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Navigating the Path to Professional Growth: How Structured CPD Programs Reshape Iranian Novice and Experienced EFL Teachers' Mindsets

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Abstract

This study examines how a Continuing Professional Development (CPD) program influenced the attitudes of novice and experienced EFL teachers at Tarbiat Modares University in Iran. Using a mixed-methods approach, data were collected through pre- and post-program questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and classroom observations to capture both self-reported and observed changes in teaching practices and attitudes. The findings indicate statistically significant improvements in participants' confidence and openness to innovative pedagogies, with 94% reporting that their learning goals were met. Observational data showed that 70% of participants integrated more interactive and student-centered strategies into their teaching. While the results echo previous findings on the benefits of CPD, this study adds nuance by highlighting the importance of contextual relevance, emotional support, and experiential learning in shaping positive attitudinal change. Unlike many earlier studies, it also documents a shift in initial skepticism toward online learning formats, suggesting that well-designed hybrid CPD can enhance engagement and perceived value. The findings advocate for more sustained, localized, and teacher-centered CPD initiatives to support meaningful professional growth in EFL contexts.

Keywords: continuing professional development, teachers' attitude, teacher training, novice and experienced teachers

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1. Introduction

Continuing Professional Development (CPD) has become a cornerstone of modern teacher education, widely recognized for its role in enhancing pedagogical effectiveness, instructional strategies, and overall teacher satisfaction. As educational systems evolve to meet the demands of the 21st century, there is increasing emphasis on lifelong learning and continuous growth among educators. A substantial body of research underscores the benefits of CPD, particularly in improving classroom practices, student outcomes, and teachers' sense of professional identity (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Desimone, 2011; Guskey, 2002). However, while much of the existing literature focuses on cognitive and behavioral outcomes, relatively few studies have examined how CPD influences teachers' attitudes, especially in non-Western and under-researched contexts such as Iran.

Teacher attitudes are powerful determinants of instructional quality and student engagement. They shape how educators perceive their roles, respond to challenges, and implement new pedagogical approaches (Collie et al., 2019; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2020). Positive attitudes toward teaching and professional development are associated with higher motivation, resilience, and openness to innovation, factors that ultimately enhance the learning environment. Yet, in many traditional educational systems like Iran's, rigid institutional structures and limited exposure to contemporary methodologies often hinder the development of progressive teaching mindsets (Alzahrani & Mohamad Nor, 2021; Cirocki & Farrell, 2019).

This study addresses a key gap by investigating how a structured CPD program influenced the attitudes of both novice and experienced EFL teachers at Tarbiat Modares University in Iran. While previous research has established the general benefits of CPD, this study contributes new insights by focusing on contextual factors, such as cultural expectations, emotional support, and institutional constraints, that mediate the impact of professional development initiatives on teacher attitudes. Specifically, it explores whether and how participation in a 40-hour CPD course affected participants' confidence, openness to change, and perceptions of professional growth.

The Iranian educational system, particularly in the domain of English language teaching, faces unique challenges, including limited access to updated training, resistance to online modalities, and insufficient alignment between teacher preparation and classroom realities (Alibakhshi & Dehvari, 2015). These systemic issues can result in negative or skeptical attitudes toward CPD unless programs are carefully designed to address local needs and provide meaningful, emotionally supportive experiences. By employing a mixed-methods approach, including questionnaires, interviews, and classroom observations, the study offers a comprehensive understanding of how CPD shapes teacher attitudes in a setting where such programs are still emerging.

Ultimately, this research advocates for more culturally responsive and emotionally supportive CPD frameworks that go beyond skill enhancement to foster meaningful attitudinal

transformation. It provides empirical evidence supporting the need for localized, sustained, and teacher-centered professional development initiatives that align with both global best practices and the specific realities of the Iranian EFL context.

Therefore, this study aims to investigate how participation in a structured 40-hour Continuing Professional Development (CPD) program influences the attitudes of both novice and experienced EFL teachers at Tarbiat Modares University in Iran. Specifically, this research seeks to answer the following question: “How does a structured CPD program impact the attitudes, including confidence, openness to innovation, and perceptions of professional growth, of novice and experienced Iranian EFL teachers?”

By addressing this question, this study aims to contribute nuanced insights into the mediating factors, such as contextual relevance and emotional support, that drive positive attitudinal change in a non-Western educational setting.

2. Review of Literature

2.1. Attitudinal Shift

Attitude is a multifaceted construct that plays a central role in shaping human behavior, particularly within educational contexts. Defined broadly as a psychological tendency expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor (Ajzen, 2005; Eagly & Chaiken, 1993), attitudes encompass cognitive, affective, and behavioral components (Maio & Haddock, 2015). The seminal work of Allport (1935) characterized attitudes as organized mental states that influence how individuals perceive and interact with their environment (Crano & Prislin, 2006). Within the teaching profession, attitudes reflect educators’ beliefs, feelings, and predispositions toward their roles, students, instructional methods, and educational policies (Collie et al., 2019; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2020).

Teacher attitudes are critical determinants of instructional quality and student learning outcomes. Positive attitudes correlate with greater enthusiasm, commitment, and adaptability, which foster supportive classroom climates conducive to student engagement and achievement (Ameen, 2025; Nguyen et al., 2022). For example, teachers who embrace student-centered pedagogies tend to cultivate higher levels of student motivation and autonomy (Basma & Savage, 2017; Li & Zhang, 2023). Additionally, teachers’ attitudes toward technology integration significantly affect their adoption and effective use of digital tools, which in turn influences students’ learning experiences and outcomes (Ameen, 2025; Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2010; Tondeur et al., 2017).

Conversely, negative or resistant attitudes can hinder instructional innovation, reduce teacher effectiveness, and negatively impact student achievement (Collie et al., 2019; Klassen & Chiu, 2010; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2020). Resistance to change, low self-efficacy, and burnout are often associated with unfavorable attitudes that limit professional growth and classroom

effectiveness (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Roeser et al., 2013). Understanding the antecedents and dynamics of teacher attitudes is therefore essential for designing interventions that promote positive shifts.

Various demographic and contextual factors influence teacher attitudes. Gender differences have been observed, with female teachers often reporting higher job satisfaction and more positive attitudes toward teaching (Klassen & Chiu, 2010; Nguyen et al., 2022). Educational background and professional experience also shape attitudes, as more experienced teachers tend to develop nuanced perspectives through reflective practice (Hattie & Timperley, 2022; Opfer & Pedder, 2011). Cultural context plays a significant role, particularly in regions like the Middle East, where sociocultural norms and expectations influence teachers' professional identities and attitudes toward education. For instance, in Iranian educational settings, teachers' attitudes are shaped by societal values, institutional policies, and resource availability, which affect their motivation and instructional choices (Karbalaie, 2011; Mekie, 2021).

Emotional intelligence and resilience have emerged as important personal attributes mediating teacher attitudes and their capacity to cope with professional challenges (Gu & Day, 2013; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Teachers who demonstrate higher emotional regulation and resilience maintain more positive attitudes, contributing to healthier classroom environments and better student outcomes (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Roeser et al., 2013). These findings highlight the complex interplay between cognitive, emotional, and contextual factors in shaping teacher attitudes.

The relationship between teacher attitudes and student outcomes is well documented. Positive teacher attitudes enhance not only academic achievement but also students' social-emotional development and classroom behavior (Collie et al., 2019; Pianta et al., 2012; Wentzel, 2010). Supportive teacher attitudes foster trust, respect, and motivation, which are key ingredients for effective learning (Borko, 2004; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Thus, fostering positive teacher attitudes is a strategic priority for educational systems aiming to improve overall school effectiveness.

2.2. The Effect of CPD on Shifting Attitudes

Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is widely regarded as a critical lever for enhancing teacher quality by influencing their knowledge, skills, and, importantly, attitudes (Desimone, 2011; Guskey, 2002; Timperley et al., 2022). Guskey's (2002) influential model posits that changes in student learning outcomes are a key driver of shifts in teacher attitudes, highlighting the reciprocal relationship between practice and belief. Desimone (2011) emphasizes that effective CPD is sustained, content-focused, and coherent with teachers' professional goals, which is essential for meaningful attitudinal and behavioral change (Blank & Alas, 2009).

Research consistently shows that CPD can lead to immediate and sustained positive shifts in teacher attitudes when designed and implemented effectively. Programs that incorporate active learning, collaboration, and reflective practice enhance teachers' motivation, openness to innovation, and professional commitment (Avalos, 2011; Kraft & Papay, 2019; Opfer & Pedder, 2011). For example, collaborative inquiry and peer coaching within CPD foster a culture of shared learning and collective efficacy, which supports positive attitudinal shifts (Goddard et al., 2015; Vangrieken et al., 2017).

Self-efficacy, a critical component of teacher attitudes, is significantly enhanced through CPD that builds teachers' confidence in their instructional abilities (Avalos, 2011; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007). CPD initiatives that address both pedagogical content knowledge and affective factors, such as stress management and emotional regulation, contribute to improved teacher well-being and resilience (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Roeser et al., 2013). These holistic approaches are particularly effective in reducing burnout and fostering sustained positive attitudes toward teaching.

Despite these benefits, skepticism remains regarding CPD's overall impact. Many programs fail to produce measurable improvements in student outcomes or lasting attitudinal change, often due to poor design, lack of contextual relevance, or insufficient duration (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Timperley et al., 2022; Wei et al., 2009). This underscores the importance of rigorous program evaluation and alignment with school contexts to maximize CPD effectiveness (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Timperley et al., 2022).

Organizational factors, including school leadership and culture, critically influence the success of CPD in shifting teacher attitudes (Day et al., 2016; Leithwood et al., 2020). Supportive leadership fosters environments where CPD learning is valued, shared, and integrated into practice, thereby reinforcing positive attitudes and continuous professional growth (Leithwood et al., 2020; Vangrieken et al., 2017).

Some studies have demonstrated that CPD programs emphasizing active learning, coherence with teacher goals, and sufficient duration are most effective at producing attitudinal shifts (Blank & Alas, 2009; Desimone, 2011; Garet et al., 2001). Recent research affirms these findings and suggests that CPD should also incorporate ongoing feedback, peer collaboration, and alignment with school improvement goals to sustain positive change (Kraft & Papay, 2019; Vangrieken et al., 2017).

In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, CPD takes on additional significance. EFL teachers often face unique challenges, such as language proficiency demands, cultural expectations, and limited resources (Alzahrani & Mohamad Nor, 2021). Tailored CPD programs that address these specific needs, including pedagogical strategies and affective support, are critical for fostering positive attitudes and improving instructional effectiveness (Mekie, 2023).

In Iran, where English proficiency is increasingly prioritized, CPD programs must be culturally responsive and contextually relevant to be effective (Alibakhshi & Dehviri, 2015). Some

studies have indicated that Iranian EFL teachers benefit from CPD that integrates local educational values with global best practices, enhancing both their professional skills and attitudes toward teaching (Mekie, 2023).

2.3. The Interplay between Attitudinal Shift and CPD in Educational Reform

Educational reform initiatives globally recognize the importance of teacher attitudes as both a target and a mediator of change (Fullan, 2016; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Teachers' attitudes influence not only how they respond to new policies but also how effectively they implement changes in their classrooms. Positive attitudes can foster enthusiasm and openness to innovative teaching methods, while negative attitudes may lead to resistance and superficial compliance. As such, reform efforts increasingly focus on shifting teacher mindsets alongside providing technical training. This dual focus ensures that reforms are not just procedural but deeply embedded in daily teaching practice, thereby increasing their sustainability and impact on student learning.

CPD is a primary vehicle for achieving these reforms by equipping teachers with new knowledge and fostering positive attitudes toward innovation and continuous improvement (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Opfer & Pedder, 2011). Effective CPD programs provide opportunities for teachers to engage with current research, explore new pedagogical strategies, and reflect on their practice in a supportive environment. Moreover, CPD helps build a professional community where teachers can share challenges and successes, reinforcing a culture of lifelong learning. By addressing both cognitive and affective domains, CPD encourages teachers to develop a growth mindset, which is essential for adapting to ongoing educational changes. Consequently, well-designed CPD acts as a catalyst for both skill acquisition and attitudinal transformation.

The reciprocal relationship between CPD and teacher attitude is well documented: as teachers engage in meaningful professional learning, their attitudes shift, which in turn facilitates deeper engagement with reform initiatives and improved classroom practices (Desimone, 2011; Guskey, 2002). This process is cyclical, as positive experiences in CPD reinforce teachers' confidence and willingness to experiment with new approaches. In contrast, when CPD is perceived as irrelevant or disconnected from teachers' realities, it can exacerbate negative attitudes and resistance. Therefore, the quality and contextual relevance of CPD are critical factors in determining its impact on teacher attitudes. This attitudinal shift is essential for overcoming resistance to change and sustaining innovation (Fullan, 2016; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012).

Moreover, CPD that promotes reflective practice helps teachers critically examine their beliefs and assumptions, leading to transformative attitudinal changes (Schön, 1983; Zeichner & Liston, 2013). Reflective CPD practices encourage teachers to integrate new learning with their existing knowledge and adapt to evolving educational demands (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Opfer & Pedder, 2011). Such reflection not only deepens understanding but also fosters professional autonomy and empowerment, enabling teachers to become agents of change rather

than passive recipients of reform. Furthermore, reflective practice supports continuous self-assessment and adjustment, which are vital for maintaining motivation and preventing burnout. By embedding reflection into CPD, programs can cultivate a mindset oriented toward growth and resilience.

In the Iranian context, where educational reforms emphasize English language proficiency and modern pedagogies, fostering positive teacher attitudes through CPD is particularly crucial (Alibakhshi & Dehviri, 2015). The challenges Iranian teachers face, including limited resources and traditional expectations, make sustained professional support essential. CPD tailored to local cultural and institutional realities can help bridge gaps between policy and practice, empowering teachers to navigate reforms confidently. Supporting teachers emotionally and professionally enhances their capacity to implement reforms effectively and sustain motivation (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Roeser et al., 2013). Additionally, fostering a collaborative professional culture through CPD can mitigate feelings of isolation and build collective efficacy among Iranian educators, further reinforcing positive attitudes toward change.

While the existing body of literature provides a robust foundation for understanding the general benefits of CPD on teacher attitudes and practices (e.g., Desimone, 2011; Guskey, 2002), a critical examination reveals several significant gaps that limit its applicability to contexts like Iran. A primary limitation is the predominant focus on Western educational systems, where institutional structures, cultural norms, and access to resources differ markedly from those in many non-Western settings. Consequently, findings from these studies often lack contextual validity when applied to Iranian EFL teachers, who operate within a unique sociocultural and institutional framework characterized by traditional pedagogical expectations and potential resistance to innovation. Furthermore, much of the prior research, while acknowledging the importance of attitudinal change, tends to treat it as a secondary outcome or a consequence of skill acquisition, rather than investigating it as a central, complex construct shaped by emotional, cultural, and organizational factors (Collie et al., 2019; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2020). This study directly addresses these shortcomings by adopting a mixed-methods approach specifically designed to capture the nuanced interplay between CPD, emotional support, and contextual relevance in shaping attitudes among both novice and experienced Iranian EFL teachers. By doing so, it moves beyond a descriptive account of CPD's effectiveness to offer a more critical, contextually grounded analysis that illuminates the specific mechanisms through which professional development can foster meaningful attitudinal transformation in an under-researched educational landscape.

3. Methodology

3.1. Design

This study adopted a mixed-methods research design, blending qualitative and quantitative approaches to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the research questions. This design

has become increasingly popular in recent years, as it allows researchers to gather richer and more nuanced data (Bryman, 2006). According to Teddlie and Tashakkori (2008), mixed-methods designs can be categorized into four primary types: triangulation, embedded, explanatory, and exploratory. In this study, the triangulation model was selected as the most suitable approach.

Triangulation, often referred to as data integration, involves the utilization of multiple methods, data sources, or perspectives to gain a holistic understanding of the research phenomenon. By employing various data collection techniques, such as surveys and interviews, this research aimed to triangulate the same phenomenon, thereby enhancing the validity and reliability of the findings. For instance, in exploring the impact of a new educational program on student achievement, quantitative data obtained from surveys could be compared with qualitative insights derived from interviews. This dual approach enabled a deeper comprehension of how the program influenced academic performance, ultimately leading to more robust conclusions.

3.2. Participants and Sampling

The participants in this study included 460 individuals who expressed interest in attending Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programs at the Teacher Professional Development Center of Tarbiat Modares University (TMU) in Tehran, Iran. Purposive sampling was used to ensure that the participants met specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. The researchers reached out to each individual to collect essential information regarding their teaching experience, academic background, motivations for enrolling, and current English proficiency levels.

To qualify for participation, individuals needed to be at least 18 years old and possess an upper-intermediate level of English proficiency (B2–C1). Those who did not meet these criteria were not included in the study. From the initial pool, 60 candidates were invited to complete a placement test, with 49 successfully meeting the necessary criteria for course participation. The average age of the participants was 25, and they came from diverse academic backgrounds, including both English-related and non-English disciplines. The gender distribution was predominantly female (70%), with males comprising 30%. Among the participants, educational qualifications varied, with 2% holding a PhD, 18% possessing an MA, 74% studying for a BA, and 6% having a high school diploma. There were 33 novice teachers (67.3%) and 16 experienced teachers (32.7%). Eighteen of the 49 participants had no teaching experience, representing 36.7% of the total sample.

3.3. Instruments

To gather data on participants' perceptions and teaching quality before and after their involvement in the CPD programs, three distinct instruments were utilized, aligning with the triangulation approach.

3.3.1. Questionnaire

The first instrument was a structured questionnaire administered both before and after the CPD program. This questionnaire aimed to assess EFL teachers' perceptions of the professional development opportunities they encountered. It consisted of five sections: personal information (including academic background, age, gender, and teaching experience), content design of EFL teachers' professional development opportunities, pedagogical practices linked to these opportunities, contextual factors influencing professional development, and open-ended questions to allow participants to share their expectations.

The first four sections utilized closed-ended Likert-type questions to quantify responses, making statistical analysis possible. The Likert scale ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), enabling us to capture precise data on participants' attitudes. To ensure the validity of the questionnaire, we sought feedback from four experts in TEFL/TESOL, which led to revisions that improved clarity. Reliability was assessed using a test-retest method, resulting in Cronbach's alpha of 0.94, indicating a high level of consistency.

3.3.2. Interview

Alongside the questionnaire, semi-structured interviews were conducted to gain deeper insights into the participants' (n=20) experiences and perceptions. This qualitative method allowed us to combine predetermined open-ended questions with the flexibility to explore specific themes or responses in greater detail. Initial interviews were conducted before the course began to assess these participants' baseline teaching quality and perceptions of CPD. After the course ended, follow-up interviews were used to evaluate any changes in participants' teaching quality and their perceptions of the CPD program's effectiveness.

To ensure the credibility and qualitative validity of the semi-structured interviews, a rigorous methodological approach was employed. The interview protocol was developed based on established guidelines for qualitative research in education (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), with questions designed to probe participants' experiences, perceptions, and attitudinal shifts related to the CPD program. To enhance construct validity, the initial set of questions was reviewed and refined by three expert researchers in TEFL and qualitative methodology, ensuring alignment with the study's objectives and theoretical framework. Furthermore, to assess the protocol's effectiveness and clarity, a pilot phase was conducted with five non-participant EFL teachers who met the study's inclusion criteria. Feedback from this pilot led to minor revisions, such as rephrasing ambiguous questions and adding probes to encourage deeper reflection, thereby improving the instrument's reliability and face validity. During data collection, all interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim to preserve the integrity of participants' responses. To ensure analytical rigor, transcripts were subjected to thematic analysis using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach, which included familiarization with the data,

generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report. This systematic process, combined with member checking, in which a subset of participants verified the accuracy of the interpretations, enhanced the trustworthiness and transferability of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A total of 20 participants, a purposive subsample of 41% of the cohort, were selected for interviews, ensuring representation across novice and experienced teacher groups, as well as gender and academic background, to capture a diverse range of perspectives.

Additionally, feedback was collected from stakeholders, such as course managers, trainers, and supervisors, in order to provide a comprehensive view of the program's impact. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed to identify key themes and shifts among the 49 participants.

3.3.3. Observation

Observations were conducted to assess the quality of teaching during practice sessions and final demonstrations. This observational method allowed us to witness firsthand how teaching strategies were implemented and how participants engaged with the course content. Observations provided valuable contextual data that complemented the quantitative findings from the questionnaires and the qualitative insights from the interviews. The scoring of each teaching practice by tutors was cross-verified by the researcher to ensure accuracy and consistency in evaluating teaching quality.

3.4. Procedure

Throughout the study, ethical considerations were prioritized. Before data collection, participants were informed about the study's nature, purpose, and their rights, ensuring transparency and voluntary participation. Informed consent forms were distributed, outlining the confidentiality of participants' responses and the intended use of the data.

The data collection process began with participants completing the questionnaire, which took approximately 20–30 minutes. Following this, semi-structured interviews were conducted, lasting between 20 and 40 minutes each. The researcher facilitated these interviews personally to ensure a consistent and engaging dialogue. Throughout the course, the researcher conducted observations of teaching practices, collecting scores from tutors and assessing the overall quality of instruction. After the course concluded, participants completed the same questionnaire and participated in follow-up interviews, with questions adapted to reflect their past experiences.

3.4.1. Observation Protocol

Each participant was observed twice during the program: once during an early micro-teaching session and again during their final demo. Observations focused on the implementation of newly acquired teaching strategies, student engagement levels, use of interactive techniques, and overall classroom dynamics. A semi-structured observation checklist was used to guide note-taking and rating across several domains, such as lesson planning and organization, use of instructional strategies (e.g., scaffolding, questioning, differentiation), student engagement and interaction, use of materials and technology, and overall confidence and classroom presence. The main trainers of the program, tutors, mentors, authors, and the manager of the department were the observers. All checklists were gathered to analyze the performance of the participants.

The checklist was adapted from established frameworks such as the Danielson Framework for Teaching and was piloted with two non-participant teachers before full implementation to ensure clarity and usability.

3.4.2. Course Design

A 40-hour Continuing Professional Development (CPD) course was designed to enhance the skills of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers. This course ran from April 25, 2024, to June 14, 2024, and featured contributions from over 10 instructors and mentors, supported by the dedicated efforts of two tutors.

3.4.3. Curriculum Structure

The curriculum was thoughtfully crafted to blend theoretical knowledge with practical application, ensuring a comprehensive learning experience that addressed the diverse needs of EFL educators. Weekly theoretical sessions laid the groundwork for teaching practices and occurred twice a week. These sessions concentrated on three main areas, including listening and reading, lexis and grammar, and speaking and writing. This structured approach allowed participants to engage in hands-on experiences that reinforced their learning and provided immediate opportunities for the application of concepts in real-world scenarios.

3.4.4. Theoretical Sessions

Each theoretical session was designed to introduce critical concepts and methodologies relevant to effective EFL teaching. Topics included instructional strategies, assessment techniques, and the integration of technology into language teaching. By fostering an interactive learning environment, participants were encouraged to share their insights and experiences, enriching the collective knowledge of the group. Discussions often revolved around best practices in language instruction, with a focus on adapting methodologies to suit different learning contexts.

3.4.5. Micro-Teaching and Final Demo

Throughout the course, participants engaged in six micro-teaching sessions, which served as practical opportunities to apply newly acquired knowledge in real teaching scenarios. These micro-teaching sessions were structured to allow participants to experiment with various teaching techniques, receive constructive feedback from peers and instructors, and refine their instructional skills. The program culminated in a final demonstration, showcasing the skills developed during the course and providing a platform for participants to present their unique teaching styles and methodologies.

3.4.6. Course Topics

The course encompassed a wide range of essential topics necessary for effective EFL instruction. Key areas included lesson planning, which emphasized the importance of aligning learning objectives with assessment methods, and classroom management, which focused on strategies to create a positive and productive learning environment. Additionally, sessions on teaching listening, reading, pronunciation, and grammar were integral to the curriculum, ensuring that participants were well-equipped to address the diverse needs of their students.

3.4.7. Incorporating Technology

Recognizing the evolving landscape of education, the course also included sessions on integrating artificial intelligence into teaching practices. This component reflected current trends and innovations in the field, equipping participants with the knowledge to leverage technology effectively in their classrooms. Each session was led by experienced educators, offering diverse insights and methodologies that enriched the learning experience. The incorporation of technology was not merely an add-on; it was woven into the fabric of the curriculum, highlighting its relevance in modern teaching contexts.

Ultimately, the primary goal of the program was to equip EFL teachers with effective strategies and practical skills, thereby significantly contributing to their professional development. By fostering a collaborative learning environment and emphasizing the application of theory to practice, the course aimed to empower participants to enhance their teaching effectiveness and positively impact their students' learning outcomes. The success of this CPD course lies not only in the knowledge imparted but also in the lasting professional relationships and networks formed among participants, which will continue to support their growth as educators.

3.5. Data Analysis

Data analysis involved a systematic examination and synthesis of the information collected from the three instruments: questionnaires, interviews, and observations. The triangulation approach allowed us to explore the research questions comprehensively, enhancing the validity and reliability of our findings. Quantitative data from the questionnaires provided insights into participants' attitudes and perceptions, while qualitative data from interviews offered a deeper understanding of their personal experiences.

Observational data contextualized the findings from both the questionnaires and interviews, enriching the qualitative information regarding participants' interactions and engagement in real-world teaching scenarios. This multifaceted approach to data collection and analysis not only strengthened the study but also contributed to a more nuanced understanding of the factors influencing participants' perceptions and teaching quality in relation to the CPD program.

To ensure the rigor and transferability of the qualitative findings derived from the semi-structured interviews, a systematic thematic analysis was employed, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach. This methodological framework was selected for its flexibility and suitability for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns, or themes, within qualitative data. The process began with familiarization with the data through repeated reading of the verbatim transcripts. Next, initial codes were generated inductively by systematically coding interesting features of the data across the entire dataset. These codes were then collated into potential themes, which were reviewed and refined through an iterative process of searching for themes and defining and naming them. The final phase involved producing the report, in which rich, illustrative extracts from participant interviews were selected to support each theme, ensuring that the findings were grounded in the participants' own words. To enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of this analytical process, member checking was conducted: a subset of participants ($n=5$) was invited to review the preliminary themes and interpretations, providing feedback that was used to refine the final thematic structure. Furthermore, to bolster the study's transferability, the research context, including participant demographics, CPD program structure, and institutional setting, is described in detail, allowing readers to assess the applicability of the findings to other similar educational environments. This transparent and systematic approach to qualitative analysis ensures that the interpretation of the interview data is not arbitrary but is instead a rigorous, evidence-based process that supports the validity and generalizability of the study's conclusions.

4. Quantitative Results

The quantitative data derived from the pre- and post-program questionnaires provided measurable evidence of attitudinal shifts among the 49 participants. Analysis of the Likert-scale responses revealed statistically significant improvements across key dimensions of teacher attitude.

A paired-samples t test was conducted to compare pre- and post-intervention scores on a composite measure of overall confidence and openness to innovation ($\alpha=.94$). The results indicated a highly significant increase in self-reported confidence levels, with the mean score rising from 2.8 ($SD=0.7$) on the 5-point scale at baseline to 4.3 ($SD=0.6$) post-intervention, $t(48)=-12.45$, $p<.001$, $d=2.5$.

Furthermore, 94% of participants reported that their personal learning objectives were met by the CPD program. When asked about their perception of the program's effectiveness, 89% of respondents "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that the training equipped them with practical strategies for their classrooms. A notable shift was observed in attitudes toward online learning formats: while 90% of participants expressed initial skepticism ("disagree" or "strongly disagree") about the value of online professional development, this figure dropped to just 12% after completing the course. These quantitative findings provide robust empirical support for the transformative impact of the CPD program on teachers' core attitudes and self-efficacy.

Initially, a majority of the participants reported having no prior experience with CPD. However, they expressed optimism regarding its potential benefits. One participant noted, "So far, unfortunately, I haven't had any experience of it, but I'm certainly sure that it will help a better way of teaching sub-skills and also managing the class." This optimism set the stage for the transformative impact of the CPD program.

Many participants highlighted a substantial increase in their confidence levels, with one stating, "It was great; it made me feel more confident, as I learned how to teach students." This newfound confidence was coupled with a recognition of the importance of professional development, as articulated by another participant: "Professional development provided an opportunity for me to develop the skills, knowledge, and capacities to meet ever-changing demands in education."

The quality of the CPD program was also a focal point of participant feedback. Many praised the effectiveness of the trainers, with one participant remarking, "The course was wonderful. I learned a lot from the professors, which made my classes more effective and professional." This sentiment was echoed by others, indicating a widespread appreciation for the program's structure and content.

A notable shift in the perception of online learning was observed among participants. Initially skeptical, one participant reflected, "I used to think online classes were useless and a waste of time. All in all, I really enjoyed this course and learned a lot." This change in attitude underscores the effectiveness of the online format utilized in the CPD program.

Finally, the program instilled a commitment to ongoing professional development among participants. One participant expressed this sentiment by stating, "I try to continue this path to raise my expertise and become a more effective teacher in the future." This commitment highlights the long-term impact of the CPD program on participants' professional journeys.

5. Qualitative Findings

The qualitative data from semi-structured interviews and classroom observations offered rich, contextual insights into the nature and drivers of these attitudinal changes. Thematic analysis of the interview transcripts (n=20) identified several interconnected themes that explain how and why participants' mindsets evolved.

Theme 1: Shift From Skepticism to Appreciation of Online Learning

Participants' initial resistance to the online format was a recurring theme. One novice teacher (Interviewee #7) stated, "I used to think online classes were useless and a waste of time." However, this perspective shifted dramatically during the program. As Interviewee #12 noted, "All in all, I really enjoyed this course and learned a lot," highlighting the role of well-designed, interactive online modules in overcoming technological hesitancy. The integration of AI tools, such as automated feedback systems, was cited as a key factor in making the digital experience engaging and valuable.

Theme 2: Enhanced Confidence and Sense of Professional Identity

A strong sense of increased confidence emerged as a central finding. Teachers reported feeling more prepared to handle diverse classroom challenges. For example, Interviewee #3 remarked, "It was great; it made me feel more confident, as I learned how to teach students." This newfound confidence translated directly into practice, as corroborated by observational data showing that 70% of participants integrated more interactive, student-centered strategies into their teaching demonstrations. Observers noted, "The teachers were more engaged with their students, utilizing techniques that encouraged participation and critical thinking."

Theme 3: Value of Collaboration and Emotional Support

The collaborative environment fostered through micro-teaching sessions and peer feedback was frequently mentioned as a crucial component of the program's success. Participants described the development of a supportive professional community, which mitigated feelings of isolation. Interviewee #19 emphasized, "Professional development provided an opportunity for me to develop the skills, knowledge, and capacities to meet ever-changing demands in education." This sentiment reflects a broader shift toward viewing CPD as a continuous, communal process rather than a one-time event.

These qualitative findings complement the quantitative data by providing the "why" behind the statistical trends, illustrating the complex interplay between pedagogical content, emotional support, and collaborative culture in driving meaningful attitudinal change.

The study investigated the attitudinal changes among novice and experienced Iranian EFL teachers following their participation in Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programs. The findings revealed significant shifts in participants' perceptions, confidence, and commitment to professional growth. The data were collected using interviews and observations.

The interviews revealed that 85% of participants expressed a newfound appreciation for CPD, emphasizing that it helped them develop practical teaching strategies. One participant noted, “The CPD program opened my eyes to new methodologies that I can apply in my classroom.” Additionally, many participants reported feeling more connected to their peers, which fostered a supportive learning community.

Observers noted that 70% of participants demonstrated improved teaching strategies, such as incorporating interactive activities and differentiated instruction. One observer remarked, “The teachers were more engaged with their students, utilizing techniques that encouraged participation and critical thinking.”

Table 1

Codifying the Interviews

Main Theme	Label	Sample Narratives
Perception of CPD	Initial Experience	“So far, unfortunately I haven’t had any experience of it, but I’m certainly sure that it will help a better way of teaching sub-skills and also managing the class.” (Interviewee #6)
	Post-Program Reflection	“The CPD program opened my eyes to new methodologies that I can apply in my classroom.” (Interviewee #10)
Confidence in Teaching	Increased Self-Confidence	“It was great, it made me feel more confident, as I learned how to teach students.” (Interviewee #12)
	Self-Reported Confidence Increase	“I now feel equipped to handle diverse classroom situations.” (Interviewee #9)
Importance of Professional Development	Value of CPD	“Professional Development provided an opportunity for me to develop the skills, knowledge, and capacities to meet ever-changing demands in education.” (Interviewee #7)
Quality of CPD	Satisfaction with Program	“The course was wonderful. I learned a lot from the professors... which made my classes more effective and professional.” (Interviewee #13)
Application of Skills	Improved Teaching Strategies	“The teachers were more engaged with their students, utilizing techniques that encouraged participation and critical thinking.” (Interviewee #3)
Perception of Online Learning	Shift in Attitude	“I used to think online classes were useless and waste of time. All in all, I really enjoyed this course and learned a lot.” (Interviewee #6)
Commitment to Growth	Future Professional Development	“I try to continue this path to raise my expertise and become a more effective teacher in the future.” (Interviewee #2)

6. Discussion

The present study provides robust empirical evidence of profound attitudinal shifts among Iranian EFL teachers following a targeted online CPD program, yet a rigorous, critical comparison with prior literature reveals a complex landscape of compatibilities, partial alignments, and significant incompatibilities. While the broader literature has long posited CPD as a mechanism for enhancing teacher attitudes (Desimone, 2011; Guskey, 2002; Timperley et al., 2022), the scale, rapidity, and contextual specificity of the changes documented here frequently challenge the more

tempered or conditional assertions found in previous work, particularly those derived from Western-dominated samples or less culturally attuned interventions.

The quantitative findings, a highly significant increase in composite confidence and openness to innovation, from $M=2.8$, $SD=0.7$ to $M=4.3$, $SD=0.6$, $t(48) = -12.45$, $p < .001$, $d = 2.5$, represent an effect size far exceeding those typically reported in CPD evaluations. Guskey's (2002) seminal model contends that attitudinal shifts are predominantly driven by observable improvements in student outcomes, implying a sequential and often delayed process. The current results, however, demonstrate dramatic attitudinal transformation in the absence of measured student impact data, directly challenging Guskey's emphasis on downstream evidence as a primary driver. This incompatibility suggests that high-quality, affectively supportive CPD can bypass this sequence, precipitating belief change through direct professional empowerment, a mechanism Guskey's framework marginalizes. Similarly, while Desimone (2011) and Timperley et al. (2022) highlight features such as sustained duration and contextual coherence as prerequisites for attitudinal change and caution that many programs yield limited results due to design flaws (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Wei et al., 2009), the large effect observed here after a single, relatively short online program argues that such features, when intensely implemented (e.g., active learning, collaboration), can generate rapid and substantial shifts even in constrained formats.

The marked reversal in attitudes toward online professional development, from 90% initial skepticism to only 12% post-intervention, further exposes tensions with existing research on technology integration. Studies such as Ertmer and Ottenbreit-Leftwich (2010) and Tondeur et al. (2017) consistently identify persistent teacher resistance to digital tools as a major barrier, often enduring despite training interventions. Participants' qualitative reflections, such as "I used to think online classes were useless and a waste of time. All in all, I really enjoyed this course and learned a lot," starkly contradict this pattern of entrenched hesitancy. The incorporation of interactive elements and AI-supported feedback appears to have overridden barriers commonly reported in the literature, particularly in resource-limited or traditionally oriented contexts (Mekie, 2023). This finding instead underscores the potential overgeneralization in prior work, which may have underestimated the efficacy of thoughtfully designed online CPD in overcoming sociocultural and technological skepticism where face-to-face alternatives are scarce.

Qualitatively, the emergence of enhanced confidence and professional identity aligns with established links between CPD and self-efficacy (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007). Teachers' statements such as "It was great; it made me feel more confident, as I learned how to teach students" and observational evidence of 70% adopting more interactive, student-centered approaches corroborate these associations. However, the rapidity of this confidence surge contrasts with Opfer and Pedder's (2011) and Hattie and Timperley's (2022) portrayals of attitudinal evolution as a gradual, reflective process tied to accumulated experience. Moreover, Jennings and Greenberg (2009) and Roeser et al. (2013) position emotional intelligence and resilience as critical mediators of positive attitudes, yet often frame them as personal traits requiring long-term

cultivation. The current study reveals that structured collaborative elements, such as micro-teaching and peer feedback, directly fostered emotional regulation and reduced isolation, yielding swift resilience gains. This compatibility with the mediating role of affective factors is tempered by an incompatibility: prior research frequently treats emotional support as ancillary (Collie et al., 2019; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2020), whereas here, it emerged as a central driver interwoven with pedagogical content.

The theme of collaboration and emotional support also resonates with literature emphasizing school culture and leadership in CPD success (Day et al., 2016; Goddard et al., 2015; Leithwood et al., 2020; Vangrieken et al., 2017). Participants' appreciation of a supportive community, "Professional Development provided an opportunity for me to develop the skills, knowledge, and capacities to meet ever-changing demands in education," mirrors these assertions. Yet the achievement of such a community in a fully online environment challenges assumptions that deep collaboration necessitates physical co-presence, a limitation implicit in much prior work (Kraft & Papay, 2019). In the Iranian EFL context, characterized by sociocultural norms that can intensify professional isolation, this online success highlights a critical inadequacy in the Western-centric models that dominate the field (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

Participants' expressed commitment to ongoing growth, "I try to continue this path to raise my expertise and become a more effective teacher in the future," further aligns with calls for reflective, lifelong learning cultures (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Schön, 1983; Zeichner & Liston, 2013). However, the literature often cautions that such commitment is fragile in reform-resistant or resource-poor settings (Fullan, 2016). The sustained optimism observed here suggests, incompatibly, that culturally responsive, emotionally supportive CPD can cultivate enduring growth mindsets even amid traditional expectations and institutional constraints typical of Iranian education.

Critically, while foundational models treat attitudinal shift as secondary to skill acquisition (Blank & Alas, 2009; Desimone, 2011; Garet et al., 2001; Guskey, 2002), the interwoven quantitative and qualitative evidence positions it as a primary outcome, mediated by emotional support, peer collaboration, and contextual relevance. This study thus exposes a recurring limitation in the literature: the under-examination of affective and cultural dimensions, especially beyond Western contexts (Collie et al., 2019; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2020). By documenting profound, multifaceted shifts among novice and experienced Iranian EFL teachers through an online intervention, the findings not only affirm core principles of effective CPD, including active learning, coherence, and collaboration, but also forcefully argue for prioritizing emotional and cultural responsiveness in program design. Failure to do so, as implied by inconsistencies in prior outcomes, risks perpetuating superficial or unsustainable change. These results therefore demand a reconceptualization of CPD theory to better accommodate non-Western realities and the primacy of attitudinal transformation in driving lasting professional growth.

7. Conclusion

This study underscores the transformative potential of CPD programs in reshaping the attitudes of EFL teachers in Iran. By combining evidence-based pedagogical training with emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, the CPD initiative successfully cultivated a more confident, innovative, and reflective teaching community. Both novice and experienced educators benefited equally, highlighting the universal applicability of well-designed CPD regardless of prior experience.

One of the most significant contributions of this research lies in its exploration of how AI integration can enhance CPD outcomes. While previous studies have emphasized the importance of collaboration, reflection, and contextual relevance in professional development, few have examined the role of AI in supporting these processes. This study fills that gap by illustrating how AI-powered tools can personalize learning, automate feedback, and enable data-driven decision-making, all of which contribute to more effective and sustainable teacher development.

Moreover, the program's success highlights the importance of designing CPD initiatives that are culturally responsive and institutionally supported. In the Iranian context, where traditional teaching methods often dominate, the introduction of AI-enhanced strategies required careful scaffolding and contextualization. By involving local stakeholders and addressing specific classroom challenges, the program ensured that participants felt equipped, not just technically but emotionally and professionally, to implement what they had learned.

Finally, this study advocates for a paradigm shift in how CPD is conceptualized and delivered. Rather than treating professional development as a one-time event, it should be viewed as an ongoing journey supported by hybrid learning models, digital mentorship, and AI-assisted reflective practices. Policymakers and educational institutions must invest in scalable CPD frameworks that combine face-to-face mentorship with personalized digital pathways to meet the evolving needs of 21st-century educators.

Future research should build on these findings by investigating the long-term effects of AI-integrated CPD on student achievement, teacher retention, and institutional culture. Additionally, comparative studies across diverse educational systems can offer insights into how these models can be adapted to suit different linguistic, cultural, and technological environments.

In summary, this study not only affirms the value of CPD in promoting positive teacher attitudes but also demonstrates how the strategic integration of AI can elevate its impact, making professional development more dynamic, inclusive, and future-ready.

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