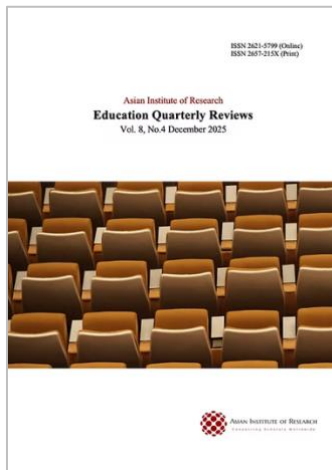




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Continuing Professional Development and Lifelong Learning among Greek German Language Teachers: Barriers and Experiences

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Abstract

This study explores the factors influencing participation in professional development and the elements contributing to teachers' professional satisfaction. Semi-structured interviews with eleven educators examined barriers such as time constraints, workload, program relevance, and quality of instruction, alongside factors enhancing engagement and professional growth. Findings indicate that limited time and competing responsibilities are major obstacles, while satisfaction depends on the trainer's quality, clarity and applicability of materials, and alignment with teachers' professional needs. The study underscores the importance of accessible, practice-oriented professional development that strengthens instructional competence and professional efficacy, and highlights policy measures to support effective participation.

Keywords: Professional Development, Lifelong Learning, Training Programmes, German Language Teachers

1. Introduction

In recent years, the teaching profession has undergone profound transformations due to the rapid integration of digital technologies, growing classroom diversity, and heightened socio-emotional demands placed on educators. Foreign language (FL) teachers, in particular, operate in increasingly complex environments where they must simultaneously foster linguistic competence, intercultural awareness, and learner autonomy (OECD, 2023; European Commission/Eurydice, 2021). This evolving landscape underscores the urgent need for targeted, flexible, and evidence-based professional development (PD) programs that reflect teachers' real-world challenges and instructional contexts (Richter & Richter, 2024; Huang et al., 2024).

Despite widespread recognition of CPD as a cornerstone for educational quality, teachers' participation is often limited. Engagement depends on a complex interplay of structural, organizational, and psychosocial factors, which may affect both access to professional learning and the effectiveness of training programs (Afshar & Ghasemi, 2020; Zhang et al., 2021; OECD, 2023). Foreign language educators, in particular, face context-specific challenges related to subject-specific pedagogy, alignment with institutional requirements, and technological constraints, making tailored, relevant, and sustainable professional development essential (Nguyen et al., 2022; Scherer & Rolka, 2024; Huang et al., 2024).

Despite the availability of CPD programs, there remains a lack of context-specific research on the needs of FL teachers in Greece, where institutional constraints, curriculum expectations, and limited resources shape access to professional learning opportunities. This study addresses this gap by presenting a qualitative investigation of Greek secondary school teachers of German. The research aims to explore two central questions: which factors influence teachers' participation in professional development programs, and how teachers evaluate program quality in relation to professional satisfaction and growth. Through this lens, the study seeks to inform the design of effective CPD initiatives that are responsive to the practical, professional, and contextual needs of FL educators.

2. The Teaching of German in the Greek Educational System: Structural Features and Pedagogical Challenges

The teaching of German within the Greek school system presents a series of structural, pedagogical, and policy-related challenges that shape both instructional practice and learning outcomes. As a non-compulsory subject, German occupies a secondary role in the foreign language curriculum, offered primarily as a second foreign language from the fifth grade of primary school or, in some cases, from the third grade of lower secondary school. This optional status directly influences students' participation, class size, and continuity of study across educational levels (ECML, 2022). In contrast to English—widely perceived as a prerequisite for academic and professional advancement—German is often selected based on external influences, such as parental preference or peer choice, rather than intrinsic motivation or long-term educational planning (Dosi & Papadopoulou, 2019).

Class composition varies considerably across regions and school types. In urban centers, German language classes typically include between 12 and 20 students, while in rural or island schools the number may drop to as few as six learners. Although smaller class sizes can allow for more personalized teaching, they also restrict the range of communicative and group-based activities, limiting opportunities for authentic language interaction (Gerovasileiou, 2022). Moreover, classes with persistently low enrollment are at risk of cancellation, creating instability in language provision and affecting teachers' employment continuity.

The timetable allocated to German is equally restrictive: two hours per week in primary school—often delivered in a block format—and one to two hours per week in lower and upper secondary education. Such minimal exposure constrains communicative competence development, particularly in oral production and interaction (ECML, 2022). The situation is compounded by the late and often disorganized process of course selection. Since the choice of the second foreign language is typically made after other registration procedures or extracurricular commitments, the planning of German classes is delayed, resulting in uncertainty about staffing, scheduling, and resource allocation. Teachers frequently learn of their placements shortly before the school year begins, leaving little time for pedagogical preparation.

An additional complexity concerns the sociolinguistic diversity of Greek classrooms. Many schools, particularly in regions such as Thessaly and Central Macedonia, host a significant number of students from multilingual or migrant backgrounds. In some cases, 35–40% of students report a first language other than Greek, creating a heterogeneous linguistic environment that both challenges and enriches the learning process (Liakou, 2023). This context underscores the need for plurilingual and intercultural pedagogical approaches that leverage learners' existing linguistic repertoires as a resource rather than a constraint (Dosi & Papadopoulou, 2019; Liakou, 2023). Implementing such approaches requires targeted professional development and institutional support, areas that remain underdeveloped in Greece.

Teachers of German face a demanding teaching landscape that requires them to combine digital literacy, differentiated instruction, and intercultural awareness. Core areas of competence include the management of small and mixed-ability groups, integration of digital media into classroom practice, communicative methodology, alignment with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), and adaptation to plurilingual contexts (Gerovasileiou, 2022; Katerini, 2023). Despite the recognized need for these skills, systematic professional development opportunities remain limited. Existing programs are often voluntary, fragmented, or insufficiently aligned with classroom realities. In-service training rarely addresses the integration of certification frameworks such as the Goethe-Zertifikat or the effective use of digital pedagogical tools.

Evidence from international contexts indicates that sustained, collaborative professional learning—particularly through mentoring, peer observation, and blended digital modules—can substantially improve teaching quality and adaptability (OECD, 2019b). However, Greece has yet to incorporate such structures into the professional trajectory of foreign language teachers in a consistent manner. This gap affects not only teacher competence but also the long-term viability of the German language in public education.

From a European perspective, the position of German in Greece is comparatively weak. According to Eurostat (2024), German is the third most widely studied foreign language in upper secondary education across the EU, with approximately 21% of students enrolled, following English (96%) and Spanish (27.1%). In Greece, by contrast, fewer than 1% of upper secondary students study two foreign languages, resulting in very limited exposure to German at advanced levels. This discrepancy reflects broader systemic and policy-level challenges rather than a lack of interest in the language itself.

Overall, the teaching of German in the Greek educational system is shaped by a combination of structural and institutional constraints: the optional nature of the subject, small and unstable class sizes, limited instructional time, late student selection, sociolinguistic heterogeneity, insufficient teacher training, and the absence of a coherent national language policy. Yet these challenges also reveal potential pathways for reform. Strengthening the presence of German in Greek schools requires a comprehensive policy framework that integrates curriculum redesign, systematic professional development, plurilingual pedagogical models, and closer collaboration with institutions such as the Goethe-Institut, the Institute of Educational Policy, and national teachers' associations.

A reoriented approach that embeds German language education within the broader goals of multilingual competence, digital pedagogy, and intercultural awareness could significantly enhance its relevance and sustainability. In this sense, the future of German in Greece depends not solely on student choice or individual teacher initiative but on strategic educational planning that recognizes linguistic diversity as a fundamental resource for modern European citizenship.

3. Barriers and Challenges in Teacher Participation in Professional Development Programs

Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is widely recognized as a cornerstone for ensuring quality in education. Systematic professional learning allows teachers to update pedagogical knowledge, adopt innovative instructional methods, adapt to technological and social changes, and enhance student learning outcomes (European Commission/Eurydice, 2021; OECD, 2023). Despite this broad consensus, teachers' actual engagement with CPD remains constrained by a complex interplay of structural, organizational, and psychosocial barriers, which often undermine both participation and impact.

Building on the understanding of structural constraints in German language teaching, this section examines the general challenges that hinder teacher engagement in professional development and then addresses the specific difficulties faced by foreign language educators, highlighting the implications for classroom practice and student learning.

3. 1. General Barriers for Teachers

Despite the recognized importance of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) in enhancing teaching quality and student outcomes, numerous factors continue to impede teachers' active participation and long-term engagement. These barriers are multifaceted—ranging from structural and financial limitations to psychological and institutional challenges—and collectively shape the effectiveness and accessibility of professional learning opportunities.

3.1.1. Time and Workload Constraints

Time scarcity remains the most frequently cited barrier to teacher participation in CPD. Teachers must navigate demanding responsibilities, including lesson planning, instruction, grading, administrative duties, and parental engagement. Additional commitments for CPD can intensify workloads, leading to stress, fatigue, and decreased motivation (Zhang et al., 2021). The Teachers in Europe report indicates that time pressure is a major deterrent, affecting both initial involvement and sustained engagement in professional learning initiatives (European Commission/Eurydice, 2021). In practice, this often results in superficial participation, where teachers attend sessions without being able to meaningfully integrate new skills into classroom instruction.

3.1.2. Financial Constraints

The cost of participation—including tuition fees, travel expenses, and materials—represents a significant barrier, especially in contexts where teachers' salaries are limited (OECD, 2023). The absence of funding or subsidy mechanisms exacerbates inequality, creating disparities between teachers who can afford CPD and those who cannot (Huang et al., 2024). Financial limitations also influence engagement quality, as teachers may choose lower-cost programs that do not adequately address their instructional needs.

3.1.3. Relevance and Quality of CPD Content

Teachers are more likely to engage in CPD programs that are perceived as practically relevant and directly applicable to classroom practice. Programs focused predominantly on theory or general pedagogy, without connection to real teaching contexts, hinder the translation of learning into classroom innovation (Nguyen et al., 2022). OECD (2019 a) emphasizes that the lack of reflective practice, feedback, and post-training support reduces effectiveness, leaving professional learning fragmented and underutilized. Programs with explicit practical focus, follow-up support, and mentoring are more likely to foster substantial pedagogical change.

3.1.4. Institutional and Organizational Barriers

School leadership and institutional culture are critical determinants of CPD success. In schools where administrators do not actively support professional development or allocate resources for participation, teacher engagement is limited (Scherer & Rolka, 2024). Across EU member states, variations in accessibility, quality, and continuity of CPD persist despite formal policy provisions (European Commission/Eurydice, 2021). Furthermore, the lack of structured integration of professional learning into daily practice reduces teachers' capacity to implement new instructional methods.

3.1.5. Technological Barriers

The shift toward digital and blended CPD has highlighted inequities in access to technology. Teachers in rural or under-resourced areas frequently lack sufficient equipment, reliable internet, and technical support, limiting their ability to participate effectively (Huang et al., 2024). Digital competence, including proficiency with online tools and platforms, has emerged as a crucial factor influencing the success of professional learning initiatives.

3.1.6. Psychosocial Factors

Teachers' motivation to participate in CPD is influenced by psychosocial factors such as perceived value, self-efficacy, and professional drive. When teachers perceive CPD as unlikely to result in meaningful change, or

experience burnout, participation decreases (Afshar & Ghasemi, 2020). Broader societal recognition also affects engagement; only 26% of teachers surveyed in TALIS 2018 reported feeling social appreciation for their work (OECD, 2020). Supportive professional communities and recognition of effort are associated with higher motivation and sustained engagement.

3.2. Barriers Specific to Foreign Language Teachers

Foreign language (FL) educators encounter all general barriers while facing additional challenges linked to the nature of their subject. Effective language instruction relies heavily on CPD and institutional support; deficiencies in these areas impede the implementation of communicative, task-based, and innovative approaches.

3.2.1. Lack of Specialized Training

Teaching languages requires particular pedagogical expertise, including facilitating oral communication, differentiating instruction in heterogeneous classrooms, and integrating authentic materials (Nguyen et al., 2022). Standard CPD often emphasizes general pedagogical theory without addressing language-specific challenges. This reduces teachers' confidence and capacity to apply innovative strategies, limits student learning opportunities, and fosters a sense of professional isolation in the absence of peer networks or communities of practice.

3.2.2. Misalignment with Institutional Requirements

National curricula and assessment frameworks frequently prioritize grammar and formal written skills over communicative or integrative approaches (Afshar & Ghasemi, 2020). Teachers face a tension between implementing modern, communicative methods and adhering to formal institutional expectations. Frequent changes in exam requirements, without adequate guidance, amplify uncertainty and discourage engagement in professional learning.

3.2.3. Technology-Specific Challenges in Language Teaching

Effective use of digital tools for language learning, such as Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) software, requires specialized infrastructure and training (Huang et al., 2024). Lack of access to appropriate software, hardware, or technical support reduces instructional quality, limits communicative activity in class, and increases teacher workload and fatigue.

3.2.4. Lack of Continuity and Supportive Structures

Fragmented, short-term CPD programs hinder sustainable integration of new teaching methods (Nguyen et al., 2022). Absence of mentoring, coaching, or structured peer collaboration means teachers often do not receive the feedback necessary to apply new skills effectively. This limitation perpetuates traditional teaching patterns, reduces motivation for future participation, and constrains educational innovation.

3.2.5. Motivation and Professional Recognition

CPD not linked to tangible career or financial benefits is often perceived as an additional burden (Scherer & Rolka, 2024). Limited promotion opportunities and low societal recognition of foreign language teachers contribute to professional undervaluation, reducing motivation to participate and adopt innovative practices. This has direct implications for the quality of language instruction and students' preparedness for intercultural and international communication contexts.

4. Method

This section presents the research methodology.

4.1 Research question

Our research questions were: a) “Which factors influence German language teachers’ participation in professional development programs, according to the sample’s views?” and b) “What factors shape teachers’ satisfaction with professional development programs, according to the sample’s views?”

4.2 Research Method -Research Tool

The data collection method was qualitative, because the purpose of the research is to investigate and understand a central theme (Creswell, 2011). The research strategy followed is a case study (Robson, 2010), since it concerns 11 German language teachers during the school year 2024-2025. According to Mason (2003), the data collection technique or better the data production technique was the semi-structured interview, a tool that enables the sequence of questions to be modified (Cohen & Manion, 1994), the choice of emphasis in the most essential aspects of each respondent (Fylan, 2005; Robson, 2010), but requires critical communication skills from the interviewer (Galletta, 2013). Therefore, this tool has been chosen as the most appropriate to highlight the views of the participants.

4.3 Sample

The sample (convenience sampling) consists of 11 German language teachers. Among them, 9 are women and 2 are men. In terms of age group, 4 are between 51 and 60 years old, 4 are between 41 and 50 years old, and 2 are over 60 years old. Regarding teaching experience, it ranges from 10 to 36 years, with most teachers having over 20 years of experience in the field of education. As for their educational background, 6 teachers hold a university degree (Bachelor’s), while 5 also possess a Master’s degree. Undoubtedly, the participants in this survey do not represent the entire population of German language teachers in Greece, and consequently, the research results are not generalizable.

4.4 Data analysis method

For the analysis of the collected data, content analysis was used. This is a research method that employs a set of procedures, methods, and techniques to draw valid conclusions (Weber, 1990, p. 9). It is a research technique that systematically and objectively leads the researcher to verifiable and valid conclusions derived from written texts and the decoding of interviews (Krippendorff, 1989, p. 7-9). Furthermore, the thematic content analysis allows quantification of the results (Trowler, 1996; Vamvoukas, 2002), which was attempted in this research.

5. Results and Discussion

This section presents the results of the research.

5.1. Factors Affecting Participation in Professional Development

The analysis of the data reveals several key factors that influence teachers’ engagement in professional development programs. Responses indicate a multifaceted set of barriers, encompassing issues of time availability, accessibility, program quality, interactivity, and the delivery format of the programs. While some participants reported encountering no significant obstacles, the majority highlighted that professional development participation is often constrained by both structural and personal limitations, reflecting the diverse experiences of educators.

5.1.1. Time Constraints as a Primary Barrier

The most consistently reported factor was the lack of available time. Participants described the demands of their professional and personal lives as leaving minimal room for meaningful engagement in professional development. As one teacher remarked, “My main difficulty is that I do not have the necessary time to consistently attend a

professional development program” (E1), while another noted, *“Limited time, especially in the afternoon when other responsibilities exist, makes participation challenging”* (E2). Several participants emphasized the combined impact of time constraints and program scheduling: *“Difficulties in access, the location of the program, and the time required to participate meaningfully hinder my engagement”* (E3), and *“Programs are long and take place during periods of high workload, making participation practically challenging”* (E6). Another participant highlighted the interaction between motivation and time pressure, stating, *“Apart from the lack of time, I often feel a lack of motivation to invest the limited time I have”* (E9). These reflections indicate that daily professional responsibilities and personal commitments leave little room for sustained participation in professional development.

5.2.2. Practical and Logistical Challenges

In addition to time constraints, teachers identified practical barriers related to the organization and accessibility of programs. One participant observed, *“There is difficulty in access due to the location, as well as the significant time required to attend”* (E3), while another emphasized that *“Programs are lengthy and scheduled during periods of intense workload, making them practically inaccessible”* (E6). Such issues underscore the importance of program design and scheduling that align with teachers’ realistic capacities.

5.2.3. Program Quality and Interactivity

The quality of professional development programs emerged as a crucial factor. Participants noted that insufficiently engaging presentations and limited trainer expertise can hinder active participation. For instance, *“The trainer’s inadequacy and the presentations that were not sufficiently engaging prevented me from participating actively”* (E4), and *“I find it difficult to ask questions or raise doubts, which prevents me from engaging fully”* (E11). Moreover, the mode of program delivery influenced perceptions of engagement. While online programs offered flexibility, participants described them as *“impersonal and limited in terms of interaction with the trainer and colleagues”* (E7), highlighting the need for greater interactivity and collaborative learning opportunities in digital formats.

5.2.4. Variability in Experiences

Interestingly, a subset of participants reported encountering no significant obstacles. As one participant remarked, *“I do not have anything specific to mention, as personally I have not encountered major obstacles”* (E5), while another noted, *“I have not faced any difficulties so far, and my experience has been positive”* (E8). These accounts demonstrate that teachers’ experiences of professional development are heterogeneous and are influenced both by individual circumstances and the structural organization of the programs.

In summary, the findings indicate that participation in professional development is shaped by a complex interplay of factors. The lack of available time emerged as the most significant barrier, compounded by logistical constraints, program quality, and the format of delivery. At the same time, the positive experiences reported by some participants suggest that well-organized programs, attentive to teachers’ needs and contextual realities, can facilitate meaningful engagement. These results underscore the importance of tailoring professional development programs to the practical realities of teachers’ schedules, providing opportunities for interactive and collaborative learning, and ensuring high-quality instruction and support. Such considerations are essential for fostering sustained participation and enhancing the impact of professional development on teaching practice and student outcomes.

5.2. Teacher Persistence and Considerations of Dropping Out from Professional Development Programs

The second part of the results explores teachers’ experiences and attitudes regarding the possibility of discontinuing professional development programs. The responses indicate a spectrum of perspectives, ranging from consistent program completion to contemplation of withdrawal, highlighting factors that influence persistence and attrition in professional learning contexts.

5.2.1. Commitment to Completion

The majority of participants emphasized that they have never abandoned a professional development program. For example, several teachers stated, *"I have never dropped out of any professional development program"* (E1), *"No, it has never happened that I abandoned a professional development program"* (E3), and *"No, I have not had the chance to leave any program"* (E7). Similarly, others remarked, *"Despite the difficulties, I have never left a professional development program"* (E6) and *"No, I have never abandoned any program"* (E11). These statements collectively reflect a strong sense of professional responsibility and dedication to continuous learning, suggesting that most teachers perceive completion as a key component of their professional role.

5.2.2. Contemplation of Withdrawal

Although actual dropouts were uncommon, several participants admitted to having considered leaving a program at certain points. For instance, one teacher noted, *"I have never abandoned a program, although there were moments when I seriously considered it"* (E2), while another explained, *"No, I did not abandon, although there was one occasion when I felt strong dissatisfaction because the presentation was unsatisfactory and there was no connection between theory and practice"* (E8). These reflections indicate that contemplation of withdrawal can arise from perceived misalignment between the program content and classroom realities.

In other cases, participants highlighted low content quality as a motivating factor for considering discontinuation. For example, *"I have thought about abandoning a professional development program because I found it particularly boring and uninteresting"* (E9). Additionally, some participants reported that external pressures, such as competing professional and personal responsibilities, contributed to thoughts of withdrawal: *"I have not abandoned any program to date, but there were many moments when I felt excessively pressured by the demands of certain seminars, combined with morning work and family obligations"* (E10). Collectively, these accounts suggest that even without actual dropout, teachers experience tension when programs fail to engage them meaningfully or when participation imposes significant logistical or emotional burdens.

5.2.3. Actual Dropout Experiences

A limited number of participants reported having abandoned a program. One participant explained, *"There was an occasion when I dropped out because the suggestions presented seemed impractical and completely unrealistic"* (E4). In another case, family responsibilities were the primary constraint: *"I decided to leave because the program was held outside working hours, and I could not meet my family obligations, particularly due to my children"* (E5). These testimonies highlight that dropout is associated with either the perceived irrelevance of program content or the practical impossibility of reconciling professional and familial duties, underscoring the importance of program design that considers both relevance and feasibility.

Overall, the data suggest that most teachers strive to complete professional development programs, even under challenging circumstances. Nonetheless, the contemplation of withdrawal frequently arises when programs are perceived as disengaging, overly theoretical, or practically unhelpful, or when participants face high external pressures. The limited incidence of actual dropout points to the critical role of program organization and targeted content: professional development is more likely to be successfully completed when it is relevant, engaging, and sensitive to teachers' professional and personal constraints.

The findings indicate that administrators and program designers should prioritize content quality, applicability, and scheduling flexibility, alongside mechanisms to support teacher motivation and reduce perceived burden. Such strategies can mitigate the risk of attrition, enhance teacher engagement, and ultimately strengthen the impact of professional development on teaching practice and student learning outcomes.

5. 3. Factors Potentially Leading to Dropout from Professional Development Programs

The third part of the results examines participants' perceptions regarding factors that could potentially lead to the discontinuation of professional development programs. Responses reveal multifaceted concerns, primarily related to the instructor's effectiveness, the relevance and clarity of materials, and the overall organization of the programs. This pattern indicates that teachers' sustained engagement is influenced not only by content topics but also by the quality of the learning experience and the degree of active participation.

5.3.1. The Role of the Instructor

The instructor emerged as a decisive factor in shaping participants' likelihood of completing or abandoning a program. Teachers emphasized that the instructor's communication skills, personality, and pedagogical methodology directly affect engagement and interest. For example, one participant noted, *"The personality, methodology, and competence of the instructor could constitute a decisive factor for dropping out"* (E4), while another remarked, *"If the instructor's teaching style lacks clarity and engagement, I would find it difficult to remain in the program"* (E3). These statements highlight that teachers require not only theoretical guidance but also inspiring, active instruction that facilitates understanding and practical application. Inadequate instruction may generate disengagement, diminishing teachers' sense of professional efficacy and personal growth.

5.3.2. Relevance and Clarity of Materials

Another crucial determinant is the appropriateness and clarity of the learning materials. When materials are vague, impractical, or poorly aligned with classroom realities, teachers' interest diminishes. One participant stated, *"The presence of vague and unclear materials, combined with the absence of a meaningful connection between theory and practice, could lead me to abandon the program"* (E2), while another emphasized, *"If the materials do not address my actual needs as a teacher, I would struggle to stay engaged"* (E3). This underscores that relevant and clearly structured materials are essential not only for cognitive understanding but also for maintaining motivation and a positive psychological stance toward professional development. Materials that are perceived as impractical or disconnected from teaching can evoke frustration and reduce engagement.

5.3.3. Program Organization and Structure

Participants also highlighted the influence of program design and organization on potential dropout. One participant commented, *"Poor program organization, combined with overly theoretical content without practical application and information overload, could lead me to abandon the program"* (E9). Similarly, another noted, *"Boring topics, an ineffective instructor, the lack of meaningful theory-practice connection, and inadequate program organization would all be reasons for dropout"* (E10). These insights suggest that coherent structuring and thoughtful pacing are critical for preventing psychological strain, while excessive theoretical density or insufficient practical opportunities can foster anxiety and a sense of futility.

5.3.4. Connection Between Theory and Practice

The integration of theoretical knowledge with practical classroom application was repeatedly emphasized. Participants reported that when theoretical content could not be applied directly, their sense of purpose and professional efficacy decreased. One participant explained, *"The presentation failed to link theory with practice in a way that meaningfully engaged me in the program"* (E8). This observation reinforces the idea that professional development must ensure practical applicability to sustain engagement and support ongoing professional competence.

5.3.5. Teacher Resilience and Satisfaction

Interestingly, a number of participants reported that no additional factors would lead them to abandon a program, reflecting resilience, satisfaction, and professional commitment. Statements included: *"I do not believe there is any other factor that would lead me to drop out of a professional development program"* (E5), *"I cannot think of any other factor that would make me leave a program"* (E6), and *"I do not identify any other factors that would*

cause me to discontinue participation” (E7, E11). These accounts suggest that well-designed programs with relevant materials, competent instructors, and practical application can create a supportive environment, fostering sustained participation.

Overall, the responses highlight that the likelihood of dropout is influenced by a complex interplay of factors involving the instructor, materials, program organization, and the integration of theory and practice. Achieving a balanced combination of these elements not only enhances interest and engagement but also strengthens teachers’ sense of professional efficacy, reducing anxiety and frustration. Therefore, careful program design that accounts for teachers’ real needs and incorporates practical applications is crucial for preventing potential dropout and promoting meaningful professional development.

5. 4. Teacher Satisfaction with Professional Development Programs

The evaluation of professional development programs by participants indicates that teacher satisfaction is shaped by a complex interplay of factors, including the quality of the instructor, the relevance and clarity of the materials, the practical applicability of the suggestions, and the overall structure of the program. Teachers appear to assess not only the content but also the program’s capacity to meaningfully support their daily teaching practice, which is closely linked to professional self-confidence and a sense of personal efficacy.

5.4.1. Instructor Quality and Communication

The instructor’s competence and communicative effectiveness emerged as a critical determinant of satisfaction. When the instructor possesses expertise, experience, and the ability to convey knowledge clearly, programs are perceived as more engaging and constructive. For instance, one participant remarked, *“On a few occasions, satisfaction was reduced due to insufficient knowledge of the instructor and limited interest of the material”* (E2). This observation underscores that a capable and inspiring instructor enhances perceived professional growth, reduces the risk of frustration, and fosters stronger engagement and commitment to the program.

5.4.2. Material Relevance and Appropriateness

The clarity and practical applicability of program materials also constitute a central axis of satisfaction. Teachers reported higher satisfaction when materials were clear, practical, and aligned with classroom realities, allowing for easier integration of new knowledge into teaching practice. As one participant stated, *“Overall, the programs were quite satisfactory and informative, providing significant support in the teaching process”* (E6). Conversely, materials perceived as overly theoretical or impractical led to diminished satisfaction: *“I was not satisfied because they were too theoretical, and many approaches were impossible to apply”* (E4), and *“Most workshops were interesting and useful, but some were excessively theoretical, and their suggestions were difficult to implement in a public school classroom”* (E10). These accounts highlight the importance of practical relevance and applicability for sustaining engagement and promoting active participation.

5.4.3. Balance of Theory and Practice

Another key factor is the integration of theory and practice. Programs that fail to connect theoretical content with practical classroom application are perceived as less satisfying. One participant observed, *“My satisfaction was partial, as some programs did not sufficiently link theory to practical classroom applications, while in others, the presentation was fragmented and limited”* (E8). This emphasizes that effective professional development requires not only high-quality content but also methods that transform theory into practical skills, enhancing professional competence and the perceived usefulness of the program.

5.4.4. Program Structure and Time Allocation

The program’s structure and the time available for implementation also influenced participant experiences. One teacher noted, *“Most of the time the programs were satisfactory, except in cases where the techniques were*

impractical due to limited class time” (E5). This statement illustrates that even well-designed programs may lose effectiveness if the temporal and practical constraints of the school context are not considered.

5.4.5. Neutral or Moderate Satisfaction

Some participants reported neutral or moderate satisfaction, without identifying major problems or remarkable moments. Statements included: *“Quite satisfactory”* (E3, E7) and *“I did not encounter anything that particularly impressed me”* (E11). These responses suggest that, even in the absence of highly positive experiences, participation is still considered valuable as long as there are no major deficiencies in materials, presentation, or practical applicability. This underscores the importance of consistency and reliability in professional development programs.

Overall, participants’ responses indicate that teacher satisfaction is contingent upon instructor quality, material relevance and clarity, the balance of theory and practice, practical applicability, and program structure. Programs that integrate clarity, practical relevance, active engagement, and adaptability to classroom needs enhance professional satisfaction and commitment while reducing the likelihood of dissatisfaction or potential dropout. The findings suggest that the true value of professional development lies not only in content delivery but also in the ability of programs to foster effective knowledge transfer, practical competence, and active engagement among teachers.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

The study focused on two primary research questions. The first addressed the factors that influence teachers’ participation in professional development programs, exploring the conditions, barriers, and difficulties that may facilitate or constrain active engagement. The discussion reveals that time constraints emerge as the most prominent barrier, reflecting the heavy workloads teachers face, including lesson planning, grading, administrative duties, and family obligations. This finding aligns with existing research emphasizing the critical role of time scarcity in limiting both initial involvement and sustained engagement in CPD (European Commission/Eurydice, 2021; Zhang et al., 2021). Financial constraints and accessibility issues were also evident, reinforcing prior studies indicating that insufficient funding or travel challenges disproportionately affect participation and quality of engagement (OECD, 2023; Huang et al., 2024). Furthermore, the perceived relevance, quality, and interactivity of programs, as well as the impersonal nature of online learning, were highlighted as significant factors. Teachers’ experiences varied, demonstrating that engagement depends not only on personal circumstances but also on program organization, content clarity, and the pedagogical competence of instructors, consistent with research showing that CPD effectiveness relies on practical applicability, instructor expertise, and supportive structures (Nguyen et al., 2022; Scherer & Rolka, 2024). These findings suggest that professional development initiatives should address both structural and psychosocial barriers, ensuring accessibility, relevance, and active engagement to maximize teacher participation.

The second research question focused on teachers’ experiences with professional development, including their perceptions of quality, potential reasons for dropout, and overall satisfaction, aiming to understand the factors associated with professional growth and fulfillment. Analysis indicates that most teachers tend to complete programs despite challenges, highlighting professional responsibility and commitment. However, thoughts of withdrawal were linked to poor content quality, lack of connection between theory and practice, and excessive workload, echoing previous studies on the importance of program relevance and instructor competency in sustaining participation (Nguyen et al., 2022; Afshar & Ghasemi, 2020). The quality and transmissibility of the instructor, the clarity and applicability of materials, the organization of the program, and the practical connection between theory and classroom practice were all decisive in shaping engagement, satisfaction, and professional self-efficacy. High-quality, well-structured programs that provide active, interactive learning and practical applicability foster higher motivation and reduce dropout risk, confirming findings on the interplay of structural, content-related, and psychosocial factors in CPD participation (European Commission/Eurydice, 2021; OECD, 2023).

The findings underscore the need for comprehensive policy measures that enhance teacher participation, reduce the risk of dropout, and increase overall satisfaction with professional development programs. Policies should ensure that dedicated time for CPD is formally integrated into the school timetable, relieving teachers from the pressure of balancing professional obligations with additional learning activities. Financial support mechanisms, such as subsidies or funding for tuition and materials, are also essential to guarantee equitable access to high-quality programs. The design of CPD should prioritize practical applicability, relevance to classroom practice, and clarity of content, particularly addressing subject-specific challenges like foreign language instruction. Equally important is the competence and pedagogical skill of program instructors, supported by mentoring and coaching structures that help teachers implement new strategies effectively. Adequate digital infrastructure and systematic ICT training are necessary to facilitate participation, especially in remote or under-resourced contexts. Linking CPD participation to professional recognition, career progression, or certification can further motivate engagement. Finally, fostering collaborative professional ecosystems, including peer networks, communities of practice, and active school leadership, supports sustained learning, mutual support, and a culture of continuous professional growth. When implemented cohesively, such measures can strengthen teacher engagement, professional satisfaction, and instructional effectiveness, thereby improving educational outcomes and promoting the adoption of innovative pedagogical practices.

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