## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### EFL TEACHERS' CPD EXPERIENCES: PERSPECTIVES FROM OMAN.

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| *Manuscript Info* | *Abstract* |
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| | This article reports the findings of a study that explored Omani in-service TESOL teachers' continuous professional development (CPD) experiences. Data were collected using questionnaires, training room observations, semi-structured and focus group interviews with TESOL teachers in Oman. The findings indicated that participants have experienced different types of CPD activities which were mostly offered to them through the Ministry of Education in structured ways (e.g. INSET courses). However, the findings suggested conflicting views among participants as to the extent to which the different types of CPD activities/events available to teachers are seen to meet their needs. The article explores the implications of the findings for teacher education and the development of TESOL teachers in Oman. |

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## Introduction:-
In most countries, teachers are expected to continue learning throughout their career in order to adapt to the changing needs of their society and its children after their initial teacher preparation programmes (Vangrieken et al., 2017; Vries et al., 2013; Day & Sachs, 2004). Such kind of learning is called professional development (PD) or continuing professional development (CPD). PD or CPD has attracted increasing attention in recent years. Faced with rapid changes, demands for high standards and calls to improve quality, teachers have a need to improve their teaching skills and update themselves through PD (Craft, 2000). Ultimately, all teacher CPD is perceived as a significant way for improving schools, increasing teachers' quality, and enhancing students' learning (Vangrieken et al., 2017; Hargreaves, 2000; Day, 1999). In fact, every modern proposal to reforming, restructuring, or transforming schools and governments emphasise teachers' CPD as a main vehicle in efforts to bring about needed changes (Vrikki et al., 2017; Guskey, 1994). However, many researchers around the world have questioned the effectiveness of CPD in delivering the desired changes. For instance, Meiers and Ingvarson (2005) argue that there is limited evidence-based research on the links between teachers' CPD and improvements in students' learning outcomes. In the same line of argument, Olson et al., (2002) highlight that in the US, for example, there is no national data that has examined CPD over time, or linked CPD participation to both changes in teaching practices and students' achievement (cited in Antoniou & Kyriakides, 2013). Questions are always being raised regarding the effectiveness of all forms of CPD and with such questions and concerns have come an increased demand for demonstrable results. Funding agencies, policy makers, the general public and legislators all want to know if PD programmes and initiatives are really making a difference (Guskey, 1994) and if they do, what evidence is there showing that they are effective.

Similarly, in Oman although the Ministry of Education is providing many CPD opportunities for in-service teachers in different subject areas as a way of promoting and/or enacting educational change, evidence from local research

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has shown that the role of these CPD opportunities in effecting change is questionable. In particular, the effectiveness of in-service education and training courses (INSET) and other CPD forms offered to English teachers was questioned (AL-Balushi, 2012; AL-Hakamani, 2011; Al-Lamki, 2009; Al-Balushi, 2009). For instance, AL-Balushi (2009) investigated the impact of an in-service course on TESOL teachers' perceptions of and their classroom practices regarding teaching stories to young learners. The researcher found little changes in participants' perceptions and no noticeable change in their classroom practices when the course was over. In general, a number of these studies have called for doing additional research to investigate the contribution of the Omani CPD system to English teachers' learning and growth. Therefore, the current study investigates EFL teachers' experiences of participating in CPD events and whether the offered opportunities by the Ministry of Education in Oman meet their needs.

**CPD and INSET:-**
Although research recommended that PD is an essential way of improving schools' performance (Hargreaves, 1994); PD as a term appears to differ between various educational concepts and traditions. Friedman and Philips (2004) contend that PD as a concept is ambiguous and contested. Taylor (1975), for example, recognises two aspects of the PD of teachers, which were: staff development and further professional study. Staff development was regarded as rooted in the needs of the institution. Further professional study means being orientated to the individual teachers' needs. Hargreaves and Fullan (1992), and Coldwell (2017) define PD as the formal and informal experiences of teachers through their careers. Interestingly, the term continuing professional development (CPD) is more commonly found in the recent literature since 2000 (Wai Yan, 2011). In fact, the term 'continuing' is used to highlight PD as being ongoing, lifelong-oriented in the process of an 'ongoing' change process (Earley & Bubb, 2004; Curtis & Cheng, 2001). Similar to Day's definition, 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).

INSET or In-service education of teachers means 'any education or training that is for people in employment that is relevant to their working life in the broadest sense' (Stone et al., 1980:2). The primarily purposes of designing INSET courses are to upgrade the performance of teachers and enable them to perform more effectively as a result of such training and education (Perraton et al., 2002). In other words, the key aim behind INSET courses is improving teaching and learning. This is similar to Hargreaves's (1994) idea that the quality of schools can be improved as a result of CPD. Thus, for a long time INSET has been a dominant model of structured or formal CPD in different educational settings (Goodall et al., 2005; Friedman & Philips, 2004; Craft, 2000). However, some researchers state that CPD as a term is different from INSET. For example, Goodall et al., (2005) consider that INSET as a term is more limited than the term CPD. They think that CPD encompasses a wide range of approaches and teaching and learning styles in a variety of settings (inside or outside school/work). Day (1999) also emphasises that INSET courses are not enough to contribute to teachers' CPD since an emerging paradigm is one that moves professional development away from the practice of attending training days and courses to the concept of continuing or lifelong learning.

## Methodology:-
**Design and Participants:-**
This study followed mixed methods in collecting data. It started with a questionnaire phase that investigated teachers' experiences of 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. Moreover, the interview participants were observed while they joined some CPD days represented by INSET days carried out by TESOL teacher trainers working for the Ministry of Education in Oman. 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.

**The questionnaire:-**

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). And

2. Attitudinal data asking respondents about their experiences of participating in some CPD events and activities and whether these CPD activities met their needs (covering issues such as participating in conferences, reading, training, coaching and mentoring, CPD and their needs…etc).

3. A number of open-ended questions asking participants to specify any other CPD activities they experienced which were unlisted in the questionnaire, and the ways that CPD activities failed to meet their needs as well as their future CPD needs (see the questionnaire below).

:Continuing Professional Development Experience

Please tick <u>one box</u> to say how often you have experienced the following types of continuing professional development either within or outside your organization (Ministry of Education) since you started your job.

| | Always | Often | Sometimes | Seldom | Never |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 21. Participating in Conferences and Symposia * | O | O | O | O | O |
| 22. Reading professional materials (e.g books, articles & online materials) * | O | O | O | O | O |
| 23. Attending training courses/workshops (language, methodology, research….etc) * | O | O | O | O | O |
| 24. Peer observation * | O | O | O | O | O |
| 25. Coaching/Mentoring by a senior English teacher, supervisor, teacher trainer (e.g through observation, pre-post lesson observation discussions… etc) * | O | O | O | O | O |
| 26. Doing action research * | O | O | O | O | O |
| 27. Participating in communities of practice (e.g study groups, online discussions) * | O | O | O | O | O |
| 28. Higher academic study (e.g M.A, Doctorate) * | O | O | O | O | O |

29. Are there any other continuing professional development activities you participated in since you started your job? *

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ (Please specify) [_____]

30. Which of the following has encouraged you to take a continuing professional development initiative? (Tick <u>all that apply</u>) *

☐ My School/other schools (e.g senior English teachers)

☐ The Ministry of Education

☐ Other Agencies (e.g British Council)

☐ Myself (I chose the activity and paid for it)

☐ Others (Please specify) [_____]

31. Continuing professional development activities organized by the Ministry of Education meet English teachers' needs. *
- ○ Agree
- ○ Disagree

32. In what ways, has the continuing professional development activities available to you failed to meet your professional needs? *

33. Over the next few years, what do you see as your key continuing professional development needs and what specific type of activities would be necessary to meet them effectively?(State at least one of these needs) Need........... Met By............. *

**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.

**Observations:-**
The observations I carried out focused on the aims of the training sessions and the input in relation to the session aims. It focuses on what knowledge and skills participants are expected to gain from the training session. Before conducting the observations, the teacher trainer and the course participants were informed about the training room observations after requesting their consent. The programme was a 5 day INSET course targeting all SETs in that governorate; each day consisted of 4 and half hours training and half an hour break. Sessions were observed and notes taken using the observation schedule specified for that for each observed training day. In total I observed 22 and a half hours; four and half hours per day. The first two days focused on teaching Jolly Phonics, days 3 and 4 focused on teaching shared reading and day 5 focused on how SETs can cascade the training of these sessions to English teachers at schools. All observations were conducted in September 2015.

**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.

**Findings:-**

It is important to stress that given that CPD in educational documents in Oman is associated with the term INSET, when I asked teachers about their CPD experiences the majority of them talked about their experience of participating in INSET courses. Thus, it seems to me that the top-down centralised educational system in Oman has moulded teachers' way of understanding PD to mean INSET courses and workshops which should be offered to them by the Ministry of Education and should be delivered by experts or people who have more experience than them. Given the above, my analysis of the data identified that a major category of findings regarding teacher experiences of CPD concerned their attendance of formal structured activities. However, I also identified two other categories of experience; informal CPD activities and CPD and teachers' needs. Analysis suggested a number of sub-categories within these three categories. The results are presented according to this categorisation in what follows, with the overall picture of the data suggesting conflicting views among teachers as to the extent to which the different types of CPD activity/events available to teachers are seen to meet their needs.

**Formal structured activities:-**

The data revealed that respondents participated in three different types of formal structured activities which are: INSET courses including courses and workshops, cascading INSET to teachers, coaching and mentoring teachers. The data indicates that all these programmes/activities/events are organised and/or funded by the Ministry of Education in Oman for English teachers. However, out of all these initiatives, INSET courses seem to be the most dominant in the CPD system in Oman as it is in a number of other educational contexts (Goodall et al., 2005; Friedman & Philips, 2004).

**INSET courses:-**

The qualitative data from interviews shows that the vast majority of the participants experienced a number of INSET courses including courses and workshops. Some participants (7 in total) stated that the majority of these INSET days were focussing on methodology and a few were language development courses. For example, in the following quote Maryam highlights the INSET courses and workshops she joined:

*"I remember the first year I started teaching I joined the cycle 1 course, I also did a language development course the second year of my teaching, I attended many and many workshops, I also did the Jolly Phonics workshop, I did the integrated curriculum course…."*

Similarly, the training room observations seem to support the above finding. As mentioned in the previous chapter, I observed 5 INSET days; all focused on supporting teachers in methodology. For instance, days (1 & 2) concentrated on supporting English literacy teaching in primary schools in Oman; day (1) focussed on grade 1 Jolly Phonics teaching and day (2) on grade 2 Jolly Phonics teaching. Days (3 & 4) concentrated on teaching shared reading and helping teachers become more confident in delivering effective shared reading lessons. The last INSET day I observed focused on how to use appropriate procedures to do the reading time. Findings from the survey also corroborated the ideas generated from the qualitative data as 92.9% of respondents claimed to attend INSET courses/workshops with a high to medium degree of frequency during their career as could be seen in table 1 below.

**Table 1:-**Importance of CPD activities/overall frequencies

| | Very important | | Important | | Unsure | | Not important | | Not important at all | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| Participating in Conferences/Symposia | 143 | 43.3% | 145 | 43.9% | 29 | 8.8% | 13 | 3.9% | 0 | 0.0% |
| Reading professional materials (e.g. books) | 185 | 56.1% | 115 | 34.8% | 24 | 7.3% | 5 | 1.5% | 1 | 0.3% |
| Attending training courses/workshops | 209 | 63.3% | 87 | 26.4% | 28 | 8.5% | 6 | 1.8% | 0 | 0.0% |
| Peer observation | 144 | 43.6% | 149 | 45.2% | 25 | 7.6% | 11 | 3.3% | 1 | 0.3% |
| Coaching/Mentoring (e.g. by a SET) | 117 | 35.5% | 145 | 43.9% | 45 | 13.6% | 14 | 4.2% | 9 | 2.7% |

| Doing action research | 83 | 25.2% | 141 | 42.7% | 71 | 21.5% | 31 | 9.4% | 4 | 1.2% |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Participating in communities of practice | 88 | 26.7% | 130 | 39.4% | 76 | 23.0% | 32 | 9.7% | 4 | 1.2% |
| Higher academic study (e.g. MA) | 110 | 33.3% | 118 | 35.8% | 61 | 18.5% | 35 | 10.6% | 6 | 1.8% |

**Cascading INSET:-**

INSET training of teachers in Oman is sometimes connected to cascading this training to other teachers and this was the case with the training sessions I observed. The post-observation discussion data shows that the 5 days INSET training mentioned above were compulsory for all SETs in each educational governorate as the teacher trainer said in the post-observation discussion. The data shows that those SETs were then expected to cascade this training to all English teachers in their educational governorates. This means that these INSET days are actually not professional development for teachers though they might be necessary for updating them within the changes in the English curriculum. The training room observations supported this evidence as it was noticeable that the second part of my last training room observation (INSET day-5) focussed on how to support SETs to cascade the training of these 5 INSET days to teachers at schools. The teacher trainers provided SETs with a cascade package to help them do the cascade properly. In the second focus-group interview, SETs commented that although this cascade package was helpful in doing the cascading, the experience of SETs and teachers enriched the process of carrying out the cascade as Badriya stresses:

*"I also felt that I added my experience to the cascade package, also my teachers' experience for example, I had two teachers who taught grade 1 before so they shared their experience with us in this regard, and when we discussed the challenges that they faced last year, experienced teachers and myself were able to provide some suggestions and solutions to these challenges…."* Out of the three SETs, one SET did the cascade herself to her staff at school while the other two SETs co-cascaded the training to their teachers. The data reveals that this co-cascading was a fruitful experience for the SETs. For example, Karima (one of the SETs) insists that the co-cascade:

*"…made me feel more confident, the confident in that we are doing training to a large number of teachers, we always do workshops for our teachers at school but doing it with other SETs and in another school and facing a large number of teachers, in the presence of our supervisors, I feel more confident now in doing such things more publicly…."*

The literature illustrates that co-cascading is effective as it ensures this is a reflexive, collaborative and context sensitive experience involving cascade teachers in managing their own professional growth, while at the same time taking account of frameworks agreed at the national level (Hayes, 2000).

**Coaching and mentoring:-**

The qualitative data confirmed that English teachers in Oman are coached and mentored by more than one party. Namely, English supervisors, English teacher trainers, and SETs as well as being peer mentored by their colleagues especially the more experienced English teachers. Yet, the findings confirm that the key persons who act as coaches and/or mentors at schools are SETs. The statistical findings also correspond with this as the analysis suggested that 90.6% of respondents were coached and/or mentored by their SETs always, often or sometimes. Interview data shed more light on teachers experience of coaching and mentoring as favourable as the following extract from Farida illustrates: *"…for example, when the SET attended a lesson with me she noticed that I am teaching the children like cycle two pupils and that I need to go down to their level and this really helped me …."* This result is in line with a recent study done in the Arab context in Egypt by Mishriki and Demian (2015) which also shows favourable attitudes towards mentoring and the effective role mentors played in orienting their teaching fellows and new teachers. The data shows that SETs are prepared for their coaching and mentoring roles at schools through a whole year INSET course which aims at preparing the new SETs for their job. Badriya explains that:

*"I attended the SET course and it was so beneficial for me, it was so practical and I did a research, action research, it was a whole year course and we learnt many skills about coaching and mentoring teachers, conducting post lesson discussions, writing reports, even I carried out an action research, in general it was a very useful course"*

**Informal CPD activities:-**

In addition to the formal CPD opportunities mentioned above, findings show that teachers participated in a number of other CPD activities; some of these are done at schools while others are done outside schools. However, the majority of these activities are again offered to teachers and funded by the Ministry which reflects the top-down nature of the educational CPD system in Oman.

The qualitative data shows that participants experienced many CPD activities carried out at schools which can fit into teachers' daily work and timetables. These activities are usually organised by SETs through preparing a PD plan that includes a number of activities to be done throughout the school year. Laila clarifies why they do these PD plans and activities *"look miss, we SETS each year do a professional development plan at school and we try to do many activities to help teachers with their professional development…."* Examples of these activities as shown by the data are: peer observation, model lessons, discussion sessions, team teaching, English open days and workshops carried out by different staff members.

However, the quantitative data from the survey indicated some conflict regarding the activities experienced inside schools. On the one hand, it shows that peer observation is the most practiced activity as 86.3% of the respondents either always, often or sometimes experienced that. On the other hand, doing action research is reported by respondents as the least practiced activity although it could also be practiced inside schools and fit into teachers' daily work and timetables. I think the main reason behind that is because teachers are not trained to carry out an action research properly. As a whole, the findings revealed that the PD activities/events done at schools are slotted into teachers' daily work and timetables and participants were in favour of more PD activities/events to be carried out inside schools. As Amna suggests, in her view the Ministry should: *"keep doing professional development activities inside schools not to take teachers outside schools…."*

Participating in international/local conferences and symposiums, PD programmes carried out by other higher education institutions in Oman (e.g. Sultan Qaboos University), on-line courses, reading professional materials and participating in communities of practice, were some other CPD activities/events respondents experienced. Most common among these activities is joining local conferences and symposiums as a high number of participants (10 in total) referred to that in the interviews. Likewise, the quantitative data shows that 69.2% of the participants indicated that they regularly or sometimes participated in conferences/symposiums. The quantitative data shows that participants experienced very few other CPD activities especially the ones that include collaborative forms of learning as only 10.7% of respondents claimed to have joined communities of practice. Despite that, all interview respondents stated that they value the types of activities that involve teachers as active and reflective participants. For instance, Farida talks about joining on-line courses, very favourably:
*"I joined online courses like the TKT and SEN (Special Education needs)… the good thing is that teachers from all educational governorates were in these online groups, so we get to know teachers and SETs from other regions, it was very good, we even created a whats app group to discuss some issues it was a very good way of exchanging experiences."*

In sum, the data illustrates that participants have experienced a number of other CPD activities/events. Yet, the results clearly indicated that teachers were in favour of the collaborative forms of activities which involve collaborative learning opportunities where they can share experiences and learn from discussed ideas (Lee, 2011). This finding resonates with others that highlight the value attached to teachers for CPD which actively involve practicing teachers in collaborative forms of learning (e.g. Moran et al., 2017; Hung & Yeh, 2013; Lee, 2011). This suggests that the MOE in Oman should seriously think of adding more collaborative forms of CPD activities (e.g. communities of practice, online discussion groups…etc) to CPD provision and according to teachers' CPD needs.

**CPD and teachers' needs:-**
There is a wealth of literature on the importance of engaging teachers in continuing professional development that meet their own personal and professional needs (Goodall et al., 2005). However, teachers' needs can vary according to their circumstances, personal and professional histories and their current dispositions (Goodall et al., 2005:24). Teachers' needs were investigated in this study and both the quantitative and the qualitative data showed conflicts in respondents' beliefs regarding CPD and their needs. While some respondents seem to believe that CPD meets their needs others do not think that. A number of interview respondents (7 in total) state that the CPD activities they experienced met their needs in that it helped them learn new strategies that can be used in their classrooms as Lulwa for example highlights in the following extract: *"they met my needs in ways that I saw lots of strategies that help me to deliver the message easily to my students, designing activities for my students, controlling the time, controlling the students…."*

Conversely, the data shows that the MOE is collecting EFL teachers' needs occasionally but these needs are not met as stressed by Amna "sometimes they ask us about our PD needs but usually they don't take these into consideration or after stating our needs we are not seeing that we are joining specific programmes/activities that can meet our

needs." In my viewpoint, this appears to illustrate that the Ministry of Education is not following a systematic way in assessing teachers' needs. The qualitative findings were confirmed by the statistical results obtained from the questionnaire in that through a closed question respondents were asked to agree or disagree with the statement "CPD activities organized by the MOE meet English teachers' needs". 327 participants 98.2% responded to this question, from which more than half of them agreed with this statement 63.3% while 34.8% disagreed as could be seen in Figure 1.
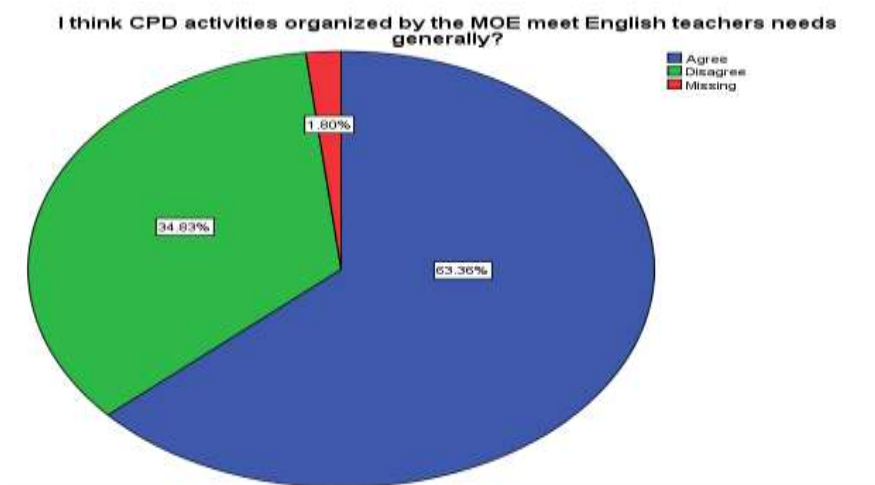


**Figure 1:-**CPD needs

The qualitative data;however, shows that the current CPD activities organised and/or offered by the MOE in Oman are not enough. A large number of teachers complained about this in the semi-structured interviews. For example, Zilal was eager to join a CPD programme but she could not *"...the TKT I wanted to but it was full."* The data from the focus-group interviews confirms that as Laila (one of the SETs) complained about the shortage in the number of CPD activities/events available to teachers by saying:

*"in fact professional development programmes and activities run by the Ministry currently are not enough, they are very few each year and teachers need more, some teachers wait for 5 years to get a chance of professional development from the Ministry."*

The data shows that the key reason for this problem is possibly the large numbers of English teachers in schools. Another reason as suggested by the data could be that some of the offered CPD activities/events failed to meet teachers' needs. This was confirmed in the questionnaire through an open-ended question which asked teachers "In what ways, have the continuing professional development activities available to you failed to meet your professional needs?" Participants' responses have been categorized into 8 headings:

  Boring and repeated topics
  Lack of practical ideas
  Lack of individual relevance
  Poor quality provision (not planned well, unqualified instructors)
  Top down (teachers needs and experiences are ignored)
  Lack of time
  Teachers lack motivation (especially when it is compulsory)
  Lack of follow-up

## Discussion and implications:-
The data revealed that respondents experienced different learning opportunities through participating in formal structured activities (e.g. INSET courses, cascading INSET, coaching and mentoring) as well as informal CPD activities (e.g. peer observation, team teaching, participating in conferences…). All of these seem to be organised and/or funded by the MOE in Oman for English teachers. However, the findings indicated that out of all these initiatives, structured formal in-service training (INSET) courses seem to be the most dominant in the CPD system

in Oman. Rich et al., (2014) reported that structured formal INSET opportunities in Oman are seen as an important support mechanism to encourage EFL teachers to remain professionally invigorated and to appreciate the importance of ongoing professional development throughout their careers. To this end, early-career teachers are offered a number of workshops and courses to help them become familiar with the philosophy underpinning the curriculum and the effective ways of implementing it, and to help them maintain their English proficiency and develop their understanding of the English language system. However, while such formal structured activities are needed for teachers especially the novice ones, they do not always respond to all teachers' needs. The research literature highlights the complexity of linking such programmes and activities to tangible outcomes such as changes in the quality of teacher practices and of student learning (Chalmers & Gardiner, 2015; Devlin, 2008). The findings from the current study also showed that although teachers' participated in a number of INSET courses and workshops, many of these failed to meet their needs. It is obvious from the results that the MOE is not following a systematic way in collecting, analysing and assessing EFL teachers' needs in Oman in order to meet these needs. Thus, these activities are not always seen by teachers as effective. This result lends support to a number of previous studies both in Oman and internationally. For instance, some Omani researchers questioned the effectiveness of INSET courses in contributing to changes in EFL teachers' beliefs and/or their classroom practices (e.g. AL-Balushi, 2009; Al-Lamki, 2009). Correspondingly, in a recent study conducted in China, Yan and He (2015) investigated a cohort of 120 senior-school EFL teachers' perspectives about their short INSET course experience. The study found that the level of endorsement for the course among participants was rather low. The underlying reason for the low satisfaction level was found to be the course features resulting from the one-shot and one-size-fits-all mentality of course providers. This study confirms the drawback of limited impact caused by the nature of short INSET courses and reveals that such courses could hardly fulfil diverse needs of participants. Theoretically speaking, this sort of approach to doing INSET contradicts Maslow's theory of hierarchical needs which moves from lower order needs (such as psychological needs, safety needs, belonging and love needs) through to esteem needs, need to know and understand, aesthetic needs and higher order needs (self-actualization and transcendence needs) (Maslow, 1970). Maslow argues that needs at the lower end of the hierarchy must be at least partially met before a person will try to satisfy higher-level needs. Although teachers must achieve the level of need to know and understand, ultimately the CPD goal is to aid them in self-actualizing or becoming 'all that one can be'. Yet, teachers have different needs and goals behind CPD which means that the one-size-fits-all approach to CPD will not meet the needs of all teachers. The self-actualisation need is to make actual what are potential for teachers regarding their personal growth and development by following their own passions and interests that help them meet their own needs. The dominance of INSET in the Omani context reflects the centralised educational system and the top-down CPD system. In other words, policies are usually formed by outside experts and people at the upper level in the hierarchy of the MOE. In such systems, CPD takes place through increasing governmental interventions for the purpose of accountability and performativity. This could be related to the pressure of globalization which have universally shaped government policies for education provision generally and CPD in particular. The power of globalization is clearly defined by the Commission on Global Governance (1995) as "the shortening of distance, the multiplying of links, the deepening of interdependence: all these factors and their interplay, have been transforming the world into a neighbourhood" (in Day & Sachs, 2004:4). This has resulted in educational systems in many countries working towards delivering programmes for both students and teachers that are internationally comparable in terms of their efficiency, effectiveness and economic viability (Gleeson et al., 2017; Day & Sachs, 2004).

In reality, however, the stages of development are different in developed and developing countries and this needs to be taken into consideration regarding the broader issues of education (Christie et al., 2004). This means that there can be no taken-for-granted assumptions about what is basic in the way of our being and our knowledge when we transcend our culturally specific educational domains. Jofré and Johnston (2014:5) highlight the fallacy of assuming that "across cultures, people have the same basic beliefs about being and knowledge". This was evident in my context as the data showed that the top-down centralised educational system in Oman has moulded teachers' way of understanding PD in that they relate it to attending INSET courses and workshops and that it should be offered to them by the Ministry and delivered by experts. This of course is different from the globalized meaning of the term PD/CPD and how teachers in other contexts understand and conceptualise the term.

As regards teachers' professionalism, such governmental interventions in CPD content and form usually result in the development of an alternative form of teacher professionalism; namely 'managerial professionalism' (Day & Sachs, 2004:5-6). This is particularly the case with the consequences of reform initiatives related to organisational change, imperatives for teachers in schools to be more accountable and for systems to be more efficient and economically viable in their activities. This is not only specific to the Omani centralised educational context, as the CPD provision

in other contexts like Europe and South America suggest that the latest policies within the education sector promoting devolution and decentralisation have provided sympathetic conditions for a discourse of managerialism to emerge and flourish (Avalos, 2004; Sugrue, 2004; Day & Sachs, 2004). Such 'managerial professionalism' reflects the corporate management model which emphasize that "The criteria of the successful professional…is of one who works efficiently and effectively in meeting the standardised criteria set for accomplishment of both students and teachers, as well as contributing to the school's formal accountability processes" (Brennan, 1996 in Day & Sachs, 2004:6). Importantly, despite the significant investment in such structured formal training by governments, there is an uneven picture of how effective or efficient in economic terms many of these initiatives have been. Buchner and Hay (1999) maintain that national in-service training courses are often forced and not planned. They are not presented according to the needs of teachers, resulting in the teachers experiencing the training as demand, instead of needs-driven. According to Mashile and Vakalisa (1999), different school contexts were not taken into consideration and training was provided as if all schools are similar and all would benefit from the same 'blanket-fit-all' type of in-service training (in Makgato, 2014). These issues are also highlighted by Borko (2004) who emphasized that each year governments spend millions, if not billions, of dollars on in-service training and other forms of professional development that are fragmented, intellectually superficial, and do not take into account how teachers learn. The situation in Oman is no exception in this regard as policy makers in such top-down systems tend to underestimate the contextual realities in their planning of these formal structured training. Overall, for dynamic teacher development, teacher education and training in the 21st century globalised world, there is a need to focus on learning from previous systemic initiatives. This may reveal future possibilities in terms of the purpose, function, design and delivery of such initiatives. In this respect, Day and Sachs, (2004) suggested that three major issues emerge. First, is how to develop a teaching force in which CPD is the core value for all teachers whereby governments' needs are achieved through such formal training and any other CPD initiative without ignoring the individual learning of teachers. Second is sustainability of CPD initiatives, entailing the development of networks and partnerships which requires significant levels of trust and the development of new types of relationships among teachers and between those who support teachers and teachers. Finally, the role of teachers themselves in the provision of CPD is significant; the way teachers are currently seen as grateful recipients of CPD does not provide the conditions for intelligent and responsive teaching profession. Writing about English language teaching (ELT) in particular, Kumaravadivelu (2012) has argued that the linguistic and cultural sensitivities triggered by cultural globalisation have prompted the ELT community to try to make a meaningful shift in policies, programmes, methods and materials governing English language teaching and the PD of teachers in order to address these. As he points out that there is also a growing realization that in order to make a meaningful shift, we need to first go beyond the transmission models of teacher support.

**The need for other forms of CPD –Post transmission models:-**
The findings indicate that the MOE in Oman offers many formally and informally-structured CPD activities each year. However, mainly due to their top-down nature, these are not enough to meet all teachers' needs as the findings have highlighted and therefore will, in many cases, lack individual relevance. Thus most of the CPD activities offered follow transmission approaches/models of teachers' learning because "they seek to transmit a set of predetermined, pre-selected, and pre-sequenced bodies of knowledge" from teacher educators to teachers (Kumaravadivelu, 2012:8). As Kumaravadivelu (2012) has observed the problem with these models is that they generally produce teachers who end up playing the role of a conduit. That is, they become passive technicians channelling the flow of information from one end of the educational spectrum (experts) to the other (learners) without an opportunity to bring their own highly relevant and valuable personal practical knowledge to bear. The main aim of these models is helping teacher learners to comprehend and eventually master content knowledge but in order to help teachers develop the capacity to address their classroom realities and to evolve as professionals there is a need for alternative post-transmission approaches to helping teachers learn, ones which are grounded in their realities and centred on their own professional growth. In relation to the Omani context and partly in response to this interpretation, alternative ways to teacher learning should be added to the CPD system as the data from the current study shows. There is a need to move from the current transmission and expert model, which asserts that teachers' PD is the result of training by other expert teachers, to more post-transmission models that help support teacher-learners to be more self-directed in their own professional learning and growth (Beach, 2017). This suggests a shift to more socio-constructivist paradigms of teachers' learning which imply that teachers construct their own knowledge through deconstruction, interpretation and reconstruction when they are engaged in social discourse and CPD activities that take place in a certain context (Kuusisaari, 2014; Vygotsky, 1978). In other words, knowledge is situated and is socially and culturally constructed (Vygotsky, 1978). This means that teacher education and the professional development of teachers are underpinned by socio-cultural perspectives, with a particular emphasis on

the importance of discourse in the promotion of learning. This can be achieved by adding other forms of CPD to teachers' CPD system in Oman. For example, there is a real need for more dialogic and collaborative forms of CPD activities. Policy makers and teacher educators in Oman need to think about adding such forms to the CPD system. This is because the findings clearly indicated that teachers were in favour of the collaborative activities whereby teachers can share experiences and learn from discussed ideas. While this finding is consistent with many studies done internationally, it contradicts a study carried out in my own context. Al-Hakamani (2011), for instance, investigated the collaborative forms of CPD available for teachers in Oman such as peer observation, team teaching, staff-meetings…etc. She found that such activities have limited contribution to Omani TESOL teachers' professional learning and development. In my view, the key reason for such limited contribution is the nature of these activities which despite having the appearance of being responsive to teachers are still top-down (especially since supervisors and SETs suggest them and plan them for teachers). The importance of collaboration within a community for teachers' professional practice and learning has been well-documented (e.g. Peercy &Troyan, 2017; Vangrieken et al., 2017; Kuusisaari, 2014; Kennedy, 2011; Day, 1999). Yet in a paper by Kennedy (2011) which explored the perceptions of stakeholders about the desirability of collaborative CPD and examined potential barriers to this by drawing on the results of two projects which each explored teachers' views of CPD in Scotland, an aspirational view of collaborative CPD was noted but occupational realities meant that CPD continued to be realised in more traditional ways not conducive to collaborative endeavour. This finding might explain the reasons behind the limited benefit of the collaborative forms of CPD studied by Al-Hakamani (2011). This suggests that dialogic-based and collaborative forms of CPD can be part of teachers' CPD in Oman. Theoretically speaking, Vygotsky's (1978) notion of (ZPD) or zone of proximal development emphasises the essentially social and collaborative nature of knowledge construction which has led to the growing interest in dialogic and collaborative forms of CPD. The ZPD, according to Vygotsky's (1978:86) original definition: "…is the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers". The sociocultural approach of Vygotsky emphasises that human's actions are mediated by tools and signs, mainly that of language and that the higher mental functioning of the individual has social origins (Vygotsky, 1978). Such collaborative learning does not entail learning through social interaction alone as Kuusisaari (2014) puts in; instead it involves collective learning whereby the group as a whole strives towards the shared aim. In recent years Vygotsky's sociocultural model of learning is one that has been enthusiastically embraced in education and in those concerned with teacher learning and development and has helped fuel a growing appreciation of the need for, interactive and collaborative forms of PD. Such forms can cover many activities ranging from working together with colleagues in informal, unplanned ways to structured, more formalized 'communities of enquiry' or 'learning communities' (Kennedy, 2011:26). They can be online (e.g. through using social media such as twitter, Facebook, blogs…etc.) or face-to-face. What all forms of dialogic-based and collaborative CPD have in common is the value placed on the learning stimulated by working with others and the effective role of dialogue in promoting learning (Vrikki et al., 2017). This form of CPD has the capacity of satisfying all three of Bell and Gilbert's (1996) dimensions of professional learning: personal, social and occupational (in Kennedy, 2011:26). While the conditions and features of the various types of collaborative learning can vary, the one thing they have in common is that learning is socially situated and not an individual isolated activity.

In sum, in order to improve teaching and support teachers' CPD, teachers need to work together in long-term collaborative groups committing to and challenging one another as a caring professional community. Forming professional communities among teachers is crucial to improve the current top-down CPD system in Oman as the findings from this study indicated. In these communities, individuals spend time together, feel secure, and feel trusting and motivated enough to share their human and decisional capital resources which can contribute to social capital building (Nolan & Molla, 2017).

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