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British Council  
Partner Schools

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# Impact of online professional development on teacher practice in a secondary school

Lydia Quansah, Ghana

# Impact of online professional development on teacher practice in a secondary school

### School context

Dayspring International Academy, an expanding international school in Accra, Ghana, was established in 2011. Our curriculum is designed to offer a broad spectrum of options in languages, humanities, the sciences, mathematics, and creative and vocational courses, leading to the attainment of IGCSE and AS/A level certification. Our learners are encouraged to be independent and critical thinkers with a love for learning.

### About the author

With over 15 years of teaching experience, Lydia Quansah, Head of Academics and Acting Head of the Secondary Department of an international school, has taught English language and literature across various levels. As a teacher and school leader, she appreciates targeted teacher training that promotes learner engagement and relevant learning experiences.



### Action research rationale

Effective Continuous Professional Development (CPD) is essential for improving school performance and driving innovation in education. In offering professional development opportunities, institutions seek to sharpen the knowledge and skills of teachers to deliver high-quality teaching that impacts positively on learner outcomes. However, there was a perception of dissatisfaction with CPD programmes within the context of this research. The common perception was that training programmes had little impact on teaching practices. There was little evidence of training application, and some teachers reported feeling inadequately trained despite participating in professional development initiatives.

The study investigated what teachers consider to be effective professional development and how this perception of effectiveness impacts training application and improvement in student learning. Using the British Council Online Support for Schools (OSS) platform, the contributions of online CPD activities to improving teachers' professional practices were examined.

### Key learnings

**This research examined the contribution of online CPD activities to improving teachers' professional practices.**

- **The British Council OSS platform proved a useful resource with a positive impact on teaching practices and student outcomes.**
- **A collective training model was more successful than the self-paced model.**
- **Students demonstrated increased engagement, while teachers incorporated more varied hands-on activities, as opposed to the traditional lecture method. This was particularly noteworthy.**
- **By addressing classroom behaviour, teachers could incorporate active learning strategies in the classroom to establish rapport and foster classroom motivation.**



Figure 1: Teachers engaging with the OSS module



Findings from the study can be used to support the development of effective professional training and enhance school professional development culture towards more targeted training to improve student learning. Online CPD's contribution to enhancing professional practice can be evaluated and used to create a feasible online professional development model for teachers. Evidence of the impact on student learning and outcomes can provide recommendations for developing impactful teacher training within the Partner Schools community, especially for schools yet to fully engage with the OSS platform.

### Exploratory research questions

1. What are teachers' perceptions of the current continuous professional development (CPD) opportunities?
2. How do teachers transmit the knowledge and skills acquired through professional development?
3. What professional development opportunities will teachers be interested in?

### Data collection procedure

A mixed-method approach of questionnaires, lesson observations, and focus group discussions was employed in conducting the research. A total of nine teachers participated in the study, three teachers from the respective subject areas: science and mathematics; languages; and humanities.

The questionnaire captured teachers' perspectives on online CPD while classroom observations centred on teachers' application of training within the classroom with an emphasis on lesson planning, understanding learners, subject knowledge, and promotion of 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills. To conclude the research methodology, a focus group discussion was held to explore teachers' perspectives on effective CPD and the factors influencing their willingness to engage in online professional development initiatives.

The research was conducted within an ethical framework. Informed written consent was obtained from all participating teachers and the students within the observed classrooms, with the aims and methods of the research clearly outlined to all participants and parents/guardians. Participants' rights were also verbally explained and a commitment to treat all participants with courtesy and respect was communicated. Confidentiality and anonymity with regard to participant data have been maintained.

**The findings emphasise a need for thoughtful consideration of logistics and interactive elements in online CPD to maximise its benefits and address teachers' varied preferences and concerns, especially regarding teacher well-being and subject-specific training.**

9. Have you observed a positive impact on your students' learning outcomes as a result of your participation in professional development?

■ No impact	0
■ Minor impact	1
■ Moderate impact	6
■ Significant impact	1
■ I'm not sure	1



Figure 2: Feedback on previous training programmes

## Key findings from exploration

The results suggest a somewhat positive perception of CPD programmes among the nine surveyed teachers.

- 78% found the current CPD opportunities to be moderately effective, while 22% found them effective.
- 67% perceived an improvement in teaching practice, while 33% expressed a neutral stance.
- Although 33.3% felt little to no improvement in subject knowledge, all respondents reported improvement in other key areas.
- 66% of the respondents viewed the impact of CPD as moderate to significant while a few were uncertain or noted minor impact.

There was a disparity in the transmission of knowledge and skills, with 67% of teachers often transmitting acquired expertise, while 33% do so only occasionally. After initial training, teachers eagerly embraced technology and 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills but faced challenges translating them into practice, emphasising the need for follow-up training. Teachers identified a lack of practicality in initial training, which is crucial for effective implementation. Classroom observations revealed limited use of learning materials, primarily audio and video resources.

Teachers also have a multifaceted perspective on online professional development. Online PD is generally well-received with 78% of teachers endorsing its effectiveness. However, some concerns about scheduling, reminders, network stability, and practicality were expressed. Teachers value flexibility (67%) and are motivated by well-planned sessions, video resources, and follow-up training. The findings emphasise a need for thoughtful consideration of logistics and interactive elements in online CPD to maximise its benefits and address teachers' varied preferences and concerns, especially regarding teacher well-being and subject-specific training.

Additionally, certification emerged as a desired feature, indicating the importance of formal recognition in motivating participation.

## Action plan

Based on the findings from the exploration, the following three actions were proposed for implementation:

### 1. A shift towards more teacher-focused CPD programmes

CPD programmes should take into consideration the needs and preferences of teachers, rather than solely focusing on school or student needs. Accordingly, targeted programmes have been formulated by considering the needs of the school, students and teachers in a triangulated approach.

### 2. Implementation of online professional development

In January 2024, we piloted online professional development with the British Council OSS Webinar on Classroom Behaviour and Interaction to target a specific area of improvement identified by teachers. With online CPD, we aimed to accommodate teachers' preferences for flexibility, interactivity, and training certification.

### 3. Enhanced practical training for teachers

After training, follow-up sessions were conducted using the British Council OSS module – Understanding and Anticipating Classroom Management Problems. Based on these sessions, teachers developed an observation form as an assessment metric to measure their progress.

Immediate classroom application opportunities were provided to integrate acquired skills into teaching. Peer assessment was used to observe and evaluate the teachers' progress in training transmission, and feedback was provided using the observation form created by the teachers.

Figure 3: Feedback regarding anticipated challenges of online PD

9 responses submitted

What concerns or challenges do you anticipate when engaging in online professional development, and how could these concerns be addressed?

"The challenge is the effectiveness of the network. Using a WiFi in a place where the network is strong."

"I anticipate that some participants might experience network issues so I think the sessions should be recorded and distributed to interested participants via mail. Also to encourage participation, a chatroom could be created for participants to share ideas, ask questions and make connections. To ensure participants actually understand what is shared and discussed, some kind of peer-reviewed test can be conducted and the results uploaded into a database for facilitators to keep track of the progress and effectiveness of the course."

"The challenge of time clashes with my teaching classes with the online professional development meetings. "

"Internet connectivity could be a problem Cost of data Security breaches "

"Staying on schedule is a major concern. Although reminders can/are sent to emails, work demands can easily overshadow the schedule. Addressing this, special permission slips can be addressed to the Management to help reduce the workload. "

"Time factor My suggested solution is to have intentionally recorded files that could be uploaded for individual teachers who may not get the time for a live session to download and go through later."

"Network issues mostly are bothersome. However, a good data connection will greatly help."

"Network challenges and software disfunction sometimes. "

"None"

## Action plan implementation

Based on the feedback gathered from the exploration phase regarding the anticipated challenges of online CPD, it was observed that most teachers identified network challenges as the primary issue in accessing the online platform, while a minority indicated scheduling conflicts (see Figure 3). In response to this feedback, two models for utilising the British Council online platform were piloted.

In the first model, three of the nine participants were granted access to the platform for three months, enabling them to utilise the platform individually at their convenience in a self-paced manner.

In the second collective model, all nine teachers were scheduled to participate in the British Council OSS webinar together in a conference room, following a prearranged structured programme. During the webinar, they engaged with the facilitator and online colleagues by posting questions and comments on the platform. Additionally, they interacted among themselves by discussing the topics presented and engaging in activities in groups.

Six weeks after the collective webinar, the teachers participated in a follow-up training session using the British Council OSS Module on Understanding and Anticipating Classroom Management Problems – Building Rapport. A designated teacher led the discussions, and the teachers collaborated on tasks and activities in groups. The module proposed four techniques for building rapport between teachers and students: planning lessons; building trusting relationships with learners; managing classroom behaviour; and responding to student behaviour.

Based on these techniques, four groups were formed, and each group designed a section of the observation criteria for classroom observation. Subsequently, a representative from each group was assigned to observe a volunteer from each of the other groups in four different classroom observation sessions, utilising the observation criteria (see Figure 4) created by the teachers.

## Data collection procedure

During this phase of the research, three data collection tools were utilised to gather insights and perspectives from various stakeholders.

A reflective journal was used to capture the researcher's reflections on the challenges in implementing online PD and how to support teachers in transmitting the knowledge and skills acquired through professional development. A questionnaire was used to gather feedback from teachers after participating in the British Council OSS module. Finally, classroom observations were conducted to observe the transmission of training skills by teachers in real classroom settings. The criteria for observation were developed in consensus with teachers post-training implementation, focusing on skills acquired during the training.

**The positive reception of online CPD activities highlights the transformative potential of the British Council OSS platform in addressing classroom challenges and enhancing teaching practices.**

Figure 4: Observation criteria designed by teachers after engaging with the British Council OSS module

**DAYSRING INTERNATIONAL ACADEMY**  
**LESSON OBSERVATION FORM**

Name of Teacher: \_\_\_\_\_ Class: \_\_\_\_\_ Subject: \_\_\_\_\_ Topic: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Duration of lesson: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_ Name of Observer: \_\_\_\_\_

**Legend: 1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly agree**

<b>PLANNING THE LESSON</b>		1	2	3	4	5
1.	The teacher used different methods and tailored the lesson to students' interests. (videos, audio, pictures, tiered-questions, etc.)					
2.	Slides were presented in a fun way using comics, cartoons and other humorous features.					
3.	Facilitator set time aside to address students directly, offering personal feedback, encouragement or support.					
4.	The classroom atmosphere was relaxed and exciting.					
<b>BUILDING TRUSTING RELATIONSHIPS WITH LEARNERS</b>						
5.	Teacher showed favouritism during lessons.					
6.	Teacher used words of affirmation during the lesson.					
7.	Teacher often gave learners the opportunity to correct their submissions.					
8.	Teacher's instructions to learners were clear and simple.					
9.	The teacher provided explanations in different ways to help understand better.					
<b>TEACHER'S CLASSROOM BEHAVIOUR</b>						
10.	Teacher used "Please" more often when talking to students during the lesson.					
11.	The teacher made his/her students laugh/smile during the lesson.					
12.	The teacher raised his/her voice at any student out of anger.					
13.	The teacher encouraged <b>all</b> students to partake in all activities during the session.					
<b>DEALING WITH STUDENT BEHAVIOUR</b>						
14.	The teacher is observant of student behaviour in class.					
15.	The teacher was able to discipline students for their misbehaviour (misbehaviour is any action taken by student that hinder the smooth running of the class).					
16.	The teacher used negative punishment approach in dealing with bad behaviours.					
17.	The teacher makes it clear to the class that it is the behaviour that is bad and not the student.					
18.	The teacher was able to notice and praise good behaviour during the lesson.					
19.	The teacher stuck to rules and regulations laid down in the class.					
20.	The teacher treated all learners equally.					

**Commendable features**

.....  
 .....  
 .....

**Suggestions for improvement**

.....  
 .....  
 .....

3. Do you believe this professional development programme has positively impacted teaching practices and student outcomes?

■ Yes	9
■ No	0

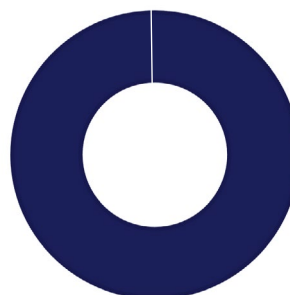


Figure 5: Feedback after Action Plan implementation

## Key findings

The British Council OSS platform proved resourceful in addressing training needs. As depicted in Figure 5, 100% of participants reported that the professional development programme had a positive impact on teaching practices and student outcomes. Participants appreciated the expertly explained course content and gained expertise in handling classroom challenges. The OSS module reinforced the concepts from the webinar and introduced practical strategies for addressing classroom misbehaviour through case study videos from around the world, which were highly valued by the teachers. However, despite all teachers attending the training using the collective model, only one teacher received a certificate, as he used his account to gain access to the platform. The rest of the teachers expressed interest in obtaining training certification.

The findings also indicated that of the three teachers on the self-paced model, two were unable to engage with the online platform during the three-month period citing conflicting schedules. One teacher reported being unable to participate in the AI in the classroom webinar after registration due to network challenges. Furthermore, even though one teacher did obtain certification from a webinar, he admitted to not gaining substantial knowledge due to concurrent school-related commitments. Though the three-month period is too brief to draw any generalised conclusions, this was a noteworthy revelation.

The classroom observation revealed that students demonstrated increased engagement, while teachers were observed to be incorporating more varied hands-on activities in their teaching approach, as opposed to the traditional lecture method. This was particularly noteworthy as it had been a significant challenge prior to the research. Surprisingly, by addressing classroom behaviour and management, teachers were able to incorporate active learning strategies in the classroom. The majority of teachers recognised that “Using students’ interests to establish rapport and foster classroom motivation is highly effective. It converts previously disengaged and unresponsive students into active participants in class discussions.”

## Conclusions

This study emphasises the critical importance of effective CPD in driving educational innovation and improving school performance. By aligning CPD programmes with teachers’ preferences and needs, fostering a culture of targeted training, and enhancing online PD accessibility and effectiveness, a more dynamic and impactful professional development ecosystem can be cultivated.

The positive reception of online CPD activities highlights the transformative potential of the British Council Online Support for Schools platform in addressing classroom challenges and enhancing teaching practices. Moreover, the observed impact on classroom practices was significant, with increased student engagement and the adoption of hands-on activities by teachers.

**‘For me, the key takeaway on managing classroom behaviour from the webinar is to remain positive. That’s it. Student behaviour can be so intolerable sometimes that you wonder what you can do, but remaining positive immediately changes the perspective.’**

**A teacher commenting after the webinar**

## 'It has empowered teachers with innovative teaching practices and refined classroom management skills.'

### A teacher commenting on how the British Council OSS module had positively impacted teaching practices and student outcomes

These insights present opportunities for enhancing teacher training and professional practices by:

- incorporating teacher preferences and needs in training programmes
- providing subject-specific training for tutors
- assessing the needs of teachers in individual school contexts to develop one of two pathways for engaging with the OSS platform:
  1. a self-paced individual model
  2. a structured hybrid collective model
- providing structured follow-up training sessions
- providing opportunities for hands-on, real-life practice sessions
- involving teachers in training assessment and evaluation based on skills acquired during training.

However, strong teacher interest in obtaining certification highlights a need to align with the British Council in future implementations of the structured collective approach to engaging with the OSS platform. Also, based on the insights, future online training should include subject-specific training to further fulfil teachers' needs.

While this study provides valuable insights into the benefits and challenges of online professional development, further research is warranted to explore long-term outcomes and scalability. Addressing connectivity and scheduling barriers, refining certification processes, providing subject-specific training for tutors, and continuing to support teachers in implementing innovative teaching strategies will be crucial in maximising the potential of the British Council OSS platforms for teacher development and student learning.

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