

Effectiveness of Teacher Professional Development Programs in Church-Based Education Schools in Myanmar

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the effectiveness of Teacher Professional Development (TPD) programs in Church-Based Education (CBE) schools in Northern Shan State, Myanmar. This research primarily examined the impact and relevance of TPD programs on instructional quality and teacher performance, aiming to address contemporary challenges and the barriers to their implementation. This study employed a convergent parallel mixed-method design, with ten participants involved. The researchers integrated thematic analysis of the questionnaires and teacher interviews with descriptive survey analysis. The results highlighted that the existing TPD programs in the CBE context had a positive influence on teachers' instructional practices and student learning outcomes, despite the challenges, such as resource limitations, financial constraints, a lack of contextual training, and restrictive governance. Thus, this study concluded that TPD programs must be tailored to the local context with adequate resource support to ensure sustainability and effectiveness. These findings provide practical implications for policymakers, educators, and teacher trainers to implement context-specific and well-resourced TPD initiatives in CBE schools to strengthen teachers' professional growth.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Professional Development (PD) is an ongoing learning process for teachers that is necessary to maintain high standards of practice throughout their careers (Casanova et al., 2023; Njenga, 2022). Darling-Hammond et al. (2017), and Basma and Savage (2023) stated that Teacher Professional Development (TPD) is highly demanding in the teaching profession, empowering teachers to address the sophisticated needs of students in preparation for further education and work readiness in this century. Complex forms of teaching are required to advance learner competencies in mastering challenging content, critical thinking, problem-solving, effective communication, collaboration, and

self-direction (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Surahman & Wang, 2023; Visscher et al., 2025). Meanwhile, the study further argues that effective TPD programs enable teachers to enrich the required pedagogies to teach these skills, and their successful implementation can significantly improve teaching practices and student learning achievement (Kohnke, 2024).

Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) emphasized that effective TPD is sustained, collaborative, and directly tied to classroom practices, incorporating seven standards: content focus, active learning, collaboration, modeling effective practice, coaching and expert support, feedback, and reflection. Similarly, Desimone (2009), and Visscher et al. (2025) proposed a theory of action to ensure the quality of TPD to enhance teachers' knowledge, skills, attitudes, and beliefs, leading to improved instructional practices and student outcomes by focusing on the content, active learning strategies, coherence, duration, and collective involvement of the teachers. Collectively, these perspectives underscore that meaningful professional learning fosters sustained instructional improvement and enhances student learning outcomes.

Within the Myanmar education context, this study focused on TPD programs in church-based schools (educational institutions established and managed by religious organizations to provide basic education) in rural Northern Shan State, Myanmar. Due to civil wars, government schools do not operate in many rural areas, and local communities have established schools in churches (Lwin, 2019). Within this educational context, the Northern Shan State Kachin Baptist Union – Church-Based Education (SJM-CBE) program serves as the education department for these schools, providing pre-service and in-service teacher training, TPD programs for principals and teachers, and community engagement initiatives (Din & Lynch, 2022).

According to Uche and Doug (2022), Church-Based Education (CBE) worldwide aims to produce academically qualified individuals with strong moral character. Building on this vision, SJM-CBE from Northern Shan State, Myanmar, promotes holistic education by developing its own curriculum that aligns with international education standards and reflects local culture, values, and history (Din & Lynch, 2022). However, since CBE schools have been operating for over a decade through self-funding, they often face resources and financial constraints that hinder their ability to support teachers' professional growth. They also face a lack of specialized teacher training aligned with their unique curricula and difficulty in evaluating the impact of the programs.

However, despite these challenges, little is known about how teacher professional development (TPD) is implemented and experienced in CBE schools, and TPD's availability, quality, and effectiveness in these contexts remain understudied, even though such programs are essential for improving teachers' pedagogical competence and integrating institutional values. This research gap also reflects Montoro's (2013) findings, which revealed that Christian schools often lack systematic, data-driven, and collaborative professional development practices. Therefore, there is a need to assess whether existing TPD initiatives in CBE schools effectively address

teachers' pedagogical capabilities, instructional quality, and professional needs that impact student outcomes.

Therefore, this study aims to examine the effectiveness of existing TPD programs in CBE schools in Northern Shan State, Myanmar to identify the challenges teachers encounter in implementing these programs. Through this investigation, the study seeks to provide insights that will inform the development of more context-specific and sustainable professional learning models for CBE schools. To address these issues, this study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How effective are Teacher Professional Development (TPD) programs in enhancing instructional quality and teacher performance within Church-Based Education (CBE) schools in Myanmar?
2. What challenges do teachers encounter in implementing TPD programs in CBE schools?

2. METHOD

This research employed a mixed-methods approach, which enhanced the validity, generalizability, and depth of the study, especially when one approach may not capture the phenomenon adequately ([Grand-Guillaume-Perrenoud et al., 2023](#); [Taherdoost, 2022](#)). [McKim \(2017\)](#) also emphasized that integrating qualitative and quantitative strands yield richer insights than a single method. Specifically, this study employed a convergent parallel mixed-methods design, which allowed researchers to collect data from the same participants for both qualitative and quantitative data analysis simultaneously ([Creswell & Creswell, 2018](#)). While the quantitative survey questionnaires provided a broad picture of church-based education teachers' perspectives on the effectiveness of TPD programs, the qualitative semi-structured interviews provided deeper insight, including personal opinions, feelings, and reasoning. Thus, covering both strands ensured that the findings captured measurable patterns and participant perspectives aligned with the study's objectives.

This study was conducted in church-based schools located in Myanmar. The participants were experienced teachers from both primary and secondary levels, each with 7 to 10 years of teaching experience and regular participation in annual TPD programs. Ten female participants were selected through purposive sampling due to limited internet access and the power cut-off during the study period, caused by the ongoing conflict. Furthermore, a small number of participants and purposive sampling allowed the researchers to focus on individuals most likely to provide relevant data ([Stratton, 2024](#)). This study includes teachers from seven different schools in the sample to ensure diversity.

This study employed the seven measures of [Darling-Hammond et al. \(2017\)](#) to evaluate the effectiveness of TPD programs in CBE schools. Likert Scale questions rated those critical factors, a psychometric scale used to gather respondents' opinions, attitudes, or feelings over a particular case ([Nemoto & Beglar, 2014](#)). Each item was

rated on a scale from 1 to 5, where “1” indicated the least effective practice, and “5” represented the most effective practice in church-based schools.

The interviewees were invited to participate voluntarily in this study via Messenger due to the physical distance, and the consent form was sent along with the invitations. Their identities were anonymized using codes (e.g., T1, T2, T3) to ensure confidentiality. After obtaining signed consent forms, the survey instrument was distributed to participants through a Google Form link, which was shared via social media platforms such as Messenger. While the questionnaires employed a Likert scale, the guided interview questions were developed in accordance with the main research questions. The schedule arrangement was primarily based on the participants’ availability. The process of explaining the survey instructions and interviewing questions in the Kachin language was carried out to enable participants to fully understand the content and respond accurately. The survey questionnaires required approximately 10-15 minutes, and the one-on-one interview sessions, conducted via Messenger or Zoom, lasted 45-60 minutes. All the questions were initially prepared in English but translated into Kachin or Burmese based on the participants’ preferences and convenience. With participants’ consent, interviews were audio-recorded and complemented by note-taking.

The data collected through Google Forms were transferred into Microsoft Excel to prepare it for descriptive analysis. The descriptive analysis was employed through Jamovi statistical software to examine the effectiveness of the TPD measurement. Additionally, a six-phase thematic analysis framework guided by [Byrne \(2021\)](#) was used for qualitative data analysis. The process encompassed data transcription and familiarization, keyword identification, initial coding, thematic development, interpretive conceptualization, and the construction of a conceptual model to illustrate the findings. The researchers employed the relevant quotations that support participants’ key narratives concerning the effectiveness of TPD programs in the CBE context. Bar charts and pie charts were also used to visualize the data.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This study revealed three significant themes: the effectiveness of the TPD programs and their impact on instructional strategies, the relevance of the TPD programs in addressing the contemporary challenges in the teaching profession, and challenges in implementing the TPD programs in church-based schools.

The Effectiveness of the TPD Programs and Their Impact on Instructional Strategies

The study findings emphasized that most of the participants improved their quality of instruction and overall performance due to TPD programs. As shown in Figure 1, nine out of ten participants (90%) reported that TPD programs had a positive impact on their instructional strategies and student outcomes; only 10% remained neutral.

Similarly, Figure 2 indicated that 90% of the participants approved that their overall performance had improved due to the accessibility of TPD programs, 10% rated it highly effective, 40% rated it effective, and 50% rated it somewhat effective.



Figure 1. Improvement in teachers' instructional strategies and student outcomes

How would you rate your performance on instructional skills to yield students' improvement and their learning outcomes after you have gained TPD? (...ing Scale: 1 = Not Effective, 5 = Highly Effective)
10 responses

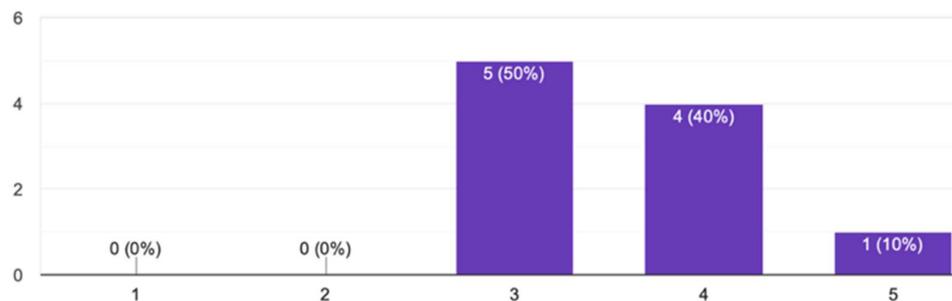


Figure 2. Rate performance on instructional skills and student outcome improvement

The qualitative data indicated that TPD programs helped them achieve improved performance, both academically and personally. For instance, T1 stated that participating in the “Positive Discipline Training” improved her classroom management.

“In 2022, I had the opportunity to participate in the positive discipline training, and I earned students' respect because they recognized my classroom management and teaching style had significantly improved after training.” (T1)

Likewise, T7 emphasized that the continuous TPD programs reinforced teachers' professional growth and student academic outcomes.

“As I am equipped with quality instructional strategies regarding lessons and can provide supportive instructions for each lesson, learners showed their motivation and best performance in the classroom.” (T7)

Furthermore, based on the seven key factors identified by Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) as shown in Figure 3, all participants (100%) reported that their TPD programs emphasize content competency and encourage an active learning environment. A large majority (90%) of the respondents supported collaboration, and effective practice models were also well applied in the TPD of CBE schools. Among them, 70% acknowledge the inclusion of feedback and reflection, while 60% confirmed that their TPD programs ensure sustained duration for the learning process. Notably, although most of Darling-Hammond et al.’s (2017) standards for effective TPD were met, the weaker provision of individualized coaching and expert mentoring underscores a critical gap in current implementation.

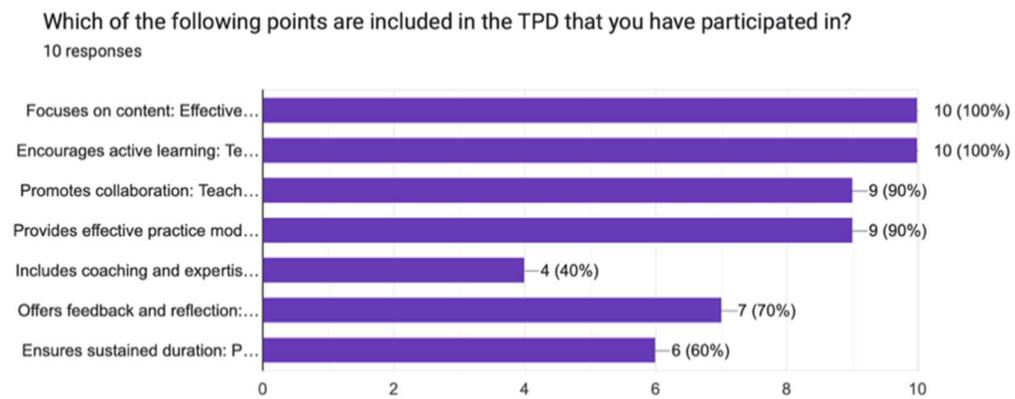


Figure 3. Rating on Darling-Hammond et al.’s seven key measures of TPD

Descriptive data analysis using Jamovi (Table 1) illustrates that all mean values were above the midpoint, ranging from 2.60 to 3.50, indicating that the data are relatively consistent. Besides, the values of mean, median, and mode were similar in Measures 1, 2, and 3, recorded as 3.50, 3.30, and 3.30, respectively, suggesting stronger performance in these areas compared to Measures 5, 6, and 7 (which had values of 2.60, 2.70, and 2.80 respectively). The similarity of the mean, median, and mode in Measures 1–4 also pointed to a more consistent pattern of responses in those dimensions.

Table 1. Descriptive data of Darling-Hammond et al.’s Seven Measures (M) of the Effective TPD

	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6	M7
Mean	3.50	3.30	3.30	3.00	2.60	2.70	2.80
Median	3.50	3.00	3.50	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00
Mode	3.00	3.00	4.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00
Standard deviation	0.850	0.675	0.823	1.25	1.07	1.06	1.14
Variance	0.722	0.456	0.678	1.56	1.16	1.12	1.29
Minimum	2	2	2	1	1	1	1
Maximum	5	4	4	5	4	4	5

In Measures 1 (0.850), 2 (0.675), and 3(0.823), the value of SD is less than 1, indicating that the responses of these measures can generally be regarded as reliable and consistent. To elaborate, the responses were closely aligned with their respective mean values. In contrast, the SD values of Measures 4 to 7, which ranged from 1.06 to 1.25, were greater than 1, implying more dispersed responses and less agreement among the participants in these areas. This suggested that while participants broadly recognized strengths in content focus, active learning, and collaboration, their perceptions varied regarding sustained duration, coaching, and tailored supports. Overall, the data indicated that the TPD programs in church-based schools were viewed as relatively reliable and effective across most measures. However, greater variability in some areas points to the need for improvement and more consistent implementation.

The Relevance of the TPD Programs in Addressing the Contemporary Challenges in the Teaching Profession

The study findings further revealed that TPD improves teachers' instructional performance. As shown in Figure 4, 90% of respondents confirmed that their TPD empowered them in the three key areas of their teaching profession: lesson planning, classroom management, and subject matter expertise. Moreover, 60% of the respondents reported that they had improved their assessment techniques through the TPD programs.

What specific areas of your teaching practice have improved through TPD programs?

10 responses

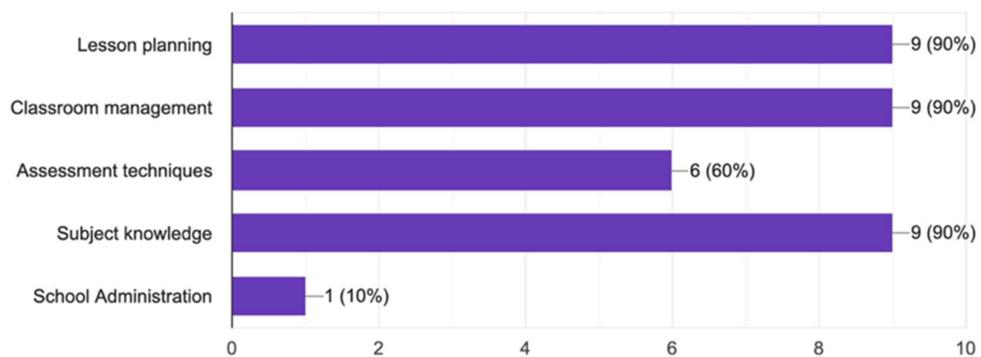


Figure 4. Specific Areas of Improvement via the TPD Program

According to Figure 5, 80% of respondents believed that pursuing a degree program is the most effective form of TPD, followed by the training program and classroom observation (each endorsed by 60%). Workshops ranked third, with half of the participants endorsing them. Practicum was rated as the least preferred TPD program, with only 10% of respondents finding it beneficial. Other forms, such as mentorship from senior supervisors (40%), online courses (30%), and peer mentoring (30%) received moderate endorsement. These findings suggest that teachers place the highest importance on structured, credential-based TPD (such as pursuing degree programs).

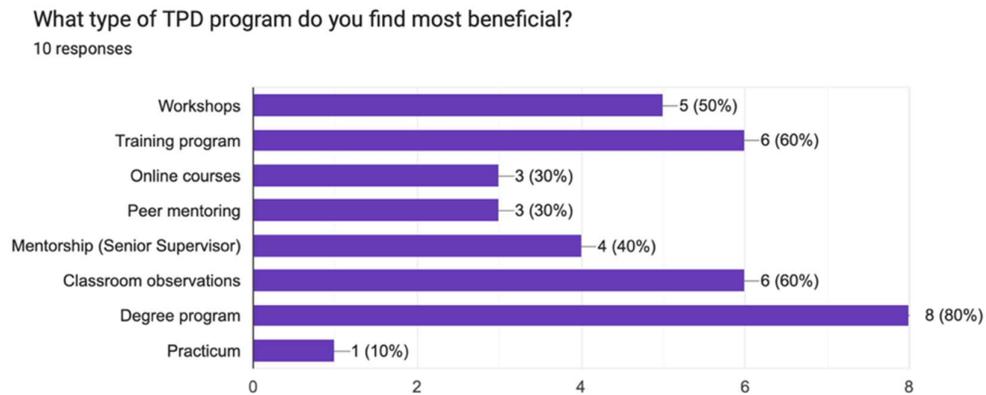


Figure 5. The most beneficial form of TPD in the church-based education context

In support of these survey results, an experienced teacher, T10, stated that their TPD programs are highly relevant in addressing their current issues. TPD programs enhanced teachers' instructional quality and overall performance as they mastered their lesson planning skills, content competency, and classroom management strategies. Most interviewees reported that they became more confident after receiving proper training, workshops, and support from their seniors. As a result, they could apply new teaching methods and suitable instructional strategies in the classroom. Hence, they became more capable of adapting lesson activities and handling challenging students.

“Students showed more respect to teachers who maintain continuous TPD because students can easily observe teachers' performance and teaching quality in the classroom.” (T10)

Similarly, T5 emphasized the value of mentoring and collaborative lesson planning.

“The TPD programs in our school are also highly relevant and supportive, especially mentoring; seniors' suggestions were helpful. For example, we have group lesson planning every Thursday, during which junior teachers observe senior teachers and learn from colleagues. Everyone came up with ideas to help each other.” (T5)

Likewise, T6 and T8 observed that their TPD programs perfectly fit teachers' needs, although additional aspects still require development. They explained that such TPD programs were particularly relevant because teachers must teach academic content and handle students' personal and social life challenges.

Finally, teachers reflected on their past experiences and explained that TPD programs on child psychology, positive discipline, and PSEA had helped them address challenges in the school environment. This training enabled teachers to build trust and respect, making students more open to them. Furthermore, those who received child training in psychology and career guidance counseling were able to offer more supportive advice to young adult students.

Challenges in implementing the TPD programs in CBE schools

The final theme identified financial issues as the most serious barrier to implementing effective TPD in CBE schools. Several participants underscored the inadequacy of budgets, which limited the quality of implementing TPD. Additionally, Figure 6 depicts that financial barriers (60% of respondents) had the most significant impact on participation in TPD programs. In addition, the second-highest factors were time constraints and the limited availability of TPD programs.

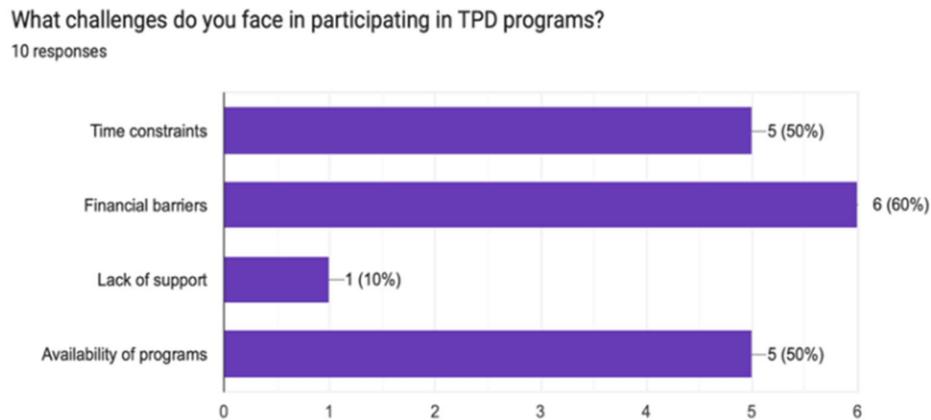


Figure 6. Common challenges to participating in TPD

To elaborate on these barriers, T3 explained that, despite having strategic plans for TPD programs, they had to be postponed each year due to financial constraints. Similarly, T8 highlighted:

“Since the student-teacher ratio is high, every teacher has a tight schedule. If one teacher participates in a TPD program, no substitute teacher is available.” (T8)

Beyond financial and time-related concerns, training availability and accessibility were significant challenges to implementing impactful TPD because CBE schools are in rural areas and face the adversity of the ongoing civil war. T7 stated:

“As the civil war resumed, we had no internet around here, and no electricity. So, our online English classes had to stop, and it affected the TPD plan.” (T7)

Furthermore, implementing tailored TPD programs is difficult in CBE schools due to insufficient program availability. Since these schools employ the looping system, teachers and students progress to the next grade level together. Then, teachers encountered difficulties adapting to students’ developmental transitions, particularly when students turn into young adults. Many teachers lacked training in child psychology, and the existing TPD program rarely addressed these specific needs in CBE schools. Consequently, teachers expressed a strong demand for specialized programs that directly addressed their current issues. For instance, T10 noted that some motivated

teachers independently sought to learn child psychology from online courses because their school's strategic plan did not cover such specialized training.

In addition to these challenges in the context of CBE schools, several limitations were also present, including staff retention issues, administrative restrictions, and resource allocation. Thus, T1 explained several limitations of effective TPD in having a contract or bond system. In some schools, teachers need to sign a 10-year contract for domestic-level specialized TPD training and a lifetime commitment for international training or study abroad. For instance.

“This can be regarded as a policy weakness for implementing TPD because it causes teachers to waver when deciding to attend courses even though they truly need it.”
(T1)

Finally, since church leaders controlled those schools, the school governance members were mainly composed of religious officials. T5 expressed her own experiences: even the school principals were not allowed to participate in the Executive Committee (EC), where they usually make decisions about school activities and budget allocation. T5 highlighted that:

“It takes a long time to get the budget and decide to implement TPD programs because the EC members make all the decisions. Even the school principal is not an EC member. How would it function smoothly? It can be an administrative weakness or a system weakness. Given this limitation, implementing TPD effectively is not so convenient.” (T5)

Overall, financial limitation is the most significant barrier to the effective implementation of TPD programs in CBE schools, with time constraints and limited program availability further restricting teacher participation. Moreover, contextual challenges such as high student–teacher ratios and the impact of ongoing civil conflict, as well as lack of specialized training, hinder teachers' professional growth in CBE schools. Additionally, restrictive governance arrangements and contract obligations to participate in TPD programs are the factors that delay program implementation. Those barriers underscore the need for adequately resourced, context-specific, and flexible TPD initiatives to strengthen teacher development in CBE schools.

Discussion

The first theme highlighted the benefits of teachers' participation in TPD programs, which helped enhance their instructional practices and had a direct impact on their students' academic outcomes. Teachers consistently associated their professional growth with improved student performance, as reflected in T7's account of applying new strategies in the classroom. This finding aligns with Fantacone's (2021) argument, in which the author argued that effective TPD programs strengthen pedagogical practices and benefit learners. Similarly, Akhan and Çiçek (2021) and Delgado et al.

(2020) found the role of teachers as exemplars of lifelong learning and their study confirmed that the role-modeling effect is evident even in resource-constrained, faith-based contexts. Previous studies, such as [Vermunt \(2014\)](#), have shown that students learn a great deal by observing their teachers' learning behaviors. Furthermore, [Dewi et al. \(2024\)](#) substantiated that enhancing instructional quality has a substantial impact on student learning results, including academic qualifications, critical thinking, and engagement. Therefore, this study corroborates that teachers must constantly reflect on their own quality of instruction and overall performance through TPD programs to sustain the positive performance of the students.

Building on these findings, the survey instrument was constructed around [Darling-Hammond et al.'s \(2017\)](#) seven key measures of effective TPD, which served as a comprehensive framework for assessing teacher experiences. TPD programs in CBE schools have already been effectively embedded with some key factors, such as content or subject matter, active learning, collaboration, and effective practice modeling, implying the framework's relevance to marginalized educational settings in Myanmar. However, the limited provision of individualized coaching, expert mentoring, and sustained duration exposed significant implementation gaps. These results underscore the need to consider the local when implementing effective TPD programs in the CBE context, even though Darling-Hammond et al.'s framework provides a valuable benchmark.

The second theme underscored the relevance of TPD in addressing contemporary teaching challenges, primarily through collaborative lesson planning and peer mentoring. Some CBE schools practice weekly group lesson planning, enabling senior teachers to guide novice colleagues, strengthening classroom management and instructional adaptability. This observation resonated with the ideas of [Murphy and Masterson \(2022\)](#), [Vadivel et al. \(2021\)](#), and [Voelkel et al. \(2023\)](#), who advocated collaborative learning communities in the academic environment to address communal issues in schools. Thus, a senior teacher can supervise or guide less experienced teachers. Likewise, [Amemasor et al. \(2025\)](#) supported the value of mentorship and structured feedback in the teaching profession, sustaining effective TPD. The present findings highlight the critical role of peer support through collaborative efforts, which function as a substitute for formal TPD intervention, thereby reinforcing the sustained effectiveness of TPD in fragile educational environments.

The third theme revealed the obstacles that CBE schools encountered in implementing effective TPD, particularly financial constraints, lack of specialized training availability, governance arrangements weaknesses, and restrictive contracts. These challenges suggest that prescribed or standardized TPD programs alone do not guarantee effective TPD implementation; instead, tailored TPD programs are necessary to resolve the challenges. The observations of [Sims and Fletcher-Wood \(2020\)](#), and [Talafian et al. \(2024\)](#) claimed that the inclusion of locally demanded TPD programs is necessary to sustain the effectiveness of TPD. Similarly, [Salifu et al. \(2024\)](#) argued that the relevance of TPD depends on aligning its content with teachers' immediate realities. This study found that church-based governance structures impede timely decision-

making and resource allocation, undermining the effectiveness of TPD implementation. Moreover, although practicum is widely regarded as integral to pre-service teacher development (Choi & Park, 2022; Yunus et al., 2010), the participants in this study, who were experienced in-service teachers, considered it the least relevant form of professional learning. This divergence indicates the need to differentiate TPD models across career stages to ensure their sustained relevance and impact.

Overall, the findings extended existing frameworks for teacher professional development by demonstrating how resource scarcity, governance structures, and teachers' career stages shape professional learning in conflict-affected, faith-based contexts. By foregrounding these underexplored dynamics, the study contributed to a broader understanding of how professional development can be sustained and adapted within marginalized educational systems.

4. CONCLUSION

This study examined the effectiveness, relevance, and challenges of Teacher Professional Development (TPD) programs in CBE schools in Myanmar. While the existing TPD programs helped teachers improve instructional practices and boosted their confidence, which contributed to better student outcomes, teachers encounter challenges in accessing effective TPD programs. Specifically, the study provided three important insights about TPD in CBE schools. First, educators strongly preferred earning degree programs over short-term workshops and mentoring opportunities. Second, while the practicum is usually regarded as essential for pre-service teachers, experienced teachers, in contrast, consider the practicum as the least helpful form of professional development programs, highlighting the need for differentiated models across career stages. Third, church governance structures and restrictive policies created barriers to implementing effective TPD programs, resulting in teachers experiencing limited professional growth. These results enhanced current TPD frameworks by illustrating the influence of resource scarcity and governance structures on program efficacy, particularly in CBE settings. For policy and practice, education leaders should design professional development programs that address teachers' needs by responding to the structural challenges they face.

The limited sample size of the current study may not fully capture the diversity of teachers' perspectives in church-based schools in examining the effectiveness of the existing TPD program. Future studies should consider a larger and more diverse sample to increase the reliability of the findings. This study suggests investigating specific coping strategies and remedies to address contemporary challenges in implementing effective TPD in church-based schools.

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