Scoping the Literature on Professional Development for Educators and Educational Leaders in the UAE

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Abstract	Article Info
This comprehensive scoping review aimed to identify and synthesize the existing research on professional development (PD) for educators and educational leaders in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) between 2018 and 2023. Fourteen scholarly articles covering a wide range of topics related to education in the UAE were collected and analyzed. The review revealed that PD initiatives in the UAE often focus on enhancing teacher effectiveness and leadership skills, particularly in the context of educational reforms and inclusive education practices. However, significant challenges were identified, including implementation gaps, cultural barriers, and resistance to centrally imposed PD programs. The findings suggest that while PD programs positively impact teacher performance and educational quality, further efforts are needed to address the challenges within the UAE's unique socio-cultural context.	

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Introduction

The UAE is committed to establishing a progressive and adaptable education system that aligns with its vision of creating a knowledge-based economy. High standards and continual adaptation to global trends characterize the country's educational framework (Hathorn & Dillon, 2018). As the UAE's education sector continues to evolve rapidly, there is an increasing demand for ongoing professional development (PD) among educators and leaders. Such development is essential for equipping them with the competencies to address the emerging challenges within this dynamic environment (El Afi, 2019; Azaza et al., 2023). Recent studies have highlighted the diverse needs of the UAE's educational sector, particularly in light of rapid socio-economic changes and ambitious national goals (Abdelaziz et al., 2023; Baroudi, 2023).

The UAE's education system operates within a unique socio-cultural and economic context, significantly influencing the effectiveness of PD programs. The country's diverse population, rapid economic growth, and ambitious national goals create a complex environment where educational leaders must navigate global best practices and local cultural expectations (Hathorn & Dillon, 2018; Abdelaziz et al., 2023). This duality requires PD initiatives to be both innovative and culturally sensitive, ensuring that educators are up to date with

217

international standards while being adept at applying them within the specificities of the UAE's educational landscape (Azaza et al., 2023; Blaik Hourani & Litz, 2018). Despite considerable investments and efforts in PD, a comprehensive understanding of its effectiveness in the UAE still needs to be explored. While various programs have been implemented, there is a need for more research on their impact on educational outcomes, particularly within the UAE's unique socio-cultural and economic context (Alneyadi, 2022). This context introduces specific challenges that conventional PD approaches may not adequately address (Abbasi & David, 2021).

Given these considerations, this review seeks to bridge this research gap by analyzing existing literature on PD practices and the challenges faced by educational leaders in the UAE. The findings from this study aim to inform strategies for enhancing PD initiatives, thereby supporting the UAE's broader educational objectives. This research investigates the PD landscape for educators and educational leaders in the UAE, drawing on a thorough review of relevant literature to examine the opportunities, challenges, and outcomes associated with PD in this context. The following research questions guide the study:

1. What characterizes the professional development initiatives available to educators and leaders in the UAE?

2. What challenges do educational leaders encounter in the context of professional development?

3. What are the observable effects of professional development programs on teacher performance and the overall quality of education in the UAE?

Background on Professional Development

PD is foundational to ongoing learning and growth within diverse professional domains. PD is essential for educators and leaders in education, providing them with the tools and insights needed to adapt to evolving challenges and enhance their competencies (Abbasi & David, 2021). In that sense, Saeed (2023) defines teacher training as a structured plan aimed at enhancing teachers' understanding, abilities, and perspectives. Teacher training programs must provide educators with continuous opportunities for professional growth and encouragement.

The field of PD has evolved, changing from traditional workshops to personalized, technology-driven approaches that meet the needs of professionals. Teachers and leaders require training in new skills to effectively engage with a generation that learns beyond traditional learning methods and settings. Thus, teacher training is essential for acquiring innovative educational methods, technological advancements, and emerging trends in education, as well as implementing them in their classrooms (Saeed, 2023). Coady et al. (2023) assert that educator professional development can positively influence teachers, leaders, and students by creating healthy work and learning environments. So, teacher training programs are precious and can occur in various settings, such as meetings, training sessions, formal or informal talks, and other gatherings (Saeed, 2023).

Ratnayake et al. (2020) argue that PD is important for teachers since it links theory with practice. PD also aims to change beliefs, attitudes, and skills positively. Effective PD does not focus on content alone but also on the delivery method, where active learning has shown more promising outcomes. Efficient PD should be innovative and involve active learning. In such programs, the teachers construct their

REAL

Hojeij, AlSuwaidi, & Ahmed (2024). Scoping the literature on professional development for educators and educational leaders in the UAE.

knowledge through collaborative activities whose content is related to their specific needs in their teaching practices. The targeted outcome should improve students' learning outcomes (Coady et al., 2023).

PD is also about acquiring subject-specific knowledge and extends to developing broader competencies such as leadership skills, emotional intelligence, and adaptability. Its effectiveness depends on aligning with the institution's aims and the constantly changing educational environment (Blaik Hourani & Litz, 2018). Successful PD initiatives are relevant and practical, contributing to individual growth, organizational resilience, and the broader professional community (Azaza et al., 2023). Furthermore, effective PD requires peer collaboration, which promotes efficient communication, socialization, and cooperation in a group (Coady et al., 2023). This is ultimately rewarding in terms of creating members who are problem solvers, leading to better outcomes. Through social interdependence, team members become more efficient. Despite having expertise in subject content and teaching practices, the study suggests more teacher training on other skills, such as integrating technology in their teaching activities (Wei et al., 2023). Teachers can link their theoretical knowledge with practice through PD programs that expose teachers to diverse teaching cases and engage them in reflective practices and collaboration with peers. Thus, targeted PD programs can promote professional competence.

Finally, research reveals that self-efficacy is highly related to performance. If educators feel that they have the necessary skills, they become more confident and motivated to use those skills in their teaching practices (De Simone, 2020; Saeed, 2023).

Methodology

This study utilizes a systematic approach to examine the literature on professional development for educational leaders in the UAE. The methodology is organized into four key stages: data identification, extraction, coding, and analysis.

Data Identification

To comprehensively review the relevant literature, a thorough search was conducted across various academic databases, which aligns with the approach used by Abdelaziz et al. (2023) in their study of professional development needs in the UAE. The selection of databases was based on their relevance and accessibility, ensuring the inclusion of a wide range of studies pertinent to professional development in the UAE. The search focused on literature published between 2018 and 2023, centered on educational leaders in K–12 and higher education settings. The inclusion and exclusion criteria were meticulously outlined (see Table 1), providing a consistent framework for selecting articles that met the study's objectives, as shown in similar research by Baroudi (2023). The search was guided by key terms such as "professional development," "teacher performance," and "United Arab Emirates."

Table 1.

Guiding Questions and Criteria for Inclusion and Exclusion

Main topic	Scoping the literature of Professional Development for Edcuators and Educational Leaders in the UAE.
Research questions	What is the nature and scope of professional development initiatives for educators and leaders in the UAE? What challenges do educational leaders perceive as inherent in professional development?

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Hojeij, AlSuwaidi, & Ahmed (2024). Scoping the literature on professional development for educators and educational leaders in the UAE.

	What are the discernible outcomes and impacts of professional development programs on teacher performance and overall educational quality in the UAE?
Goal	The goal of this study is to systematically compile and summarize the existing literature, explaining the current status and comprehension of professional development in the UAE. This includes an examination of the opportunities available, the challenges confronted by educational leaders, and the resulting outcomes.
Data evaluation and Inclusion/ Exclusion Criteria	Articles published between 2018 and 2023 only are used. Geographical emphasis is strictly on the UAE context. Articles not directly related to defined themes were excluded.
Main Results	Various PD initiatives in the UAE cover specialized training, sustainable modules, inclusive education, and gifted education through workshops, seminars, conferences, and online platforms. Challenges like implementation gaps, cultural barriers, and resistance to centrally imposed PD are being faced, requiring collaborative solutions. Despite obstacles, PD programs showed positive outcomes such as increased teacher confidence and performance.

This table outlines the guiding questions and criteria for inclusion and exclusion during the article selection process. It helps ensure a transparent and consistent approach to identifying relevant literature.

Table 2.

Database Accessibility Comparison for Research Resources

Database	Access	Internet Site	Pay Site	Articles Count
Taylor & Francis Online	Online database and publisher	https://taylorandfrancis.com/	Yes	5
Google Scholar	Online search engine	www.googlescholar.com	No	4
ProQuest	Online database and publisher	www.proquest.com	No	2

ERIC (Educational Resources Information Center)	Online search software	https://eric.ed.gov	No	1
The Social Science Research Network (SSRN)	Online search engine	www.ssrn.com	No	1
Wiley Online Library	Online database and publisher	https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com	No	1

This table compares the accessibility of various databases used for this literature review, including their respective website URLs, whether they are freely accessible or require payment for access, and the number of articles retrieved from each database.

Scoping Review Explanation

This study adopts a scoping review methodology, which is increasingly recognized for its effectiveness in synthesizing evidence across broad and complex topics, particularly in educational contexts (Azaza et al., 2023). Unlike systematic reviews that aim to answer specific research questions, scoping reviews map the available literature on a particular topic and provide an overview of its scope, nature, and key characteristics. This approach is particularly beneficial for identifying gaps in existing research, clarifying complex concepts, and laying the groundwork for future studies (Munn et al., 2018). A similar approach is exemplified by Bellibaş and Gümüş (2019) in their systematic review of educational leadership and management research in Turkey, where they conducted a content analysis of topics,

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Hojeij, AlSuwaidi, & Ahmed (2024). Scoping the literature on professional development for educators and educational leaders in the UAE.

conceptual models, and methods to provide a comprehensive overview of the field. Scoping reviews have been used in various fields, including education, to explore broad topics where more focused, systematic reviews may not be feasible or appropriate (Pham et al., 2014).
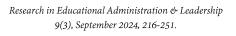
Data Extraction

After identifying relevant articles, a systematic process was employed to extract essential information from each study. This process follows the method outlined by Ewen et al. (2023), ensuring that all relevant data is captured systematically. This included details such as the title, authors, year of publication, research questions, methodology, educational setting, and specifics about the professional development initiatives discussed. The extracted data were organized into a structured format, as summarized in Table 3, allowing for a comprehensive overview of each article's contributions to the field.

Table 3.

Overview of Selected Articles on Professional Development in the UAE

This table summarizes critical details such as the title, authors, publication year, journal, database, abstract, keywords, research questions, methodology, educational setting, country, type of PD, participants, duration, mode of delivery, timing about COVID-19, and funding source (if mentioned). This overview helps readers understand the selected articles' primary focus, findings, and implications regarding professional development in the UAE.

Article	Title	Author(s)	Year	Journal	Methodology	PD Purpose	Delivery Mode
1	Investigating Teacher Professional Learning in a Context of Change: A UAE Case Study	Azaza, M., Litz, D., & Hourani, R. B.	2023	Leadership and Policy in Schools	Exploratory case study / qualitative	Job-embedded PD	F2F
2	Professional Development Needs and Challenges Faced by K-12 Teachers in Delivering Effective Online Education in the UAE	Abdelaziz, H. A., Ankit, A., Almekhlafi, A. G., Aderibigbe, S., Alawani, A., & Goyol, A. B.	2023	International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research	Descriptive research design / Mixed Methods	Enhancing teachers' knowledge, skills, using technology tools	Online
3	Exploring Teacher Education for Sustainable Development in the UAE	Baroudi, S	2023	Sustainability	Qualitative case study	Improving assessment skills	Blended
4	Evaluation of an Innovative Model for Teacher Professional Development on Educational Inclusion in the UAE	Ewen, M., Ferreira, A., & Helder, M. G.	2023	Professional Development in Education	Mixed methods	Inclusive Education	Blended
5	I Have Removed My Ceiling": Qualitative Experiences of Teachers on Their Professional Development	Garces-Bacsal, R. M., Elhoweris, H., Mohamed, A., Almuhairy, O., Safi, M., Moustafa, A., & Alzyoudi, M.	2022	Journal for the Education of the Gifted	Qualitative study	(a) higher order thinking skills, (b) best practices in gifted education, and (c) curriculum differentiation for gifted and talented learners	Blended

Data Coding

225

REAL

Hojeij, AlSuwaidi, & Ahmed (2024). Scoping the literature on professional development for educators and educational leaders in the UAE.

6	High School Science Teachers' Professional Development Experiences in the United Arab Emirates	Alneyadi, S. S.	2022	Journal of Science Teacher Education	Mixed methods	Science education: classroom management, instructional skills, technology integration, differentiated instruction,student-centered strategies	F2F
7	The Role of School Leaders in Facilitating Continuous Professional Development to Empower Teachers in Private Schools in Dubai	Phogat Neena	2022	The British University in Dubai	Mixed methods	Continuous Professional Development	Not mentioned
8	The Impact of Continuous Professional Development on Teacher's Performance, A Case Study Among Teachers in a Private School in Dubai	Abbasi, M. A., & David, S. A.	2021	Globus Journal of Progressive Education	Quantitative study	Ongoing professional development, induction programs, mentoring programs, and professional learning community	Not mentioned
9	The Role of Education Leadership in Managing Teaching Competencies of Selected Secondary Teachers in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) (An Exploratory Study)	Kumari, V., Hameed, S., Krishnadas Mazumder, L., & Sathyan, A	2020	International Journal of Management	Quantitative study	Not mentioned	Not mentioned
10	Investigating Teachers' Perceptions of the Influence of Professional Development on Teachers' Performance and Career Progression	Tantawy, N.	2020	Arab World English Journal	Qualitative interpretive study	Pedagogy, classroom management, content knowledge	F2F
11	Listening to and Supporting Teachers in the United Arab Emirates: Promoting	Goe, L., Alkaabi, A., &	2020	ETS Research Report No. RR-20-06	Qualitative study	Not mentioned	Not mentioned

	Educational Success for the Nation	Tannenbaum, R. J.					
12	The Impact of Professional Development Training on Teachers' Performance in Abu Dhabi Cycle Two and Three Schools	El Afi, A.D.	2019	Teacher Development:An international journal of teachers' professional development	Mixed methods	New School Model	Not mentioned
13	Aligning Professional Development, School Self- Evaluation and Principals' Performance Standards: A UAE Case Study	Blaik Hourani, R., & Litz, D. R.	2018	School Leadership & Management	Qualitative case study	Not mentioned	Not mentioned
14	Action Research As Professional Development, Its Role in Education Reform in the UAE	Hathorn, C., & Dillon, A. M.	2018	Educational Research	Quantitative study	Action Research	F2F

The next step involved categorizing the extracted data through a coding process, following the approach taken by El Afi (2019) in his study on the impact of professional development training in Abu Dhabi. This coding process entailed assigning codes to different elements of the studies, such as the type of professional development, participant demographics, mode of delivery, and the timing of the initiatives about the COVID-19 pandemic. The coding framework was developed iteratively, adapting to emerging themes and ensuring that all relevant aspects were systematically addressed. This process facilitated the organization of the data into meaningful categories for subsequent analysis.

Data Analysis

Finally, the coded data were analyzed to address the research questions posed by this study. The analysis aimed to uncover patterns, trends, and gaps in the literature, providing insights into the current state of professional development for educational leaders in the UAE. This analytical approach is consistent with that used by Saeed (2023) in their evaluation of teacher training programs. The findings were synthesized to explain the challenges, opportunities, and outcomes associated with these initiatives, ultimately contributing to the broader discourse on educational leadership and professional development.

Results

To address the research questions proposed, articles from existing literature were summarized to explain the status and understanding of professional development in the UAE. This process involved examining available opportunities, challenges faced by educational leaders, and the resulting outcomes. Articles were sourced from various databases, including Taylor & Francis Online (5), Google Scholar (4), and others such as ERIC, ProQuest, SSRN, and Wiley Online Library and the publication years of the articles varied, with (4) published in 2023, (3) in 2022, (1) in 2021, (3) in 2020, (1) in 2019, and (2) in 2018. Articles published before 2018 were excluded from the study (see Table 1 for inclusion/exclusion criteria). Of the 14 identified studies, six used qualitative, three used quantitative, and five used mixed methods.

Additionally, all studies were conducted in a school education setting. The duration range of professional development programs discussed in the articles spans from as short as eight weeks to as long as two years, with variations in hours per week and total workshop duration.

However, many articles did not explicitly state the duration of the PD program.

Research Question 1: What is the nature and scope of professional development initiatives for educators and leaders in the UAE?

The literature findings show an overview of PD initiatives and programs targeting educators and leaders in the UAE. These initiatives include various themes, strategies, and specific programs to enhance teacher effectiveness, promote innovation and education practices, and enhance leadership skills. Below are the key findings:

Specialized Training and Professional Development Programs

Professional development initiatives in the UAE use a multifaceted approach, addressing different topics and themes important for educator growth and school improvement. The Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC) introduced PD plans and standards for school administrators to align with ongoing school reforms, focusing on enhancing teaching effectiveness and leadership skills, aligning with educational authorities' vision, covering areas such as curriculum design and pedagogical strategies, and fostering collaboration among educators. (Blaik Hourani & Litz, 2018). Tamkeen is one of the formal recent PD programs established by ADEC, which aims to enhance teacher performance by providing training on different PD topics such as behavior management, classroom management, critical thinking, differentiation, information and communication technology (ICT), school improvement plans, and teacher evaluation. (Azaza et al., 2023).

In addition, there are PD initiatives in Abu Dhabi's education system that aim to enhance teachers' performance at schools by conducting activities, including sessions delivered by external educational

advisors, school leadership, peer observations, coaching, and mentoring. These sessions focus on pre-planned content, lesson planning, teaching methods, teaching tools, classroom management, and cooperation. Examples of PD topics include lesson planning focusing on objectives, assessment, and time management; teaching methods focusing on modern approaches and student engagement; teaching tools such as smart boards and PowerPoint presentations; classroom management strategies including disciplinary measures and rapport building; and cooperation addressing group work and effective collaboration among teachers. (El Afi, 2019).

According to Hathorn and Dillon (2018), PD in the UAE is crucial for education reform initiatives, focusing on improving teacher quality. Various models of PD exist across the UAE, managed by different educational entities such as the Ministry of Education (MoE), the Knowledge Health and Development Authority (KHDA), and ADEC. These initiatives aim to align with international standards and enhance teacher performance. PD initiatives extend beyond traditional training sessions to include action research (AR) to promote teacher autonomy and effectively address classroom challenges. Based on critical theory, AR encourages teachers to engage in authentic learning experiences, fostering collaboration, research, and reflection to drive pedagogical improvement.

Furthermore, professional development initiatives for educators and leaders, as mentioned in the article by Tantawy (2020), include various activities such as workshops, seminars, conferences, peer observations, discussions with colleagues, and formal courses. These programs cover pedagogy, classroom management, content knowledge, and leadership skills. Both in-house sessions organized by schools and external opportunities sponsored by organizations like the Middle

East and North Africa (MENA) Teacher Summit are mentioned, indicating a diverse approach to professional development.

Sustainable Professional Development Module

A study by Baroudi (2023) involved a sustainable professional development module structured to be over 25 hours across ten weeks and designed to meet the needs of teachers and head teachers at various branches of a specific private school in the UAE. It focuses on assessment skills and new teaching methods and techniques. The study employed qualitative methods, including interviews, post-PD surveys, and reflections, to collect and analyze data to explore the PD program's effectiveness and sustainability in enhancing teachers' skills and practices.

Inclusive Education Practices

The professional development initiatives in the UAE focus on promoting inclusive education practices through a comprehensive model, aiming to promote the capability of teachers to meet the needs of all students in their regular classrooms, including 'students of determination.' This model integrates various elements such as training sessions, mentoring, portfolio completion, and participation in professional learning communities (PLC). Emphasizing active learning, collaboration, and sustained duration, these initiatives aim to enhance educators' knowledge, attitudes, and practical application skills related to inclusive classroom practices. It includes instructional sessions covering topics such as inclusive education, universal design for learning, specific learning difficulties, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), physical disabilities, autism spectrum disorder, and encouraging positive student behavior. (Ewen et al., 2023).

REAL

Hojeij, AlSuwaidi, & Ahmed (2024). Scoping the literature on professional development for educators and educational leaders in the UAE.

Gifted Education Initiatives

The government, recognizing the importance of prioritizing giftedness and innovation in education, has strategically invested in training teachers to align classroom pedagogies with national initiatives. One notable program is a two-year PD training program administered in a blended format, offered by a teacher-training university in partnership with the Abu Dhabi Department of Education and Knowledge (ADEK). This program focuses on enhancing teachers' expertise in higher-order thinking skills, differentiation, and best practices in pedagogies for gifted and talented students. The PD uses various methods, such as district-sponsored workshops, university courses, professional conferences, and online learning experiences, catering to both seasoned and beginning teachers. (Garces-Bacsal et al., 2022).

Continuous Professional Development (CPD)

The CPD program offers the development of critical and reflective practices, problem-solving skills, teaching practices' references, practitioner's dialogue skills, increased links, cooperation and collaboration with a different teacher, personal satisfaction and promotion opportunities, and best practices sharing their capability towards students. This program is tailored for educators in private schools in Dubai. (Phogat, 2022).

These CPD initiatives mentioned include coaching, mentoring, and training programs aimed at improving teaching practices and keeping educators updated with changing trends in education. The study emphasizes the importance of instructional leadership in supporting teachers and enhancing student learning outcomes through PD and highlights the role of technology in facilitating PD. (Abbasi & David, 2021)

Research Question 2: What challenges are inherent in professional development as perceived by educational leaders?

Different studies have been conducted to assess and evaluate the effectiveness of PD programs and initiatives. Below are the key findings of the challenges faced by educational leaders.

Implementation Gap in Professional Development

There is a significant gap between formal policy objectives regarding PD and their actual implementation. Teachers need more agency and face different obstacles that hinder their engagement in PD activities. Additionally, the absence of clear goals and strategies for PD implementation leads to confusion and inefficiency. This lack of coherence contributes to the dissatisfaction and disengagement of educators (Azaza et al., 2023).

Teachers who participated in the 2-year PD program expressed many perceptions regarding innovation in gifted education and the program's impact on their teaching practice. Despite receiving training in innovative strategies, educators faced challenges implementing them effectively in their classrooms. Some obstacles include proper information and training on gifted programs, heavy workloads, and a gap between national policies and actual implementation (Garces-Bacsal et al., 2022).

Cultural and Language Barriers

Gender, language, and cultural differences have been identified as challenges to effective communication and collaboration among teachers, especially between Arabic and English-medium teachers (Garces-Bacsal et al., 2022). Additionally, the limited involvement of school leaders and logistical complexities present obstacles to practical

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Hojeij, AlSuwaidi, & Ahmed (2024). Scoping the literature on professional development for educators and educational leaders in the UAE.

implementation. These challenges include language accessibility, geographical considerations, and the relatively new concept of inclusion for many teachers (Ewen et al., 2023).

As stated by Azaza et al. (2023), despite the findings indicating that cultural diversity was perceived as an opportunity for professional learning and collaboration, some teachers noted that cultural factors such as gender, language, and cultural values affect teacher collaboration and interaction, hindering effective PD and impacting communication and collaboration among teachers, necessitating strategies to address these issues.

Furthermore, some teachers expressed concerns that PD content was designed based on Western educational practices and needed to consider their schools' cultural context and student demographics fully. This made implementing new teaching techniques challenging. Additionally, teachers, especially those teaching Arabic and humanities subjects, mentioned a need for more resources and support specific to their subject areas during PD sessions. This limitation hindered their ability to implement new teaching strategies effectively. Moreover, teachers highlighted the burden of excessive paperwork and administrative tasks associated with PD implementation. They felt overwhelmed by the workload, which affected their ability to fully engage in the activities (El Afi, 2019).

Resistance to Centrally Imposed PD

Teachers resist externally mandated PD programs, preferring more autonomy and control over their professional learning experiences. This resistance indicates a need for more participatory and teacher-driven approaches to PD (Azaza et al., 2023).

Baroudi (2023) also explains that the pressure of mandatory assessments limits the extent to which changes from PDs can be sustained. However, leaders are taking action to solve these problems and support teachers by arranging professional training that meets their specific needs.

Inadequate Evaluation and Support

There needs to be more systematic evaluation and support mechanisms for PD programs, leading to uncertainty regarding their effectiveness and impact on teacher practice and student learning (Azaza et al., 2023).

Transitioning to Online Education

The study titled "Professional Development Needs and Challenges Faced by K-12 Teachers in Delivering Effective Online Education in the UAE," conducted by Abdelaziz et al. (2023), discusses how, although teachers in the UAE are generally exposed to PD workshops and programs, these workshops need to be regularly revised in line with the changing needs and contexts of teachers and their students. This study targeted all schools' K–12 teachers that had transitioned to an online mode of education due to the spread of COVID-19. The study results indicate that challenges related to online education are significant, including adapting to new technologies, redesigning curriculum for online delivery, managing online classrooms effectively, and ensuring student engagement in virtual learning environments.

Another article addresses these challenges in PD programs within the context of the changing educational landscape. It highlights the importance of teachers adapting to new tasks such as task differentiation, online teaching, content delivery, feedback provision,

and online assessments. It focuses on the importance of teachers' technological pedagogical knowledge and access to opportunities for improving digital skills during training. Additionally, it identifies a prevalent need for more basic ICT skills among educators, affecting their effectiveness in online learning and ongoing PD efforts. The study, conducted through a questionnaire distributed to 436 secondary teachers, underscores the urgent need for educators to continuously update their competencies and skills, particularly in response to evolving teaching and learning environments, including challenges posed by events like the COVID-19 pandemic (Kumari et al., 2020).

Unmet Teacher Needs in PD Initiatives

A study conducted in Al Ain targeting high school science teachers involved qualitative data collection through semi-structured interviews and quantitative analysis through a questionnaire survey. Despite highlighting several strengths of PD, weaknesses, and areas for improvement were also identified, such as language barriers, theory-heavy activities, a lack of contextual relevance, time constraints, high teaching loads, and inadequate school support. The study suggests the need for a CPD model tailored to individual schools' needs and subject-specific contexts. Digital platforms for training and sharing expertise are recommended, along with adopting best practices (Alneyadi, 2022).

While PD offers numerous benefits, educators may encounter challenges such as maintaining high teaching standards amidst evolving educational landscapes, managing workload stress associated with PD, and ensuring that PD initiatives align with the needs of both teachers and students. Additionally, the article suggests the importance of effective leadership in navigating these challenges

Research in Educational Administration & Leadership
9(3), September 2024, 216-251.

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and fostering a supportive environment for teachers to engage in continuous PD (Abbasi & David, 2021).

To support teachers in the UAE, a study was conducted through focus group research involving 94 educators from public and private schools in Abu Dhabi and Dubai. The results included the challenges faced by educational leaders, which encompassed career progression, fairness in teacher assessment, teaching students with special needs, dissatisfaction with teaching, lack of teacher support, curriculum issues, student behavior and attitudes, parental support, school leadership, and online platforms (Goe et al., 2020).

Research Question 3: What are professional development programs' discernible outcomes and impacts on teacher performance and overall educational quality in the UAE?

The results of the different studies showcase the positive outcomes and impacts of professional development programs on teacher performance and overall educational quality in the UAE, underscoring the importance of continued investment in professional growth and institutional development. Below are the perceived outcomes of PD programs.

Increased Confidence and Performance Enhancement

The piloted sustainable PD program in the UAE had noticeable impacts on teacher performance, leadership efficacy, and overall educational quality. Teachers reported increased confidence in assessment practices, improving students' higher-order thinking skills. The program also increased teachers' awareness of their role in creating a learning environment that is sustainably developed. Despite challenges, the study suggests sustainable PDs can positively impact leadership skills, teacher attitudes, and student learning outcomes,

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Hojeij, AlSuwaidi, & Ahmed (2024). Scoping the literature on professional development for educators and educational leaders in the UAE.

contributing to inclusive and improved quality education (Baroudi, 2023).

An additional study in which data were collected using a survey questionnaire among 150 teachers in a private school in Dubai shows significant positive impacts of continuous PD on teacher performance, as evidenced by correlations and regression analyses. Key outcomes include improved teaching effectiveness, enhanced learning abilities among students, and the generation of innovative teaching ideas. The article concludes that PD initiatives contribute to the better delivery of quality education and emphasizes the interconnectedness between teacher performance, student learning outcomes, and the success of PD programs. Recommendations are made to enhance PD efforts further and support continuous improvement in teaching practices (Abbasi & David, 2021).

The study by Kumari et al. (2020), which targeted responses from 436 secondary school teachers in the UAE, reveals a significant positive relationship between various competencies possessed by secondary school teachers and their professional development and lifelong learning. Factors such as professional knowledge, pedagogical practice competence, subject knowledge, teaching strategies, and curriculum knowledge greatly predict the effectiveness of professional development initiatives. Additionally, the research identifies that age and teaching grades impact the relationship between competencies and professional development, suggesting potential areas for targeted support and interventions.

Enhancing Pedagogical Impact

The study titled "The Impact of Professional Development Training on Teachers' Performance in Abu Dhabi Cycle Two and Three Schools" by

El Afi (2019) reveals significant improvements in teachers' performance across various domains using quantitative analysis. These domains include lesson planning, teaching tools, teaching methods, classroom management, and cooperation. Teachers who participated in PD demonstrated higher effectiveness in these areas than those who did not receive PD.

The qualitative analysis study conducted in Al Ain, targeting high school science teachers, reveals strengths inherent in PD programs using the SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) framework. These strengths include enhanced classroom practices, differentiation, technology integration, and student-centered strategies. Teachers experienced the positive impacts of PD on job satisfaction, morale, self-efficacy, and confidence while facilitating networking opportunities, knowledge sharing, and the creation of a supportive learning community among educators (Alneyadi, 2022).

Enhanced Leadership Efficacy

PD initiatives that included opportunities for teacher leadership roles, coaching, and mentoring were found to impact teachers' leadership efficacy positively. Teachers who took on leadership roles reported increased motivation and engagement in the PD program (El Afi, 2019).

Enhanced Knowledge and Skills in Inclusive Education

Teachers participating in the PD model reported improved knowledge, attitudes, and practical skills related to inclusive education. These positive changes impacted and enhanced their classroom practices, benefiting students with special needs and their

typically developing peers. Moreover, the PD model facilitates the dissemination of inclusive practices at the whole school level, leading to changes in school policies, assessment practices, and staff training initiatives. However, further research is needed to independently assess student outcomes and evaluate PD initiatives' long-term sustainability and scalability (Ewen et al., 2023).

Advancement in Gifted Education Practices

Through the two-year PD program, teachers gained valuable insights into innovative practices in gifted education. They developed a deeper understanding of how to meet and embrace the needs of gifted and talented students. Despite facing challenges in implementation, teachers reported improvements in their teaching practices and observed changes in their students' processes and performance. Additionally, the focus on innovation in education aligns with the UAE's broader goals of becoming a center of educational and research excellence in the Middle East. By engaging in professional development and assisting teachers as they improve in educating gifted students, the UAE is progressing in educational excellence and creating an atmosphere of innovation within its educational institutions (Garces-Bacsal et al., 2022).

PD Outcomes and Alignment with Educational Frameworks

Blaik Hourani and Litz's (2018) research used a qualitative case-study approach and interviewed fourteen school administrators, including principals, vice principals, and academic principals representing six cycles in public school. These interview outcomes (post-PD program) revealed several key findings, including participants reporting enhanced knowledge and skills regarding their roles, a comprehensive understanding of ADEC's mission and vision, implementing student-

centered teaching-learning approaches, and conducting teacher appraisals. Moreover, improvements in teaching-learning practices were noted, such as adopting new teaching strategies and catering to the needs of special education students. The alignment between PD initiatives and the SSE-Irtiqaa framework was also recognized, resulting in an understanding of school self-evaluation criteria and enhancing school performance.

Facilitation of Action Research for Continuous Improvement

Action research initiatives have significantly impacted teacher performance, leadership efficacy, and overall educational quality. Teachers report that AR enables them to find practical solutions to classroom challenges, promote reflective practice, and enhance their teaching efficacy. Participation in AR positively affects current and future instructional practices, as teachers have the tools to make impactful changes within their schools, implement best practices, and improve lesson planning processes. Peer observations and collaborative learning experiences enhance teaching methods (Hathorn & Dillon, 2018).

Discussion

The findings of this study shed light on the nature and scope of PD initiatives in the UAE, highlighting the significant efforts made to enhance teacher effectiveness and leadership skills through formal programs such as Tamkeen and various in-house sessions. Despite these concerted efforts, educational leaders have reported several challenges. Among these are the implementation gap between policy objectives and on-ground realities, cultural and language barriers, and resistance to centrally imposed PD programs. The transition to online education, necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic, further

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complicated these efforts, with concerns about maintaining class engagement emerging as a critical issue. Similar challenges have been noted in other studies, such as those by Coady et al. (2023), who identified logistical barriers like distance and location, and by Bădoi-Hammami (2023), who pointed out issues related to inadequate guidance, organization, and resources, as well as the ongoing need for continuous professional development.

Nevertheless, the positive outcomes of PD programs are evident. These initiatives have significantly impacted teacher performance and overall educational quality, leading to increased confidence, enhanced pedagogical practices, and improved leadership efficacy. Supporting this, various studies have asserted the success of professional development programs, suggesting they serve as effective models for equipping teachers with the necessary content and pedagogical knowledge. Moreover, when PD programs are thoughtfully designed to meet the specific needs of targeted teacher groups, they can address these needs effectively, leading to beneficial outcomes (Coady et al., 2023; Richman et al., 2019). For instance, Richman et al.'s (2019) study emphasized the role of PD in enhancing teachers' content and pedagogical knowledge, particularly in meeting the demands of science curricula and standards. As highlighted in these studies, collaboration plays a crucial role in building knowledge and sharing expertise. Similarly, Saeed's (2023) research demonstrated that teacher training programs significantly boost teachers' motivation, professional development, and self-efficacy.

Furthermore, the studies reviewed highlight a growing recognition of the importance of PD in enhancing student learning outcomes, improving teacher practices, and driving school improvement efforts. Coady (2023) found that long-term PD programs enabled teachers to

implement changes in teaching strategies for English language learners, improving student engagement and academic achievement. Richman et al.'s (2019) participants also reported enhancements in student learning outcomes, further emphasizing the value of well-designed PD programs.

Finally, this review underscores the urgent need for more professional development that explicitly targets technology integration in educational settings. With the increasing importance of technology in education, it is vital to provide educators with the necessary training to incorporate digital tools effectively into their teaching strategies. Bădoi-Hammami (2023) notes the significant challenges faced by teachers who lack digital competence, as these difficulties impede their ability to support student learning. Echoing this, ElSayary (2022) found that a targeted upskilling training program in the UAE significantly improved teachers' digital competence, with participants expressing positive perceptions of how this training enhanced their teaching and learning experiences.

Suggestions

These studies and evaluations will contribute to coherent and strategic approaches to PD implementation, adapting and improving the use of technology tools and maximizing their impact. Based on the research findings, addressing the challenges and optimizing teachers' needs is crucial to enhancing PD programs for educational leaders. One of the main recommendations is revising PD content to incorporate comprehensive training and programs on elements of performance standards, addressing identified knowledge and skill gaps such as strategic planning, curriculum design, and documentation processes. Additionally, efforts are required to align formal policy, practice, and implementation, considering teachers' perspectives and experiences to

243

REAL

Hojeij, AlSuwaidi, & Ahmed (2024). Scoping the literature on professional development for educators and educational leaders in the UAE.

meet their needs. Moreover, language barriers and cultural differences should be considered when designing PD based on Western educational practices to ensure effective communication. Finally, evaluation is critical to understanding the challenges and effectiveness of any changes made in PD programs.

Moreover, although the study has a geographical emphasis on the UAE, some of the studies specified the emirates where PD was implemented and evaluated, including and limiting to Abu Dhabi and Dubai. So, it is suggested that the PD program outcomes in the other emirates be studied as well to ensure a comprehensive evaluation of the PD initiatives in the country.

Conclusion

In summary, the review highlights the diverse range of professional development initiatives in the UAE, addressing challenges and outcomes. Despite challenges like implementation gaps and cultural barriers, PD programs significantly positively impact teacher performance and student outcomes. Optimizing PD programs, aligning policy with implementation, and conducting systematic evaluations are crucial. Exploring PD outcomes in all emirates would provide a comprehensive understanding of nationwide improvements in education.

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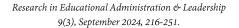
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