

TEACHERS' CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT REIMAGINED



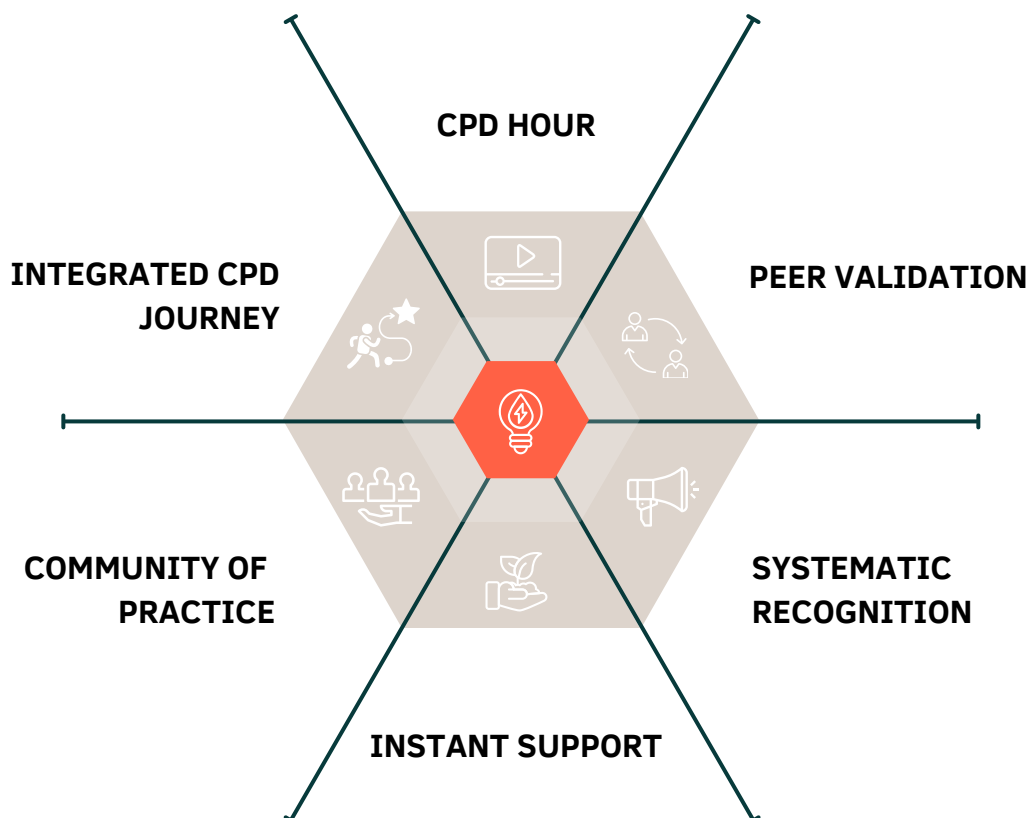
Muhammad Ebraheem Alam
Policy Associate

INTRODUCTION

The praxis of Teachers' Continuous Professional Development (CPD) in the Pakistani education system is often misunderstood – being reduced to one-off training sessions with limited teacher input pre-delivery, and almost no post-session follow up and/or support. While these trainings aim to introduce teachers to new techniques, materials, and pedagogical approaches, they fall short of offering the ongoing, iterative support necessary to transform teaching practices in the classroom in any meaningful way. CPD, by definition, is a process of sustained professional growth that builds teacher capacity over time.

A truly effective CPD framework demands not only ongoing engagement with the teaching community but also empowers teachers to adapt and apply new practices within the unique contexts of their classrooms. Drawing on lived experiences and insights from across Pakistan, this policy note identifies six core elements that are necessary for an effective CPD framework — tailored to meet the evolving needs of Pakistani teachers.

TEACHERS' CPD REIMAGINED



INTEGRATED CPD JOURNEY

1

A structured CPD program provides teachers with regular and well-planned opportunities for continuous professional development through comprehensive, pre-scheduled progression pathways. This implies development of dedicated learning cycles for various tiers of teachers i.e., primary, middle/elementary, high school teachers, and subject-specialists that are part of the system. This approach requires quarterly or at least biannual training sessions designed to go beyond surface-level learning, offering deeper exploration into pedagogical strategies, subject-specific content, and emerging educational practices.

Through a structured training journey, teachers benefit from consistent, targeted, and impactful learning experiences that enhance their professional capacity over time. In Pakistani context, the existing training mechanisms are sporadic and/or mostly donor-driven that are often misaligned with teachers' actual needs and fail to produce lasting improvements (Ahmad, Arain & Anjum, 2022).

On the other hand, the cyclic nature of a structured training and CPD journey is demand-driven and designed for long-term career progression of the teacher. The design is configured to address key challenges, such as irregular implementation, lack of follow-up support, and the absence of alignment with local classroom realities.

Key features of structured CPD journey include:

Scheduled Training Cycles

Training sessions should be integrated into the academic calendar to ensure predictability and participation

Needs-based Content

It should be designed after conducting need assessments to focus on areas where teachers require the most support

Content Depth

Modules should delve into complex concepts, practical strategies, and real-world applications to enable teachers to develop advanced competencies

Interactive & Practical Approach

Teachers should be exposed to activities such as case studies, simulations, hands-on workshops to encourage active learning

Varied Delivery Models

Incorporate a blend of in-person workshops, online modules, and hybrid formats ensuring accessibility and continuity for teachers

Consistent support mechanism

Embed supporting pathways such as CPD hour/ refreshers, mentoring support, peer validation, community of practice, for a holistic CPD support program

A dedicated virtual CPD hour (weekly or biweekly) ensures that professional development becomes a continuous and integral part of teachers' routines. By setting aside regular, scheduled time, this initiative allows teachers to engage with focused and relevant professional learning. The schedule and content of the CPD hour is announced in advance, featuring a blend of content-specific sessions, activity-based workshops, and opportunities to refine pedagogical skills.

This approach addresses the shortcomings of the existing mechanism of in-service training that are often supply-driven and limited in their ability to enhance teachers' knowledge and skills. Research highlights that the existing in-service training programs frequently lack alignment with teachers' actual needs, suffer from irregular implementation due to insufficient funding, and rely heavily on donor sponsorship (Tahira, Hassan, Malik, & Yousuf, 2020).

The virtual CPD hour is supported by bite-sized content packages, offering user-friendly materials directly relevant to teachers' specific needs and aligned with the academic cycle. These short, targeted sessions ensure that teachers can address gaps, reinforce their understanding, and stay engaged with key concepts over time. By embedding these sessions into teachers' routines, they transition from being isolated, one-off events to being part of an evolving learning process that empowers educators to refine their practice and build on previously acquired skills. This consistent, teachers-centric approach ensures they are continuously supported, equipped with the necessary tools and confidence to integrate new strategies effectively into their classrooms.

Elements of an effective CPD hour include:

WHAT

Bite-sized content including teaching-learning materials (TLM) and experiential student activity models aligned with the academic cycle, designed to address specific teacher needs and provide practical strategies for classroom implementation

Delivered through in-person, virtual, or hybrid formats, with flexible engagement options such as optional and asynchronous modules, within a manageable duration of 30–45 minutes.

HOW

WHO

Designed for a diverse audience within the education system, including:

- **Teaching staff:** Primary, middle or elementary, high school teachers and subject specialists
- **Education managers:** Head teachers, area and district education office teams and other education experts
- **Teacher trainers:** For effective content delivery, teacher support, and capacity-building for improved delivery of teachers' CPD

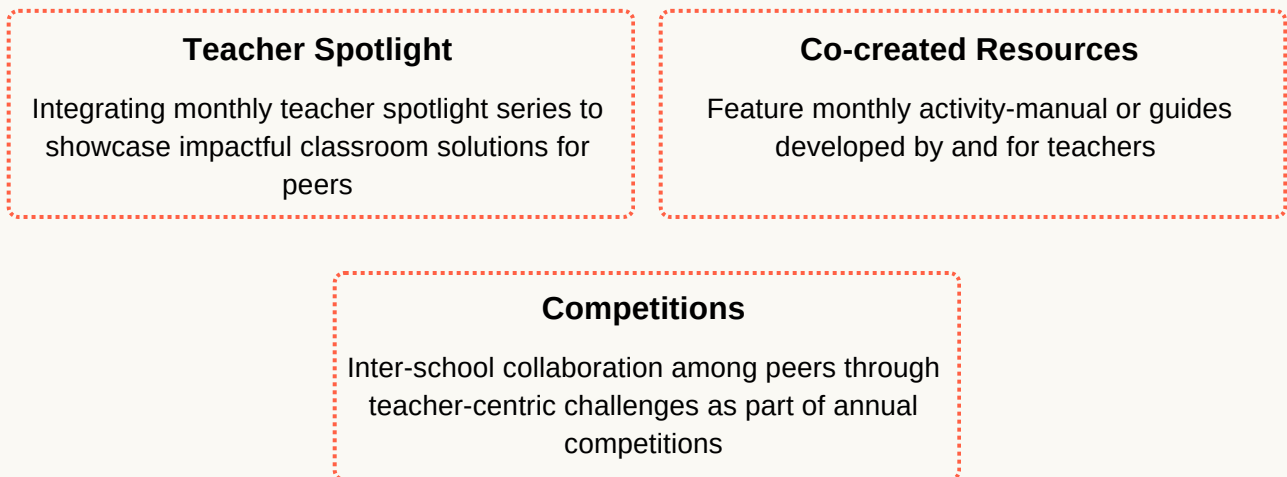
PEER VALIDATION MODEL

3

Celebration and recognition by peers elevates teacher confidence, improves motivation, and enables educators to see the tangible benefits of improved teaching practices through real-life classroom experiences. This inspires a culture of collaboration and shared growth creating a ripple effect that uplifts the entire teaching community (Andrews, 2011).

By spotlighting exemplary classroom practices “of the teachers, by the teachers, for the teachers,” leadership demonstrates its commitment to empowering educators. This approach transforms CPD from a prescriptive process into a participatory and aspirational journey, actively involving teachers in shaping their professional growth.

Effective peer validation pathways include:






FORMAL RECOGNITION MECHANISM

4

A structured teacher recognition mechanism, aligned with intrinsic motivations and meaningful incentives, fosters a sense of professional pride and value among educators. By embedding recognition milestones within teachers' annual journeys, this approach not only celebrates their contributions but also cultivates a culture of innovation and continuous improvement. Recognized teachers are inspired to further refine their practices, creating a ripple effect that drives systemic advancements across the education sector. The Voice of Teachers highlights that acknowledgment of teacher's work is often sporadic but deeply impactful when it occurs. Teachers described these rare instances of recognition as “high points” in their careers, underscoring the transformative potential of consistent acknowledgment (SAHE & Alif Ailaan, 2014).

Globally, teacher awards have been shown to strengthen educators' commitment to quality teaching, foster reflective practices, and inspire peers by promoting role models within professional communities (Scheidig & Tremp, 2024). By applying similar principles to school-level systems, recognition initiatives can elevate teaching practices, enhance individual growth, and inspire a collective pursuit of excellence. Institutionalizing such mechanisms builds pathways for celebrating achievements and driving systemic innovation across the educational landscape.

Effective formal recognition mechanisms include:

-  Establishing a regime of annual teacher awards to honor outstanding contributions and achievements in various teaching domains for each academic cycle
-  Developing district-level recognition programs that celebrate teacher efforts and classroom innovations in the local setting
-  Facilitate interaction sessions with education leadership such as the Secretary or Minister (chai-meet up). These not only provide personal/individual recognition but also allow for meaningful dialogue that can directly influence education planning

Teachers are more likely to persist with innovative approaches when supported by leadership, feel connected to their peers, and witness measurable improvements in student learning.

SUPPORT SYSTEM: TEACHERS' HELPDESK

5

A robust, on-demand support system (or one-on-one mentoring) ensures that teachers have continuous access to assistance, guidance, and resources when needed most. A study by the British Council on CPD options for Primary School Teachers (PSTs) reiterates that 79% of teachers emphasized the importance of coaching and mentoring in their professional development. Teachers expressed a strong preference for a support mechanism that includes continuous follow-up and real-time assistance to address challenges in their teaching practices (British Council, 2018).

Building on these insights, the 24/7 helpdesk model for teachers provides immediate support for challenges ranging from pedagogical inquiries to technical assistance with educational tools. Research corroborates the effectiveness of this model, showing that “individualized, intensive, sustained, context-specific, and focused” support significantly enhances teaching quality and student achievement (Kraft, Blazar, & Hogan, 2018). This instant support system not only empowers teachers to address their immediate needs but also fosters a culture of trust and open communication.

Leveraging low-cost technologies is key to maintaining cost effectiveness, accessibility, and scalability of one-on-one support systems. By enabling participation through widely accessible technologies such as mobile phones and platforms that require minimal internet bandwidth, teachers in resource constrained settings can receive real-time assistance without needing advanced infrastructure.

These technologies make it possible to extend one-on-one mentoring to a larger number of teachers, overcoming logistical and resource barriers that might otherwise limit the reach of personalised support. This approach underscores the potential of affordable and simple technologies in bridging gaps and ensuring equitable support for all educators.

Building on this potential, it also serves as a valuable data collection tool, identifying recurring challenges that teachers face. These insights inform the design of future professional development programs, tailoring CPD offerings to align more closely with teachers' needs. By combining real-time support with continuous learning, the system underscores the transformative potential of coaching and mentoring to improve teaching standards and student learning outcomes (SLOs).

Effective components of the instant teacher support system include:

- A feedback loop where teachers can suggest improvements with the support system evolving based on their needs
- Real-time, subject-specific assistance for teachers facing immediate classroom challenges
- Access to expert resources through a user-friendly digital platform for ongoing support (WhatsApp and Zoom as prime examples)

FROM THEORY TO ACTION

The STEAM Helpdesk by PAMS is a 24/7 support initiative designed to provide real-time, personalized assistance to teachers across Pakistan, ensuring they have access to expert guidance whenever needed. It operates through two primary channels:

1. Zoom Helpdesk: Live sessions are conducted three days a week, offering interactive support on aspects like student-led hands-on activities, teacher hubs, and strategies to improve student engagement. This platform fosters engagement, enabling teachers to address challenges and receive tailored advice.
2. WhatsApp Helpdesk: Available round the clock, this text-based platform ensures teachers can seek help anytime, making it especially useful for those unable to attend live Zoom sessions.

The multi-channel model is built on accessibility, leveraging low-cost, widely available technologies to reach teachers in even the most resource-constrained areas. With over 1,500 Zoom queries and 1,200 WhatsApp interactions addressed monthly, the STEAM Helpdesk empowers educators with timely solutions, improves classroom practices, and gathers valuable feedback to refine teacher development strategies. It serves as a lifeline for educators, fostering collaboration, confidence, and continuous professional growth.

Building a strong community of practice is essential for fostering collaboration, innovation, and shared learning among teachers. Teacher hubs, both within schools and across school clusters, provide a structured platform for educators to engage in collective problem-solving, share effective teaching strategies, and co-create solutions to classroom challenges. These hubs/baithaks serve as a space for professional growth, offering teachers opportunities to learn from one another in a supportive and collaborative environment.

It combines face-to-face interactions, self-reflection, and collaborative learning to ensure teachers can apply and refine their skills in real-time. This approach ensures that professional development is both sustainable and rooted in practical, classroom-based realities (Sindh Teacher Education Development Authority [STEDA], n.d.). This collaborative approach led to measurable improvements in student achievement across subjects and grades, highlighting the transformative power of peer learning (Ali, 2011).

The importance of informal support is further reinforced by the findings of the Voice of Teachers. Teachers across Pakistan report turning to informal peer networks in the absence of formal support mechanisms. These networks allow educators to share lesson plans, assessment practices, and classroom strategies. Many teachers view structured cluster-based support as a solution to the challenges they face, enabling regular interaction and fostering a culture of mutual learning and growth (SAHE, & Alif Ailaan 2014).

This evidence underscores that teacher hubs, when implemented effectively, can bridge gaps in professional development, break silos, and cultivate a sense of belonging among educators. The peer-driven nature of these hubs ensures that learning is relevant, practical, and deeply rooted in classroom realities, empowering teachers to innovate and improve collectively.

Effective strategies for establishing communities of practice/teacher hubs include:



Begin with an in-school community of practice that meets regularly to discuss teaching practices, challenges, and successes



Develop cluster-based hubs to connect teachers from nearby schools for joint CPD sessions, collaborative lesson planning, and knowledge sharing



Create digital communities of practice through online platforms and forums, enabling ongoing engagement and resource sharing, even in remote areas

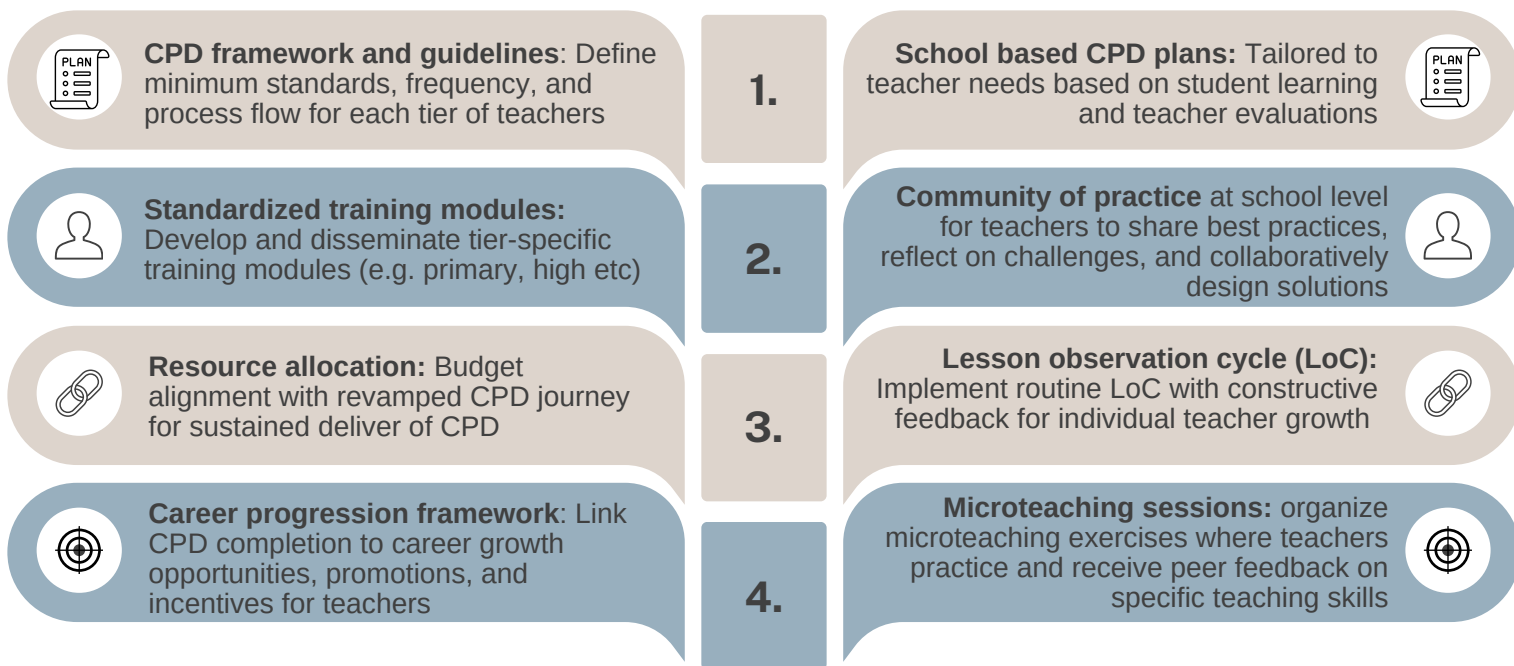
CONCLUSION

To fulfill the true potential of CPD, the system must shift from episodic interventions to a comprehensive framework of professional support. This involves integrating targeted and ongoing mechanisms such as in-school and external communities of practice, CPD hour, peer-validation models, and/or remote assistance through digital tools. These approaches provide teachers with the guidance, collaboration, and reinforcement needed to adapt new practices to their unique classroom contexts.

Adopting a holistic CPD lens for various tiers of teaching requires reconfiguration at the system and school level. The illustration below explains the broad implications at both levels.

System level CPD Journey

School level CPD Journey



Beyond technical support, sustained CPD also fosters motivation by building teacher confidence, signaling leadership commitment, and enabling educators to see the tangible benefits of improved student outcomes.

REFERENCES

Ahmad, G., Arain. S. S., & Anjum. T.M., (2022). Impact of Teacher's Professional Trainings on Students' Learning at Secondary Level in Punjab Province, Pakistan: Problems and Prospects. *International Research Journal of Education and Innovation*.
[https://doi.org/10.53575/irjei.v3.01.13\(22\)130-140](https://doi.org/10.53575/irjei.v3.01.13(22)130-140)

Andrews, H. A. (2011). Supporting quality teachers with recognition. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 36(12). <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ954843.pdf>.

DevTrio Consultants. (2018, November). Continuing professional development (CPD) options for primary school teachers (PSTs) at school and local level in Punjab. British Council.
https://www.britishcouncil.pk/sites/default/files/cpd_options_for_psts_at_school_and_local_level_in_punjab_-_british_council_2018.pdf

Kraft, M. A., Blazar, D., & Hogan, D. (2018). The effect of teacher coaching on instruction and achievement: A meta-analysis of the causal evidence. *Review of Educational Research*, 88(4), 547–588. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654318759268>.

SAHE, & Alif Ailaan. (2014). The voice of teachers: Learning from teachers across Pakistan. Alif Ailaan. <https://www.sahe.org.pk/services/the-voice-of-teachers-learning-from-teachers-across-pakistan/>

Scheidig, F., & Tremp, P. (2024). Teaching award winners – (in)visible best-practice examples? Findings from Austria and Switzerland. *International Journal for Academic Development*, 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1360144X.2024.2378790>

Sindh Teacher Education Development Authority (STEDA). (n.d.). Continuous professional development (CPD) model. School Education & Literacy Department, Government of Sindh.
<https://www.sindheducation.gov.pk/Contents/Menu/CPD%20Model.pdf>

Tahira, M., Hassan, A., Malik, A., & Yousuf, M. I. (2020). Teacher education in Pakistan: Issues and problems. ERIC - Education Resources Information Center.
<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED608314.pdf>

