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Teachers' Motivation for Professional Development: A Phenomenological Case Study Approach

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Abstract
The rapid transformation of the education sector, driven by advances in AI and evolving student needs, makes continuous professional development (PD) essential for teachers; yet, sustaining motivation for ongoing learning remains a significant challenge in resource-constrained contexts like Nigeria. This qualitative study explores how teachers in the ECHO Education Nigeria PD program perceive the value of their learning experiences and identifies the factors that motivate or discourage their participation and continued growth. Using a phenomenological case study design, data were collected through in-depth interviews with eight of the ten highest-scoring participants from a Value Creation Survey completed by more than sixty teachers. Findings reveal three main categories of motivational influences: factors that propel engagement, such as teachers' desire to make a meaningful impact on their students and society and their commitment to staying current in their profession; factors that sustain engagement, including the mutual respect and sense of belonging fostered within the EEN PD social learning community and the resulting shifts in perception and teaching practice; and factors that hinder engagement, such as limited access to teaching resources, preference for in-person interaction, lack of administrative support, and broader systemic challenges within the education system. The study underscores the importance of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivators and emphasizes the need for professional development models that are collaborative, accessible, and responsive to local realities. Implications for educational leadership and policy include fostering supportive school cultures, improving technological access, and addressing systemic barriers to teachers' ongoing development.

Keywords: ECHO Education Nigeria, Educational Leadership, Teacher Motivation, Teacher PD Model, Value Creation

1. INTRODUCTION

The field of education is experiencing an unprecedented pace of change, driven by advancements in technology and evolving student needs. Teachers, as central figures in the learning process, are expected not only to adapt but to continually develop their skills, knowledge, and pedagogical approaches to meet these demands (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). However, despite the abundance of professional development opportunities aimed at predisposing teachers to the current demands in their profession, many teachers show a lack of sustained motivation to engage in continuous development of skills and attitude towards their profession (Kennedy, 2016). This lack of engagement can lead to skill stagnation, reduced teacher efficacy, and ultimately, negative impacts on student outcomes (Ling & Mackenzie, 2015).

Teacher motivation for professional development is essential for maintaining effective teaching practices and fostering positive student outcomes (Guskey, 2002). However, numerous challenges, including time constraints, institutional pressures, and stressors inherent in teaching, can diminish teachers' motivation to engage in continued professional growth (Smylie, 1999). Research has shown that external

factors such as school culture, leadership support, and available professional learning resources play a significant role in sustaining or undermining teacher motivation (Kelchtermans, 2018). Also, factors such as self-efficacy and emotional regulation have emerged as pivotal in understanding the trajectories of teachers' professional motivations (Beltman et al., 2011). This means that motivational factors that influence teachers' professional development are primarily dispositional. This quantitative-oriented research has helped understand teachers' motivation for sustained professional development. While other quantitative studies have identified key factors contributing to teachers' motivation (Gobena, 2018; Thoonen et al., 2011), there is less emphasis on the lived experiences of teachers navigating these motivations within complex educational environments. Understanding how teachers create, perceive, and interpret value from their professional development experiences can provide nuanced insights into sustaining their motivation over time. This study addresses this gap by using qualitative methods to explore how teachers perceive value in professional development, ultimately identifying factors that propel, enhance, or impede their motivation for continued growth.

1.1. Literature Review

1.1.1. Value of Professional Development

The value of professional development (PD) in education has been extensively studied, with growing consensus on its critical role in enhancing teacher effectiveness and student achievement. Teachers' perceptions of the value of PD are shaped by various factors, including the relevance of the training to their classroom practices, the alignment with their professional goals, and the impact on student outcomes. Understanding these perceptions is essential for developing effective PD programs that not only enhance teaching practices but also foster long-term professional growth. Research indicates that the relevance of PD to daily classroom practices is one of the most significant factors influencing teachers' engagement with these programs. Ling and Mackenzie (2015), for example, emphasize that teachers are more likely to perceive PD as valuable when it directly addresses the challenges they face in their classrooms. Similarly, Guskey (2002) found that teachers are more inclined to adopt new instructional strategies when they see a direct connection between the PD content and their immediate instructional needs. PD that provides practical tools and techniques applicable to the classroom context is often rated as more useful by teachers, particularly when it offers solutions to problems they encounter regularly (Hill et al., 2013). Consequently, PD programs that fail to connect with the realities of classroom teaching may be perceived as irrelevant, leading to low levels of engagement and implementation. Moreover, the duration and structure of PD programs also influence their perceived value. Yoon et al. (2007) argue that sustained and intensive PD, which allows teachers to engage with new concepts over time, is more likely to lead to changes in teaching practices. One-off workshops, on the other hand, are often criticized for lacking depth and continuity, which can limit their impact on classroom practice. Research has shown that ongoing, context-specific PD, where teachers have opportunities to reflect on and refine their teaching strategies, fosters greater commitment and leads to more significant improvements in instructional quality (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Thus, the structure of PD plays a crucial role in shaping teachers' perceptions of its value.

Another critical aspect of the perceived value of PD is its impact on student outcomes. Teachers are more likely to value PD if they believe it will lead to improvements in student learning. As noted by Avalos (2011), PD that is explicitly linked to enhancing student achievement tends to be viewed more favorably. This is particularly important in subject-specific PD, where teachers expect training to result in measurable gains in student performance. Borko (2004) highlights that when teachers see a direct correlation between the PD they receive and improvements in student outcomes, their perception of the PD's effectiveness increases. Kennedy (2016) further asserts that PD focused on subject-specific pedagogy, particularly in areas such as mathematics and science, can lead to significant gains in student learning, thereby reinforcing the perceived value of such programs among teachers. In addition to the relevance to classroom practices and student outcomes, alignment with professional goals and personal aspirations also plays a significant role in shaping teachers' perceptions of PD. Desimone (2009) argues that when PD aligns with teachers' career trajectories and professional ambitions, it is more likely to be perceived as valuable. Teachers who view PD as a pathway to achieving their professional goals, such as obtaining leadership roles or deepening their subject knowledge, are more motivated to engage in these programs. Furthermore, PD that supports personal growth and self-efficacy is often viewed as more meaningful. Opfer and Pedder (2011) suggest

that PD, which allows teachers to reflect on their practice and develop a stronger sense of professional identity, fosters deeper engagement and a higher valuation of the PD experience.

The social and collaborative nature of PD is another factor that influences teachers' perceptions of its value. Research indicates that PD models that incorporate collaboration and peer learning are often more successful in engaging teachers than those that adopt a top-down, isolated approach. Vangrieken et al. (2017) found that professional learning communities (PLCs) and other collaborative PD formats enhance teachers' motivation and commitment to the PD process. When teachers are given the opportunity to share experiences, discuss challenges, and learn from their colleagues, they are more likely to view the PD as valuable and relevant. Collaborative PD also provides a supportive environment where teachers can experiment with new practices and receive feedback, further reinforcing the perceived value of the experience (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

1.1.2. Theory of Motivation

Motivation has been a central topic in psychology and education, with various theories developed to explain what drives human behavior. One of the most influential frameworks is Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, which posits that human motivation is structured in a pyramid of needs, ranging from basic physiological requirements to higher-level self-actualization (Maslow, 1943). This theory suggests that individuals are motivated to fulfill their basic needs before seeking personal growth and fulfillment. While widely accepted, Maslow's theory has been critiqued for its rigid hierarchical structure, as research indicates that individuals may simultaneously pursue higher-order needs while addressing lower-order ones (Wahba & Bridwell, 1976). Another significant contribution to motivation theory is Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which focuses on intrinsic and extrinsic motivations (Deci & Ryan, 1985). According to SDT, people are motivated by the need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, with intrinsic motivation being linked to tasks that are inherently interesting or enjoyable (Deci & Ryan, 2000). In contrast, extrinsic motivation is driven by external rewards or pressures, though it can become internalized if it aligns with personal goals (Ryan & Deci, 2000). This theory has been widely applied in educational contexts, where fostering intrinsic motivation is seen as crucial for student engagement and learning outcomes (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009).

The theory of motivation has significant implications for teachers, as it directly influences their engagement and performance in educational settings. According to Self-Determination Theory (SDT), teachers are more motivated and effective when their basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are met, leading to higher levels of intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000). When teachers feel a sense of autonomy in their instructional practices, they are more likely to engage with their work and develop innovative teaching strategies (Roth et al., 2007). Furthermore, feelings of competence, bolstered by ongoing professional development and support, enhance teachers' motivation to improve student outcomes (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). Lastly, relatedness, or the connection with colleagues and students, contributes to a supportive teaching environment that fosters sustained motivation and job satisfaction (Evelein et al., 2008).

1.1.3. The Professional Development Program of Study– ECHO Education Nigeria

The PD program in this qualitative study was launched in 2022 as a free initiative under Oklahoma State University, aimed at fostering professional growth among K-12 educators and administrators in Nigeria (Egure, 2023). Since its inception, the program has successfully run three cohorts, with each cohort following a structure modeled after the Nigerian K-12 education system. Participants include a diverse group of teachers and school leaders from across Nigeria, averaging 30 attendees per session. These educators engage in learning sessions twice a month, each lasting 60 minutes, with the program delivered via Zoom to accommodate participants from different regions, making it accessible and flexible. Admission to the program is entirely free, reflecting the initiative's core mission of promoting educational growth and professional development without financial barriers. This aspect of the program has been instrumental in attracting a broad range of participants who may not have had access to such opportunities otherwise. The recruitment process is largely participant-driven, as many educators who have completed the program invite

their colleagues and peers to join subsequent cohorts, contributing to the program's organic growth and wide reach within the Nigerian educational community.

Each cohort runs for a full academic year, aligning with the Nigerian K-12 school calendar. The program includes two break periods, in August and December, to coincide with the Nigerian school holidays, ensuring that participants can balance their professional learning with their teaching responsibilities. This schedule allows educators to participate actively in the program without conflicting with their school commitments, ensuring continuity and sustained engagement throughout the year. The curriculum for each cohort is developed based on participant input, with surveys sent out at the beginning of each cohort to gather feedback on the specific topics they wish to explore. This participatory approach ensures that the PD content remains highly relevant to the participants' professional contexts and personal growth goals.

The structure of each session is designed to be both informative and interactive. Every session begins with a welcome address, setting a collaborative tone for the meeting. This is followed by a 15-minute didactic presentation delivered by a university professor or expert from Oklahoma State University. These presentations cover a range of pertinent educational topics such as "Learning Communities Based on Core Values," "Designing in E-Learning," "Emotional Intelligence for School Leaders and Teachers," and "Empathetic Listening: Understanding Before Acting." The sessions are crafted to provide participants with both theoretical insights and practical tools that they can apply in their daily teaching and administrative roles. Following the didactic presentation, the session transitions into a "Problem of Practice" discussion, which centers on real-world challenges that participants face in their schools. These discussions often address critical issues such as conflicts between Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) and school administrations, student behavior management, and teacher motivation. Participants are encouraged to share their experiences, offer recommendations, and collaborate on solutions, making these sessions a dynamic platform for peer learning and mutual support. This interactive component is essential in fostering a sense of community among the participants, who benefit not only from expert-led learning but also from the collective wisdom and shared experiences of their peers.

A key incentive for participation and sustained engagement in the program is the award of certificates of competency. Participants who maintain an attendance rate of 80% or higher throughout the cohort are eligible to receive these certificates, which recognize their commitment to professional development and validate the competencies they have acquired during the program. This recognition serves as both a motivator for consistent attendance and a valuable credential that participants can add to their professional portfolios.

1.2. Research Questions

1. How do teachers perceive value in their professional development experiences?

2. What factors do teachers identify as motivating or demotivating in their engagement with professional development?

3. What role does organizational support play in fostering or inhibiting teachers' motivation for professional growth?

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Research Design and Data Gathering

This study employs a phenomenological case study approach to explore the intricate relationship between the experiences of K-12 educators and administrators participating in the ECHO Education Nigeria online PD program, launched at Oklahoma State University. By combining the frameworks of phenomenology and case study research, this design captures both the lived experiences of participants and the operational dynamics of the PD program as a bounded system. The phenomenological component draws from an interpretive approach, emphasizing the participants' meaning-making processes and professional transformation through their lived experiences. The case study element treats the ECHO PD program as a bounded case, limited to a specific cohort and timeframe, allowing for a detailed analysis of

how the program's structure, curriculum, and delivery mechanisms influence outcomes. The integration of these approaches provides both depth and contextual specificity, offering a comprehensive view of individual experiences within a defined cultural system.

The research design for this study follows a rigorous qualitative approach, employing in-depth interviews as the primary data collection method. The selection of interview participants was grounded in a carefully planned two-phase process to ensure the quality and relevance of the data. Initially, a Value Creation Survey was administered to all participants in the ECHO Education Nigeria PD program via email and phone. This survey, which is recognized for assessing how individuals perceive the value generated through participation in learning communities, served as a preliminary screening tool. Although the survey results themselves are not reported in this research, they played a critical role in identifying the most suitable interview candidates. From this pool, eight participants who scored high on the Value Creation Survey were invited to partake in the interview phase, a selection process that ensured those chosen had significant engagement and could provide rich, nuanced insights into their experiences with the PD program. The final interview cohort consisted of one school administrator and seven teachers, allowing for a diverse range of perspectives within the educational system. These participants, seven females and one male, ranged in age from 28 to 52 years, with teaching experience between 2 and 20 years. Inclusion criteria required active participation in the PD sessions, completion of the survey, and willingness to engage in follow-up interviews.

The ECHO Education Nigeria program serves as the focal "case," providing a rich context for understanding how its structure, curriculum, and delivery impact participants' professional growth and engagement. The interviews were conducted using the Value Creation Interview Protocol developed by Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2020), a framework that is particularly effective for exploring how individuals create value through their participation in communities of practice. This protocol consists of six thematic areas. They are immediate, potential, applied, realized, reframed, and transformative value, and they capture both short-term and long-term outcomes of learning engagement. This protocol was chosen for its alignment with the study's focus on professional development and its rigor in capturing various dimensions of value creation, from immediate experiences to long-term professional outcomes. The use of this structured interview protocol ensured that the questions were not only relevant to the research objectives but also systematically explored different aspects of the participants' professional growth, engagement, and application of knowledge gained from the PD program. The protocol has been validated in prior studies and demonstrates high internal reliability, with reported Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.78 to 0.89 (Harris et al., 2025).

To enhance the rigor and validity of the interview process in this qualitative research, several strategies were employed. First, the use of the Value Creation Protocol itself, as an established framework, adds methodological robustness by offering a well-validated set of questions that has been previously tested in research on learning communities. This contributes to the reliability of the interview process, ensuring consistency across interviews while still allowing for depth and flexibility in responses. Additionally, the interviews were semi-structured, providing a balance between guided questions and the opportunity for participants to express their thoughts freely, which is essential in qualitative research to capture the richness of personal experiences (Patton, 2015). Member checking was another key strategy employed to enhance the credibility of the data. After each interview, participants were given the opportunity to review and confirm the accuracy of the transcripts or summaries of their responses, ensuring that their perspectives were accurately captured and reducing the likelihood of researcher bias or misinterpretation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This process of verification strengthens the trustworthiness of the data, as it gives participants agency in validating the information gathered during the interviews. Furthermore, as stated earlier, the research employed purposeful sampling, which is commonly used in qualitative research to select individuals who are particularly knowledgeable or experienced with the phenomenon under study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this case, selecting participants based on their high engagement in the ECHO Education Nigeria PD program, as indicated by their survey scores, ensured that the interviewees were not only willing but also well-positioned to provide detailed and meaningful insights. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim, further enhancing the rigor of the data collection process. Detailed transcriptions ensure that no nuances in the participants' responses are lost, allowing for thorough analysis. Participants were contacted and recruited via email and phone following survey completion. Informed consent was obtained electronically using a form approved by the Oklahoma State University Institutional Review

Board. All interviews were conducted online via Zoom and lasted between 45 and 60 minutes. Ethical considerations, including confidentiality, voluntary participation, and secure data handling, were strictly adhered to throughout the study. Finally, reflexivity was maintained throughout the research process. As a qualitative researcher, I remained mindful of my own potential biases and preconceptions, regularly reflecting on how these might influence the interpretation of the data. This reflexive stance helped to ensure that the analysis remained grounded in the participants' lived experiences rather than being shaped by the researcher's expectations.

2.2. Data Analysis

The data analysis for this study followed a systematic and rigorous approach aimed at uncovering themes and patterns that reflect the participants' experiences in the ECHO Education Nigeria online professional development program. Following the transcription of the audio-recorded interviews, a coding framework was developed based on the theory of motivation and value creation interview protocol. This framework facilitated an initial round of open coding, where significant statements and phrases relevant to motivation and value, and to the research questions, were identified. Each transcript was meticulously reviewed, and codes were assigned to segments of data that reflected the participants' perceptions of the value derived from their involvement in the PD program and their motivation. This coding process was guided by the principles of phenomenological analysis, focusing on capturing the essence of participants' lived experiences (Husserl, 2001). After the initial coding, a second round of analysis involved axial coding, where codes were grouped into broader categories to identify overarching themes. This stage was crucial for understanding how various elements of the participants' experiences interrelated and contributed to the perceived value of the ECHO Education Nigeria program. For example, themes such as "professional growth," "community engagement," and "challenges in implementation" emerged as salient categories that encapsulated the multifaceted nature of the participants' experiences. From axial coding, themes began to emerge. Findings from the data analysis are presented through thematic narratives, supported by direct quotes from participants to illustrate the richness and depth of their experiences.

3. FINDINGS

Findings revealed three key factors influencing interest in professional development opportunities: those that propelled interest, those that sustained interest, and those that hindered it. Specifically, the factors that propelled interest were characterized by a strong desire to effect change, a commitment to making a meaningful impact, and aspirations for both personal and professional improvement and growth. Factors that sustained interest are the values participants perceive in the PD program, which include mutual respect and trust, engagement, a sense of belonging, and change in perception and practice. Lastly, the factors that hinder interest in attending PD include limited access to necessary resources and materials, preference for physical, in-person interactions over virtual sessions, and pessimism and frustration regarding the systemic challenges.

3.1. Factors that Propelled the Interest of Teachers in Participating in the Professional Development Opportunity

Desire to Make a Positive Impact in Schools and Communities. Data reveals that the strongest motivator for teachers' participation in ECHO Education Nigeria (EEN) is a shared desire to contribute meaningfully to educational improvement. Many educators framed their engagement as part of a broader aspiration to support both teachers and students while remaining sensitive to the pressures educators already face. One participant articulated this balance clearly, stating, "I could actually make a change, make a difference in the lives of these teachers without making them feel more pressured." Her emphasis on making change without adding burden reflects a nuanced understanding of the challenges teachers navigate daily. This same orientation toward collective uplift is echoed by another participant who explained, "We need to uplift each other," underscoring her belief that meaningful improvement emerges from mutual support rather than isolated effort. For these educators, participation in EEN represents an opportunity to contribute to a supportive professional community committed to shared progress. Their

reflections illustrate a consistent theme: impact is rooted in empathy, collaboration, and an awareness of the lived realities of fellow educators. Through these perspectives, teachers position EEN not merely as a PD initiative but as a collaborative space where their desire to foster positive change can take form. The opportunity to engage in meaningful conversations, exchange ideas, and contribute to a collective vision reinforces their initial motivation to join the network.

Commitment to Continuous Learning and Professional Growth. Another prominent factor propelling interest in the program is teachers' commitment to learning and self-development. Several participants described a desire to strengthen their teaching practice and remain current in the field. One participant reflected on her evolving engagement, sharing, "I would not say that I'm active yet, but I'm also not passive. I'm still indeed in between active and passive," explaining that although she began as a passive participant, she is gradually becoming more involved as her confidence grows. Another teacher expressed a strong intrinsic motivation for ongoing learning, noting, "I always like to learn more…" and further explaining her goal "to learn more on how to make sure I deliver..." These statements demonstrate a future-oriented mindset, where learning is tied to improving instructional quality. A third participant reinforced this orientation toward growth, stating, "I believe in continuous improvement and gaining knowledge that can help me achieve my goals and vision." For her, professional development is connected to both personal advancement and broader career aspirations. She added, "I was hoping to improve myself... to stand out," and later shared her ambition of becoming "the head of my own school in the future." Collectively, these narratives reflect a shared belief that participation in EEN serves as a pathway to excellence, enabling teachers to refine their skills while positioning themselves for long-term professional success.

Motivation to Contribute to Wider Educational Change. Alongside personal development and school-level impact, many teachers expressed motivation to contribute to broader educational transformation. Participants described a belief that small, intentional actions can create meaningful shifts in the system. One participant captured this perspective when she stated, "If we take a positive step, we may get results," emphasizing her belief that improvement begins with purposeful effort. Others viewed their involvement as an opportunity to extend learning beyond their own schools. One participant explained her desire to encourage wider participation in EEN: "I actually have been thinking about if it is possible for me to go to other schools… to talk to teachers and invite them," demonstrating her hope that growing the network can deepen its impact. Her reflection shows an understanding that systemic change is strengthened through collaboration and shared learning across schools. For another educator, this motivation is deeply rooted in a sense of service. She shared, "I always have a passion to help... I believe the little we can do here and there will go a long way." Her words reflect a commitment to incremental but meaningful contributions, grounded in the belief that small actions accumulate into wider change. This ethos is echoed in a participant who stated, "I want to be able to use my knowledge to support others, to impact my community."

Together, these narratives paint a cohesive picture: teachers were propelled to join EEN not only to improve themselves but also to influence their schools, support their colleagues, and contribute to a collective vision for educational transformation.

3.2. Factors that Sustained the Interest of Teachers in the Professional Development Opportunity

A Collaborative Culture Built on Trust and Mutual Respect. Teachers' sustained participation in ECHO Education Nigeria (EEN) is closely tied to the program's collaborative culture, built on trust, mutual respect, and shared ownership of learning. Central to this experience is EEN's guiding principle of "All Teach, All Learn," which participants frequently referenced as the foundation of the supportive environment they encountered. In this model, hierarchies are set aside, allowing educators of different backgrounds and levels of experience to contribute freely, listen actively, and learn from one another. This inclusive structure fosters a climate where participants feel respected and confident that their voices matter. A key feature that reinforces this sense of community is the "problems of practice" segment included in each session. Participants repeatedly described this as a meaningful part of their engagement because it offers space to discuss concrete challenges and collectively explore solutions. As one participant explained, "I look forward to the case presentation… I want to hear other people's challenges," reflecting both anticipation and trust in the openness of the group. Another participant described the network as "people that share a common goal, the goal of providing solutions to educational problems". Trust among

participants also extends beyond session discussions. One teacher described reaching out to another member after hearing her perspective during an EEN session, noting, "I have taken the step of meeting up with her to discuss the challenges that we are having… I expected her to act on it." This expectation of support demonstrates the relational depth formed within the community and participants' confidence in one another's willingness to help.

A Structure That Encourages Gradual and Sustained Engagement. Another important factor sustaining teachers' engagement is EEN's low-dose, high-frequency structure. The 60-minute sessions held every two weeks offer a manageable commitment while maintaining a steady rhythm of learning. This consistency helped participants become more comfortable over time, contributing to a gradual shift from passive attendance to active involvement. One teacher described this change in herself: "I was an observer, yes. But now I'm moving gradually to the active stage." For several educators, continued participation was also tied to an emerging sense of responsibility toward the group. One participant remarked, "It's not just about take, take, take. You should also give. Life is about give and take." Her words point to a growing awareness that the community thrives when members both learn from others and share their own insights. Another participant expressed a similar sentiment, noting, "I'm always trying to look back, okay, what can I share," a reflection that illustrates how the routine of meeting with colleagues encouraged her to consider what contributions she might bring to each session. Together, these experiences help explain why the program's structure encourages increasingly engaged participation over time. This environment of respect and reciprocity naturally gives rise to a strong sense of belonging. Several participants described EEN as feeling like a family. One educator shared, "It feels like family… it makes you, if you discover people who have the same mindset." Others echoed this sentiment: "When I come, I have a home," and "I have been in touch with other participants… you feel like family." These expressions capture the emotional connection participants experience, a connection that sustains long-term involvement and reinforces EEN as more than a professional space.

Shifts in Perception and Practice. EEN also contributes to changes in participants' perceptions and practices. Participants attributed new insights, confidence, and increased intentionality in their behavior to their involvement in the network. One teacher stated, "I have gained new knowledge and experiences," highlighting the learning dimension. Another described a personal shift toward greater positivity and relational awareness: "I became intentional about greeting. I became intentional about wearing a smile." These behavioral adjustments suggest that EEN influences not only instructional practices but also interpersonal approaches that shape school culture. One participant summarized her internal transformation by saying, "I had to embrace all that value," pointing to the broader mindset shift encouraged by the program.

Facilitator Support and Relevance of Content. Finally, EEN facilitators play a critical role in supporting sustained engagement. Their practice of contacting schools to learn about ongoing challenges, and presenting them anonymously for group discussion, ensures that the content remains relevant, respectful, and grounded in participants' realities. Because challenges discussed come directly from their own classrooms, teachers see immediate applicability in the ideas generated during sessions.

Collectively, these experiences illustrate why educators remain committed to EEN. The combination of trust, belonging, reciprocal learning, and meaningful professional and personal growth sustains their engagement and solidifies EEN as a valued community of practice.

3.3. Factors that Hinder the Interest of Teachers in the Professional Development Opportunity

Teachers' hesitation or inability to participate fully in professional development (PD) opportunities such as ECHO Education Nigeria (EEN) often stems from a combination of resource limitations, structural barriers, and contextual realities of the Nigerian educational system. These challenges, including technical, logistical, financial, and organizational challenges, collectively shape how educators perceive the feasibility and value of PD. While EEN offers a platform for meaningful growth, participants' reflections highlight the broader systemic issues that complicate engagement.

Limited Access to Digital Resources and Technology. A recurring barrier identified by participants is the difficulty accessing the necessary materials and technology required for virtual PD. Although EEN provides digital resources, teachers often struggle to access them due to permissions,

connectivity issues, or inadequate devices. One participant expressed her frustration, explaining, "I have it [materials] in the Dropbox, but… I cannot use it because the permission is not granted." Dropbox serves as the platform where EEN stores its session recordings and learning materials, making access essential for participants. When permissions fail, or users cannot retrieve files, these technical barriers, combined with the already limited technological infrastructure in many Nigerian schools, significantly hinder their ability to benefit from the resources provided. Even when teachers have some access, the constraints of poor connectivity significantly hinder their ability to participate meaningfully in virtual learning environments. These technological barriers create a practical disconnect between the availability of resources and the ability of educators to use them.

Financial Burdens Associated With Virtual Participation. Although EEN sessions are free, the data costs required to participate are not. For educators working in a context where internet data is expensive, participation becomes a financial consideration. One participant articulated this tension: "Though it is free, participants still spend money… Maybe we do a local ECHO Education session just in the school, where people may not have to use data." Her suggestion for school-based sessions reflects recognition of a real cost barrier. Without institutional support to offset these expenses, teachers are left to personally shoulder the financial burden of attending PD, a barrier that can discourage consistent participation.

Preference for Face-to-Face Engagement over Virtual PD. Another theme that emerged is teachers' preference for in-person learning experiences. While virtual sessions offer accessibility, some educators feel that meaningful engagement and relationship-building are better fostered through physical interaction. One teacher shared, "I would've preferred meeting one-on-one… at least once, maybe a quarterly meeting, physically." This preference suggests that virtual-only PD formats may not meet the relational expectations of all participants. In contexts where physical presence is culturally associated with accountability, connection, and authenticity, virtual interactions may feel insufficient or less engaging.

Lack of Administrative Support within Schools. Participants also described challenges stemming from inadequate support from school leadership. When administrators do not prioritize PD or advocate for teachers' participation, educators feel discouraged or uncertain about investing their time in such opportunities. One participant expressed this frustration: "…I don't know why my principal cannot stand up to her superiors and explain things to them." This sense of limited advocacy reflects broader organizational issues within some schools, where PD is not embedded as a strategic priority. Without administrative backing, PD becomes an individual rather than institutional pursuit, diminishing teachers' motivation to participate.

Perceived Lack of Immediate or Tangible Benefits. Economic realities further influence how teachers evaluate the value of PD. In a context where many educators face financial strain, PD that does not offer immediate or tangible rewards may be viewed as a lower priority. One participant summarized this sentiment bluntly: "At the end of the day, they're asking, what do I gain from it? How much." Although sometimes expressed jokingly, such comments reflect genuine concerns. In the absence of financial incentives or direct benefits, some teachers may perceive PD as an additional obligation rather than an opportunity, especially when balancing personal and professional demands.

Pessimism toward the Education System and Systemic Challenges. Several participants expressed frustration with the broader state of the education sector, which also affects their motivation to engage in PD. One teacher lamented, "I know that Nigerian education is dying day by day." Another noted, "So many challenges… many people… need encouragement." These statements reflect a sense of disillusionment with structural issues in the system. When teachers feel overwhelmed by systemic decline, PD may appear insufficient to address the deeper challenges they face daily. Additionally, workload concerns, particularly large class sizes, further constrain teachers' capacity to engage in PD. One teacher commented, "The UBE standard is one to 35… but the government that stated that is even worse… compared to private schools," pointing to the disconnect between recommended standards and actual conditions. Heavy workloads reduce the time and cognitive bandwidth teachers can devote to professional learning, making PD appear impractical, even when they value it.

In summary, while teachers acknowledge the potential value of EEN, numerous obstacles hinder their full participation: limited technological access, financial constraints, preference for in-person engagement, inadequate administrative support, economic pressures, systemic frustrations, and

overwhelming workloads. These challenges reflect the complex realities within which Nigerian educators work. Addressing these structural issues could significantly improve teachers' ability to engage in and benefit from PD initiatives such as EEN.

4. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study underscore the significance of effective professional development (PD) for educators, particularly in contexts like Nigeria, where systemic challenges are profound. Effective PD plays a crucial role in enhancing teachers' instructional practices, fostering continuous professional growth, and ultimately improving student outcomes (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Ling & Mackenzie, 2015). PD initiatives, when well-designed, provide educators with opportunities to update their skills, reflect on their practices, and engage with new pedagogical approaches that are crucial for modern education (Kennedy, 2016). ECHO Education Nigeria (EEN) exemplifies this by offering a structured platform where teachers can engage with evidence-based practices, collaborate on problem-solving, and develop new insights into their teaching methods.

However, the sustainability and impact of PD initiatives like EEN hinge on addressing the various factors that motivate or hinder educators' engagement. Research has shown that PD is most effective when it is ongoing, collaborative, and context-specific, enabling educators to directly apply what they have learned to their classroom contexts (Opfer & Pedder, 2011). EEN's "All Teach, All Learn" philosophy supports these conditions by cultivating a collaborative learning environment and a sense of shared responsibility for educational improvement. Yet, barriers such as limited access to resources and systemic constraints highlight persistent challenges in delivering effective PD in under-resourced settings (Avalos, 2011; Mitchell et al., 2024).

Motivation emerged as a central theme in understanding educators' willingness to participate in and sustain engagement with PD. Intrinsic motivation, including the desire for personal growth, self-improvement, and contributing to positive change, was a strong driver for EEN participation. These findings align with Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), which emphasizes autonomy, competence, and relatedness as conditions that foster internal motivation. This theory was evident in participants' aspirations to learn, lead, and serve their communities through teaching. The centrality of intrinsic motivation in this context reflects what Fesi et al. (2024) call a "resilience-driven commitment" often seen in teachers working in underfunded systems. In low-resource environments like Nigeria, where material incentives are scarce, teachers frequently rely on personal values and social commitment to sustain engagement (Fesi et al., 2024). This resonates with research across sub-Saharan Africa showing that intrinsic motivators, such as pride in teaching, a sense of purpose, and spiritual values, are often more potent than financial ones (UNESCO-Teacher Task Force, 2020). However, extrinsic factors also play a critical role. Participants in this study acknowledged that sustained engagement requires more than good intentions. Support from school leadership, recognition, and even modest financial incentives were seen as important. Ajayi and Lawal (2023), who found that Nigerian teachers often disengage from PD due to poor administrative support and a lack of career incentives, echo these findings.

Furthermore, findings from this study indicate teachers' preferences for the mode of PD delivery and the school leadership factor in PD. The preference for in-person over virtual sessions reported by participants reflects both infrastructural limitations and cultural preferences. Teachers in this study reported difficulties related to internet access, cost of data, and unfamiliarity with online platforms. Mitchell et al. (2024), who reported that educators in similar African contexts often prefer face-to-face PD due to its perceived relevance, trust-building capacity, and immediate feedback, support these findings. Additionally, the strong communal values in many Nigerian schools make physical interaction more meaningful for learning and collaboration (Mallam et al., 2022). School leadership emerged as a crucial factor in sustaining or limiting motivation. In schools where principals were seen as supportive and communicative, teachers expressed greater confidence in engaging with PD. Conversely, the lack of advocacy from administrators was demotivating. This aligns with findings by García-Martínez et al. (2023), who emphasized the role of school leaders in shaping teachers' professional learning environments through emotional, logistical, and professional support.

5. CONCLUSION

This study explored the motivational dynamics that influence teachers' engagement in professional development (PD) through the ECHO Education Nigeria (EEN) program. The findings revealed that intrinsic motivations, such as a desire to effect change, grow professionally, and support others, play a central role in propelling educators' participation. Sustained engagement was fostered through a culture of mutual respect, belonging, and collaborative learning. However, significant barriers, including poor infrastructure, limited leadership support, and systemic disillusionment, hindered full participation.

These findings have several practical implications. For teachers, PD programs must be designed to tap into their intrinsic motivations by aligning content with their personal and professional goals. Recognizing teachers as change agents, not just recipients of training, can foster ownership and deeper engagement. For students, the professional growth of educators translates into enriched instructional practices, which can enhance learning outcomes when PD leads to meaningful classroom application. For school leaders, the study underscores the importance of active support and advocacy for teacher learning. Administrators must provide not only technical and logistical support but also a culture that values reflection, collaboration, and continuous improvement. For policymakers and PD program designers, there is a need to prioritize inclusive, low-barrier models of PD that address both the professional and contextual realities of educators, especially in low-resource environments. Programs like EEN demonstrate the potential of collaborative, community-driven learning models to transform educational practice when they are adequately supported.

While this study provides rich insights, it is not without limitations. First, the sample size was small (eight participants), and while diverse in background, it was geographically limited to Nigerian educators involved in one specific PD program. The qualitative nature of the study also introduces the potential for researcher bias in interpreting participants' narratives, despite efforts to maintain reflexivity and use member checking. These limitations restrict the generalizability of the findings but do not diminish their value in providing an in-depth, contextual understanding.

Future research should aim to build on this work by exploring motivational dynamics across different educational settings. Employing mixed-methods approaches could provide a more comprehensive understanding of both the breadth and depth of teachers' engagement with PD. Longitudinal studies are also needed to investigate the long-term impact of PD programs like EEN on teaching practices, student learning, and systemic school improvement. Such research can inform more sustainable, context-sensitive, and effective professional development strategies that empower educators globally.

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