

Continuing Professional Development: Teacher Perspectives in International Private Schools in Bahrain

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ABSTRACT

Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is widely recognised as an important means of enhancing teacher learning, improving teaching practice and supporting school improvement. Although CPD has been extensively researched within Western education systems, comparatively little is known about how it is experienced within private international schools in the Kingdom of Bahrain. This research explored teachers' perspectives of CPD and examined the factors influencing its implementation and effectiveness within this distinctive educational context.

The research adopted an interpretivist paradigm and employed a qualitative multiple case study design involving three private international schools in Bahrain. Data were collected through a demographic questionnaire, semi-structured interviews and documentary analysis. Forty teachers completed the questionnaire, whilst eighteen participants, comprising fifteen teachers and three senior leaders, took part in semi-structured interviews. Documentary evidence was analysed to provide contextual information and support data triangulation. The data were analysed using Braun and Clarke's Reflexive Thematic Analysis.

The findings indicate that, whilst CPD was valued by teachers and senior leaders, its implementation was frequently influenced by organisational priorities, leadership practices and contextual limitations. Participants identified limited time, restricted access to external professional learning, financial constraints and limited opportunities for teacher involvement in planning CPD as key challenges. The findings also highlighted the importance of collaborative learning, teacher agency, reflective practice and supportive leadership in promoting meaningful professional development.

The research concludes that effective CPD requires a balance between organisational priorities and teachers' professional learning needs. By providing an in-depth exploration of teachers' experiences within Bahrain's private international school sector, the research contributes to the limited literature on CPD in international schools and offers recommendations for educational leaders, policymakers and future research.

Keywords: *Continuing Professional Development (CPD); professional learning; international schools; Bahrain; teacher development; educational leadership; teacher agency.*

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Meaning
AFL	Assessment for Learning.
AoBSO	Association of British Schools Overseas
AQA	Assessment and Qualifications Alliance,
ASCD	The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
BERA	British Education Research Association
BOG	Board of Governors
BQA	Bahrain Education and Training Quality Authority
BSME	British Schools in the Middle East
BSO	British Schools Overseas
BTC	Bahrain Teachers College
CIE	Cambridge International Examinations
COBIS	Council of British International Schools
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
CPL	Continuing Professional Learning
DfE	Department for Education
ECT	Early Career Teacher
EYFS	Early Years and Foundation Stage
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GTC	General Teaching Council
HOD	Head of Department
INSET	In service training.
IT	Information Technology
ITT	Initial Teacher Training
L and N	Literacy and Numeracy
NQT	Newly Qualified Teacher
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OFSTED	Office for Standards and in Education
PD	Professional Development
PGCE	Postgraduate Certificate in Education
PMS	Performance Management System
QTS	Qualified Teacher Status

SEN	Special Educational Needs
SLT	Senior Leadership Team
TDA	The Training and Development Agency for Schools
TES	Times Education Supplement
UK	United Kingdom
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

1.0 Introduction

Continuing Professional Development (CPD) has become a central component of educational improvement, reflecting the growing recognition that good teaching is fundamental to improving pupil progress and outcomes and ensuring school effectiveness. Across many education systems, professional development is viewed as a process that enables teachers to develop their knowledge, skills and professional practice throughout their careers whilst supporting wider school improvement initiatives (Day, 1999; Garet et al., 2001; Timperley et al., 2008). Consequently, educational policymakers, school leaders and researchers increasingly regard CPD as an essential mechanism for improving teaching quality and responding to the varying demands placed upon schools.

Within the international school sector, the importance of CPD has become particularly significant. International schools operate within increasingly complex educational environments characterised by culturally diverse teaching staff, internationally recognised curricula, external inspection frameworks and high levels of organisational accountability (Hayden and Thompson, 2013). These contextual factors require teachers and school leaders to engage in continuous professional learning to maintain high standards of teaching and learning whilst responding to local educational requirements alongside international expectations. As a result, CPD has become an integral component of school improvement and educational quality assurance within international schools. More recently, research has emphasised that the effectiveness of CPD depends not only on the quality of individual professional development activities but also on the organisational contexts in which teachers work. School leadership, collaborative cultures and opportunities for professional dialogue have been identified as important factors influencing teachers' engagement with professional learning and the application of new knowledge in classroom practice (Cordingley et al., 2015; van der Lans et al.,

2018). These developments suggest that effective CPD should be understood as an ongoing, context related process rather than a series of isolated training events.

Despite the increasing emphasis placed upon professional development, relatively little research has explored how teachers working within private international schools perceive and experience CPD, particularly within the Kingdom of Bahrain. Whilst educational reform has placed increasing importance on teacher quality and professional learning, there remains limited understanding of whether existing CPD provision effectively supports teachers' professional needs within these unique educational settings. Understanding teachers' perspectives is therefore important in informing leadership practice, professional learning policy and future CPD provision.

This research explores teachers' perspectives of CPD across three private international schools in Bahrain. Using an interpretivist multiple case study approach, the research examines how participants understand CPD, their experiences of professional learning, the influence of school leadership on CPD provision, and the extent to which professional development reflects both organisational priorities and individual professional learning needs. In doing so, the research hopes to contribute to the limited body of research concerning CPD within private international schools in Bahrain and provide recommendations that may support future policy and practice within similar educational contexts. The remainder of this chapter provides the background and context to the research, explains the rationale underpinning the research, outlines the research aim and questions, discusses the significance of the research and concludes by presenting the structure of the thesis.

1.1 Background to the Research

Over the past three decades, CPD has evolved from being viewed primarily as attendance at isolated training events to being recognised as a continuous process of professional learning embedded within teachers' everyday practice. Current educational policy increasingly positions CPD as a strategic mechanism for improving teaching quality, supporting school improvement and enhancing pupil

outcomes (Day, 1999; Guskey, 2000; Timperley et al., 2008). Effective professional development is now widely understood as being sustained, collaborative and closely connected to classroom practice, teacher reflection and organisational improvement (Desimone, 2009; Avalos, 2011). More recent literature has expanded this understanding by emphasising that effective professional development is influenced not only by its content and structure but also by the organisational context in which it takes place. Leadership support, collaborative school cultures and opportunities for professional dialogue have been identified as important factors in enabling teachers to engage with and apply professional learning in practice (Cordingley et al., 2015; van der Lans et al., 2018).

Alongside these developments, the international school sector has expanded significantly worldwide. International schools now educate millions of pupils and operate within increasingly complex educational environments characterised by culturally diverse teaching workforces, internationally recognised curricula and multiple systems of accountability (Hayden and Thompson, 2013). Teachers working within these settings are expected to satisfy both international educational standards and local regulatory requirements, creating an ongoing need for professional learning that supports curriculum development, pedagogical innovation and school improvement.

Within the Kingdom of Bahrain, education occupies a central position in national development policy. The launch of *Economic Vision 2030* placed considerable emphasis on developing human capital through educational reform and improving the quality of teaching and learning (Bahrain Economic Development Board, 2008). Since 2005, Bahrain has implemented a programme of educational reform designed to strengthen school accountability, improve teaching quality and raise educational standards across both state and private education. These reforms resulted in the establishment of the Education and Training Quality Authority (QAAET), responsible for evaluating educational provision and promoting continuous improvement throughout the Kingdom.

Private international schools have become an increasingly important part of Bahrain's education system, serving both expatriate and Bahraini communities

through the delivery of internationally recognised curricula. Whilst these schools operate under the supervision of the Ministry of Education, many are also inspected through international quality assurance frameworks such as British Schools Overseas (BSO) and maintain accreditation with organisations including the Council of British International Schools (COBIS) and British Schools in the Middle East (BSME). Consequently, school leaders are required to balance national educational requirements with international expectations regarding teaching quality, leadership and professional development.

The three schools selected for this research; Abbey School, Kingsway School and Salisbury School, represent established British curriculum international schools operating within this educational context. Although differing in size, organisational structure and stage of development, all three schools share a commitment to delivering high quality education whilst complying with Bahraini educational legislation and international inspection requirements. Their shared characteristics provide an appropriate context within which to explore teachers' experiences of CPD. Within these schools, CPD forms an important component of organisational development, supporting curriculum implementation, teacher effectiveness, leadership development and inspection readiness. However, responsibility for planning and implementing professional development largely rests with individual schools and their leadership teams. Consequently, teachers' experiences of CPD may vary according to leadership priorities, organisational culture, available resources and opportunities for professional learning. This educational context provides the foundation for the research presented in this thesis and establishes the setting within which teachers' perspectives of CPD are explored.

1.2 Educational Context and School Improvement in Bahrain

School improvement within Bahrain is shaped by a distinctive educational, cultural and organisational context that differs in important respects from many of the Western education systems upon which much of the CPD literature is based. Whilst international schools operating in Bahrain frequently adopt British curricula, leadership structures and inspection frameworks, they continue to operate within a

nationally regulated education system characterised by centralised governance, clearly defined organisational hierarchies and accountability to the Ministry of Education. Consequently, school improvement initiatives, including CPD, are influenced by both international educational expectations and national policy priorities. Much of the international literature presents effective CPD as a collaborative process in which teachers actively contribute to identifying professional learning needs, shaping development priorities and participating in school improvement initiatives (Kennedy, 2014; Timperley, 2008; Harris, 2014). These approaches are often underpinned by assumptions of distributed leadership, teacher agency and shared decision making. However, such assumptions may not always reflect the realities of educational leadership within more centralised systems, where organisational priorities, inspection requirements and policy implementation inevitably influence leadership decision making such as the Kingdom of Bahrain. Recent research also suggests that professional learning is most effective when teachers have opportunities to participate actively in identifying their learning needs and engaging in collaborative professional dialogue. However, these opportunities are shaped by organisational culture, leadership practices and the wider educational context in which schools operate (Cordingley et al., 2015; van der Lans et al., 2018).

Within Bahraini private international schools, senior leaders are required to balance a range of competing expectations. These include maintaining compliance with Ministry of Education regulations, meeting the requirements of international accreditation and inspection bodies, satisfying the expectations of school owners and governing boards, and supporting the professional learning of teachers working within culturally diverse environments. Consequently, professional development may fulfil both developmental and organisational purposes, serving not only to enhance teacher practice but also to support institutional accountability, curriculum implementation and school improvement.

Recognising this context is important when considering teachers' perspectives of CPD. Rather than assuming that models of professional development developed within Western educational systems can be transferred directly to Bahrain, this research acknowledges that teachers' experiences are shaped by the organisational

culture, leadership structures and educational priorities within which they work. The findings presented in this thesis are therefore interpreted within the specific context of Bahraini private international schools, recognising that effective CPD must be understood in relation to the cultural and organisational environment in which it is implemented.

Whilst CPD is frequently presented within educational policy as a mechanism for improving teaching quality and school performance, the concept of school improvement itself has been subject to considerable debate. Ball (2003) argues that managerial and neoliberal reforms have increased accountability, inspection and performance measures, reshaping teachers' work through a culture of performativity. Larsen (2010) further argues that educational reform has often been preceded by a discourse of blame and derision towards teachers, in which they are portrayed as responsible for wider educational shortcomings. Consequently, school improvement is frequently judged through measurable outcomes rather than teacher autonomy or professional learning. Although Bahrain has a different political, cultural and educational context, similar tensions may arise between accountability, organisational priorities and teachers' professional development.

Recent studies continue to recognise these tensions, suggesting that accountability requirements, leadership expectations and organisational priorities can influence how teachers experience professional learning and the extent to which CPD supports genuine professional growth (Al Mahdi et al., 2023; OECD, 2023). Consequently, it is important not to assume that models of participatory professional development developed within Western education systems can be transferred directly to Bahraini private international schools without considering the wider cultural and organisational context in which they operate. This contextual perspective provides an important lens through which the findings of the present research are interpreted.

1.3 International Schools within the Bahraini Education System

Private international schools occupy a distinctive position within Bahrain's education system. Unlike government schools, which primarily educate Bahraini nationals

through the national curriculum, international schools generally deliver overseas curricula, including the English National Curriculum, International Baccalaureate (IB) and American programmes. Their student populations typically comprise a combination of expatriate families working temporarily within Bahrain alongside Bahraini families seeking internationally recognised educational qualifications. Consequently, these schools operate within Bahrain's regulatory framework whilst simultaneously responding to the expectations of international accreditation bodies, overseas examination boards and globally recognised inspection systems.

This dual role creates important questions regarding the relationship between international schools and national educational policy. Whilst Bahrain's long term educational strategy seeks to develop the knowledge, skills and employability of its future workforce through educational reform and human capital development (Al-Zayani et al., 2023; Khairy, 2017; Aldada et al., 2024; Khalifa et al., 2023; Al-Mudhahki, 2017), many international schools primarily educate children from internationally mobile families who may not remain in Bahrain beyond their parents' employment. At the same time, increasing numbers of Bahraini families choose international schools because of their perceived educational quality and the opportunities they provide for progression to overseas universities. Consequently, international schools contribute to Bahrain's educational landscape in ways that extend beyond preparation of the future national workforce, supporting educational diversity, international competitiveness and the country's wider economic development.

Educational quality within Bahrain has received increasing attention through national inspection systems and international performance comparisons. However, caution is required when interpreting international assessment data such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). Whilst PISA provides valuable comparative information regarding national education systems, it was not designed specifically to evaluate the effectiveness of private international schools. Participation is based upon nationally selected samples of fifteen-year-old students, meaning that international schools may be underrepresented depending upon national sampling arrangements and student demographics (OECD, 2019).

Consequently, national PISA outcomes cannot be assumed to provide a direct measure of educational quality within Bahrain's private international school sector.

Similarly, inspection evidence presents a more nuanced picture than broad claims regarding educational quality. Reports produced by the Education and Training Quality Authority (QAAET), together with British Schools Overseas (BSO) and Council of British International Schools (COBIS) inspections, demonstrate considerable variation in school performance, with many international schools achieving good or outstanding judgements whilst others continue to identify areas requiring improvement. Rather than assuming widespread deficiencies in educational quality, this research recognises that schools operate within diverse organisational contexts characterised by differing leadership practices, resources and approaches to professional learning.

Recent studies of international schools have also highlighted the influence of leadership, organisational culture and teacher collaboration on professional learning. Although many international schools share similar curricula and inspection frameworks, teachers' experiences of CPD continue to vary according to school priorities, available resources and leadership practices. This reinforces the importance of examining CPD within its specific organisational and cultural context rather than assuming that experiences are consistent across international schools (Al Mahdi et al., 2023; van der Lans et al., 2018).

For these reasons, the present research is not predicated upon the assumption that international schools in Bahrain are underperforming. Instead, it recognises that CPD has become an increasingly important component of school improvement regardless of inspection outcomes. Exploring teachers' and senior leaders' perspectives of CPD therefore provides an opportunity to understand how professional learning is experienced within a distinctive educational context that has received relatively limited attention within the existing literature.

1.4 Rationale for the Research

Although CPD has been extensively researched over the past three decades, much of the existing literature has been undertaken within national education systems in the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia and other Western contexts (Day, 1999; Garet et al., 2001; Desimone, 2009; Avalos, 2011). These studies have made important contributions to understanding the characteristics of effective professional development and its relationship with teacher learning, classroom practice and student outcomes. However, comparatively little research has examined how teachers working within private international schools perceive and experience CPD, particularly within the Kingdom of Bahrain. Although recent studies have examined professional learning in parts of the Gulf region, limited attention has been given to how teachers working in Bahraini private international schools understand and experience CPD within their own organisational contexts. Consequently, important questions remain regarding the influence of leadership, organisational culture and teacher agency on professional learning in these settings.

Within Bahrain, educational reform has placed increasing emphasis on improving teaching quality, leadership effectiveness and school performance as part of the country's wider *Economic Vision 2030* (Bahrain Economic Development Board, 2008). Whilst professional development is recognised as an important mechanism for achieving these objectives, limited research evidence exists regarding how teachers working within Bahraini private international schools understand and experience CPD. Studies undertaken across the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) have identified challenges relating to leadership support, teacher engagement, collaborative learning and the alignment of CPD with school improvement priorities (Romanowski et al., 2019; Al Mahdi et al., 2023). However, relatively little research has explored teachers lived experiences of CPD within private international schools in Bahrain or examined how organisational culture and leadership influence professional learning in this context.

The rationale for this research also reflects the researcher's professional experience of leading and developing CPD programmes within international schools across the United Kingdom, Oman, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. Throughout these leadership

roles, considerable variation was observed in the way professional development was planned, implemented and evaluated, together with differing levels of teacher engagement and organisational support. Whilst many schools invested significant time and resources into CPD, questions remained regarding whether professional development genuinely reflected teachers' professional learning needs or primarily served organisational priorities. These professional experiences provided the initial motivation for undertaking this research whilst recognising the importance of investigating these issues systematically rather than relying upon personal experience alone. This research therefore seeks to address an identifiable gap within the existing literature by exploring teachers' perspectives of CPD across three private international schools in Bahrain.

1.5 Research Aim

The overall aim of this research is to explore teachers' perspectives of CPD within private international schools in the Kingdom of Bahrain. The research seeks to develop a deeper understanding of how participants perceive, experience and evaluate professional development, together with the influence of school leadership, organisational culture and institutional policy on CPD provision and participation.

Through an interpretivist multiple case study approach involving three private international schools in Bahrain, this study examines how CPD is understood by teachers and senior leaders, the extent to which professional development meets both individual and organisational needs, and the role of leadership in planning, supporting and evaluating professional learning. To achieve this aim, the following research questions guided the empirical investigation. The findings are intended to inform leadership practice, school policy, and the planning and implementation of CPD within private international schools in Bahrain and comparable educational contexts.

1.6 Research Questions

The research was guided by the following research questions:

1. What do teaching staff understand by the term Continuing Professional Development (CPD)?
2. What experiences and perspectives of CPD do teaching staff have?
3. What expectations of the school do teaching staff have concerning their own CPD?
4. What are the specific roles and responsibilities of the senior leadership regarding CPD provision?
5. How do the school owners and leadership support CPD through school policy and practice?

These research questions were developed directly from the literature review and the identified research gap. Collectively, they explore teachers' understanding of CPD, their experiences of professional learning, the influence of leadership and organisational culture, and the extent to which professional development supports both individual professional growth and wider school improvement. The questions also provided the framework for the design of the questionnaire, the semi-structured interview schedules and the subsequent thematic analysis presented in Chapters 4 and 5.

1.7 Significance of the Research

This research makes both theoretical and practical contributions to the understanding of CPD within private international schools in Bahrain. Although teacher professional learning has been widely examined within national education systems, relatively little research has explored how CPD is experienced within the unique organisational and cultural contexts of private international schools in the Gulf region. By examining the lived experiences of teachers and senior leaders across three international schools, this study addresses an important gap in the literature and contributes new empirical evidence to an under researched educational context. In doing so, it extends existing scholarship on teacher professional learning, educational leadership and organisational learning (Avalos,

2011; Desimone & Garet, 2015; Opfer & Pedder, 2011). The study also contributes to the growing literature examining professional learning within international schools, where teachers operate within distinctive organisational, cultural and accountability contexts.

From a practical perspective, the findings provide valuable insights for school leaders, CPD coordinators and policymakers responsible for the planning, implementation and evaluation of professional development. The research identifies a range of factors influencing teachers' engagement with CPD, including leadership support, organisational culture, teacher voice, opportunities for collaboration, workload, time constraints and the alignment of professional learning with both individual and organisational priorities. These findings may assist schools in designing more responsive, contextually relevant and sustainable CPD programmes that better support teacher learning, improve professional practice and contribute to whole-school improvement (Day & Sachs, 2004; Timperley et al., 2007).

The research also has important implications for educational policy and leadership within Bahrain. As educational reform increasingly emphasises teacher quality, accountability and school effectiveness, understanding how teachers perceive and experience CPD provides valuable evidence to inform future policy and strategic decision making. The findings may therefore be of interest to the Ministry of Education, school owners, inspection bodies and international accreditation organisations seeking to strengthen the quality, relevance and long-term impact of professional learning across the private international school sector.

Finally, the research provides a foundation for future studies exploring professional learning within international schools in Bahrain and comparable educational settings across the Gulf region and beyond. The contextualised findings may inform comparative research across different international school systems, while also encouraging further investigation into the relationships between leadership, organisational culture, teacher agency and professional learning. By contributing empirical evidence from a relatively under researched context, the research supports the continued development of knowledge concerning effective CPD and

teacher professional learning within international education. By providing research evidence from a relatively under researched context, the study contributes to a broader understanding of how organisational context influences teachers' experiences of CPD within international schools.

1.8 Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is organised into six chapters, each addressing a specific aspect of the research:

Chapter One introduces the research by providing the educational context, research rationale, research aim and questions, together with the significance of the research and an overview of the thesis structure.

Chapter Two critically reviews the literature relating to CPD, examining theoretical perspectives, teacher professional learning, adult learning theory, leadership, professional learning communities and CPD within international schools. The chapter identifies the gaps in the existing literature that informed the research questions and provided the foundation for this research.

Chapter Three presents the research methodology. It outlines the interpretivist philosophical position adopted for the research, justifies the use of a multiple case study research design and describes the data collection methods, including questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and documentary analysis. The chapter also explains the process of reflexive thematic analysis, together with the procedures adopted to ensure trustworthiness, ethical integrity and methodological rigour.

Chapter Four presents the findings of the research. The chapter begins by providing contextual findings from the questionnaire and documentary analysis before presenting the thematic findings derived from the interviews with teachers and senior leaders. The findings are organised around the major themes that emerged during the analysis and are supported by participant quotations from each of the three case study schools.

Chapter Five discusses and analyses the findings in relation to the existing literature. The chapter interprets the empirical findings through the lens of current research and theoretical perspectives, highlighting areas of agreement, divergence and new understanding concerning CPD within private international schools in Bahrain.

Chapter Six concludes the thesis by summarising the principal findings in relation to the research questions and considering their implications for leadership, policy and professional practice. The chapter also discusses the limitations of the research, identifies recommendations for future research and concludes by outlining the contribution to knowledge.

1.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter has introduced the research by outlining the educational context, research rationale, research aim and research questions. It has also explained the significance of the study and provided an overview of the structure of the thesis. The chapter has established the need to explore teachers' perspectives of CPD within private international schools in Bahrain, positioning the research within the context of educational reform, organisational accountability and teacher professional learning.

Chapter Two now critically reviews the literature relating to CPD, teacher professional learning, leadership and international schools, establishing the theoretical and empirical foundations for the study.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

Continuing Professional Development (CPD) has become an increasingly important area of educational focus, reflecting a recognition of the relationship between teacher learning, professional practice and student progress and outcomes. Within current educational systems, teachers are expected to respond to curriculum reviews, technological developments, changing pedagogical approaches and increasingly diverse learner needs. Consequently, professional learning is widely regarded as a key part of educational improvement and organisational effectiveness (Day, 1999; Darling-Hammond, Hyler and Gardner, 2017). This position continues to be supported by more recent research, which suggests that effective CPD is most likely to improve teaching practice when it is sustained, evidence informed and closely connected to teachers' classroom practice. The literature also emphasises that the impact of professional development depends not only on the quality of individual learning activities but also on the organisational conditions that support implementation and collaboration (Cordingley et al., 2015; Sims et al., 2021).

Despite widespread agreement regarding the importance of professional development, considerable debate exists concerning its purpose, characteristics and effective implementation. Researchers differ in their understanding of CPD, with some viewing it primarily as a method for improving teaching effectiveness and supporting school improvement, whilst others emphasise teacher agency, professional autonomy and lifelong learning (Kennedy, 2005; Avalos, 2011). These different perspectives have contributed to a wide range of literature, highlighting the need for further examination of the assumptions underpinning professional development policy and practice. Evidence also indicates that understanding CPD requires greater attention to the contexts in which teachers work, arguing that school culture, leadership and opportunities for collaboration influence how professional development is experienced and implemented (van der Lans et al., 2018).

The purpose of this chapter is to review the literature relating to CPD and to establish the theoretical and conceptual foundations informing the research. The chapter begins by examining definitions of CPD before exploring the importance of professional development for teachers, schools and educational systems. The review then considers the characteristics of effective professional development, adult learning theory, teacher agency, professional learning communities and leadership influences on professional learning. Attention is given to research concerning international schools and professional development within the Gulf region, reflecting the context of the present research area.

This literature review adopts a critical approach by examining areas of agreement and disagreement within the literature and identifying gaps in current knowledge. Whilst substantial research has examined CPD within national education systems, comparatively little attention has been given to teachers' experiences of professional development within private international schools, particularly within Bahrain and the wider Gulf region. Furthermore, much of the existing literature focuses on the characteristics and design of effective CPD rather than how teachers themselves understand, experience and evaluate professional learning within specific organisational and cultural contexts. This suggests there remains a need for research that explores teachers' perspectives of CPD within private international schools in Bahrain. This chapter therefore critically reviews the literature, identifies the principal theoretical perspectives informing the study, and establishes the rationale for the research presented in the subsequent chapters.

2.1 Definitions of Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

Continuing Professional Development (CPD) has become a central concept within educational research and policy, yet the literature reveals significant differences in how the term is defined and understood. This lack of consensus reflects the evolving nature of professional learning and the multiple purposes that CPD serves within educational settings. As Fraser et al. (2007) observe, professional development encompasses changes in teachers' knowledge, skills, beliefs, attitudes and practices, highlighting its complex and multifaceted nature. Research has

increasingly recognised this broad understanding of CPD, whilst placing greater emphasis on professional learning as an ongoing, collaborative and context-dependent process rather than a series of isolated training activities. Current research increasingly recognises that teachers construct professional knowledge through reflection, collaboration and engagement with their own professional contexts, reinforcing the shift away from narrow training-based models of professional development (Cordingley et al., 2015; OECD, 2023).

The terminology used alongside the term CPD further illustrates this complexity. Terms such as continuing professional learning (CPL), teacher development, staff development, in-service education and professional learning are often used interchangeably within the literature (Gravani, 2007). Whilst these concepts share common characteristics, they reflect different assumptions regarding the purpose and processes of professional learning. For example, traditional ideas of staff development often emphasised training and skill acquisition of teachers, whereas current interpretations increasingly focus upon professional learning as a collaborative and reflective process (Day and Sachs, 2004).

One of the most often cited definitions is provided by Day (1999, p. 4), who describes professional development as:

‘all natural learning experiences and those conscious and planned activities which are intended to be of direct or indirect benefit to the individual, group or school and which contribute, through these, to the quality of education in the classroom.’

Day’s definition is crucial because it extends beyond formal training activities and recognises the importance of informal learning experiences occurring throughout a teacher’s career. This broader view challenges earlier ideas of CPD that focused mainly on externally delivered courses and workshops.

Similarly, Bolam (2002) defines CPD as a process involving formal and informal learning opportunities that enhance professional knowledge, skills and understanding. Guskey (2000) similarly emphasises CPD as a purposeful and

systematic process designed to improve professional practice and student outcomes. Together, these definitions highlight the nature of professional learning as developmental whilst recognising its contribution to educational improvement.

However, not all definitions of CPD place equal emphasis on teacher agency. Day and Sachs (2004) distinguish between deficit and aspirational models of professional development. The deficit model assumes that teachers require additional knowledge or skills to address perceived weaknesses in practice and therefore highlights professional development as a mechanism for correcting those deficiencies. In contrast, the aspirational model recognises teachers as knowledgeable professionals capable of directing and forming their own learning. This distinction reflects a wider debate within the literature regarding whether CPD should primarily serve organisational priorities or support teachers' professional autonomy and growth.

Kennedy (2005) further argues that professional development models exist along a continuum ranging from what is termed a transmissive approach, where knowledge is delivered to teachers by external experts, to more wholesale transformative approaches, where teachers actively construct knowledge through collaboration, reflection and inquiry. This perspective highlights the importance of examining not only what CPD is intended to achieve, but also how professional learning is experienced by participants. The literature therefore suggests that CPD cannot be understood simply as attendance at a course or a training event but a wider understanding. Rather, it represents a more complex process of professional learning shaped by a whole range of individual, organisational and contextual factors. Whilst definitions vary, there is broad agreement that effective professional development should contribute to improvements in teacher knowledge, teacher professional practice and ultimately student progress and outcomes (Desimone, 2009, Darling-Hammond, Hyler and Gardner, 2017).

The evolution of CPD definitions over time also reflects a changing understanding of teaching as a profession. Earlier understanding focused primarily on the acquisition of knowledge and skills, whereas more recent perspectives emphasise collaboration, reflection, professional agency and lifelong learning (Avalos, 2011).

Consequently, current interpretations of CPD increasingly recognise teachers as active participants in their own professional development journey rather than passive recipients of externally generated knowledge.

For the purposes of this research, CPD is understood as a continuous and multifaceted process through which teachers engage in formal and informal learning experiences that enhance professional knowledge, skills, beliefs and practices. This interpretation aligns closely with Day's (1999) holistic definition and reflects the research focus on understanding how teachers themselves experience and perceive professional development within international school contexts. Although there is no universally accepted definition of CPD, there is growing agreement that effective professional development should be viewed as a continuous process embedded within teachers' professional practice rather than an isolated event. This broader understanding provides an important foundation for examining how teachers experience CPD within private international schools, where organisational culture, leadership and professional relationships may significantly influence opportunities for learning.

2.2 Importance of Continuing Professional Development

CPD is widely recognised as a fundamental component of teacher learning and educational improvement. As educational systems become increasingly complex and subject to continual change, teachers are expected to update their knowledge, develop new skills and adapt their practice to meet evolving curriculum requirements, technological developments and student needs. Consequently, CPD has become a central feature of educational policy and school improvement initiatives internationally (Day and Sachs, 2004). The importance of CPD is closely associated with the relationship between teacher effectiveness and student outcomes. Research regularly demonstrates that teachers represent one of the most influential school-based factors affecting student achievement (Hattie, 2009, Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). As a result, policymakers and educational leaders increasingly view professional development as a means of improving teaching quality and student performance. Garet et al. (2001) argue that effective

professional development contributes to improvements in teachers' content knowledge, instructional practice and professional confidence, all of which have the potential to positively influence student learning and outcomes. The literature continues to reinforce the relationship between high-quality professional development and improvements in teaching practice. A systematic review by Cordingley et al. (2015) concluded that sustained, collaborative and evidence-informed CPD is associated with positive changes in teachers' professional knowledge, classroom practice and, ultimately, student learning. Similarly, the OECD (2023) emphasises that ongoing professional learning is essential in enabling teachers to respond effectively to increasingly complex educational environments.

Beyond its contribution to classroom practice, CPD is also regarded as an important tool for supporting school improvement. Fullan (2001) argues that sustainable educational change depends largely upon the capacity of teachers to learn, adapt and implement new practices. From this perspective, professional development assists not merely as an individual learning activity but as a key organisational process through which schools look to improve performance and achieve their educational goals. Similarly, Bubb and Earley (2007) suggest that CPD should be viewed as an integral part of school development planning rather than an isolated activity undertaken by individual teachers.

However, the literature also highlights tensions regarding the purposes of professional development. Whilst policymakers often emphasise CPD as a mechanism for implementing reform and achieving organisational objectives, teachers may view professional learning primarily as a means of enhancing their professional competence, career development and personal fulfilment (Kennedy, 2005). This difference is significant because it reflects a wider debate concerning the extent to which professional development should be driven by organisational priorities or individual learning needs of teachers. Day (1999) argues that professional development should support both teacher growth and school improvement, suggesting that these objectives are not mutually exclusive. Nevertheless, research indicates that teachers are more likely to engage positively with professional development when they perceive it as relevant to their own professional needs and classroom practice (Avalos, 2011). Consequently, the

effectiveness of CPD may depend not only upon its content and structure but also upon participants' perspectives of its value and relevance.

The importance of CPD has become particularly evident in response to changing ideas of teaching as a profession. Current educational environments require teachers to engage in ongoing learning throughout their careers rather than relying solely upon initial teacher education. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) argue that teaching should be understood as a profession characterised by continuous learning, collaboration and knowledge creation. From this perspective, professional development represents an essential component of professional identity and lifelong learning. Recent evidence also suggests that professional development has become increasingly important as schools respond to curriculum reform, digital technologies and changing learner needs following the COVID-19 pandemic. These developments have reinforced the need for CPD that is flexible, context-specific and responsive to teachers' professional challenges (OECD, 2023).

Professional development also contributes to the development of professional communities within schools. Wenger (1998) emphasises that learning occurs through participation in communities of practice, where professionals collaborate, share experiences and construct knowledge collectively. This view challenges traditional assumptions that professional development occurs primarily through formal training activities and highlights the importance of collaborative learning opportunities within schools. Research has also shown that teachers often value professional dialogue, peer observation and collaborative inquiry because such activities are closely connected to their daily professional experiences (Timperley, 2008).

Despite widespread recognition of its importance, the impact of CPD is not always straightforward. Guskey (2000) notes that substantial investment in professional development does not automatically result in improved practice or better student outcomes. Similarly, Opfer and Pedder (2011) argue that teacher learning is influenced by a complex interaction of individual, organisational and contextual factors. These findings suggest that the effectiveness of CPD depends not simply

upon participation but upon the quality, relevance and organisational support associated with professional learning activities.

Within international schools, professional development may carry additional significance due to the diversity of staff backgrounds, curriculum frameworks and cultural contexts. Teachers frequently work alongside colleagues from different educational systems and may be required to adapt to new organisational expectations and pedagogical approaches. Consequently, CPD plays an important role in supporting teacher adaptation, promoting consistency of practice and facilitating organisational improvement within international school settings (Hayden and Thompson, 2013). Whilst the benefits of CPD are widely recognised, contemporary research suggests that its effectiveness depends less on the quantity of professional development provided and more on its quality, relevance and successful implementation within schools. This reinforces the view that professional learning should be considered an ongoing organisational process rather than a series of isolated training events (Cordingley et al., 2015; Sims et al., 2021).

Overall, the literature demonstrates that CPD is important for multiple and interconnected reasons. It supports teacher learning, contributes to school improvement, enhances professional identity and has the potential to improve student outcomes. However, the literature also highlights tensions concerning the purposes and implementation of professional development, particularly regarding the balance between organisational objectives and individual teacher needs. These debates provide an important foundation for this research, which seeks to explore how teachers themselves perceive and experience CPD within private international schools in Bahrain.

2.3 Characteristics of Effective Continuing Professional Development

Whilst there is widespread agreement regarding the importance of CPD, there is considerably less consensus regarding what constitutes effective professional learning. Over the past two decades, researchers have sought to identify the characteristics associated with successful CPD initiatives, resulting in a substantial

body of literature examining the factors that influence teacher learning and professional growth. Despite differences in emphasis, several common themes emerge consistently across the literature, including relevance, collaboration, active engagement, sustained duration and organisational support. One of the most influential studies in this area was conducted by Garet et al. (2001), who identified several core features associated with effective professional development. These included content focus, active learning, coherence, duration and collective participation (Garet et al., 2001). The authors found that professional development was more likely to influence classroom practice when it focused directly on subject knowledge and teaching strategies relevant to teachers' daily work. This finding challenged traditional methods based upon generic training sessions and highlighted the importance of connecting professional learning to classroom practices. Although Garet et al.'s (2001) framework continues to underpin much of the professional development literature, more recent systematic reviews have reached similar conclusions. Cordingley et al. (2015) found that professional development is most effective when it is sustained over time, incorporates opportunities for collaboration and reflection, and is closely aligned with teachers' classroom practice. These findings suggest that many of the characteristics identified more than two decades ago continue to remain relevant within contemporary educational contexts.

The importance of relevance is consistently emphasised throughout the literature. Teachers are more likely to engage with professional development when they perceive it as directly applicable to their own teaching practice and professional needs (Avalos, 2011). Equally, professional development that is perceived as disconnected from classroom challenges is often viewed negatively and may have limited impact on practice. Desimone (2009) argues that coherence between professional development activities, curriculum requirements and teachers' professional goals is essential for meaningful learning to occur.

A second characteristic frequently associated with effective CPD is active participation. Traditional models of professional development often relied upon teachers acting as passive recipients of knowledge delivered through lectures or workshops. However, current research suggests that teachers learn most effectively

when they are actively involved in professional learning processes, including reflection, inquiry, experimentation and collaborative problem solving (Desimone, 2009). Active learning opportunities enable teachers to engage critically with new ideas and consider how they may be applied within their own professional environment. The literature also highlights the importance of implementation. Sims et al. (2021) argue that even well-designed professional development may have limited impact if teachers are not provided with sufficient time, leadership support and opportunities to embed new learning within their everyday practice. This suggests that implementation should be viewed as an integral component of effective CPD rather than a separate stage following professional learning.

Closely linked to active participation is the importance of collaboration. Professional learning is increasingly viewed as a social process rather than an individual activity. Wenger's (1998) concept of communities of practice emphasises the role of collaboration in supporting knowledge construction and professional growth. Similarly, Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018) argue that collaborative professionalism enables teachers to share expertise, challenge assumptions and collectively improve practice. Research suggests that professional development is more likely to be effective when teachers are provided with opportunities to work together, exchange ideas and engage in professional dialogue (Timperley, 2008).

The duration of professional development also appears as an important factor. Short term workshops and one-off training events have often been criticised for their limited impact on long term professional learning (Guskey, 2000). Whilst such activities may raise awareness of new ideas, they rarely provide sufficient time for teachers to develop, implement and evaluate changes in practice. Garet et al. (2001) found that sustained professional development programmes were associated with greater changes in teacher knowledge and classroom practice than brief training interventions. Similarly, Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) argue that effective professional development should occur over an extended period and provide opportunities for follow up support and reflection.

Reflection itself is widely recognised as a critical component of effective CPD. Schön (1983) argues that professional learning occurs when practitioners engage in

reflection both during and after professional action. Reflective practice enables teachers to critically evaluate their experiences, identify areas for development and refine their professional knowledge. Consequently, professional development initiatives that incorporate structured opportunities for reflection are often considered more effective than those focused solely on information transmission. Leadership support represents another important characteristic of successful professional development. Research indicates that school leaders play a crucial role in creating conditions that facilitate teacher learning (King, 2016). Effective leaders provide access to professional development opportunities, allocate resources, encourage collaboration and foster cultures that value continuous learning. Harris and Jones (2023) argue that leadership influences student outcomes indirectly through its impact on teacher learning and organisational conditions. Consequently, the success of professional development initiatives is often dependent upon the extent to which leaders actively support and promote professional learning. Schools with collaborative cultures and supportive leadership are more likely to sustain improvements from professional development. Professional dialogue and ongoing support help teachers apply new learning in the classroom (Cordingley et al., 2015).

However, the literature also highlights limitations associated with attempts to identify universal characteristics of effective CPD. Opfer and Pedder (2011) argue that teacher learning is shaped by complex interactions between individual, organisational and contextual factors. From this perspective, professional development cannot be reduced to a simple checklist of features. Rather, the effectiveness of CPD depends upon how different elements interact within specific educational environments. What is effective in one context may not necessarily produce similar outcomes in another.

This issue is particularly relevant within international schools, where teachers often work within culturally diverse environments characterised by varying professional backgrounds, organisational structures and educational expectations. The effectiveness of professional development may therefore be influenced by contextual factors such as school culture, leadership practices and teacher mobility. Consequently, understanding teachers' perspectives of effective professional

development requires attention not only to the characteristics of CPD itself but also to the contexts within which professional learning occurs.

Overall, both seminal and contemporary research suggest that effective CPD is no longer viewed simply as the delivery of isolated training events but as a sustained process of professional learning embedded within teachers' everyday practice. Recent systematic reviews continue to highlight the importance of sustained engagement, collaborative learning, reflection and effective implementation in supporting meaningful changes in classroom practice (Cordingley et al., 2015; Sims et al., 2021). Despite these developments, relatively little research has explored how these principles are experienced within private international schools in the Gulf region, where organisational structures, leadership practices and teacher mobility may shape opportunities for professional learning in distinctive ways. This continuing gap provides an important rationale for the present study.

2.4 Teacher Learning and Professional Growth

Teacher learning lies at the heart of CPD and is widely recognised as a critical factor in improving educational practice and student outcomes and progress. Whilst CPD is often discussed in terms of programmes, policies and activities, its ultimate purpose is to support teacher learning and professional development and growth. Understanding how teachers learn is therefore fundamental to understanding the nature and effectiveness of professional development. Traditional approaches to professional development frequently assumed that teacher learning occurred through the transmission of knowledge from experts to practitioners. Under this model, teachers were viewed primarily as recipients of information who could subsequently apply new knowledge within their classrooms. However, current research has challenged this perspective, arguing that teacher learning is a complex, active and socially situated process influenced by individual experiences, professional contexts and organisational environments (Opfer and Pedder, 2011). Research also highlights that teacher learning is influenced by individual motivation, collaborative professional relationships and organisational culture. Rather than viewing professional learning as a linear process, teachers develop their knowledge

through ongoing reflection, practice and professional dialogue within their school communities (Cordingley et al., 2015; OECD, 2023).

Teacher learning has increasingly been understood as a process of knowledge construction rather than knowledge acquisition. This perspective reflects broader developments in educational theory, particularly constructivist approaches which emphasise the active role of learners in making sense of new experiences (Vygotsky, 1978). Applied to professional development, this suggests that teachers do not simply absorb information presented through CPD activities but actively interpret, adapt and integrate new ideas within their existing professional knowledge and practice.

The importance of experience in teacher learning is highlighted by Day (1999), who argues that professional development should be viewed as a lifelong process extending throughout a teacher's career. According to Day, teachers continuously develop through a combination of formal professional development activities and informal workplace experiences. This broader perspective recognises that significant professional learning often occurs outside structured training programmes through collaboration, reflection and everyday professional practice. Similarly, Avalos (2011) argues that teacher professional development should be understood as a process through which teachers examine, renew and expand their commitment to teaching whilst developing the knowledge, skills and emotional intelligence required to support student learning. This definition emphasises that professional growth involves not only technical competence but also changes in beliefs, values and professional identity.

Professional growth is often linked to the concept of reflective practice. Schön (1983) argues that professionals develop expertise through ongoing reflection on their experiences. Reflection enables teachers to evaluate their actions, consider alternative approaches and develop deeper understandings of their professional practice. As a result, many current models of professional development place considerable emphasis on reflective activities, including action research, professional dialogue and self-evaluation. The literature also highlights the importance of context in shaping teacher learning. Teachers do not learn in isolation

but within schools, departments and professional communities that influence opportunities for growth and development (Lave and Wenger, 1991). School culture, leadership practices, organisational structures and relationships with colleagues all contribute to the professional learning environment. Consequently, teacher development cannot be understood solely in terms of individual motivation or participation in CPD activities; it must also be considered in relation to the organisational conditions that support or constrain learning.

Opfer and Pedder (2011) propose a complexity theory perspective on teacher learning, arguing that professional growth results from interactions between teachers, schools and professional development experiences. Their work challenges simplistic assumptions that participation in CPD automatically leads to improved practice. Instead, they suggest that professional learning outcomes depend upon how teachers engage with new knowledge and the extent to which organisational contexts support implementation.

The relationship between teacher learning and professional identity has also received increasing attention within the literature. Beijgaard, Meijer and Verloop (2004) argue that professional identity is continuously shaped through experiences, relationships and learning opportunities. Professional development therefore contributes not only to the acquisition of knowledge and skills but also to how teachers perceive themselves as professionals. This perspective is particularly relevant in international school contexts, where teachers frequently work within culturally diverse environments and may be required to adapt to new educational systems and organisational expectations. Professional growth is strengthened when teachers engage in evidence-informed inquiry, collaborative reflection and sustained professional dialogue. These approaches help teachers develop new knowledge while evaluating and refining their practice over time, supporting long-term professional learning (Sims et al., 2021).

Furthermore, current research increasingly recognises teachers as active agents in their own professional learning. Rather than being passive recipients of externally determined training, teachers are viewed as professionals capable of identifying learning needs, seeking development opportunities and contributing to the learning

of others (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012). This shift towards greater recognition of teacher agency has important implications for the design and implementation of professional development programmes. Despite widespread agreement regarding the importance of teacher learning, questions still remain regarding how professional growth can best be supported within schools. Whilst some researchers emphasise structured professional development programmes, others highlight the importance of informal learning, collaboration and workplace experiences. These differing perspectives suggest that professional growth is influenced by multiple factors and cannot be reduced to participation in specific training activities alone. Although there is broad agreement regarding the importance of teacher learning, recent literature also highlights that professional growth is shaped by the specific organisational contexts in which teachers work. Consequently, understanding teachers' own perspectives is increasingly recognised as essential for evaluating the effectiveness of CPD within different educational settings (Cordingley et al., 2015).

Overall, the literature demonstrates that teacher learning is a complex and ongoing process involving the interaction of experience, reflection, collaboration and organisational support. Professional growth extends beyond the acquisition of technical skills and encompasses the development of professional knowledge, identity and practice. Understanding these processes provides an important foundation for examining how teachers experience CPD within international schools and informs the theoretical perspectives discussed in the following section.

2.5 Adult Learning Theory

Adult Learning Theory, commonly referred to as andragogy, provides one of the most prominent theoretical frameworks for understanding CPD and teacher learning. Developed primarily through the work of Knowles (1980), andragogy challenges traditional assumptions associated with pedagogy and proposes that adults learn differently from children due to their accumulated experiences, self-concept and motivation for learning. As teachers participating in CPD are adult learners, Adult Learning Theory offers an important lens through which professional

development can be understood and evaluated. Knowles (1980) argued that traditional educational approaches often position learners as dependent recipients of knowledge, whereas adult learners are generally more self-directed and autonomous. According to Knowles, effective adult learning is characterised by active participation, personal relevance and opportunities for learners to draw upon their existing experiences. This perspective has had a significant influence on professional development literature and continues to inform current approaches to teacher learning.

Knowles (1980) identified six assumptions underpinning adult learning. First, adults possess a need to understand why they are learning something before committing to the learning process. Second, adults see themselves as self-directed individuals capable of taking responsibility for their own learning. Third, adults bring a wealth of prior experiences that influence how they interpret and engage with new knowledge. Fourth, readiness to learn is often linked to social and professional roles. Fifth, adults are generally problem centred rather than content centred in their approach to learning. Finally, adult learners are primarily motivated by internal factors such as professional growth, self-esteem and personal fulfilment.

These assumptions have important implications for professional development. If teachers are viewed as adult learners, CPD should be designed in ways that acknowledge their professional expertise, provide opportunities for active engagement and address authentic problems arising from classroom practice. Professional development that fails to recognise these characteristics may be viewed as irrelevant or disconnected from teachers' professional needs. Contemporary research continues to demonstrate the relevance of andragogical principles within teacher professional development. Recent studies indicate that teachers are more likely to engage meaningfully with CPD when learning is relevant to their professional context, encourages active participation and recognises their existing expertise and experience (OECD, 2023; Cordingley et al., 2015).

The principle of self-directed learning is particularly relevant within discussions of teacher professional development. Knowles (1980) argues that adults prefer to exercise control over their learning and participate actively in decisions concerning

what and how they learn. This perspective aligns closely with current discussions surrounding teacher agency and professional autonomy. Research suggests that teachers are more likely to engage positively with professional development when they have opportunities to influence learning objectives and select activities that reflect their individual needs and interests (Avalos, 2011).

The role of prior experience represents another important aspect of Adult Learning Theory. Unlike younger learners, adults possess extensive personal and professional experiences that shape their understanding of new concepts and ideas (Merriam and Bierema, 2013). Within educational settings, teachers bring diverse classroom experiences, pedagogical knowledge and professional beliefs to professional development activities. Effective CPD therefore recognises these experiences as valuable resources for learning rather than treating teachers as passive recipients of externally generated knowledge.

The emphasis on problem centred learning also has significant implications for professional development. Knowles (1980) suggests that adults learn most effectively when learning activities are directly related to real world challenges and practical concerns personal to their situation and context. This principle is reflected in research demonstrating that teachers value CPD opportunities that address classroom issues, support curriculum implementation and provide practical strategies for improving teaching and learning (Garet et al., 2001). Equally, professional development perceived as overly theoretical or disconnected from professional practice is often viewed less favourably. Adult learning within schools is enhanced when professional development is collaborative, sustained and supported by opportunities to apply new learning in practice. This supports Knowles' emphasis on authentic, experience-based learning while recognising the importance of organisational support for professional growth (Sims et al., 2021).

Whilst Adult Learning Theory has been highly influential, it has also attracted criticism. Some academics argue that Knowles overstates the distinction between adult and child learners and assumes a level of autonomy that may not exist in all educational contexts (Brookfield, 1986,1992). Others suggest that social, cultural and organisational factors may exert a greater influence on learning than individual

characteristics alone (Merriam, Caffarella and Baumgartner, 2011). These criticisms are particularly relevant within schools, where professional development is often shaped by organisational priorities, accountability requirements and leadership decisions. Furthermore, critics argue that Adult Learning Theory tends to focus primarily on individual learning processes whilst paying less attention to the social and collaborative aspects of professional learning. Current theories of teacher learning increasingly emphasise the importance of communities of practice, professional dialogue and collective learning (Wenger, 1998). Consequently, whilst andragogy provides valuable insights into individual learning preferences, it may not fully explain the difficulty of professional learning within organisational settings. Despite these criticisms, Adult Learning Theory remains highly relevant to CPD. The emphasis on self-direction, relevance, experience and problem solving aligns closely with many of the characteristics associated with effective professional development identified within the broader literature (Desimone, 2009; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). As a result, andragogy continues to provide a useful framework for examining how teachers experience professional learning and how CPD can be designed to support meaningful professional growth. Whilst Adult Learning Theory remains an influential framework for understanding CPD, contemporary literature suggests that adult learning should also be understood within the wider organisational and social contexts in which teachers work. Consequently, professional learning is increasingly viewed as the product of both individual learner characteristics and the collaborative environments created within schools (Cordingley et al., 2015).

For the purposes of this research, Adult Learning Theory provides an important theoretical lens through which participants' perspectives of professional development can be interpreted. In particular, the concepts of self-directed learning, professional relevance and the use of prior experience offer valuable insights into how teachers understand and evaluate CPD within private international schools. These ideas also provide a foundation for the subsequent discussion of teacher agency and professional autonomy within professional learning contexts.

2.6 Models of Continuing Professional Development

As CPD has evolved, a variety of approaches have emerged regarding how professional learning should be organised and delivered. These approaches differ significantly in their assumptions about teacher learning, professional autonomy and the purposes of professional development. Consequently, understanding the different models of CPD is important because the effectiveness of professional learning is influenced not only by its content but also by the way it is structured and implemented. Historically, professional development was often characterised by a training model in which teachers attended courses, workshops or seminars delivered by external experts. Such approaches assumed that professional knowledge could be transmitted from specialists to practitioners and subsequently applied within classroom settings (Guskey, 2000). Whilst these approaches remain common within schools, they have been criticised for encouraging passive participation and for failing to recognise the complexity of teacher learning (Avalos, 2011).

One of the most influential frameworks for understanding CPD models was developed by Kennedy (2005). Kennedy argues that professional development approaches can be positioned along a continuum ranging from transmissive models to transformative models. This framework is particularly significant because it highlights the relationship between professional development and teacher empowerment, demonstrating how different approaches can either reinforce or challenge existing power structures within educational organisations.

At the transmissive end of the continuum are training, award bearing and deficit models of professional development (Kennedy, 2005). These approaches are generally characterised by externally determined objectives, limited teacher involvement in decision making and an emphasis on knowledge transmission. The training model, for example, typically involves experts delivering information to teachers through workshops, conferences or presentations. Whilst such approaches can be effective in communicating policy changes, introducing new curricula or developing specific technical skills, they often provide limited opportunities for critical reflection or collaborative learning. Although Kennedy's

(2005) framework remains one of the most widely used models for understanding CPD, more recent research has emphasised that professional development is rarely confined to a single model in practice. Schools increasingly adopt blended approaches that combine formal training, coaching, collaborative inquiry and workplace learning to meet both organisational priorities and teachers' professional learning needs (Cordingley et al., 2015).

Similarly, deficit models assume that professional development is required to address perceived weaknesses in teachers' knowledge or performance. Under this approach, CPD is often designed and directed by school leaders or external agencies with the intention of correcting identified shortcomings. Whilst deficit-oriented approaches may support organisational accountability and quality assurance processes, critics argue that they can undermine teacher professionalism by positioning teachers as problems to be fixed rather than professionals capable of directing their own learning (Kennedy, 2005). Award bearing models represent another transmissive approach and are frequently associated with accredited programmes delivered by universities or professional organisations. Such programmes may contribute to career progression and formal qualifications; however, critics have questioned the extent to which they always influence classroom practice directly (Fraser et al., 2007).

Moving along Kennedy's continuum, transitional models seek to balance organisational priorities with opportunities for teacher participation and professional growth. Examples include mentoring, coaching and communities of practice. These approaches recognise the importance of professional dialogue and collaboration whilst maintaining some degree of organisational direction. Coaching and mentoring, for instance, provide opportunities for individualised support and professional reflection, enabling teachers to engage actively with their learning whilst benefiting from guidance and feedback from colleagues (Bubb and Earley, 2007).

At the transformative end of the continuum are professional development approaches that emphasise teacher empowerment, critical reflection and professional autonomy (Kennedy, 2005). These models position teachers as active

contributors to professional knowledge rather than passive recipients of information. Examples include action research, collaborative inquiry and practitioner research, all of which encourage teachers to investigate their own practice, generate knowledge and contribute to school improvement. Transformative approaches are closely aligned with contemporary understandings of teacher professionalism. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) argue that sustainable educational improvement depends upon the development of professional capital through collaboration, reflection and collective responsibility. Similarly, Timperley (2008) suggests that meaningful professional learning occurs when teachers actively engage with evidence, question assumptions and evaluate the impact of changes in practice. Such approaches recognise teachers as professionals capable of contributing to educational knowledge rather than simply implementing externally prescribed solutions. Recent studies also suggest that transformative approaches are most effective when supported by strong leadership, collaborative cultures and opportunities for teachers to engage critically with evidence from their own practice. This reinforces the view that professional learning should be viewed as an ongoing process rather than a series of isolated professional development activities (OECD, 2023).

However, the literature suggests that no single model is universally effective. Opfer and Pedder (2011) argue that professional learning is shaped by complex interactions between individual, organisational and contextual factors. Consequently, schools frequently employ a combination of approaches rather than relying upon a single model of professional development. For example, schools may use training sessions to introduce curriculum changes whilst simultaneously promoting collaborative inquiry and professional learning communities to support ongoing implementation.

The relevance of CPD models is particularly evident within international school settings. International schools often operate within accountability driven environments characterised by inspection requirements, accreditation standards and organisational improvement targets. Such pressures may encourage the adoption of transmissive models focused on organisational priorities. At the same time, internationally mobile teachers frequently bring diverse experiences and

professional expectations, creating a need for professional development approaches that recognise teacher agency and professional autonomy. These competing influences may create tensions between school directed CPD and teacher led professional learning. Contemporary literature therefore suggests that the effectiveness of different CPD models depends less on the model itself and more on how it is implemented within specific organisational contexts. Factors such as leadership support, school culture and teacher engagement appear to influence whether professional learning leads to sustained improvements in practice (Sims et al., 2021).

Overall, Kennedy's (2005) framework provides a valuable lens through which to understand the diversity of professional development approaches and their implications for teacher learning. The distinction between transmissive and transformative models highlights important debates concerning professional autonomy, organisational control and the purposes of CPD. These issues are particularly relevant to the present research, which seeks to explore how teachers and senior leaders perceive professional development within private international schools in Bahrain. The discussion of CPD models also provides a foundation for the following section, which examines the concepts of teacher agency and professional autonomy in greater detail.

2.7 Teacher Agency and Professional Autonomy

Teacher agency and professional autonomy have become increasingly important concepts within current discussions of CPD. Whilst traditional approaches to professional development often positioned teachers as recipients of externally agreed knowledge and training, more recent perspectives emphasise the active role teachers play in shaping, directing and evaluating their own professional learning. This shift reflects broader changes in educational thinking that recognise teachers as professionals capable of exercising judgement, making informed decisions and contributing to educational improvement (Priestley, Biesta and Robinson, 2015).

Teacher agency is commonly defined as the capacity of individuals to act purposefully and make choices that influence their professional practice and development. Priestley et al. (2015) argue that agency should not be viewed simply as an individual characteristic but rather as something that emerges through the interaction between teachers and their professional environments. Consequently, agency is influenced not only by personal motivation and competence but also by organisational structures, leadership practices and workplace cultures that either facilitate or constrain professional action. Teacher agency is an important factor in successful professional learning. Teachers who identify their own learning needs and contribute to CPD planning are generally more engaged and more likely to implement changes in classroom practice than those who participate only in mandated training (Cordingley et al., 2015).

Within the context of CPD, teacher agency refers to the extent to which teachers can influence decisions regarding their professional learning, identify development needs and participate in determining the content and direction of professional development activities. Research suggests that teachers are more likely to engage positively with CPD when they perceive themselves as active participants in the learning process rather than passive recipients of externally imposed initiatives (Avalos, 2011). This finding reflects principles of adult learning theory, which emphasise the importance of self-direction, relevance and ownership in adult learning (Knowles, 1980).

Closely related to agency is the concept of professional autonomy. Professional autonomy refers to the degree of control professionals exercise over decisions relating to their work, including teaching practices, curriculum implementation and professional learning (Ingersoll, 2003). Historically, autonomy has been regarded as a defining characteristic of professional occupations because it enables practitioners to apply specialised knowledge and exercise professional judgement. Within education, professional autonomy is often associated with increased motivation, innovation and professional commitment (Sachs, 2003).

The literature suggests that teacher autonomy plays an important role in professional development. Teachers who have opportunities to identify their own

learning needs and select professional development activities are often more engaged and more likely to apply new learning within their practice (King, 2016). Furthermore, autonomy may enhance professional responsibility by encouraging teachers to take ownership of their learning and contribute actively to school improvement initiatives.

However, the relationship between professional autonomy and CPD is often characterised by tension. Contemporary educational systems are increasingly influenced by accountability measures, performance management systems and inspection frameworks that seek to standardise practice and ensure organisational effectiveness (Ball, 2003). Consequently, professional development is frequently designed to support school improvement priorities, curriculum reforms or policy initiatives. Whilst such approaches may serve legitimate organisational purposes, they can reduce opportunities for teachers to exercise choice and influence over their professional learning.

Kennedy (2005) argues that professional development models differ significantly in the extent to which they promote teacher autonomy. Transmissive models tend to prioritise organisational control and policy implementation, whereas transformative models seek to empower teachers through collaboration and inquiry. This distinction highlights the importance of considering not only the content of professional development but also the degree of agency afforded to participants.

The concept of teacher agency is also closely linked to professional identity. Beijaard, Meijer and Verloop (2004) argue that professional identity develops through ongoing interactions between personal experiences, professional knowledge and workplace contexts. Opportunities to participate in meaningful professional learning can therefore strengthen teachers' sense of professional competence and identity. Equally, highly prescriptive approaches to CPD may undermine professional confidence by limiting opportunities for teacher voice and professional judgement. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) contend that effective professional learning requires a balance between collective responsibility and individual autonomy. Whilst schools must ensure that professional development supports organisational goals and student outcomes, teachers should also be

recognised as knowledgeable professionals capable of contributing to decisions regarding their own learning. This perspective reflects current approaches that emphasise collaborative professionalism, shared leadership and distributed expertise within schools (Hargreaves and O'Connor, 2018).

Within international schools, issues of agency and autonomy may assume particular significance. Teachers often work within culturally diverse environments, adapt to unfamiliar curricula and navigate differing organisational expectations. As a result, they may seek professional learning opportunities that address their specific contexts and professional needs. At the same time, international schools frequently operate within competitive and accountability driven environments where CPD is closely linked to inspection outcomes, accreditation requirements and school improvement priorities. These circumstances can create tensions between teacher preferences and organisational expectations regarding professional development. Whilst the importance of teacher agency is widely recognised, contemporary studies suggest that opportunities for agency continue to vary considerably between schools due to differences in leadership practices, organisational culture and accountability expectations. Understanding teachers' own experiences of these influences therefore remains an important area for further research, particularly within international school settings (Cordingley et al., 2015).

Research suggests that opportunities for teacher voice and participation contribute positively to perceptions of CPD effectiveness (Opfer and Pedder, 2011). Teachers who are consulted regarding professional learning priorities are more likely to perceive CPD as relevant and meaningful. Conversely, professional development that is imposed without consultation may be viewed as less effective and less responsive to classroom realities. Overall, the literature highlights teacher agency and professional autonomy as important factors influencing professional learning. Teachers are increasingly recognised as active participants in their own development rather than passive recipients of training. However, opportunities for agency are shaped by organisational contexts, leadership practices and accountability structures, creating ongoing tensions between individual choice and institutional priorities. These tensions are particularly relevant to this research and

provide an important foundation for examining teacher participation in CPD, which is discussed in the following section.

2.8 Teacher Participation in Continuing Professional Development

Teacher participation is a critical factor influencing the effectiveness of CPD. Whilst schools may provide a range of professional learning opportunities, the impact of such initiatives ultimately depends upon the extent to which teachers engage meaningfully with the learning process. Consequently, understanding the factors that influence participation has become an important area of professional development research. Participation in CPD extends beyond attendance at training sessions and encompasses teachers' levels of engagement, commitment and willingness to apply new learning within their professional practice. Guskey (2000) argues that professional development cannot be considered successful simply because teachers attend training activities; rather, meaningful participation involves reflection, experimentation and the integration of new knowledge into classroom practice. This distinction highlights the importance of examining not only access to CPD but also the quality of teacher engagement.

Research suggests that teachers are more likely to participate actively in professional development when learning opportunities are perceived as relevant to their professional needs and classroom experiences. Desimone (2009) argues that relevance is a key determinant of engagement because teachers are more motivated to participate in learning activities that address immediate professional challenges. Similarly, Avalos (2011) found that teachers frequently value CPD that provides practical strategies, opportunities for reflection and direct application to their own teaching and learning practices in the classroom.

Motivation also plays an important role in influencing participation. Adult Learning Theory suggests that adults are primarily motivated by internal factors such as personal growth, professional competence and self-fulfilment rather than external rewards (Knowles, 1980). Consequently, teachers may be more inclined to participate actively in professional development when they perceive opportunities

for professional growth, career development or improvements in classroom practice. Conversely, participation may be limited when CPD is perceived as irrelevant, repetitive or disconnected from professional realities.

The literature also highlights the influence of organisational culture on teacher participation. Schools that promote collaboration, trust and continuous learning often experience higher levels of engagement with professional development initiatives (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012). Within such environments, professional learning is viewed as a shared responsibility rather than an individual obligation. Teachers are encouraged to exchange ideas, engage in professional dialogue and support one another's development. These collaborative cultures can enhance participation by creating positive attitudes towards professional learning and fostering a sense of collective purpose.

Leadership support represents another significant factor influencing participation. School leaders play an important role in establishing expectations regarding professional learning and creating conditions that facilitate teacher engagement (King, 2016). Leaders who prioritise professional development, provide access to resources and recognise teachers' professional learning needs may encourage greater participation. Conversely, a lack of leadership support may reduce engagement by limiting opportunities for learning or creating perceptions that professional development is not valued within the organisation.

Time is frequently identified as one of the most significant barriers to teacher participation in CPD. Teachers often experience substantial workloads associated with planning, assessment, administration and pastoral responsibilities. As a result, finding time to engage in meaningful professional learning can be challenging (Bubb and Earley, 2007). Research consistently identifies workload pressures as a major factor limiting participation, particularly when professional development is perceived as an additional demand rather than an integrated component of professional practice (Opfer and Pedder, 2011). Access to professional development opportunities may also influence participation. Teachers working within different educational contexts may experience varying levels of access to training, resources and external learning opportunities. Financial constraints, staffing limitations and

organisational priorities can all affect the availability of professional development (Mansour et al., 2014). Such factors may be particularly relevant within international schools where budgetary considerations and operational demands influence decisions regarding CPD provision.

Another important consideration is teacher voice and involvement in planning professional development. Research indicates that teachers are more likely to participate actively when they have opportunities to contribute to decisions regarding learning priorities and professional development activities (King, 2016). Participation in decision making may enhance feelings of ownership and increase the perceived relevance of CPD. This finding aligns closely with discussions of teacher agency and professional autonomy, suggesting that meaningful participation extends beyond attendance and includes involvement in shaping professional learning opportunities. The relationship between participation and professional identity has also attracted attention within the literature. Teachers who view themselves as lifelong learners may be more likely to engage actively in CPD and seek opportunities for professional growth (Day, 1999). Participation therefore reflects not only organisational factors but also individual beliefs regarding professionalism, learning and career development. Professional development may strengthen professional identity by reinforcing teachers' commitment to continuous improvement and reflective practice.

Within international school settings, participation may be influenced by additional factors such as teacher mobility, cultural diversity and organisational expectations. International teachers often work within dynamic environments characterised by changing curricula, diverse student populations and multicultural staff teams. These factors may create both opportunities and challenges for participation in professional learning. Whilst teachers may benefit from exposure to diverse perspectives and experiences, they may also encounter barriers relating to workload, adaptation and organisational priorities. Contemporary research also suggests that sustained participation depends upon creating organisational conditions that support continuous professional learning, including protected time for collaboration, supportive leadership and opportunities for professional reflection. These factors

appear to be particularly important in schools seeking to establish long-term cultures of professional learning (Cordingley et al., 2015; Sims et al., 2021).

Overall, the literature suggests that teacher participation in CPD is influenced by a complex interaction of individual, organisational and contextual factors. Relevance, motivation, leadership support, school culture, teacher voice all contributes to levels of engagement with professional learning. Understanding these influences is important because participation represents a crucial link between professional development provision and professional learning outcomes. The discussion also highlights the importance of collaborative learning environments, which form the focus of the following section on professional learning communities and collaborative professional learning.

2.9 Professional Learning Communities and Collaborative Learning

Professional learning communities (PLCs) have emerged as one of the most influential approaches to CPD within contemporary educational settings. In contrast to traditional models of professional development that emphasise individual participation in training events, PLCs recognise learning as a collaborative and social process through which teachers work together to improve professional practice and student outcomes. This perspective reflects a broader shift in educational thinking from viewing professional learning as the acquisition of knowledge towards understanding it as a process of collective inquiry, reflection and knowledge construction.

The theoretical foundations of professional learning communities can be traced to the work of Wenger (1998), whose concept of Communities of Practice emphasises learning through participation in shared professional activities. Wenger (1998) argues that learning occurs when individuals engage with others who share common goals, challenges and professional interests. Through participation in communities of practice, individuals develop professional knowledge, construct meaning and establish shared understandings of effective practice. This perspective highlights the social nature of learning and challenges traditional assumptions that professional development occurs primarily through individual study or external

training. Lave and Wenger (1991) further suggest that learning is situated within social contexts and cannot be separated from the environments in which it occurs. Applied to schools, this implies that teachers learn most effectively when they engage collaboratively with colleagues, discuss professional challenges and reflect upon their experiences. Consequently, professional development is increasingly viewed as an ongoing process embedded within daily professional practice rather than a series of isolated training events.

The concept of professional learning communities gained prominence through the work of DuFour and Eaker (2009), who argued that schools should be organised around collaborative cultures that support continuous professional learning. According to this perspective, effective schools create structures that enable teachers to work collectively, share expertise and focus on improving student learning and outcomes. Professional learning communities are therefore characterised by shared values, collective responsibility, reflective dialogue and collaborative inquiry (Stoll et al., 2006).

Research has consistently highlighted the benefits of collaborative professional learning. Vescio, Ross and Adams (2008) found that participation in professional learning communities was associated with improvements in teaching practice and positive impacts on student achievement. Similarly, Hord (2004) argues that collaboration promotes professional growth by enabling teachers to learn from one another, challenge existing assumptions and develop new approaches to teaching and learning.

More recent evidence continues to support collaborative approaches to professional learning. Cordingley et al. (2015) conclude that sustained collaboration, structured professional dialogue and opportunities for peer reflection are among the strongest features of effective CPD. Likewise, Sims et al. (2021) argue that collaborative professional learning is most effective when teachers are supported to implement, evaluate and refine new practices over time rather than simply attending isolated professional development events. These findings reinforce the view that collaboration should be viewed as an ongoing process embedded within teachers' everyday professional practice rather than an occasional activity.

Evidence from the Gulf region also supports the value of collaborative professional learning. In a study of private schools in Bahrain and Oman, Al Mahdi et al. (2023) found that professional learning communities strengthened collaboration, leadership development and professional dialogue amongst teachers. However, the study also demonstrated that the success of PLCs depended upon supportive leadership, organisational trust and sufficient time for collaboration. This suggests that collaborative structures alone are insufficient; schools must also create organisational conditions that enable meaningful professional learning.

A key feature of collaborative learning is the opportunity for professional dialogue. Through discussion and reflection, teachers can examine their practice, exchange ideas and explore solutions to shared challenges. Timperley (2008) suggests that professional conversations are particularly valuable because they encourage teachers to critically evaluate evidence and consider alternative perspectives. Such dialogue supports the development of reflective practitioners capable of adapting and improving their professional practice. The importance of collaboration has also been emphasised by Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018), who introduced the concept of collaborative professionalism. Unlike superficial forms of collaboration, collaborative professionalism involves purposeful, sustained and evidence-informed engagement between professionals working towards shared goals. Rather than simply exchanging ideas, teachers collectively analyse evidence, evaluate practice and assume shared responsibility for improving teaching and learning. This approach positions teachers as contributors to professional knowledge rather than passive recipients of externally determined expertise.

However, the literature also highlights challenges associated with implementing professional learning communities effectively. Simply bringing teachers together does not automatically result in meaningful professional learning. Stoll et al. (2006) argue that successful PLCs require supportive leadership, trust, shared purpose and opportunities for genuine collaboration. Similarly, Al Mahdi et al. (2023) found that competing organisational priorities, workload pressures and limited opportunities for collaborative reflection could reduce the effectiveness of professional learning communities, even where schools were committed to professional development.

Leadership therefore plays a crucial role in fostering collaborative learning environments. School leaders influence the extent to which collaboration is valued, supported and embedded within organisational culture. Hord (2004) suggests that leaders must create conditions that encourage trust, open communication and shared decision-making if professional learning communities are to flourish. Harris and Jones (2023) similarly argue that leadership influences teacher learning indirectly by establishing the organisational conditions that support collaboration and continuous professional development.

Professional learning communities may be particularly relevant within international schools, where teachers often work within culturally diverse environments and bring a wide range of professional experiences. Collaborative learning enables teachers from different educational backgrounds to share expertise, establish common expectations and support one another in adapting to new curricula, educational systems and organisational cultures. These opportunities may be especially valuable in schools characterised by high levels of staff mobility, where collaboration can contribute to organisational continuity and collective professional learning.

Despite the growing popularity of professional learning communities, some researchers caution against viewing collaboration as a universal solution to professional development challenges. Avalos (2011) argues that collaboration varies considerably in quality and that not all collaborative activities result in meaningful professional learning. Similarly, Opfer and Pedder (2011) suggest that collaborative learning is influenced by complex interactions between individual teachers, school culture and wider organisational contexts. Consequently, professional learning communities should be viewed as one component of a broader professional development strategy rather than a standalone solution.

Overall, the literature demonstrates that professional learning communities make an important contribution to teacher learning by promoting collaboration, professional dialogue, reflective practice and collective responsibility for improvement. Whilst contemporary evidence continues to support the effectiveness of collaborative professional learning, it also suggests that successful implementation depends upon supportive leadership, organisational culture and sustained opportunities for

meaningful collaboration. Despite increasing research into PLCs, relatively little attention has been given to how teachers within private international schools in Bahrain experience collaborative professional learning. Addressing this gap provides an important rationale for the present study.

2.10 Continuing Professional Development and School Improvement

CPD is widely regarded as a key mechanism through which schools seek to improve teaching quality, enhance student outcomes and achieve organisational effectiveness. Whilst professional development is often discussed in relation to individual teacher learning, a growing body of literature emphasises its broader contribution to school improvement and educational change. Consequently, CPD is increasingly viewed not simply as a personal development activity but as a strategic process that supports organisational growth and sustained educational improvement. The relationship between teacher quality and student achievement has been widely documented within educational research. Hattie (2009) argues that teachers represent one of the most influential school-based factors affecting student learning. Similarly, Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) argue that improvements in teaching quality are fundamental to improving educational outcomes. As a result, professional development has become a key component of school improvement initiatives designed to enhance teaching practice and student outcomes.

School improvement literature frequently identifies professional learning as a critical factor in successful educational change. Fullan (2001) argues that sustainable improvement depends upon the capacity of teachers to learn, adapt and implement new practices. From this perspective, educational reform cannot be achieved solely through policy initiatives or structural changes; rather, meaningful improvement requires investment in teacher learning and professional capacity. Consequently, CPD is often viewed as a vehicle through which schools can translate improvement strategies into classroom practice.

The concept of capacity building is particularly relevant to discussions of school improvement. Capacity building refers to the development of the knowledge, skills

and organisational conditions necessary to support sustained improvement (Fullan, 2001). Professional development contributes to capacity building by enhancing teachers' expertise, encouraging collaboration and fostering professional learning cultures. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) describe this process as the development of professional capital, whereby schools strengthen collective expertise and improve their ability to respond to educational challenges. Effective professional development is increasingly viewed as a key mechanism through which schools build organisational capacity for improvement. Cordingley et al. (2015) argue that sustained professional learning strengthens teachers' knowledge, promotes collaborative practice and supports the implementation of evidence-informed teaching strategies. These findings reinforce the view that school improvement depends not only on structural or policy changes but also on the continuous development of teachers' professional expertise.

Research suggests that professional development is most effective when aligned with broader school improvement priorities. Bubb and Earley (2007) argue that CPD should not be viewed as a separate activity disconnected from organisational goals. Instead, professional learning should be integrated into strategic planning and linked directly to teaching, learning and student achievement. Such alignment helps ensure that professional development contributes to meaningful improvements in practice rather than becoming an isolated administrative requirement. However, tensions frequently arise between organisational objectives and individual teacher needs. Whilst schools may seek to direct professional development towards strategic priorities, teachers often value learning opportunities that address their own professional interests and classroom challenges (Kennedy, 2005). Balancing these competing demands remains a significant challenge for educational leaders. Day (1999) suggests that effective professional development should support both individual growth and organisational improvement, recognising that these objectives are interconnected rather than mutually exclusive. The literature also highlights the importance of collaborative learning in supporting school improvement. Professional learning communities, collaborative inquiry and peer learning initiatives enable teachers to share expertise, reflect upon practice and contribute collectively to educational development (Stoll et al., 2006). Such approaches are increasingly viewed as more effective than isolated training events because they promote

sustained engagement with professional learning and encourage the dissemination of good practice throughout the organisation.

Another important aspect of the relationship between CPD and school improvement concerns organisational culture. Schools that promote continuous learning, professional trust and collaboration are more likely to create conditions conducive to improvement (Senge, 2006). Learning organisations encourage staff to engage in ongoing reflection, experimentation and knowledge sharing, thereby supporting both individual and collective development. In contrast, schools characterised by compliance-driven cultures may struggle to foster meaningful professional learning despite investing significant resources in CPD.

Evidence also suggests that the impact of professional development on school improvement is not always immediate or straightforward. Guskey (2000) argues that changes in teacher beliefs and practices often occur gradually and may require sustained support over time. Furthermore, improvements in student outcomes may be influenced by a range of factors beyond professional development alone. Consequently, evaluating the effectiveness of CPD requires consideration of both short term and long-term outcomes. Research also indicates that professional learning is most successful when it forms part of a coherent school improvement strategy rather than being delivered as isolated initiatives. Schools that align CPD with strategic priorities, classroom practice and ongoing evaluation are more likely to achieve sustained improvements in teaching and learning (OECD, 2023).

Within international school settings, professional development may play an especially important role in supporting school improvement. International schools often operate within highly competitive educational environments and are subject to multiple accountability frameworks, including inspections, accreditation processes and parental expectations. These factors place considerable emphasis on educational quality and continuous improvement. Professional development therefore becomes an important mechanism through which schools seek to enhance teaching standards, implement curriculum changes and maintain organisational competitiveness and effectiveness.

Whilst the relationship between CPD and school improvement is well established, studies also demonstrate that improvements are influenced by organisational culture, leadership and teachers' willingness to engage with change. This highlights the importance of understanding how teachers themselves perceive professional learning within their own school contexts. Nevertheless, research indicates that school improvement initiatives are most successful when teachers perceive professional development as meaningful, relevant and supportive rather than imposed or compliance driven (Avalos, 2011). This suggests that professional learning contributes most effectively to school improvement when it is viewed as a collaborative process rather than simply a managerial tool for implementing organisational priorities.

Overall, the literature demonstrates a strong relationship between CPD and school improvement. Professional learning contributes to teacher effectiveness, organisational capacity and educational change, making it a central component of contemporary school improvement strategies. However, the effectiveness of CPD depends upon the extent to which professional learning is aligned with both organisational goals and teachers' professional needs. This relationship highlights the critical role of leadership in creating conditions that support professional learning and school improvement, which forms the focus of the following section.

2.11 Leadership and Professional Learning

Leadership is widely recognised as one of the most significant factors influencing the effectiveness of CPD and the creation of professional learning cultures within schools. Whilst teachers are ultimately responsible for engaging in their own professional learning, school leaders play a crucial role in shaping the conditions that facilitate this professional development. Consequently, the relationship between leadership and professional learning has become an important area of educational research, particularly in studies examining school improvement and organisational effectiveness. Research regularly demonstrates that leadership influences student progress and outcomes indirectly through its impact on teaching quality, school culture and professional learning opportunities (Harris and Jones,

2023). Hallinger (2011) argues that effective leaders create environments in which teachers are supported, encouraged and empowered to engage in continuous learning. From this perspective, leadership is not simply concerned with administrative management but also with fostering conditions that enable professional growth and organisational improvement.

The concept of instructional leadership has been particularly influential in understanding the relationship between leadership and professional development. Instructional leaders focus explicitly on teaching and learning, supporting teachers through professional development, mentoring and the promotion of effective pedagogical practices (Hallinger, 2011). Such leaders are actively involved in shaping professional learning priorities and ensuring that CPD aligns with both educational goals and classroom needs. Research suggests that instructional leadership contributes positively to teacher learning by creating clear expectations and providing support for professional growth. Leadership plays an important role in creating the conditions that enable professional learning to flourish. School leaders influence participation in CPD through the allocation of time, resources and opportunities for collaboration, whilst also shaping a culture in which professional learning is valued and supported (Harris and Jones, 2023).

Transformational leadership has also been widely associated with professional learning. Transformational leaders seek to inspire, motivate and empower staff by developing shared visions and encouraging innovation and collaboration (Leithwood and Jantzi, 2005). Rather than directing professional development through top-down approaches, transformational leaders aim to build commitment to organisational goals whilst supporting individual professional growth. This approach is particularly relevant to CPD because it emphasises teacher empowerment, shared responsibility and professional agency.

King (2016) argues that leadership is essential for establishing professional learning cultures within schools. Effective leaders create structures and processes that support collaboration, reflection and ongoing professional dialogue. They allocate resources, provide time for learning and encourage teachers to engage with professional development opportunities. Furthermore, leaders play an important

role in modelling lifelong learning by demonstrating their own commitment to professional growth and reflective practice.

The literature also highlights the importance of distributed leadership in supporting professional learning. Distributed leadership recognises that leadership responsibilities are shared across the organisation rather than concentrated solely within senior leadership teams (Spillane and Camburn, 2006). This perspective is particularly relevant to professional development because it acknowledges the contributions of teachers, middle leaders and professional learning communities in promoting educational improvement. Distributed approaches may enhance professional learning by creating opportunities for teachers to lead initiatives, share expertise and contribute to organisational decision-making.

Professional learning is also influenced by leaders' attitudes towards teacher autonomy and participation. Research suggests that teachers are more likely to engage positively with CPD when leaders provide opportunities for consultation, involvement and professional dialogue (King, 2016). Conversely, highly directive approaches may reduce teacher ownership and limit the perceived relevance of professional development. This finding reflects broader debates regarding the balance between organisational priorities and individual professional learning needs.

An important responsibility of school leaders is ensuring that professional development is aligned with organisational goals whilst remaining responsive to teachers' needs. Bubb and Earley (2007) argue that effective leaders recognise that professional development serves both individual and organisational purposes. Consequently, leaders must balance school improvement priorities, accountability requirements and curriculum developments with opportunities for teachers to pursue areas of professional interest and growth.

However, the literature also identifies challenges associated with leadership and professional learning. Time constraints, budget limitations and competing organisational priorities may restrict leaders' ability to provide meaningful professional development opportunities (Opfer and Pedder, 2011). Additionally,

leaders may experience pressure from inspection frameworks, accreditation bodies and policymakers to prioritise specific forms of CPD that align with organisational objectives rather than teacher preferences. Such pressures can create tensions between managerial accountability and professional autonomy.

Within international schools, leadership assumes particular importance due to the diverse nature of staff populations and organisational contexts. International school leaders often manage multicultural teams, support curriculum implementation across different educational traditions and respond to multiple accountability frameworks. Consequently, leadership decisions regarding professional development may have significant implications for teacher adaptation, organisational coherence and school improvement. The ability of leaders to create supportive professional learning environments is therefore especially important within these settings. Effective leadership extends beyond organising professional development activities. Leaders support professional dialogue, encourage reflective practice and provide opportunities for teachers to share expertise, helping to strengthen professional learning across the school (OECD, 2023).

Research further suggests that effective professional learning cultures are characterised by trust, collaboration and shared responsibility (Hargreaves and O'Connor, 2018). Leaders contribute to these cultures by encouraging open communication, valuing teacher expertise and creating opportunities for collaborative inquiry. Such environments support sustained professional learning and enhance teachers' willingness to engage with development opportunities. These findings suggest that leadership should be viewed not simply as a management function but as a central influence on teachers' professional learning experiences. This is particularly relevant within international schools, where organisational structures and governance arrangements may shape both the availability and quality of professional development opportunities.

Overall, the literature demonstrates that leadership plays a central role in shaping professional learning within schools. Through the allocation of resources, establishment of learning cultures and support of teacher development, leaders influence both the quality and effectiveness of CPD. However, leadership also

involves balancing competing priorities, including accountability requirements, organisational goals and teacher needs. These issues are particularly relevant to the present research, which seeks to explore teachers' perspectives regarding the provision and effectiveness of professional development within private international schools in Bahrain. The discussion also provides a foundation for the following section, which examines the barriers that may limit the effectiveness of CPD despite organisational commitment to professional learning.

2.12 Barriers to Effective Continuing Professional Development

Despite recognition of the importance of CPD, research consistently identifies a range of factors that may limit its effectiveness. Whilst schools invest considerable resources in professional development of teaching staff, participation alone does not guarantee significant professional growth or improvements in professional practice. Therefore, understanding the barriers that delay effective professional development is essential for both researchers and practitioners seeking to enhance teacher learning and school improvement.

One of the most frequently cited barriers within the literature is the lack of time available for professional learning. Teachers work within demanding environments with extensive teaching commitments, lesson preparation, assessment responsibilities, administrative tasks and pastoral duties. As a result, opportunities to engage in sustained professional development may be restricted by competing workload pressures (Bubb and Earley, 2007). Research consistently demonstrates that teachers perceive time constraints as one of the most significant obstacles to meaningful professional learning (Avalos, 2011; Opfer and Pedder, 2011).

The issue of workload is closely linked to time availability. Increasing accountability measures, curriculum demands and administrative responsibilities have contributed to growing concerns regarding teacher workload internationally. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) argue that excessive workload can reduce teachers' capacity to engage in reflective practice and professional learning. Consequently, even when professional development opportunities are available, teachers may struggle to

participate fully due to the various competing professional commitments. Time continues to be identified as one of the most significant barriers to professional learning. Teachers frequently report that competing workload demands reduce opportunities for sustained engagement with CPD and limit the implementation of new approaches within classroom practice (OECD, 2023).

Funding and resource limitations represent another significant barrier to effective CPD. Professional development often requires financial investment in training programmes, external consultants, conferences and professional learning materials. Schools operating within constrained budgets may therefore be limited in the range and quality of professional development opportunities they are able to provide (Guskey, 2000). These challenges may be particularly evident in contexts where schools prioritise operational demands or where access to external training opportunities is restricted, especially within private international schools. In addition to time and financial constraints, teachers are more likely to engage with professional development when they perceive it to be relevant to their classroom practice and professional needs (OECD, 2023).

The relevance of professional development is widely recognised as an important factor in its effectiveness. Teachers are more likely to engage with CPD when it is meaningful, relevant and directly applicable to their classroom practice and professional context (Desimone, 2009). In contrast, CPD that is perceived as generic, repetitive or disconnected from teachers' everyday experiences is less likely to influence teaching practice or improve learning outcomes. Avalos (2011) similarly argues that teachers become frustrated when professional development does not address their individual needs or reflect the realities of their professional contexts.

A related concern involves the extent to which teachers are involved in identifying professional learning priorities. Research suggests that CPD is more effective when teachers have opportunities to contribute to decisions regarding their development needs and learning goals (King, 2016). However, professional development is frequently determined by organisational priorities, policy requirements or leadership decisions, potentially limiting teacher ownership and engagement. Such

circumstances may create tensions between school improvement objectives and individual professional learning needs.

The literature also identifies organisational culture as a factor influencing professional development effectiveness. Schools characterised by collaborative cultures, trust and open communication are generally more successful in supporting professional learning than those operating within hierarchical or compliance-driven environments (Stoll et al., 2006). In schools where professional development is viewed primarily as an accountability mechanism rather than a learning opportunity, teachers may participate out of obligation rather than genuine commitment to professional growth. Leadership practices can further facilitate or hinder professional development. Effective leaders provide access to resources, encourage collaboration and create conditions that support professional learning (King, 2016). However, insufficient leadership support may restrict opportunities for meaningful engagement with CPD. For example, a lack of follow-up activities, limited opportunities for reflection or inadequate recognition of teachers' learning needs may reduce the impact of professional development initiatives.

Teacher attitudes and perspectives also influence professional learning outcomes. Previous experiences of ineffective CPD may contribute to scepticism regarding new professional development initiatives (Opfer and Pedder, 2011). Similarly, teachers who perceive professional development as externally imposed or lacking relevance may be less motivated to engage fully in learning activities. These findings suggest that professional development effectiveness depends not only upon organisational provision but also upon participants' beliefs and attitudes towards learning.

Within international schools, additional challenges may arise due to staff mobility, cultural diversity and organisational complexity. International teachers often work within multicultural environments and may experience varying levels of familiarity with curricula, assessment systems and organisational expectations. Frequent staff turnover may limit opportunities for sustained professional learning and make it difficult to embed long term development initiatives (Hayden and Thompson, 2013). Furthermore, schools may face challenges in designing CPD programmes capable

of meeting the diverse needs of internationally recruited teaching staff with varying degrees of experience and knowledge. Organisational culture also appears to influence participation in professional learning. Schools characterised by supportive leadership, collaboration and trust are generally more successful in overcoming barriers to CPD than schools where professional development is viewed primarily as a compliance requirement.

The literature also highlights the difficulty of evaluating the impact of professional development. Guskey (2000) argues that schools often struggle to assess whether CPD has resulted in meaningful changes in classroom practice or improved student outcomes. Without systematic evaluation processes, professional development may become an activity focused rather than outcomes focused attempt, making it difficult to determine its effectiveness. Despite these barriers, researchers generally agree that many challenges can be addressed through thoughtful planning, supportive leadership and the creation of professional learning cultures. Effective professional development requires adequate time, relevant content, opportunities for collaboration and organisational commitment to teacher learning. Understanding the barriers that influence professional development is therefore essential for improving CPD provision and ensuring that professional learning contributes meaningfully to teacher growth and school improvement.

Overall, the literature demonstrates that barriers to effective CPD arise from a complex interaction of individual, organisational and contextual factors. Time constraints, workload pressures, funding limitations, relevance, leadership support and organisational culture all influence the extent to which professional development achieves its intended outcomes. These issues are particularly relevant to the current research in Bahrain, as many of the challenges identified within the literature may also shape teachers' experiences of professional development within international school settings. The following section therefore examines CPD within international schools, providing a contextual foundation for the research.

2.13 Continuing Professional Development in International Schools

The international school sector has expanded considerably over the past three decades and now represents one of the fastest-growing areas of global education. Whilst international schools were originally established to educate the children of expatriate families, they increasingly enrol local students seeking internationally recognised curricula and qualifications (Hayden and Thompson, 2013). This expansion has increased scholarly interest in the distinctive organisational, cultural and professional characteristics of international schools, including how continuing professional development (CPD) is designed, implemented and experienced by teachers.

International schools differ from national education systems in several important respects. They are characterised by multicultural student populations, internationally recruited teaching staff and the delivery of diverse curricula such as the International Baccalaureate (IB), British, American and other national programmes (Bunnell et al., 2016). Teachers working within these settings frequently bring different educational backgrounds, pedagogical approaches and professional experiences. Whilst this diversity can enrich professional learning, it also presents challenges for schools seeking to develop coherent professional learning cultures that meet the needs of staff with differing levels of experience and professional expectations.

Professional development assumes particular importance within international schools because teachers are often required to adapt to unfamiliar curricula, assessment systems, organisational cultures and national contexts. Consequently, CPD serves not only as a mechanism for improving teaching practice but also as an important process supporting teacher induction, professional integration and organisational coherence (Hayden and Thompson, 2013). Unlike many national school systems, international schools frequently operate across multiple educational traditions, requiring teachers to develop both curriculum expertise and intercultural competence.

Research suggests that many international schools view professional development as a strategic mechanism for maintaining educational quality, supporting accreditation processes and achieving school improvement objectives (Bunnell et al., 2016). However, contemporary evidence indicates that the effectiveness of CPD depends less upon the quantity of professional development provided than upon its relevance, sustainability and alignment with teachers' professional contexts (Cordingley et al., 2015; Sims et al., 2021). This reflects a broader shift away from viewing CPD as a series of isolated training events towards understanding professional learning as an ongoing organisational process.

Teacher mobility represents one of the defining characteristics of international schools and has important implications for professional development. International schools frequently experience higher levels of staff turnover than national schools due to the temporary nature of expatriate employment (Hayden and Thompson, 2013). Whilst internationally mobile teachers contribute valuable knowledge and diverse professional experiences, high turnover can limit the sustainability of long-term professional learning initiatives and reduce opportunities to embed organisational knowledge. Consequently, schools often face the challenge of balancing induction and curriculum familiarisation with longer-term professional development that promotes continuous improvement.

The multicultural nature of international schools also shapes teachers' professional learning experiences. Staff frequently work alongside colleagues educated in different countries and educational traditions, resulting in varying beliefs about teaching, leadership and professional learning. Bunnell et al. (2016) argues that this diversity provides opportunities for innovation and professional exchange but may also create challenges in establishing shared understandings of effective pedagogy and professional practice. Professional development therefore needs to accommodate diverse perspectives whilst fostering a common organisational vision. Recent research from the Gulf region provides further insight into professional learning within international school contexts. Al Mahdi et al. (2023), in their study of private schools in Bahrain and Oman, found that professional learning communities promoted collaboration, reflective dialogue and leadership development. However, the authors also concluded that the success of collaborative professional learning

depended upon supportive leadership, organisational trust and sufficient opportunities for sustained professional interaction. Similarly, Alharbi (2024), investigating international schools in Saudi Arabia, identified workload pressures, limited teacher involvement in planning CPD and resource constraints as significant barriers to effective professional development. These studies suggest that the organisational conditions surrounding CPD are as important as the professional development activities themselves.

Despite the continuing growth of international education, research examining CPD within international schools remains comparatively limited when compared with studies conducted in national education systems. Much of the existing literature focuses upon organisational effectiveness, leadership, accreditation or curriculum implementation, with relatively fewer studies examining teachers' own experiences and perceptions of professional learning. Furthermore, much of the evidence continues to originate from Europe, North America and Australasia, leaving comparatively little research exploring professional development within private international schools in the Gulf region.

This lack of context-specific research is particularly significant for Bahrain, where the international school sector has expanded rapidly in response to increasing demand for internationally recognised education. Whilst schools continue to invest in professional development to improve teaching quality and organisational performance, there remains limited understanding of how teachers themselves experience, interpret and evaluate CPD within these multicultural educational settings. Understanding teachers' perspectives is important because professional learning is influenced not only by the quality of CPD provision but also by organisational culture, leadership, collaboration and opportunities for teacher agency.

Overall, the literature suggests that international schools provide distinctive environments for professional learning in which multicultural staff, organisational diversity and international curricula create both opportunities and challenges for CPD. Although collaborative professional learning, supportive leadership and sustained development opportunities are consistently associated with positive

outcomes, comparatively little research has explored how teachers working within private international schools in Bahrain perceive these experiences. Addressing this gap provides an important rationale for the present study and contributes to the growing body of research examining professional learning within international education.

2.14 Continuing Professional Development in the Gulf Region

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region has experienced significant educational reform over the past two decades as governments have sought to improve educational quality, enhance human capital and support economic diversification. Countries including Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates have invested heavily in educational development, recognising the importance of teacher quality in achieving national educational objectives. As a result, CPD has become an increasingly prominent feature of educational policy and school improvement initiatives throughout the region.

Despite these developments, research suggests that professional development within the Gulf region continues to face several challenges. Whilst governments and educational organisations frequently emphasise the importance of CPD, questions remain regarding the effectiveness, accessibility and relevance of professional learning opportunities available to teachers. Furthermore, much of the existing literature indicates that professional development within the region is often characterised by centrally determined priorities, limited teacher involvement in decision-making and an emphasis on compliance with organisational objectives (Mansour et al., 2014).

Research conducted in Saudi Arabia highlights several challenges relating to teacher professional development. Alghamdi (2025) found that teachers generally recognised the value of CPD but expressed concerns regarding limited opportunities for participation, insufficient time and the relevance of available training programmes. Participants frequently reported that professional development activities were designed to meet organisational requirements rather than individual

learning needs. Similar findings have been reported elsewhere within the region, suggesting that tensions between organisational priorities and teacher agency remain a recurring theme in professional development provision.

Studies conducted in Qatar have likewise highlighted the importance of leadership support and organisational culture in shaping teachers' experiences of CPD. Romanowski, Alkhateeb and Nasser (2019) found that whilst teachers generally valued professional development opportunities, concerns existed regarding the alignment of CPD with classroom realities and teachers' professional needs. Participants emphasised the importance of meaningful learning experiences, opportunities for collaboration and greater involvement in determining professional development priorities. These findings mirror broader international research suggesting that teacher participation and ownership are important determinants of CPD effectiveness.

The United Arab Emirates has also invested significantly in educational reform and teacher development as part of broader efforts to improve educational outcomes and align schooling with national development strategies. Research conducted within UAE schools suggests that professional development is often linked to curriculum reform, quality assurance initiatives and school improvement agendas (Badri et al., 2017). Whilst these initiatives have expanded access to professional learning opportunities, studies indicate that teachers continue to express concerns regarding workload pressures, the practical relevance of training and opportunities for sustained professional learning. Challenges to effective CPD remain across the Gulf despite increased investment in teacher development. Al Mahdi et al. (2023), examining professional learning communities in private schools in Bahrain and Oman, found that collaborative professional learning strengthened teacher reflection, leadership capacity and professional dialogue. However, sustained collaboration depended on supportive leadership, organisational trust and sufficient time for teachers to engage meaningfully with one another. These findings highlight the importance of organisational conditions in supporting effective CPD, rather than professional development activities alone.

A recurring theme throughout GCC literature is the influence of leadership on professional development. Educational leaders play a central role in determining CPD priorities, allocating resources and creating professional learning opportunities. Mansour et al. (2014) found that teachers frequently perceived leadership support as a critical factor influencing their engagement with professional development. Schools characterised by supportive leadership and collaborative cultures were generally more successful in promoting meaningful professional learning than those operating within highly hierarchical structures.

Another important issue identified within Gulf region research concerns teacher voice and participation. Whilst professional development is widely recognised as important, several studies suggest that teachers often have limited influence over the design and content of CPD activities (Romanowski et al., 2019). Professional development priorities are frequently determined by ministries, school owners or senior leaders, potentially reducing opportunities for teachers to exercise professional agency. Such findings are consistent with Kennedy's (2005) distinction between transmissive and transformative models of professional development and highlight ongoing debates regarding professional autonomy within educational organisations.

Within Bahrain, research examining teachers' experiences of professional development remains relatively limited compared to neighbouring GCC countries. Whilst educational reforms have emphasised school improvement, accountability and teacher quality, comparatively little research has explored how teachers themselves perceive and experience CPD within Bahraini schools. Existing studies tend to focus on policy initiatives, organisational structures or educational reform rather than the lived experiences of teachers participating in professional learning (Mansour et al., 2014). One notable exception is Al-Mahdi (2020), whose research into lesson study demonstrated that collaborative professional learning promoted reflective practice, professional dialogue and leadership development when embedded within teachers' everyday practice. Similarly, Al Mahdi et al. (2023) found that professional learning communities within Bahraini private schools supported collaboration and collective learning but required strong organisational support if they were to be sustained successfully.

The growth of the private international school sector within Bahrain further strengthens the need for context specific research. International schools operate within distinctive environments characterised by multicultural staff populations, diverse curricula and varying organisational expectations. These factors may influence how professional development is understood, experienced and implemented. However, despite the increasing importance of international schools within Bahrain's educational landscape, relatively little research has examined professional development within these settings.

The literature therefore suggests that whilst CPD is widely recognised as an important component of educational improvement throughout the Gulf region, significant challenges remain regarding relevance, participation, leadership support and teacher agency. Furthermore, research focusing specifically on Bahrain remains limited, particularly within international school contexts. This lack of context-specific evidence creates an important gap in the literature and highlights the need for studies that explore teachers' perspectives of professional development within Bahrain's private international schools.

Whilst Bahrain has invested considerably in educational reform and school improvement initiatives over the past two decades, relatively little research has examined how teachers experience CPD within private international schools. The Bahraini education sector has undergone significant change through quality assurance measures, curriculum developments and increasing expectations regarding teacher effectiveness. In parallel, the private international school sector has expanded to meet the needs of both expatriate and local families seeking international curricula and qualifications.

Despite these developments, the existing literature relating to Bahrain has focused predominantly on educational policy, school effectiveness and organisational reform, with limited attention given to teachers' perspectives and experiences of professional learning. Consequently, there remains a need for context-specific research that explores how professional development is understood, experienced and supported within Bahrain's international school sector. Such research may

provide valuable insight into the factors that facilitate or constrain meaningful professional learning within this distinctive educational environment.

Overall, research from the GCC region demonstrates many similarities with the wider international CPD literature, particularly regarding the importance of relevance, collaboration, leadership support and teacher engagement. However, the regional evidence also highlights the influence of educational reform agendas, organisational hierarchy and cultural context in shaping teachers' experiences of professional learning. Although recent studies have begun to explore collaborative professional learning within Bahrain and neighbouring GCC countries, empirical research examining teachers' perspectives within private international schools remains limited. This lack of context-specific evidence provides a clear justification for the present study, which seeks to explore how teachers understand and experience CPD within Bahrain's private international school sector.

2.15 Theoretical Perspectives Informing the Research

The literature reviewed throughout this chapter highlights the complexity of continuing professional development and demonstrates that teacher learning is influenced by multiple individual, organisational and contextual factors. Rather than adopting a single, fixed theoretical framework, this study draws upon several complementary theoretical perspectives that provide useful lenses through which teachers' experiences of professional development can be understood and interpreted. These perspectives include Adult Learning Theory (Knowles, 1980), Kennedy's (2005) models of continuing professional development, Communities of Practice (Wenger, 1998) and Professional Capital Theory (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012).

The first theoretical perspective informing this study is Knowles' (1980) theory of adult learning, commonly referred to as andragogy. Knowles argues that adults differ from children in their approaches to learning because they possess accumulated experiences, greater self-awareness and a preference for self-directed learning. Adult learners are generally motivated by professional relevance, practical

application and opportunities to address authentic problems. These principles are particularly relevant to teachers participating in professional development because they highlight the importance of relevance, autonomy, prior experience and active engagement in learning. Contemporary professional development research continues to support these principles by demonstrating that teachers engage more meaningfully when CPD is connected to classroom practice and recognises their existing professional knowledge (Cordingley et al., 2015; OECD, 2023). Within this study, Adult Learning Theory therefore provides a useful perspective for interpreting participants' views regarding the relevance, ownership and practical value of CPD.

A second perspective is provided by Kennedy's (2005) framework of continuing professional development models. Kennedy conceptualises professional development as existing along a continuum ranging from transmissive approaches, which emphasise knowledge transmission, compliance and organisational control, to transformative approaches that promote professional autonomy, critical reflection and teacher empowerment. This framework is particularly valuable because it enables consideration of how professional development is organised and experienced within schools. It also provides insight into the tensions that may arise between organisational priorities and teachers' preferences for greater ownership of their professional learning. More recent literature suggests that schools frequently use blended approaches that combine formal training with coaching, collaboration and workplace learning, rather than operating through a single CPD model (Cordingley et al., 2015). Kennedy's framework is therefore used as an interpretive lens rather than as a rigid classification system.

The third perspective informing the study is Wenger's (1998) theory of Communities of Practice. Wenger argues that learning is fundamentally social and occurs through participation in communities in which individuals share experiences, address problems and construct knowledge collectively. This perspective challenges traditional assumptions that professional learning occurs primarily through formal training events and instead highlights the importance of collaboration, professional dialogue and shared practice. Communities of Practice are particularly relevant to educational settings, where teachers frequently learn through interaction with colleagues, collaborative inquiry and participation in professional learning

communities. Recent evidence from private schools in Bahrain and Oman also demonstrates that collaborative professional learning can strengthen professional dialogue and collective leadership, although its success depends upon supportive leadership, trust and sufficient time for collaboration (Al Mahdi et al., 2023). This perspective therefore assists in interpreting participants' experiences of collaborative and school-based professional learning.

The final theoretical influence derives from Hargreaves and Fullan's (2012) concept of Professional Capital. Hargreaves and Fullan argue that sustainable educational improvement depends upon the development of human capital, social capital and decisional capital within schools. Human capital refers to teachers' individual knowledge, skills and expertise; social capital concerns the professional relationships and collaborative networks through which knowledge is shared; and decisional capital relates to the professional judgement developed through experience, reflection and practice. This framework emphasises that professional learning should be viewed not only as an individual activity but also as a collective organisational process that contributes to school improvement. It is therefore relevant to examining how school leadership, collaboration and organisational culture may support or constrain teachers' professional growth.

Whilst each of these theoretical perspectives offers a distinct understanding of professional learning, they share several common assumptions. First, they recognise teachers as active participants in their own learning rather than passive recipients of externally determined information. Second, they emphasise professional relevance, meaningful engagement and the importance of teachers' previous experience. Third, they recognise collaboration and social interaction as important influences on professional growth. Finally, they acknowledge that professional learning is shaped by organisational conditions, leadership practices and the contexts in which teachers work.

Importantly, these perspectives are not employed as a predetermined framework through which the data are categorised or forced into fixed themes. Instead, they function as sensitising concepts that support the interpretation and discussion of participants' accounts. Braun and Clarke (2021) explain that qualitative research

may be theoretically informed without requiring data to be fitted into predetermined categories. This approach is consistent with reflexive thematic analysis, allowing themes to be developed through active engagement with participants' accounts whilst drawing upon existing theory to deepen interpretation.

Collectively, these perspectives provide a coherent foundation for examining CPD within private international school contexts. Adult Learning Theory supports consideration of relevance, self-direction and professional experience; Kennedy's framework enables analysis of the organisation and purposes of CPD; Communities of Practice highlights collaboration and socially situated learning; and Professional Capital Theory connects individual teacher learning with professional relationships and organisational improvement. Together, they provide interpretive resources for understanding how teachers experience professional development and how their experiences are influenced by leadership, school culture and organisational context.

2.16 Leadership, Professional Learning and Cultural Context

Much of the literature concerning CPD has been developed within Western educational systems and reflects assumptions regarding distributed leadership, teacher agency and professional autonomy (Day, 1999; Kennedy, 2014; Timperley et al., 2008). Whilst these principles have contributed significantly to understanding effective professional learning, several authors argue that educational leadership should be understood within its wider cultural and organisational context rather than assuming universal applicability (Dimmock and Walker, 2005; Hallinger and Leithwood, 1996). Comparative educational research suggests that leadership practices are strongly influenced by national culture, organisational traditions and societal expectations. Dimmock and Walker (2005) argue that educational leadership cannot be separated from the cultural environments in which schools operate, whilst Hallinger (2018) similarly suggests that leadership models developed within Anglo-American education systems require careful contextual thought before being applied elsewhere. Consequently, concepts such as distributed leadership, teacher participation and professional autonomy may be

expressed differently across educational systems whilst pursuing similar educational objectives.

Within many Islamic societies, educational leadership has traditionally emphasised ethical responsibility, consultation (*Shura*), collective decision-making, trust and service (Beekun and Badawi, 1999; Shah, 2006). Whilst organisational authority is generally more hierarchical than that assumed within many Western leadership models, leadership is also expected to demonstrate fairness, consultation and responsibility towards the wider educational community. Professional learning therefore takes place within organisational cultures that seek to balance institutional leadership with collective responsibility and mutual respect.

These cultural perspectives are particularly relevant when considering CPD within Bahraini private international schools. Although many schools adopt British curricula, inspection frameworks and leadership structures, they continue to operate within a broader cultural and regulatory environment shaped by Bahraini educational policy and Islamic social values. Consequently, professional development cannot be understood solely through Western theories of teacher agency and distributed leadership. Rather, teachers' experiences of CPD are likely to reflect a combination of international educational practice, organisational leadership and local cultural expectations. Recognising these contextual influences does not lessen the value of the dominant Western literature upon which much contemporary CPD research is based. Instead, it highlights the importance of interpreting these theories critically when applied within different educational contexts. This research therefore adopts established theories of professional learning whilst recognising that teachers' experiences of CPD are shaped by the cultural, organisational and leadership contexts in which they work. This contextual perspective provides an important framework for interpreting the findings presented in the later chapters of this thesis.

2.17 Research Gap

The literature reviewed throughout this chapter demonstrates that CPD has become a significant area of educational research and practice. Previous studies have

consistently highlighted the importance of professional learning in supporting teacher effectiveness, enhancing classroom practice and contributing to school improvement (Garet et al., 2001; Desimone, 2009; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). More recent research continues to emphasise that effective CPD is characterised by sustained collaboration, professional relevance, active engagement and opportunities for critical reflection (Cordingley et al., 2015; Sims et al., 2021). Collectively, this literature demonstrates that professional learning is now widely recognised as a complex, context-dependent process rather than a series of isolated training activities.

Despite these contributions, the literature reveals several important gaps. Firstly, much of the existing research has been conducted within national education systems in North America, Europe and Australasia. Whilst these studies provide valuable insights into professional development, their findings cannot necessarily be assumed to apply directly to international school contexts. International schools operate within distinctive organisational environments characterised by multicultural staff populations, internationally mobile workforces and diverse educational traditions (Hayden and Thompson, 2013). Consequently, there remains a need for research that examines professional development within these unique educational settings.

Secondly, although research examining professional development within international schools has increased in recent years, the evidence base remains comparatively limited when compared to mainstream educational contexts (Bunnell et al., 2016). Existing studies frequently focus on organisational practices, accreditation requirements and school improvement strategies, with relatively less attention given to teachers' lived experiences and perceptions of professional learning. As Avalos (2011) argues, understanding how teachers experience professional development is essential because professional learning ultimately depends upon how participants interpret, engage with and apply development opportunities.

Thirdly, the review highlights a shortage of research focusing specifically on the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region. Whilst studies conducted in Saudi Arabia, Qatar

and the United Arab Emirates have explored issues relating to leadership support, teacher engagement and professional learning provision (Mansour et al., 2014; Romanowski, Alkhateeb and Nasser, 2019; Alghamdi, 2025), relatively little research has examined teachers' perspectives of CPD within Bahrain. Existing literature relating to Bahrain tends to focus on educational reform, policy initiatives and organisational structures rather than the experiences of teachers participating in professional development.

A further gap concerns the relationship between teacher agency and professional development. The literature increasingly emphasises the importance of teacher voice, autonomy and participation in shaping professional learning (Kennedy, 2005; Priestley, Biesta and Robinson, 2015). However, limited research has explored how teachers working within international schools perceive their level of influence over professional development decisions. Understanding these perspectives is particularly important in contexts where professional development is closely linked to school improvement priorities, inspection frameworks and organisational accountability.

The literature also reveals limited understanding of how teachers and senior leaders perceive the purposes and effectiveness of professional development within international schools. Whilst previous studies have identified factors associated with effective CPD, less attention has been given to how different stakeholders interpret professional learning and the extent to which organisational provision aligns with teachers' expectations and needs. Exploring these perspectives may provide valuable insight into the factors that facilitate or constrain meaningful professional development within international educational environments.

Taken together, these gaps indicate a need for context-specific research that examines professional development within Bahrain's international school sector from the perspectives of those directly involved. This research seeks to address these gaps by exploring teachers' perspectives of CPD within three private international schools in Bahrain. Through examining how professional development is understood, experienced and supported, the research aims to contribute to

existing knowledge regarding teacher learning, professional development and educational leadership within international school contexts.

Taken together, these gaps indicate a need for context-specific research that explores how teachers understand, experience and evaluate professional development within Bahrain's private international school sector. By adopting a qualitative multiple case study design across three private international schools, this research provides an in-depth examination of teachers' and senior leaders' perspectives within their organisational contexts. Such an approach enables a richer understanding of how leadership, school culture, collaboration and teacher agency shape professional learning than is typically captured through large-scale policy or survey research.

The study therefore makes three principal contributions to knowledge. First, it extends the international literature on CPD by focusing on private international schools, a context that remains comparatively under-researched. Second, it contributes empirical evidence from Bahrain, addressing a recognised gap within the GCC literature on teachers' professional learning. Third, by foregrounding the perspectives of teachers and senior leaders, the research provides a contextually grounded understanding of how professional development is interpreted, experienced and supported within multicultural international school environments. These contributions have the potential to inform future policy, school leadership and professional development practice within Bahrain and comparable international school settings.

2.18 Chapter Summary

This chapter has critically examined the literature relating to CPD and established the theoretical foundations for the research. The review demonstrated that understandings of CPD have evolved from traditional models of training towards broader conceptions of professional learning that emphasise collaboration, reflection, teacher agency, organisational learning and sustained professional growth (Ventista & Brown, 2023; Sims et al., 2021). Whilst there is widespread

agreement that effective CPD has the potential to improve teaching practice, teacher development and student outcomes, the literature also reveals continuing debate regarding the design, implementation and evaluation of professional learning.

The review further highlighted that the effectiveness of CPD is shaped by multiple interacting factors, including leadership, organisational culture, teacher agency, professional collaboration and the extent to which professional learning is relevant to teachers' professional contexts. Contemporary evidence increasingly recognises professional learning as a complex, context-dependent process embedded within teachers' everyday practice rather than a series of isolated training events (Ventista & Brown, 2023). Despite the growing international evidence base, the literature review identified a significant gap in relation to private international schools in Bahrain. Existing research provides limited understanding of how teachers and senior leaders experience CPD within this distinctive educational context or how organisational, cultural and policy factors influence professional learning. Addressing this gap forms the central purpose of the present research.

Overall, the literature reviewed in this chapter has established the need for a qualitative exploration of teachers' perspectives of CPD within private international schools in Bahrain. The following chapter explains the methodological approach adopted to investigate these perspectives, outlining the research philosophy, multiple case study design, data collection methods and analytical procedures used throughout the study.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

3.0 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological approach adopted in this research to investigate teachers' perspectives of CPD within private international schools in Bahrain. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a clear explanation for the research design and methods used to address the research aim and research questions. The chapter outlines the research aim and research questions before discussing the philosophical assumptions underpinning the research. The ontological and epistemological positions informing the research are then explored, followed by a justification for adopting an interpretivist qualitative research design and a multiple case study methodology.

This chapter further examines the research context, participant selection procedures and data collection methods. Consideration is given to the use of semi-structured interviews, questionnaires and documentary analysis as complementary methods for exploring participants' perspectives of CPD. The process of data analysis is then discussed, with reflexive thematic analysis providing the analytical framework through which themes were generated from the data. Finally, this methodology chapter considers ethical considerations, researcher positionality and reflexivity, together with the actions taken to ensure trustworthiness and methodological rigour throughout the research. The methodological decisions presented in this chapter are informed by an interpretivist approach, which aims to understand the meanings participants attach to their experiences of CPD. Consequently, the research focuses on developing an in-depth understanding of participants' perspectives within their own context rather than seeking statistical generalisation.

3.1 Research Aim and Research Questions

The aim of this research was to explore teachers' perspectives of CPD within private international schools in Bahrain and to examine how professional learning is understood, experienced and supported within these educational settings.

3.1.1 Research Questions

This study was guided by the five research questions presented in Chapter 1. These questions informed the research design, the development of the interview schedule, the collection of documentary evidence and the subsequent thematic analysis. Together, they provided the framework for exploring teachers' perspectives of continuing professional development within private international schools in Bahrain.

The research questions were designed to explore both individual and organisational perspectives of professional development. The first three questions examine teachers' understandings, experiences and expectations of CPD, whilst the final two explore the role of leadership and organisational structures in supporting professional learning. Collectively, they provide a framework for investigating how CPD is experienced within private international schools and the extent to which professional development provision meets the needs of both teachers and schools.

The research questions also reflect the tensions identified in the literature between school-driven models of professional development and approaches that emphasise teacher agency and professional autonomy (Kennedy, 2005; Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012). By examining the perspectives of both teachers and senior leaders, the study seeks to develop a deeper understanding of how professional learning is understood, implemented and experienced within the context of private international schools in Bahrain.

3.2 Research Paradigm

A research paradigm provides the philosophical framework that guides the research process and influences the selection of research methods, data collection techniques and approaches to analysis. According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), paradigms represent a set of beliefs concerning the nature of reality (ontology), the nature of knowledge (epistemology), and the methods through which knowledge can be generated (methodology). These assumptions shape how researchers understand the world and determine how they investigate social phenomena.

The selection of an appropriate research paradigm is particularly important in educational research because educational experiences are influenced by complex social, cultural and organisational factors (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2017). Given the focus of this research on exploring teachers' perspectives of CPD, it was necessary to adopt a paradigm capable of capturing the subjective meanings and interpretations participants attached to their experiences. This research was situated within an interpretivist paradigm. Interpretivism assumes that reality is socially constructed and that individuals develop different understandings of the world based upon their experiences, interactions and contexts (Creswell and Creswell, 2017). Rather than seeking a single objective truth, interpretivist researchers aim to understand how individuals interpret and make sense of their social realities (Merriam, 1998). This approach was considered particularly appropriate for the current research because teachers' perspectives of CPD are shaped by their professional experiences, school cultures, leadership practices and organisational contexts.

Interpretivist research is concerned with understanding the meanings individuals attribute to social phenomena rather than measuring objective variables or establishing causal relationships (Denzin, 2018). The purpose of the present research was not to determine whether CPD was objectively effective or ineffective but rather to understand how teachers and senior leaders experienced, perceived and interpreted professional development within private international schools in Bahrain. An interpretivist approach therefore provided an appropriate framework for exploring these subjective experiences in depth.

The adoption of an interpretivist paradigm also reflects the nature of the research questions. This research wanted to understand participants' perspectives regarding the purpose of CPD, the factors influencing its effectiveness and the barriers and opportunities associated with professional learning. These questions require exploration of personal experiences, beliefs and interpretations rather than the measurement of predetermined variables. Consequently, an interpretivist approach offered the flexibility necessary to capture the complexity and richness of participants' experiences.

Furthermore, interpretivism acknowledges the active role of the researcher in the construction of knowledge. Knowledge is viewed as being co-constructed through interactions between the researcher and participants rather than existing independently of human interpretation (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). This perspective was particularly relevant to this research, where data were generated through semi-structured interviews that encouraged participants to share and reflect upon their experiences of CPD. The researcher therefore played an important role in facilitating dialogue and interpreting participants' accounts.

The interpretivist paradigm has been widely used in educational research because of its capacity to provide rich insights into complex educational processes and experiences (Merriam, 1998; Cohen et al., 2017). Given the exploratory nature of this research and its focus on understanding teachers' lived experiences of professional development, interpretivism provided the most appropriate philosophical foundation for the research.

3.2.1 Ontology

Ontology refers to assumptions regarding the nature of reality and what can be known about the world (Crotty, 1998; Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Different ontological positions make different assumptions about whether reality exists independently of human perception or whether reality is socially constructed through human interaction and interpretation. This research adopted a relativist ontological position, which assumes that multiple realities exist and that these realities are constructed through individuals' experiences and interpretations of the social world (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). From a relativist perspective, there is no single objective reality that can be discovered and measured. Instead, reality is understood as being shaped by individuals' experiences, beliefs, values and social contexts.

The adoption of a relativist ontology was particularly appropriate for this research because teachers and senior leaders may experience and interpret CPD in different ways. Their perspectives are influenced by a range of factors, including professional background, career stage, leadership responsibilities, organisational culture and previous experiences of professional development. Consequently, it would be unrealistic to assume that all participants share a single understanding of CPD or experience professional learning in identical ways. For example, a classroom teacher may view CPD primarily as a means of improving instructional practice, whereas a senior leader may perceive CPD as a mechanism for supporting school improvement and organisational change. Both perspectives represent valid realities constructed through participants' professional experiences and responsibilities. The purpose of this research was therefore not to identify a single correct interpretation of CPD but to explore and understand the range of meanings participants attributed to professional development.

A relativist ontological position also acknowledges the influence of context in shaping reality. The experiences of teachers working within private international schools in Bahrain are likely to be influenced by factors such as school culture, policy, accountability requirements and the unique characteristics of international education. These contextual influences contribute to the construction of multiple realities that may differ both within and across schools. By adopting a relativist ontology, the research recognised that participants' perspectives represent legitimate and meaningful interpretations of their professional experiences. Understanding these diverse realities was central to addressing the research aim and exploring teachers' perspectives of CPD within the specific context of international schools in Bahrain.

3.2.2 Epistemology

Epistemology concerns the nature of knowledge and the relationship between the researcher and what is being researched (Crotty, 1998). It addresses questions regarding how knowledge is generated, what constitutes valid knowledge and how understanding can be developed through the research process (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2017). Epistemological assumptions are closely linked to ontology because beliefs about reality influence beliefs about how knowledge of that reality can be obtained. Consistent with the interpretivist paradigm and relativist ontology adopted in this, the research was informed by a constructivist epistemological position. Constructivism assumes that knowledge is socially constructed through human interaction and experience rather than discovered as an objective truth existing independently of individuals (Creswell and Creswell, 2017). From this perspective, knowledge is created through the meanings individuals attach to their experiences and the ways in which they interpret the social world around them.

The adoption of a constructivist epistemology was particularly appropriate for this research because the research sought to explore teachers' perspectives and experiences of CPD rather than measure predetermined variables or test hypotheses. Teachers and senior leaders were viewed as individuals who actively construct understandings of professional development based upon their personal experiences, professional roles and organisational contexts. Consequently, knowledge relating to CPD was understood as emerging through participants' interpretations rather than existing as an objective reality waiting to be discovered.

Within a constructivist framework, the researcher is not viewed as a detached observer but as an active participant in the process of knowledge generation (Merriam, 1998). Knowledge is co-constructed through dialogue and interaction between the researcher and participants. This perspective was particularly relevant to the use of semi-structured interviews within this research, where participants were encouraged to reflect upon and articulate their experiences of professional development. The interview process therefore provided opportunities for participants to construct and communicate meanings whilst enabling the researcher to explore these meanings in greater depth.

A constructivist epistemology also acknowledges that multiple interpretations of the same phenomenon may exist. Teachers working within similar educational settings may nevertheless develop different understandings of CPD depending upon their experiences, expectations and professional identities. The aim of the research was therefore not to establish a single definitive account of professional development but rather to understand the diversity and complexity of participants' perspectives. The decision to adopt a constructivist epistemological position aligns closely with the exploratory nature of the research. Understanding teachers' perspectives required an approach capable of capturing subjective experiences and contextual influences. By recognising knowledge as socially constructed and context dependent, constructivism provided an appropriate framework through which participants' experiences could be explored and interpreted.

3.3 Research Design

This section outlines the research design adopted for the research and explains the rationale for the methodological choices made. It begins by justifying the use of a qualitative research approach before describing the multiple case study design employed to investigate teachers' perspectives of CPD within three private international schools in Bahrain. Together, these methodological decisions provided an appropriate framework for exploring participants' experiences and addressing the research aim and research questions.

3.3.1 Qualitative Research Approach

The research adopted a qualitative research design. Qualitative research is concerned with understanding how individuals interpret and make sense of their experiences within specific social contexts (Denzin, 2018). Rather than focusing on measurement and statistical analysis, qualitative research seeks to generate rich, detailed and contextually grounded understandings of social phenomena (Miles, Huberman and Saldaña 2014). A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study aimed to explore teachers' perspectives of CPD within private international schools in Bahrain. The research questions focused on understanding participants' experiences, perceptions and interpretations of professional development rather than measuring the effectiveness of specific CPD programmes. Consequently, a qualitative design offered the flexibility necessary to capture the complexity and depth of participants' experiences.

Creswell and Creswell (2017) argue that qualitative research is particularly suitable when researchers seek to explore meanings, understand social processes and investigate issues about which little is known. Whilst a substantial body of literature exists regarding CPD, limited research has examined teachers' perspectives of professional development within the specific context of private international schools in Bahrain. A qualitative approach therefore provided opportunities to generate contextually rich insights capable of addressing this gap in the literature.

Qualitative research also enables participants to express their views in their own words, thereby providing detailed accounts of their experiences and perspectives (Merriam, 1998). This was particularly important given the exploratory nature of the study. Semi-structured interviews allowed participants to discuss issues they considered important and provided opportunities for the researcher to explore emerging themes in greater depth.

Furthermore, qualitative inquiry acknowledges the importance of context in shaping experiences and perspectives (Denzin, 2018). Professional development does not occur in isolation but is influenced by organisational cultures, leadership practices, policy environments and individual professional experiences. A qualitative design therefore enabled the research to explore CPD within the complex realities of international school settings rather than reducing participants' experiences to quantifiable variables.

The decision not to adopt a quantitative approach was informed by the nature of the research questions and philosophical assumptions underpinning the study. Quantitative methods are often associated with positivist paradigms and are typically used to measure variables, identify relationships and test hypotheses (Cohen et al., 2017). Such approaches were not considered appropriate because the research sought to understand subjective experiences and meanings rather than establish causal relationships or produce statistically generalisable findings. The qualitative design adopted within this research therefore reflected both the interpretivist philosophical position of the research and the exploratory nature of the research questions. By facilitating detailed exploration of participants' experiences, the approach provided a suitable methodological framework through which teachers' perspectives of CPD could be investigated.

3.3.2 Justification for a Multiple Case Study Design

To investigate teachers' perspectives of CPD within private international schools in Bahrain, the research adopted a multiple case study design. Case study research is particularly appropriate when researchers seek to explore contemporary phenomena within real life contexts and where the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clearly defined (Yin, 2018). The phenomenon under investigation was teachers' perspectives of CPD, whilst the context consisted of private international schools operating within Bahrain. Given the influence of organisational culture, leadership practices and institutional structures on professional development, it was important to examine CPD within its natural setting rather than separate it from its contextual influences.

Yin (2018) argues that case studies are particularly useful when addressing 'how' and 'why' questions and when researchers seek to develop an in-depth understanding of complex social phenomena. Similarly, Stake (1995) suggests that case study research enables detailed exploration of lived experiences within specific contexts. Both perspectives align closely with the aims of this research, which sought to understand how teachers experience CPD and why particular perspectives of professional development emerge. A multiple case study design was selected rather than a single case study because it enabled comparisons across three international schools. Examining multiple cases provided opportunities to identify similarities and differences in participants' experiences whilst enhancing the richness and robustness of the findings. According to Yin (2018), multiple case studies can strengthen analytical insights by allowing patterns to be identified across different contexts. The three participating schools shared common characteristics as private international schools operating within Bahrain. However, each school possessed unique organisational cultures, leadership structures and approaches to professional development. Investigating these schools as separate but related cases enabled the research to explore both shared experiences and contextual variations in teachers' perceptions of CPD. The multiple case study design therefore provided a methodological framework capable of generating rich, contextually grounded insights into professional development whilst recognising the importance of organisational context in shaping participants' experiences.

3.4 Research Context

This section provides the contextual background to the research by outlining the educational environment within which the research was conducted. It first considers the wider educational context of the Kingdom of Bahrain before examining the distinctive characteristics of the international school sector. Understanding this context is important because organisational structures, educational policy, leadership practices and cultural influences shape how CPD is experienced and implemented within schools. The contextual information presented provides the foundation for understanding the case study schools and participants discussed later in the chapter.

3.4.1 Educational Context of Bahrain

The Kingdom of Bahrain has undergone significant educational development over the past two decades as part of broader national efforts to modernise the economy and enhance human capital. Education occupies a central position within Bahrain's national development agenda, with successive reforms seeking to improve educational quality, student outcomes and workforce readiness. Alongside a well-established government school sector, Bahrain has experienced substantial growth in private education, particularly within the international school sector, reflecting increasing demand from both expatriate and local families seeking internationally recognised qualifications.

The education system in Bahrain is regulated by the Ministry of Education, which oversees government schools and licenses private national and international schools. In recent years, increasing emphasis has been placed on accountability, quality assurance and school improvement through inspection frameworks and regulatory oversight. Schools are expected to demonstrate continuous improvement in teaching and learning, curriculum delivery and student achievement. These expectations have elevated the importance of teacher quality and professional development as key mechanisms for improving educational outcomes.

The private school sector plays a significant role within Bahrain's educational landscape. Many private schools offer international curricula, including British, American and International Baccalaureate programmes. Such schools operate within a competitive environment where parental expectations, accreditation requirements and inspection outcomes influence strategic priorities and organisational decision making. As a result, schools increasingly invest in CPD to enhance teaching quality, support curriculum implementation and maintain educational standards.

Professional development has become a central component of educational reform and school improvement efforts internationally. Research consistently demonstrates that teacher effectiveness is one of the most significant school-based factors influencing student achievement (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Harris and Jones, 2023). Consequently, CPD is widely viewed as an essential mechanism through which teachers maintain professional competence, develop new pedagogical knowledge and respond to changing educational demands.

Within Bahrain, however, relatively limited research has examined how teachers themselves experience and perceive professional development, particularly within international school settings. Whilst policy initiatives and organisational practices often emphasise the importance of CPD, less attention has been given to understanding how professional learning is interpreted, valued and experienced by those directly involved. This research therefore seeks to contribute to understanding professional development within the specific context of private international schools in Bahrain.

3.4.2 International School Context

International schools represent a distinctive educational sector characterised by culturally diverse student populations, internationally mobile teaching staff and globally recognised curricula. Whilst definitions vary, international schools are generally understood to be institutions that provide education to multinational communities and deliver programmes designed to prepare students for international higher education and employment opportunities (Hayden and Thompson, 2013).

The international school sector has expanded rapidly across the Gulf region, including Bahrain, because of economic growth, globalisation and increasing demand for internationally recognised qualifications. These schools often recruit teachers from a variety of countries and educational systems, creating multicultural professional environments that differ considerably from national school contexts. As a result, international schools frequently face unique challenges associated with curriculum implementation, cultural diversity, staff recruitment and professional learning. Professional development occupies a particularly important position within international schools. Teachers often arrive from diverse educational backgrounds and may possess varying levels of familiarity with school curricula, assessment systems and organisational expectations. CPD therefore serves several functions, including supporting induction, promoting consistency of practice, facilitating curriculum development and contributing to school improvement initiatives.

Research suggests that international schools often place considerable emphasis on professional learning because of the complexity of their operating environments (Bunnell et al., 2016). Teachers are expected to adapt to new curricula, work within multicultural communities and respond to evolving educational expectations. Consequently, effective professional development is frequently viewed as essential to maintaining educational quality and organisational effectiveness. At the same time, international schools are often subject to multiple forms of accountability. Schools may be required to satisfy the expectations of owners, governing bodies, accreditation agencies, inspection frameworks and parents. These competing demands can influence the nature and purpose of professional development, creating tensions between organisational priorities and individual teacher learning needs. Previous research has highlighted the challenges associated with balancing school improvement objectives with teacher autonomy and professional agency (Kennedy, 2005; Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012).

The multicultural nature of international schools also has implications for professional learning. Staff often bring different educational philosophies, professional experiences and cultural perspectives to their roles. Whilst this diversity can enrich professional dialogue and collaborative learning, it may also present challenges for leaders seeking to design CPD programmes capable of meeting

diverse professional needs. Understanding how teachers experience professional development within these environments is therefore particularly important.

3.4.3 Characteristics of the Case Study Schools

Although the three schools all followed the English National Curriculum and operated as private international schools in Bahrain, each school had its own identity, culture and approach to teaching and learning. These differences were important because they influenced how CPD was organised, delivered and experienced by teachers. They also provided three contrasting educational settings in which teachers' perspectives of CPD could be explored.

Abbey School was an established British international school with a strong reputation for academic achievement and student wellbeing. The school promoted a child centred approach to learning, encouraging pupils to become confident, independent learners through enquiry-based learning. Considerable emphasis was placed on inclusion, pastoral care and supporting the needs of individual learners. Staff generally worked within a collaborative culture where professional dialogue and the sharing of good practice were encouraged.

Kingsway School had a different organisational culture. Whilst maintaining high expectations of teaching and learning, there was a stronger emphasis on consistency, accountability and whole school improvement. The staff profile was also more diverse, with a combination of overseas recruited teachers, locally recruited expatriate teachers and Bahraini teachers employed through the Bahrainisation programme. As a result, teachers brought different professional experiences, career aspirations and expectations of professional development, which provided valuable perspectives within the research.

Salisbury School was experiencing a period of significant organisational change during the research. The school had recently undergone changes in ownership, leadership and educational direction as it transitioned towards a British curriculum model. This created a different professional environment for teachers, who were

adapting to new systems, policies and leadership expectations. Consequently, CPD focused not only on improving classroom practice but also on supporting curriculum change, organisational development and the establishment of a shared vision for the future.

The characteristics of the three participating case study schools are summarised in **Table 3.1**. Whilst each school had its own culture and educational philosophy, there were also several similarities. All three schools were regulated by the Bahraini Ministry of Education, followed the English National Curriculum and were subject to external inspection and quality assurance processes. All employed teachers from a range of nationalities and served culturally diverse student populations made up of both expatriate and Bahraini families. These common characteristics provided a shared educational context, whilst the differences between the schools enabled the research to explore how organisational culture, leadership and school priorities influenced teachers' experiences of CPD.

To protect confidentiality, each school was allocated a pseudonym. The pseudonyms Abbey School, Kingsway School and Salisbury School were selected to avoid any connection with the schools' actual names, ownership or geographical location. Similarly, all participants were assigned pseudonyms to ensure that neither individual teachers nor schools could be identified within the findings.

Table 3.1 Characteristics of the Three Case Study Schools

Characteristics	Abbey	Kingsway	Salisbury
Educational Philosophy	Child-centred and inclusive	Structured, accountability and improvement focused	Organisational change and curriculum development
Student Profile	Expatriate and Bahraini	Expatriate and Bahraini	Expatriate and Bahraini
Staff Profile	Mainly overseas recruited	Mixed overseas, local expatriate and Bahraini	Mainly overseas recruited
CPD Emphasis	Teaching, learning and inclusion	School improvement and consistency	Change management and curriculum implementation
Organisational context	Established school	Established school with diverse staffing	School undergoing transition

Collectively, the three schools provided contrasting organisational contexts through which teachers' and senior leaders' experiences of CPD could be explored. Although each school differed in terms of its educational philosophy, organisational culture and professional development priorities, all operated within the same national policy context and delivered the English National Curriculum. This enabled the research to examine both common and context-specific experiences of CPD across the participating schools.

3.5 Purposive Sampling

Purposive sampling was employed to select participants for this research. Purposive sampling involves intentionally selecting individuals who possess relevant knowledge and experience relating to the research topic (Patton, 2002). The approach is widely used in qualitative research because it enables researchers to identify information-rich participants capable of providing detailed insights into the phenomenon under investigation. The selection criteria required participants to be currently employed within one of the three participating private international schools in Bahrain and to have direct experience of CPD within their organisation. Teachers and senior leaders were purposively selected because both groups played important, yet complementary, roles in the professional development process. Whilst teachers were able to describe their experiences of participating in CPD activities, senior leaders provided insight into the planning, implementation and evaluation of professional development within their schools. The inclusion of both groups therefore enabled the research to explore CPD from multiple organisational perspectives.

The decision to include participants from three different international schools further strengthened the research by enabling comparisons across different organisational cultures, leadership approaches and school contexts. Although all three schools delivered the British curriculum, each possessed its own organisational structures, institutional ethos and approaches to professional learning. Including participants from each school therefore enhanced the breadth and depth of the data and enabled similarities and differences in participants' experiences of CPD to be explored.

Purposive sampling was considered particularly appropriate because the research sought to obtain rich, detailed accounts from participants who were directly involved in the experience or leadership of CPD. The intention was not to produce findings that were statistically representative of all teachers working within Bahrain's international schools but rather to develop an in-depth understanding of how CPD was perceived and experienced within the specific organisational contexts under investigation. This approach is consistent with interpretivist research, which seeks to understand the meanings individuals attach to their experiences rather than generate statistically generalisable findings (Merriam, 1998; Creswell and Creswell, 2017).

The final sample comprised eighteen participants, including fifteen teachers and three senior leaders. Data collection continued until sufficient depth and diversity of perspectives had been obtained to address the research questions. The sample size was considered appropriate for an interpretivist qualitative multiple case study, where the emphasis is placed on generating rich, contextualised understanding rather than statistical generalisation.

3.6 Participants

This section describes the characteristics of the participants who took part in the research. The final sample comprised eighteen participants, including fifteen teachers and three senior leaders drawn from the three participating private international schools in Bahrain. Participants represented a range of educational phases, subject specialisms and levels of professional experience, providing diverse perspectives on CPD. The section outlines the participants' professional backgrounds before presenting the demographic profile of the questionnaire respondents, including their teaching experience, educational phases and subject specialisms. These characteristics provide important contextual information for interpreting the findings presented in Chapter 4 and demonstrate the breadth of professional experience represented within the study.

3.6.1 Participant Characteristics and Professional Background

The participant group represented a diverse cross section of teachers and senior leaders working across the three participating private international schools in Bahrain. All participants were employed within schools delivering the British curriculum; however, they reflected a broad range of nationalities, cultural backgrounds and professional experiences that are characteristic of Bahrain's international school sector. The diversity of the participant group was considered a particular strength of the study, as it enabled the research to explore CPD from multiple educational, organisational and cultural perspectives.

Most participants were expatriate teachers who had relocated to Bahrain from countries including the United Kingdom and South Africa. Alongside these internationally recruited teachers, the study also included locally recruited expatriate teachers and Bahraini nationals. This combination reflected the staffing profile commonly found within Bahrain's private international schools, where teachers from a range of educational systems work alongside locally employed staff within the same organisational environment. Several participants represented distinctive professional backgrounds that reflected the diversity of the international school workforce. Aminah (Kingsway School, T1), originally from Lebanon, had lived in Bahrain with her family for many years and was employed as a locally recruited teacher. Noreen (Kingsway School, T4), originally from Tunisia, had relocated to Bahrain on a spouse visa and taught Arabic within the primary school. Both participants represented long term expatriate teachers whose professional identities had developed through extensive experience of working within Bahrain's education system.

The research also included two Bahraini teachers whose perspectives provided an important local dimension to the research. Fawzia (Kingsway School, T2) was a young Bahraini teacher employed through the national Bahrainisation programme, whilst Faris (Salisbury School, T3) was a Bahraini physical education teacher employed through the local recruitment process. Their inclusion enabled the research to capture the experiences of teachers educated and employed within Bahrain alongside those of internationally recruited colleagues. This combination of

local and international perspectives reflected the multicultural nature of teaching within Bahrain's private international schools.

The inclusion of both expatriate and locally recruited teachers also reflected the wider educational context of Bahrain. Through the Bahrainisation programme, private schools are encouraged to increase the employment of Bahraini nationals whilst continuing to recruit experienced international teachers to deliver internationally recognised curricula. Consequently, teaching staff within Bahrain's international schools comprise culturally diverse teams whose educational backgrounds, professional experiences and expectations of professional learning have been shaped by different national and organisational contexts.

Rather than seeking statistical representation, purposive sampling was employed to capture a broad range of professional experiences across different schools, leadership roles and cultural backgrounds. The participant group therefore provided rich and varied perspectives through which teachers' and senior leaders' experiences of CPD could be explored within the distinctive organisational and cultural context of private international schools in Bahrain.

3.6.2 Professional Career Pathways in International Schools

Teaching within international schools is characterised by distinctive professional career pathways that differ considerably from those found within many national education systems. Unlike teachers employed within a single national education service, international teachers frequently pursue careers that involve working across different countries, educational systems and cultural contexts. Consequently, professional mobility has become a defining characteristic of international education and influences teachers' professional experiences, career aspirations and engagement with CPD.

Many internationally recruited teachers employed within British international schools originate from countries such as the United Kingdom, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand and Canada. To be eligible for appointment, teachers are generally

required to hold a recognised undergraduate degree in the subject they intend to teach, together with a recognised teaching qualification, such as a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) or equivalent, Qualified Teacher Status (QTS), and a minimum of two years' teaching experience. These requirements are typically stipulated by international schools and approved by the Bahraini Ministry of Education when granting work permits for overseas teachers.

International teaching is often regarded as both a professional career opportunity and an opportunity to experience different countries and cultures. Initial employment contracts are commonly offered for two years, followed by annual contract renewals. Employment packages generally include furnished accommodation or a housing allowance, annual return flights, private medical insurance and relocation assistance, reflecting established recruitment practices across the Gulf region. These employment conditions enable schools to attract experienced teachers from around the world whilst providing teachers with opportunities to broaden their professional and cultural experiences.

Career trajectories within international education vary considerably. For some teachers, overseas employment represents a relatively short period of professional experience before returning to their home country or accepting posts in other international schools. Others establish long term careers within international education, progressing through middle leadership, senior leadership and, in some cases, headship positions whilst working across different countries and educational systems.

These differing career pathways were considered important within the context of the present research because they were likely to influence participants' perspectives of CPD. Teachers who were new to international education often required support in adapting to different curricula, organisational cultures and educational expectations, whereas more experienced international teachers frequently placed greater emphasis on leadership development, professional autonomy and long term career progression. Similarly, teachers intending to establish long term careers within Bahrain may hold different expectations of professional learning from those anticipating further international mobility.

Understanding these professional career pathways provides important context for interpreting participants' experiences of CPD. Professional learning within international schools is influenced not only by organisational priorities and leadership practices but also by teachers' previous educational experiences, future career aspirations and levels of professional mobility. Recognising these factors provides a broader understanding of how teachers engage with CPD within the culturally diverse environment of Bahrain's private international schools.

3.6.3 Questionnaire Respondent Profile

Prior to the interview phase of the research, a demographic questionnaire was distributed to teaching staff across the three participating international schools to provide contextual information regarding the participant sample. A total of forty teachers completed the questionnaire, representing staff working across Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), primary and secondary education. The questionnaire was designed to provide an overview of participants' professional characteristics and to inform the purposive selection of interview participants. It was not intended to generate substantive quantitative findings but rather to provide descriptive information that supported the qualitative phase of the research.

Following completion of the questionnaire, purposive sampling was employed to select participants for the interview phase. Eighteen participants were subsequently interviewed, comprising fifteen classroom teachers and three senior leaders. Participants were selected because they possessed direct experience of CPD within their respective schools and were able to provide rich and detailed insights into the phenomenon under investigation. The inclusion of both teachers and senior leaders enabled the research to capture complementary perspectives, with teachers describing their experiences of participating in CPD and senior leaders providing insight into its planning, implementation and evaluation.

The questionnaire respondents represented a broad range of professional backgrounds and educational settings. Participants worked across EYFS, primary

and secondary phases and taught a variety of curriculum subjects. The sample also included teachers at different stages of their careers, ranging from early career practitioners to highly experienced teachers. This diversity provided a broad contextual overview of the teaching workforce within the participating schools and informed the selection of interview participants whose experiences reflected the varied professional backgrounds represented within the wider sample. The distribution of questionnaire respondents across the three educational phases is presented in **Table 3.2**.

Table 3.2: Question 1 -The occupation of questionnaire respondents (%)

School type	% Male (n= 11)	% Female (n= 29)	% Total
EYFS	0	28	20
Primary	18	38	32.5
Secondary	82	34	47.5

As shown in **Table 3.2**, almost half of the questionnaire respondents worked within secondary education (47.5%), whilst the remaining participants were employed within primary (32.5%) and EYFS (20%) settings. Female teachers were more highly represented in the EYFS and primary phases, whereas male teachers were more concentrated within secondary education. These characteristics reflected the diverse educational settings represented within the participating schools and informed the purposive selection of interview participants to ensure a range of professional perspectives was included in the research.

3.6.3.1 Subject Specialisms

The questionnaire respondents represented a broad range of curriculum areas across the three participating schools. This diversity was important because it ensured the research reflected the experiences of teachers working across different subject disciplines and educational phases, rather than focusing on a single curriculum area. The inclusion of teachers from a variety of specialisms also increased the likelihood that different perspectives on CPD would be represented, reflecting the diverse professional learning needs within international schools. The

curriculum subjects taught by the questionnaire respondents are presented in **Table 3.3**.

Table 3.3: Question 2 - Subjects taught by the respondents (%)

Subjects taught	% Male (n=11)	% Female (n= 29)	% Total
Arabic	0	4	4
Art	0	2	2
Business Studies	8.3	0	1
Chemistry	8.3	0	1
PSHE	8.3	1	2
Early Years FS	0	6	6
English	4	8	12
French	0	2	2
Maths	1	5	6
PE	1	1	2
Physics	2	0	2

As shown in **Table 3.3**, the respondents taught a wide range of subjects, including English, Mathematics, Arabic, Science, Physical Education, Business Studies, Art, PSHE and the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). English was the most frequently represented subject, although participants were drawn from a broad range of curriculum areas across both primary and secondary education. This diversity strengthened the study by ensuring that participants' experiences of CPD reflected a variety of teaching contexts rather than the perspectives of a single department or subject area. Consequently, the findings provide a more comprehensive understanding of professional learning across the participating schools.

3.6.3.2 Teaching Experience

The questionnaire respondents represented a broad range of professional experience. Almost half of the participants had five years or less teaching experience, whilst others had more than twenty years of experience. Including teachers at different stages of their careers enabled the research to explore how CPD was perceived and experienced across varying levels of professional

experience. The teaching experience profile of the questionnaire respondents is presented in **Table 3.4**.

Table 3.4: Question 3 - Comparison of Gender versus Years of teaching experience of respondents (%)

Question 3 - Year of teaching experiences	% Male (n= 11)	% Female (n= 29)	% Total
Under 5 years	27.3	55.2	47.5
6-10 years	27.3	24.1	25.0
11-15 years]	9.0	6.9	7.5
16-20 years	27.3	6.9	12.5
More than 20 years	9.0	6.9	7.5

As shown in **Table 3.4**, almost half of the respondents (47.5%) had five years or less teaching experience, whilst over a quarter had more than ten years of experience. This balance ensured that the research captured the perspectives of both early career and more experienced teachers. The diversity of professional experience strengthened the research by providing a range of perspectives on CPD and contributing to a richer understanding of how professional learning is experienced within private international schools.

3.7 Data Collection Methods

This section outlines the methods used to collect the data required to address the research aim and research questions. Consistent with the interpretivist multiple case study design, data were collected using three complementary methods: a demographic questionnaire, semi-structured interviews and documentary analysis. The use of multiple methods enabled the researcher to develop a comprehensive understanding of participants' experiences of CPD whilst enhancing the richness, depth and credibility of the data. Employing multiple sources of evidence is consistent with qualitative case study research and contributes to a more nuanced understanding of complex social phenomena (Yin, 2018).

Although semi-structured interviews constituted the primary source of data, the demographic questionnaire and documentary analysis provided valuable contextual information that informed participant selection, supported the interpretation of interview findings and facilitated the triangulation of evidence across multiple data sources.

3.7.1 Demographic Questionnaire

Prior to the interview phase of the research, an online demographic questionnaire was distributed to teaching staff across the three participating international schools. The questionnaire was designed to gather contextual information regarding participants' professional backgrounds and experiences and to assist in the development of more focused interview questions. According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2017), questionnaires can provide researchers with an efficient means of collecting standardised information from a large number of participants whilst generating valuable contextual data to support subsequent stages of the research process.

The questionnaire collected information relating to participants' gender, educational phase, subject specialism, years of teaching experience and professional role within the school. The purpose of collecting this information was not to generate substantive quantitative findings but rather to develop a profile of the participant sample and inform the purposive selection of interview participants. As Robson (2024) suggests, questionnaires can provide important background information that enhances understanding of participants and their professional contexts.

The questionnaire was administered electronically through designated gatekeepers within each participating school. The use of an online questionnaire facilitated efficient data collection, ensured participant anonymity and enabled respondents to complete the questionnaire at a time convenient to them. A total of forty teachers completed the questionnaire across the three participating schools. The questionnaire findings provided an overview of the participant population and

assisted in identifying broad patterns that were subsequently explored in greater depth during the interview phase of the research.

Questionnaires are frequently employed within qualitative research as a complementary method for gathering demographic and contextual information (Bryman, 2016). Whilst the primary source of data for this research was the semi-structured interviews, the questionnaire served an important descriptive function by providing information about participants' professional backgrounds, educational settings and levels of experience. The demographic profiles generated from the questionnaire data are presented earlier in this chapter and were used to contextualise the interview findings rather than as an independent source of analysis.

The questionnaire also contributed to the triangulation of data sources by providing contextual information that could be compared with interview responses and documentary evidence. Yin (2018, p. 128) argues that the use of multiple sources of evidence strengthens the credibility of case study research by enabling researchers to corroborate findings across different forms of data. The questionnaire therefore served as a supporting instrument that enhanced understanding of the participant sample and informed the overall research design.

3.7.2 Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews constituted the principal method of data collection. Interviews are particularly appropriate when researchers seek to understand participants' experiences, perspectives and interpretations of social phenomena (Rubin and Rubin, 2011). Given the exploratory nature of the research and its focus on teachers' perspectives of CPD, semi-structured interviews provided an effective means of generating rich and detailed qualitative data. Semi-structured interviews occupy a position between structured and unstructured interviews. Whilst guided by a series of predetermined questions, they also provide flexibility for researchers to explore emerging issues and pursue topics introduced by participants (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2018). This flexibility was particularly important because participants'

experiences of CPD varied according to their professional roles, experiences and organisational contexts.

An interview schedule was developed based upon the research questions and themes emerging from the literature review. Questions explored participants' understandings of CPD, perspectives of effective professional development, experiences of professional learning, barriers to participation and the role of leadership in supporting professional growth. The interview schedule served as a guide rather than a rigid framework. Participants were encouraged to elaborate upon their responses and introduce issues they considered relevant to the study. This approach enabled the researcher to explore participants' perspectives in depth whilst maintaining sufficient consistency across interviews to facilitate subsequent analysis.

A total of eighteen interviews were conducted, involving fifteen teachers and three senior leaders across the three participating schools. Interviews lasted between approximately 45 and 60 minutes and were conducted at times convenient to participants. With participants' consent, all interviews were audio recorded to ensure accurate capture of responses and facilitate detailed analysis. Audio recordings were subsequently transcribed verbatim. Following transcription, each participant was emailed a copy of their transcript to review and confirm its accuracy before analysis commenced. Transcription enabled careful examination of participants' accounts and provided the textual data used during the thematic analysis process. The use of verbatim transcription is recommended within qualitative research because it preserves participants' original language and facilitates detailed interpretation of meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

3.7.3 Documentary Analysis

In addition to questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, documentary analysis was employed as a supplementary source of data. Documentary analysis is defined as a systematic procedure for reviewing and evaluating documents to gain understanding, develop empirical knowledge and provide contextual insight into the

phenomenon under investigation (Bowen, 2009). Within qualitative case study research, documentary evidence is particularly valuable because it enables researchers to examine organisational processes, policies and practices whilst corroborating evidence obtained from other data sources (Yin, 2018).

The documents examined included CPD policies, staff handbooks, annual school reports, self-evaluation forms, inspection reports and professional development schedules. These documents were selected because they provided insight into how CPD was formally understood, planned, implemented and evaluated within the participating schools. Documentary analysis served several important purposes within the research design. First, it provided contextual information regarding each school's organisational structures, professional development priorities and approaches to staff learning. Second, it enabled comparisons between formal school policies and participants' reported experiences of CPD. Third, the documents informed the development of the interview questions by identifying areas that required further exploration during the interview process. As Bowen (2009) notes, documentary evidence can assist researchers in identifying issues, concepts and themes that may not emerge through interviews alone.

The documentary analysis involved repeated reading of each document to identify references relating to the planning, implementation and evaluation of CPD. Particular attention was paid to statements concerning professional learning opportunities, staff appraisal, leadership responsibilities, school improvement priorities and expectations for teacher development. Notes were recorded throughout the review, and the documents were compared across the three participating schools to identify common approaches as well as differences in policy and practice. Rather than being coded as a separate dataset, the documentary evidence was used to provide contextual information, inform the development of the interview schedule and support the interpretation of findings emerging from the questionnaire and interview data.

Consistent with Yin's (2018) recommendations for case study research, documentary evidence was used to support data triangulation and enhance the credibility of the findings rather than being analysed as an independent source of

evidence. The integration of documentary evidence with questionnaire and interview data enabled a richer and more comprehensive understanding of continuing professional development within the participating schools. **Table 3.5** summarises the documentary evidence reviewed and its contribution to the research.

Table 3.5. Summary of Documentary Evidence Reviewed.

Document Type	Examples	Contribution to the Research
1.CPD Circular	CPD training schedules	List of CPD courses being offered by each school, both internal and external CPD training.
2.Policies	Teacher Training and Professional Development School Policies	School Policies for Teacher Training and CPD
3. Reports	Annual School Reports School Evaluation Forms (SEF) BSO/COBIS Inspection Reports 2017 School review reports from the Quality Assurance Authority for Education and Training (QAAET) in Bahrain. Ministry of Education, Government of the Kingdom of Bahrain	1. Annual report of progress, attainment, highlights of the school year provided to the Board of Governors 2. Self-Evaluation Form completed by the Senior Leadership Team evaluating all areas of the school in line with inspection criteria. 3. BSO/COBIS School inspections reports 4. QAAET – School inspection reports from the Ministry of Education

Overall, documentary evidence complemented the questionnaire and interview data by providing valuable contextual information about organisational policies and professional learning practices. Although documentary analysis did not constitute the primary source of evidence, it strengthened the credibility of the study through data triangulation and enabled comparisons between formal organisational documentation and participants' reported experiences (Bowen, 2009; Yin, 2018; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018).

3.8 Triangulation of Data Sources

The use of questionnaires, interviews and documentary analysis facilitated methodological triangulation. Triangulation involves the use of multiple data sources

or methods to explore a phenomenon from different perspectives (Denzin, 2002). Within qualitative research, triangulation is often used to enhance the depth, credibility and trustworthiness of findings. In the present research, interviews provided the primary source of data regarding participants' perspectives of CPD. Questionnaires contributed demographic and contextual information, whilst documentary analysis offered insight into organisational policies and professional development structures. The combination of these methods enabled a more comprehensive understanding of CPD within the participating schools than would have been possible through a single method alone.

The integration of multiple data sources therefore strengthened the research by providing opportunities to compare and contextualise findings across different forms of evidence. This approach was consistent with the multiple case study design and supported the development of rich and contextually grounded interpretations of participants' experiences.

3.9 Data Analysis

The data generated through the semi-structured interviews were analysed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) as developed by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2019, 2021). Thematic analysis is a flexible qualitative analytical method used to identify, analyse and interpret patterns of meaning within qualitative data. It is particularly appropriate for research seeking to explore participants' experiences, perspectives and understandings of social phenomena (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Given the exploratory nature of this research and its interpretivist orientation, reflexive thematic analysis was considered an appropriate analytical approach because it facilitated an in-depth examination of participants' perspectives of CPD. The method enabled the researcher to move beyond descriptive accounts of individual responses and identify broader themes reflecting shared meanings and experiences across the dataset. Reflexive thematic analysis aligns closely with interpretivist and constructivist approaches to research because it recognises that themes do not simply emerge from data but are actively developed through the interaction between the researcher and the data (Braun and Clarke, 2021). This perspective

acknowledges the interpretive role of the researcher in identifying patterns of meaning and constructing analytical insights.

3.10 Rationale for Using Reflexive Thematic Analysis

Several factors influenced the decision to adopt reflexive thematic analysis. Firstly, the method is well suited to studies exploring experiences, perspectives and meanings, which aligned directly with the research aim of understanding teachers' perspectives of CPD (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Secondly, thematic analysis provides flexibility and can be applied across a range of theoretical and philosophical positions (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This flexibility enabled the analysis to remain consistent with the interpretivist paradigm underpinning the research whilst allowing themes to be developed inductively from participants' accounts. Thirdly, reflexive thematic analysis facilitates both descriptive and interpretive analysis. Whilst initial coding focuses on describing participants' experiences, subsequent stages involve deeper engagement with the data to identify patterns, relationships and meanings (Braun and Clarke, 2021). This approach was particularly valuable in addressing the research questions because it enabled exploration of not only what participants said about CPD but also the underlying meanings and assumptions shaping their perspectives.

Finally, thematic analysis is widely used within educational research and has been recognised as a rigorous method for analysing qualitative interview data (Braun and Clarke, 2019). Its systematic yet flexible nature made it particularly appropriate for analysing the large volume of interview data generated within the study. An illustrative example of the development of interpretive codes into patterns of shared meaning and the final themes is provided in **Appendix H** to enhance the transparency of the analytical process.

3.10.1 The Six Phases of Reflexive Thematic Analysis

Data analysis followed the six phases of reflexive thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2021):

Phase 1: Familiarisation with the Data

The first phase involved immersion within the dataset through repeated reading and re-reading of interview transcripts. Following each interview, audio recordings were transcribed verbatim to ensure accurate representation of participants' responses. The researcher listened to recordings whilst reviewing transcripts to verify accuracy and become familiar with the data. During this phase, preliminary observations, reflections and potential patterns were recorded within a research journal. Familiarisation enabled the researcher to develop a comprehensive understanding of participants' experiences and begin identifying recurring issues relating to CPD. Braun and Clarke (2021) emphasise that familiarisation is a critical stage because it provides the foundation upon which subsequent analysis is built. Through repeated engagement with the transcripts, the researcher developed an increasingly nuanced understanding of the dataset.

Phase 2: Generating Initial Codes

The second phase involved systematic coding of the interview transcripts. Coding refers to the process of identifying meaningful features of the data that are relevant to the research questions (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Codes were generated inductively from the data rather than being imposed from predetermined theoretical frameworks. Segments of text relating to participants' understandings of CPD, perceptions of effectiveness, experiences of professional learning, barriers to participation and leadership support were identified and assigned descriptive labels. Examples of initial codes included Lifelong learning; Teacher Choice; Practical relevance; Time constraints; Workload pressures; Leadership support; Collaboration; School improvement priorities. Coding was conducted across the entire dataset to ensure consistency and enable comparison between participants and schools.

Phase 3: Searching for Themes.

The third phase involved examining relationships between codes and grouping them into broader categories of meaning. At this stage, individual codes were reviewed and clustered according to conceptual similarities.

For example, codes relating to teacher autonomy, professional choice and self-directed learning were grouped together. Similarly, codes concerning workload, lack of time and competing responsibilities were combined within broader categories relating to barriers to professional development. This process enabled the development of preliminary themes representing shared patterns of meaning across participants' accounts.

Phase 4: Reviewing and Refining Themes

The fourth phase involved reviewing and refining the developing themes. Braun and Clarke (2021) describe this stage as an iterative process in which themes are evaluated against both the coded extracts and the entire dataset. Themes were examined to determine whether they accurately represented participants' experiences and whether sufficient evidence existed to support them. Some themes were merged, revised or reorganised as analysis progressed. This process ensured that each theme was conceptually coherent and distinct from the others. The iterative nature of this stage contributed to the credibility and robustness of the analysis by ensuring that themes remained grounded in participants' accounts whilst providing meaningful analytical insight.

Phase 5: Defining and Naming Themes

The fifth phase involved defining the essence of each theme and determining how it contributed to understanding teachers' perspectives of CPD. Detailed analytical descriptions were developed for each theme to clarify its meaning and significance.

The final analysis generated six interconnected themes:

- Understanding the Purpose of CPD
- Characteristics of Effective CPD
- Barriers to Effective CPD
- Teacher Agency and Professional Ownership

- Leadership and Organisational Support
- Balancing School Priorities and Individual Teacher Needs

These themes captured the principal patterns of meaning identified across the dataset and formed the basis of the findings presented in Chapter Four.

Phase 6: Producing the Report

The final phase involved synthesising the analysis and presenting the findings in a coherent narrative. Data extracts were selected to illustrate key themes and support analytical interpretations. The findings chapter was organised around the six themes identified through the analytical process, enabling participants' experiences to be presented in a structured and meaningful manner. Consistent with Braun and Clarke's (2021) approach, the analysis moved beyond description to provide interpretation of participants' perspectives and explore relationships between themes.

3.10.2 Researcher Reflexivity in Analysis

An important feature of reflexive thematic analysis is recognition of the researcher's active role in the analytical process. Braun and Clarke (2019) argue that themes are generated through the researcher's engagement with the data rather than emerging independently from it. Throughout the analysis, the researcher maintained a reflexive journal in which decisions, interpretations and emerging ideas were documented. This process encouraged critical reflection regarding how personal experiences, assumptions and professional background may have influenced the interpretation of participants' accounts.

As a former international school leader working within Bahrain, the researcher recognised the potential influence of prior professional experiences on data interpretation. Maintaining reflexive awareness throughout the analytical process helped ensure that interpretations remained grounded in participants' accounts whilst acknowledging the researcher's role in knowledge construction.

3.10.3 Summary of Data Analysis

Reflexive thematic analysis provided a rigorous and systematic framework for analysing participants' perspectives of CPD. Through six iterative phases of analysis, patterns of meaning were identified, refined and organised into six overarching themes. The approach was consistent with the interpretivist and constructivist foundations of the research and enabled the development of rich, contextually grounded insights into teachers' perspectives of professional development within private international schools in Bahrain. The findings generated through this analytical process are presented in Chapter Four.

3.11 Trustworthiness

Within qualitative research, the concept of trustworthiness is often used in place of the positivist concepts of validity and reliability. Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that qualitative research should be evaluated according to criteria that are consistent with its philosophical assumptions. They propose four key criteria for establishing trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. These criteria were used throughout the research to enhance the quality, rigour and integrity of the research process.

3.11.1 Credibility

Credibility refers to the extent to which the findings accurately represent participants' perspectives and experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It is broadly comparable to the concept of internal validity within quantitative research and concerns the trustworthiness of the interpretations developed by the researcher.

Several strategies were employed to enhance credibility. Firstly, the use of semi-structured interviews enabled participants to describe their experiences in their own words, providing rich and detailed accounts of continuing professional development (CPD) within their schools. The flexibility of the interview process also allowed the

researcher to seek clarification and explore emerging issues in greater depth, thereby reducing the likelihood of misunderstanding.

Secondly, the research incorporated methodological triangulation through questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and documentary analysis. The use of multiple sources of evidence enabled findings to be examined from different perspectives and provided contextual understanding that strengthened the interpretation of participants' accounts (Denzin, 2002).

Following transcription, each participant was emailed a copy of their interview transcript and invited to review it for accuracy. Participants were asked to confirm that the transcript accurately reflected their views or to identify any factual errors or clarifications before the data were analysed. This process helped ensure that participants' accounts were accurately represented within the study and contributed to the credibility of the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Thirdly, prolonged engagement with the data further enhanced credibility. The researcher spent considerable time reading interview transcripts, listening to audio recordings and engaging in repeated cycles of analysis. This process facilitated a deeper understanding of participants' experiences and supported the development of nuanced interpretations. Finally, the inclusion of verbatim participant quotations within Chapter 4 enables readers to examine the relationship between participants' accounts and the interpretations presented, thereby strengthening confidence in the credibility of the findings.

3.11.2 Transferability

Transferability refers to the extent to which findings may be applicable to other contexts or settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Unlike quantitative research, qualitative studies do not seek statistical generalisation. Instead, researchers provide sufficient contextual detail, often referred to as *thick description*, to enable readers to determine whether the findings may be relevant to other contexts.

To support transferability, detailed descriptions of the research context, participants and case study schools were provided. The study outlined the characteristics of Bahrain's international school sector, the participating schools and the professional backgrounds of participants. This contextual information enables readers to assess the extent to which the findings may resonate with similar educational settings. The use of multiple case studies further enhanced transferability by enabling the exploration of experiences across three different schools. Although the findings cannot be generalised to all international schools, they may provide valuable insights for researchers, practitioners and policymakers working within comparable educational environments.

3.11.3 Dependability

Dependability concerns the consistency and transparency of the research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It requires researchers to demonstrate that the study was conducted systematically and that methodological decisions were clearly documented. To enhance dependability, a clear audit trail was maintained throughout the research process. Decisions relating to participant recruitment, data collection, coding procedures and theme development were documented within research notes. This documentation provided a transparent record of how the research evolved and how analytical decisions were reached.

Furthermore, the research methodology was described in detail to enable readers to understand how the data were collected and analysed. The use of Braun and Clarke's (2006; 2021) six-phase framework for reflexive thematic analysis provided a systematic and transparent approach to data analysis. By documenting each stage of the analytical process, the research sought to demonstrate methodological consistency and rigour. The interview schedule was also used consistently across participants whilst retaining sufficient flexibility to explore individual experiences. This balance between consistency and responsiveness contributed to the dependability of the research process.

3.11.4 Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the extent to which findings are grounded in the data rather than reflecting researcher bias, assumptions or personal preferences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Within interpretivist research, the aim is not complete objectivity but transparency regarding the researcher's role in interpreting the data.

Reflexivity played a central role in enhancing confirmability. Throughout the study, the researcher maintained a reflexive journal to document personal reflections, assumptions and analytical decisions. This process encouraged critical examination of how the researcher's professional experiences and beliefs may have influenced both data collection and interpretation, consistent with Braun and Clarke's (2021) emphasis on researcher reflexivity within reflexive thematic analysis.

The inclusion of verbatim participant quotations within Chapter 4 further strengthened confirmability by providing direct evidence to support the interpretations presented. Readers are therefore able to examine the relationship between participants' accounts and the researcher's analysis. In addition, the use of multiple data sources contributed to confirmability by enabling findings to be considered in relation to different forms of evidence, thereby reducing reliance upon a single source of data and strengthening confidence in the interpretations developed.

3.11.5 Summary of Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of the research was enhanced through careful attention to credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Methodological triangulation, transcript verification, prolonged engagement with the data, thick description, reflexive practice, systematic data analysis and transparent reporting all contributed to the rigour of the study. Consistent with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) framework and Braun and Clarke's (2021) principles of reflexive thematic analysis, these strategies sought to ensure that the findings provide a credible, dependable

and trustworthy account of teachers' and senior leaders' perspectives of continuing professional development within private international schools in Bahrain.

3.12 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are fundamental to educational research and are particularly important when studies involve human participants. Ethical research requires the protection of participants' rights, dignity, privacy and wellbeing throughout the research process (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2017). Given that this research involved teachers and senior leaders discussing their experiences of CPD within their schools, careful attention was paid to ethical issues before, during and after data collection.

Prior to commencing the research, ethical approval was obtained from the relevant university ethics committee. The research was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles outlined by the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2018), which emphasise the importance of informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, anonymity and the avoidance of harm.

3.12.1 Informed Consent

Informed consent is a central principle of ethical research and requires participants to understand the purpose of the research, the nature of their involvement and any potential risks associated with participation (BERA, 2018). Prior to data collection, all participants received an information sheet outlining the aims of the research, the research process, the intended use of the data and their rights as participants.

Participants were informed that participation was entirely voluntary and that they could withdraw from the research at any stage without penalty or negative consequences. Written consent was obtained before questionnaires were completed and interviews commenced. Participants were also informed that interview recordings would be used solely for research purposes and would remain

confidential. The consent process was designed to ensure that participants fully understood the nature of the research and were able to make informed decisions regarding their involvement.

3.12.2 Voluntary Participation and Right to Withdraw

Participation in the research was entirely voluntary. No participant was under any obligation to take part, and all individuals were informed that they could decline participation or withdraw from the research at any point without providing a reason. The right to withdraw is particularly important within educational settings where hierarchical relationships may exist between teachers and school leaders (Cohen et al., 2017). To minimise any perception of coercion, participants were reassured that decisions regarding participation would not affect their employment or professional relationships in any way. Participants were informed that they could withdraw their interview data within a specified period following the interview if they no longer wished their contributions to be included in the research.

3.12.3 Confidentiality and Anonymity

Protecting participant confidentiality and anonymity was a key ethical consideration throughout the research. Given the relatively small size of the international school sector in Bahrain, particular care was required to ensure that individual participants and schools could not be identified. Pseudonyms were assigned to all schools and participants. The participating schools were referred to as Abbey School, Kingsway School and Salisbury School, whilst participants were assigned pseudonyms when reporting findings. Identifying information was removed from interview transcripts and research records to reduce the possibility of recognition.

Confidentiality was maintained throughout the research process. Interview recordings, transcripts and associated documentation were stored securely and were accessible only to the researcher and supervisory team where appropriate.

Any quotations used within the thesis were carefully reviewed to ensure that participants could not be identified through contextual details.

3.12.4 Data Protection and Storage

The research complied with university requirements regarding data protection and secure storage of research data. Electronic files, including interview recordings and transcripts, were stored on password protected devices and secure digital storage systems. Hard copy materials were stored in locked facilities accessible only to the researcher. Data were retained in accordance with institutional policies and relevant data protection regulations. Upon completion of the retention period, research data will be securely destroyed in line with university guidelines.

The secure management of research data was particularly important given the potentially sensitive nature of participants' comments regarding professional development practices, leadership and organisational processes within their schools.

3.12.5 Minimising Potential Harm

Educational research should seek to minimise any potential risks or harm to participants (BERA, 2018). Whilst the study was considered low risk, participants were invited to discuss professional experiences that could potentially involve criticism of organisational practices or leadership approaches. To minimise discomfort, participants were informed that they were not required to answer any questions they found uncomfortable and could terminate interviews at any time. Interviews were conducted in a respectful and professional manner, allowing participants to express their views freely whilst maintaining appropriate professional boundaries. Care was also taken when reporting findings to ensure that participants' comments could not be linked to specific individuals or institutions. This was particularly important because negative comments regarding professional

development practices could potentially affect workplace relationships if participants were identifiable.

3.12.6 Ethical Considerations and Research Quality

Ethical practice contributes not only to participant protection but also to the quality and credibility of research (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Establishing trust, respecting participants and maintaining transparency throughout the research process encouraged honest and reflective participation. Participants appeared willing to discuss both positive and negative aspects of their experiences, thereby contributing to the richness and authenticity of the data. Ethical considerations therefore informed all stages of the research process, from participant recruitment and data collection through to analysis and reporting. By adhering to recognised ethical principles, the research sought to protect participants whilst ensuring the integrity and trustworthiness of the research.

3.13 Researcher Positionality and Reflexivity

Within interpretivist research, the researcher is recognised as an active participant in the research process rather than a detached observer. Consequently, it is important to acknowledge how the researcher's professional background, experiences and assumptions may influence the design, conduct and interpretation of the research. This section therefore considers the researcher's positionality and explains the reflexive practices adopted throughout the research to enhance transparency, credibility and trustworthiness.

3.13.1 Researcher Positionality

Researcher positionality refers to the ways in which a researcher's personal background, professional experiences, beliefs and values may influence the research process and the interpretation of findings (Merriam, 1998). Within

interpretivist research, researchers acknowledge that knowledge is co-constructed through interactions with participants rather than being discovered objectively (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Braun and Clarke (2021) similarly argue that researchers play an active role in generating qualitative knowledge, making reflexivity and transparency essential throughout the research process. Consequently, recognising and reflecting upon the researcher's positionality formed an important aspect of the methodological rigour of this research.

The researcher's interest in CPD was shaped by more than thirty years of experience in education, including eighteen years in senior leadership positions across schools in the United Kingdom, Oman, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. During this time, the researcher held responsibilities for leading, designing, implementing and evaluating CPD programmes for teachers and school leaders. At the time of conducting the research, the researcher was serving as the Headteacher of an international school in Bahrain. These professional experiences provided extensive knowledge of the educational landscape, leadership structures and professional learning practices within international schools and informed the development of the research questions.

The researcher's position can best be understood as one of both insider and outsider, depending on the context. Professionally, the researcher occupied an insider position. Having worked in Bahrain's international school sector for several years, the researcher was familiar with the educational system, the expectations placed upon schools and the challenges associated with teacher professional development. In addition, the researcher knew members of the senior leadership teams in two of the participating schools. These established professional relationships facilitated access to the research sites, helped build rapport during interviews and encouraged open and candid discussions about participants' experiences of CPD. Participants often appeared comfortable discussing both positive and critical aspects of professional development because they recognised that the researcher understood the realities of working within international schools in Bahrain.

However, the researcher's positionality was more complex than simply being an insider. Although professionally embedded within Bahrain's international school community, the researcher was a British Pakistani working in Bahrain rather than a Bahraini national. Consequently, aspects of ethnicity and culture positioned the researcher as an outsider. At the same time, many participants identified as Muslim, creating a degree of shared religious understanding that contributed to mutual trust and facilitated respectful dialogue during the interviews. This combination of shared and differing identities meant that the researcher's positionality shifted throughout the research process rather than remaining fixed. Participants and researchers often occupy multiple insider and outsider positions simultaneously, with these positions influencing the ways in which knowledge is co-constructed during qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

The researcher's professional background inevitably influenced the way in which CPD was understood. Years of leading professional development initiatives had generated views regarding effective CPD, school improvement and teacher learning. These experiences also prompted important research questions concerning the extent to which CPD balanced organisational priorities with teachers' individual professional learning needs. However, the purpose of the research was not to validate the researcher's own professional experiences or assumptions but to understand how teachers and senior leaders themselves experienced and interpreted CPD within their own schools.

Recognising the potential influence of prior experience, reflexivity was maintained throughout the research process. The researcher kept a reflexive journal to record assumptions, methodological decisions and reflections following interviews and during data analysis. Attention was given to ensuring that participants' perspectives were represented faithfully and that interpretations remained grounded in the data rather than being shaped by prior leadership experience or personal beliefs about effective professional development. This reflexive approach is consistent with Braun and Clarke's (2021) view that researchers should acknowledge and critically examine their role in the production and interpretation of qualitative data rather than attempting to eliminate subjectivity.

3.13.2 Reflexivity

Reflexivity refers to the process through which researchers critically examine how their own experiences, assumptions, values and professional identities influence every stage of the research process (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Within interpretivist research, reflexivity is regarded as an essential component of methodological rigour because researchers acknowledge that knowledge is co-constructed through the interaction between themselves and participants rather than being objectively discovered. Consequently, reflexivity promotes transparency by encouraging researchers to recognise and critically evaluate how their own perspectives may shape the generation, interpretation and presentation of qualitative data.

Throughout the research, the researcher engaged in continuous reflexive practice by maintaining reflective research notes during both the data collection and data analysis phases. These notes documented methodological decisions, reflections following interviews, emerging interpretations and assumptions that arose throughout the study. Maintaining this record enabled the researcher to reflect upon how previous professional experiences, personal beliefs and interactions with participants may have influenced the research process. The reflective notes also provided opportunities to question emerging interpretations, consider alternative explanations and refine analytical decisions throughout the iterative process of analysis.

Attention was given to recognising assumptions relating to continuing professional development (CPD). The researcher brought over thirty years of teaching experience, including eighteen years in senior leadership positions across international schools in the United Kingdom, Oman, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. During this time, the researcher had significant responsibility for designing, implementing and evaluating CPD programmes and, at the time of conducting the research, was serving as the Headteacher of an international school in Bahrain. These experiences provided valuable contextual understanding of professional learning within international schools but also had the potential to influence expectations regarding effective CPD, leadership and school improvement. Maintaining reflective research notes encouraged continual self-questioning

throughout the research process and helped ensure that participants' experiences remained central to the analysis rather than being interpreted primarily through the researcher's own professional experiences.

The researcher's positionality also required ongoing reflection. Professionally, the researcher occupied an insider position, having worked within Bahrain's international school sector for several years and knowing members of the senior leadership teams in two of the participating schools, as well as some of the teachers who participated in the study. These existing professional relationships facilitated access to participants, helped establish rapport during interviews and encouraged open discussion of both positive and challenging experiences of CPD. At the same time, the researcher recognised that these relationships had the potential to influence participants' responses or shape the interpretation of the data. Consequently, particular care was taken to ask open, non-leading questions, to encourage participants to express their own perspectives freely and to remain receptive to views that differed from the researcher's own professional experiences.

The researcher's positionality was also shaped by broader social and cultural factors. Although professionally an insider within Bahrain's international school community, the researcher was a British Pakistani working in Bahrain rather than a Bahraini national. In this respect, aspects of ethnicity and culture positioned the researcher as an outsider. However, the majority of participants identified as Muslim, creating an important shared religious understanding that contributed to mutual respect and trust throughout the interview process. Rather than viewing positionality as fixed, the researcher recognised that insider and outsider positions shifted according to the particular relationships and contexts within which the research took place. This understanding is consistent with Braun and Clarke's (2021) view that researchers actively contribute to the construction of qualitative knowledge and should therefore remain transparent about their role throughout the research process.

Reflexivity was particularly important during the thematic analysis. Consistent with Braun and Clarke's (2021) conceptualisation of Reflexive Thematic Analysis, themes were not regarded as objective entities waiting to be discovered but were

actively developed through the researcher's sustained engagement with the data. The researcher therefore moved repeatedly between the interview transcripts, questionnaire responses, documentary evidence and reflective research notes, continually questioning interpretations, considering alternative explanations and ensuring that themes were firmly grounded in participants' accounts. This iterative process helped to minimise the influence of preconceived assumptions while acknowledging that interpretation inevitably reflects the researcher's active engagement with the data.

Although complete objectivity is neither possible nor desirable within interpretivist research, the researcher sought to ensure that interpretations remained firmly grounded in participants' accounts through ongoing reflexive practice, systematic analysis and careful consideration of alternative explanations. Consequently, the researcher's positionality was viewed not as a limitation of the research but as a valuable resource that enhanced contextual understanding whilst requiring continual critical reflection throughout the research process. By engaging in ongoing reflexive practice, maintaining reflective research notes and remaining transparent about the influence of personal and professional experience, the researcher sought to enhance the credibility, trustworthiness and overall rigour of the research.

3.14 Chapter Summary

This chapter has outlined and justified the methodological framework underpinning the research. An interpretivist paradigm, informed by a relativist ontology and constructivist epistemology, provided the philosophical foundation for exploring teachers' perspectives of CPD within private international schools in the Kingdom of Bahrain. A qualitative multiple case study design was adopted to investigate these experiences within their organisational and cultural context.

The chapter justified the use of purposive sampling and described the participant group comprising fifteen teachers and three senior leaders from three private international schools. Data were collected through demographic questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and documentary analysis, with the interviews serving as

the principal source of data. The chapter also outlined the application of Braun and Clarke's (2006; 2019; 2021) Reflexive Thematic Analysis and explained the ethical principles, researcher positionality, reflexivity and strategies employed to enhance the credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability of the research.

Collectively, these methodological decisions provided a coherent framework for addressing the research aim and research questions. The interpretivist multiple case study design enabled an in-depth exploration of participants' perspectives whilst recognising the influence of the organisational, cultural and educational context in which CPD was situated. The following chapter presents the findings of the research, organised around the themes generated through Reflexive Thematic Analysis, and explores teachers' and senior leaders' perspectives of CPD within Bahrain's private international school sector.

CHAPTER 4

Presentation of Findings and Analysis

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents findings generated from the demographic questionnaire, documentary analysis and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire and documentary evidence provide contextual information that supports the interpretation of the interview findings, whilst the interviews constitute the principal source of the thematic analysis. Following the approach proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006; 2019; 2021), interview transcripts were repeatedly reviewed, coded and analysed to identify patterns of meaning across participant responses. The analysis moved beyond a descriptive account of individual responses to explore shared experiences, divergent perspectives and recurring issues relating to CPD.

The purpose of this chapter is to present the themes that emerged from the data rather than report findings according to interview questions. The analysis revealed six interconnected themes: (1) Understanding the Purpose of CPD; (2) Characteristics of Effective CPD; (3) Barriers to Effective CPD; (4) Teacher Agency and Professional Ownership; (5) Leadership and Organisational Support; and (6) Balancing School Priorities and Individual Teacher Needs. Together, these themes provide insight into how teachers and senior leaders perceive, experience and engage with CPD within the context of private international schools in Bahrain.

Whilst the themes are presented separately for analytical purposes, they are closely interconnected. Participants frequently linked effective professional development to issues of relevance, leadership support, teacher autonomy and organisational priorities. The findings therefore demonstrate the complex and multifaceted nature of CPD within international school settings in Bahrain. The findings presented in this chapter represent the final themes generated through the reflexive thematic analysis. An illustrative example of the analytical process from interview extracts to final themes is provided in **Appendix H**.

4.1 Overview of Questionnaire Findings

Prior to the interview phase, an initial questionnaire was distributed to teaching staff across the three participating international schools. A total of forty teachers completed the questionnaire. The purpose of the questionnaire was not to generate standalone quantitative findings but to provide contextual information regarding teachers' perspectives of CPD and to inform the development of the semi-structured interview schedule. The questionnaire therefore served as a preliminary stage of data collection that identified broad patterns and issues which were subsequently explored in greater depth through the interview process (Bryman, 2016; Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The questionnaire explored teachers' perceptions of several aspects of CPD, including preferred forms of professional development, the perceived purpose of CPD, the relationship between appraisal and professional learning, teacher involvement in determining CPD priorities and opportunities for professional growth. The findings are presented descriptively using frequencies and percentages to illustrate participants' responses to each questionnaire item. Rather than being interpreted in isolation, the questionnaire findings are considered alongside the interview data and documentary evidence to provide a richer understanding of teachers' experiences of CPD. Throughout this chapter, the questionnaire findings provide contextual evidence that supports the subsequent thematic analysis and contributes to the triangulation of findings across multiple data sources (Yin, 2018).

4.1.1 Questionnaire Findings

Overall, the questionnaire findings indicated that teachers generally recognised the importance of CPD in supporting professional learning and improving classroom practice. Respondents demonstrated a clear preference for professional development activities that were practical, collaborative and directly applicable to their teaching responsibilities. Courses, conferences and workshops were identified as the most valued forms of CPD, whilst collaborative learning opportunities, such as observing colleagues and engaging in professional dialogue, were also viewed

positively. In contrast, online learning was consistently ranked as the least preferred approach to professional development. The questionnaire also highlighted differing perspectives regarding the extent to which CPD met teachers' individual professional learning needs. Although many respondents recognised the value of CPD, a substantial proportion believed that professional development was primarily designed to meet organisational priorities rather than their own professional learning requirements. Similarly, responses concerning the relationship between performance management and CPD suggested that the alignment between appraisal outcomes and professional development opportunities was not consistently experienced across the three participating schools.

Teacher involvement in shaping professional development also emerged as an important issue. Whilst many respondents reported feeling involved in determining school INSET priorities, a significant proportion disagreed, indicating variation in the extent to which teachers experienced agency in relation to CPD planning and decision-making. Despite these differences, the questionnaire findings were generally positive regarding opportunities for professional growth. Most respondents agreed that their schools provided genuine opportunities to develop their professional knowledge and skills, suggesting that teachers broadly viewed their schools as supportive of continuing professional learning. Taken together, the questionnaire findings identified several issues that subsequently emerged within the interview data, including teachers' preferred approaches to CPD, the balance between organisational priorities and individual professional learning needs, teacher voice in CPD decision-making and perceptions of professional growth. These findings therefore provided an important contextual foundation for the thematic analysis presented in the remainder of this chapter and informed the development of the interview questions explored with participants.

Table 4.1 presents teachers' rankings of different forms of continuing professional development. Respondents were asked to rank five common forms of CPD according to their personal preference, with one representing the most preferred option and five representing the least preferred. The findings provide an initial indication of the types of professional learning teachers considered to be most

valuable before these preferences were explored in greater depth during the interviews.

Table 4.1: Question 6 – Preferred forms of CPD by teachers (%)

Ranking of CPD by respondents	1	2	3	4	5
Courses/ conferences/workshops	54	14	16	8	8
School Inset days	11	19	19	30	22
Watching and talking with colleagues	8	43	30	8	11
Personal research and reading	11	16	22	43	8
Online learning	16	8	14	11	51

Table 4.1 shows that courses, conferences and workshops were the most highly valued forms of CPD, with 54% of respondents ranking them as their first choice. These findings suggest that teachers valued structured professional learning opportunities that provided access to specialist knowledge, practical classroom strategies and opportunities to engage with educational experts.

Collaborative professional learning also emerged as an important preference. Watching and talking with colleagues was ranked either first, second or third by 81% of respondents, indicating that teachers valued opportunities to learn from experienced colleagues, share professional practice and engage in collaborative dialogue. This finding suggests that professional learning embedded within teachers' everyday practice was perceived as particularly beneficial.

School INSET days received more varied responses. Although some teachers viewed them positively, others ranked them lower, suggesting that the perceived value of whole-school professional development depended on its relevance, quality and applicability to classroom practice. Similarly, personal research and reading attracted mixed responses, reflecting differences in teachers' preferences for self-directed learning.

Online learning was the least preferred form of CPD, with over half of respondents (51%) ranking it fifth. Similarly, personal research and reading received lower levels of support, with 43% of respondents ranking this activity fourth in importance.

Overall, these findings suggest that teachers preferred professional development activities that promoted collaboration, interaction and opportunities to engage directly with colleagues rather than more individualised approaches to professional learning. These findings are consistent with the literature, which suggests that professional development is most effective when it is collaborative, sustained, relevant to teachers' professional needs and closely connected to classroom practice (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Ventista & Brown, 2023; Sims et al., 2021). However, the questionnaire findings alone cannot explain why teachers held these preferences or how they experienced different forms of CPD within their schools. These issues were therefore explored in greater depth during the semi-structured interviews, which examined participants' experiences of different approaches to CPD and the factors that influenced their engagement with professional learning.

Tables 4.2 and 4.3 presents teachers' perceptions of the extent to which continuing professional development (CPD) addressed their individual professional learning needs and whether professional development opportunities were aligned with outcomes identified through the performance review process.

Table 4.2. Question 7 – Perceptions of Whether CPD Meets School Needs Rather Than Individual Needs (%)

Question 7	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
CPD meets the needs of the school rather than me personally	5.0	37.5	47.5	10.0	0

Table 4.3. Question 8 - Teacher's responses regarding needs identified within Performance Review being met through CPD (%)

Question 8	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neither agree nor disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly disagree (%)
Needs identified in my performance review have been met through CPD	5.0	35.0	37.5	22.5	0

Table 4.2 indicates that teachers held mixed views regarding the purpose of CPD within their schools. Whilst 42.5% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that CPD was designed primarily to meet the needs of the school rather than their own professional learning needs, almost half of the respondents (47.5%) neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement. Only 10% disagreed. The high proportion of neutral responses suggests that teachers' experiences varied across the participating schools or that the purpose of CPD was not always clearly communicated. Nevertheless, the findings indicate that many teachers perceived professional development to be closely aligned with organisational priorities and school improvement objectives rather than being explicitly tailored to individual learning needs.

A similar pattern emerged in relation to the relationship between performance management and professional development (Table 4.3). Whilst 40% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that needs identified through the performance review process had been addressed through CPD opportunities, over one-third (37.5%) neither agreed nor disagreed and almost one-quarter (22.5%) disagreed. These findings suggest that the relationship between appraisal and professional development was not experienced consistently across the three participating schools. Although some teachers perceived a clear connection between performance review and subsequent CPD opportunities, others appeared uncertain whether professional learning was genuinely informed by their appraisal outcomes.

Taken together, the findings suggest that, although teachers generally valued CPD, there was less certainty regarding the extent to which it was personalised and responsive to their individual professional learning needs. The results point towards a potential tension between organisational priorities and teacher agency, particularly in relation to decisions about the focus and purpose of professional development. These findings are consistent with research suggesting that teachers are more likely to engage meaningfully with CPD when it reflects their individual professional needs whilst also supporting wider school improvement priorities (Desimone, 2009; Ventista & Brown, 2023; Sims et al., 2021). However, the questionnaire findings alone cannot explain why teachers held these perceptions or how organisational priorities influenced their experiences of CPD. These issues were therefore explored in greater depth during the semi-structured interviews and subsequently emerged as one of the central themes of this study.

Table 4.4 presents teachers' perspectives of their involvement in shaping professional development priorities and school INSET programmes. The question explored the extent to which teachers felt they had an opportunity to contribute to decisions regarding the content and focus of continuing professional development within their schools.

Table 4.4. Question 9 – Teacher Involvement in Shaping Professional Development Agendas

Question 9	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neither agree nor disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly disagree (%)
I feel that I have a part in setting the agenda in the school INSET days	20.0	22.5	25.0	27.5	5.0

Table 4.4 indicates that teachers reported differing experiences regarding their involvement in shaping professional development within their schools. Whilst 42.5% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they played a role in determining the agenda for school INSET days, almost one-third (32.5%) disagreed or strongly disagreed, and a further 25% neither agreed nor disagreed. These findings suggest

that opportunities for teacher participation in CPD planning were not experienced consistently across the three participating schools.

The variation in responses may reflect differences in leadership approaches, organisational culture and the extent to which schools encouraged staff consultation when determining professional development priorities. Whilst some teachers appeared to experience meaningful involvement in decision-making, others perceived CPD agendas to be determined predominantly by senior leaders or organisational priorities. The relatively high proportion of neutral responses may also suggest uncertainty regarding the extent to which teachers' views influenced final CPD decisions.

These findings are consistent with the literature, which suggests that teachers are more likely to engage positively with professional development when they are actively involved in identifying their learning needs and shaping CPD opportunities (Kennedy, 2014; Ventista & Brown, 2023; Sims et al., 2021). Teacher voice has been identified as an important factor in promoting professional ownership, motivation and sustained engagement with professional learning. However, the questionnaire findings alone do not explain why teachers experienced different levels of involvement in CPD decision-making or how leadership practices influenced these perceptions. These issues were explored in greater depth during the semi-structured interviews and subsequently became an important aspect of the theme relating to teacher agency and leadership support.

Table 4.5 presents teachers' perceptions of whether they were provided with genuine opportunities to improve their professional skills within their schools. This question explored participants' overall perceptions of the effectiveness of continuing professional development (CPD) in supporting their professional learning and growth.

Table 4.5. Question 10 – Opportunities to Improve Professional Skills (%)

Question 10	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I am given a real opportunity to improve my skills in school	27.5	40.0	32.5	0	0

Table 4.5 indicates that teachers generally viewed their schools positively in relation to opportunities for professional development. Over two-thirds of respondents (67.5%) agreed or strongly agreed that they were provided with genuine opportunities to improve their professional skills, whilst no respondents disagreed with this statement. However, almost one-third (32.5%) neither agreed nor disagreed, suggesting that experiences of professional development were not entirely consistent across all participants.

These findings suggest that, despite earlier concerns regarding teacher voice, the alignment of CPD with individual learning needs and the relationship between appraisal and professional development, teachers generally perceived their schools as providing supportive environments for professional learning. The absence of any negative responses may indicate that participants recognised the availability of CPD opportunities, even if they differed in their views regarding the relevance, quality or personal value of those opportunities.

These findings are consistent with the literature, which suggests that teachers are more likely to engage positively with professional development when schools provide sustained opportunities for learning within supportive professional environments (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Ventista & Brown, 2023; Sims et al., 2021). However, the questionnaire findings alone do not explain why some teachers expressed uncertainty regarding the impact of CPD on their professional development. These issues were explored in greater depth during the semi-structured interviews, where participants discussed the influence of leadership

support, the relevance of CPD activities and the extent to which professional learning addressed their individual needs.

4.1.2 Summary of Questionnaire Findings

Table 4.6 summarises the principal findings emerging from the questionnaire. Overall, teachers recognised the value of continuing professional development (CPD) and viewed professional learning as an important aspect of their professional development. However, the results also revealed uncertainty regarding the extent to which CPD reflected individual professional learning needs, the alignment between performance management and professional development provision, and opportunities for teacher involvement in shaping CPD. Collectively, these findings informed the subsequent semi-structured interviews and provided the contextual foundation for the thematic analysis presented in the remainder of this chapter.

Table 4.6 Summary of Key Questionnaire Findings

Questionnaire Area	Summary of Findings
Perceptions of CPD	Teachers generally viewed CPD positively and recognised its contribution to professional learning.
Preferred Forms of CPD	Courses, conferences, workshops and collaborative learning were the most highly valued forms of CPD
Professional Growth	Most respondents believed CPD provided opportunities to develop their professional knowledge and skills.
School and Individual Needs	Teachers expressed mixed views regarding whether CPD reflected organisational priorities or individual professional learning needs.
Performance Management	Perceptions varied regarding the extent to which appraisal outcomes informed CPD opportunities.
Teacher Voice and Agency	Teachers reported differing levels of involvement in shaping CPD priorities and school INSET programmes.

The questionnaire findings should therefore be viewed as contextual evidence that informed the subsequent interview phase rather than as independent quantitative findings. Whilst the questionnaire identified broad patterns across the three case study schools, the semi-structured interviews provided a richer and more nuanced understanding of teachers' experiences of CPD. The interview data enabled further exploration of the issues identified in the questionnaire, including teachers' preferred approaches to professional learning, the balance between organisational priorities and individual learning needs, teacher voice in CPD decision-making and opportunities for professional growth.

4.2 Documentary Evidence Reviewed

Whilst the questionnaire provided an initial overview of teachers' perceptions of continuing professional development (CPD), documentary analysis offered additional contextual evidence regarding how professional development was formally structured, implemented and evaluated within the three participating schools. The documentary evidence complemented the questionnaire and interview data by illustrating how CPD was represented within official school documentation and how professional learning was positioned within organisational policies and school improvement processes.

Table 4.7 Summary of Documents Reviewed

Type of Document	Title of Document	Purpose of Document
CPD Circular	CPD training schedules	List of CPD courses being offered by each school, both internal and external CPD training.
Policy	Teacher Training and Professional Development School Policies	School Policies for Teacher Training and CPD
Reports	1. Annual School Report 2. School Evaluation Forms (SEF) 3. BSO/COBIS Inspection Reports 2017	1. Annual report of progress, attainment, highlights of the school year provided to the Board of Governors 2. Self-Evaluation Form completed by the Senior Leadership Team evaluating all

	4. School review reports from the Quality Assurance Authority for Education and Training (QAAET) in Bahrain.	areas of the school in line with inspection criteria. 3. BSO/COBIS School inspections reports 4. QAAET – School inspection reports from the Ministry of Education
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Table 4.7 summarises the documents reviewed as part of the documentary analysis. The documents included CPD training schedules, professional development policies, and school evaluation and inspection reports, illustrating the range of documentary evidence used to support the analysis. Analysis of these documents revealed a consistent emphasis on continuing professional development as a key mechanism for improving teaching quality, supporting school improvement priorities and maintaining educational standards. Across all three schools, CPD was presented as an integral component of organisational development and was closely linked to teaching and learning priorities, performance management processes and inspection outcomes.

The CPD training schedules demonstrated that schools provided a range of professional learning opportunities, including school-based training sessions, external courses, conferences, curriculum development activities and collaborative learning opportunities. However, the documentation indicated that these activities were predominantly planned around whole-school priorities and strategic improvement objectives, with comparatively little evidence of individualised professional learning pathways.

Similarly, the professional development policies emphasised continuous improvement, teacher learning and the importance of maintaining high professional standards. Whilst these policies highlighted the school's commitment to supporting staff development, they provided limited evidence of formal mechanisms through which teachers could influence CPD priorities or contribute to decisions regarding professional learning. This finding reflected the questionnaire results, where teachers reported differing levels of involvement in shaping CPD agendas, and was explored further during the interviews.

Inspection reports and school self-evaluation documents consistently identified professional development as an important contributor to teaching quality and school effectiveness. References to staff training, leadership development and improvements in classroom practice appeared throughout the documentation, reinforcing the importance attached to CPD across all three schools. At the same time, these documents frequently linked professional development to organisational accountability, inspection frameworks and school improvement targets, suggesting that CPD was often viewed as a strategic mechanism for achieving institutional objectives.

Overall, the documentary evidence supported the questionnaire findings by demonstrating that professional development occupied a prominent position within school policies and improvement planning. However, whilst the documents clearly articulated organisational expectations and strategic priorities, they provided less insight into teachers' experiences of CPD or the extent to which professional learning reflected individual needs. Consequently, the semi-structured interviews were essential in exploring how teachers interpreted and experienced the CPD approaches described within the documentary evidence.

4.2.2 Summary of Documentary Analysis

Overall, the documentary analysis provided important contextual evidence regarding the structure, purpose and implementation of continuing professional development (CPD) within the three participating schools. The documents consistently demonstrated that CPD was viewed as a strategic mechanism for improving teaching quality, supporting school improvement priorities and meeting organisational and accountability requirements. They also highlighted the close relationship between professional development, performance management and school improvement planning. The documentary evidence broadly reinforced the patterns identified in the questionnaire findings, particularly the emphasis placed on organisational priorities, leadership influence and opportunities for professional

learning. However, whilst school policies and reports clearly articulated institutional expectations for CPD, they offered comparatively little insight into teachers' involvement in determining professional development priorities or how CPD was experienced in practice. These issues were explored more fully through the semi-structured interviews.

The documentary analysis therefore served as an important source of contextual evidence that complemented the questionnaire and interview data. By triangulating findings across organisational documents, questionnaires and interviews, the study developed a more comprehensive understanding of teachers' experiences of CPD, thereby strengthening the credibility and trustworthiness of the overall findings.

4.3 Overview of Semi-Structured Interview Findings

The semi-structured interviews constituted the primary source of data for this research and provided rich insights into teachers' experiences and perspectives of CPD within the three participating international schools. Whilst the questionnaire and documentary analysis established important contextual patterns, the interviews enabled participants to explain their experiences in greater depth, offering a more nuanced understanding of how CPD was perceived, implemented and experienced in practice.

The interview data were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006; 2019; 2021) Reflexive Thematic Analysis. Through an iterative process of familiarisation, coding and theme development, six interconnected themes were identified that addressed the research aim and research questions. These themes capture participants' understandings of CPD, their experiences of professional learning within their schools and the organisational factors that influenced their engagement with professional development. The themes are presented sequentially throughout the remainder of this chapter. Each theme begins with an overview before presenting evidence drawn from participants' accounts, supported by illustrative quotations and analytical commentary. Quotations are identified using pseudonyms together with participants' school affiliation, professional role and participant code to facilitate

case comparison whilst preserving anonymity. The findings are interpreted in relation to the research questions and, where appropriate, linked to the questionnaire and documentary evidence to demonstrate convergence and divergence across the different sources of data. The first theme explores participants' understandings of the purpose of CPD and how they conceptualised professional learning within their professional practice.

4.4 Theme One: Understanding the Purpose of Continuing Professional Development

The first theme explores participants' understanding of the purpose and meaning of continuing professional development (CPD). Across the interviews, teachers and senior leaders consistently reflected on what CPD represented to them and how it contributed to their professional practice. Although participants expressed their views from different professional perspectives, there was broad agreement that CPD extended beyond attendance at courses or mandatory training and formed an integral part of ongoing professional learning throughout a teacher's career.

Analysis of the interview data revealed that participants viewed CPD as a continuous process through which teachers maintained professional knowledge, developed classroom practice and responded to educational change. At the same time, participants emphasised that effective professional development depended upon both organisational support and individual commitment. This theme comprises three interrelated sub-themes. The first explores participants' perceptions of CPD as a process of continuous professional learning. The second examines how participants associated CPD with professional growth and improved teaching practice, whilst the third considers how teachers understood the balance between individual professional learning and wider organisational priorities.

4.4.1 CPD as Continuous Professional Learning

A dominant theme emerging from the interviews was the perception of CPD as an ongoing process of professional learning rather than a series of isolated training events. Participants consistently described CPD as a mechanism through which teachers maintained professional competence, updated their knowledge and developed their pedagogical practice. For many participants, professional learning was viewed as a continuous responsibility that extended throughout a teacher's career.

Several teachers described CPD as a process of lifelong learning. Kirby explained (Abbey School, SENCO, T2):

“It's about never standing still. Never thinking that you're enough, which I think is important in teaching. Developing yourself within your profession and also even outside of your profession, as a person and staff. So, I think both very important and I think it should be an ongoing journey from where you come into the profession until you leave.”

Similarly, David (Abbey School, Teacher, T4) viewed CPD as an essential professional obligation:

“You're going to need to keep up to date with current trends and research, best practice. Not only for the benefit of yourself, but also for the school itself. And, more importantly, for the children.”

Walter, (Salisbury School, Teacher T4) supported a balanced approach to professional development that recognised and valued both individual and school needs. The emphasis on personal growth suggested a focus on continuous improvement of individual teachers, acknowledging their unique skills and areas for development:

“I guess it means opportunities for your own personal growth, your own professional development. But also, as part of a school development program or a school set of goals and missions. So, if it's two things connected, hopefully ideally.”

These responses suggest that participants viewed professional development as extending beyond mandatory school training. Rather than perceiving CPD as a compliance activity, teachers frequently described it as an ongoing commitment to professional growth. The emphasis placed upon continuous learning reflected a belief that educational practice is dynamic and requires teachers to remain responsive to changing pedagogical knowledge, curriculum developments and student needs.

Another teacher, Leyla (Salisbury School, Teacher 5, T5) emphasised the interplay between personal autonomy and the collective goals of the school in professional development:

“Ideally, I’d start by saying that you’re aiming to have some say in the direction that it took, and that it set into your practice as a professional and also as an individual. From experience, I will say...feeds in very much to the specific role that you have in the school, which can benefit, I suppose, primarily the school, and secondarily, perhaps, you. But initially it’s for the school, to make the school aligned with what’s expected of a school.”

Analysis of the data further revealed that participants associated professional growth with personal responsibility. Teachers frequently referred to self-directed learning, independent research and personal initiative as important components of professional development. This suggests that participants perceived effective CPD as a shared responsibility between schools and individual teachers rather than solely an organisational function.

4.4.2 CPD as Professional Growth and Improvement

Participants consistently associated CPD with improving professional knowledge, teaching effectiveness and classroom practice. Teachers frequently described CPD as a means of developing new skills, refining existing practices and enhancing educational outcomes for students.

Fawzia (Kingsway School, Language Teacher, T2) described CPD as:

“Training and maybe online courses or training, to develop their career, to develop their techniques and the teaching in the classes.”

Likewise, Amy (Abbey School, Deputy Head, L1), a senior leader, defined CPD broadly as:

“Anything that brings your practice on.”

These perspectives highlight an understanding of CPD as a process centred upon improvement. Participants emphasised the importance of acquiring new knowledge and skills that could subsequently be translated into classroom practice. The emphasis placed upon improving teaching quality indicates that professional development was often viewed through a practical lens, with teachers seeking opportunities that directly enhanced their effectiveness in supporting student learning.

Interestingly, both teachers and senior leaders framed professional growth as an evolving process rather than a fixed outcome. Improvement was not viewed as reaching a particular level of competence but rather as a continual cycle of learning, reflection and adaptation. This perception reinforces the developmental nature of CPD and highlights the importance participants attached to maintaining professional relevance throughout their careers.

4.4.3 CPD as a Balance Between Individual and Organisational Needs

A further theme emerging from the interviews concerned the relationship between individual teacher development and wider organisational priorities. While participants recognised the importance of personal growth, many also acknowledged that CPD served broader school improvement objectives.

Walter (Salisbury School, Teacher, T4) articulated this balance when he stated:

“It’s two things connected, hopefully, ideally.”

Similarly, Leyla (Salisbury School, English Teacher, T5) suggested that professional development often reflected organisational priorities:

“Initially it’s for the school, to make the school aligned with what’s expected of a school.”

Senior leaders also emphasised the organisational dimension of CPD. John (Kingsway School, Principal, L1) explained:

“CPD is where it supports the teacher in what we’re asking them to do related to the programme that we’re running.”

These findings indicate that participants recognised a dual-purpose underpinning CPD. On one hand, professional development was expected to support individual career progression and personal growth. On the other hand, CPD was viewed as a strategic mechanism through which schools sought to implement organisational goals, curricular reforms and improvement initiatives.

Another senior leader spoke about learning and growing as a learner. Annabel (Salisbury School, Senior Leader 1, L1):

“I think it basically focuses on growing as a learner, and the continuing development, it’s like when you talk about ongoing assessment, to be able to learn whether or not your students are learning and how much they are learning and what else you can do to support them. I think it’s the same for us as adults, how much am I investing in my own professional growth, and what am I taking on as courses, seminars, as workshops, as webinars to improve practice.”

The data suggest that tensions occasionally emerged when organisational priorities appeared to dominate individual learning needs. Nevertheless, most participants acknowledged that some degree of alignment between personal and institutional objectives was both necessary and desirable. Consequently, understanding CPD as a process that simultaneously serves teachers and schools emerged as a central finding within the research.

4.4.4 Theme Summary

The findings indicate that participants conceptualised CPD as a continuous and multifaceted process of professional learning. Teachers and senior leaders viewed CPD as extending beyond attendance at training sessions to encompass lifelong learning, professional growth and reflective practice. Participants also recognised

the dual role of CPD in supporting both individual development and organisational improvement. Whilst individual teachers emphasised personal responsibility and professional autonomy, senior leaders highlighted the importance of aligning professional learning with school priorities. Together, these findings suggest that CPD is perceived not merely as a mechanism for skill acquisition but as an ongoing process through which teachers negotiate their professional identities, responsibilities and contributions to school improvement.

4.5 Theme Two: Characteristics of Effective Continuing Professional Development

4.5.1 Introduction

A prominent theme emerging from the data concerned participants' perspectives of what constitutes effective CPD. Whilst participants recognised the value of professional development generally, they distinguished clearly between CPD that was meaningful and impactful and CPD that was perceived as ineffective or lacking relevance. Across all three schools, participants consistently identified relevance, practical application, expert facilitation, collaboration and teacher involvement as the characteristics most likely to enhance the effectiveness of professional learning activities.

Analysis of the data revealed that teachers were more likely to engage positively with CPD when it addressed authentic classroom challenges and contributed directly to improvements in teaching and learning. Conversely, participants expressed frustration with professional development activities that were generic, disconnected from classroom realities or imposed without consideration of teachers' professional needs.

4.5.2 Relevance to Professional Practice

The most frequently cited characteristic of effective CPD was relevance. Participants repeatedly emphasised the importance of professional learning that addressed the specific needs of teachers, students and schools. Professional development was considered most valuable when teachers could clearly identify how the learning could be applied within their own classrooms and professional contexts.

Kirby (Abbey School, SENCO, T2) explained:

“It has to be relevant to what you’re doing. If it’s not relevant, people switch off very quickly because they can’t see how it’s going to help them.”

Similarly, Leyla (Salisbury School, English Teacher, T5) noted:

“The best CPD is when you leave feeling that you can use something the next day.”

These comments illustrate the importance participants attached to immediate applicability. Teachers consistently expressed a preference for professional development that addressed current educational challenges rather than abstract theoretical concepts. Effective CPD was therefore viewed as closely connected to classroom realities and professional responsibilities.

The findings further suggest that relevance was linked to engagement. Participants indicated that when CPD aligned with their professional roles and responsibilities, they were more motivated to participate actively and implement new approaches. Conversely, when training was perceived as unrelated to classroom practice, participants often questioned its value and impact.

Analysis of the data therefore indicates that relevance acts as a critical factor influencing both engagement and implementation. Teachers appeared more likely to value professional development when they perceived a direct connection between the content of the training and the practical challenges they encountered within their daily work.

4.5.3 Practical Application and Classroom Impact

A second characteristic of effective CPD concerned the extent to which learning could be translated into classroom practice. Participants consistently emphasised the importance of practical strategies, techniques and approaches that could be implemented directly with students.

Mandy (Kingsway School, Year 2 Teacher, T3) explained:

“The best CPD gives you something practical that you can actually use. You can go back into your classroom and try it straight away.”

Fawzia (Kingsway School, Language Teacher, T2) similarly described effective CPD as:

“Something that helps you improve what you are doing every day with the students.”

These responses suggest that teachers evaluated CPD largely in terms of its impact on professional practice. Participants demonstrated a strong preference for learning experiences that moved beyond theoretical discussion and provided actionable strategies for improving teaching and learning.

Interestingly, participants did not reject theory entirely. Rather, they emphasised the importance of balancing theoretical understanding with practical implementation. Professional development was viewed most positively when theory informed practice and enabled teachers to reflect critically on their existing approaches whilst simultaneously providing practical tools for improvement.

The findings therefore indicate that effectiveness was often measured by the extent to which CPD resulted in tangible changes within classrooms. Teachers sought evidence that professional development could enhance student engagement, improve learning outcomes and strengthen instructional practice.

4.5.4 Expertise and Credibility of Facilitators

Participants also highlighted the importance of knowledgeable and credible facilitators in determining the effectiveness of CPD. Teachers frequently referred to

the value of learning from individuals who possessed significant educational expertise and practical classroom experience.

Shelley (Salisbury School, Teacher, T2) observed:

“The best training comes from people who have actually done the job and understand what happens in classrooms.”

Similarly, Walter (Salisbury School, Teacher, T4) commented:

“You want somebody who knows what they’re talking about and can answer questions based on real experience.”

These responses suggest that credibility was closely linked to participants’ perceptions of quality. Teachers appeared more receptive to professional learning when facilitators demonstrated expertise and could draw upon authentic educational experiences. Participants frequently contrasted effective facilitators with presenters who relied heavily on generic presentations without demonstrating practical understanding of teaching contexts.

Analysis indicates that credibility influenced both engagement and trust. Participants were more willing to accept new ideas and approaches when they believed the facilitator possessed relevant knowledge and practical experience. Consequently, facilitator expertise emerged as a significant determinant of CPD effectiveness.

4.5.5 Collaboration and Professional Dialogue

Another recurring theme concerned the importance of collaboration. Participants consistently described professional learning as being enhanced through opportunities to discuss ideas, share experiences and learn from colleagues.

David (Abbey School, Teacher, T4) explained:

“Some of the most valuable CPD comes from talking to other teachers and sharing what works.”

Amy (Abbey School, Deputy Head, L1) similarly highlighted the importance of collaborative learning:

“The strongest professional development often happens when staff learn from each other.”

These findings suggest that participants viewed professional development as a social process rather than an individual activity. Teachers valued opportunities to engage in professional dialogue, exchange ideas and reflect collectively upon practice. Collaboration was perceived as particularly valuable because it enabled teachers to contextualise new knowledge within their own settings and learn from the experiences of others.

The data further indicate that collaborative learning contributed to the development of professional communities. Participants described how discussions with colleagues often extended beyond formal CPD sessions and continued through informal conversations, mentoring relationships and shared professional inquiry.

This finding suggests that effective CPD may be strengthened when opportunities for collaboration are embedded within professional learning structures rather than being treated as isolated events.

4.5.6 Teacher Involvement and Ownership

A final characteristic of effective CPD concerned teacher involvement in identifying professional learning needs and shaping development opportunities. Participants frequently expressed a desire for greater ownership over their professional learning journeys.

Walter (Salisbury School, Teacher, T4) stated:

“The best CPD is when teachers have some say in what they need and what they want to develop.”

Mavis (Abbey School, EYFS Teacher, T3) similarly observed:

“People are more invested when they feel they’ve chosen it rather than it being imposed on them.”

These comments highlight the importance of agency in professional learning. Participants suggested that teachers were more likely to engage meaningfully with

CPD when they had opportunities to influence its content and direction. Ownership appeared to increase motivation, relevance and commitment to implementation.

Analysis of the data indicates that teacher involvement was closely linked to perceptions of professional respect and trust. Participants valued professional development environments in which teachers were recognised as active contributors to their own learning rather than passive recipients of information. Consequently, teacher agency emerged as an important characteristic of effective CPD and is explored further in Theme Four.

4.5.7 Theme Summary

The findings indicate that participants shared relatively consistent views regarding the characteristics of effective CPD. Relevance, practical application, facilitator expertise, collaboration and teacher ownership emerged as the most significant factors influencing perspectives of effectiveness. Teachers valued professional learning that addressed authentic classroom challenges, provided actionable strategies and created opportunities for meaningful professional dialogue. The findings further suggest that effective CPD is not solely determined by the content of professional development programmes but also by the extent to which teachers perceive the learning as relevant, credible and responsive to their professional needs. These findings provide important insight into the conditions under which professional development is most likely to contribute to meaningful professional learning and sustained improvements in practice.

4.6 Theme Three: Barriers to Effective Continuing Professional Development

4.6.1 Introduction

Whilst participants overwhelmingly acknowledged the importance of CPD, the data revealed a number of barriers that limited its effectiveness and impact. Across all three schools, teachers and senior leaders identified challenges relating to time, workload, relevance, accessibility and organisational constraints. Although participants generally expressed positive attitudes towards professional learning,

they frequently described difficulties in engaging fully with CPD due to competing professional responsibilities and institutional demands.

The findings suggest that barriers to effective CPD were not solely related to the availability of professional development opportunities but also to the conditions under which such opportunities were delivered. Participants frequently highlighted tensions between the aspiration to engage in meaningful professional learning and the practical realities of working within busy international school environments.

4.6.2 Time Constraints and Workload Pressures

The most frequently cited barrier to effective CPD concerned the lack of time available for meaningful professional learning. Participants consistently described the competing demands of teaching, planning, assessment, administration and extracurricular responsibilities as limiting their capacity to engage fully with CPD activities.

Amy (Abbey School, Deputy Head, L1) explained:

“Time is always the biggest issue. Teachers want to develop, but the reality is that there are only so many hours in the day.”

Similarly, Shelley (Salisbury School, Teacher, T2) stated:

“You can have excellent CPD opportunities, but if staff are exhausted or overwhelmed, they’re not going to get the full benefit.”

Teachers frequently described professional development as something that was often added to already demanding workloads. Several participants indicated that whilst CPD was valued, it could sometimes be perceived as an additional obligation rather than a meaningful learning opportunity.

Leyla (Salisbury School, English Teacher, T5) reflected:

“Sometimes you are attending training after a full day of teaching and meetings. It becomes difficult to fully engage because you are already mentally tired.”

These comments highlight the complex relationship between workload and professional learning. Whilst participants recognised the importance of CPD, they also acknowledged that excessive workload could undermine its effectiveness. The findings suggest that successful professional development requires not only high-quality content but also sufficient time and organisational support to enable meaningful engagement.

Analysis of the data further indicates that time constraints were particularly significant within international school contexts where teachers often undertook multiple responsibilities beyond classroom teaching. Consequently, workload emerged as a structural barrier that influenced both participation and implementation.

4.6.3 Relevance and Contextual Appropriateness

A second significant barrier concerned the perceived relevance of professional development activities. Participants frequently reported that CPD was less effective when it failed to address the specific needs of teachers, students or schools.

Walter (Salisbury School, Teacher, T4) explained:

“Sometimes training is too generic. It sounds good in theory, but when you get back to your classroom, it doesn’t really fit.”

Mavis (Abbey School, EYFS Teacher, T3) similarly observed:

“There have been sessions where you leave wondering how any of it applies to what you actually do every day.”

These responses suggest that teachers evaluated CPD largely through the lens of practical applicability. Professional development that was disconnected from classroom realities was often viewed as having limited value, regardless of the quality of delivery.

Participants also highlighted challenges associated with externally delivered programmes that did not adequately reflect the unique characteristics of international schools. Several teachers felt that examples and case studies were

often drawn from educational contexts that differed significantly from their own experiences.

Analysis suggests that relevance functions as both a characteristic of effective CPD and a potential barrier when absent. The findings indicate that professional development must be carefully tailored to the contextual realities of participants if it is to achieve meaningful impact.

4.6.4 Limited Access to External Professional Development Opportunities

Participants also identified access to external training opportunities as a challenge. Whilst schools provided a range of internal CPD activities, some participants expressed concerns regarding the availability of specialised external programmes that aligned with their professional interests and development needs.

John (Kingsway School, Principal, L1) commented:

“There is always a balance between what staff would like to do and what schools can realistically provide.”

Several participants referred to financial considerations as influencing the range of opportunities available. Budget limitations sometimes restricted access to conferences, specialist workshops and international professional learning events.

One teacher Mandy (Kingsway School, Year 2 Teacher, T3) explained:

“There are excellent courses available, but funding can be an issue, especially when travel and accommodation are involved.”

These findings suggest that resource constraints can shape the scope and diversity of professional development provision. Although schools were generally committed to supporting staff development, practical considerations sometimes limited the availability of certain opportunities.

The data further indicate that access to professional learning was influenced by organisational priorities. Decisions regarding funding and participation were often linked to school improvement goals, which occasionally resulted in individual development interests receiving lower priority.

4.6.5 The Theory–Practice Gap

Another recurring issue concerned the perceived disconnect between theoretical content and practical classroom application. Whilst participants acknowledged the value of educational theory, many expressed frustration when professional development remained at a conceptual level without providing clear guidance regarding implementation.

Mandy (Kingsway School, Year 2 Teacher, T3) explained:

“Sometimes there’s too much focus on ideas and not enough focus on how you actually put those ideas into practice.”

Walter (Salisbury School, Teacher, T4) similarly observed:

“You leave feeling inspired, but then you’re not entirely sure what to do differently on Monday morning.”

These responses suggest that teachers sought a stronger connection between theoretical knowledge and practical application. Participants did not reject theoretical perspectives; rather, they emphasised the importance of translating theory into strategies that could be implemented within classroom settings.

Analysis of the data indicates that the theory–practice gap may limit the perceived usefulness of CPD. Professional learning was viewed most positively when participants could clearly identify how theoretical concepts informed practical action. Consequently, effective CPD appeared to require a balance between conceptual understanding and actionable guidance.

4.6.6 Organisational Constraints and Competing Priorities

Participants also highlighted organisational factors that could constrain professional development. Several teachers described situations in which CPD agendas were influenced heavily by inspection requirements, accreditation processes or school improvement initiatives.

Whilst participants generally understood the rationale behind such priorities, some questioned whether organisational objectives always aligned with individual learning needs.

One participant, Leyla (Salisbury School, Teacher, T5) noted:

“Sometimes CPD is driven by what the school needs rather than what teachers need.”

This perspective created tensions between institutional expectations and personal professional development goals. Teachers recognised the necessity of organisational priorities but occasionally felt that these priorities limited opportunities for personalised learning.

Senior leaders also acknowledged these challenges. They described the difficulty of balancing whole-school improvement initiatives with the diverse professional needs of individual staff members.

Analysis suggests that organisational constraints represent a complex barrier because they are often embedded within the broader structures of school leadership and accountability. Whilst institutional priorities are necessary for school improvement, the findings indicate that excessive emphasis on organisational objectives may reduce teachers' sense of ownership and engagement.

4.6.7 Theme Three Summary

The findings reveal that participants encountered a range of barriers that influenced the effectiveness of CPD. Time constraints, workload pressures, issues of relevance, limited access to external opportunities, the theory–practice gap and organisational priorities emerged as the most significant challenges. Importantly, these barriers were often interconnected rather than isolated. Participants frequently described how workload limited engagement, how relevance influenced implementation, and how organisational priorities shaped access to professional learning opportunities. The findings therefore suggest that improving CPD requires attention not only to programme content but also to the broader organisational conditions within which professional learning takes place. Addressing these barriers

may enhance teachers' capacity to engage meaningfully with CPD and maximise its impact on professional practice.

4.7 Theme Four: Teacher Agency and Professional Ownership

4.7.1 Introduction

A significant theme emerging from the data was the importance participants attached to teacher agency and professional ownership within CPD. Across all three schools, teachers frequently expressed a desire to play a more active role in shaping their professional learning experiences. Participants consistently suggested that CPD was most effective when teachers were able to identify their own learning needs, influence the direction of their professional development and engage in learning activities that reflected their interests and career aspirations.

The findings indicate that teachers did not view themselves as passive recipients of professional development. Rather, they perceived professional learning as a collaborative process in which teachers should have opportunities to exercise professional judgement, autonomy and responsibility. Participants frequently linked ownership of learning to motivation, engagement and the successful implementation of new knowledge and skills.

4.7.2 Self-Directed Professional Learning

A recurring pattern within the data was the emphasis participants placed on self-directed learning. Many teachers described engaging in professional learning activities independently, outside formally organised school CPD programmes. These activities included professional reading, online learning, participation in professional networks and engagement with educational research.

Kirby (Abbey School, SENCO, T2) explained:

“A lot of the professional development I do is self-directed. If there's something I want to improve or learn more about, I'll actively seek it out.”

Similarly, David (Abbey School, Teacher, T4) commented:

“Some of the best learning comes from your own curiosity and wanting to improve yourself rather than being told what you need.”

These responses suggest that participants viewed professional growth as extending beyond formal CPD structures. Teachers frequently demonstrated a proactive approach towards their own development and recognised personal responsibility as an important component of professional learning.

Analysis of the data indicates that self-directed learning was often motivated by a desire to improve classroom practice, develop specialist expertise or address specific professional challenges. Teachers appeared to value opportunities to pursue learning that reflected their individual interests and professional goals. Consequently, self-directed learning emerged as an important complement to school-based CPD.

The findings further suggest that teachers who actively engaged in self-directed learning often demonstrated higher levels of professional confidence and commitment to ongoing development. This highlights the importance of creating professional cultures that encourage curiosity, reflection and independent learning.

4.7.3 Professional Choice and Autonomy

Participants repeatedly emphasised the importance of having choice within professional development programmes. Teachers expressed greater enthusiasm for CPD when they felt they had some influence over the content, focus and format of their learning experiences.

Walter (Salisbury School, Teacher, T4) explained:

“When teachers are involved in deciding what they need, there is much more buy-in. People are naturally more motivated.”

Mavis (Abbey School, EYFS Teacher, T3) similarly observed:

“If professional development is completely imposed, staff can become disengaged because they don’t feel ownership of it.”

These findings suggest that professional autonomy plays a significant role in shaping teachers' perceptions of CPD. Participants frequently associated ownership with motivation and engagement, indicating that professional development was most meaningful when teachers were able to exercise some degree of control over their learning.

Analysis of the data reveals that autonomy was not interpreted as complete freedom from organisational expectations. Rather, participants recognised the need to balance individual choice with school priorities. Teachers generally accepted that certain aspects of professional development would be linked to institutional goals. However, they also expressed a desire for greater flexibility within these structures.

The findings therefore indicate that effective CPD may require a balance between organisational direction and professional autonomy. Teachers appeared more likely to engage positively with professional learning when they perceived themselves as active contributors rather than passive recipients.

4.7.4 Professional Identity and Motivation

The interviews also revealed a strong relationship between professional development and teachers' sense of professional identity. Participants frequently described CPD as an important mechanism through which they developed confidence, expertise and professional competence.

Amy (Abbey School, Deputy Head, L1) explained:

“Good professional development helps teachers feel valued because it demonstrates an investment in their growth and future.”

Similarly, Leyla (Salisbury School, English Teacher, T5) commented:

“When schools invest in teachers' learning, it sends a message that development is important and that teachers matter.”

These responses suggest that professional development extends beyond the acquisition of knowledge and skills. Participants frequently associated CPD with feelings of professional recognition, validation and growth. Professional learning

was therefore viewed not only as a technical process but also as an important aspect of professional identity formation.

Analysis indicates that motivation was strongly influenced by teachers' perspectives of whether professional development addressed their aspirations and supported their career progression. Participants who felt that CPD aligned with their personal goals were more likely to engage actively and implement new learning. Conversely, professional development that was perceived as irrelevant or imposed often generated lower levels of enthusiasm and commitment.

The findings therefore suggest that motivation and professional identity are closely connected to teacher agency. Opportunities for meaningful participation in professional learning appear to strengthen both professional confidence and engagement.

4.7.5 Learning Through Professional Networks and Collaboration

Another dimension of teacher agency concerned participation in professional networks and collaborative learning communities. Participants frequently described learning from colleagues, professional associations and informal professional interactions.

David (Abbey School, Teacher, T4) explained:

“Some of the best ideas come from conversations with colleagues who are facing similar challenges.”

Kirby (Abbey School, SENCO, T2) similarly stated:

“Professional learning doesn't always happen in formal training sessions. It often happens through discussions, observations and sharing ideas.”

These findings highlight the importance of social and collaborative dimensions of professional learning. Teachers frequently viewed professional knowledge as something that was developed collectively through dialogue, reflection and shared practice.

Analysis of the data suggests that collaborative learning opportunities strengthened teacher agency by enabling participants to contribute their own experiences and expertise. Rather than simply receiving information, teachers became active participants in the construction of professional knowledge. This collaborative dimension of CPD appeared to support both professional learning and professional identity development.

The findings further indicate that informal learning opportunities were often perceived as equally valuable as formal CPD activities. Participants described mentoring relationships, peer observations and professional discussions as important sources of professional growth. This suggests that effective professional learning extends beyond structured training programmes and includes a wide range of professional interactions.

4.7.6 Teacher Agency Within Organisational Structures

Whilst participants valued autonomy and ownership, they also acknowledged that professional development occurs within organisational structures and constraints. Teachers recognised that schools have strategic priorities that influence the focus and direction of CPD programmes.

However, participants frequently suggested that greater consultation and collaboration could improve the alignment between institutional objectives and individual learning needs.

One participant, Walter (Salisbury School, Teacher 4, T4) reflected:

“Schools need priorities, but teachers should also have a voice in shaping the learning that affects them.”

Senior leaders similarly recognised the importance of involving teachers in professional learning decisions. Several leaders described efforts to gather staff feedback, conduct needs analyses and provide differentiated CPD opportunities.

Analysis of the data suggests that teacher agency is not incompatible with organisational priorities. Rather, the findings indicate that professional development is most effective when schools create structures that enable teachers to contribute

meaningfully to decisions about their learning. This balance between organisational direction and professional autonomy emerged as a key feature of successful CPD provision.

4.7.7 Theme Four Summary

Teacher agency and professional ownership emerged as significant factors influencing participants' experiences of CPD. Teachers valued opportunities to exercise professional judgement, pursue self-directed learning and contribute to decisions regarding their professional development. The findings indicate that autonomy, motivation and professional identity are closely interconnected and play an important role in shaping engagement with CPD. Participants consistently suggested that professional learning is most effective when teachers are recognised as active participants in the learning process rather than passive recipients of information. Furthermore, collaborative learning, professional networks and opportunities for self-directed development were viewed as important mechanisms through which teachers exercised agency and enhanced their professional growth. Collectively, these findings suggest that fostering teacher ownership may increase engagement, strengthen professional commitment and enhance the overall effectiveness of CPD initiatives.

4.8 Theme Five: Leadership and Organisational Support

4.8.1 Introduction

A significant theme emerging from the data was the influential role of leadership and organisational support in shaping teachers' experiences of CPD. Participants consistently identified school leaders as key factors in determining the quality, accessibility and effectiveness of professional development opportunities. Whilst teachers recognised their own responsibility for professional learning, they frequently emphasised that leadership support was essential in creating the conditions necessary for meaningful professional growth.

The findings indicate that leadership influenced CPD in multiple ways, including establishing professional learning priorities, allocating resources, creating opportunities for collaboration and fostering a culture that values continuous improvement. Participants further suggested that leadership support extended beyond organising training sessions and encompassed the broader organisational environment within which professional learning occurred.

4.8.2 Leadership as a Driver of Professional Learning

Many participants described leadership as playing a central role in promoting professional learning and development within their schools. Teachers frequently associated effective leadership with a visible commitment to staff development and a willingness to invest in professional growth.

Amy (Abbey School, Deputy Head, L1) explained:

“Leadership has to set the tone. If leaders value professional learning, then it becomes part of the culture of the school.”

Similarly, Annabel (Salisbury School, Head of Secondary, L1) noted:

“CPD works best when leaders actively support it rather than simply expecting staff to attend training.”

These comments suggest that leadership was viewed as a critical influence on the perceived importance of CPD. Participants frequently described leaders as role models who shaped attitudes towards professional learning through their actions and priorities.

Analysis of the data indicates that teachers were more likely to engage positively with CPD when they perceived leaders as genuinely committed to staff development. Professional learning appeared to be most effective when it was embedded within a broader culture of continuous improvement supported by school leadership.

The findings further suggest that leadership commitment contributed to the legitimacy of CPD initiatives. Teachers often interpreted leadership investment in

professional learning as evidence that development was valued and prioritised within the organisation.

4.8.3 Creating a Culture of Professional Learning

Participants consistently highlighted the importance of organisational culture in supporting professional development. Teachers frequently described schools with strong professional learning cultures as environments in which reflection, collaboration and continuous improvement were actively encouraged.

David (Abbey School, Teacher, T4) explained:

“The culture of the school makes a huge difference. In schools where learning is valued, teachers are much more open to trying new ideas.”

Similarly, Shelley (Salisbury School, Teacher, T2) observed:

“People need to feel safe to experiment, make mistakes and learn from each other.”

These responses suggest that professional learning is influenced not only by formal CPD programmes but also by the wider organisational climate. Participants frequently linked effective CPD to cultures characterised by trust, collaboration and openness to innovation.

Analysis indicates that professional learning cultures were often fostered through everyday interactions rather than isolated training events. Opportunities for discussion, peer support and collaborative reflection appeared to contribute significantly to teachers’ professional growth.

The findings therefore suggest that leadership support is most effective when it contributes to the development of a culture in which learning is viewed as an integral aspect of professional practice rather than an occasional activity.

4.8.4 Balancing Organisational Priorities and Staff Development Needs

A recurring issue identified by both teachers and senior leaders concerned the challenge of balancing organisational priorities with individual professional

development needs. Participants acknowledged that schools must pursue strategic objectives, yet they also emphasised the importance of recognising the diverse needs and aspirations of individual staff members.

John (Kingsway School, Principal, L1) explained:

“There has to be a balance. Schools have priorities that need to be addressed, but teachers also have professional goals that matter.”

Similarly, Amy (Abbey School, Deputy Head, L1) stated:

“The challenge is finding ways to meet school improvement needs without losing sight of what individual teachers need.”

These findings suggest that leadership involves navigating competing demands. Whilst organisational priorities often shape CPD programmes, participants frequently argued that professional development should not become exclusively focused on institutional objectives.

Analysis of the data indicates that tensions sometimes emerged when teachers perceived CPD as being driven primarily by inspection requirements, accreditation processes or organisational targets. In such circumstances, participants occasionally questioned the relevance and value of professional development activities.

However, the findings also reveal that many teachers understood the necessity of aligning professional learning with school improvement priorities. The issue was therefore not the existence of organisational goals but the extent to which these goals were balanced with opportunities for personalised learning.

4.8.5 Providing Resources and Opportunities

Participants frequently identified the allocation of resources as an important aspect of leadership support. Teachers highlighted the significance of time, funding and access to learning opportunities in determining the effectiveness of CPD.

Annabel (Salisbury School, Head of Secondary, L1) explained:

“You can talk about professional development all you like, but if staff don’t have time or resources, it becomes very difficult.”

Similarly, Kirby (Abbey School, Teacher 2, T2) commented:

“Support means more than just offering courses. It means giving people the time and opportunity to engage properly.”

These responses suggest that leadership support was often evaluated through tangible actions rather than statements of intent. Participants frequently emphasised that effective professional learning required investment in resources and structures that enabled meaningful participation.

Analysis indicates that resource allocation influenced both access and engagement. Teachers were more likely to perceive CPD positively when schools demonstrated a willingness to invest in their professional growth through funding, release time and access to specialist expertise.

The findings therefore suggest that organisational commitment to CPD is demonstrated not only through policy but also through the practical support provided to teachers.

4.8.6 Monitoring and Evaluating Professional Learning

Another important finding concerned the role of leadership in evaluating the impact of professional development. Senior leaders frequently emphasised the importance of assessing whether CPD resulted in meaningful improvements in teaching and learning.

John (Kingsway School, Principal, L1) explained:

“It’s important to know whether professional development is actually making a difference rather than simply recording attendance.”

Participants suggested that effective evaluation should focus on changes in practice rather than participation alone. Several teachers expressed concerns that some

schools placed excessive emphasis on attendance records rather than professional learning outcomes.

Analysis of the data indicates that participants viewed evaluation as an important but often underdeveloped aspect of CPD. Whilst schools generally monitored participation, there appeared to be less consistency in evaluating the longer-term impact of professional development on teaching practice and student outcomes.

The findings suggest that leadership plays a critical role in ensuring that CPD is not viewed as a procedural requirement but as a meaningful process contributing to professional and organisational improvement.

4.8.7 Theme Five Summary

Leadership and organisational support emerged as fundamental influences on teachers' experiences of CPD. Participants consistently highlighted the role of leaders in establishing professional learning priorities, creating supportive organisational cultures, allocating resources and evaluating impact. Effective leadership was associated with a visible commitment to staff development, opportunities for collaboration and a balance between organisational objectives and individual learning needs. The findings further suggest that professional learning is shaped not only by the content of CPD programmes but also by the organisational conditions within which learning occurs. Consequently, leadership emerged as a key factor in determining whether professional development was experienced as meaningful, relevant and capable of supporting sustained professional growth.

4.9 Theme Six: Balancing School Priorities and Individual Teacher Needs

4.9.1 Introduction

The final theme emerging from the data concerned the ongoing tension between organisational priorities and individual professional development needs. Whilst participants generally recognised the importance of aligning CPD with school improvement objectives, many also highlighted the need for professional learning opportunities that reflected individual interests, career aspirations and classroom

realities. This theme permeated much of the interview data and appeared closely connected to participants' perspectives of relevance, ownership, motivation and leadership support.

The findings suggest that professional development within international schools operates within a complex environment where multiple stakeholders hold different expectations regarding the purpose and outcomes of CPD. Teachers often sought opportunities that addressed their immediate professional needs, whereas school leaders were required to ensure that professional learning contributed to broader organisational goals. Consequently, balancing these competing priorities emerged as one of the most significant challenges identified by participants.

4.9.2 CPD as a School Improvement Strategy

Both teachers and senior leaders acknowledged that CPD plays an important role in supporting school improvement. Participants recognised that schools must ensure consistency in teaching quality, respond to inspection requirements, implement curriculum developments and achieve strategic objectives. Professional development was frequently viewed as a mechanism through which these goals could be achieved.

John (Kingsway School, Principal, L1) explained:

“Professional development has to support the direction of the school. There has to be alignment between what staff are learning and what the organisation is trying to achieve.”

Similarly, Annabel (Salisbury School, Head of Secondary, L1) commented:

“CPD is one of the most important tools schools have for improving teaching and learning across the organisation.”

These responses indicate that participants understood the organisational rationale underpinning many professional development initiatives. School leaders viewed CPD as a strategic process capable of influencing teaching quality, student outcomes and institutional effectiveness.

Participants generally accepted the need for professional development to support school improvement. However, concerns emerged when organisational objectives appeared to dominate the professional learning agenda to the extent that individual needs received limited attention. Whilst participants acknowledged the importance of whole-school priorities, they frequently argued that effective CPD should also accommodate the diverse developmental needs of individual teachers.

4.9.3 Individual Professional Learning Needs

Alongside recognition of organisational priorities, participants consistently emphasised the importance of addressing individual learning needs. Teachers described professional development as being most meaningful when it reflected their stage of career development, subject specialism, professional interests and classroom challenges.

Walter (Salisbury School, Teacher, T4) explained:

“Every teacher is different. What one person needs might be completely different from what another teacher needs.”

Similarly, Leyla (Salisbury School, English Teacher, T5) stated:

“The most valuable professional development is often the learning that directly addresses your own challenges and goals.”

These comments suggest that participants viewed professional learning as a highly individualised process. Teachers frequently expressed a desire for differentiated opportunities that recognised varying levels of experience, expertise and professional aspiration.

Participants perceived a strong relationship between personal relevance and engagement. Professional development that addressed individual needs was often associated with higher levels of motivation, commitment and implementation. Conversely, participants suggested that standardised approaches sometimes failed to recognise the diversity of professional learning requirements within schools.

The findings therefore highlight the importance of flexibility and differentiation within CPD programmes. Participants frequently advocated for professional learning

models that allowed teachers to pursue development pathways aligned with their specific needs whilst remaining connected to broader organisational objectives.

4.9.4 Tensions Between Compliance and Professional Growth

A recurring issue identified throughout the interviews concerned the tension between compliance-driven professional development and genuine professional growth. Several participants described situations in which CPD appeared to be influenced primarily by external accountability measures, accreditation requirements or inspection frameworks.

One teacher, Mavis (Abbey School, Teacher 3, T3) observed:

“Sometimes CPD feels like it is designed to satisfy external requirements rather than help teachers improve.”

Another participant, Adam (Kingsway School, Teacher 4, T4) commented:

“There can be a difference between what schools need to demonstrate and what teachers actually need.”

These responses suggest that professional development occasionally served multiple purposes that were not always fully aligned. Whilst compliance requirements were recognised as necessary, participants expressed concern that they could sometimes overshadow opportunities for deeper professional learning.

The data indicates that teachers were more likely to engage positively with CPD when they perceived it as supporting authentic professional growth rather than merely satisfying organisational or external expectations. Participants frequently distinguished between professional development that encouraged reflection, experimentation and learning, and professional development perceived as procedural or bureaucratic.

The findings therefore reveal an ongoing challenge for schools seeking to balance accountability demands with meaningful professional learning opportunities. Participants suggested that effective CPD requires careful consideration of both organisational requirements and teachers’ professional aspirations.

4.9.5 Negotiating Shared Professional Learning Goals

Despite the tensions identified, participants frequently described examples of successful alignment between organisational priorities and individual learning needs. Both teachers and senior leaders highlighted the importance of dialogue, consultation and collaboration in identifying professional development goals that served both individual and institutional interests.

Amy (Abbey School, Deputy Head, L1) explained:

“The best outcomes happen when teachers understand the reasons behind school priorities and can see how they connect to their own development.”

Similarly, David (Abbey School, Teacher, T4) reflected:

“Professional development works well when there is a shared understanding of what everyone is trying to achieve.”

These responses suggest that communication and consultation play a crucial role in reducing tensions between competing priorities. Participants frequently argued that teachers should be involved in identifying learning needs and shaping professional development programmes.

The data indicates that shared ownership contributes to stronger engagement with professional learning. When teachers understood how organisational priorities related to their own professional development, they appeared more willing to embrace school-wide initiatives. Similarly, leaders who considered staff perspectives were perceived as more effective in supporting meaningful professional growth.

The findings therefore suggest that balancing organisational and individual priorities is less about choosing one over the other and more about creating opportunities for dialogue and collaboration that enable both sets of objectives to be addressed simultaneously.

4.9.6 CPD in the Context of International Schools

Participants also highlighted factors specific to international schools that influenced the relationship between organisational priorities and individual needs. International schools often operate within highly competitive environments characterised by diverse student populations, external accreditation requirements and rapidly changing educational expectations.

Several participants noted that these factors increased pressure on schools to prioritise organisational improvement initiatives. However, they also recognised that international schools often employ teachers from diverse educational backgrounds who bring varying experiences, expectations and professional development needs.

One senior leader, Amy (Abbey School, L1) explained:

“International schools have unique challenges because staff come from different systems and have different experiences. That makes balancing needs more complex.”

Analysis of the data suggests that the international school context may intensify the challenge of balancing individual and organisational priorities. The diversity of staff experiences and expectations requires professional development approaches that are sufficiently flexible to accommodate differing needs whilst maintaining coherence across the organisation.

Consequently, participants frequently emphasised the importance of adaptive and responsive CPD models capable of addressing both institutional objectives and individual professional learning requirements.

4.9.7 Theme Six Summary

The findings reveal that balancing school priorities and individual teacher needs represents one of the most complex aspects of CPD within international schools. Participants recognised the importance of professional development in supporting organisational improvement but also emphasised the need for opportunities that address individual professional aspirations and classroom realities. Tensions occasionally emerged when professional development was perceived as being

driven primarily by compliance requirements or institutional objectives. However, participants also identified examples of successful alignment achieved through consultation, collaboration and shared ownership of professional learning goals. The findings suggest that effective CPD requires a careful balance between organisational direction and individual agency. Within international school contexts, where diverse staff backgrounds and external accountability pressures are common, achieving this balance appears particularly important in supporting meaningful and sustainable professional development.

4.10 Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented the findings arising from the thematic analysis of interviews conducted with teachers and senior leaders across three private international schools in Bahrain. Six interconnected themes emerged from the data: Understanding the Purpose of CPD; Characteristics of Effective CPD; Barriers to Effective CPD; Teacher Agency and Professional Ownership; Leadership and Organisational Support; and Balancing School Priorities and Individual Teacher Needs.

The findings indicate that participants viewed CPD as a continuous process of professional learning that extends beyond formal training events. Effective professional development was characterised by relevance, practical application, collaboration, expert facilitation and teacher involvement. However, participants also identified barriers including workload pressures, time constraints, limited resources and tensions between organisational objectives and individual learning needs.

The findings further highlighted the importance of teacher agency, leadership support and professional learning cultures in shaping experiences of CPD. Participants consistently emphasised the need for professional development that supports both school improvement and individual professional growth. Collectively, the themes reveal the complex and multifaceted nature of CPD within private international schools and provide a foundation for the discussion of findings presented in Chapter Five

Chapter 5

Discussion and Analysis of Findings

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss and interpret the findings presented in Chapter 4 in relation to the existing literature, theoretical perspectives and wider debates surrounding CPD. Whilst Chapter 4 focused on presenting the themes emerging from the data, this chapter seeks to explore the significance of those findings and their contribution to understanding teachers' perspectives of CPD within private international schools in Bahrain.

The findings revealed six interconnected themes: Understanding the Purpose of CPD; Characteristics of Effective CPD; Barriers to Effective CPD; Teacher Agency and Professional Ownership; Leadership and Organisational Support; and Balancing School Priorities and Individual Teacher Needs. These themes are discussed in relation to contemporary literature on professional learning, adult learning theory, school improvement and educational leadership. Through this discussion, the chapter seeks to identify areas of convergence and divergence between the findings and existing scholarship whilst highlighting the unique contextual factors influencing CPD within international schools in Bahrain.

The discussion is structured around the six themes emerging from the thematic analysis. This approach allows the findings to be situated within broader theoretical and empirical debates whilst maintaining a clear connection to participants' perspectives and experiences.

5.2 Understanding the Purpose of Continuing Professional Development

One of the most significant findings emerging from this research was the broad and sophisticated understanding participants demonstrated regarding the purpose of CPD. Teachers and senior leaders consistently described CPD as an ongoing process of professional learning, growth and improvement rather than a series of isolated training events. This finding aligns with current understanding of professional development, which emphasise continuous learning throughout a

teacher's career rather than participation in episodic training programmes (Day, 1999; Avalos, 2011). This finding is further supported by Timperley et al. (2007), who argue that professional learning should be viewed as an ongoing process embedded within teachers' daily professional practice rather than as a series of disconnected training events. Similarly, Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) identify sustained duration, active engagement and relevance to classroom practice as essential characteristics of effective professional learning. The perspectives expressed by participants therefore reflect contemporary understandings of CPD as a continuous and developmental process rather than a one-off intervention.

Participants frequently described CPD as a lifelong process through which teachers maintain professional competence, respond to changing educational demands and improve outcomes for students. Such perspectives reflect Day's (1999) argument that professional development should be understood as a lifelong endeavour encompassing formal and informal learning experiences. Similarly, Avalos (2011) argues that effective professional development involves continuous processes of reflection, adaptation and growth rather than isolated interventions. The findings of this research support these perspectives, suggesting that teachers within international schools view professional learning as an ongoing professional responsibility rather than a compliance requirement.

The emphasis participants placed on continuous learning also resonates with contemporary understandings of teacher professionalism. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) argue that teaching increasingly requires the development of professional capital through sustained investment in knowledge, skills and professional judgement. Participants in this research demonstrated similar perspectives, frequently describing professional learning as essential for maintaining relevance and effectiveness within rapidly changing educational environments. This finding is particularly significant within international schools, where curriculum reforms, accreditation requirements and diverse student populations create additional demands upon teachers' professional knowledge and practice. These findings are also consistent with research conducted within international school contexts. Romanowski et al. (2019) argue that teachers working within international schools frequently encounter diverse curricular expectations, multicultural student populations and rapidly changing educational requirements. Consequently,

professional learning is often perceived as essential to maintaining professional effectiveness and responding to evolving organisational demands. Similarly, Mansour et al. (2014) highlight the importance of contextualised professional learning within Middle Eastern educational settings, suggesting that CPD must be responsive to both local and international influences.

The findings further support the principles of adult learning theory. Knowles (1980) argues that adult learners are motivated by learning that is relevant, purposeful and connected to their professional experiences. Participants consistently described professional learning as most valuable when it addressed authentic challenges encountered within their daily practice. This suggests that teachers approach CPD not simply as recipients of information but as active professionals seeking solutions to practical problems. The findings therefore provide empirical support for key assumptions underpinning andragogical approaches to adult learning.

However, the findings also extend existing literature by highlighting the dual purpose of CPD within international school contexts. Whilst participants recognised the importance of personal professional growth, they simultaneously acknowledged the organisational function of professional development. Teachers frequently described CPD as serving both individual and institutional objectives. This finding reflects Kennedy's (2005) observation that professional development frequently operates within competing agendas, balancing teacher learning with organisational improvement priorities.

The tension between individual and organisational purposes has been widely discussed within the CPD literature. Kennedy (2014) argues that professional development often exists along a spectrum ranging from transmission-oriented models designed to implement institutional priorities to transformative models that empower teachers as agents of change. Participants in this research appeared to recognise elements of both approaches. Whilst many valued opportunities for self-directed learning and professional autonomy, they also acknowledged the necessity of aligning professional learning with broader school improvement goals.

This duality is particularly relevant within international schools operating in highly competitive educational environments. Such schools are frequently subject to accountability pressures arising from accreditation bodies, parental expectations

and performance indicators. As a result, CPD may be expected to fulfil both developmental and organisational functions simultaneously. The findings suggest that participants generally accepted this reality but remained sensitive to the potential imbalance that can occur when organisational priorities dominate professional learning agendas.

The research therefore contributes to existing knowledge by demonstrating that teachers in Bahrain's private international schools conceptualise CPD as a multifaceted process that encompasses professional growth, lifelong learning and organisational improvement. Whilst these findings broadly align with existing literature, they also highlight the complex interplay between individual and institutional purposes within international school contexts. This complexity provides an important foundation for understanding the subsequent themes emerging from the research, particularly those relating to effectiveness, leadership and professional agency.

5.3 Characteristics of Effective Continuing Professional Development

The findings presented in Chapter 4 identified several characteristics that participants associated with effective CPD. Teachers and senior leaders consistently emphasised the importance of professional development that was relevant to classroom practice, collaborative in nature, practically focused and responsive to individual and organisational needs. These findings align with a substantial body of literature that has sought to identify the features of effective professional learning and provide further insight into how such characteristics are perceived within the context of private international schools in Bahrain.

A recurring finding within this research was the importance of relevance. Participants consistently reported that professional development was most effective when it addressed the realities of their day-to-day teaching responsibilities and could be directly applied within their classroom contexts. This finding supports Desimone's (2009) framework for effective professional development, which identifies content focus as a critical component of successful CPD. Similarly, Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) argue that professional learning is most effective when it is closely connected to teachers' professional practice and provides opportunities to address authentic

challenges encountered within the classroom. Participants' emphasis on relevance therefore reflects broader understandings of professional development as a practice based and contextually meaningful process.

The findings also highlighted the importance of practical application. Teachers frequently expressed a preference for professional development activities that generated tangible strategies, resources and approaches that could be implemented immediately within their teaching practice. This supports the work of Timperley et al. (2007), who argue that professional learning is most likely to influence student outcomes when teachers can translate new knowledge into classroom practice. Similarly, Cordingley et al. (2015) found that CPD is more effective when teachers are actively engaged in applying and evaluating new approaches within their own professional contexts. The emphasis placed on practical application by participants therefore reinforces the importance of ensuring that professional development extends beyond theoretical discussion and supports meaningful changes in practice.

Collaboration emerged as another significant characteristic of effective CPD. Participants frequently identified opportunities to observe colleagues, share experiences and engage in professional dialogue as valuable aspects of their professional learning. This finding aligns closely with Wenger's (1998) concept of Communities of Practice, which emphasises the role of social interaction and collaborative learning in professional development. Through collaboration, teachers can construct shared understandings, exchange expertise and collectively address professional challenges. Similar conclusions were reached by Vescio et al. (2008), whose review of professional learning communities found that collaborative professional learning contributes positively to teacher development and classroom practice. The findings of this research therefore support the view that professional learning is strengthened when teachers are provided with structured opportunities to learn with and from one another.

Participants also emphasised the importance of facilitator expertise and credibility. Teachers expressed greater confidence in professional development led by individuals with practical educational experience and an understanding of the challenges faced by classroom practitioners. This finding reflects Kennedy's (2014)

argument that the effectiveness of professional development is influenced not only by its content but also by the credibility of those delivering it. Participants' comments suggest that teachers are more likely to engage positively with CPD when they perceive facilitators as knowledgeable, experienced and capable of relating professional learning to authentic educational contexts.

A further characteristic emerging from the findings concerned teacher involvement and ownership of professional development. Participants frequently expressed a preference for CPD that reflected their individual professional needs and allowed opportunities for choice and participation. These findings are consistent with Knowles' (1984) principles of adult learning, which emphasise self-direction, autonomy and relevance to professional practice. Current perspectives on teacher professionalism similarly highlight the importance of professional agency in shaping meaningful learning experiences (Sachs, 2016; Biesta, 2015). The findings therefore suggest that teachers are more likely to value and engage with professional development when they perceive themselves as active participants rather than passive recipients of training.

The characteristics identified by participants correspond closely with contemporary models of effective professional learning. Desimone (2009) identifies content focus, active learning, coherence, duration and collective participation as key components of effective CPD, whilst Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) emphasise collaboration, reflection and sustained engagement. The findings of this research support these frameworks and suggest that teachers working within private international schools in Bahrain hold similar expectations regarding the qualities of effective professional development.

The findings also contribute to the limited literature examining CPD within international school settings. Romanowski et al. (2019) argue that international teachers often operate within complex educational environments characterised by diverse curricula, multicultural student populations and evolving accountability expectations. Under such conditions, professional learning that is relevant, collaborative and responsive to professional needs becomes particularly important. Similarly, Mansour et al. (2014) highlight the importance of contextualised professional development within Middle Eastern educational environments,

suggesting that effective CPD must be sensitive to local organisational and cultural contexts.

Overall, the findings suggest that effective CPD is characterised by relevance, practical application, collaboration, facilitator credibility and opportunities for teacher ownership. These characteristics closely align with established models of professional learning and reinforce the importance of designing CPD that supports both individual professional growth and organisational improvement. The findings therefore contribute to existing knowledge by demonstrating how these characteristics are perceived and experienced by teachers and senior leaders working within private international schools in Bahrain.

5.4 Barriers to Effective Continuing Professional Development

Whilst participants overwhelmingly recognised the importance of CPD, the findings revealed a range of barriers that constrained engagement, participation and implementation. Time pressures, workload demands, issues of relevance, limited access to external opportunities and tensions between organisational priorities and professional learning emerged as significant obstacles across all three case study schools. These findings reflect many of the challenges identified within the wider professional development literature and highlight the complex organisational and contextual factors influencing teachers' experiences of CPD.

The most frequently identified barrier concerned time. Recent studies continue to identify workload and time pressures as major obstacles to effective professional learning. Cordingley et al. (2015) found that teachers are significantly more likely to implement new learning when schools provide dedicated opportunities for reflection, experimentation and collaborative inquiry. Likewise, Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) argue that professional development initiatives often fail when insufficient attention is paid to the organisational conditions required to support teacher learning.

Participants consistently described the competing demands of teaching, planning, assessment, administration and extracurricular responsibilities as limiting opportunities for meaningful engagement with professional learning. This finding is strongly supported by existing literature, which has repeatedly identified lack of time

as one of the most significant barriers to effective professional development (Day, 1999; Avalos, 2011; Opfer and Pedder, 2011).

Day (1999) argues that professional learning requires time for reflection, experimentation and consolidation. However, contemporary teachers often operate within increasingly demanding environments where opportunities for sustained professional inquiry are constrained by workload pressures. Participants in this research described similar experiences, frequently expressing frustration that professional development was expected to occur alongside extensive professional responsibilities. Such findings suggest that the effectiveness of CPD cannot be understood solely in terms of programme design but must also consider the organisational conditions within which learning takes place.

The findings further support Opfer and Pedder's (2011) argument that teacher learning is influenced by a complex interaction of individual, school and system-level factors. Their model emphasises that professional learning cannot be isolated from the broader context within which teachers work. Participants in this research consistently highlighted the impact of workload and organisational pressures on their capacity to engage meaningfully with CPD, reinforcing the importance of considering professional learning as part of a wider educational ecosystem rather than as a discrete activity.

Interestingly, the significance of time constraints appeared particularly pronounced within the international school context. Participants frequently referred to the additional demands associated with accreditation processes, curriculum changes, inspection requirements and diverse student populations. These findings suggest that international schools may experience unique pressures that further complicate opportunities for sustained professional learning. Whilst such schools often place considerable emphasis on professional development, the demands associated with maintaining institutional performance may simultaneously reduce teachers' capacity to engage fully with learning opportunities.

A second barrier identified by participants concerned the perceived relevance of professional development activities. Teachers frequently reported that professional learning was less effective when it was overly generic, disconnected from classroom realities or insufficiently responsive to their specific professional needs. This finding

aligns closely with Desimone's (2009) assertion that content relevance is a critical determinant of professional development effectiveness. When professional learning fails to address authentic challenges faced by teachers, engagement and implementation are likely to diminish.

The findings also resonate with Kennedy's (2014) critique of standardised approaches to professional development. Kennedy argues that CPD frequently reflects institutional priorities rather than the diverse needs of individual teachers. Participants in this research expressed similar concerns, particularly when professional development appeared to be driven primarily by organisational objectives rather than professional learning needs. This suggests that tensions between institutional priorities and teacher agency may undermine the perceived value of professional development initiatives.

The issue of relevance also highlights an important challenge within international schools. Participants frequently emphasised the unique nature of their educational contexts and questioned the applicability of some externally developed CPD programmes. This finding reflects Mansour et al.'s (2014) observation that professional development is most effective when it is sensitive to local contexts and professional realities. The research therefore contributes to existing knowledge by suggesting that professional learning within international schools must be carefully contextualised if it is to achieve meaningful impact.

Another significant barrier identified by participants was limited access to external professional development opportunities. Whilst schools generally provided internal CPD programmes, several participants expressed concerns regarding funding, availability and access to specialist learning opportunities. This finding reflects broader discussions within the literature regarding the relationship between resources and professional development. Guskey (2000) argues that meaningful professional learning requires sustained investment in time, expertise and organisational support. Similarly, Bubb and Earley (2007) highlight the importance of providing diverse professional learning opportunities capable of addressing varying teacher needs.

The findings suggest that resource allocation plays a crucial role in shaping professional learning experiences. Teachers frequently described external

conferences, specialist workshops and professional networks as valuable sources of learning yet acknowledged that access to such opportunities was often constrained by financial considerations. This reinforces the argument that professional development is influenced not only by pedagogical considerations but also by organisational and economic realities.

The theory vs practice gap emerged as a further barrier to effective CPD. Participants frequently expressed frustration when professional development focused heavily on theoretical concepts without providing clear guidance regarding implementation. Whilst teachers generally recognised the value of educational theory, they emphasised the importance of translating theoretical knowledge into practical strategies capable of improving classroom practice.

This finding reflects longstanding debates within educational research concerning the relationship between theory and practice. Korthagen (2010) argues that professional learning is most effective when teachers can connect theoretical understanding with practical experience through cycles of reflection and action. Similarly, Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) emphasise the importance of active learning approaches that enable teachers to apply and evaluate new knowledge within authentic professional contexts.

The findings of this research suggest that participants did not reject theoretical knowledge but rather sought stronger integration between conceptual understanding and classroom application. This distinction is important because it challenges simplistic assumptions that teachers prefer practical learning at the expense of theory. Instead, the findings indicate that participants valued theory when it contributed meaningfully to professional practice. Consequently, effective CPD may require greater attention to the processes through which theoretical knowledge is translated into professional action.

Perhaps the most significant finding emerging from this theme relates to organisational priorities and accountability pressures. Participants frequently described tensions arising from the need to balance institutional objectives with individual professional learning needs. These findings align with broader critiques of managerial and performative approaches to professional development. Ball (2003) argues that contemporary educational systems increasingly emphasise

accountability, performance measurement and organisational targets, often influencing the nature and purpose of professional learning. Similarly, Kennedy (2014) suggests that CPD may become focused on compliance and institutional improvement rather than professional empowerment.

The findings provide evidence of these tensions within international schools. Whilst participants generally recognised the importance of school improvement priorities, several expressed concerns that professional development was sometimes shaped more by organisational requirements than by teacher learning needs. This finding is particularly significant because it highlights the complex and sometimes contradictory purposes served by CPD. Professional development simultaneously functions as a mechanism for school improvement, accountability and professional growth, creating potential tensions between competing objectives.

Taken together, the barriers identified within this research support existing literature whilst also revealing the challenges associated with professional learning in international school contexts. Time constraints, workload pressures, relevance, resource limitations, theory–practice tensions and organisational priorities emerged as interconnected factors influencing teachers' experiences of CPD. Consistent with Opfer and Pedder's (2011) understanding of teacher learning, the findings suggest that professional development effectiveness is shaped by a complex interaction of individual, organisational and contextual factors. Consequently, addressing barriers to CPD requires more than improving programme content alone; it necessitates attention to the broader organisational conditions that enable or constrain professional learning.

5.5 Teacher Agency and Professional Ownership

One of the most significant findings emerging from this research was the importance participants attached to teacher agency and professional ownership within CPD. Teachers consistently expressed a desire to play an active role in determining their professional learning needs and shaping the direction of their development. Participants viewed professional learning as most effective when teachers exercised autonomy, professional judgement and responsibility for their own growth. These

findings align strongly with contemporary understandings of adult learning, teacher professionalism and professional identity.

The findings also resonate with more recent conceptualisations of teacher professionalism. Sachs (2016) argues that teachers increasingly seek opportunities to act as active contributors to educational change rather than passive recipients of externally imposed initiatives. Similarly, Biesta (2015) emphasises the importance of professional judgement and agency within educational practice, suggesting that meaningful professional learning requires opportunities for teachers to exercise autonomy and critical reflection.

The findings provide considerable support for Knowles' (1980) theory of andragogy, which emphasises the importance of self-directed learning among adults. Knowles (1980) argues that adult learners differ from children in several important respects, particularly in their desire for autonomy, independence and control over their learning experiences. According to Knowles (1980), adults are more likely to engage meaningfully with learning when they perceive it as relevant to their immediate needs and when they have opportunities to influence the learning process. The findings of this research strongly reflect these assumptions. Participants consistently expressed greater enthusiasm for professional development when they were involved in identifying learning priorities and selecting development opportunities.

Teachers frequently described professional learning as extending beyond formally organised CPD programmes. Many participants reported engaging in independent professional reading, online learning, professional networking and self-directed inquiry. These findings support Knowles' (1980) assertion that adult learners possess an intrinsic motivation to learn and frequently pursue knowledge independently when learning is perceived as meaningful and professionally relevant. The findings therefore suggest that teachers do not rely exclusively upon school organised professional development but actively seek opportunities to enhance their professional competence.

The significance of teacher agency identified in this research also aligns with Kennedy's (2016) critique of traditional professional development models. Kennedy (2016) argues that many CPD initiatives continue to position teachers as passive

recipients of externally generated knowledge rather than active participants in professional learning. Such approaches frequently emphasise compliance and implementation rather than professional inquiry and critical reflection. Participants in this research expressed similar concerns, particularly when professional development appeared overly prescriptive or disconnected from their professional needs.

The findings suggest that teacher agency influences not only participation but also engagement and implementation. Participants consistently reported greater commitment to professional learning when they perceived themselves as having ownership over the process. This finding supports Hargreaves and Fullan's (2012) concept of professional capital, which emphasises the importance of professional judgement, expertise and autonomy in developing effective teachers. According to Hargreaves and Fullan (2012), sustainable school improvement depends upon investing in teachers as professionals capable of making informed decisions rather than simply implementing externally prescribed practices. The findings of this research reinforce this perspective by demonstrating the importance teachers attach to autonomy and professional trust.

The findings also contribute to broader discussions regarding professional identity. Participants frequently described professional development as an important mechanism through which they developed confidence, expertise and a stronger sense of professional competence. This supports Day's (1999) argument that professional learning plays a central role in shaping teachers' professional identities throughout their careers. Professional identity is not static but continually reconstructed through experiences, reflection and engagement with professional communities. The findings indicate that teachers viewed CPD as an important contributor to this ongoing process of professional identity formation.

An important aspect of teacher agency emerging from the findings relates to collaboration and professional learning communities. Participants repeatedly highlighted the value of learning from colleagues, sharing experiences and engaging in professional dialogue. These findings align closely with Wenger's (1998) theory of Communities of Practice, which conceptualises learning as a social process occurring through participation in professional communities. Wenger (1998) argues

that knowledge is constructed collectively through interaction, collaboration and shared practice rather than being transmitted from experts to passive recipients.

Similarly, Lave and Wenger (1991) emphasise the importance of situated learning, arguing that professional knowledge develops through participation in authentic professional activities and communities. Participants in this research frequently described informal conversations, peer observations and collaborative discussions as among the most valuable forms of professional learning. These findings suggest that teachers often perceive professional knowledge as emerging through interaction with colleagues rather than solely through formal training programmes.

The importance attached to collaborative learning also supports Hargreaves and O'Connor's (2018) concept of collaborative professionalism. According to Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018), effective professional learning increasingly depends upon collaboration, collective responsibility and shared professional inquiry. Participants in this research consistently valued opportunities to work alongside colleagues, reflect upon practice and exchange ideas. Such findings reinforce the argument that professional learning is both an individual and collective process.

However, whilst the findings support existing literature, they also reveal tensions between teacher agency and organisational control. Participants frequently acknowledged that schools must pursue strategic objectives and school improvement priorities. Nevertheless, some teachers expressed concerns when organisational goals appeared to dominate professional learning agendas. This finding reflects broader debates within the literature concerning the relationship between professional autonomy and managerial accountability.

Ball (2003) argues that contemporary educational systems increasingly operate within cultures of performativity characterised by accountability measures, performance indicators and managerial control. Such environments may limit opportunities for teacher agency by emphasising compliance and measurable outcomes. Similarly, Kennedy (2014) suggests that professional development frequently reflects institutional priorities that may not always align with teachers' individual learning needs. The findings of this research provide evidence of these tensions within international schools, where accountability pressures associated

with accreditation, inspection and school improvement often shape professional development priorities.

Interestingly, participants did not reject organisational priorities outright. Rather, they emphasised the importance of achieving an appropriate balance between school objectives and individual learning needs. This finding suggests that teacher agency should not be understood as complete independence from organisational structures but as meaningful participation within them. Teachers appeared willing to support school improvement initiatives when they perceived opportunities to influence the direction and content of professional learning.

The international school context provides an additional dimension to understanding teacher agency. Participants frequently described working alongside colleagues from diverse cultural, educational and professional backgrounds. This diversity appeared to create opportunities for rich professional dialogue and exposure to alternative perspectives. The findings therefore extend existing research by suggesting that international schools may provide unique conditions for collaborative learning and professional knowledge exchange. However, they also highlight the challenge of designing professional development programmes capable of meeting the diverse needs of an internationally recruited workforce.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that teacher agency and professional ownership are central components of effective professional development. Consistent with adult learning theory, professional capital theory and communities of practice, participants viewed professional learning as most meaningful when teachers exercised autonomy, participated actively in decision making and engaged collaboratively with colleagues. Whilst organisational priorities inevitably influence professional development, the findings suggest that successful CPD requires opportunities for teachers to shape, influence and take ownership of their professional learning. Consequently, fostering teacher agency may represent an important mechanism through which schools can enhance engagement, motivation and the long-term impact of professional development initiatives.

5.6 Leadership and Organisational Support

The findings presented in Chapter 4 demonstrated that leadership and organisational support played a central role in shaping participants' experiences of CPD. Teachers consistently identified leadership as a key factor influencing the quality, accessibility and effectiveness of professional learning. Participants viewed leaders not only as organisers of professional development activities but also as individuals responsible for creating organisational conditions that support continuous learning, collaboration and professional growth. These findings align closely with contemporary research on educational leadership, school improvement and professional learning.

The findings also support distributed perspectives on educational leadership. Spillane and Camburn (2006) argues that leadership should be understood as a collective organisational activity rather than the sole responsibility of formal leaders. Similarly, Harris (2013) suggests that effective school improvement is more likely when leadership responsibilities are shared and professional learning opportunities are embedded throughout the organisation. Participants' emphasis on collaboration and leadership support reflects these broader understandings of distributed professional learning cultures.

The significance of leadership identified in this research is consistent with Hallinger's (2011) concept of leadership for learning. Hallinger argues that effective school leaders influence teaching and learning indirectly through their ability to establish conditions that support professional growth and organisational improvement. Rather than focusing exclusively on managerial functions, leadership for learning emphasises the creation of environments where teachers are encouraged to engage in continuous professional inquiry and development. Participants in this research expressed similar views, frequently describing effective leaders as individuals who actively promoted professional learning and demonstrated a commitment to staff development.

The findings also support Harris and Jones' (2023) assertion that leadership remains one of the most significant school-based influences on teaching quality and student outcomes. According to these authors, successful leaders create structures and cultures that facilitate teacher learning, collaboration and professional improvement.

Participants consistently described leadership support as essential in enabling access to professional development opportunities and sustaining engagement with professional learning initiatives.

A notable finding emerging from this research was the importance participants attached to leadership commitment. Teachers frequently suggested that professional development was most effective when leaders demonstrated a visible and genuine commitment to staff learning. This finding resonates with Fullan's (2001) argument that educational change is unlikely to succeed unless leaders actively model and support learning behaviours. Fullan contends that school improvement depends upon leaders creating cultures in which learning is valued not only for students but also for teachers. Participants in this research also repeatedly emphasised the importance of leaders who viewed professional learning as a strategic priority rather than an administrative requirement.

The findings further support King's (2011) research regarding the role of leadership in sustaining professional learning. King argues that leaders influence teacher learning by creating opportunities for collaboration, reflection and professional dialogue. Participants frequently described collaborative learning environments as important contributors to their professional growth. These findings suggest that leadership effectiveness is closely linked to the extent to which schools facilitate professional interaction and collective learning.

An important aspect of leadership identified within the findings relates to organisational culture. Participants consistently highlighted the significance of working within schools that valued professional learning and encouraged experimentation, reflection and innovation. This finding aligns with Senge's (2006) concept of the learning organisation, which emphasises the importance of creating environments where individuals and groups continually expand their capacity to learn and improve. Whilst Senge's work originates outside education, it has been widely applied to school improvement and professional learning contexts.

Similarly, Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) argue that sustainable school improvement depends upon the development of professional cultures characterised by trust, collaboration and collective responsibility. Participants in this research repeatedly described the importance of feeling supported when implementing new practices

and experimenting with innovative approaches. Such findings suggest that effective leadership extends beyond organising CPD programmes and includes fostering organisational cultures that encourage risk-taking, reflection and professional growth.

The findings also reveal the challenges leaders face in balancing organisational priorities with individual professional development needs. Senior leaders frequently acknowledged the tension between supporting school improvement initiatives and responding to the diverse learning requirements of staff. This finding reflects broader discussions within the school improvement literature regarding the relationship between institutional objectives and teacher agency.

Leithwood et al. (2020) argue that successful leaders must balance competing priorities whilst maintaining a clear focus on teaching and learning. Similarly, Hallinger (2011) suggests that effective leadership involves aligning organisational goals with the professional needs of teachers. Participants in this research described this balancing act as one of the most challenging aspects of CPD leadership. Whilst teachers generally understood the importance of school wide priorities, they also emphasised the need for personalised professional learning opportunities.

The findings therefore suggest that leadership effectiveness may depend upon the extent to which leaders are able to create alignment between organisational and individual objectives. Rather than viewing these priorities as competing agendas, successful leaders appear to facilitate professional learning environments in which school improvement goals and teacher development needs reinforce one another.

Another important finding concerns the allocation of resources. Participants consistently highlighted the importance of time, funding and access to professional learning opportunities. This finding supports Guskey's (2000) argument that meaningful professional development requires sustained organisational investment. Similarly, Bubb and Earley (2007) emphasise that leadership commitment is often demonstrated through the allocation of resources necessary to support professional growth.

Teachers in this research frequently described resource allocation as evidence of organisational priorities. Where schools invested time and funding in professional

learning, participants often interpreted this as an indication that their development was valued. Conversely, limited access to professional learning opportunities sometimes created perceptions that professional development was secondary to other organisational concerns. These findings reinforce the importance of tangible leadership support in shaping teachers' experiences of CPD.

A further issue emerging from the findings relates to the evaluation of professional development. Participants suggested that whilst attendance at CPD activities was often monitored, there was less consistency in evaluating the impact of professional learning on teaching practice and student outcomes. This finding aligns with Guskey's (2000) critique that many schools focus on participation rather than impact when evaluating CPD effectiveness.

Guskey's (2000) five-level model of professional development evaluation emphasises the importance of examining changes in teacher knowledge, professional practice and student learning outcomes. The findings of this research suggest that evaluation practices within the participating schools were often strongest at the level of participation and satisfaction but less developed in relation to long-term impact. This highlights an area for potential improvement and reflects challenges identified within the wider professional development literature.

The international school context adds a further dimension to understanding leadership and professional learning. Participants frequently referred to the diversity of staff backgrounds, educational experiences and professional expectations characteristic of international schools. This diversity creates both opportunities and challenges for school leaders. On the one hand, international schools benefit from a rich range of perspectives and expertise. On the other hand, leaders must design professional learning opportunities capable of meeting the needs of culturally and professionally diverse staff populations.

This finding extends existing literature by highlighting the unique leadership challenges associated with international education settings. Whilst much of the leadership and CPD literature originates from Western educational systems, the findings suggest that leaders within international schools must navigate additional complexities arising from multicultural workforces and diverse educational traditions.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that leadership and organisational support are fundamental influences on the effectiveness of CPD. Consistent with contemporary leadership and school improvement literature, participants viewed leaders as key contributors to professional learning cultures, resource allocation, organisational alignment and professional growth. The findings suggest that effective leadership extends beyond the administration of CPD programmes and involves creating environments in which teachers are supported, valued and empowered as professional learners. Consequently, leadership emerges as a critical factor in determining whether professional development contributes to meaningful and sustained professional learning.

5.7 Balancing School Priorities and Individual Teacher Needs

The final theme emerging from the findings concerns the relationship between organisational priorities and individual professional learning needs. Participants consistently recognised that CPD serves multiple purposes within schools. On one level, professional development is intended to support individual teachers' professional growth, career progression and classroom effectiveness. On another level, CPD functions as a mechanism through which schools pursue strategic objectives, implement curriculum changes, respond to inspection requirements and improve organisational performance. The findings revealed that whilst participants generally accepted both purposes, tensions frequently emerged regarding how these competing demands should be balanced.

This finding reflects a longstanding debate within the professional development literature regarding the purpose of CPD. Kennedy (2005) argues that professional development exists on a continuum ranging from transmission-oriented models, designed to implement organisational priorities, to transformative models that empower teachers as active agents of professional change. The findings of this research suggest that participants experienced elements of both approaches. Whilst they acknowledged the importance of school improvement initiatives, they also emphasised the need for professional learning opportunities that reflected individual aspirations and classroom realities.

Participants frequently described CPD as being most effective when organisational priorities and individual needs were aligned. This finding supports Desimone's (2009) argument that professional development is more likely to result in meaningful changes in practice when teachers perceive learning as relevant to both professional responsibilities and broader educational goals. Teachers in this research demonstrated a willingness to engage with school-wide initiatives when they understood the rationale underpinning them and could identify clear benefits for their own practice.

However, the findings also indicate that tensions emerged when professional development was perceived as being driven primarily by institutional objectives. Several participants expressed concerns that CPD occasionally prioritised inspection requirements, accreditation demands or organisational targets at the expense of individual professional growth. This finding reflects broader critiques of managerial approaches to professional development.

Ball (2003) argues that contemporary educational systems increasingly operate within cultures of performativity, where accountability measures and performance indicators shape professional practice. Within such environments, professional development may become focused on achieving measurable organisational outcomes rather than fostering deeper professional learning. Similarly, Sachs (2003) suggests that managerial approaches to professional development can reduce opportunities for teacher autonomy and professional agency. The findings of this research provide evidence of these tensions within the context of private international schools in Bahrain.

These findings may also be interpreted through broader critiques of managerialism and performativity within education. Ball (2003) argues that contemporary educational systems increasingly prioritise accountability, performance indicators and measurable outcomes, often influencing the nature and purpose of professional learning. Within such environments, professional development risks becoming a mechanism for organisational compliance rather than professional growth. Sachs (2016) similarly cautions that excessive managerial control may reduce opportunities for teacher voice and professional agency. Whilst participants in this research generally accepted the importance of organisational priorities, their

concerns regarding the balance between institutional objectives and individual learning needs suggest that these broader tensions are also evident within the international school context. In Bahrain, where educational governance remains relatively centralised, these tensions may be further amplified as schools seek to balance accountability requirements with opportunities for teacher participation and professional autonomy.

Importantly, participants did not reject organisational priorities altogether. Rather, they frequently acknowledged that schools must pursue improvement goals and maintain accountability standards. The issue was therefore not the existence of organisational objectives but the extent to which these objectives allowed space for individual professional learning needs. This distinction is significant because it suggests that tensions arise not from organisational priorities themselves but from how these priorities are enacted and communicated.

The findings support Leithwood et al.'s (2020) argument that effective educational leadership requires the alignment of organisational goals and individual professional aspirations. Participants frequently described positive experiences when school leaders actively involved teachers in identifying development priorities and designing professional learning opportunities. Such approaches appeared to reduce perceptions of conflict between institutional and individual objectives.

This finding also aligns with King's (2016) research on professional learning leadership. King argues that teachers are more likely to engage meaningfully with professional development when they understand how learning activities contribute to both personal growth and organisational improvement. Participants in this research expressed similar views, suggesting that transparency, consultation and collaboration were important factors in securing teacher engagement.

The findings further highlight the importance of differentiation within professional development programmes. Teachers repeatedly emphasised that professional learning needs vary according to career stage, subject specialism, previous experience and individual aspirations. This supports Opfer and Pedder's (2011) argument that teacher learning is a complex and highly individual process influenced by multiple interacting factors. Standardised approaches to professional

development may therefore struggle to meet the diverse needs of teachers within contemporary schools.

This issue may be particularly significant within international school settings. Participants frequently referred to the diversity of staff backgrounds, educational experiences and professional expectations characteristic of international schools. Teachers working within these contexts often originate from different national education systems and bring varied professional experiences to their roles. Consequently, professional development programmes designed around uniform assumptions may fail to address the complexity of teachers' learning needs.

The findings therefore contribute to emerging literature concerning professional development within international schools. Whilst previous studies have highlighted the importance of contextualising professional learning (Mansour et al., 2014; Romanowski et al., 2019), this research suggests that balancing organisational and individual priorities may represent one of the defining challenges facing CPD leaders in international education settings. The multicultural nature of international schools requires leaders to navigate diverse expectations whilst maintaining organisational coherence and strategic direction.

Another important aspect of this theme relates to teacher motivation. Participants consistently reported higher levels of engagement when they perceived professional learning as personally meaningful and professionally relevant. This finding supports Self-Determination Theory (Deci and Ryan, 2000), which emphasises the importance of autonomy, competence and relatedness in motivating individuals. Although not originally developed within educational leadership literature, Self-Determination Theory provides a useful lens through which to understand why participants valued opportunities for professional choice and ownership.

The findings suggest that teachers are more likely to engage deeply with professional learning when they experience a sense of agency and professional control. Conversely, professional development that is perceived as imposed or disconnected from professional needs may generate compliance rather than genuine engagement. This distinction is particularly important because meaningful professional learning requires more than attendance at CPD events; it requires active participation, reflection and implementation.

The findings also resonate with Hargreaves and Fullan's (2012) concept of professional capital. According to Hargreaves and Fullan (2012), educational improvement depends upon developing the expertise, judgement and collaborative capacity of teachers. Professional development should therefore be viewed not merely as a mechanism for implementing organisational priorities but as an investment in teachers as professionals. Participants consistently demonstrated similar perspectives, viewing CPD as most valuable when it supported both individual growth and organisational improvement.

Taken together, the findings suggest that balancing organisational priorities and individual professional learning needs represents one of the most complex challenges associated with CPD. Whilst organisational objectives are necessary for school improvement, teachers also require opportunities for personalised, relevant and meaningful professional learning. The findings indicate that successful professional development programmes are those that achieve alignment between these objectives rather than prioritising one at the expense of the other. Within international school contexts, where staff diversity and accountability pressures are particularly pronounced, achieving such balance appears especially important. Consequently, this study highlights the need for professional development models that combine organisational coherence with flexibility, responsiveness and teacher agency.

5.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter has discussed the findings presented in Chapter 4 in relation to existing literature, theoretical perspectives and broader debates concerning CPD. The discussion revealed substantial alignment between the findings and current understanding relating to teacher professional learning, adult learning theory, leadership and school improvement.

The findings demonstrated that participants viewed CPD as a continuous process of professional learning and growth rather than a series of isolated training events. Effective professional development was characterised by relevance, practical application, collaboration, facilitator expertise and teacher ownership. However, participants also identified significant barriers including workload pressures, limited

time, issues of relevance and tensions between organisational priorities and individual learning needs.

The discussion further highlighted the importance of teacher agency and professional ownership in shaping engagement with professional learning. Consistent with adult learning theory and professional capital perspectives, participants valued opportunities to exercise professional judgement and influence the direction of their development. Leadership and organisational support also emerged as critical factors influencing professional learning cultures, resource allocation and the effectiveness of CPD initiatives.

Finally, the findings revealed the complexity of balancing school improvement priorities with individual teacher needs, particularly within the context of private international schools. The discussion suggests that successful CPD requires a careful balance between organisational objectives and teacher agency, enabling professional learning to contribute simultaneously to school improvement and individual professional growth.

The next chapter draws together the key findings of the study, outlines its contribution to knowledge, considers implications for policy and practice, identifies limitations and presents recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.0 Introduction

This chapter concludes the thesis by bringing together the principal findings arising from the investigation of teachers' perspectives of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) within private international schools in Bahrain. It restates the research aim, summarises the key findings in relation to the research questions, discusses the implications for policy and practice, presents recommendations arising from the research, considers the limitations of the research and identifies areas for future research. The chapter concludes by outlining the contribution of the research to knowledge and reflecting on the significance of the findings for CPD within international school settings.

6.1 Restatement of the Research Aim

The aim of this study was to explore teachers' perspectives of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) within private international schools in Bahrain and to examine how school leadership, organisational structures and professional learning opportunities influence teachers' experiences of CPD.

To address this aim, the study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What do teaching staff understand by the term Continuing Professional Development (CPD)?
2. What experiences and perspectives of CPD do teaching staff have?
3. What expectations do teaching staff have of their school concerning their own CPD?
4. What are the specific roles and responsibilities of senior leadership regarding CPD provision?
5. How do school owners and senior leaders support CPD through school policy and practice?

The following sections synthesise the principal findings in relation to each research question before considering the implications of the findings for policy, practice and future research.

6.2 Summary of Key Findings

The findings revealed that teachers generally viewed CPD positively and recognised its importance in supporting professional growth, improving classroom practice and enhancing student learning. However, participants also expressed concerns regarding the quality, relevance and accessibility of professional development opportunities available within their schools.

The first key finding demonstrated that participants viewed CPD as a continuous process of professional learning rather than a series of isolated training events. Teachers valued professional development that was relevant to their classroom practice and responsive to their individual professional needs. However, many participants reported that CPD was frequently shaped by organisational priorities rather than personal learning goals.

The second key finding concerned the characteristics of effective CPD. Participants consistently identified practical relevance, collaboration, professional dialogue, facilitator credibility and opportunities for application as important features of meaningful professional development. Teachers expressed a preference for learning opportunities that could be directly implemented within their teaching practice and which promoted collaboration with colleagues.

The third key finding related to barriers to effective professional development. Time constraints, workload pressures, limited funding and restricted access to external training opportunities emerged as significant challenges. Participants frequently reported that competing professional responsibilities limited their ability to engage fully in CPD activities.

The fourth key finding highlighted the importance of teacher agency and professional ownership. Teachers valued opportunities to influence CPD priorities and expressed greater engagement when professional learning reflected their

individual interests and professional aspirations. The findings suggest that teacher involvement in CPD planning contributes positively to perceptions of professional learning.

The fifth key finding demonstrated the critical role of leadership in shaping professional learning cultures. Senior leaders were viewed as influential in determining CPD priorities, allocating resources and creating organisational conditions that either supported or hindered professional learning. Effective leadership was associated with collaboration, communication, support and responsiveness to teachers' needs.

The final key finding identified tensions between organisational priorities and individual professional development needs. Whilst teachers generally understood the importance of school improvement objectives, many participants expressed concerns that CPD was often designed primarily to meet institutional requirements rather than individual professional learning needs.

Taken together, these findings suggest that effective CPD within international schools requires a balance between organisational priorities and teacher agency, supported by strategic leadership, collaborative cultures and meaningful opportunities for professional growth.

6.3 Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings of this research have several important implications for policy and practice within private international schools in Bahrain. The research demonstrated that teachers value professional development opportunities that are relevant, practical, collaborative and responsive to their individual professional needs. Consequently, schools should move beyond traditional models of CPD that rely primarily on one off training sessions and instead adopt more sustained and teacher centred approaches to professional learning.

One significant implication concerns the role of school leadership in supporting effective professional development. The findings demonstrated that leadership

plays a central role in shaping professional learning cultures through the allocation of resources, the establishment of CPD priorities and the creation of opportunities for collaboration and professional dialogue. School leaders should therefore view CPD as a strategic component of school improvement rather than an isolated administrative requirement. Leaders should actively involve teachers in identifying professional development needs and ensure that CPD provision aligns with both organisational objectives and individual professional aspirations.

The findings also suggest the need for schools to develop more systematic approaches to evaluating the effectiveness of CPD. Whilst participants generally recognised the value of professional learning, many questioned whether existing CPD activities resulted in meaningful improvements in classroom practice. Schools should therefore implement more robust evaluation processes that assess not only participation rates but also the impact of CPD on teaching practice, professional growth and student learning outcomes.

A further implication relates to teacher agency and professional ownership. Participants consistently expressed greater engagement with CPD when they felt involved in determining professional learning priorities. Schools should therefore consider adopting more participatory approaches to professional development planning, providing teachers with opportunities to contribute to CPD agendas and identify areas for professional growth. Such approaches may increase engagement, motivation and the perceived relevance of professional learning activities.

The findings also have implications for policymakers and educational organisations operating within Bahrain. Professional development policies should recognise the importance of balancing organisational accountability requirements with opportunities for teacher autonomy and professional judgement. Policymakers should encourage professional learning frameworks that support collaboration, reflection and sustained professional growth rather than focusing solely on compliance with institutional objectives.

Finally, the research highlights the importance of developing professional learning cultures within international schools. Effective CPD should be embedded within the daily life of the organisation and supported through collaboration, mentoring,

coaching and professional dialogue. Schools that cultivate such cultures are more likely to support meaningful teacher learning and sustainable school improvement.

6.4 Recommendations for Practice

The recommendations presented in this section are informed by the findings of this study and the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. They are intended to support school leaders, policy makers and practitioners in strengthening the planning, implementation and evaluation of continuing professional development within private international schools in Bahrain. Whilst the recommendations are grounded in the experiences of participants from the three case study schools, they may also provide insights for similar international school contexts where professional learning is influenced by organisational priorities, leadership practices and accountability requirements.

6.4.1 Recommendations for School Leaders

The findings of this research indicate that school leaders play a pivotal role in shaping teachers' experiences of CPD. Participants consistently reported greater engagement with CPD when they were able to contribute to decisions regarding their professional learning and when they perceived that their expertise and professional judgement were recognised. Consequently, school leaders should adopt more collaborative and participatory approaches to CPD planning that actively involve teachers in identifying professional learning priorities. This may be achieved through regular professional learning needs analyses, staff consultation, collaborative planning groups and structured opportunities for teachers to evaluate existing CPD provision.

Whilst school improvement priorities will inevitably influence professional development agendas, the findings suggest that teachers are more likely to engage meaningfully with CPD when organisational objectives are balanced with individual professional aspirations. School leaders should therefore seek to create professional learning cultures characterised by trust, collaboration and shared

responsibility, where teachers are recognised as active partners in the design and implementation of professional development rather than passive recipients of training. Such an approach is likely to strengthen teacher agency, increase professional motivation and enhance the long-term impact of CPD on classroom practice.

6.4.2 Recommendations for Professional Development Provision

The findings demonstrate that teachers value professional development that is relevant, practical and directly applicable to their classroom practice. Participants consistently emphasised the importance of CPD that addresses authentic professional challenges, provides opportunities for collaboration and supports sustained professional learning rather than isolated training events. Schools should therefore move beyond one-off workshops towards more continuous models of professional development that promote ongoing reflection and professional dialogue.

Greater emphasis should be placed on coaching, mentoring, peer observation, lesson study and professional learning communities, allowing teachers to engage in collaborative enquiry and reflect critically upon their own practice. In addition, schools should provide differentiated CPD pathways that recognise differences in teachers' experience, subject specialism, career stage and professional interests. Such personalised approaches are more likely to increase teacher engagement, strengthen professional ownership and support meaningful improvements in teaching and learning. At the same time, whole-school priorities should remain integrated within CPD programmes to ensure that individual development contributes to wider organisational improvement.

6.4.3 Recommendations for Evaluation and Impact

The findings suggest that evaluation remains one of the least developed aspects of CPD within the participating schools. Participants frequently referred to attendance at professional development activities but provided comparatively little evidence of systematic evaluation of their longer-term impact on teaching practice or student learning. Schools should therefore implement more comprehensive evaluation

frameworks that assess not only participation and satisfaction but also changes in professional practice over time.

Evaluation processes should include a range of evidence, including teacher reflection, peer observation, coaching conversations, classroom observations and professional dialogue, alongside appropriate measures of improvements in teaching and learning. Whilst recognising that changes in student outcomes cannot always be attributed directly to individual CPD activities, a broader evidence base would enable school leaders to make more informed decisions regarding future professional development priorities. Systematic evaluation would also contribute to a culture of continuous improvement by identifying which approaches have the greatest impact within school contexts.

6.4.4 Recommendations for International Schools in Bahrain

The findings highlight several contextual factors that influence CPD within private international schools in Bahrain, including diverse teacher backgrounds, organisational priorities, accountability requirements and the dynamic nature of international school staffing. Consequently, international schools should develop long-term strategic professional learning frameworks that recognise these unique contextual characteristics whilst supporting both organisational improvement and individual professional growth.

Professional development strategies should provide greater flexibility to accommodate teachers at different career stages and from diverse educational backgrounds. Schools should also consider establishing dedicated professional development leadership roles, such as CPD coordinators, to oversee strategic planning, facilitate professional learning communities and ensure that professional development aligns with both school improvement priorities and teachers identified learning needs. Given the high mobility often associated with international school staff, structured induction, mentoring and ongoing support should form an integral part of professional learning frameworks. Furthermore, greater collaboration between international schools within Bahrain could provide valuable opportunities

for sharing expertise, reducing duplication of professional development activities and promoting sector-wide improvement. Such approaches have the potential to strengthen professional learning whilst responding effectively to the distinctive challenges and opportunities associated with international education.

6.5 Limitations of the Research

As with all research, this research contains several limitations that should be acknowledged when interpreting the findings. These limitations do not diminish the value of the research but provide important context for understanding the scope and applicability of the findings.

Firstly, the research was conducted within three private international schools in Bahrain. Whilst the multiple case study design provided rich and detailed insights into teachers' perspectives of CPD, the findings reflect the experiences of participants within specific organisational and cultural contexts. Consequently, the findings should not be interpreted as representative of all international schools in Bahrain or the wider Gulf region. Rather, the intention of the research was to develop an in depth understanding of participants' experiences within the selected cases.

Secondly, the research relied primarily on participants' self-reported perspectives and experiences. Although interviews provided valuable insights into teachers' views of professional development, the research did not include classroom observations or direct evaluation of professional development activities. As a result, the findings reflect participants' interpretations of CPD rather than objective measures of professional development effectiveness.

A further limitation relates to the range of stakeholder perspectives included within the research. The research focused specifically on teachers and senior leaders, reflecting the aim of exploring teachers' perspectives of CPD. However, the inclusion of additional stakeholders, such as school owners, governors, policymakers or professional development providers, may have generated a broader understanding of how professional development is planned, implemented and evaluated within international schools.

Finally, the research was undertaken within a particular period of educational development within Bahrain. Professional development policies, school priorities and educational reforms continue to evolve, and it is therefore possible that participants' perspectives may change over time. The findings should therefore be viewed as a reflection of professional development practices within the participating schools during the period in which the research was conducted.

Despite these limitations, the research provides a detailed and contextually rich exploration of teachers' perspectives of CPD and contributes valuable insights into professional learning within private international schools in Bahrain.

6.6 Future Research

The findings of this research highlight several opportunities for future research relating to CPD within international school settings. Firstly, future research could explore teachers' perspectives of CPD across a larger number of international schools within Bahrain and other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. Comparative research across different educational contexts may provide further insight into how organisational structures, cultural influences and national educational policies shape teachers' experiences of professional learning.

Secondly, future research could examine the perspectives of additional stakeholder groups involved in professional development. The inclusion of school owners, governors, policymakers, CPD coordinators and professional development providers may provide a broader understanding of how professional learning priorities are established, implemented and evaluated within international schools.

Thirdly, longitudinal research would be valuable in examining how teachers' perspectives of CPD evolve over time. Such research could explore the long-term impact of professional development initiatives on teacher practice, professional identity and career progression. Longitudinal approaches may also provide greater insight into the sustainability of professional learning and school improvement initiatives.

A further area for investigation concerns the relationship between professional development and student outcomes. Whilst participants frequently referred to the importance of improving teaching and learning, future research could explore more directly how specific professional development approaches influence classroom practice and student achievement within international school contexts.

Future research could also investigate the effectiveness of different models of professional learning, including coaching, mentoring, professional learning communities and collaborative inquiry approaches. Such research may contribute to a deeper understanding of which professional development strategies are most effective within international schools operating in culturally diverse environments.

Finally, further research examining the relationship between teacher agency, leadership practices and organisational culture would be valuable. The findings of this research highlighted tensions between organisational priorities and individual professional development needs. Additional research could explore how schools can balance accountability requirements with opportunities for teacher autonomy, participation and professional ownership. Collectively, these areas of future research would contribute to a deeper understanding of professional development within international schools and support the development of more effective approaches to teacher learning and school improvement.

6.7 Contribution to Knowledge

This research contributes to the existing body of knowledge by providing a detailed exploration of teachers' perspectives of CPD within three private international schools in the Kingdom of Bahrain. Whilst a substantial body of research has examined CPD within Western educational contexts (Avalos, 2011; Darling-Hammond, Hyler and Gardner, 2017), comparatively little research has explored how teachers experience professional development within Bahrain's private international school sector. This research therefore contributes to addressing this gap by providing a contextually rich understanding of CPD within an under researched educational setting.

The research contributes to knowledge by demonstrating that teachers perceive CPD as a continuous process of professional learning rather than simply a series of isolated training events. Whilst this finding supports previous research highlighting the importance of sustained and collaborative professional learning (Desimone, 2009; Timperley et al., 2007), the research extends existing knowledge by illustrating how these principles are experienced within the organisational and cultural context of Bahrain's private international schools.

A significant contribution of the research is its examination of the relationship between organisational priorities and teachers' professional learning needs. The findings demonstrate that teachers value professional development that is relevant, practical and responsive to their individual needs, yet they also recognise that CPD is frequently shaped by school improvement priorities and organisational accountability. The research therefore contributes to existing discussions surrounding teacher professionalism, leadership and organisational culture by providing empirical evidence of how teachers negotiate the balance between institutional expectations and individual professional aspirations within international school settings.

The research also contributes to understanding the importance of teacher agency within CPD. Participants consistently expressed greater engagement with professional learning when they were actively involved in identifying their professional development needs and contributing to decisions regarding CPD provision. These findings reinforce previous research emphasising the importance of teacher agency (Biesta, 2015; Sachs, 2016), whilst extending current understanding by demonstrating how teacher participation influences perceptions of professional learning within culturally diverse international schools.

A further contribution relates to educational leadership and the creation of professional learning cultures. The findings demonstrate that school leaders influence CPD not only through the allocation of resources and the organisation of professional development activities, but also through establishing collaborative cultures characterised by trust, communication, and professional dialogue. The research therefore provides further evidence that effective leadership is central to creating conditions in which meaningful professional learning can flourish.

The research also makes a practical contribution by providing evidence informed recommendations for school leaders, policymakers and educational organisations responsible for CPD within international schools. The findings provide a stronger understanding of teachers' expectations of CPD and offer practical guidance for developing professional learning programmes that balance organisational priorities with teachers' individual professional learning needs. In doing so, the research offers recommendations that may support the development of more effective, teacher centred approaches to professional development within Bahrain and similar international school contexts.

Finally, the research contributes methodologically through the use of an interpretivist qualitative multiple case study design involving three private international schools. By drawing together demographic questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and documentary analysis, the research provides a rich and contextually grounded understanding of teachers' and senior leaders' experiences of CPD. The use of multiple case studies also enabled similarities and differences to be identified across different organisational contexts, providing a more nuanced understanding of how CPD is perceived and experienced within Bahrain's international school sector.

Overall, this research contributes to both theory and practice by extending understanding of CPD within an under researched educational context. The findings provide new insights into the relationship between leadership, organisational culture, teacher agency and professional learning, whilst offering practical recommendations that may inform the design and implementation of CPD within international schools in Bahrain and the wider Gulf region.

6.8 Final Conclusion

This research set out to explore teachers' perspectives of CPD within private international schools in the Kingdom of Bahrain. Using a qualitative multiple case study approach, the research examined how teachers and senior leaders perceived professional development, the factors influencing its effectiveness and the role of leadership in supporting meaningful professional learning.

The findings demonstrate that teachers value CPD and recognise its importance in supporting professional growth, improving classroom practice and contributing to school improvement. However, the research also identified several challenges that continue to influence teachers' experiences of CPD, including workload pressures, limited opportunities for professional autonomy and tensions between organisational priorities and teachers' individual professional learning needs. The findings suggest that professional development is most effective when it is relevant, collaborative, practical and responsive to the professional needs of teachers.

A central conclusion emerging from this research is that effective professional development extends beyond the provision of training events. Meaningful professional learning is dependent upon supportive leadership, collaborative professional cultures and opportunities for teachers to reflect upon and influence their own professional development. Schools that encourage professional dialogue, trust and shared responsibility for learning are better positioned to create sustainable cultures of continuous improvement that benefit both teachers and students.

Although this research was undertaken within three private international schools in Bahrain, the findings have wider relevance for international schools operating in similarly diverse educational contexts. As schools continue to respond to changing educational priorities, increasing accountability and evolving professional expectations, there is a growing need for CPD that balances organisational objectives with teachers' professional aspirations. Investing in high quality, teacher centred professional learning is likely to strengthen not only individual teacher development but also organisational capacity and long-term school improvement.

It is hoped that this research will encourage school leaders, policymakers, and educational organisations to view CPD as a strategic investment in both teachers and schools rather than simply a programme of mandatory training. By placing teachers' perspectives at the centre of professional learning, schools can create more inclusive, collaborative, and sustainable approaches to CPD that support teacher effectiveness and enhance educational outcomes. Furthermore, it is anticipated that this research will provide a foundation for future studies examining CPD within Bahrain and the wider international school sector.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A – Copy of the Gatekeeper Letter

Khalil Ahmed MA, NPQH, FRAS
London.

11th October 2018

Dear Colleague,

I would like to thank you sincerely for expressing an interest in assisting with research being conducted at your school. I would like to conduct research at your school as part of my Doctorate in Education with both your Leadership staff and also your teaching staff. My research topic is titled 'Continuing Professional Development: Perceptions of School Teachers at International schools in Bahrain'. This research project will involve staff completing a set of pilot questionnaires and being part of a semi-structured interview. The sample size is three-leadership staff and ten teachers within your school. The information obtained will be considered strictly confidential and will be used solely for this research purpose only, with all participants anonymised to protect their identities. I am including a copy of the Participants Information Sheet to outline the details regarding this research. Before commencing with any data collection exercise, I would like to visit the school and explain the research and what each of the participant's role will be. I will explain how I will go about the research and how the interviews and audio recordings will be conducted. I would like the opportunity to speak with interested staff and go through the research aims and select participants based on their interest in the research topic and be given the opportunity to explain the reasons and purpose of the research. I am hoping this can be week commencing 23rd October 2018

I would like to thank you for your support in this research. I hope that the information obtained from this research will benefit the staff and school community in the area of CPD.

Yours sincerely

Khalil Ahmed MA, NPQH, FRAS

k.ahmed@uea.ac.uk

Te No: Bahrain, 00973 33788987, UK, 07494772482

If you are willing for your school to participate in this study, please sign this letter as a declaration of your consent, i.e. that you participate in this project willingly and that you understand that you may withdraw from the research project at any time.

Participant's signature.....: Date:

Researcher's signature: Date:

Appendix B – Participant Information Sheet

Khalil Ahmed
Doctoral Student
June 2018

Faculty of Education
School of School of Education and
Lifelong Learning

University of East Anglia
Norwich Research Park
Norwich NR4 7TJ
United Kingdom

Continuing Professional Development: Perceptions of School Teachers at British Schools in Bahrain

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION STATEMENT – Teachers

(1) What is this study about?

You are invited to take part in a research study about developing an understanding of perspectives of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) of teaching staff and senior leaders. I hope to investigate if there is a need to develop further the current CPD provision at the school leading to improved outcomes for students and a long term continuous improvement across the school. You have been invited to participate in this study because *you are a member of teaching staff at this school*. This Participant Information Statement tells you about the research study. Knowing what is involved will help you decide if you want to take part in the study. Please read this sheet carefully and ask questions about anything that you don't understand or want to know more about. Participation in this research study is voluntary. By giving consent to take part in this study you are telling us that you:

- ✓ Understand what you have read.
- ✓ Agree to take part in the research study as outlined below.
- ✓ Agree to the use of your personal information as described.

(2) Who is running the study?

The study is being carried out by the following researcher: Khalil Ahmed, Doctoral student, School of Education and Lifelong Learning, University of East Anglia.

(3) What will the study involve for me?

Your participation will involve an interview with me. The interview will take place in the school. You will be asked to describe your understanding of CPD and also your experiences as a member of staff. You will be given an opportunity to discuss your professional journey including the opportunities and challenges you may have encountered at the school. The interview will be at a convenient time for you. The interview will be audio recorded and typed

out at a later stage. You will be able to review the written record of what was said in the interview, if you wish, to ensure that it is an accurate reflection of the discussion.

(4) How much of my time will the study take?

It is expected that each interview will last between 30-40 mins.

(5) Do I have to be in the study? Can I withdraw from the study once I've started?

Being in this study is completely voluntary and you do not have to take part. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relationship with the researchers or anyone else at the University of East Anglia. If you decide to take part in the study and then change your mind later, you are free to withdraw at any time. You can do this by letting me know by email (k.ahmed@uea.ac.uk). You are free to stop the interview at any time.

Unless you say that you want us to keep them, any recordings will be erased and the information you have provided will not be included in the study results. You may also refuse to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer during the interview. If you decide at a later time to withdraw from the study, your information will be removed from our records and will not be included in any results, up to the point where we have analysed and published the results.

(6) Are there any risks or costs associated with being in the study?

Aside from giving up your time, we do not expect that there will be any risks or costs associated with taking part in this study.

(7) Are there any benefits associated with being in the study?

I would hope that by speaking openly and freely about your individual CPD experiences including those areas that need additional attention, the school can acknowledge positive aspects and/or review its CPD provision for the greater benefit of all the community. This study would also add to the body of knowledge on CPD in International schools and may serve as a basis for policy formulation both within the school and externally drawing the attention of organisations such as British Schools Overseas (BSO), British Schools in the Middle East (BSME) and COBIS. The research seeks to acknowledge that schools need to support and engage teachers in their career development whilst meeting their professional needs.

(8) What will happen to information about me that is collected during the study?

By providing your consent, you are agreeing to us collecting personal information about you for the purposes of this research study. Your information will only be used for the purposes

outlined in this Participant Information Statement, unless you consent otherwise. Data management will follow the 1998 Data Protection Act and the University of East Anglia Research Data Management Policy (2013).

Your information will be stored securely and your identity/information will be kept strictly confidential, except as required by law. Study findings may be published, but you will not be identified in these publications if you decide to participate in this study. In this instance, data will be stored for a period of 10 years and then destroyed.

(9)What if I would like further information about the study?

When you have read this information, Khalil Ahmed will be available to discuss it with you further and answer any questions you may have. If you would like to know more at any stage during the study, please feel free to contact Khalil on email; k.ahmed@uea.ac.uk .

(10)Will I be told the results of the study?

You have a right to receive feedback about the overall results of this study. You can tell me that you wish to receive feedback by providing your contact details on the consent section of this information sheet. This feedback will be in the form of a one page lay summary of the findings. You will receive this feedback after the study is finished.

(11)What if I have a complaint or any concerns about the study?

The ethical aspects of this study have been approved under the regulations of the University of East Anglia's School of Education and Lifelong Learning Research Ethics Committee.

If there is a problem please let me know. You can contact me via the University at the following address:

Khalil Ahmed
School of Education and Lifelong Learning
University of East Anglia
NORWICH NR4 7TJ
k.ahmed@uea.ac.uk

If you are concerned about the way this study is being conducted or you wish to make a complaint to someone independent from the study, please contact please contact the Head of the School of Education and Lifelong Learning, Professor Richard Andrews, at Richard.Andrews@uea.ac.uk.

(12) OK, I want to take part – what do I do next?

You need to fill in one copy of the consent form and hand it in the sealed envelope provided to the Receptionist of the School, clearly marked with my name, Khalil Ahmed. Please keep the letter, information sheet and the 2nd copy of the consent form for your information.

This information sheet is for you to keep.

Appendix C

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM (1st Copy to Researcher)

I, [PRINT NAME], agree to take part in this research study.

In giving my consent I state that:

- ✓ I understand the purpose of the study, what I will be asked to do, and any risks/benefits involved.
- ✓ I have read the Participant Information Statement and have been able to discuss my involvement in the study with the researchers if I wished to do so.
- ✓ The researcher has answered any questions that I had about the study and I am happy with the answers.
- ✓ I understand that being in this study is completely voluntary and I do not have to take part. My decision whether to be in the study will not affect my relationship with the researchers or anyone else at the University of East Anglia now or in the future.
- ✓ I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time.
- ✓ I understand that I may stop the interview at any time if I do not wish to continue, and that unless I indicate otherwise any recordings will then be erased and the information provided will not be included in the study. I also understand that I may refuse to answer any questions I don't wish to answer.
- ✓ I understand that personal information about me that is collected over the course of this project will be stored securely and will only be used for purposes that I have agreed to. I understand that information about me will only be told to others with my permission, except as required by law.

✓ I understand that the results of this study may be published, but these publications will not contain my name or any identifiable information about me unless I consent to being identified using the “Yes” checkbox below.

☐ Yes, I am happy to be identified.

☐ No, I don’t want to be identified. Please keep my identity anonymous.

I consent to:

- **Audio-recording** YES ☐ NO
☐
- **Reviewing transcripts** YES ☐ NO
☐
- **Would you like to receive feedback about the overall results of this study?** YES ☐ NO
☐

If you answered **YES**, please indicate your preferred form of feedback and address:

☐ Postal: _____

☐ Email: _____

.....

.....

Signature

PRINT name

Date

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM (2nd Copy to Participant)

I, [PRINT NAME], agree to take part in this research study.

In giving my consent I state that:

- ✓ I understand the purpose of the study, what I will be asked to do, and any risks/benefits involved.
- ✓ I have read the Participant Information Statement and have been able to discuss my involvement in the study with the researchers if I wished to do so.
- ✓ The researcher has answered any questions that I had about the study and I am happy with the answers.
- ✓ I understand that being in this study is completely voluntary and I do not have to take part. My decision whether to be in the study will not affect my relationship with the researchers or anyone else at the University of East Anglia now or in the future.
- ✓ I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time.
- ✓ I understand that I may stop the interview at any time if I do not wish to continue, and that unless I indicate otherwise any recordings will then be erased and the information provided will not be included in the study. I also understand that I may refuse to answer any questions I don't wish to answer.
- ✓ I understand that personal information about me that is collected over the course of this project will be stored securely and will only be used for purposes that I have agreed to. I understand that information about me will only be told to others with my permission, except as required by law.
- ✓ I understand that the results of this study may be published, but these publications will not contain my name or any identifiable information about me unless I consent to being identified using the "Yes" checkbox below.

- ☐ Yes, I am happy to be identified.
- ☐ No, I don't want to be identified. Please keep my identity anonymous.

I consent to:

- **Audio-recording** YES ☐ NO
☐
- **Reviewing transcripts** YES ☐ NO
☐
- **Would you like to receive feedback about the overall results of this study?** YES ☐ NO
☐

If you answered **YES**, please indicate your preferred form of feedback and address:

- ☐ Postal: _____
- ☐ Email: _____

Signature

PRINT name

Date

Appendix D – Copy of Initial Questionnaire - Teachers' Perspectives of CPD and its impact on students.

1. Main Role / Responsibility in School (if any) *
2. What is your main subject specialism or the subject you spend most of your time teaching? *
3. How long have you been teaching? *
 - Under 5 years
 - 6 - 10 years
 - 11-15 years
 - 16-20 years
 - 21+ years
4. How many schools have you taught in during your teaching career? *
 - Under 2
 - 2- 4 schools
 - 5 - 7 schools
 - 8 - 11 schools
 - 11 + schools
5. How long have you been teaching at this school in Bahrain? *
6. What is your view of what CPD is? Please rank in order of importance. *

Courses/conferences/workshops

School INSET days

Watching and talking with colleagues

Personal research and reading

On-line learning

7. CPD generally meets the needs of the school rather than me personally. *

Strongly agree Neither agree nor disagree Disagree strongly disagree

8. Needs identified in my performance review have been met through CPD. *

Strongly agree Neither agree nor disagree Disagree strongly disagree

9. I feel that I have a part in setting the agenda in the school INSET days. *

Strongly agree Neither agree nor disagree Disagree strongly disagree

10. I am given a real opportunity to improve my skills in the school. *

Strongly agree Neither agree nor disagree Disagree strongly disagree

Appendix E Outline of Interview Participants

Name and School	Gender	Age	No. of Years Teaching at Current School	Job Title	Code	Nationality	Employment Status
Amy Abbey	Female	46	3	Deputy Head	L1	British	Overseas Recruited
Arthur Abbey	Male	45	3	Year-3 Class Teacher	T1	British	Overseas Recruited
Kirby Abbey	Female	37	3	Learning Support Leader—SENCO	T2	British	Overseas Recruited
Mavis Abbey	Female	28	3	Early Years Foundation Stage Teacher	T3	British	Overseas
David Abbey	Male	32	2	Teacher	T4	British	Overseas
Karen Abbey	Female	50	2	Year 4 and 5 English	T5	British	Overseas
John Kingsway	Male	55	2	Primary School Principal	L1	British	Overseas
Aminah Kingsway	Female	38	1	Curriculum and Training Coordinator	T1	Lebanese	Locally Recruited
Fawzia Kingsway	Female	28	1	Language Teacher	T2	Bahraini	Bahrainisation
Mandy Kingsway	Female	36	1	Year-2 Teacher	T3	British	Overseas Recruited
Noreen Kingsway	Female	32	1	EYFS Teacher Arabic	T4	Tunisia	Locally recruited
Adam Kingsway	Male	51	1	Learning Centre Coordinator	T5	British	Overseas
Annabel, Salisbury	Female	42	3	Head of Secondary	L1	British	Overseas
Neil, Salisbury	Male	34	4	Head of Faculty	T1	British	Overseas
Shelly, Salisbury	Female	37	2	Teacher	T2	British	Overseas
Faris, Salisbury	Male	32	2	Teacher	T3	Bahraini	Bahrainisation
Walter, Salisbury	Male	28	4	Teacher	T4	British	Overseas
Leyla, Salisbury	Female	44	4	English Teacher Year 4/5	T5	Lebanon	Locally recruited

Appendix F – Copy of the Teacher and Senior Leader Interview Questions

Research Questions	Interview Questions	SLT Interview questions
Research Question 1— What do teaching staff understand by the term CPD?	1. What is your understanding of the term CPD? 2. What are your views of CPD in the school and how is it organised? 3. What are the features of effective CPD?	1. What is your understanding of the term CPD? 2. How is CPD organised at this school? 3. What are staff views of CPD in this school? 4. What are the key features of effective CPD ?
Research Question 2— What experiences and perspectives of CPD do teaching staff have?	4.What are the characteristics of effective CPD? 5. How are your individual needs matched with the school's needs?	4. How the school needs aligned with the needs of the individual?
Research Question 3— What expectations of the school do teaching staff have concerning their own CPD?	6. Do you think there is a conflict between CPD needs and school needs?	5.Do you think there is a conflict between the individual CPD needs and the school needs?
Research Question 4— What are the specific roles and responsibilities of the Senior Leadership regarding CPD provision?	7.How have your CPD needs been met? 8.What training programmes and resources are available for your development?	
Research Question 5— How do the school owners and leadership support CPD through school policy and practice?		6.What are the main barriers you have encountered in undertaking your role as a leader in terms of providing CPD at the school? 7. What do you think is the staff attitude toward their own training and development at the school?

		<p>8. How do you receive feedback on the CPD provided and can you describe the process?</p> <p>9. Can I ask funding? What is the main criteria that you use to allocate funding and support for CPD?</p> <p>10. What are the next steps in terms of CPD here at the school and what would these next steps look like?</p>
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Appendix G- Copy of the Extract for the Coded Transcripts

Question 1: What do teaching staff understand by the term CPD?			
	<i>Understanding of the term CPD</i>	<i>Respondents view of how CPD is organised</i>	<i>Features of effective CPD</i>
T1:A	taking our own ownership of our CPD, very structured or regimented, professional learning portfolio, professional learning log.	more, flexible for the teachers. So, we basically have an open CPD schedule. It's every other Monday. follow specific targets.	Someone taking control of the CPD, Subject knowledge. Putting it into practice someone observing you.
T2:A	Never standing still. Never thinking that you're enough, which I think is really important in teaching. Developing yourself within your profession, ongoing journey from where you come into the profession until you leave.	It's far more independent. We can form focus groups; we can sit and do online learning. more personalised. They do give us some suggestions.	needs to be relevant too. delivered by somebody who's confident in that area., I think people need to be motivated. Both the person delivering a CPD or the person receiving it.
T3:A	mostly to do with my professional development and how I work in my team. We do classroom monitor, which is a way of tracking children, finding help with that.	so it was all the staff all together. Organised by the senior management team. And as an EYFS teacher I felt a lot of it was aimed at higher parts of the school, a lot of things last year was quite a waste of time in a way, because I felt like I could have been doing other things.	I find that, for my CPD, I find that being taught things is easier for me So I've gone away and I've done my own professional development and researched it and thought, right, how does this work?
T4:A	Yes. Well, first that, I was back in Uni, I did a physio	It's every other Monday. The Monday's that	

	<p>degree. And it came to light that in all areas of your career, job, whatever you take, you're going to need to keep up to date with current trends and research, best practice. Not only for benefit of yourself, to keep yourself up to date, but also for... So, for example, physiotherapy for the patients. And for school edification, for the school itself. And, more importantly, for the children to make sure they're getting the best.</p> <p>So, my understanding, is, I believe there's a big onus on yourself to ensure you're keeping up to date yourself. You can't rely on schools or outside companies or whatever to upgrade for you. It's your job as a professional to keep up to date as much as you can. And to help other people within the industry as well.</p>	<p>aren't CPD are planning, the [unclear] PPA time.</p> <p>So, at the moment, each teacher will have a professional learning portfolio, professional learning log, which you get to fill in for CPD. They've taken them themselves, they're online courses, or TEDx talks or things like that.</p>	
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Appendix H

Illustrative Development of Themes Using Reflexive Thematic Analysis

The following table provides an example of the analytical process undertaken during the reflexive thematic analysis. Consistent with Braun and Clarke (2021, 2022), coding was treated as an iterative and interpretive engagement with the interview data. The examples below demonstrate how selected interview extracts informed the development of interpretive codes, which were subsequently refined into broader patterns of shared meaning before contributing to the final themes presented in Chapter Four. The table provides an example of the process used rather than include every code generated.

Table H.1 Illustrative Development of Themes

Interview Extract	Initial Interpretive Code	Pattern of Shared Meaning	Final Theme
<i>"It's about never standing still... it should be an ongoing journey from where you come into the profession until you leave."</i> (Kirby, T2)	Professional learning is lifelong	CPD viewed as continuous professional learning	Understanding the Purpose of CPD
<i>"You're going to need to keep up to date with current trends and research..."</i> (David, T4)	Maintaining professional currency	Teachers perceive CPD as maintaining professional competence	Understanding the Purpose of CPD
<i>"The best CPD is when you leave feeling that you can use something the next day."</i> (Leyla, T5)	Immediate classroom application	Practical relevance determines perceived effectiveness	Characteristics of Effective CPD
<i>"Some of the most valuable CPD comes from talking to other teachers."</i> (David, T4)	Collaborative professional learning	Learning through professional dialogue	Characteristics of Effective CPD
<i>"Time is always the biggest issue."</i> (Amy, L1)	Insufficient time for professional learning	Structural workload barriers restrict engagement	Barriers to Effective CPD
<i>"Sometimes training is too generic."</i> (Walter, T4)	Generic CPD lacks contextual relevance	Relevance influences implementation	Barriers to Effective CPD
<i>"A lot of the professional development I do is self-directed."</i> (Kirby, T2)	Independent professional learning	Teachers actively construct their own learning	Teacher Agency and Professional Ownership

Interview Extract	Initial Interpretive Code	Pattern of Shared Meaning	Final Theme
<i>"When teachers are involved in deciding what they need, there is much more buy-in."</i> (Walter, T4)	Professional autonomy increases engagement	Ownership strengthens motivation	Teacher Agency and Professional Ownership
<i>"Leadership has to set the tone."</i> (Amy, L1)	Leadership shapes learning culture	Leaders influence organisational commitment to CPD	Leadership and Organisational Support
<i>"You can talk about professional development all you like, but if staff don't have time or resources..."</i> (Annabel, L1)	Leadership provides enabling conditions	Organisational support extends beyond policy	Leadership and Organisational Support
<i>"Professional development has to support the direction of the school."</i> (John, L1)	CPD linked to school improvement	Organisational priorities shape CPD	Balancing School Priorities and Individual Teacher Needs
<i>"Every teacher is different."</i> (Walter, T4)	Professional learning should be differentiated	Individual needs require flexible CPD	Balancing School Priorities and Individual Teacher Needs

Note: This appendix is provided to illustrate the development of themes and enhance the transparency of the analytical process. In keeping with Braun and Clarke's (2021, 2022) Reflexive Thematic Analysis,