

## **Academics and their Respective Institution Practices of Continuous Professional Development: A Case of Hawassa University**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This study aims to explore the practices and institutional challenges of Hawassa University academics staff pertaining to their continuous professional development (CPD) engagement. To this end, we employ an exploratory case study as our research design using various sources of data. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings reveal that there is a range of understanding of CPD among staff and that is practiced both formally and informally. The major challenges that hinder the practical effectiveness of CPD include misunderstanding of its importance, the inability of the institution to make the content of CPD relevant to academics' current needs and insufficient financial provisions. It is recommended that institutional and systematic policy actions for CPD management be prioritized.*

**Keywords:** Academics, adult learning theory, continuous professional development, higher education institutions, institutional practices of continuous professional development

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## INTRODUCTION

According to the SWOT analysis of Hawassa University's strategic plan (2021-2030), inadequate staff development programs, the demotivation of senior staff to mentor new staff and the inadequate motivation of academics to publish in reputable scientific journals are identified as prevailing weaknesses of the university (Hawassa University, 2021). We therefore found it imperative to delve into academics and their respective institutional practices of continuous professional development (CPD) and challenges pertaining to academic staff engagement with CPD at Hawassa University in Ethiopia.

As one of the first-generation public universities in Ethiopia, Hawassa University encompasses nine colleges, three institutes, and seven campuses. Owing to its reputation, it has recently been identified by the Ministry of Education as one of the eight Research Universities in Ethiopia. As a result, it is working toward becoming one of the top ten research universities in East Africa by the 2030th (Hawassa University, 2021).

At present, Hawassa University runs different in-service CPD programs which include the Higher Diploma Program (HDP), the English Language Improvement Program (ELIP), and ICT. The Higher Diploma Program is aimed at improving teachers' skills and competencies at the current teaching level. The ELIP program is aimed at improving teacher ability to use the English language as a medium of instruction while the ICT intended to improve academics' knowledge and competency in using various technologies and digital tools for educational purposes (Demewoz, 2016; Yelifashewa, 2013). Furthermore, at the university, there are various sporadic in-service professional development practices involving lectures, annual research conferences, seminars and training.

CPD is widely acknowledged as a prerequisite for both individuals' and organizations' competitiveness (Santos et al., 2019). In particular, academics' CPD is becoming a requirement for higher education institutions to remain competitive. This means that the quality of higher education and, by extension, society as a whole is in need of proper CPD for academics. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the CPD practices of academics and their respective institutions at Hawassa University. This appears to be due to some current issues, such as accreditation and quality assurance, university differentiation, increased student diversity, and technological advancement.

Furthermore, since it is one of the universities that is differentiated as a Research University in Ethiopia, studying Hawassa University as a case study will hopefully offer good insight and contribute to a better understanding of the practices of CPD and related challenges. This seems to have an effect on the CPD programs and quality enhancement at Hawassa University which help to achieve institutional success specifically and in Ethiopian higher education institutions at large.

Similarly, researchers in Ethiopia have generally indicated that there is a large gap between what has been expected from professional development programs and what has been observed in the processes of their practices (Bekalu, 2009; Demewoz, 2016; Yelifashewa, 2013). Furthermore, scholars have noted that the professional development of academics is an under researched field (Masoumi et al., 2019; Santos et al., 2019). In an effort to contribute to this research gap, this study strives to answer the following research questions.

1. How is continuous professional development conceptualized and practiced at Hawassa University?
2. What are the prevailing challenges hindering academic staff and their respective institutions in maintaining quality CPD practices?

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The term continuous professional development (CPD) covers all interventions and activities aimed at improving academics' competency in their different roles. These diverse roles include acting as scholars, advisers, designers and evaluators of academic programs and courses; acting as academic leaders, contributors to public services and participants in institutional decisions; and contributing to a college's or university's mission accomplishment (Baker et al., 2018; Masoumi et al., 2019; Sadovets, 2017). These various roles of academics encompass the ideal scenario, which may not always play out in practice and, subsequently, has implications for the types of professional development academics are expected to be engaged in.

The effective practice of CPD benefits both academic staff and their institution in numerous ways. It enhances the teaching and learning process by equipping academic staff with the latest teaching methodologies, technologies, and best practices in their field, new instructional strategies, assessment techniques, and approaches to engage and support students effectively. As noted by Knight (2002), providing teachers with opportunities for continuous professional development is essential because initial teacher education programs cannot provide them with all the competencies that are needed in the classroom, especially procedural or how to develop skills, which primarily develop in practical settings. In relation to the focus and goals of continuous professional development, authors such as Borko (2004) and Desimone et al. (2002) note that teacher professional development is an essential mechanism for enhancing teachers' knowledge and instructional practices.

Enhancing the capacity to adapt to the changing educational landscape is another important aspect of CPD. Higher education is constantly evolving due to technological advancements, changes in student demographics, and shifts in educational policies. CPD enables academic staff to adapt to these changes, ensuring that they remain relevant and competent in their respective fields. It allows them to integrate new technologies, teaching methods, and research

advancements into their teaching practices. The expectation for today's teachers is to embrace life-long learning to be able to constantly adapt to new situations and respond to the changing demands of society in the classroom (Dede et al., 2009).

CPD also paves the way for research and scholarship initiatives by providing opportunities for academic staff to be engaged in research and scholarship activities. It enables them to stay abreast of the latest developments and contribute to knowledge creation in their discipline. Continuous learning and exposure to new research methodologies and findings can enhance the quality and impact of their scholarly work (Zeichner, 2003).

As a profession related construct, CPD also supports the professional growth of academic staff by providing opportunities for advancement, recognition, and career progression (Dadds, 2014). Similarly, Rimmer and Floyd (2020) stated that participation in workshops, conferences, and seminars allows academic staff to network, collaborate, and build relationships with colleagues from other institutions, fostering a sense of community and professional development.

CPD also promotes institutional excellence: through CPD, academic staff can contribute to institutional excellence by sharing their knowledge and experiences with colleagues. They can lead workshops, mentor new academic staff, and participate in curriculum development initiatives. By continuously improving their skills and knowledge, academic staff can positively impact the overall quality of teaching, research, and institutional reputation (Jaiswal, 2017).

Academics' CPD is seen as a key factor for both enhancing and ensuring quality in higher education (Masoumi et al., 2019; Pham, 2021). In other words, it plays a central role in meeting accreditation and quality assurance requirements. Many higher education institutions have accreditation and quality assurance processes in place. These often require evidence of continuous professional development to ensure that academic staff meets certain standards and demonstrate ongoing professional growth. CPD helps academic staff fulfill these requirements and maintain the institution's accreditation and reputation.

According to Naveed et al. (2009), quality in the education system should hold all its functions, including teaching and academic programs, research and scholarships, staffing, students, buildings, facilities, equipment, services to the community and the academic environment. The quality of educational services in higher education is influenced mainly by the quality of teachers (Martin et al., 2018; Masoumi et al., 2019). Since academic staff performs the central tasks of teaching, researching, and serving the community, the effective practice of professional development programs is a decisive input for promoting teachers' professional competencies and enhancing the quality of education and training.

There are a variety of continuous professional development practices across the world, including formal training courses, coaching and mentoring and informal learning. In Ethiopia, one of the measures that has been taken by the Ministry of Education to enhance quality in higher education institutions is the professional development of academic staff through the Higher Diploma Program (henceforth, HDP) (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2018). HDP was identified following extensive studies by the Ministry of Education on the overall education system including teacher training in 2002 (Demewoz, 2016). It is a licensed one-year training program aimed at developing the skills and professionalism of teacher educators including organizing and offering short-term training on research and technology.

Currently, at Hawassa University there are different centers and programs that are working to provide professional development opportunities to academics. These include the Academic Development and Resources Center (ADRC), one of the CPD centers in the university, which offers courses on instructional skills like induction and information communication technology (ICT). The HDP has also been established as a major CDP intended to train instructors at the university.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Andragogy refers to any deliberate, professionally guided activity that seeks to effect change in adults (Knowles et al., 2005). This study uses the andragogy in practice model as a theoretical lens for exploring the understanding, practices and institutional challenges pertaining to academic staff engagement with CPD at Hawassa University. This model offers an enhanced conceptual framework to more systematically apply andragogy across multiple domains of adult learning practice (Knowles et al., 2005). It also presents core principles of adult learning that in turn enable those designing and conducting adult learning to build more effective learning processes for adults.

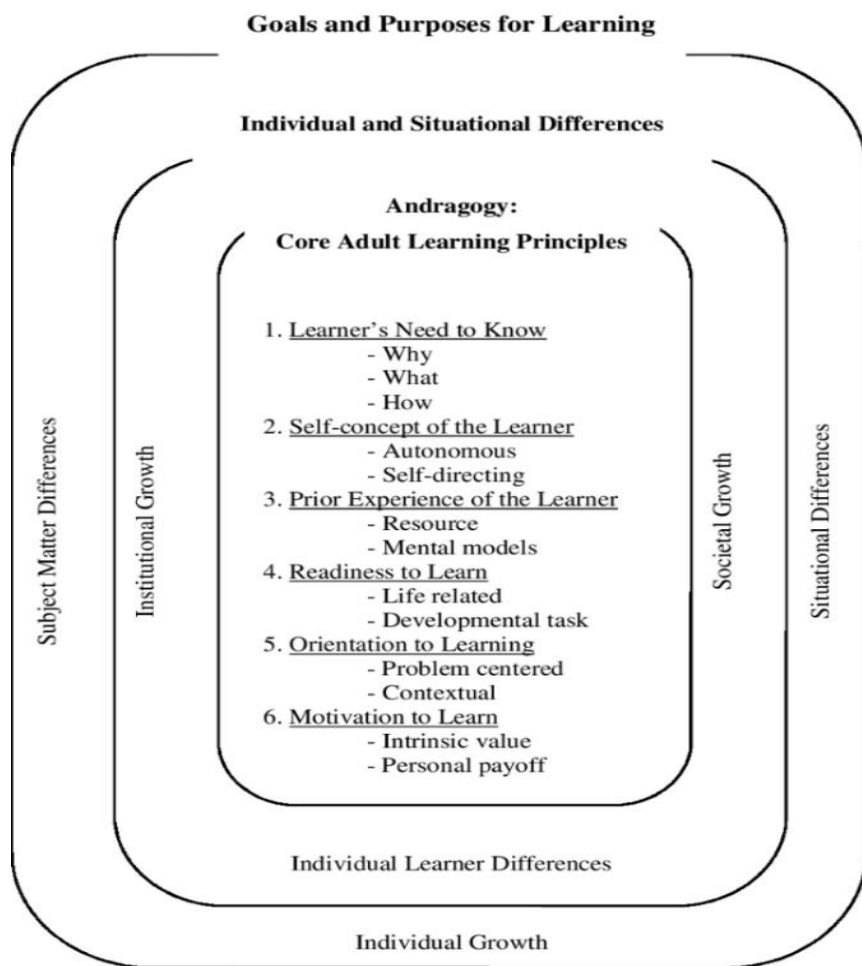
Conventionally, the professional development of academic staff has relied on external sources as agents of change and providers of solutions. These sources tend to adopt a "top-down" model that takes a unified approach to work-based learning, ignoring the expertise and specific needs workers bring to the learning context. Terms such as "training" and "development" suggest that workers are passive recipients of learning programs. However, recent advances in learning theory highlight the limitations of top-down training programs in changing practices and improving outcomes. As a result, reform agendas that have driven change and innovation internationally have emphasized the need for professional development based on an understanding of adult learning principles (Hargreaves, 1994; Zuber-Skerritt et al., 2015).

A theoretically sound understanding of the core principles of adult learning, therefore, underpins the academics and their respective institutional

practices of successful adult learning programs, such as continuing professional development programs for academic staff. Knowles et al. (2005) proposed core adult learning principles based on the view that adult learners are autonomous and responsible for making independent decisions about their own learning. The six principles of andragogy are (1) the learner's need to know, (2) self-concept of the learner, (3) prior experience of the learner, (4) readiness to learn, (5) orientation to learning, and (6) motivation to learn. For a better understanding of the theory, the factors that might affect adult learning processes and practices are pointed out in the schematic representation, which is depicted below in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**

*Andragogy in practice model (Adapted from Knowles et al., 2005).*



In addition, the six principles are listed at the center of the model. There are also varieties of other factors that affect adult learning in any particular situation and may cause adults to behave more or less closely to the core principles. These include individual learners, situational differences, and the goals and purposes of learning, shown in the two outer rings of the model by Knowles et al. (2005). In fact, this theory is at the heart of continuous professional development practice in which academic staff as adult learners take control of their learning, including what, when and how in relation to their teaching experience and their needs. As such, it is essential to recognize their preferences in continuous professional development.

**Table 1**

*Demographic profile of the respondents of the study*

Participants	Sex			Year of Experience in Hawassa University	Coded as
	M	F	T		
Academic vice president	1	-	1	17	AP <sub>1</sub>
College dean	1	-	1	14	CD <sub>1</sub>
HDP(Higher Diploma Program) Coordinator	1	1	2	M = 7 F = 12	HDPC <sub>1</sub> HDPC <sub>2</sub>
ELIP (English Language Improvement Program) Coordinator	1	-	1	15	ELIPC <sub>1</sub>
ICT (Information and Communication Technology) Coordinator	1	-	1	5	ICTC <sub>1</sub>
Academic Staffs for interview	3	2	5	From 2 up to 17 years	AS <sub>1-5</sub>
Academic Staffs for FGD (Focus Group Discussion)	21	3	24	From 2 up to 17 years	FGD <sub>1-4</sub>
<b>Total</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>35</b>		

## RESEARCH METHOD

In this study, an exploratory case study approach was employed. A case study is chosen when the researchers wish to gain an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project, policy, institution, program, or system in a real-life context (Denizen & Lincoln, 2018; Yin, 2012, 2018). Hawassa University was selected purposely as a site for this study in anticipation of a sufficient number and appropriate participants for the study within it. It is generally believed that the university has its own specific cultures that are molded by the shared practices of participants. Furthermore, to recruit participants who had the required experience; or who were known to possess special knowledge to provide the information the research questions sought to answer, purposive sampling was employed. The number of participants in this research is summarized in Table 1.

### **Data collection and analysis**

The data pertaining to the research questions and objectives were collected from different sources using different data collection strategies. Formal semistructured interviews were conducted with 11 interviewees (one academic vice president, one education college dean, four CPD program coordinators and five academic staff) who were research participants; each interview lasted 70 to 85 minutes and the interviews were audio-recorded. These interviews took place at the university while the participants were free from normal classes and other activities. For Focus Group Discussion (FGD) 24 academic staff (21 male and 3 female) were selected. FGDs were used to explore issues related to the thoughts, feelings, understanding, practices and challenges of the practices of academic staff's continuous professional development within their naturally occurring setting. This type of data sets the context of qualitative studies. Furthermore, data were collected from written and recorded documents that included policy materials, university's strategic plan and reports, HDP plans and portfolios.

In this study, a top-down or deductive thematic analysis, that is driven by the specific research question was employed (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This data analysis technique is one of the most common approaches to qualitative data analysis and involves identifying themes or patterns of cultural meaning; coding and classifying data according to themes; and interpreting the resulting thematic structures by seeking commonalities, relationships, overarching patterns, theoretical constructs, or explanatory principles (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Bryman, 2012; Mills et al., 2010). Therefore, a deductive thematic approach and insightful interpretations that are contextually grounded in the understanding, practice and challenges of CPD at Hawassa University were employed to qualitatively analyze the themes and subthemes identified from interviews and FGD data.



## **Ethical Issues**

When conducting any type of study, researchers have a duty and responsibility to act ethically in regard to matters of professional and moral conduct as well as their participants. To ensure the successful completion of the study's aims, various ethical norms must be followed. To ensure the success of the study, letters of support and collaboration from Addis Ababa University were secured. The participants were informed that the information gathered from them would only ever be used for the study. All volunteers agreed to participate by signing the consent letter. The participants were informed of the study's purposes prior to data collection. Also disclosed to the participants was the fact that the study would only use the data they submitted. Additionally, the researcher protected participants confidentially by using a code rather than their names to identify them.

## **Limitations of the study**

This study employs a single case study to explore the understanding, practice and institutional challenges pertaining to academic staff engagement in CPD. However, the fact that multiples cases were not included may affect the generalizability of the findings to other contexts.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

In this section, the findings and discussion of the study are presented under the following four themes that deductively emanated from the two research questions staff understanding, CPD practice, follow-up and evaluation and challenges that hinder academic staff and their respective institutions in developing the quality of CPD practices.

### **Understanding of academic staff on the need to participate in CPD**

At Hawassa University the CPD of academics which can be considered a mechanism for developing and perpetuating academics' professional knowledge, skills and attitudes is understood in different ways. In the interviews, one of the HDP coordinators explained:

There are teachers who attend CPD programs such as HDPs in search of only the certificate that is given upon completion of the program and that is considered a requirement to teach in higher education; there are teachers who understand that CPD is important only for academics who donot have pedagogical knowledge or who did not take education courses, and there are also teachers who understand that CPD is important for all teachers who want to be competent and effective in their profession (HDPC<sub>1</sub>, interview).

As reflected in the above quote, academics have a polarized understanding of the need to participate in CPD. Even though there are academics who have the

intended understanding of the importance of CPD, evidence from the coordinator's statement suggests that academics are more concerned about the requirement of CPD than program itself. Thus, the primary purpose of CPD participation is higher education system compliance.

At Hawassa University, there is another stance that recognizes CPD as a determinant for academics who lack pedagogical training. However, for academics who participate in teacher training programs, such training is less important (AS<sub>1</sub>; 2; 4, interview).

These findings revealed that CPD is perceived as if it only applies to staff without pedagogical training. Nevertheless, the CPD of academics is important not only for pedagogical training but also for other reasons. For instance, it is imperative to train and enhance academics' skills and competence in the areas pertaining to modern technologies in the courses that they teach (Dysart & Weckerle, 2015; Yue et al., 2016).

CPD is also important as a means to keep pace with the changing role of academics and to cope with challenges that have resulted from high competition in attracting and retaining students; and globalization (Bachelier, 2015; Lam, 2010). In addition, it is important to develop critical thinking, subject knowledge and skills, and achieve emotional maturity, which are necessary for academics' qualitative professional activity (Sadovets, 2017). Furthermore, CPD is a useful tool helping academics fulfill their expected roles in dynamic working situations and globalization (Hasan & Parvez, 2017; Ofojebe & Chukwuma, 2015; Yaqub et al., 2020).

Furthermore, one of the academic staff's interviewees explained that "CPD is a means by which one academic constantly looks into his own actions and experiences, and reflects on what needs improvement in his professional knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (AS<sub>2</sub>, Interview). This implies that there is academic staff who understands reflective practice as a means to be engaged in continuous professional development. This finding is in line with that of Mathew et al. (2017), who reported that reflective practice is the most important source of personal professional development and improvement. This understanding is important for guaranteeing that academics are doing their jobs accurately and, above all, they are meeting the needs of their students.

Furthermore, other participants explained that, "CPD is important, recognizing that pre-service trainings lack longevity, practicality, and context specificity" (AP<sub>1</sub>, Interview; AS<sub>3</sub>, Interview). This finding is in line with that of MacPhail et al. (2018) who claimed that teachers receive minimal preparation or possibilities for professional development to fulfill their multiple and complex roles. As a result, they need to acquire relevant knowledge and skills after taking their position. Similarly, Lindvall & Ryvea (2019) opined that the days on which a single degree last for a full career are long gone and that this fact has

become widely accepted and that most teachers in high-income economies participate in some kind of CPD activities.

From analysis of document example Higher Diploma Program (2018), CPD is understood as a means to enhance the quality of education in higher education institutions (MoE, 2018). This finding aligns with Santos et al. (2019), who claimed that insufficient professional development of academics creates a considerable risk to the quality of higher education and, consequently, to society as a whole.

### **CPD practices of academic staff**

To be competent in their multiple roles, academics pursue different kinds of CPD activities at Hawassa University. Participants reported formal activities such as attending induction, HDP, training, seminars, conferences, and upgrading programs. In addition, informally, academics learn to become better teachers and researchers from various learning opportunities embedded in their day-to-day work in an organizational system. These include activities such as colloquial discussion, reading books, and using e- sources (FGD<sub>1.4</sub>).

Furthermore, the findings revealed that academics practice CPD through reflective practice and self-reading. In relation to this, one interviewee explained the practices as follows:

I update myself highly through reflection on action. When I complete a semester or academic year, I carefully consider what was good and what was not, and how I can improve my professional competency for the future. In addition, I read different books from electronic sources to update myself (AS<sub>1</sub>, Interview).

This implies that reflective practice is deeply interconnected with the CPD practices of academics. This result supports the findings of Mathew et al. (2017), who reported that reflective practice is the most important source of personal professional development and improvement.

### **Institutional practice of CPD: assessing need, planning CPD, following up, evaluating and giving feedback**

Regarding the institutional practice of CPD, most of the interviewees and FGD participants said that Hawassa University practices CPD in two ways: updating and upgrading. Updating, through which different trainings are provided in a continuous process in which every professional academic participates during their career as an academic in the university. These updating programs include induction, HDP and other training that focuses on academics' scientific writing, research software, grant project writing etc. (AS<sub>1.5</sub>, Interview; FGD<sub>1.4</sub>, Focus group discussion). Most of the time, these trainings are given to enrich academics with research skills or research capacity, since one of their expected roles is conducting research. Upgrading is the process by which

academics can choose to participate in further study outside their regular work as academics at appropriate times in their career, that is, to upgrade a first degree to a master's degree or a master's degree to a PhD or a postdoctoral degree.

Regarding university CPD practices, from document analysis, the researchers confirmed that induction, HDP, and different training are given to academics (institutional annual reports; Academics HDP Workbook). Induction denotes a collective of programs involving orientation, support, and guidance for beginning academics. The HDP is a one-year professional development program with two face-to-face two-hour sessions every week. The other is training, which includes short-term intensive in-house training that is important for academics in fulfilling their expected role.

In relation to institutional practices of need assessment, planning, follow-up, evaluation, and feedback of CPD, the collected data from documents reveal that individualized academics' needs are not assessed. The plan is expressed in terms of the number of academics who are going to participate in induction, HDP, or other training (University's annual plan; HDP plan). This implies that, need assessments were not done to plan training. The first step in the professional development process of academics as Koc et al. (2015) claim is to set goals, which are based on subjects that are defined according to the interests and needs of academics. Otherwise, the training may cause losses in time, resources, and labor.

Needs assessment provides a rational approach for not only determining areas that require development but also detecting trainees' levels of cognitive and emotional readiness, specifying priorities, making economical use of budgets, efficiently using tools and equipment, and strategizing for the institution. Detecting demand areas plays an important role in training to reach its goals and be effective (Yaqub et al., 2020). In addition, this claim aligns with andragogy in practice theory, which states that an adult is motivated to learn by being in situations where she or he sees a need "why, what and how" to learn (Knowles et al., 2005, p.4).

In addition, the focus group participants explained that, many trainings lack robust follow-up and evaluation. After training are given, no one attempted to evaluate their impact or to provide feedback (FGD<sub>4</sub>). This result is in line with the findings of Earley and Porritt (2014), who reported that the evaluation of professional development requires a focus on determining the impact of the professional development in which teachers are engaged in. Similarly, Guskey (2000) reported that systematic investigation of the value of CPD endeavors is important for a number of reasons: to examine academics' perceptions of professional development events or activities; to identify program outcomes; to check whether a program is meeting objectives or participant needs; to replicate and scale successful programs; and to determine and test best practices. In addition, the evaluation of CPD plays at least two roles in the professional

development process: (1) to promote continuous program improvement and (2) to ensure program accountability.

In relation to the content of CPD, there are differences among colleges. For instance, in health colleges, content wise training has been given to academics, especially when new medication and instruments are going to be used (AS<sub>4</sub>, Interview). On the other hand, participants from the Education College, Natural Science College, and Social Science College explained that CPD contents don't have discipline-specific contents (FGD<sub>1; 3</sub>). Scholars such as Berry (2018), however, claim that quality continuous professional development should help to build academics' technological, pedagogical, and content knowledge. To develop expertise in a field, academics need to be provided with learning experiences that enhance their discipline content knowledge. The andragogy theory, which states that subject matter differences are one factor affecting adult learning, is supported by this investigation (Knowles et al., 2005).

### **Challenges that hinder the quality of CPD practices among academic staff and their respective institutions**

The other theme that emerged from the research data was the challenges hindering academics and their respective institutions from participating in and developing high-quality CPD practices. This theme is directly related to research question number two. These challenges have been classified as academic-related challenges, institutional-related challenges and policy-related challenges.

#### ***Academic-related challenges***

There are numerous potential challenges that hinder academics from participating in CPD. The two HDP coordinators explained this as follows:

There is a misunderstanding about the importance of CPDs. For instance, there are academics who participate in HDP training to have only certificates, as it is a requirement to teach in higher education. There is a lack of academic interest in engaging in CPD. Individual academics have also had problems identifying and informing their gaps that can be filled by institutionalized CPD programs (HDPC<sub>1; 2</sub>).

This finding reveals that there is a misunderstanding of the importance of CPD and demotivation which implies the inadequacy of the support provided by stakeholders to become aware of and motivate academics in relation to CPD. As Haque et al. (2014) noted motivation is a method of instilling a high level of excitement to achieve organizational goals, and this circumstance is satisfied by meeting some individual needs. Essentially, motivation refers to fulfilling organizational core goals by meeting the requirements or wants of individual employees.

Additionally, the culture of academia does not encourage professional development learning from one another. This implies that institutional culture

does not encourage learning from one another. Lewis et al. (2016), however, argue that the most powerful organizational learning strategy is team learning because of its ability to create a collaborative culture and collective responsibility within the professional learning community.

The other challenges enumerated by participants of the FGD include lack of materials such as an individual office, tables and chairs, and laptops and an absence of rewards for those academics, who have practiced CPD effectively. This result supports the findings of Ofojebe and Chukwuma (2015), who reported many factors hindering the utilization of CPD for academic staff effectiveness in colleges of education in Delta State. This included insufficient funds and a lack of equipment and facilities. According to the study's findings, CPD programs must be used effectively throughout Hawassa University. The effective use of CPD produces favorable outcomes for academics' competitiveness and for their respective institutions in the present and future, and for the overall quality improvement of the higher education system.

### ***Institutional-related challenges***

This study identified many institutional barriers to developing effective CPD. The first persistent challenge identified by this study is the inability of institutions to run relevant CPD programs that address the individualized needs of academics. In relation to this, one interviewee explained:

... researcher I have 12 years of experience; for instance, trainings in relation to research are usually started by asking "what is research" How many years should I have been trained on this issue? Taking this type of training is not so useful; it is waste of time sitting and listening to something that is irrelevant for improving my status... In my view, if I took Analysis of variance (ANOVA) last year, I should take Multivariate Analysis of Covariance (MANCOVA) this year... and there should be an organizational management that follow-up and manages these things (AS<sub>5</sub>, Interview).

According to the quote, the content of CPD program in the Hawassa University was not personalized to the need of individual academic. Participation in such undifferentiated and repeated CPD content without examining improvements has made it boring for academics. This result is in line with those of Baker et al. (2018), Qader (2019), Yaqub et al. (2020) and Yilfashewa (2012), who reported that there is a mismatch between academics' needs and CPD endeavors. These challenges influence the understanding and institutional practices of CPD at universities.

The other challenge identified by the respondent is a lack of institutional capacity to provide discipline-specific CPD programs that focus on content knowledge. For instance, two FGD participants from the Education College and Natural Science College explained that trainings are not given on content

knowledge but rather focus on pedagogical knowledge, research skills, and ICT (FGD<sub>1</sub>). Nevertheless, scholars such as Fabriz et al. (2020) have suggested that including subjective knowledge in professional development programs is highly recommended to impact teaching-related self-efficacy, self-concept, and subjective knowledge.

The inability of the university to institutionalize all CPD programs was the other identified challenge. Only HDP and Induction are successfully institutionalized CPD programs for academics at Hawassa University; other trainings are sometimes given arbitrarily simply to use the allocated budget. In addition, many training methods lack a robust evaluation component. In other words, after the training, no one has attempted to evaluate their impact (AS<sub>5</sub>, Interview). This finding of this study showed the inability of the university to institutionalize all CPD programs. This finding is in line with Dereje (2022), who reported that the HDP is a centrally initiated and successfully institutionalized professional development program for teachers in Ethiopian public universities.

We argue that the institutionalized system for organizing CPD and following up on CPD endeavors at the university is not as strong. It was found that CPD endeavors, especially training, was arbitrarily run rather than intentional, systematic, and continuous; although the literature on professional development in higher education emphasizes continuity, variety, and collaboration, the existing reality was far from these (Guskey, 2000). This result is consistent with that of Yilfashewa (2012), who reported that there is a gap between what the literature is advocating and existing practices at Adama University.

In addition, HDPs are given in their own rooms; this does not make any difference from the theoretical or conceptual trainings that are given during preservice education. The main purpose of almost all professional development efforts is improving teacher practices to enhance students' outcomes. Therefore, it will be best if it is placed under the umbrella the teaching classroom environment (FGD<sub>1</sub>).

### ***Policy-related challenges***

This study identifies a number of policy-related challenges. First, is that there is no comprehensive plan or follow-up for CPD that could enhance the effectiveness and quality of academics' CPD activities. In relation to this, one of the interviewees explained that "there is no established framework for academics CPD after the completion HDP, everyone should explore his own ways of development... even there is no system which holds academics accountable, if they are not engaged in CPD endeavors"(AS<sub>5</sub>, Interview). This finding is consistent with those MacPhail et al. (2018) and Masoumi et al. (2019), who reported that there is a lack of financial, organizational, and institutional capacity

to plan and implement and evaluate the effectiveness of CPD in a higher education context.

Another persistent challenge identified by this study is the low payment or low salary of academic staff, by which academic staff cannot afford to buy important products for themselves or their families. This leads academics to be engaged in other income-generating activities. Most academics have more than one job, as they are part-time lecturers. One of the FGD participants explained the situation as follows:

In 2020, Dehub Media shared the life experience of one female academic staff member in relation to income generation as a best practice. Her experience includes the following activities: every day, at 4p.m., she sells chips. On weekends, she washes clothes of others by rounding home to home, and she also works as a hair stylist to generate income. These things injured my moral, and I feel the pain till now... In my view all these things are not best practices, but rather a mirror that shows how academic staff at Hawassa University or in Ethiopia is low paid and strive to generate income to afford their basic needs. All these things have an impact on how academics understand and practice CPD individually or as a group institutionally (FGD<sub>1</sub>).

The quote show that external influences such as material incentives have an impact on participation in CPD. Teaching in higher education is seen as a profession that delivers little to financial incentives.

Similarly, the other policy-related obstacle identified by this study is the lack of incentives for upgrading academics. The participants in FGD explained that most academics do not want to upgrade to a PhD because the incentives given upon the completion of the program do not inspire them to do so (FGD<sub>1</sub>). This may explain why academics are losing interest in upgrading professional development programs such as PhD. Rather, the statements expressed academics' drive to seek other opportunities that offer them financial benefits to overcome the hardships of living off of the meager wages they receive as instructors. Thus, investing time in CPD is not as important. This finding is in line with that of Leibowitz (2016), who proposed that extrinsic types of incentive may play an essential role in encouraging academics to participate in professional development opportunities.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS**

It is known that CPD is important for enhancing the competitiveness of individuals and the institutions in which they work. The aim of this study is to explore and examine the understanding and practices of academic staff's CPD within Hawassa University in Ethiopia, as well as the challenges that hinder academic staff and their respective institutions in developing quality CPD



practices. The results of the study indicate that CPD for academics is understood and practiced in different ways. There are CPD challenges related to individual academics, institutional practices, and policy issues.

The researchers propose the following implications for future academic CPD actions at Hawassa University: ample awareness should be created about the importance of CPD, and appropriate need assessment should therefore be performed to provide information about the individual academic and collective needs that can be addressed via CPD. In addition, nurturing a culture of CPD at Hawassa University as a learning community could enhance its effectiveness and quality.

The researchers also suggest that instead of haphazard trainings whose outcomes have never been evaluated, the importance of developing a comprehensive plan and follow-up for CPD could enhance its effectiveness and quality.

To improve the quality and effectiveness of CPD efforts, it is suggested that emphasis should be placed on establishing institutional and systematic policy initiatives to plan, monitor, and evaluate CPD. Institutional managers at different levels should be involved in and take responsibility for educational decisions about how such initiatives could be developed, conducted, and refined. In addition, the provision of all kinds of resources needs to be improved.

In future research, similar studies could be used with multiple cases by using quantitative and mixed-methods research approaches. A mixed research approach could be conducted to determine the opinions and suggestions of all concerned stakeholders.

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