



OER Africa Research

Continuing Professional Development strategies in
Higher Education Institutions

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the important role that professional development for university academics plays in strengthening teaching and learning. As has been reported in numerous publications during 2020 and 2021, universities found themselves having to close their campuses and unable to teach their students face-to-face. Universities in Africa resorted to various strategies to do this, from complete closure of their institution, with no teaching taking place, through emergency remote teaching (ERT) with some form of online teaching, to fully implemented e-learning (Koninckx, Fatondji and Burgos, 2021). Whatever form the teaching has taken, academics have found that the pedagogy underpinning the primary teaching method they have traditionally practised (lecturing) has not been very effective when implementing ERT or online teaching. Those who are experienced in adult pedagogies have expressed the inadequacies of the lecture mode for undergraduate teaching (e.g. Jones, 2007; Khan, 1997). A need for new forms of teaching is now becoming clear. Several recent opinion pieces have expressed a need for professional development of academic staff (here we refer to it as continuing professional development or CPD), especially with respect to their teaching competence. Mihai (2021) and Harle (2021) stress that CPD needs to be a central strategy within higher educational institutions (HEIs) around the world, supporting academics with digital teaching and communities of practice. Even before the pandemic struck, Haras (2018) was lamenting the low status of CPD in HEIs and proposing that it should be more prominent, as it is crucial to the continuing improvement of the institutions, their staff, and to student success.

This report was embarked upon to provide a basis for the development of an online CPD course for senior managers in African universities. The focus of the draft course [*Rethinking Professional Development for Academics*](#)¹ is for senior managers to think differently about how they and their academics can approach professional development, and have been developed by OER Africa for the Association of African Universities (AAU). The report opens with a review of successful and innovative CPD models and approaches used in HEIs around the world. It goes on to examine CPD models relevant for the African context, and learnings we have taken from the piloting of recent CPD activities by OER Africa. This is followed by the presentation of a framework of CPD elements and activities, and a set of draft institutional policy guidelines that might be customized and adopted by African institutions wishing to initiate, implement or expand CPD for teaching, learning and research in their institution. The report closes with concluding remarks.

Review of global CPD initiatives

Darling-Hammond, Hyler and Gardner (2017), in the context of schooling, defined CPD as “a structured professional learning that results in changes to teacher knowledge and practices, and improvements in student learning outcomes” (p. 2). This definition is quite narrow, so, in this report, we extend the definition to include unstructured and ad-hoc CPD.

A review of the literature suggests that CPD in HEIs around the world is under-researched. A 2019 report by the European Union (EU) on CPD was informed by a literature review and a series of case studies, which identify innovations that can form exemplars for CPD (Inamorato dos Santos et al 2019b). The report suggests that there are three drivers increasing the need for CPD in higher education, namely:

- The massification and marketisation of HE;
- The digitalisation of HE; and
- The value of professional success for individual academics.

(Inamorato dos Santos et al 2019a).

¹ Access the course at <https://moodle.saide.co.za/login/index.php> and log in as guest.

However, the same report notes that, despite these drivers, academics rarely participate in CPD due to numerous barriers, including the following:

- Academics' reluctance to renounce teaching practices with which they are familiar;
- The absence of formal requirements or inducements for teaching development in HEIs;
- A lack of time for CPD among academics;
- HEIs' lack of pedagogical expertise and institutional capacity to develop effective CPD schemes.

One study suggests that lack of time is the key factor (King, 2004). It is likely, though, that the barriers are inter-related and stem from the imbalance in prioritisation between teaching and research in institutions, with a bias towards the latter. Traditional CPD has tended to focus on lecture-style inputs, and is regarded in the EU report as ineffective because there is often little relationship between the training and academics' classrooms and students. The report therefore focuses on innovative CPD practices that can mitigate the barriers listed above. Rather than define the term innovation, the report identifies examples of practices that (the authors maintain) are innovative. These include the following:

1. Collaboration, and participating in informal and ad-hoc practices where academics can learn from each other rather than during formal presentations;
2. Conferences and events which showcase teaching skills that improve student learning;
3. Staff mobility within and between institutions so that academics can learn from each other.

Such ideas can be combined with institutional systems and procedures that reinforce the CPD, including formal proof of teaching competency, provision of self-study materials to allow flexible learning, and intra- and inter-institutional partnerships to enable formal and informal networks and collaborations.

The overall recommendations of the EU report are that HEIs should:

- Maintain a unit, endorsed by university management, dedicated to the professional development (for teaching and learning) of their academic staff;
- Provide a range of CPD opportunities, as well as personalized support, for academic staff;
- Find methods of rewarding successful teaching practices;
- Ensure that all CPD offered is evaluated to determine its efficacy and provide a better research base for the discipline.

(Inamorato dos Santos et al 2019a)

An earlier publication focuses on the approach to CPD of eight world-class universities and includes a review of trends, challenges, and opportunities across five continents. The authors admit that the term 'world-class' is contentious and might serve to exclude excellent institutions from the developing world. The authors accepted that there is considerable diversity of context across the African continent. They nevertheless highlighted issues such as the inadequacy of qualified academic staff, the aging and exodus of such staff, the effects of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, and a lack of scrutiny in implementing information and communication technology (ICT) for teaching and learning. Their conclusion was that "African HEIs must make professional development a priority" (p. 3).

Recommendations, similar to those of the EU report, include the need for support from senior management to enable professional development centres to be set up in institutions, and provide multiple offerings such as self-study materials, podcasts, seminars, courses, and workshops. Such centres need to be led in a consultative and collaborative way, as effective CPD requires relationships to be built and maintained, resulting in meeting the needs of individual academics. The centres also need to be linked to other key services such as the library and ICT. Other recommendations include:

- Small communities of practice, which allow optimal CPD, based on data-driven decision-making, should be developed and rolled out.
- Technology should be used to support pedagogical ends and contextualized according to the needs of staff and students.
- Rewards structures need to be established to provide incentives for the best academic and professional staff to invest in CPD.

(Jacob, Xiong and Ye 2015)

It is relevant here to mention two of the nine case studies in the European report (Inamorato dos Santos et al 2019b), as they might possibly be adapted to the African university context.

First, the Sipping Point² is “an informal, campus-wide community where staff across all disciplines meet for one hour once a month to discuss and share ideas about topical challenges in teaching, assessment, and student engagement” (Inamorato dos Santos et al. 2019b p. 24). The innovation is a semi-structured, informal, face-to-face practice, which is followed up with online links to allow for further engagement by interested staff. An evaluation of the practice indicates improvement of participants’ knowledge and competences around student engagement, assessment, and available tools for teaching.

Second, University Pedagogical Support or UNIPS³ is a digital solution for developing pedagogical competence, consisting of small online modules that are adapted to the needs of academics and doctoral students. Developed for small and medium-sized universities in Finland, the modules are designed to be completed online in 3-4 days of study, and are regarded as being particularly useful for institutions where financial and staff resources are limited. The modules include a variety of multimedia, journal articles, glossaries, and quizzes. Research on UNIPS has demonstrated that the pedagogical training helped to change participants’ conceptions of teaching from teacher-focused to learning-focused.

While not all of the recommendations of the reports will be relevant to developing countries, they provide useful ideas to consider when developing CPD offerings for the contexts of African HEIs. We would regard CPD for the African context as being different from CPD in developed-country institutions. For example, while the goal in developed-country institutions might be to ‘maintain a unit, endorsed by university management, dedicated to the professional development (for teaching and learning) of their academic staff’ (Inamorato dos Santos et al 2019a), this may not be attainable (at least immediately) in the African context, for various reasons, such as the availability of funds or personnel.

This does not mean the CPD should not and cannot happen in African HEIs. Some of the recommendations arising from global CPD initiatives can be applied in the African context, and could support the development and implementation of CPD in African institutions. This is what led to the idea of a *framework* or matrix. Using a framework, institutions can think about elements of quality, innovative CPD which they can implement in a flexible way that meets the contextual needs of their own academics, and possibly even towards the establishment of a dedicated unit. We will illustrate the use of the framework / matrix at the end of this section.

We interviewed three senior academics on the state of CPD in Africa. One, based in South Africa, questioned whether CPD has to be interpreted in a formal way. A recent summary of teaching and learning initiatives in South Africa focused on educational technology includes three formal (i.e. accredited) programmes, three semi-formal (some recognition), and nine non-formal (non-recognised) initiatives (Czerniewicz, 2022).

² See <https://www.dcu.ie/teu/non-formal-professional-development-pd-options>

³ See <https://unips.fi>

A director of a Centre of Teaching and Learning based in a second South African University indicated the university is in the process of trying to establish a CPD system, but is finding it is a complex task that requires some degree of national consensus on what good teaching and learning means, and how it is aligned to job descriptions, promotion, and performance management. The university has a new academic promotion framework, based on the Higher Education Learning and Teaching Association of Southern Africa (HELTASA) national framework⁴ with criteria which they will use to develop a system and create alignment. He thinks it is too early to share their work. The UK⁵ and Australia (Deakin University⁶) have similar frameworks.

A former Dean in an East African University indicated that academics are trained, but in an unplanned, fairly haphazard way, depending on when there is funding either from internal sources or linked to research projects in partnership with other universities.

Based on the rationale that traditional CPD for academics has not been very successful in changing teaching and learning practices (as reported in the literature above), in 2019-21 OER Africa developed a set of short online innovative professional development learning pathways (LPs) for academic staff and librarians in HEIs in Africa. Academics can engage with the LPs using various devices such as computers, tablets, and smartphones, but require an Internet connection. The standalone online LPs consist of short tutorials that engage participants in authentic learning tasks that can be done individually, collaboratively, or in a workshop environment. They can be worked on independently based on one's needs and available time, and are intended to be user-friendly and easy to navigate. Our experience in piloting seven learning pathways has provided us with insights into how one form of CPD might be used in African universities. Here, we summarise the successes, challenges, and lessons learned from the piloting process.

Learnings from the piloting of CPD learning pathways

By the end of 2021, seven LPs had been developed and published,⁷ each of which focuses on relevant, contextualised practical skills and knowledge development concerned with teaching and learning (and to a lesser extent research) at higher education level. The development of the LPs was an action research exercise from which we drew lessons of experience for improvement. To facilitate such learnings, regular planning meetings were held where progress was shared, opportunities were explored, and development was documented for additional LPs to be created.

Six of the learning pathways were piloted and evaluated. For the current research report, we provide a summary of our learnings that have bearing on how CPD strategies might be developed in institutions.

Ease of Use

Over 90% of respondents stated that design of the LPs was user friendly, easy to navigate, and that they found them useful. Most indicated that they did not encounter any technical challenges in going through the LP. The few negative comments received related to bandwidth and small navigation issues. Respondents to the surveys conducted after the LPs were presented indicated a wide variety of knowledge, skills, and attitudes they developed.

Motivation to engage further

Evidence suggests the potential of the LPs to motivate academics to want to engage with them. For example:

⁴ https://heltasa.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/National-Framework-for-Enhancing-Academics-as-University-Teachers_signed.pdf

⁵ <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/fellowship/fellowship>

⁶ <https://dteach.deakin.edu.au/teaching-capability-framework/>

⁷ See <https://www.oerafrica.org/book/learning-pathways-open-education-online-tutorials>

- Some participants acknowledged that they had no education background and they found LPs on Learning Design very useful.
- Participants indicated that they learnt something from the LPs and plan to use the knowledge in various ways, including revising courses on information literacy, etc.
- Some participants indicated that they were:
 - improving their courses on the bases of knowledge gained about searching for and integrating OER.
 - using the knowledge gained to select the most suitable OA journals for the library.

For five of the six LPs, statistical T-tests showed significant change happening as a result of participating in the LPs. This is an indicator of the benefits academics derive from the LPs, and shows their potential to motivate academics.

Challenges

While the overall response to the LPs was very positive, respondents did raise challenges regarding implementation of an online, flexible, individual approach to CPD. The following issues were highlighted as likely to be potential barriers to implementing online LP tutorials as a professional development strategy. These include:

- Poor connectivity in some universities.
- High data costs; respondents commented on the fact that the videos in the LPs required the use of a lot of data.
- Lack of suitable personal digital devices is a barrier for some academic staff.
- Lack of dedicated time to engage with the LPs due to other commitments in the university.
- Lack of incentives to motivate academic staff to engage with this form of CPD where staff use their own time and do the LPs out of their own accord.

The full evaluation report is available on the OER Africa website on the [learning pathways page](#).

A framework for CPD activities for higher education.

Due to contextual realities, African HEIs may see the need to prioritise CPD, but may be constrained by factors such as the lack of availability of funds, resources or personnel to set up a central unit for teaching and learning, at least in the short to medium term.

We believe some of the recommendations arising from global CPD initiatives could support the development and implementation of CPD in African institutions. Rather than prescribe, or even suggest, ideal models, we have developed a framework to help senior management and interested academic staff to think about what may be possible (and desirable) to institute as part of a progressive journey towards such a central unit. The framework can be used as a tool for institutions to plan, explore and review ways of implementing CPD and supporting people to embark on a CPD journey in their institutions.

The framework is a set of framing questions across the top of a matrix, related to a set of elements or criteria down the left-hand side of the matrix. Deans, Deputy Deans, senior management and academics, ask themselves a series of questions to help them explore, review and plan for innovative CPD.

We have developed an online course which draws on recommendations and exemplars from the research to support institutional leadership to use the matrix to initiate, plan, review, change or improve CPD within an institution.

For example, in response to question 2A in the matrix, *'Does CPD need to be formal and structured?'*, the model of the Sipping Point illustrates how HEIs can put in place a semi-structured, informal range of offerings on a regular basis. This would still need to be supported by senior management, and should develop a culture of building relationships through consultation and collaboration, that

serves as a strong basis and motivation for the development of a more formal, central structure down the line. The framework helps leadership and management to think about what is possible and desirable to begin to lay down this foundation.

By the end of the course, participants have a tool that can be shared and discussed with colleagues and completed, adapted, and implemented in their own time.

The CPD course matrix is shown here, and will be finalised as we interact further with OER Africa's partners.

Questions	What do we learn? What do we do for CPD? What content & focus?	How do we learn? How do we do CPD? What models & modes?	How do we provide support for CPD?	How do we know we are succeeding? What does 'success' look like?	How do we ensure quality CPD?
Purpose & structure	IA Why should we bother with CPD?	2A Does CPD need to be formal and structured?	3A How can CPD be supported?	4A Does CPD for academics impact on students?	5A What criteria to determine quality CPD?
Academic staff & roles	IB Who should be involved in CPD?	2B	3B	4B How does CPD impact on academic staff?	
Funding	IC	2C	3C How can institutions access funding for CPD?	4C	
Offerings & resources	ID What topics should be offered in CPD?	2D What format does your CPD take?	3D How can CPD support teaching and learning?	4D	
Relationships	IE	2E What is the value of relationships in CPD?	3E How can relationships in CPD be supported?	4E	
Management	IF	2F	3F How can senior management support CPD?	4F How can CPD impact institutional culture?	
Human resources policy	IG	2G	3G	4G How can institutional policies support participation in CPD?	

Preliminary guidelines for supporting Open Educational Resource practices through Continuous Professional Development

These guidelines on policy implications for supporting OER practices through effective CPD have been developed from the two research reports resulting from the current OER Africa grant (Grant No. 2019-9305). *OER Initiatives in African Higher Education - Successes, challenges, and lessons learned* is a retrospective analysis of selected initiatives to assess the long-term contribution to establishing sustainable OER practices in African higher education. *Continuing Professional Development strategies in Higher Education Institutions* is a review of innovative CPD approaches used in higher education globally, CPD models relevant for the African context, learnings from the piloting of the OER Africa learning pathways, and a framework of CPD elements and activities developed for a course on CPD for senior academics.

Although some higher education institutions have made progress in building OER practices, many still face a complex set of challenges in fully harnessing the potential of OER. Thus, these guidelines serve to highlight key areas of attention to integrate OER-related practices into institutions, align CPD activities with these practices, and ensure that at an operational level, institutions are working toward these collective aims. Supporting OER practices through CPD is not a dichotomy between no OER practices and having implemented OER practices, but should rather be viewed as a continuum along which institutions can consistently move (i.e. there is no end-point of perfect implementation). Institutions need to continue iterating and build these practices over time. They will need to make decisions about how they wish to work with such a continuum. They will need to be supported by the promotion of institutional policies that incentivise and support CPD. The following guidelines are proposed.

1. Mainstream OER within institutional processes, including:
 - a. Introducing performance metrics for OER development and use for academics;
 - b. Developing an OER strategy;
 - c. Creating and consistently updating an institutional repository for OER;
 - d. Setting clear, realistic institution-wide targets for implementing open practices.
2. Review, refine and/or develop institutional policies to support capacity-building, including:
 - a. The provision of incentives for academics and other stakeholders. Consider policy that requires a certain level of CPD for all academic staff.
 - b. Facilitating supporting mechanisms such as the development of a policy that recognises or incentivises participation in communities of practice for promotion as well as intrinsic purposes
 - c. Providing requisite time for academics to pursue capacity-building opportunities.
 - d. Encouraging stakeholders to consider how policies will be implemented as part of the OER policy design process.
 - e. Draft policy that provides guidelines for the role of senior management in supporting CPD within departments.
3. The proliferation of policies creates more rules, which can act in opposition to openness. Simplify policies at the national and institutional levels in aid of 'opening up' opportunities for OER use and implementation of open practices.

4. Prioritize capacity-building by supporting the orientation of existing and new staff regarding pedagogical competencies and OER.
5. Create a system that provides different layers of institutional support, including:
 - a. Setting up a Centre for Teaching and Learning.
 - b. Financial and symbolic support from institutional management,
 - c. Peer recognition and awards for OER design and implementation.
6. Seek out and nurture partnerships and collaborations within the institution (including the library) as well as with government and other institutions to fully harness the potential of OER by sharing resources, expertise, and guidance.
7. Conduct localization (i.e., adapting resources for different geographical, pedagogical, political, or technical contexts) by conducting research.
8. Undertake research on OER implementation in higher education and CPD development areas for academics in Africa. This can include what content is already available, what can be adapted, reasons why localization is necessary, what should be created, and in which languages.
9. Tailor the messaging in advocacy efforts to optimize adoption of OER practices. This may involve using tools such as social media campaigns and communications strategies to outline objectives, reach specific audiences, and convey key messages.
10. Define impact metrics as early as possible. Undertake rigorous and regular data collection to monitor OER development, use, research, policy implementation, and practice.

OER Africa will unpack the guidelines through intensive interaction with institutions in the next phase of our work.

Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to provide a context for the development of an online CPD course, based on international best practice for CPD in higher education, a framework for course development and a set of guidelines for supporting Open Educational Resource practices through CPD. We reviewed reports of successful and innovative CPD models and approaches used in HEIs around the world and identified drivers for and barriers that prevent the take-up of CPD by academics. The need for innovative or effective CPD is stressed in the literature, and we discuss how such CPD recommendations from the literature might be applicable to African contexts. Further, we evaluated the OER Africa learning pathways as examples of innovative approaches to CPD. We identified the successes and challenges in the approach we took, and combined the literature review with the learnings from our own work to develop a framework for CPD activities for higher education. We used the framework in the development of an online CPD course for senior managers in institutions, that we sent to the AAU for review. We are currently awaiting feedback from AAU on the course, and will develop it further for roll-out in the next phase of the grant. The findings from this research and the related study "[OER initiatives in African Higher Education: Successes, challenges, and lessons learnt](#)" have been used to develop the *preliminary guidelines for supporting Open Educational Resource practices through CPD* that will be further developed in the next phase of our work.



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