Unpacking Teachers' Professional Development Experiences in Lebanese Schools

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Abstract:

This qualitative study investigates the lived experiences of public-school teachers in Lebanon regarding teacher professional development (TPD), amidst ongoing systemic, economic, and technological challenges. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with 18 in-service teachers across various regions, the research reveals five interrelated themes: the misalignment between TPD content and classroom realities, limited teacher agency in designing development programs, inconsistent institutional support, inadequate digital training and infrastructure, and divergent impacts of TPD on professional identity. While some teachers experienced renewed confidence through targeted and contextually relevant TPD, others reported feelings of devaluation due to tokenistic, compliance-oriented training efforts. These findings expose a persistent disconnect between top-down policy frameworks and teachers' localized needs, echoing wider regional and global calls for participatory, practice-embedded, and equity-oriented professional learning models. The study contributes to the growing body of research emphasizing the need for contextually responsive and teacher-informed TPD strategies and offers policy-level suggestions for systemic reform.

Keywords: *Teacher professional development, Lebanon, teacher agency, Digital equity, Educational policy*

1. Introduction

In recent decades, teacher professional development (TPD) has become a central pillar of global education reform, recognized for its potential to enhance teaching quality, elevate student learning outcomes, and support the continuous renewal of education systems (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; OECD, 2019). High-quality TPD is increasingly conceptualized as an ongoing, collaborative, context-responsive process that extends beyond technical training, fostering deeper pedagogical understanding, professional identity formation, and teacher agency (Avalos, 2011; Opfer & Pedder, 2011). As education systems grapple with complex transformations—ranging from digitalization to inclusive education and sustainability imperatives—teachers are expected to continually evolve in their roles and competencies, rendering professional development not a luxury, but a necessity (Timperley et al., 2007; Kennedy, 2014).

Within the global South and fragile-state contexts, however, TPD initiatives often struggle to move beyond donor-driven, fragmented, and compliance-oriented models that reinforce performative cultures and bureaucratic accountability (Ginsburg, 2012; Tikly & Barrett, 2011). This is particularly evident in centralized education systems such as Lebanon's, where school teachers face deeply entrenched structural constraints—ranging from political interference and outdated training modalities to limited opportunities for school-based learning and professional dialogue (Shuayb, 2014; Ghamrawi, 2013). Despite recurrent reform attempts and donor investments, Lebanese education remains tethered to traditional, top-down approaches that prioritize system maintenance over transformative professional growth (Karami Akkary, 2014; Boujaoude & Baddour, 2022).

Recent scholarship has begun to explore teacher agency and leadership in Arab contexts (Arar et al., 2023; Boujaoude & Faour, 2024), yet few empirical studies offer an in-depth examination of how school teachers in Lebanon experience, interpret, and engage with professional development—especially in light of recent crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic, economic collapse, and political instability. These overlapping disruptions have significantly impacted the teaching profession and altered the contours of TPD, yet remain underexamined in scholarly literature (Al Maalouf & Al Baradhi, 2024; World Bank, 2022).

This study seeks to address this gap by critically investigating the current landscape of teacher professional development in Lebanese schools, as experienced by teachers themselves. Specifically, it asks: **How do teachers in Lebanon's education system experience and make meaning of professional development opportunities within the current policy and socio-political environment?** By centering teachers' voices and experiences, this study aims to contribute to a more grounded, context-sensitive understanding of TPD in Lebanon, while informing policy dialogue around sustainable and empowering models of teacher learning in the region.

2. Literature Review
2.1 Professional Development and Educational Reform
The international literature increasingly views teacher professional development (TPD) not merely as periodic training but as a transformative process that fosters instructional innovation, professional agency, and systemic reform (Avalos, 2011; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Within the Lebanese context, however, research consistently reveals a fragmented and compliance-driven TPD landscape, particularly within the education sector. Ghamrawi (2013a) critiques the dominance of superficial workshops and infrequent interventions that fail to account for teachers' evolving classroom needs or pedagogical challenges. Instead of positioning teachers as co-constructors of knowledge, these approaches reinforce hierarchical power dynamics and epistemic dependence.

Despite policy rhetoric that acknowledges the need for quality professional learning (Ghamrawi, 2016), empirical studies demonstrate a disconnect between reform discourse and practice. Ghamrawi et al. (2017), for example, showed that many Lebanese schools still operate with outdated instructional methods, with minimal integration of learner-centered pedagogy or active learning techniques. This stagnation persists in part due to insufficient or irrelevant TPD offerings. By contrast, Ghamrawi and Al-Hasan (2019) documented the positive impact of an in-service program focused on active learning, which significantly enhanced teacher leadership capacities and classroom practice. Their findings underscore that when TPD is structured around classroom application, teacher reflection, and collaborative learning, it contributes to deeper pedagogical change and revitalizes teachers' sense of professional purpose.

Moreover, a growing body of work argues for a distributed leadership model in which teachers are recognized as central agents of school development. Ghamrawi and El-Khatib (2019) applied this lens to the context of health education, showing how distributed leadership enhanced teachers' engagement and learning outcomes. Similarly, Ghamrawi (2013b) theorized teacher leadership as a grassroots phenomenon that can thrive even in hierarchical systems when schools are structured to allow collegial influence and professional autonomy. Collectively, these studies establish that teacher learning is most effective when integrated within a broader reform strategy that emphasizes leadership, agency, and practical relevance.

2.2 Technology and Professional Learning: Possibilities, Constraints, and Inequities
Lebanon's TPD ecosystem has been further complicated by rapid digitalization and the urgent shift to online and blended modalities, especially during and after the COVID-19 crisis. While global discourses present educational technology as a vehicle for inclusion and innovation, local evidence suggests a more uneven and exclusionary reality. Ghamrawi et al. (2020) captured the experiences of parents during remote learning and revealed that many teachers lacked the digital skills and institutional support to

deliver effective online instruction, exacerbating pre-existing educational inequities. These digital divides mirrored professional development disparities, with school teachers often left without access to digital training or infrastructure.

The potential of Web 2.0 and social media for TPD has been explored in multiple studies. Shal et al. (2018a, 2018b) found that while Lebanese principals and teachers expressed interest in using social media for professional learning, their actual engagement remained low due to institutional constraints, policy ambiguity, and concerns about professionalism. In another study, Ghamrawi et al. (2017, 2018, 2019, 2020) found that although some school leaders used social media to access new practices, they often encountered significant obstacles, including a lack of digital literacy and limited time for online engagement.

Despite these challenges, digital tools do offer promise when integrated into professional learning systems with intention and equity in mind. Ghamrawi et al. (2016) illustrated how ICT-assisted career guidance supported teacher-student dialogue and professional skill development in a school setting. Likewise, Ghamrawi (2010b) emphasized the value of a Teaching–Learning–Technology (TLT) formula, which reimagines teacher development as an integrative process that blends pedagogy with technological fluency. However, these innovations remain exceptions rather than norms in the Lebanese sector, revealing an urgent need to mainstream digital competencies within the TPD agenda.

The literature also highlights how digital professional learning must be contextualized within broader socio-technical realities. As Ghamrawi and Shal (2012) assert, simply introducing digital tools without shifting pedagogical mindsets or building teacher confidence leads to superficial adoption. Thus, any reform agenda promoting technology in teacher learning must also address structural inequalities, power asymmetries, and cultural readiness within schools.

2.3 Toward a Contextualized and Equity-Oriented TPD Framework

Efforts to enhance TPD in Lebanon must contend with multiple intersecting factors, including centralized policymaking, political instability, and limited school autonomy. Ghamrawi's policy reviews for UNESCO (2016) caution that while policy documents often espouse progressive ideals about teacher development, they frequently lack implementation mechanisms, robust monitoring systems, or alignment with school realities. This results in a form of "policy-practice decoupling," wherein school teachers are expected to meet international standards without receiving the professional scaffolding necessary to do so.

Further compounding this is the continued reliance on outdated supervisory models. Ghamrawi et al. (2019) highlighted that top-down inspection practices are still prevalent, often demotivating teachers and reducing TPD to a performative exercise. Their study advocated for differentiated supervision approaches, where support is tailored to teachers' experience levels and professional needs, thereby fostering trust and reflection. Such approaches have shown promise in re-establishing professional dialogue and cultivating communities of practice among educators.

Another critical insight from the literature is the relational dimension of professional development. Ghamrawi (2011) emphasized that teachers are more likely to engage in professional growth when they perceive their principals as supportive and trust-based leaders. This aligns with findings from earlier work (Ghamrawi, 2010; 2013c), which underscored the importance of middle leadership and subject coordinators in facilitating peer learning and promoting a culture of inquiry. When TPD is framed as a collective responsibility rooted in school culture rather than external mandates, it becomes more sustainable and impactful.

Finally, studies have also begun to address how TPD intersects with equity and inclusion. The work of Ghamrawi and Zeitoun (2019) on student leadership and Ghamrawi and Al-Jammal (2015) on self-

leadership both point to the need for TPD programs that nurture not only technical skills but also ethical leadership and civic responsibility. This requires moving beyond narrow competency-based models toward holistic development frameworks that value teacher identity, emotional labor, and context-responsive pedagogies.

Taken together, these findings call for a recalibration of TPD policy and practice in Lebanon. A contextually grounded, equity-oriented, and participatory model of professional development is not only possible but necessary for improving teaching quality and sustaining reform in education.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in three interrelated theoretical lenses: transformative learning theory, teacher agency theory, and sociocultural perspectives on professional development. Together, these frameworks provide a robust foundation for examining how teachers in Lebanon's education system experience, interpret, and negotiate the conditions and consequences of professional development amid systemic and political constraints.

4. Transformative Learning Theory

Transformative learning theory, as articulated by Mezirow (1991), positions professional development as a process through which individuals critically examine their assumptions, reframe their perspectives, and alter their practices in response to new experiences. In the context of TPD, this lens emphasizes the importance of critical reflection, dialogue, and experiential learning as mechanisms for meaningful professional growth (Cranton, 2016). When applied to teacher learning, transformative learning foregrounds not only cognitive development but also affective and identity shifts that empower teachers to become agents of change in their classrooms and schools (Taylor, 2007).

Lebanese scholarship echoes these ideas, with Ghamrawi (2013a) demonstrating how teachers involved in reflective and collaborative professional communities reported a stronger sense of purpose and instructional confidence. Furthermore, Ghamrawi and Al-Hasan (2019) documented the transformative impact of an active learning-based in-service program on teachers' leadership dispositions and self-efficacy. By conceptualizing professional development as a space for transformation rather than transmission, this study seeks to investigate whether and how Lebanese school teachers are able to reconfigure their professional identities and pedagogical practices through TPD encounters.

5. Teacher Agency

Complementing this lens is teacher agency theory, which views teachers as intentional actors capable of making choices, taking stances, and shaping their professional trajectories within structural constraints (Biesta, Priestley, & Robinson, 2015). Agency is not merely individual autonomy but a relational and temporal capacity to act with purpose and within evolving contexts. This perspective is particularly relevant in fragile-state settings like Lebanon, where education policy is often externally driven, leadership structures are centralized, and schools operate under intense socio-political pressure.

The relevance of agency is made evident in Lebanese literature that critiques the managerial logic underpinning many TPD initiatives (Ghamrawi, 2013b; Ghamrawi et al., 2019). These studies suggest that when teachers are positioned as passive recipients of top-down directives, their agency is curtailed, and professional learning remains performative. Conversely, models that support differentiated supervision (Ghamrawi et al., 2019), collegial influence (Ghamrawi, 2013c), or distributed leadership (Ghamrawi & El-Khatib, 2019) have been shown to enhance teachers' sense of empowerment and professional investment. This study adopts the view that understanding teachers' professional development experiences necessitates an exploration of their agency—how they navigate, negotiate, and resist the structures surrounding them.

6. Sociocultural Theories of Professional Learning

Finally, sociocultural theories of professional development (Vygotsky, 1978; Lave & Wenger, 1991) inform this study's attention to the relational and contextual nature of teacher learning. These perspectives suggest that knowledge is co-constructed through interaction within communities of practice, and that learning is shaped by cultural tools, institutional settings, and interpersonal relationships. Professional development, from this vantage point, is not confined to formal workshops but emerges through everyday practice, mentorship, collaboration, and dialogue within situated contexts. This approach is particularly salient in Lebanon, where studies have highlighted the relational dynamics of teacher learning. For instance, Ghamrawi (2011) found that trust in school leadership significantly influenced teachers' motivation to engage in development initiatives. Similarly, Shal et al. (2018a, 2018b) examined how social media offered informal spaces for professional learning, albeit constrained by institutional cultures and leadership support. The role of digital affordances was further explored by Ghamrawi et al. (2020), who underscored the need to address digital inequities and contextual barriers in any e-learning strategy. Drawing on these insights, the study adopts a sociocultural view that teacher professional development is embedded in organizational, digital, and interpersonal ecologies that must be accounted for in both analysis and reform.

7. Synthesis and Application

Together, these theoretical lenses illuminate the multi-layered nature of professional development in Lebanon's education system. Transformative learning theory helps interrogate whether teachers experience identity and pedagogical shifts through TPD. Teacher agency theory reveals how systemic constraints enable or inhibit purposeful professional action. Sociocultural theory draws attention to the institutional and relational contexts in which teacher learning is enacted. By triangulating these frameworks, the study seeks to capture the nuanced realities of TPD in Lebanon—its aspirations, limitations, and transformative potential.

8. Method

This study adopts a qualitative interpretive research design aimed at understanding how teachers in Lebanon's education system experience and make meaning of professional development (TPD) within the current socio-political and institutional landscape. The interpretive paradigm is well-suited for this inquiry, as it prioritizes participants' subjective meanings and lived experiences, acknowledging that reality is socially constructed and context-dependent (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This design is also congruent with the study's theoretical framework, which foregrounds teacher agency, transformative learning, and sociocultural contexts.

9. Research Setting and Participants

The study was conducted in schools across three Lebanese governorates that reflect geographic and socio-economic diversity: Beirut, Mount Lebanon, and the North. These areas were selected purposefully to capture the variability in school infrastructure, access to TPD programs, and institutional support. Participants were selected using purposive criterion sampling (Patton, 2014), focusing on in-service school teachers who met the following conditions: (1) had at least five years of teaching experience, (2) had participated in at least one formal or informal TPD activity within the past two years, and (3) were willing to reflect on and discuss their professional learning experiences in depth.

A total of 18 teachers participated in the study, representing a range of grade levels, subject specializations, and school contexts. The sample included both teachers who had access to donor-funded programs and those whose development was primarily school-based or self-initiated. This diversity allowed the study to examine contrasting experiences and institutional conditions that shape professional development.

10. Data Collection Methods

Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews, which enabled the researcher to explore participants' perspectives while allowing flexibility to probe emergent themes (Seidman, 2006). The interview protocol was developed based on the theoretical framework and literature review and included open-ended questions on the following domains:

- Teachers' perceptions of available TPD opportunities
- The relevance and impact of TPD on their classroom practice
- Institutional and leadership support for professional learning
- Barriers to and enablers of meaningful development
- The relationship between TPD and their sense of agency, identity, and leadership

Interviews were conducted in Arabic, the participants' preferred language, and later translated into English for analysis. Each interview lasted between 45 and 70 minutes and was audio-recorded with participant consent. Field notes were also taken to document contextual observations and non-verbal cues.

11. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed thematically using an iterative coding process informed by Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework. All transcripts were first read holistically to gain an overall sense of the narratives, followed by open coding using NVivo 22 qualitative data analysis software. Codes were then organized into broader categories, and themes were constructed inductively and deductively, guided by the study's theoretical framework. Themes were further refined through constant comparison across participants and through memo-writing, which allowed for the tracking of analytic decisions and emerging patterns.

To ensure trustworthiness, several strategies were employed, including member checking, where selected participants reviewed the accuracy of summaries, and peer debriefing, where analytic codes and interpretations were discussed with two fellow educational researchers familiar with the Lebanese context. Additionally, thick description was used to provide contextual detail, allowing readers to evaluate the transferability of findings to similar settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1994).

12. Findings

The interview data were analyzed thematically, resulting in five overarching themes and ten corresponding sub-themes that reflect participants' shared experiences and perceptions of teacher professional development (TPD) in Lebanese public schools. Table 1 summarizes the thematic structure, highlighting the frequency of references and illustrative code words used by participants.

Table 1: Thematic Analysis of Data

Theme	Sub-Themes	Frequency	Illustrative Code Words
1. **Relevance and Quality of TPD**	1.1 Misalignment with Classroom Needs 1.2 One-off, Theory-Heavy Workshops	16 14	"irrelevant", "textbook theory", "doesn't match our students"
2. **Teacher Agency and Voice**	2.1 Lack of Consultation in TPD Design 2.2 Self-Initiated Learning Efforts	13 15	"we are not asked", "I search online myself"
3. **Institutional and Leadership Support**	3.1 Encouraging vs. Controlling Leadership Styles 3.2 Peer Collaboration Opportunities	12 11	"principal pushes us", "colleagues help more"

4. **Digital Competence and Access**	4.1 Unequal Access to Digital Tools 4.2 Inadequate Training for Online Pedagogy	15 14	"no internet at school", "we were lost on Zoom"
5. **Impact on Professional Identity**	5.1 Renewed Confidence through Effective TPD 5.2 Feeling Devalued by Tokenistic Initiatives	9 10	"I felt capable again", "just ticking a box"

Theme 1: Relevance and Quality of TPD

1.1 Misalignment with Classroom Needs

Most participants reported that professional development offerings did not reflect the realities of their classrooms. They described sessions as generic and detached from the challenges they face in overcrowded, resource-limited schools.

"They talk about strategies that work in small, well-equipped classrooms. My reality is 35 students, no projector, and three broken chairs." (Participant 7)

"We need training on how to deal with students who have trauma, not just theories about curriculum design." (Participant 12)

1.2 One-off, Theory-Heavy Workshops

Many teachers expressed frustration at the lack of sustained follow-up. TPD was often delivered in isolated workshops that did not include coaching, mentoring, or opportunities for practice.

"It's like throwing a stone in water — some ripples, then silence. No one comes back to see if we applied anything." (Participant 3)

"We leave the session with a PowerPoint, but no idea how to make it work in our reality." (Participant 16)

Theme 2: Teacher Agency and Voice

2.1 Lack of Consultation in TPD Design

Several teachers highlighted that TPD programs are typically designed without teacher input, resulting in irrelevant content and diminished engagement.

"We are never asked what we need. They decide for us in Beirut, and we just receive the orders." (Participant 1)

"If they asked us, we could tell them the gaps we have — but they don't." (Participant 14)

2.2 Self-Initiated Learning Efforts

Faced with the limitations of official TPD, many teachers turned to self-directed learning via online platforms, peer sharing, and informal networks.

"Honestly, I learn more from YouTube than from any official training I have attended." (Participant 9)

"We created our own WhatsApp group to share ideas. That's how I learned to use Kahoot in my class." (Participant 11)

Theme 3: Institutional and Leadership Support

3.1 Encouraging vs. Controlling Leadership Styles

Teachers' experiences of TPD were shaped by their principals' attitudes. Supportive leaders facilitated participation and encouraged experimentation, while controlling leaders viewed TPD as a compliance requirement.

"My principal always asks what I learned and encourages me to try it in class." (Participant 6)

"In our school, the principal just signs the attendance sheet and tells us not to waste time." (Participant 17)

3.2 Peer Collaboration Opportunities

Collaborative learning opportunities were scarce but valued when available.

"The best TPD I had was when we met teachers from other schools and exchanged ideas."(Participant 5)

"Working with my colleagues to solve real problems helped more than listening to a lecturer." (Participant 15)

Theme 4: Digital Competence and Access

4.1 Unequal Access to Digital Tools

Participants stressed that technological disparities between schools severely limited the reach of digital-focused TPD.

"Some schools have smart boards. In mine, we still use chalk. How can we apply the digital strategies they show us?" (Participant 4)

"We don't even have stable electricity to run a projector." (Participant 2)

4.2 Inadequate Training for Online Pedagogy

Even when digital tools were introduced, training often focused on technical functions rather than pedagogical integration.

"They showed us how to create a Google Form but not how to design questions that engage students." (Participant 13)

"I knew how to open Zoom, but I didn't know how to keep my students from disappearing during class." (Participant 10)

Theme 5: Impact on Professional Identity

5.1 Renewed Confidence through Effective TPD

A minority of participants reported that high-quality, sustained TPD renewed their sense of professional competence.

"That workshop on active learning made me feel like a teacher again, not just a lesson deliverer." (Participant 8)

"When I applied what I learned and saw my students more engaged, I felt proud." (Participant 18)

5.2 Feeling Devalued by Tokenistic Initiatives

Conversely, others felt demotivated by tokenistic initiatives that appeared designed to fulfill bureaucratic requirements rather than improve teaching.

"Sometimes I feel they do these trainings just to say they did them, not to help us." (Participant 7)

"We are treated like we don't know anything, even after years in the classroom." (Participant 12)

13. Discussion

The findings of this study illuminate a persistent disconnect between the official discourse of teacher professional development (TPD) reform in Lebanon and the lived realities of school teachers, echoing prior critiques of top-down, performative, and system-maintaining practices (Ghamrawi, 2013a; Ghamrawi, 2016a). While TPD is globally conceived as a vehicle for instructional transformation and teacher empowerment (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Opfer & Pedder, 2011), the experiences of participants in this study highlight a model that is dominantly theoretical, episodic, and alienated from classroom realities. The reported misalignment between workshop content and the contextual challenges of overcrowded, under-resourced schools aligns with earlier research that problematized the transplantation of decontextualized pedagogical strategies into fragile or unequal schooling environments (Tikly & Barrett, 2011; Ghamrawi et al., 2017). These findings underscore the argument that pedagogical change cannot emerge from transmission-based models, especially when divorced from teachers' material and affective conditions (Kennedy, 2014).

Converging with the literature on transformative learning, the findings affirm that teachers crave development opportunities that engage their judgment, respect their expertise, and facilitate reflective practice (Cranton, 2016; Taylor, 2007). Yet, as this study demonstrates, the structural design of TPD in Lebanese schools systematically precludes such transformation. The lack of follow-up mechanisms, practical modeling, and sustained engagement—cited by teachers as a source of fatigue and futility—mirrors critiques of donor-driven, accountability-oriented interventions that privilege coverage over depth (Ginsburg, 2012). The absence of embedded coaching or iterative learning contradicts the premises of sustainable teacher development and reinforces feelings of tokenism, with teachers often perceiving

themselves as passive recipients rather than co-constructors of professional growth (Ghamrawi & Al-Jammal, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c, 2013d, 2013e, 2013f, 2013g, 2013h, 2013i).

Equally notable is the tension between imposed professional development and emergent, self-initiated learning, which reflects an assertion of agency against institutional inertia. The widespread reliance on informal peer-sharing platforms, social media, and autonomous digital exploration—often in the absence of formal guidance—resonates with prior studies in the Lebanese context (Shal et al., 2018a; Ghamrawi et al., 2020). These acts of self-direction affirm the salience of teacher agency theory, which posits that professional action is always mediated by structural affordances and constraints (Biesta et al., 2015). However, the data also suggest that this agency is frequently enacted in compensatory rather than developmental ways; teachers fill institutional voids rather than build upon institutional foundations. This distinction is crucial, as it indicates not merely resilience but structural abandonment—where professional development becomes a self-governed struggle rather than a supported process.

The role of school leadership in shaping professional development trajectories further reinforces the sociocultural foundations of teacher learning. Teachers' testimonies revealed stark divergences in how principals mediated access to and expectations from TPD. Supportive leadership was associated with encouragement, follow-up, and trust, while managerial leadership signaled surveillance and compliance. These findings align with previous scholarship that highlights the relational preconditions for meaningful teacher learning (Ghamrawi, 2010a, 2011; Ghamrawi, 2013a, 2013b,2013c,2013d, 2013e). They also confirm that professional growth is contingent not only on what is offered, but on how it is scaffolded within the school ecology—through peer dialogue, distributive authority, and psychological safety (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Ghamrawi & El-Khatib, 2019). Yet, the limited availability of collaborative spaces and the ad hoc nature of peer learning further emphasize the fractured institutional culture within which teachers attempt to grow.

Technology emerged as both an enabler and a barrier—reinforcing existing inequalities while simultaneously providing spaces for autonomous learning. Teachers' experiences of digital training—described as overly technical, inequitable, and insufficient—resonate with broader critiques of digital policy in education systems that prioritize hardware over human capacity (Ghamrawi et al., 2016; Ghamrawi & Shal, 2012). Inadequate infrastructure, lack of differentiated support, and minimal pedagogical framing of tools all point to a techno-centric, rather than pedagogically informed, approach to TPD. This confirms that digital equity is not merely a matter of access but of meaningful engagement, requiring integration with professional judgment, curriculum goals, and relational teaching practices (Vygotsky, 1978; Shal et al., 2018b).

Perhaps most critically, the study surfaces the deep emotional and identity-related consequences of professional development. While some teachers reported renewed confidence when exposed to relevant, active-learning-oriented programs (see Ghamrawi & Al-Hasan, 2019), many others described feelings of devaluation, marginalization, and fatigue. The symbolic violence embedded in tokenistic or performative initiatives—often designed more for institutional metrics than teacher growth—erodes professional identity and reinforces a sense of systemic neglect. These narratives align with earlier concerns about the gap between espoused reform and enacted policy (Boujaoude & Baddour, 2022; Karami Akkary, 2014), as well as the enduring effects of policy-practice decoupling on frontline educators (Ghamrawi, 2016b). This study's findings must be interpreted in light of its limitations. As a qualitative inquiry based on 18 participants from selected Lebanese governorates, the results are not intended to generalize but to illuminate situated experiences. Further research could examine the longitudinal impact of specific TPD programs, the role of subject-specific development, or the intersection of gender and professional growth. Future studies might also explore systemic interventions that reposition teachers as co-designers of learning, rather than objects of reform.

In sum, the findings of this study both confirm and extend existing scholarship by showing that teacher professional development in Lebanon remains constrained by structural, epistemic, and political barriers—yet also marked by moments of agency, hope, and resistance. Addressing these contradictions requires more than revising training content; it demands a reconfiguration of the architecture, purpose, and ethics of teacher learning itself. Unless teachers are centered as critical knowers, policy actors, and pedagogical leaders, TPD will continue to fall short of its emancipatory potential.

14. Conclusion

This study critically examined how school teachers in Lebanon experience and make meaning of professional development within a context marked by systemic centralization, political instability, and limited institutional responsiveness. Drawing on teachers' narratives, the findings reveal a deep disjunction between the aspirational language of reform and the fragmented, performative reality of TPD implementation. Professional development was widely perceived as irrelevant to classroom needs, devoid of continuity, and enacted through hierarchical rather than participatory structures. While teachers demonstrated remarkable agency by pursuing self-directed learning and forming peer networks, these efforts often emerged as compensatory acts in response to institutional absence rather than as part of a coherent developmental framework.

The study also foregrounds the critical role of school leadership and sociocultural context in enabling or constraining teacher learning. Principals' engagement, school climate, and access to collaborative spaces shaped not only the effectiveness of TPD but also teachers' professional identities and sense of value. Moreover, the findings underscore the importance of moving beyond technical skill-building toward reflective, relational, and context-responsive learning—particularly as digital inequities and pedagogical unpreparedness continue to challenge the equity and quality of professional development across Lebanon's education system.

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to rethinking professional development in fragile-state education systems. By foregrounding teachers' lived experiences, it calls for a shift from compliance-oriented models to ones that affirm teacher agency, prioritize contextual relevance, and embed sustained, dialogic learning within school cultures. Future research should deepen this inquiry by exploring teacher leadership as a lever for professional growth, the impact of localized communities of practice, and the development of hybrid models that blend digital accessibility with pedagogical substance.

Ultimately, for TPD in Lebanon to be transformative, it must not only be better designed and more equitably delivered—it must be reimagined as a vehicle for teacher empowerment, policy coherence, and educational justice. The challenge, therefore, is not merely to reform professional development, but to reframe it as a foundational pillar in the reconstruction of a responsive and inclusive education system.

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