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Reinventing teacher educators' professional learning: Affordances of a context-based continuous professional development model in Kenya

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Abstract

Continuous Professional Development (CPD) is widely recognised as a critical mechanism for strengthening teachers' and teacher educators' capacity to respond to evolving educational reforms. However, many professional development initiatives remain episodic, externally driven and insufficiently connected to educators' institutional realities, limiting their long-term impact on professional practice. This study investigated how a context-based CPD model influenced teacher educators' pedagogical capacity, professional identity and implementation of competency-based education within a Kenyan teacher education institution. Guided by Transformative Learning Theory and Experiential Learning Theory, the study employed a qualitative research design involving 24 teacher educators who participated in a four-year workplace-based CPD programme. Data were generated through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, reflective narratives and document analysis and analysed using thematic analysis. The findings indicate that the context-based CPD model enhanced tutors' pedagogical competence, strengthened digital literacy, improved assessment practices, fostered reflective practice, promoted collaborative mentoring and increased confidence in implementing competency-based curricula. The workplace-embedded nature of the programme enabled participants to translate professional learning directly into classroom practice while simultaneously transforming their professional identities. Nevertheless, institutional constraints, including inadequate digital

infrastructure, limited instructional resources and competing workload demands, constrained the sustainability of some innovations. This study contributes to the growing literature on teacher professional learning by demonstrating that context-based CPD extends beyond knowledge acquisition to facilitate sustained pedagogical transformation through reflection, collaboration and situated professional inquiry. It argues that effective CPD should be continuous, context-responsive, evidence-informed and institutionally supported if meaningful educational reform is to be realised.

Key terms: Continuous Professional Development, Context-Based Professional Learning, Teacher Educators, Competency-Based Education, Transformative Learning, Experiential Learning, Kenya.

Introduction

Educational systems worldwide are undergoing profound transformation as governments seek to prepare learners for increasingly complex social, technological and economic realities. These reforms have accelerated the adoption of competency-based education (CBE), which emphasises the development of transferable knowledge, practical skills, values and dispositions required for lifelong learning and participation in contemporary society. Consequently, countries across Europe, Asia, Africa and the Americas have restructured their curricula to promote learner-centred pedagogies, authentic assessment, digital integration and competency-oriented instruction. Kenya joined this global movement in 2017 through the implementation of the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC), fundamentally redefining expectations of teaching, learning and assessment.

Curriculum reform cannot succeed solely through policy change. Its effectiveness is largely dependent on the professional knowledge, pedagogical competence and adaptive capacity of teachers and teacher educators who translate curriculum intentions into classroom practice. Teacher educators occupy a particularly strategic position as they prepare future teachers while simultaneously modelling the instructional approaches expected within contemporary education systems. Their professional learning, therefore, has multiplier effects that extend beyond individual classrooms to influence institutional quality and national education reform.

Consequently, Continuous Professional Development (CPD) has become an essential strategy for strengthening educational quality and supporting sustainable curriculum implementation. International organisations increasingly recognise that effective professional learning is continuous, collaborative, evidence-informed and embedded within educators' workplaces rather than limited to isolated workshops. Such approaches enable teachers and teacher educators to respond effectively to changing curricular expectations, technological innovation and the evolving needs of learners.

Recent scholarship has therefore shifted attention from the quantity of professional development to its quality, relevance and contextual responsiveness. Emerging evidence suggests that professional learning is most effective when it is embedded within educators' workplaces, addresses authentic professional challenges, promotes collaborative inquiry and enables continuous reflection on practice. Context-based CPD represents one such approach by positioning educators' institutional environments as the primary sites for professional learning. Rather than treating teachers as passive recipients of externally generated knowledge, this model encourages them to become reflective practitioners, collaborators and agents of educational improvement capable of generating locally relevant solutions to pedagogical challenges.

Although context-responsive models have attracted growing international attention, empirical evidence regarding their influence on teacher educators' professional learning remains relatively limited, particularly within sub-Saharan Africa. Existing studies predominantly examine school teachers, while

comparatively little is known about how workplace-based professional learning shapes teacher educators' pedagogical practices, professional identities and readiness to implement competency-based reforms. This represents an important knowledge gap because teacher educators play a pivotal role in preparing future teachers to enact educational change.

This study addresses the gap in research by examining the affordances of a context-based Continuous Professional Development (CPD) model implemented over four years within a Kenyan teacher education institution. The study explored how sustained workplace-based professional learning influenced tutors' pedagogical capacity, curriculum implementation, mentoring practices, reflective practice, assessment approaches and professional identity. It further investigated the institutional factors that enabled or constrained the implementation of learning acquired through the CPD programme.

The study is guided by the following research question:

How does a context-based model of CPD build teacher educators' pedagogical capacity and transform their professional practice within a teacher education institution?

Grounded in Transformative Learning Theory and Experiential Learning Theory, this study contributes to the scholarship on teacher professional learning by demonstrating how context-responsive CPD can facilitate sustained professional transformation through reflection, collaborative inquiry and authentic workplace learning. Beyond its theoretical contribution, the study offers practical insights for policymakers, teacher education institutions and professional development providers seeking to design sustainable CPD models capable of supporting competency-based educational reform.

Literature Review

Continuous Professional Development in Teacher Education

Continuous Professional Development (CPD) has become a central pillar of educational reform as countries seek to improve teaching quality and learner outcomes in increasingly complex educational environments. Rather than viewing teacher learning as an isolated event occurring during pre-service education, contemporary scholarship conceptualises professional learning as a lifelong, continuous, and contextually situated process through which educators refine their knowledge, pedagogical skills, professional judgement, and professional identity (Kennedy, 2014; OECD, 2019).

The global transition towards competency-based education has intensified the need for effective professional learning. Competency-based curricula require teachers to facilitate learner-centred instruction, authentic assessment, interdisciplinary learning, and technology-enhanced pedagogies. Consequently, teacher educators are expected not only to understand these reforms but also to model them in preparing future teachers. Professional learning has therefore become an indispensable mechanism for strengthening instructional quality and supporting successful curriculum implementation (OECD, 2019; UNESCO, 2021).

Despite widespread investment in CPD, concerns remain regarding its effectiveness. Many professional development programmes continue to rely on short-term workshops characterised by one-way transmission of information, limited opportunities for practice, and minimal follow-up support. Such approaches frequently improve awareness without producing sustained changes in classroom practice or professional identity. Increasingly, researchers argue that the effectiveness of CPD depends less on the quantity of training provided than on the quality, relevance, duration, and contextual responsiveness of professional learning experiences (Kennedy, 2005, 2014).

Models of Continuous Professional Development

Scholars have proposed numerous models of CPD, reflecting differing assumptions about how teachers learn and improve professionally (Kennedy, 2005, 2014). Kennedy (2005) conceptualises professional development along a continuum ranging from transmissive models that emphasise knowledge transfer to transformative models that promote teacher autonomy, inquiry, and professional agency.

Among the most widely implemented approaches is the cascade model, in which selected educators receive initial training before disseminating knowledge to colleagues. Although economically attractive and capable of reaching large numbers of teachers within a relatively short period, the cascade model has been criticised for reducing opportunities for contextual adaptation and collaborative professional learning (Kennedy, 2005).

Alternative approaches emphasise collaborative and inquiry-oriented learning. Increasingly, international evidence suggests that professional learning is most effective when educators participate in sustained, collaborative, workplace-based learning that is directly connected to their instructional practice (OECD, 2019).

More recently, workplace-embedded models have gained prominence because they position schools and teacher education institutions as primary sites for professional learning. Rather than separating professional development from everyday practice, these approaches integrate learning within educators' normal work environments, enabling immediate application, collaborative problem-solving, and continuous reflection.

Context-Based Continuous Professional Development

Context-based CPD has emerged as one of the most promising approaches to teacher professional learning because it situates learning within educators' own institutional, cultural, and professional environments. The underlying assumption is that professional knowledge develops most effectively when teachers investigate authentic problems arising from their own practice rather than attempting to implement externally prescribed solutions.

Research increasingly demonstrates that context-based CPD strengthens teacher agency, promotes professional collaboration, enhances reflective practice, and supports sustainable instructional improvement (Gjedia & Gardinier, 2017; OECD, 2019). Because learning occurs within authentic professional settings, participants are able to test new ideas, evaluate their effectiveness, and continuously refine their practice.

The model further aligns with the concept of professional learning communities, where teachers collectively investigate instructional challenges, share expertise, provide peer feedback, and generate institutional knowledge (Gjedia & Gardinier, 2017).

Nevertheless, successful implementation depends upon supportive organisational conditions, including institutional leadership, adequate learning resources, opportunities for collaboration, and sustained investment in professional learning (UNESCO, 2021).

Teacher Professional Learning as Transformative and Experiential

Contemporary perspectives increasingly recognise teacher learning as a transformative and experiential process rather than simple acquisition of technical knowledge. Professional learning involves questioning existing assumptions, reconstructing pedagogical beliefs, experimenting with alternative practices, and developing new professional identities through reflective engagement with experience.

Transformative Learning Theory explains how educators critically examine established beliefs and assumptions when confronted with new educational challenges. Perspective transformation occurs through critical reflection, dialogue, and reinterpretation of professional experience, enabling teachers to adopt more effective instructional practices. Within competency-based education, where learner-centred pedagogies challenge traditional transmission models of teaching, transformative learning provides a valuable framework for understanding professional change.

Experiential Learning Theory complements this perspective by explaining how professional knowledge develops through iterative cycles of experience, reflection, conceptualisation, and experimentation. Rather than learning through passive reception of information, educators actively construct understanding by engaging with authentic teaching situations, reflecting upon outcomes, and applying new insights within their professional contexts. Together, these theories suggest that meaningful CPD should provide opportunities for reflection, collaboration, experimentation, and continuous refinement of practice.

Knowledge Gap and Contribution of the Study

Although the international literature increasingly supports workplace-based and context-responsive professional learning, empirical evidence remains concentrated within school settings and predominantly focuses on practising teachers. Comparatively limited research has examined how context-based CPD influences teacher educators, whose professional learning has important implications for the preparation of future teachers and the successful implementation of competency-based education.

Furthermore, relatively few African studies have investigated how sustained, institutionally embedded professional development shapes pedagogical practice, professional identity, mentoring, reflective practice, and curriculum implementation over extended periods. Existing research often evaluates short-term interventions rather than examining long-term professional transformation.

This study addresses these gaps by investigating a four-year context-based CPD programme implemented within a Kenyan teacher education institution. By examining tutors' experiences through the complementary lenses of Transformative Learning Theory and Experiential Learning Theory, the study contributes empirical evidence on how workplace-based professional learning facilitates sustained pedagogical transformation, strengthens professional identity, and supports competency-based educational reform. In doing so, it extends current understanding of context-based CPD beyond teacher development to the professional learning of teacher educators within African higher education.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in Transformative Learning Theory (TLT) (Mezirow, 1989) and Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) (Kolb, 2015). These complementary theories provide a robust conceptual framework for understanding how teacher educators acquire new professional knowledge, critically examine existing pedagogical assumptions, and transform their instructional practices through sustained workplace-based learning. Together, the theories explain not only *how* professional learning occurs but also *why* context-based Continuous Professional Development (CPD) can generate lasting changes in professional practice.

Transformative Learning Theory

Transformative Learning Theory, developed by Mezirow (1989), conceptualises adult learning as a process through which individuals critically examine their existing assumptions, beliefs, and professional practices before reconstructing new perspectives that guide future action. Unlike traditional views of professional development that emphasise the acquisition of technical skills, transformative learning

recognises that meaningful professional growth requires educators to question deeply held beliefs about teaching, learning, and assessment.

Perspective transformation often begins with what Mezirow describes as a *disorienting dilemma*—an experience that challenges existing ways of thinking. Within teacher education, curriculum reforms, technological innovations, changing learner characteristics, and new assessment approaches frequently create such dilemmas by exposing the limitations of established pedagogical practices. Through critical reflection, professional dialogue, and collaborative inquiry, educators gradually reconstruct their understanding of effective teaching and develop new professional identities.

The implementation of Kenya's Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) represents such a transformative context. Teacher educators who had previously relied on teacher-centred pedagogies were required to adopt learner-centred instruction, authentic assessment, digital integration, and competency-oriented teaching approaches. Context-based CPD provided opportunities for participants to reflect critically on these changing expectations, examine their existing instructional practices, and experiment with alternative pedagogical strategies within their own institutional settings. Consequently, Transformative Learning Theory offers an appropriate lens for understanding how sustained professional learning contributed to changes in participants' pedagogical beliefs, professional identities, and instructional practices.

Experiential Learning Theory

Experiential Learning Theory, proposed by Kolb (2015), complements Transformative Learning Theory by explaining how professional knowledge is constructed through experience. Kolb argues that learning is a continuous process involving four interconnected stages: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation, and active experimentation. These stages form a cyclical process through which individuals continuously refine their knowledge and professional competence.

Within context-based CPD, teacher educators engaged directly with authentic teaching challenges encountered in their classrooms and institutions. Professional workshops introduced innovative pedagogical approaches that participants immediately implemented in their own teaching. Reflection on these experiences enabled tutors to evaluate the effectiveness of new strategies, generate professional insights, and modify subsequent instructional practices. Rather than learning through passive reception of information, participants developed professional competence through iterative cycles of practice, reflection, adaptation, and improvement.

Experiential learning is particularly relevant to teacher education because professional competence develops through active engagement with authentic educational contexts. Classroom teaching, mentoring student teachers, curriculum implementation, assessment, and educational technology integration all provide opportunities for educators to construct professional knowledge through experience. Context-based CPD therefore aligns closely with Kolb's conception of learning by situating professional development within educators' everyday work environments.

Integrating Transformative and Experiential Learning

Although Transformative Learning Theory and Experiential Learning Theory differ in their emphasis, they are complementary rather than competing perspectives. Transformative Learning Theory explains the cognitive and reflective processes through which educators reconsider existing beliefs and develop new professional perspectives, whereas Experiential Learning Theory explains how those new perspectives are translated into improved professional practice through continuous cycles of experience and reflection.

Together, the theories suggest that effective professional learning requires more than the transmission of

new knowledge. It requires opportunities for educators to engage in authentic professional experiences, critically reflect on those experiences, collaborate with colleagues, test alternative pedagogical approaches, and continuously refine their practice within supportive institutional environments. These characteristics correspond closely with the principles underpinning context-based CPD.

Conceptual Lens for the Study

The integration of Transformative Learning Theory and Experiential Learning Theory informed both the design and interpretation of this study. The theories guided the analysis by providing a framework for examining how participation in a four-year context-based CPD programme influenced teacher educators' professional learning.

Specifically, the study explored whether participation in workplace-based professional learning:

- challenged existing pedagogical assumptions and stimulated critical reflection;
- strengthened pedagogical competence and confidence in implementing competency-based education;
- promoted reflective practice, mentoring, and collaborative professional learning;
- enhanced digital literacy and assessment practices through authentic classroom application; and
- contributed to the development of new professional identities and sustained improvements in teaching practice.

Rather than serving merely as explanatory background, the two theories function as analytical lenses through which the findings are interpreted. They provide the conceptual bridge between participants lived experiences and the broader processes of professional transformation, enabling a deeper understanding of how context-based CPD contributes to sustainable educational improvement.

Conceptual Proposition

Drawing upon these complementary theories, this study advances the proposition that context-based Continuous Professional Development facilitates sustained professional transformation when authentic workplace experiences are combined with critical reflection, collaborative inquiry, and continuous experimentation within supportive institutional contexts**.** This proposition underpins the analysis presented in the subsequent sections of the paper and forms the basis for interpreting the relationship between professional learning, pedagogical change, and curriculum implementation.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative research design to explore how participation in a context-based Continuous Professional Development (CPD) programme influenced teacher educators' professional learning and pedagogical practice. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study sought to understand participants lived experiences, professional meanings, and interpretations of sustained workplace-based learning rather than measure predetermined outcomes. Qualitative inquiry is particularly suitable for investigating complex educational processes where participants' perspectives, reflections, and experiences provide rich insights into how professional transformation occurs (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The study was guided by the following research question:

How does a context-based model of Continuous Professional Development build teacher educators' pedagogical capacity and transform their professional practice within a teacher education institution?

Given the exploratory nature of this question, qualitative inquiry enabled an in-depth examination of how tutors experienced, interpreted, and applied professional learning within their institutional contexts over an extended period.

Study Context

The study was conducted in a public teacher education institution in Kenya that participated in a four-year Continuous Professional Development programme implemented through an educational partnership with a university. The programme was deliberately designed using a context-based CPD model, where professional learning was embedded within the tutors' workplace rather than delivered through isolated external workshops.

The intervention sought to strengthen tutors' capacity to implement competency-based education through sustained professional learning that integrated learner-centred pedagogy, assessment for learning, educational technology, reflective practice, mentoring, and collaborative inquiry. Professional development activities were continuously adapted to the institution's emerging needs, allowing tutors to implement, evaluate, and refine new practices within their own classrooms.

Participants and Sampling

Purposive sampling was employed to select participants who had actively engaged in the CPD programme throughout the implementation period. This sampling strategy ensured that participants possessed direct experience of the phenomenon under investigation and could provide rich, information-intensive accounts of professional learning and pedagogical change.

The study involved 24 teacher educators representing different subject specialisations within the institution. Because these tutors participated in the CPD programme over four years, they were well-positioned to reflect on changes in their instructional practices, professional beliefs, curriculum implementation, mentoring experiences, and institutional learning.

Data Collection

Data were generated using multiple qualitative methods to capture different dimensions of participants' professional experiences and to enhance the credibility of the findings through methodological triangulation.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews provided opportunities for participants to describe their experiences of the CPD programme in depth. An interview guide containing open-ended questions facilitated discussion while allowing flexibility to probe emerging issues and explore participants' reflections in greater detail. Interviews focused on tutors' pedagogical practices, implementation of competency-based education, professional identity, mentoring, assessment, reflective practice, and perceived facilitators and barriers to professional learning.

Focus Group Discussions

Focus group discussions complemented individual interviews by enabling participants to collectively reflect upon shared professional experiences. Group interaction stimulated dialogue, encouraged comparison of perspectives, and generated richer insights into institutional learning processes, collaborative practice, and professional culture. The discussions also illuminated areas of consensus and divergence regarding the implementation of learning acquired through the CPD programme.

Document Analysis

Document analysis provided additional evidence of professional learning and pedagogical change. Documents examined included tutors' reflective journals, lesson plans, workshop artefacts, institutional records, and selected instructional materials developed during the CPD programme. These documents enabled corroboration of participants' accounts and illustrated how professional learning was translated into classroom practice over time.

The combination of interviews, focus groups, and document analysis provided a comprehensive understanding of participants' experiences while strengthening the trustworthiness of the findings through data triangulation.

Data Analysis

Data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis, guided by the procedures outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2021). Audio-recorded interviews and focus group discussions were transcribed verbatim before being read repeatedly to achieve familiarity with the data. Initial codes were then generated inductively from participants' narratives while remaining attentive to concepts derived from the study's theoretical framework.

Codes sharing conceptual similarities were organised into broader categories, which were subsequently refined into themes representing recurring patterns across participants' experiences. Throughout the analytical process, constant comparison was undertaken between interviews, focus group discussions, and documentary evidence to identify convergence, divergence, and contextual variation.

Interpretation of the themes was further informed by Transformative Learning Theory and Experiential Learning Theory, enabling analysis of both the processes through which professional learning occurred and how that learning influenced pedagogical practice and professional identity.

Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of the study was established using the criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985): credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility was enhanced through prolonged engagement with participants during the four-year programme, triangulation of multiple data sources, and member checking, whereby participants reviewed interview transcripts to verify the accuracy of their accounts. Transferability was supported through detailed description of the institutional context, participants, and CPD programme, enabling readers to determine the applicability of the findings to comparable educational settings.

Dependability was strengthened by maintaining an audit trail documenting methodological decisions, data collection procedures, coding processes, and theme development. Confirmability was promoted through reflexive engagement with the data, systematic documentation of analytical decisions, and continual comparison between participants' accounts and documentary evidence.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for the study was obtained through the relevant institutional procedures before data collection commenced. Participation was voluntary, and all participants provided informed consent after receiving information regarding the purpose of the study, confidentiality procedures, and their right to withdraw at any stage without consequence.

Participants' identities were protected through the use of pseudonyms, while the identity of the participating institution has been withheld to preserve anonymity. All data were securely stored and used exclusively for research purposes.

Methodological Reflection

The qualitative design enabled an in-depth understanding of how teacher educators experienced context-based professional learning within authentic institutional settings. By combining multiple qualitative methods with prolonged engagement over four years, the study captured not only what changed in participants' professional practice but also the processes through which those changes occurred. This methodological approach aligns closely with the study's theoretical framework, recognising professional learning as both an experiential and transformative process embedded within educators' everyday work.

Findings

The findings demonstrate that the context-based Continuous Professional Development (CPD) model substantially influenced teacher educators' professional practice. Participants consistently described the programme as transformative because it extended beyond conventional workshop-based training to provide sustained, workplace-embedded learning that enabled immediate application of new knowledge within authentic teaching contexts. Six interconnected themes emerged from the analysis: (1) pedagogical transformation, (2) digital competence and technology integration, (3) implementation of competency-based education, (4) reflective and collaborative professional learning, (5) improved assessment practices, and (6) institutional enablers and constraints.

Theme 1: Pedagogical Transformation through Learner-Centred Practice

The most significant outcome of the CPD programme was the transformation of tutors' pedagogical practices. Prior to participating in the programme, many participants acknowledged relying predominantly on teacher-centred instructional approaches characterised by lectures and content transmission. Through sustained professional learning, tutors reported increased confidence in adopting learner-centred pedagogies that actively engaged students in constructing knowledge.

Participants described integrating instructional approaches such as World Café discussions, gallery walks, collaborative learning, mind mapping, peer instruction, case-based learning, and problem-solving activities into their lessons. Rather than merely introducing new teaching techniques, the programme encouraged tutors to rethink their roles from knowledge transmitters to facilitators of learning.

One participant explained:

"Initially, I mostly used lectures because they seemed efficient. After the workshops, I realised that learners understand concepts better when they actively participate. My classroom has become much more interactive." (R7)

Another tutor reflected:

"The CPD opened my eyes to many approaches I had never considered before. Instead of giving students

answers, I now create opportunities for them to investigate, discuss and present solutions." (FGD2)

Participants consistently reported that learner-centred pedagogies increased student engagement, participation, collaboration, and classroom interaction. Several tutors further indicated that they had become more intentional in designing lessons that promoted critical thinking and authentic learning rather than simple content coverage.

These findings suggest that the context-based CPD programme contributed to sustained pedagogical transformation by enabling tutors to apply newly acquired instructional strategies directly within their own teaching contexts.

Theme 2: Strengthening Digital Competence and Technology Integration

A second major finding concerned the development of tutors' digital literacy and confidence in integrating educational technology into teaching and learning. Participants indicated that before the CPD programme, many had limited experience using digital technologies beyond basic presentation software. The workshops introduced a range of digital tools, including Google Classroom, Padlet, Nearpod, Slido, Mentimeter, and Google Forms, which tutors subsequently incorporated into their teaching.

Participants reported that these technologies enhanced learner participation, facilitated formative assessment, and extended learning beyond the physical classroom.

One tutor observed:

"Before the programme I only used PowerPoint. Now I confidently use Google Classroom, online quizzes and collaborative digital platforms because they make learning much more interactive." (R11)

Several participants further explained that digital technologies enabled more timely feedback, greater learner collaboration, and improved management of instructional resources. However, the extent of technology integration varied depending on institutional access to internet connectivity and digital devices.

Overall, participants viewed digital competence as one of the most valuable outcomes of the context-based CPD programme because it enhanced both instructional effectiveness and professional confidence.

Theme 3: Enhanced Capacity to Implement Competency-Based Education

The findings indicate that participation in the CPD programme strengthened tutors' understanding and implementation of Kenya's Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC). Participants acknowledged that they initially experienced uncertainty regarding learner-centred pedagogy, competency-based assessment, and curriculum interpretation. Through sustained professional learning, however, tutors developed greater confidence in translating curriculum expectations into classroom practice.

Several participants explained that the workshops demonstrated practical strategies rather than simply presenting theoretical explanations, enabling them to adapt competency-based approaches to their own instructional contexts.

As one participant explained:

"The training moved beyond theory. We were shown exactly how to plan lessons, assess competencies and engage learners actively. That practical experience made implementation much easier." (R15)

Participants also reported greater consistency in designing competency-based lesson plans, selecting learner-centred activities, and aligning assessment with intended learning outcomes. Many indicated that they had subsequently modelled these practices for student teachers during teaching practice

supervision.

These findings suggest that the workplace-based nature of the programme reduced the gap between curriculum policy and classroom implementation by providing continuous opportunities for practice, reflection, and refinement.

Theme 4: Development of Reflective Practice and Collaborative Professional Learning

Another important outcome was the strengthening of reflective practice and professional collaboration. Participants described reflection as becoming an increasingly routine component of their professional work. Rather than viewing teaching as a repetitive activity, tutors reported critically analysing lesson effectiveness, learner engagement, and instructional challenges to inform future improvement.

Reflection was further strengthened through peer observation, collaborative planning, mentoring, and professional dialogue. Participants explained that discussions with colleagues enabled them to share instructional experiences, receive constructive feedback, and jointly develop solutions to common pedagogical challenges.

One tutor reflected:

“Previously I rarely reflected on my lessons. Now I deliberately ask what worked, what did not work and what I should improve next time.” (R5)

Another participant noted:

“The workshops created a culture where we openly share ideas and learn from one another instead of working in isolation.” (FGD1)

Participants consistently described collaboration as increasing professional confidence while reducing resistance to educational change.

Theme 5: Improved Assessment Practices

The CPD programme also strengthened tutors’ understanding and implementation of assessment for learning. Participants reported moving beyond traditional examinations towards more continuous and formative approaches including rubrics, portfolios, peer assessment, self-assessment, performance tasks, and digital assessment tools.

Many tutors indicated that they had become more intentional in using assessment to guide instruction rather than merely assigning grades.

One participant explained:

“Assessment is no longer something done at the end of teaching. I now use it continuously to understand learners’ progress and adjust my teaching.” (R10)

Participants further noted that formative assessment generated richer information about learners’ understanding while supporting more personalised instructional decisions.

Theme 6: Institutional Enablers and Constraints

Although participants overwhelmingly valued the CPD programme, they identified several institutional factors that influenced its implementation.

Facilitator expertise emerged as an important enabling factor. Participants consistently described facilitators as knowledgeable, approachable, and capable of connecting theoretical concepts with authentic classroom practice. Interactive workshop approaches, collaborative learning activities, and

opportunities for immediate classroom application further enhanced programme effectiveness.

However, participants also identified several constraints that limited sustained implementation. The most frequently reported challenges included inadequate ICT infrastructure, limited access to instructional resources, insufficient internet connectivity, and competing teaching responsibilities. Some learner-centred approaches required materials that were not always available, while workshop scheduling occasionally conflicted with teaching timetables, reducing participants' concentration and opportunities for practice.

Despite these challenges, participants generally agreed that the context-based CPD model had fundamentally strengthened their professional practice. The barriers identified were viewed not as weaknesses of the model itself but as institutional conditions requiring attention to sustain long-term implementation.

Summary of Findings

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the context-based CPD programme substantially strengthened teacher educators' pedagogical competence, digital literacy, curriculum implementation, reflective practice, collaborative learning, mentoring, and assessment practices. The workplace-embedded design enabled tutors to apply newly acquired knowledge immediately within authentic teaching contexts, thereby facilitating sustained professional learning. At the same time, the findings indicate that the long-term success of context-based CPD depends upon supportive institutional conditions, including adequate resources, digital infrastructure, and organisational commitment to continuous professional learning.

Discussion

This study examined how a context-based Continuous Professional Development (CPD) model influenced teacher educators' professional practice within a Kenyan teacher education institution. The findings demonstrate that sustained, workplace-based professional learning can facilitate significant pedagogical transformation by strengthening instructional competence, digital literacy, reflective practice, mentoring, assessment, and the implementation of competency-based education. More importantly, the study suggests that the effectiveness of professional learning lies not merely in the acquisition of new knowledge but in the creation of institutional conditions that enable educators to apply, reflect upon, and refine that knowledge within authentic teaching contexts.

Context-Based CPD as a Catalyst for Pedagogical Transformation

The most significant contribution of this study is its demonstration that context-based CPD promotes sustained pedagogical transformation rather than short-term instructional improvement. Participants moved beyond adopting isolated teaching techniques to fundamentally reconsidering their roles as facilitators of learning. This transition from teacher-centred instruction towards learner-centred pedagogy reflects deeper changes in professional thinking rather than simple methodological adaptation.

These findings reinforce international evidence that professional development is most effective when it is sustained, collaborative, and embedded within educators' everyday practice rather than delivered as isolated workshops (Kennedy, 2014; OECD, 2019). The findings further demonstrate that workplace-based learning enables teacher educators not only to acquire innovative pedagogical strategies but also to adapt those strategies to their institutional realities through continuous reflection and experimentation.

Viewed through Transformative Learning Theory, this pedagogical shift represents a process of perspective transformation. As participants encountered new expectations associated with competency-

based education, many questioned long-held assumptions regarding effective teaching, assessment, and learner engagement. Through critical reflection, dialogue, and repeated classroom experimentation, tutors reconstructed their professional beliefs and developed more learner-centred conceptions of teaching. The study therefore provides empirical support for Mezirow's proposition that transformative learning occurs when individuals critically reassess existing frames of reference and subsequently modify professional practice.

Professional Learning as an Experiential Process

The findings further demonstrate that professional growth occurred through continuous cycles of experience, reflection, experimentation, and adaptation. Rather than learning solely through formal instruction, tutors developed professional competence by applying newly acquired knowledge within authentic classroom contexts, evaluating learner responses, and refining subsequent instructional decisions.

This pattern closely reflects Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, where concrete experience, reflective observation, conceptual understanding, and active experimentation form an iterative learning cycle. Importantly, the context-based CPD programme enabled participants to complete multiple cycles of experiential learning over four years, thereby facilitating sustained professional development rather than one-off instructional change.

Unlike many conventional professional development programmes that separate learning from practice, the context-based model integrated professional learning directly into participants' daily work. This integration reduced the traditional divide between theory and practice and enabled educators to construct professional knowledge through continuous engagement with authentic educational challenges. The findings therefore strengthen arguments that experiential, workplace-based learning offers a more sustainable pathway to instructional improvement than externally delivered training programmes.

Developing Capacity for Competency-Based Education

The study also demonstrates that context-based CPD can strengthen teacher educators' readiness to implement competency-based educational reforms. Although curriculum reforms frequently introduce new pedagogical expectations, many educators struggle to translate policy intentions into classroom practice. Participants in this study initially expressed uncertainty regarding learner-centred instruction, competency-based assessment, and curriculum interpretation. Sustained professional learning gradually reduced these uncertainties by providing repeated opportunities for practice, feedback, and reflection.

These findings contribute to current debates concerning curriculum implementation by suggesting that successful reform depends less upon policy dissemination than upon continuous professional support. Competency-based education requires educators to modify deeply embedded instructional practices, assessment approaches, and conceptions of learning. Such changes cannot realistically be achieved through short-term training alone. Instead, they require professional learning environments that encourage experimentation, collaborative inquiry, and ongoing institutional support.

Consequently, the study positions context-based CPD as an enabling mechanism through which curriculum reforms become operationalised within everyday educational practice.

This finding is consistent with UNESCO's (2021) call for teacher professional learning systems that equip educators to respond effectively to educational transformation through continuous, context-responsive capacity development.

Digital Competence as Professional Capacity

The development of digital competence represents another important contribution of the study. Participants consistently described increased confidence in integrating educational technologies into teaching, assessment, communication, and collaborative learning. Digital competence therefore emerged not merely as a technical skill but as an integral component of contemporary pedagogical practice.

Previous research has frequently examined educational technology separately from teacher professional learning. This study suggests that digital literacy develops most effectively when technological learning is embedded within broader pedagogical development rather than taught as an isolated competency. Participants adopted digital tools because they addressed authentic instructional needs, illustrating that technology integration is fundamentally a pedagogical rather than technological process.

Reflective Practice, Mentoring, and Professional Identity

An important finding concerns the emergence of reflective practice as a routine component of participants' professional work. Reflection enabled tutors to move beyond evaluating whether lessons had been completed towards examining how instructional decisions influenced learner engagement, understanding, and participation. Such reflective habits contributed to continuous professional improvement while strengthening educators' capacity for self-directed learning.

Similarly, mentoring evolved from a hierarchical process of providing advice towards collaborative professional learning characterised by dialogue, peer observation, coaching, and reciprocal feedback. These findings suggest that context-based CPD contributed to the development of informal communities of professional practice where collective learning became embedded within institutional culture.

Collectively, these developments indicate that professional learning extended beyond improving instructional competence to reshaping participants' professional identities. Teacher educators increasingly perceived themselves as reflective practitioners, collaborators, mentors, and lifelong learners responsible for continuously improving educational practice.

Institutional Conditions and the Sustainability of Professional Learning

Although participants overwhelmingly reported positive professional outcomes, the findings highlight that sustained professional learning depends upon enabling institutional conditions. Inadequate ICT infrastructure, limited instructional resources, competing workload demands, and poorly timed workshops constrained participants' ability to consistently implement newly acquired practices.

These findings reinforce previous studies demonstrating that organisational capacity significantly influences the effectiveness of professional development. Even highly relevant and transformative learning experiences cannot produce lasting educational improvement when institutional systems fail to provide adequate resources, leadership support, and opportunities for continued professional inquiry.

The study therefore argues that responsibility for professional learning extends beyond individual educators. Institutions themselves must cultivate organisational cultures that value continuous learning, provide appropriate infrastructure, allocate sufficient time for collaboration and reflection, and recognise professional development as a strategic investment rather than an isolated activity.

Theoretical Contribution

This study contributes to teacher professional learning scholarship by demonstrating that Transformative Learning Theory and Experiential Learning Theory are mutually reinforcing rather than independent explanations of professional growth. Transformative learning explains how educators reconstruct their

professional beliefs through critical reflection, whereas experiential learning explains how those reconstructed beliefs become embedded in practice through repeated cycles of experimentation and reflection.

The findings therefore support a more integrated understanding of teacher professional learning in which cognitive transformation and experiential application operate simultaneously within authentic workplace contexts. This theoretical integration advances current understanding of how context-based CPD facilitates sustained professional change.

Practical and Policy Implications

From a practical perspective, the study demonstrates that professional development programmes should prioritise long-term, workplace-based learning rather than isolated workshops. Institutions should establish professional learning communities, mentoring systems, reflective practice structures, and opportunities for collaborative inquiry that enable educators to continuously improve instructional practice.

From a policy perspective, the findings suggest that successful implementation of competency-based education requires sustained investment in teacher educator professional learning. Educational reforms should therefore incorporate long-term institutional CPD strategies alongside curriculum development, digital infrastructure investment, and leadership support. Without these complementary investments, curriculum reforms are unlikely to achieve their intended educational outcomes.

Synthesis

Overall, this study demonstrates that context-based Continuous Professional Development functions not simply as a mechanism for enhancing teachers' knowledge but as an institutional process that transforms professional practice through reflection, collaboration, and authentic workplace learning. The evidence suggests that sustained educational improvement occurs when professional learning becomes embedded within the everyday work of educators rather than remaining an external intervention. By integrating transformative and experiential perspectives, the study offers a comprehensive explanation of how context-responsive CPD supports pedagogical innovation, professional identity development, and successful curriculum implementation within teacher education institutions.

Recommendations

The findings of this study demonstrate that context-based Continuous Professional Development (CPD) has considerable potential to strengthen teacher educators' professional practice and support the successful implementation of competency-based education. However, sustaining these gains requires institutional, policy, and systemic support. The following recommendations are proposed.

Institutionalising Context-Based Continuous Professional Development

Teacher education institutions should institutionalise context-based CPD as an integral component of academic practice rather than treating professional development as periodic training events. Professional learning should be embedded within institutional calendars and aligned with organisational priorities, enabling tutors to engage in continuous inquiry, reflection, and collaborative improvement.

Strengthening Digital Infrastructure

The study identified digital competence as one of the most significant outcomes of the CPD programme. Institutions should therefore invest in reliable internet connectivity, learning management systems,

digital devices, and technical support to enable tutors to integrate educational technology effectively into teaching, assessment, and mentoring.

Sustaining Learner-Centred Pedagogies

Teacher education institutions should establish structured mechanisms that sustain learner-centred instructional practices beyond professional development workshops. Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), lesson study groups, peer observation, coaching, and collaborative lesson planning should become routine institutional practices that promote continuous pedagogical improvement.

Embedding Reflective Practice

Reflection emerged as a critical mechanism through which tutors refined their professional practice. Institutions should formally integrate reflective journals, teaching portfolios, peer reflection sessions, and structured self-evaluation into academic quality assurance systems to strengthen evidence-informed teaching.

Strengthening Mentoring Systems

The collaborative mentoring practices that emerged during the CPD programme should be institutionalised through formal mentoring frameworks. Structured mentoring relationships involving experienced tutors, early-career academics, and peer coaching can strengthen professional learning while fostering collaborative institutional cultures.

Enhancing Assessment Literacy

Future CPD initiatives should place greater emphasis on authentic assessment practices that align with competency-based education. Particular attention should be given to formative assessment, rubric development, portfolio assessment, feedback literacy, digital assessment, and assessment for learning.

Improving Organisational Support

Institutional leaders should recognise that professional learning cannot flourish without supportive organisational conditions. Adequate instructional resources, flexible learning spaces, protected time for professional collaboration, and strategic scheduling of CPD activities are essential for translating professional learning into sustained classroom practice.

Policy Implications

From a policy perspective, the findings support international recommendations that teacher professional learning should be institutionalised as a continuous process rather than implemented through episodic training initiatives (OECD, 2019; UNESCO, 2021). Educational reforms should therefore integrate long-term professional learning, leadership development, digital infrastructure, and collaborative institutional cultures if competency-based education is to achieve sustainable impact.

Directions for Future Research

Future studies should examine the long-term influence of context-based CPD across multiple teacher education institutions to determine its transferability across different educational contexts. Comparative studies involving universities, teacher training colleges, and school-based professional learning programmes would strengthen understanding of how contextual factors influence professional learning. In addition, mixed-methods and longitudinal research could provide further evidence regarding the

relationship between context-based CPD, teacher educator effectiveness, student teacher preparation, and learner outcomes.

Conclusion

This study investigated the influence of a context-based Continuous Professional Development model on teacher educators' professional practice within a Kenyan teacher education institution. The findings demonstrate that sustained workplace-based professional learning contributed significantly to pedagogical transformation by strengthening learner-centred teaching, digital competence, competency-based curriculum implementation, assessment literacy, reflective practice, mentoring, and collaborative professional learning.

The study further demonstrates that meaningful professional learning extends beyond the acquisition of new knowledge and skills. Rather, sustainable improvement occurs when educators are provided with opportunities to engage in authentic professional experiences, critically reflect on their practice, collaborate with colleagues, and continuously refine their instructional approaches within supportive institutional environments. These processes enabled tutors to reconstruct their professional identities while improving the quality of teaching and learning.

The findings also reveal that the effectiveness of context-based CPD is shaped by organisational conditions. Although participants demonstrated substantial professional growth, inadequate digital infrastructure, limited instructional resources, competing workload demands, and institutional constraints reduced opportunities for sustained implementation. Consequently, professional development should be understood not only as an individual responsibility but also as an organisational commitment requiring strategic leadership, institutional investment, and supportive professional cultures.

Theoretically, the study demonstrates that Transformative Learning Theory and Experiential Learning Theory provide complementary explanations of teacher professional learning. Professional transformation occurs through critical reflection on existing beliefs, while experiential learning enables educators to translate those transformed perspectives into sustained classroom practice through continuous cycles of application, reflection, and refinement. The integration of these theoretical perspectives' advances understanding of how context-based CPD facilitates long-term professional growth.

Ultimately, this study argues that context-based Continuous Professional Development represents a sustainable model for strengthening teacher education in Kenya and comparable educational contexts. By embedding professional learning within authentic institutional practice, teacher education institutions can cultivate reflective, collaborative, and innovative educators capable of successfully implementing competency-based educational reforms and responding to the evolving demands of twenty-first-century education.

Study Contribution

Theoretical Contribution

This study extends scholarship on teacher professional learning by demonstrating that Transformative Learning Theory and Experiential Learning Theory are complementary explanatory frameworks for understanding context-based Continuous Professional Development. It proposes that sustainable professional transformation emerges through the interaction of critical reflection, authentic workplace experience, collaborative inquiry, and continuous experimentation rather than through isolated professional development activities.

Empirical Contribution

The study provides empirical evidence from a four-year context-based CPD programme implemented within a Kenyan teacher education institution. Unlike much of the existing literature, which focuses primarily on schoolteachers, this research contributes new knowledge regarding the professional learning of teacher educators within an African higher education context.

Methodological Contribution

By employing multiple qualitative methods over an extended implementation period, the study demonstrates the value of longitudinal, workplace-based qualitative inquiry in examining professional learning. The integration of interviews, focus group discussions, and documentary evidence provides a comprehensive understanding of how professional transformation develops over time.

Practical Contribution

The findings provide practical guidance for universities, teacher education colleges, educational leaders, and professional development providers seeking to design sustainable CPD programmes. The study demonstrates that workplace-embedded professional learning, collaborative mentoring, reflective practice, and institutional support mechanisms are essential components of effective teacher educator development.

Policy Contribution

The study offers evidence that can inform national teacher education policy by highlighting the importance of institutionalising context-based professional learning as part of competency-based educational reform. It supports policy approaches that invest in continuous professional learning alongside curriculum reform, educational technology, leadership development, and institutional capacity building.

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