RESEARCH ARTICLE

OMANI TESOL TEACHERS' BELIEFS ABOUT CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT.

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Manuscript Info

Abstract

This article reports the findings of a study that explored Omani TESOL teachers' beliefs about continuing professional development (CPD). Data were collected using questionnaires, semi-structured and focus group interviews with EFL teachers in Oman. The findings revealed that a key source influencing teachers' CPD participation is their beliefs, and that participants' hold a wide range of beliefs about CPD. Participants' responses seem to be affected mainly by their experience of participating in CPD events and/or the beliefs they hold about teaching and learning (Vries et al., 2013). The article explores the implications of the findings for teacher education and the development of TESOL teachers in Oman.

Introduction:-

Educational reform movements in Oman and around the world are setting ambitious goals for students' learning. Many factors can contribute to achieving these goals. In fact, the changes in classroom practices demanded by the reform visions ultimately rely on teachers, their learning, and transforming their knowledge into practice (Vangrieken et al., 2017; Wermke, 2012; Avalos, 2011; Borko, 2004). This realization has led educational policy makers and scholars to demand continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities for teachers to help them enhance their knowledge and develop new instructional practices (Borko, 2004). Such CPD of teachers has arguably been perceived as a significant way to improving schools, and enhancing teaching and learning. For example, teachers' CPD has consistently been shown by research literature to be a vital component of teachers' growth, well-being and success and accordingly of successful school development (Vangrieken et al., 2017; Hargreaves, 2000; Day, 1999; Hargreaves, 1994). This is because, it has confirmed that there is greater potential for classroom and school improvement if teachers are given the opportunity for reflecting, accessing new ideas, experimenting and sharing experiences within school cultures and if school leaders encourage suitable levels of challenge and support (Muijs & Reynolds, 2000).

Recent efforts which focus on trying to understand the possible impact of teachers' CPD on developing schools, increasing teachers' quality and improving the quality of students' learning have led policymakers and researchers to focus on understanding the effectiveness of such opportunities. As the OECD TALIS (2009) study revealed that in most countries teachers' CPD is generally not meeting teachers' needs. Due to such concerns, studies in many international contexts focussing on diverse subject areas have attempted to explore the effectiveness of teacher CPD programmes, why teacher CPD has failed to live up to its development potential and ways of improving CPD effectiveness in the future (e.g. Antoniou & Kyriakides, 2013; Kelly & MacDiarmid, 2002; Lamb, 1995). In the Sultanate of Oman, the setting for this study, despite the huge amount of money spent each year on the in-service education and training of teachers (INSET) and other forms of CPD for teachers, the situation is no better than the

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international context mentioned earlier. This has been reflected in a number of local research studies conducted in Oman questioning the real impact of some offered INSET courses on the classroom practices of teachers (for example, Al-Balushi, 2009; Al-Ghatrifi, 2006). Besides, there appears to be a mismatch between teachers' beliefs and practices and the CPD system in Oman (AL-Lamki, 2009).

CPD and Teachers' beliefs
Teachers' CPD is generally described as a learning process which embraces any activity that contributes to enhancing the professional career growth of teachers (Rogan & Grayson, 2003). Moreover, the teacher as a professional needs to be involved in his/her CPD across the various stages of his/her professional life to fulfil different goals and needs in his/her career (Day & Gu, 2010; Day, et al., 2007; Harrison, 2003). Putnam and Borko (2000) argue that learning in individuals, including teachers, is a constructive and iterative process in which people interpret events on the basis of their existing beliefs, dispositions and knowledge. Hence, 'what' and 'how' teachers' learn is shaped and filtered through the lenses of their existing beliefs, knowledge and practice. Teachers' beliefs and perceptions play a major role in influencing their actions/practices (Borg, 2015; 2003). The basic argument behind the significance of teachers' beliefs is that they play a vital role in determining teachers' perspectives and judgments about different situations in ways which might have an impact on their practice (AL-Lamki, 2009). The vast amount of research studies on teachers' beliefs have shown various definitions for the term belief (Borg, 2011; Borg, 2001; Pajares, 1992). According to Mansour (2009), belief is one of the most difficult terms to define. In his view, 'beliefs can neither be clearly defined, nor do they have a single correct clarification' (p.35) because teachers' beliefs tend to be more experience-based than theory-based. Thus, in the literature various definitions of beliefs have been found. Such variation in trying to define and conceptualize beliefs have made them difficult to study. As Pajares (1992:307) clearly states that 'the difficulty in studying teachers' beliefs has been caused by definitional problems, poor conceptualizations, and differing understandings of beliefs and belief structures'. Borg (2001) further warns that beliefs could be problematic to study because they colour peoples' memories with their evaluation and judgment, and can frame their understanding of events. She adds that when reading articles on beliefs caution needs to be exercised.

One of the particular concerns for researchers, and a source of much debate was the attempt to distinguish between beliefs and knowledge (Canagarajah, 2016). Some writers consider knowledge to be more objective and beliefs to be more subjective (e.g. Woods, 1996), while others such as Fenstermacher (1994) associate knowledge with facts and beliefs with personal values by stating that epistemologically knowledge is different from beliefs because it is related to factual propositions, while beliefs are related to personal values which might not have any epistemic merits. However, lots of researchers perceive them as synonymous, inseparable and/or interchangeable (Calderhead 1996; Kagan 1992; Pajares 1992; Clandinin & Connelley, 1987). For example, Kagan (1992:65) refers to beliefs as a "particularly provocative form of personal knowledge" and claims that most of a teacher's professional knowledge can be regarded more accurately as belief. Clandinin and Connelley (1987) also argue that any effort in distinguishing between them faces the difficulty of determining where beliefs begin and knowledge ends. The argument here is that aiming to separate knowledge and belief is not a fruitful exercise given that in the teachers' minds these constructs are not perceived or held distinctively (Borg, 2015; 2006).

In spite of trying to distinguish between beliefs and knowledge, some writers have tried to define the term belief by citing some of its common features. In this respect, Borg (2011:371) drawing on the work of Pajares (1992) and other researchers suggest that beliefs are 'propositions individuals consider to be true and which are often tacit, have a strong evaluative and affective component, provide a basis for action, and are resistant to change'. Borg (2001:186) also defines a belief as 'a proposition which may be consciously or unconsciously held, is evaluative in that it is accepted as true by the individual, and is therefore imbued with emotive commitment; further, it serves as a guide to thought and behaviour'. Both definitions by Simon Borg (2011) and Michaela Borg (2001) share some similar features about a belief related to being a mental state, is accepted to be true by its holder and is connected to people's behaviours. For the purpose of this study, these features were considered to form the basis of conceptualizing the term beliefs. In general, beliefs are significant as they provide 'the best indicators of the decisions individuals make throughout their lives' (Pajares, 1992:307), and they strongly affect people's learning and working practices (Schommer, 1998). Teachers' prior beliefs affect how they perceive and act on various messages about changing their teaching. Teachers will only accept new information to the degree that it is consistent with their pre-existing beliefs (Pajares 1992) Thus, teachers' prior beliefs play a vital role in influencing their learning and hence their benefit from CPD. Evidence from research, however, questioned the impact of teacher education and teacher development on language teachers' beliefs (Lamb, 1995). For example, Phipps (2007)

investigated the impact of four months of an 18-month course on the beliefs about grammar teaching of a teacher of English in Turkey using qualitative measures. While he acknowledged an overall positive impact of the course, he concluded that, during the period of the study, 'there were few tangible changes to existing beliefs. Instead, many existing beliefs were 'confirmed, deepened and strengthened' (p. 13). My own experience of researching the impacts of an INSET course on English teachers' beliefs and their classroom practices in Oman (AL-Balushi, 2009) support Phipps' (2007) findings. This is because I have noted little changes in teachers' beliefs and no observable changes in their classroom practices when the course was over.

Why this study?
It has been widely recognized that teacher education and teacher development are more likely to impact on what teachers do if it also impacts on their beliefs (Phipps & Borg, 2007). However, understanding of the impacts of language teacher education and development on practising teachers' beliefs remains incipient and the issue merits much additional empirical attention (Borg, 2011). In response to this gap, I cannot assume that the in-service courses and other CPD opportunities being offered by the Omani MOE to TESOL teachers are having any impact on teachers' beliefs; therefore, this study investigates this issues. In fact, a recent body of research proposes that there is a relationship between teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning, and their participation in and benefit from CPD (Vries et al., 2013; Maskit, 2011). Therefore, I have investigated such a relationship to have a better understanding of the Omani educational and CPD system.

Research questions
In the light of the above discussion about teacher learning and their CPD as well as the importance of teachers' prior beliefs in influencing their learning, professional growth and their benefit from CPD, the current study tried to answer the following research questions:
1. What are the beliefs of in-service TESOL teachers in Oman about continuing their professional development?
2. Do their beliefs have any influence on their participation in and benefit from the CPD events they participate in?

Methodology:-
Design and Participants
This study followed mixed methods in collecting data. It started with a questionnaire phase that investigated teachers' beliefs about continuing their professional development. To dig deeply in their responses from the questionnaire, some participants were then interviewed via individual semi-structured interviews and a focus group interview with 3 Senior English teachers. For the questionnaire phase, a stratified sample of 379 participants was selected. The questionnaire was administered online and sent as a link to English teachers and Senior English teachers in schools in Oman. A total of 331 questionnaire responses were received from participants representing an 84% response rate (27.3% of males and 70.5% of females). Questionnaires were received and coded using numbers in order to protect respondents' anonymity as an ethical safeguard. As part of the questionnaire, participants were asked to provide their name and telephone number if they were willing to take part in the follow-up semi-structured and focus group interviews.

Instrument
The design of the questionnaire followed mostly a mixed format of five-item-Likert-rating scale, multiple choices and open-ended questions. The questionnaire starts with an introductory section including information for participants about the study and instructions for completing the questionnaire. The questionnaire sought to collect:
1. Participants' background data including (gender, job title (Teacher/SET), age category, teaching experience, educational phase teaching in, and qualifications) in part A of the questionnaire. And
2. Attitudinal data asking respondents about importance of some activities for teachers' CPD (covering issues such as participating in conferences, reading, training, coaching and mentoring…etc) with an open-ended question asking participants to specify any other activities unlisted in the questionnaire (see part B of the questionnaire in the appendix 1).
3. Multiple choices asking participants about their views towards how some CPD initiatives can help English teachers with some propositions (focusing on issues such as increasing teachers' subject knowledge, developing their self-confidence…etc) (see Appendix 1 the questionnaire).

Reliability and validity of the questionnaire data was assessed using regular psychometric procedures. In quantitative studies, reliability refers to the purity and consistency of the measures, to the repeatability and the probability of obtaining the same results again if the measure were to be duplicated (Punch, 2014; Oppenheim,

2000). In this study, after the online questionnaire administration, the internal consistency reliability of the questionnaire scale and items were checked through the application of Cronbach's alpha tests of inter-reliability correlations. The analysis offered an indication of the degree of correlation between all the items for the attitude scale investigating teachers' beliefs about continuing their professional development. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient value was .70 or greater which indicates that this questionnaire met the internal consistency reliability. Validity in questionnaire research tells us whether the scale measured what it is supposed to measure (Punch, 2014; Pallant, 2007; Oppenheim, 2000). Tests of content validity were undertaken in this study. Content validity "refers to the adequacy with which a measure or scale has sampled from the intended universe or domain of content" (Pallant, 2007:7). Several steps were undertaken to assess the content validity of the self-developed online questionnaire instrument. First, books and articles addressing the issue were consulted to locate previous research and identify major themes.

In view of the above and in order to better determine whether the items measured what they sought to measure, I used an expert panel consisting of two lecturers who teach research methods at university level and four colleagues who have a long experience of working as TESOL teachers, Senior English teachers and teacher educators. They all revised and critiqued the questionnaire and suggested some changes related to the questionnaire layout, reordering the wording in some items, avoiding challenging terms, adding some more items, providing examples for some statements and making some questions shorter. After the feedback I received from this expert panel, the whole questionnaire was revised and changes were done accordingly. For example, one of the four TESOL teachers noticed that the terms CPD and continuous professional development were used interchangeably in the questionnaire and suggested using one of them to show consistency. Hence, to avoid any misinterpretation by the participants, the term continuous professional development was used throughout the questionnaire.

Interviews
After analyzing the questionnaire data, both individual semi- structured interviews and a focus group interview were conducted to collect more qualitative data. The aim behind doing both semi-structured and focus-group interviews was to follow up individual participants' ideas, and dig deeply into them by investigating feelings and motives (Punch, 2014; Bell, 2010; Kvale, 2009). The selection of participants for the interviews was based on their desire to take part in this phase of this study when they were asked in the questionnaire about that. 18 participants agreed to take part in the interviews (15 English teachers and 3 SETs). Therefore, 15 individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers to follow up the online questionnaire data and dig deeply in responses to the questionnaire. This was followed by 1 focus group interview with 3 SETs that sought to obtain follow up information on individual teachers' comments in the semi-structured interviews. An interview schedule was designed with introductory comments followed by a number of questions, follow-up prompts and probes. All questions, prompts and probes sought English teachers' and SETs beliefs regarding teaching as a job.

Data Analysis
The quantitative data gathered from the questionnaires (e.g. the 5-item-likert-scale and multiple choice questions) were analysed numerically using SPSS (the statistical package for the social sciences). Each statement was given a number that matches the statement number in the online questionnaire. For instance, the first statement in the questionnaire was coded as Q1, the second as Q2 and so on. Within each 5-item-likert-scale statement, each of the five choices/answers to the statements was given a score of 1-5 where 1 corresponds to "strongly agree" and 5 to "strongly disagree". In the multiple choice questions, each of the answers to the statement was given a number according to the number of answer statements provided. For instance, if there are 8 answers to a specific question, the first answer was coded as 1 and the last as 8. Analysis of the data was conducted using descriptive statistics (mode, frequency and percentage) which were calculated and presented in tables and bar charts to help develop an understanding of the patterns of the data. Qualitative data analysis involves preparing and organizing the data for analysis, exploring the data then reducing it into themes through a coding process, and finally representing the data in figures, tables or a discussion (Jamieson, 2016; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Creswell, 2007). These were the steps which I followed in analysing the qualitative data from both semi-structured and focus group interviews in this research.

Ethical considerations:
While doing this research, I followed the Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research set by the Council of the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2011). The ethical process of this study started by obtaining access to teachers and SETs and avoiding any act of unethical behaviour. To do so, I got the permission of the

organization to which those teachers belong, which is the MOE in Oman. I wrote a letter in Arabic (the official language of the country) to the department at the Ministry, which is responsible for granting permission for researchers. This letter explained the purpose of the study; the different data collection methods and all participants who were expected to take part in the study. Supporting documents were also attached to the letter such as consent forms and a copy of the questionnaire. Moreover, assurances of confidentiality and anonymity were outlined for participants within the framework of voluntary informed consent which participants read and signed, in the instructions accompanied with the online questionnaire, and in interviews. In terms of the online questionnaires, they did not include any names or any codes, so participants cannot be identified. Moreover, participants' permission was granted to audio record the interviews before these went ahead. I also used pseudonyms when presented the study findings in the report.

Findings
Teachers' beliefs about CPD
The data shows that participants hold a wide range of beliefs about continuing their own PD. Participants' responses seem to be affected mainly by their experience of participating in CPD events and/or the beliefs they hold about teaching and learning (Vries et al., 2013). The generated ideas were divided predominantly into five categories including participants' definitions of CPD, the importance of CPD, CPD feeds teaching, CPD responsibility and teachers' roles in their CPD as indicated in Figure 1.

Figure 1:-(Teachers' beliefs about CPD)
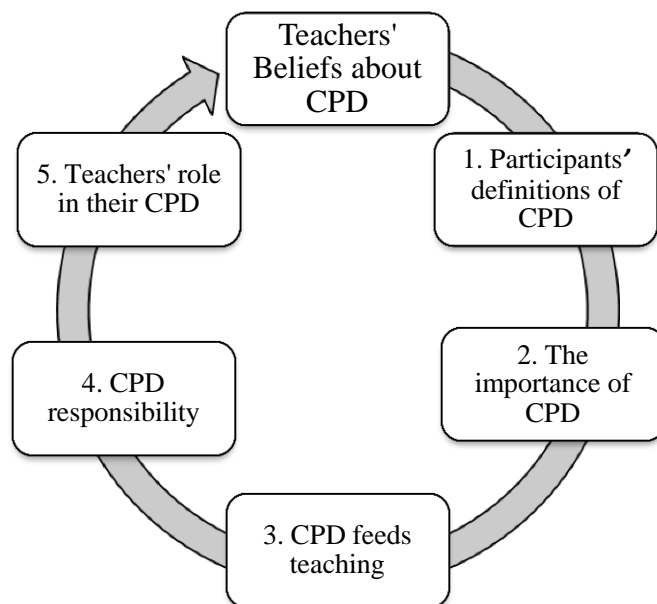
Participants' definitions of CPD
The qualitative data from interviews indicated that respondents conceptualised the term CPD in different ways. While the majority of them looked at the term from a more positive perspective, there were some negative views associated with the term CPD. For example, the majority of the participants (16 in total) associated the term CPD with a way of improving teaching and learning. They explained this view by stating that CPD adds new knowledge, skills and ideas to teachers and thus it helps in improving their teaching abilities. In their view, this can result in improving teaching and learning in schools. This is in line with Vangrieken's et al., (2017); Bolam's (2000) and Hargreaves' (1994) idea that professional development is an essential part of improving the performance of schools. In a similar vein, some respondents think that CPD is a process of evaluating personal performance to find strengths and weaknesses, then to work on improving their weaknesses. From my viewpoint, this idea is related to reflective teaching which means that teachers look at what they do in their classrooms, think about why they do it, and think about if it works; it is a process of self-observation and self-evaluation. Through collecting information about what goes on in their classrooms, and through analysing and evaluating this information, reflective teachers explore and identify their own underlying beliefs and practices. This might possibly then lead to improvements and changes in their teaching. This view contends that reflective teaching is therefore a means of PD because when teachers engage

in such practices, they may develop deeper understandings of their teaching, assess their professional growth, develop informed skills such as decision making, and they become confident and proactive in their teaching (Pollard et al., 2008; Farrell, 2007).   By contrast, other respondents (2 in total) seem to have more negative beliefs about CPD. Responses to the individual semi-structured interviews reflected such negative beliefs; one teacher said that as much as the teacher spends in teaching, he/she gains the knowledge needed, so he/she does not need to participate in any CPD activity/task. In my view, such negative associations with the concept could be the result of a misunderstanding of the term CPD or that those specific participants who hold these beliefs have negative experiences of some CPD activities that they participated in and thus resulted in such negative conceptualisation of the term. The interview data seems to confirm such interpretation; when asked about PD Ameera complained: *"I feel it is not well activated, it is all about the plan you have, for example, you have a workshop to either plan and carryout according to the school plan or attend one by a colleague...."*

Overall, the data revealed that participants seem to vary in their beliefs regarding the term CPD. Yet, the data shows that the majority seem to positively think of the term and share some similar beliefs about the general aims of CPD which relate reflective teaching, being updated, being responsible for self-improvement, and being motivated. In fact, in the wealth of literature on PD I could not find a concise definition for the term PD or CPD. Consequently and in agreement with the literature, PD/CPD seems to be an ambiguous and contested concept (Friedman & Philips, 2004).

The importance of CPD
Both the qualitative and the quantitative data show that most participants see CPD as important for teachers. The majority of the interview respondents justified their views by highlighting the role of CPD in gaining new knowledge, being updated with the latest teaching methods and techniques, and helping teachers to overcome the challenges they face in teaching. CPD was also seen as helping with teachers' English language proficiency. As Shamsa puts in: "…the more professional development programmes the teacher participates in, the better his or her language will be."

Other participants stressed that in-service training and CPD played an important role in compensating for the inadequacies of their pre-service programmes and/or differences between different programmes. Farida, for example, said:

"the Ministry shouldn't rely on teacher preparation programmes because each institution does this in a different way for example we have been trained in the college to teach handwriting for kids using the 4 lines but other institution graduates like Ajman and SQU no, so the Ministry shouldn't rely on that, they need to train teachers."

Research confirms that teachers with strong preparation programmes behind them are much better able to do their job (Ngang & Chan, 2015; Darling-Hammond, 2000). The statistical findings also corroborated the importance of CPD for teachers. Part B of the questionnaire asked teachers to rate some CPD activities according to their level of significance in teachers' professional development from very important to not important at all. Broadly speaking, the low mean scores and standard deviations for all items indicate that there is a level of agreement among participants but to varying degrees. The responses to each item are given in details in Table 1 (see appendix 2).

The data in Table 1 in appendix 2 indicates that the majority of the participants think that all listed activities are either very important or important in helping teachers to develop professionally. Only a few participants were unsure about some activities, especially doing action research and participating in communities of practice which I think may reflect the fact that they were unfamiliar with these as they had not experienced them. Rogers and Horrocks (2010) emphasized that adult learning (including among teachers) is more effective when it encompasses experiential learning in which adults actively participate in their learning process. Participants were also asked to state any other activities unlisted in the survey that are significant to teachers' professional development. They identified many activities; however, out of these activities, a good number of respondents (N=102) chose team work such as staff meetings, team teaching and social networking among teachers as an important source of teachers' CPD. In my view, this means that they value working with others and believe that others' ideas and contributions add a lot to teachers' professional learning and development. This finding supports Appleby and Pilkington's (2014) idea about the role of dialogue in facilitating the exploration of practice and theorising around practical knowledge generating discrete, shared or professional knowledge. To conclude, the data reveals that respondents believe in the importance of CPD and that participating in different activities and events can crucially contribute to teachers' CPD.

The justifications participants provided for their answers focused on various aspects of CPD. However, the majority of them, regardless of their gender, job title, age and teaching experience generally agreed, unsurprisingly, that CPD results in improving teaching and learning. This finding matches some empirical studies that identify a link between teachers' professional development and improvements in teaching skills and students' achievements (e.g. Garet et. al, 2001; Darling-Hammond, 2000). By the same token, many participants think that CPD feeds teaching.

CPD feeds teaching
The qualitative data from interviews revealed that there is a strong relationship between teaching and professional development. Respondents who hold this view think that professional development updates teachers with new ways and techniques in teaching. They think that this leads to improving their teaching skills and developing them as teachers. Alya for example maintained that:
"…they complete each other… Professional development helps me as a teacher to develop my teaching, I might not be aware of some teaching techniques, so I gain these from the professional development programmes that I participate in like courses and workshops. For example, now they are offering us the Jolly Phonics workshop, if teachers are not trained how to teach Jolly Phonics through these workshops then they will find difficulties in teaching them properly…. "

Conversely, the data shows that not all CPD activities/events affect teaching positively or lead to improving teachers. Anisa mentioned that:
"…there are some professional development activities that you join in and they add something to you at the moment of attending them but not later to your teaching or classroom, then you feel this professional development is a waste."

Generally, the data illustrates that there is a relationship between teaching and professional development. It confirms that some CPD activities/events that teachers join in can enrich them by supporting their teaching skills and thus they feed teaching and develop it. This finding can add to the literature on the relationship between teaching and professional development. This is because while professional development is widely considered significant to enhance the quality of teaching; only a few studies have demonstrated clear relationships between the professional learning of teachers and improvements in teaching (Gore et al., 2015).

CPD responsibility
One of the most interesting and yet controversial finding from the interviews (both the semi-structured and focus groups) pertains to where the responsibility for CPD resides. The majority of respondents (14 out of the 18) believe that all parties involved in the ELT system in Oman are responsible for English teachers' professional development. As Ameera accentuated, for example:
"In my view, all are responsible for teachers' professional development including the Ministry of Education, the English supervisors, trainers, SETs and teachers, each one has a role in that. For example, my SET knows my training needs, so she contacts the English supervisor to nominate me for a special PD activity or task, and the supervisor contact the educational governorate or the Ministry to give me a chance…and so on."

This finding supports Appleby and Pilkington's (2014) model for supporting critical professional development. In this model, while the individual is central, the model represents ways that individual learning can be practitioner-led or organisationally-led. It shows elements where organisations or policy-makers play a significant role in shaping learning activities for the teacher. Moreover, shaping is largely instigated by teachers and is led by their interests and priorities (Appleby & Pilkington, 2014; Kabilan & Veratharaju, 2013). In spite of that, the data shows that there was a level of disagreement between participants regarding who has the main responsibility for English teachers CPD. On the one hand, almost all participants stated frankly that the Ministry of Education in Oman has a key role and responsibility towards teachers' PD. For example, Alya remarks that "The Ministry of Education is responsible for that and it should try to provide opportunities for teachers to develop them."

On the other hand, when I asked some follow-up questions about teachers' role in this regard, some participants replied that teachers' PD is the responsibility of the teacher him/herself. The latter part of results supports Gray's (2005) idea that teachers should take responsibility of continuing their own PD. Correspondingly, item no 30 in the questionnaire sought to know the CPD providers for English teachers in Oman. It asked respondents to select from four different items which had encouraged them to take a CPD initiative, and the chance to identify any other CPD providers unlisted in the survey. The results shown in Table 2 (see appendix 3) indicate that 29.9% of the

participants choose the CPD activity themselves and they paid for it. The second most chosen CPD provider 27% is the Ministry of Education in Oman followed by participants' schools 25.4%.

CPD activities done inside schools are usually organised and funded by the Ministry of Education (MOE). This is because the MOE specifies a budget for each school each year to use for the CPD activities inside schools. Thus, the (52.4% = total of 27% MOE + 25.4% school) of CPD activities teachers participate in are all organised and funded by the MOE. In my viewpoint, this reflects the Ministry's work on teachers' CPD through the many CPD activities organised by the MOE for English teachers inside and outside schools.

Teachers' role in their CPD
Connected with the previous category, the semi-structured interview data demonstrated that a good number of participants emphasised the significant roles of teachers in their professional development. They seem to believe that teachers have to become responsible to identify and address their own PD needs. For instance, in the following extract Zilal suggested that teachers can follow a number of strategies and techniques to contribute to their own PD: "Reading, being updated, trying to join private courses not only the ones offered by the ministry of education, even by private institutions…courses not done during the work days, they can arrange their responsibilities management at home and join courses at weekends or other times of the day like evenings outside the work times…."

Moreover, a number of participants proposed that teachers can utilize the new technology to develop professionally. As an example, Halima says *"…at least go to the internet it is open and free and you can find everything available…."* In fact, the findings suggest that a key reason for teachers to take such a role in their professional development is their belief that the chances provided by the Ministry of Education in Oman are not enough, so teachers should work for their own PD. Shamsa confirms that teachers *"…should work towards their professional development because if they wait for the Ministry the chances are very few and they will wait for years and years."* The view that teachers should be responsible for their own PD is one that resonates with the literature on PD being something that teacher should take charge of and continue to work on throughout their career (Vangrieken et al., 2017; Wermke, 2012; Day & Sachs, 2004).

Discussion and recommendations:-
Teachers' work and CPD
Teaching is forever an unfinished profession; thus, professional development is intrinsic to the vocation of teaching. This means that by its very nature, teaching is never complete, never conquered, always being developed and always changing. As Day and Sachs (2004:3-4) put it "Higher expectations for higher quality teaching demands teachers who are well qualified, highly motivated, knowledgeable and skilful, not only at the point of entry into teaching but also throughout their careers". Teachers CPD can lead to improving teachers' qualities and their teaching practices, yet teachers differ greatly in the extent to which they engage in CPD (Vries et al., 2013:338) and, as this study has indicated teachers hold a wide-range of beliefs related to CPD.

Relationship between teachers' CPD beliefs and practices
In extensive research into which factors can affect teachers' participation in CPD, the effects of teachers' beliefs have received limited attention, despite the strong influences they have on people's learning and working (Vries et al., 2013). The results from the current study show that participants hold a wide range of beliefs about CPD. While the majority of them looked at the term from a more positive perspective, there were some negative views associated with the term CPD. In the Omani context, a previous study (Al-Lamki, 2009) also examined teachers' beliefs and practices regarding CPD and showed that teachers hold a range of sometimes incompatible views. The researcher attributed such incongruity at least partially, to the lack of an explicit and shared policy document for teachers with reference to CPD. However, the Omani educational system is rigidly centralised, so one would expect a unified system which should have explicitly stated and shared guiding document/s from policy makers at the MOE for all involved in teachers' CPD including teachers themselves. Yet, since there is no formal guidance for teachers about the CPD opportunities available to them, how to access CPD, teachers' own roles in their CPD process, it is inevitable that beliefs about CPD are more likely to be inconsistent as they might depend on people's own preferences, understandings and interpretations (Al-Lamki, 2009).

Developments in cognitive psychology had highlighted the importance of teachers' beliefs through the influence of thinking on behaviour. This suggested that understanding teachers requires an understanding of their mental lives rather than an exclusive focus on their observable behaviours (Borg, 2015). This is because beliefs are used by

individuals as a filtering mechanism through which new encounters and experiences (e.g. participation in CPD initiatives) are screened, interpreted, understood and absorbed. Beliefs are clearly subjective judgements and may at times 'defy logic' and are by nature 'disputable and disposable' (Kumaravadivelu, 2012:60). Thus, in order to understand teachers, researchers needed to study the psychological processes through which teachers make sense of their work. The results from this study showed that a key source for teachers' beliefs is their practices. It is obvious that participants' responses are affected mainly by their experience of participating in CPD events and/or the beliefs they hold about teaching and learning. In a similar vein, Vries et al., (2013) note that a comparable relationship exists between teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning and their own learning activities or CPD. The study findings also reveal that many of the research participants hold positive beliefs about continuing their PD; they value the importance of CPD and believe in the strong relationship between teaching and CPD. They think that some CPD activities that teachers join can enrich them by supporting their teaching skills and thus they feed teaching and develop it. This is encouraging as it is well-documented that teachers with more positive attitudes towards CPD are more likely to have beneficial learning experiences in CPD programmes (Haney et al. 1996; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995).

In sum, in many countries worldwide including Oman, the roles of schools are changing and so is what is expected of teachers. Teachers are asked to teach in increasingly multicultural classrooms; to place greater emphasis on integrating students with special learning needs in their classrooms; to make more effective use of information and communication technologies for teaching… (OECD, 2009). This suggests that no matter how good pre-service training for teachers is, it cannot prepare teachers for all the challenges they will face throughout their careers. Education systems therefore should seek to provide teachers with opportunities for in-service CPD in order to maintain a high standard of teaching and to retain a high-quality teacher workforce (OECD, 2009). Yet, any such CPD initiative should consider teachers' beliefs if teacher educators and policy makers are seeking for change in teachers, students and schools.

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Appendix (1):

Part B:Views about Continuing Professional Development

Please tick <u>one box</u> to say how important you feel these activities are in helping English teachers' to develop professionally.

	Very important	Important	Unsure	Not important	Not important at all
11. Participating in Conferences and Symposia *	○	○	○	○	○
12. Reading professional materials (e.g books & articles) *	○	○	○	○	○
13. Attending training courses/workshops (e.g in methodology) *	○	○	○	○	○
14. Peer observation *	○	○	○	○	○
15. Coaching/Mentoring by a senior English teacher, supervisor, teacher trainer (e.g through observation, pre-post observation discussions…etc) *	○	○	○	○	○
16. Doing action research (e.g researching a problematic issue in your own classroom) *	○	○	○	○	○
17. Participating in communities of practice (e.g online discussions) *	○	○	○	○	○
18. Higher academic study (e.g M.A, Doctorate) *	○	○	○	○	○

19. Are there any other activities which English teachers can participate in and help their continuous professional development? *

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ If yes, what are these activities? [   ]

20. Please tick the appropriate box to say how you feel professional development initiatives (e.g conferences, courses...etc) can help English language teachers (Tick all that apply) *

☐ Increase teachers' subject knowledge

☐ Teachers develop certain teaching skills that are crucial for their work

☐ Teachers teach more effectively

☐ Teachers manage their classrooms more effectively

☐ Teachers develop self-confidence

☐ Teachers develop other professional skills (e.g communication skills...)

☐ Teachers get better employment opportunities

☐ Teachers get better promotion opportunities

☐ Improve the standard of pupils' learning/outcomes in schools

☐ Improve the standard of teaching in schools

☐ Others (Please specify) [   ]

Appendix (2):
Table 1:-Participant views on the importance of different CPD activities to teachers' professional development

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
-Participating in Conferences and Symposia	330	1	4	1.73	.781
-Reading professional materials (e.g. Books)	330	1	5	1.55	.722
-Attending training courses, workshops (e.g. in methodology)	330	1	4	1.49	.728
-Peer observation	330	1	5	1.72	.770
-Coaching/Mentoring by a Senior English teachers	330	1	5	1.95	.952
-Doing action research (e.g. researching a problem you are facing in classroom)	330	1	5	2.19	.959
-Participating in communities of practice (e.g. online discussion group)	330	1	5	2.19	.979
-Higher academic study (e.g. MA/ Doctorate)	330	1	5	2.12	1.047
Valid N (listwise)	330				

Appendix (3)
Table 2:-CPD providers (by frequency and percentage)

	Responses		% of Cases
	N	%	
- My School/other schools (e.g. Senior English teachers)	147	25.4%	48.5%
- The Ministry of Education	156	27.0%	51.5%
- Other Agencies (e.g. British Council)	80	13.8%	26.4%
- Myself I chose the activity and paid for it	173	29.9%	57.1%
- Others Please specify	22	3.8%	7.3%
Total		100.0%	