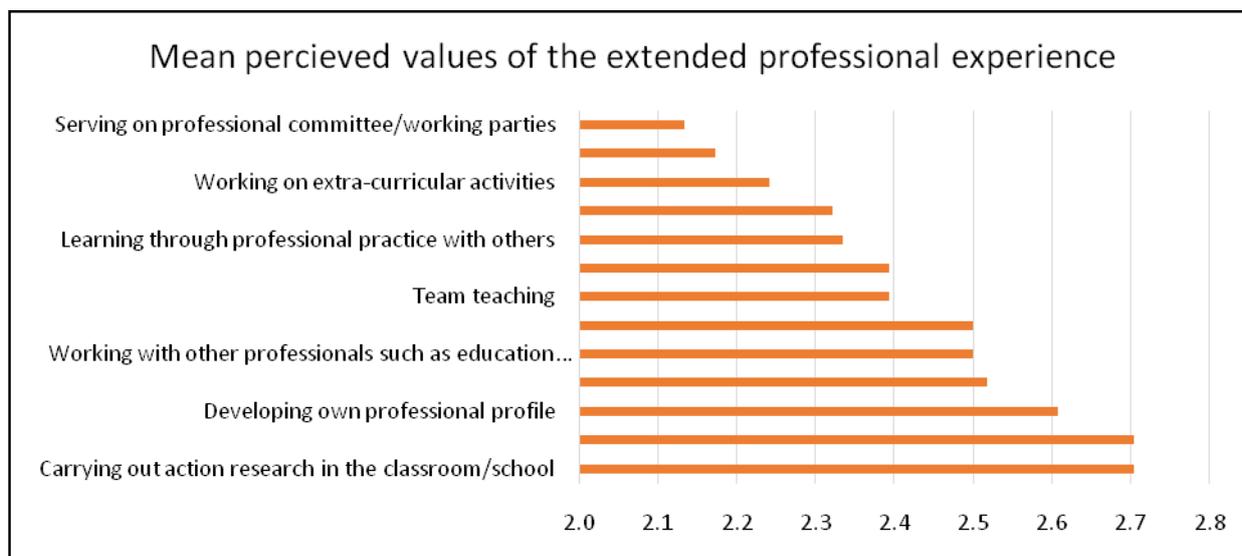


Figure 2: English Language Teaching Experience of Practitioners

4.3 OWN EXPERIENCES

There are many ways for ELT practitioners to get involved in a lifelong learning to hone their abilities of learning and outcomes. Prospective teachers always teach with meticulous attention and

take time to evaluate their practice through peer-observation, student's feedback, reflection, online communities and active communication with their students through emails.

Table 4: The effectiveness of ELT practitioners' own professional experience

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Inviting your peers to observe you	30	2.67	0.479
Getting feedback from your own pupils	31	2.61	0.495
Videoring yourself for reflection	29	2.55	0.572
Learning Networks	26	2.35	0.562
Integrating the use of pupil websites and online communities into teaching	26	2.19	0.567
Using e-mail/video conferencing between students and teaching.	28	2.11	0.74

As education is undergoing rapid change, it is crucial for practitioners to keep themselves updated and keep themselves abreast of ongoing changes in the field of ELT. As every teacher has unique learning needs in different situations of learning, s/he should not be compelled to adopt specific CPD activities.

As for the results of own professional experience, *getting feedback from students* was considered the most effective experiences in the teaching life of the practitioners; whereas, *inviting peers to observe* was considered as the second most effective experience followed by videoring oneself. The least prioritized experiences were *online communities* and *networking*.



4.4 OTHER PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCES

Table5: Mean Perceived value of the experiences of ELT teachers

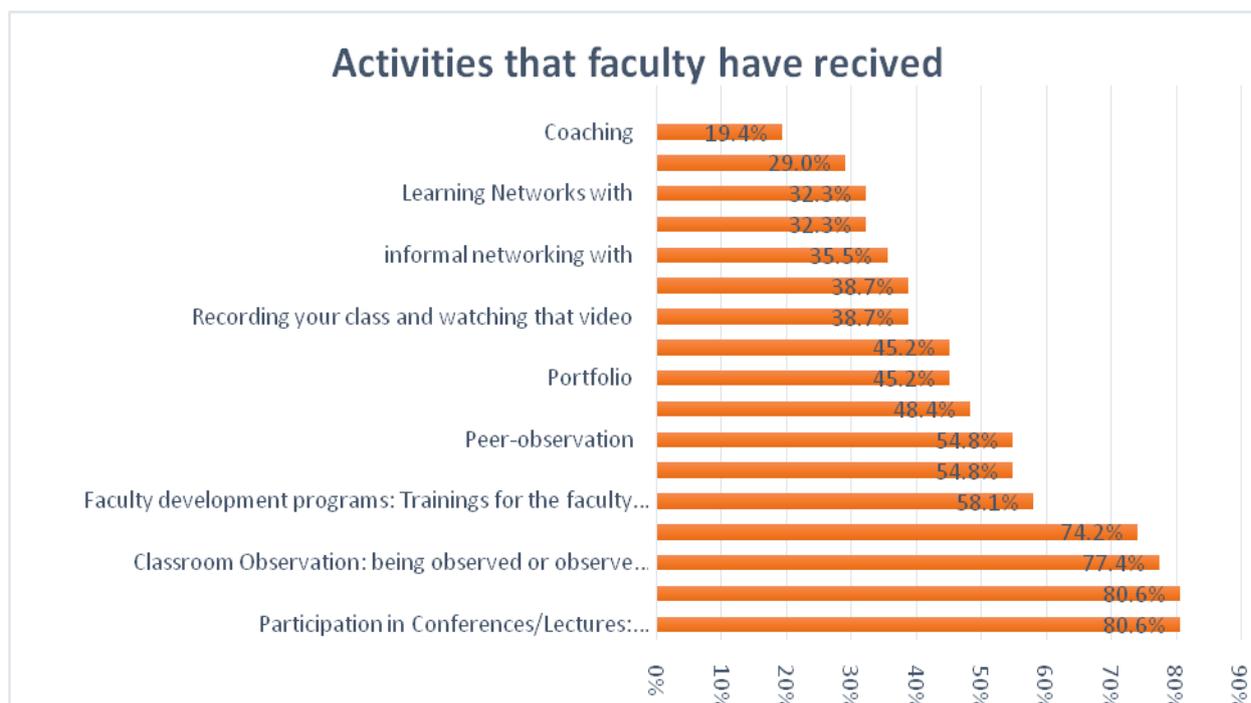
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
International exchange or visit	29	2.79	0.412
Participation in local, national and international conferences	30	2.77	0.430
Using authentic materials - (news, photos, experience,...)	30	2.47	0.507
In-house training: at departmental/whole institutional level	27	2.22	0.424
Informal Networking with colleagues	31	2.19	0.402
ICT training in-house: Webinars/Online materials	28	2.04	0.576

In other effective professional experiences, *international exchange program* with a mean value of 2.8 out of 3 followed by *participation in conferences*, *using authentic materials*, *in-housing training*, *informal networking* and *ICT training*, respectively were found to be the prominent ones (see table-5).

updated and who need to socialize their knowledge among their peers by training, coaching, action research, reflections, participating in conference, seminars and workshops, guiding and observing other teachers and many other formal and informal CPD activities are considered to be the updated practitioners.

4.5 CPD EXPERIENCES ACQUIRED

Many ELT practitioners are already involved in CPD activities but they are not fully aware of them. Teachers who are aware that their knowledge base is

**Figure 3: Acquired Activities by ELT practitioners**



The figure 3 shows the ELT practitioners' degree of receiving CPD activities in the eastern region. The result indicates that about 80 percent of the ELT practitioners have received CPD professional development experience of *participation in conferences, seminars, classroom observation or workshops* followed by *faculty development programs, using authentic materials, and peer-observation* that about 50 percent of the faculty have received. The result is alarming as almost 50% practitioners were found to be deprived of being exposed to essential CPD activities.

4.6 ACTIVITIES DEMANDED FOR CPD BY ELT PRACTITIONERS

Among the activities demanded by ELT practitioners for CPD, total eight activities came into light (see figure-4). Of them, *seminars, conference, and workshops* proved to be the most demanding CPD activity; whereas, *class observation, classroom reflection* and *reading research articles* were found to be three major demanding activities. On the other hand, less than 20 percent of the faculty demanded "*coaching a colleague, being mentored, coach yourself and webinars*" for their CPD professional development.

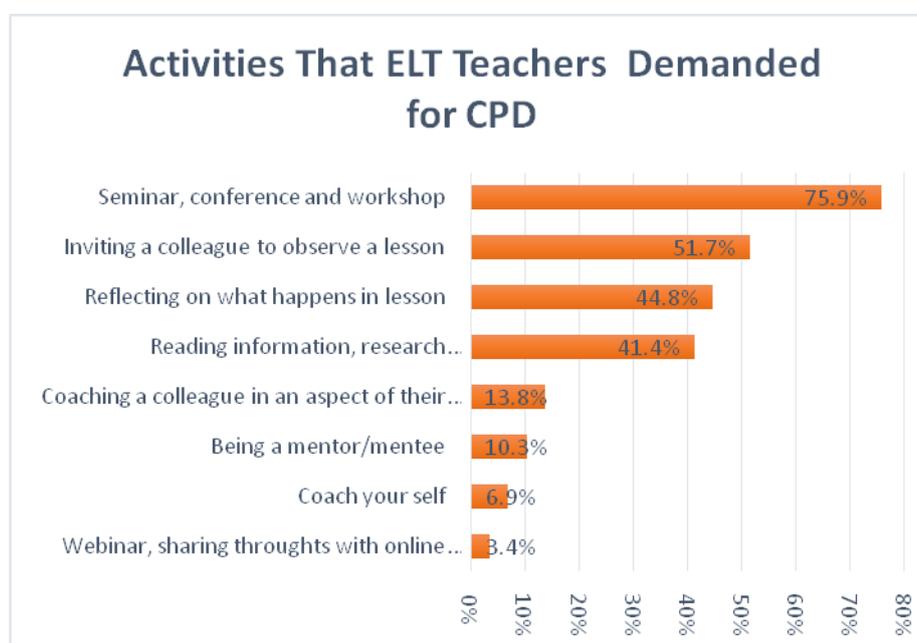


Figure-4: Activities that Practitioners demanded for CPD activities

5. CONCLUSION

In its heuristic approach, this study has attained all the set objectives by answering four research questions. To sum up, the study, tried to decode the underlying principles of CPD advocated by past and contemporary researchers. Moreover, the study elicits the perceptions of Afghan ELT practitioners on six parameters namely *observing good practitioners, extended professional experiences, own experiences, other professional experiences, CPD experiences acquired, and activities demanded for CPD by ELT practitioners*. Among the

striking facts, it is desirable to mention here three facts as they are more pertinent to the scope of this research. Firstly, the Afghan ELT practitioners admit that "*observing and working with a visiting expert*" will help them improve their CPD skills. Secondly, a large number of practitioners realized the importance of action research and networking as part of *Extended Professional Experiences*. Thirdly, a significant number of respondents stressed over the importance of *participation in conferences, seminars, classroom observation or workshops* as key CPD activities. Despite all these formalisms, it is apt to



quote here Palmer (1997: 10) who believes that good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher. Teachers' understanding of identity plays an important role in their professional development.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Zamark Shinwari is an Assistant Professor of English Language at Nangarhar University, Jalalabad, Afghanistan. With 10 years of ELT experience, he moved to India under US scholarship scheme where he is currently pursuing his *M.A in Applied Linguistics and ELT* at Amity University, Haryana.