

 Research Article

Key Success Factors in Faculty Professional Development Programs

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Abstract

Faculty Professional Development (FPD) plays a critical role in enhancing teaching effectiveness, strengthening academic capacity, and fostering a culture of continuous learning in higher education institutions. However, across many African university contexts, FPD initiatives remain fragmented, under-resourced, and weakly aligned with faculty needs and institutional priorities. This study examined the key success factors that enable effective and sustainable faculty professional development programs within Ugandan universities. Using a qualitative descriptive research design, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with fifty-six participants, comprising faculty members and administrators drawn from ten public and private universities across four regions of Uganda. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis supported by NVivo 12 software. The findings revealed seven interrelated success factors underpinning effective FPD programs: institutional commitment and support; relevance and customization of program content; continuous and comprehensive learning opportunities; active learning and participant engagement; peer collaboration and professional networking; integration of technology; and systematic evaluation for continuous improvement. These factors explain how institutional alignment, participatory program design, and sustained support mechanisms enhance faculty motivation, skill acquisition, and long-term professional growth. The findings were synthesized into a context-sensitive conceptual framework grounded in adult learning theory and organizational support theory, illustrating interactions between institutional structures and individual learning processes. This study contributes original empirical evidence to the literature on faculty professional development in African higher education. It offers practical implications for university leaders and policymakers seeking to design responsive, inclusive, and sustainable professional development systems. Although situated in Uganda, the findings provide transferable insights to comparable resource-constrained contexts.

Keywords: Faculty, Professional Development, Key Success Factors, Institutional Commitment, Technology Integration

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1. INTRODUCTION

Faculty Professional Development (FPD) is an effort created to assist faculty members' ongoing learning and development within higher education establishments (Luthra et al., 2024; Sancar et al., 2021; Uzorka et al., 2023). These initiatives seek to raise faculty members' performance levels, encourage intellectual endeavours, and increase teaching effectiveness. Professional development programs can be offered as webinars, conferences, workshops, seminars, and continuous training opportunities (Shalet al., 2024; Uzorka et al., 2021). Pedagogy, technological integration, research skills, and academic leadership are among the subjects they frequently cover (Kong & Wang, 2024; Nurhidayat et al., 2024). Faculty members can enhance their teaching techniques, stay current with industry trends and advancements, and make more valuable contributions to their academic community by taking part in professional development programs.

The term “faculty” refers to the academic staff or teachers working at a university or college. In addition to teaching, they are expected to carry out research and make intellectual contributions through publications, conferences, and other means to the academic community. Faculty members have a significant influence on how students perceive their education (Mohamed, 2024). Faculty members need professional development (PD) to improve their educational practices, stay current on research, and actively contribute to their academic communities (Hiniz & Yavuz, 2024; Uzorka et al., 2023). Faculty professional development programs are essential for promoting a culture of ongoing learning and development in higher education.

Like in many other nations, universities in Uganda are beginning to realize how crucial it is to fund staff professional development to raise the standard of instruction and research. Effective FPD program design and implementation are still difficult, nevertheless, frequently because of a lack of funding, conflicting agendas, and uneven institutional support (Alkaabi, 2023; Popova et al., 2022). Designing initiatives that satisfy faculty members’ needs and support institutional objectives requires an understanding of the critical success factors in faculty professional development programs. In this context, “success” refers to the extent to which faculty professional development programs achieve their intended goals, such as improving teaching practices, fostering continuous learning, and contributing to positive changes in student engagement and performance.

For this research, “key success factors” are conceptually defined as the critical elements, structural, procedural, institutional, and personal, that contribute significantly to the design, implementation, sustainability, and perceived effectiveness of FPD programs. These may include institutional commitment, relevance of content, engagement strategies, peer collaboration, and mechanisms for feedback and continuous improvement. In essence, key success factors are conditions or practices that demonstrably enhance the likelihood that a faculty development initiative will meet its intended objectives and create meaningful impact. Identifying and understanding these key success factors is crucial for designing and implementing professional development initiatives that not only meet the immediate needs of faculty members but also promote sustainable growth and innovation in educational practices.

The motivation for this study stems from the recognition that context matters deeply in educational development. Uganda, like many low- and middle-income countries, has a rapidly expanding higher education sector, with both public and private universities navigating complex challenges such as limited funding, faculty shortages, inconsistent professional development policies, and unequal access to training opportunities (Uzorka & Olaniyan, 2023). While faculty development programs exist in many institutions, their structure, reach, and outcomes vary widely. Without a clear understanding of what makes these programs successful, universities may continue to invest resources in fragmented or ineffective approaches. To guide the inquiry, the study was framed around the following research question:

What key factors do university faculty rate as successful in the light of their pedagogic development needs?

In line with this central question, the objectives of the study were:

- To explore the experiences and perceptions of university faculty and administrators regarding current professional development practices.
- To identify the critical success factors that contribute to effective FPD programs in Ugandan universities.

By focusing on both administrators and faculty members across a diverse set of institutions, this study offers a holistic view of what constitutes “success” in the context of FPD. It contributes to the growing body of knowledge on educational capacity building and provides actionable insights for university leaders, policymakers, and faculty development practitioners. Furthermore, it adds a much-needed contextual perspective from Sub-Saharan Africa.

1.1. Literature Review

FPD programs play a crucial role in enhancing teaching effectiveness, promoting scholarly activity, and fostering a culture of continuous learning among faculty members (Efu, 2020; Fairman et al., 2023).

Effective FPD programs are essential for ensuring that faculty members remain abreast of current pedagogical trends, technological advancements, and research findings in their respective fields (Chakraborty & Biswas, 2020; Fairman et al., 2023). In defining what makes FPD “successful,” scholars have pointed to several success factors, including institutional support, alignment with faculty needs, active engagement strategies, opportunities for collaboration, and mechanisms for feedback and evaluation (Ostinelli & Crescentini, 2024; Rodriguez et al., 2024). However, most of these frameworks and studies have emerged from North American or European contexts, limiting their generalizability to developing regions such as Sub-Saharan Africa.

Faculty professional development that is successful is based on institutional commitment and support. Initiatives for FPD may find it difficult to obtain the infrastructure, funding, and recognition they require without the institution’s strong support (Fuller et al., 2023; Ostinelli & Crescentini, 2024; Uzorka & Olaniyan, 2023). FPD-focused institutions show a dedication to raising the quality of instruction and encouraging a culture of lifelong learning among faculty members. This dedication can take many different forms, such as funding for professional development events, time set aside for professional growth, and institutional guidelines that encourage and reward involvement in FPD initiatives.

For faculty members to be engaged and for the information to be directly applicable to their teaching and research needs, professional development programs must be relevant and customized (Agathangelou et al., 2024; Bergmark, 2023). The learning process can be made more significant by customizing professional development programs to the unique requirements and environments of faculty members. Customization can take many different forms, such as providing distinct courses or pathways according to the topic areas or career stages of faculty members. To guarantee that the content of FPD activities corresponds with faculty members’ interests and professional goals, it may also entail soliciting their feedback throughout the planning and design stages.

Sustaining faculty members’ continuing professional development and progress requires offering them extensive and continuous learning opportunities (Fakhar et al., 2024; Lubin & Voldman, 2024; Porcencaluk et al., 2023). Instead of being restricted to one-time seminars or workshops, professional development programs ought to provide a variety of tools and activities that enable faculty members to participate in ongoing learning. Both formal education, such as courses or certifications, and informal learning, such as webinars, conferences, and peer mentoring, can be a part of comprehensive professional development programs. Institutions can accommodate the varied requirements and interests of faculty members by providing a range of learning opportunities.

In professional development programs, active learning techniques are essential for boosting engagement and improving learning outcomes (Patfield et al., 2023; Park & Xu, 2024; Taylor, 2023). Active learning strategies include conversations, group projects, and hands-on activities (Patfield et al., 2023; Perry & Booth, 2024). Faculty members are encouraged to actively participate in their education through active learning, which cultivates a sense of accountability and ownership for their professional growth. Additionally, it encourages participation and teamwork among participants, resulting in a lively and engaging learning atmosphere.

Peer collaboration and networking are important elements of successful professional development programs because they allow faculty members to share best practices and exchange knowledge (Ni et al., 2023; Slakmon & Abdu, 2024). Faculty can get new insights, learn from one another’s experiences, and create a supportive community of practice by working together with their peers. Peer collaboration can take many different forms, including communities of practice centred around particular areas of interest, cooperative initiatives, and peer coaching. Institutions can cultivate a culture of ongoing learning and development among faculty members by encouraging peer collaboration.

Technology integration into professional development programs is crucial for giving faculty members access to a variety of learning materials and improving their capacity to use technology in the classroom (Ahadi et al., 2024; Brodén et al., 2023; Mutseekwa et al., 2025). Innovative FPD activities can be delivered through technology in several ways, including online courses, webinars, and virtual conferences. Faculty members can stay up to date on the latest technical developments and digital tools that can improve their research and teaching through the use of technology integration. Institutions can design more adaptable and easily available professional development programs that meet the demands of a varied faculty by embracing technology.

To evaluate the success of professional development programs and make ongoing adjustments based on participant feedback, ongoing evaluation and feedback systems are required (Fairman et al., 2023; Sancar et al., 2021). Institutions can determine areas for growth and assess the effect of professional development programs on faculty learning outcomes through evaluation. Comprehensive feedback from participants should be gathered through a range of approaches, including surveys, interviews, and observations, during the evaluation process. The outcomes of assessment initiatives ought to guide future professional development strategies and guarantee that curricula continue to be applicable and efficient in fulfilling the requirements of faculty members.

In Africa, the higher education sector has experienced rapid expansion over the last two decades. The growing number of universities has not been matched by a proportional investment in academic staff development, leading to significant disparities in quality and capacity (Theodorio, 2024; Uzorka et al., 2023). Faculty members in many African universities face high teaching loads, limited access to professional development, poor infrastructure, and weak institutional policies on academic growth (Theodorio, 2024; Uzorka et al., 2021). Although several development initiatives have been introduced, such as donor-supported workshops, centers for teaching excellence, and staff exchange programs, systematic evaluation of their success and sustainability remains limited. Studies conducted in African countries, such as Nigeria, Tanzania, and Kenya, highlight recurring challenges: a lack of institutional commitment, insufficient funding, the absence of clear policies, and a disconnect between program content and faculty needs (Edu, 2025; Matiba, 2024; Thukia, 2025). Despite these findings, the literature on success factors specific to the African context, especially Uganda, remains sparse.

Uganda's higher education sector comprises both public and private universities, many of which are relatively young and operate in resource-constrained environments. Faculty development policies and practices vary widely across institutions. While some universities have established staff development units or teaching and learning centers, others rely heavily on ad hoc, donor-funded training initiatives (Uzorka et al., 2023). Few institutions have integrated FPD into their strategic plans, and there is often little follow-up to assess the impact of training on teaching effectiveness or student outcomes. Existing studies in Uganda tend to focus on other aspects of academic development, such as ICT training (Olaniyan & Fakuade, 2023), research supervision (Emara et al., 2024), or general academic quality assurance (Aluma, 2025), rather than offering a holistic understanding of what makes faculty development effective. Moreover, most are evaluative or descriptive, with limited qualitative exploration of stakeholder perspectives. This leaves a critical gap in the literature: a lack of contextually grounded, empirically informed understanding of the key success factors that underpin effective faculty development programs in Ugandan universities. This study aims to address this gap by examining the perspectives of administrators and faculty members from Ugandan universities to identify the key success factors in faculty professional development programs in this context. Unlike previous studies that emphasize barriers or focus on singular dimensions of faculty training, this research identifies a comprehensive set of success factors, grounded in real-world practices and experiences.

1.2. Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in two interrelated theoretical perspectives: Adult Learning Theory (Andragogy) and Organizational Support Theory (OST). Together, these frameworks provide a conceptual lens for understanding both the individual and institutional dimensions of FPD and help explain the conditions under which such programs are likely to succeed.

Malcolm Knowles' Adult Learning Theory posits that adult learners, such as university faculty, engage best in learning environments that recognize their autonomy, prior experience, readiness to learn, and immediate application of knowledge (Findik, 2025). Knowles identified six assumptions about adult learners (Findik, 2025):

Self-concept: Adults are self-directed and prefer control over their learning.

Experience: Adults bring a wealth of experience that should be acknowledged and leveraged in training.

Readiness to learn: Adults are motivated to learn things that have immediate relevance to their professional roles.

Orientation to learning: Adults prefer problem-centered learning rather than content-centered learning.

Motivation: Adults are primarily internally motivated.

Need to know: Adults need to understand the value and rationale for learning something before committing to it.

In the context of this study, Adult Learning Theory provides a framework for assessing the design and delivery of FPD programs.

Organizational Support Theory, as articulated by Eisenberger et al., focuses on employees' perceptions of how much the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being (Hameli et al., 2025). The central premise of OST is that when employees perceive high levels of perceived organizational support (POS), they are more likely to be committed, motivated, and engaged in their work. In the context of higher education, OST is crucial in understanding institutional commitment to faculty development. Faculty members who perceive that their institutions provide adequate resources, recognition, mentorship, and development opportunities are more likely to engage actively in FPD initiatives.

By combining Adult Learning Theory and Organizational Support Theory, this study captures the micro-level (individual learning) and macro-level (institutional environment) dimensions of FPD. The use of Adult Learning Theory and Organizational Support Theory allows this study to move beyond a surface-level description of FPD programs. It provides a structured way to examine how faculty members engage with development opportunities, and how institutional environments either support or hinder that engagement.

2. METHOD

2.1. Study Design

To investigate the critical success factors in faculty professional development programs, this qualitative study used a descriptive design through in-depth interviews. A descriptive qualitative research design was selected for its ability to provide a rich, in-depth understanding of participants' perspectives and experiences regarding FPD. A descriptive qualitative design was deemed more appropriate than case study or phenomenological approaches because the focus was on identifying broad themes and success factors across multiple institutions, rather than understanding a single bounded case (as in case study) or exploring lived experiences in a philosophical context (as in phenomenology). The aim was to generate practical insights and actionable recommendations for policy and program development. The study spans six months, allowing for comprehensive data collection and the observation of meaningful outcomes related to key success factors in faculty professional development programs. A brief outline of the key activities is provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Key Research Activities

Activity	Description	Time Frame
Literature Review	Review of existing studies on faculty professional development	Month 1
Development of Interview Guide	Creation of semi-structured interview questions	Month 1
Pilot Testing	Testing the interview guide with a small group of faculty	Month 2
Data Collection	Conducting semi-structured interviews with participants	Months 2-4
Data Analysis	Analyzing data using NVivo 12	Months 5
Report Writing	Compiling findings and writing the final report	Month 6

2.2. Population and Sample

The population for this study consisted of administrators and faculty members from universities in Uganda. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select 56 participants from ten (10) universities across Uganda. The sample was carefully selected to capture a diverse and representative range of institutional types, including: Public universities (6), Private universities (4). The selection ensured regional representation from the Central, Western, Northern, and Eastern regions of Uganda, allowing for the inclusion of contextual and institutional diversity in FPD practices. The inclusion of both public and private institutions, and institutions from multiple regions, was intentional and justified to reflect the broader landscape of higher education in Uganda and to capture variability in institutional support, policies, and challenges in implementing professional development programs. Saturation was reached, ensuring that no new information emerged during data collection and analysis.

2.3. Sampling Technique

Purposive sampling was employed to choose participants based on their expertise and familiarity with faculty professional development. This strategy made certain that the sample consisted of people with pertinent knowledge and perspectives.

2.4. Demographic Characteristics

Table 2 presents the demographic characteristics of the participants. There were 56 participants in the study. 35 (62.50%) were men, and 21 (37.50%) were women. 26 (46.43%) of the participants were PhD holders. 43 (76.79%) were faculty, and 13 (23.21%) were administrators. Concerning job experience, 09 (16.07%) had less than five years, 21 (37.50%) had five to ten years, 17 (30.36%) had eleven to fifteen years, and 09 (16.07%) had sixteen years or more.

Table 2. Demographic Characteristics

Variables	Male Frequency (%)	Female Frequency (%)	Total Frequency (%)
Gender	35 (62.50%)	21 (37.50%)	56 (100%)
Age (Years)			
20–29	05 (41.67%)	07 (58.33%)	12 (21.43%)
30–39	11 (57.89%)	08 (42.11%)	19 (33.93%)
40–49	12 (70.59%)	05 (29.41%)	17 (30.36%)
50–above	07 (87.50%)	01 (12.50%)	08 (14.28%)
Educational Qualification			
Bachelor	06 (50.00%)	06 (50.00%)	12 (21.43%)
Master	11 (61.11%)	07 (38.89%)	18 (32.14%)
PhD	18 (69.23%)	08 (30.77%)	26 (46.43%)
Designation			
Administrator	07 (53.85%)	06 (46.15%)	13 (23.21%)
Lecturer	28 (65.12%)	15 (34.88%)	43 (76.79%)
Work experience (Years)			
Under 5 years	04 (44.44%)	05 (55.56%)	09 (16.07%)
5–10 years	14 (66.67%)	07 (33.33%)	21 (37.50%)
11–15 years	11 (64.71%)	06 (35.29%)	17 (30.36%)
16 years and above	06 (66.67%)	03 (33.33%)	09 (16.07%)

Sources: Primary data 2024

2.5. Data Collection Method

Through semi-structured interviews, data were gathered. With this approach, it was flexible to delve further into participants' answers and get detailed information from them. An interview guide was developed based on a review of existing literature on faculty professional development, prior qualitative studies, and theoretical frameworks such as adult learning theory and organizational support theory. Questions were designed to elicit detailed and reflective responses. The guide was pilot-tested with six

participants (excluded from the main study) to refine question clarity and relevance. The open-ended questions used in the interview were:

1. Can you describe your experience with faculty professional development programs at your institution?
2. What do you consider to be the key factors that contribute to the success of faculty professional development programs?
3. How do you think faculty professional development programs can be tailored to meet the specific needs and contexts of faculty members?
4. Can you share any examples of successful faculty professional development initiatives that you have been involved in or are aware of?
5. What are the key strategies for sustaining faculty professional development programs over the long term?

2.6. Data Collection Procedure

Interviews were scheduled over three months to minimize changes in data and maximize participant availability. The interview took place for twelve days in January 2024, February 2024, and March 2024. Before the interview, each participant signed a consent form. Individual interviews took place at the participants' offices and campus meeting spaces. They lasted an average of 45 minutes. With consent, all interviews were recorded. To guarantee uniformity throughout interviews, interview guides were utilized. To elucidate and elaborate on participants' answers, additional questions were posed as appropriate.

2.7. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework. NVivo 12 software was used to manage, organize, and analyze the qualitative data. The analytical process includes:

Familiarization with Data: The researcher read all transcripts multiple times to become immersed in the data.

Generating Initial Codes: Meaningful segments of text were coded line-by-line. Coding was both inductive (emerging from data) and deductive (based on the research questions and literature).

Organizing Codes in NVivo: Codes were created and organized hierarchically in NVivo 12. This allowed for the easy merging, splitting, and restructuring of codes as the analysis progressed.

Searching for Themes: Related codes were grouped into potential themes. The process involved clustering similar codes under broader categories.

Reviewing Themes: Themes were refined by comparing them against the entire data set to ensure internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity. Themes that were too broad were subdivided; those that overlapped were merged or clarified.

Defining and Naming Themes: Each theme was clearly defined and supported by exemplar quotes from participants to illustrate the key ideas.

Example of Coding-to-Theme Evolution:

Initial Codes: "management support," "funding," "leadership encouragement," "administrative policies."

Sub-theme: "Institutional Support Mechanisms"

Final Theme: Institutional Commitment and Support

This process was conducted iteratively, and multiple rounds of coding and theme refinement were conducted until data saturation was confirmed, meaning no new codes or themes were emerging from additional interviews. Two experienced qualitative researchers independently coded the data. Coding discrepancies were resolved through iterative consensus discussions, and the final coding framework was jointly agreed upon and consistently applied across the dataset, enhancing analytical rigor and credibility.

2.7.1. Trustworthiness

To ensure trustworthiness, several strategies were employed. Triangulation was used by cross-checking data from different sources. Member checking was conducted by sharing the findings with a few participants to verify the accuracy and credibility of the interpretations. Additionally, an audit trail was maintained to document the research process and decisions made throughout the study.

2.8. Ethical Consideration

Ethical considerations were rigorously observed throughout the study. Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review board. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring they were fully aware of the study's purpose, procedures, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Confidentiality was maintained by anonymizing the data and securely storing the interview recordings and transcripts.

3. RESULTS

The analysis of faculty professional development programs revealed several key themes that contribute to their success. These themes highlight the critical factors that enable programs to effectively enhance faculty skills, foster professional growth, and ultimately improve student outcomes. Each of these themes represents a distinct yet interconnected element that supports the overall effectiveness of professional development initiatives. Participants in the study were assigned a database number (P1 to P56) to maintain the confidentiality of their names. When the findings reference a participant's comment, the database number is recorded in parentheses.

3.1. Institutional Commitment and Support

Institutional commitment emerged as a foundational success factor, primarily because administrative support legitimizes FPD and signals its strategic importance within the university. Participants explained that when leadership provides financial resources, supportive policies, and visible engagement, faculty perceive professional development as valued rather than optional. This perceived legitimacy increases motivation, participation, and sustained engagement. Leadership participation in workshops further reinforced this commitment by modeling desired behaviors and fostering a shared culture of learning. As one participant noted, "*When leaders advocate for FPD, it creates a culture that values continuous improvement and innovation*" (P25). Financial backing also reduced structural barriers, enabling faculty to focus on skill acquisition and innovation without concerns about resource constraints (P10, P20). Thus, institutional commitment operates both symbolically through leadership visibility and practically through funding and policy support to create enabling conditions for effective FPD.

3.2. Relevance and Customization

Relevance and contextual alignment were critical because faculty engagement depended on the perceived applicability of FPD content to their disciplinary and instructional realities. Participants consistently reported that generic, one-size-fits-all programs were less effective than customized initiatives tailored to departmental needs and classroom challenges. Customization enhanced motivation by allowing faculty to directly translate learning into practice. As participants explained, when training addressed "*the exact challenges I face in my classroom*" (P1) and aligned with instructional goals (P16), it was seen as a meaningful investment of time rather than an institutional obligation. This finding suggests that relevance functions as a motivational mechanism, strengthening the link between professional development and teaching improvement.

3.3. Continuous and Comprehensive Learning Opportunities

Participants emphasized that FPD is most effective when conceptualized as an ongoing process rather than a one-time event. Continuous learning opportunities allowed faculty to reinforce knowledge, reflect on implementation challenges, and progressively refine their skills. Follow-up sessions were particularly valued because they supported the transfer of learning into practice. As noted by P40, “*a single workshop is only a starting point.*” Ongoing engagement enabled participants to adapt new strategies over time and remain current with evolving pedagogical methods and technologies (P38, P45). This theme highlights that sustained learning structures are essential for deep professional growth and long-term impact.

3.4. Active Learning and Engagement

Active learning approaches were identified as effective because they positioned faculty as participants rather than passive recipients of information. Interactive strategies such as hands-on exercises, collaborative discussions, and problem-based tasks enhanced understanding and retention by allowing participants to practice new skills in realistic contexts. Participants reported that engagement increased when workshops incorporated opportunities for collaboration and experiential learning (P6, P11). These approaches also facilitated peer learning, enabling faculty to draw on collective experience and contextual knowledge (P21, P29). Active engagement, therefore, strengthens learning outcomes by aligning FPD methods with adult learning principles that emphasize participation, reflection, and application.

3.5. Peer Collaboration and Networking

Peer collaboration functioned as a social support mechanism that sustained learning beyond formal training sessions. Professional learning communities enabled faculty to share experiences, exchange feedback, and collectively address teaching challenges. Participants described how peer mentorship and collaboration reduced the isolation often associated with instructional innovation and increased confidence in adopting new practices (P31, P33). Regular interactions fostered accountability and ongoing motivation (P42), while networking expanded professional resources and opportunities (P53). This theme illustrates how collegial relationships enhance both the emotional and practical dimensions of professional development.

3.6. Integration of Technology

The integration of technology was effective because it simultaneously built faculty digital competence and modeled pedagogically meaningful uses of technology. Participants valued programs that moved beyond theoretical discussions to provide hands-on experience with digital tools relevant to teaching and learning. Seeing practical demonstrations of technology-enhanced instruction helped faculty envision how to apply these tools in their own classrooms (P18, P29). Moreover, participants viewed technology-focused FPD as essential preparation for a digitally driven academic future (P25). Thus, technology integration supported both immediate instructional improvement and long-term professional relevance.

3.7. Evaluation and Continuous Improvement

Evaluation and feedback mechanisms were critical for ensuring that FPD programs remained responsive and effective over time. Participants emphasized that systematic feedback allowed institutions to identify gaps, refine content, and adapt programs to emerging needs. When faculty saw their feedback reflected in program revisions, they perceived FPD as participant-centered and institutionally responsive (P5, P13). Continuous evaluation, therefore, functioned as a quality assurance mechanism, reinforcing program relevance and sustainability (P15, P33). This finding underscores that successful FPD is iterative, evolving through ongoing dialogue between participants and program designers.

3.8. Integrated Model of Key Success Factors for Faculty Professional Development

Figure 1 presents a conceptual framework developed directly from the study's findings, grounded in the lived experiences and perspectives of faculty and administrators across ten Ugandan universities. The framework integrates the seven key success factors identified through thematic analysis and reflects their interrelatedness across two broad domains: Institutional Enablers and Learning-Centered Strategies. This emergent model provides a context-sensitive understanding of how universities can design, implement, and evaluate effective faculty professional development programs in Uganda and similar higher education systems.

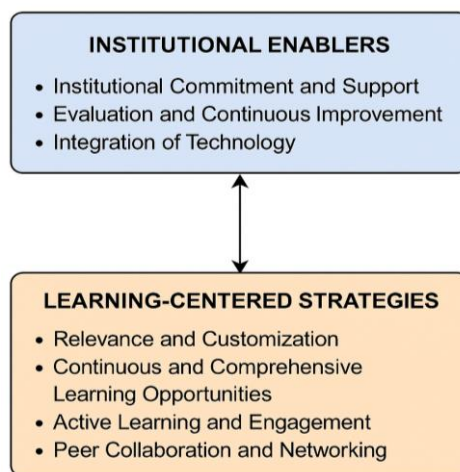


Figure 1. Integrated Model of Key Success Factors in Faculty Development

4. DISCUSSION

The study identified seven key success factors in faculty professional development programs: Institutional Commitment and Support, Relevance and Customization, Continuous and Comprehensive Learning Opportunities, Active Learning and Engagement, Peer Collaboration and Networking, Integration of Technology, and Evaluation and Continuous Improvement. One of the most significant contributions of this study is the development of a context-sensitive, empirically grounded conceptual framework for faculty development success. While previous studies in faculty development often draw from Western contexts and emphasize generic best practices (Ostinelli & Crescentini, 2024; Rodriguez et al., 2024), this research builds a model rooted in the lived experiences of faculty and administrators in Uganda, reflecting real-world institutional dynamics, constraints, and cultural contexts. This study moves beyond merely cataloguing barriers and challenges to offer a structured synthesis of enabling conditions for success. The emergent framework highlights the interdependence between institutional systems and adult learning principles, showing that success depends not only on content or delivery methods but also on strategic alignment, policy commitment, and continuous improvement efforts. In doing so, the study affirms the relevance of Organizational Support Theory and Adult Learning Theory as dual lenses for understanding and designing effective FPD programs in African universities.

Furthermore, the identification of themes such as institutional support and dedication introduces important nuances to how faculty engage with professional development in collectivist and resource-constrained contexts. Strong institutional support and dedication are essential for the effectiveness of faculty professional development initiatives, according to the study. This includes acknowledging the value of professional growth and providing administrative and financial support. This result is in line with earlier studies that emphasize the importance of institutional support in creating an atmosphere that encourages lifelong learning and career advancement (Fuller et al., 2023; Ostinelli & Crescentini, 2024; Uzorka & Olaniyan, 2023).

The significance of customizing professional development initiatives to the unique requirements and environments of faculty members was underscored by the participants. By guaranteeing that the content is current and instantly applicable, customization raises the possibility that it will be implemented successfully.

This supports the findings of Bergmark (2023), who contend that context-specific professional development that is in line with participants' objectives and difficulties is most beneficial. The necessity of possibilities for thorough and continuous professional growth was also highlighted by participants. Long-term, integrated learning experiences are more beneficial to faculty members than sporadic workshops or seminars. Porcenaluk et al. (2023), who contend that ongoing professional development is essential for long-lasting change in teaching practice, support this.

Active learning techniques that involve faculty engagement and improve learning outcomes include practical exercises, conversations, and hands-on activities. This result is consistent with the findings of Taylor (2023), who highlights the value of active learning for professional growth and notes that it promotes the retention of newly acquired knowledge and abilities as well as a deeper understanding of them. The study also emphasized the importance of networking and peer collaboration for professional advancement. A friendly community of practice is fostered by opportunities for faculty to work together, exchange experiences, and gain knowledge from one another. Slakmon & Abdu (2024) discovered that collaborative professional development has a favourable effect on teachers' practices and student outcomes, which supports this.

Another important success factor for professional development programs was found to be the integration of technology, which makes learning more adaptable, varied, and accessible. This is in line with the research conducted by Brodén et al. (2023), who examined the advantages of technology-enhanced professional development in offering customized and diverse learning experiences. Participants also underlined the significance of continual assessment and enhancement of professional development programs. Effective programs have systems in place for frequent evaluation and feedback, which facilitate iterative improvement. This is consistent with Sancar et al.'s (2021) evaluation approach, which emphasizes the need to assess professional development initiatives to make sure they fulfil goals and adjust to changing demands.

In Uganda, where faculty development structures are often fragmented and under-resourced (Uzorka et al., 2023), this study offers a roadmap for institutional leaders and policymakers. The emphasis on institutional commitment and systematic evaluation calls for universities to embed FPD into their strategic priorities, with dedicated resources, policies, and leadership support. Moreover, the finding that active learning and peer engagement are critical to program success underscores the importance of creating participatory, collegial spaces for faculty development, moving away from passive, lecture-based workshops toward more interactive, collaborative models. This study also reinforces the need to integrate technology thoughtfully, not just as a delivery mechanism but as a tool for expanding access, enabling flexibility, and fostering ongoing learning communities. With growing access to digital tools, Ugandan universities have the opportunity to reimagine FPD as a continuous, blended experience rather than an occasional event. While the findings are grounded in the Ugandan higher education context, the core components of the conceptual framework are transferable to other developing countries and under-resourced university settings across Sub-Saharan Africa and beyond. Countries with similar challenges, such as limited funding, uneven faculty capacity, lack of national policies on staff development, and rapid higher education expansion, are likely to find the study's insights highly relevant.

5. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

While this study offers valuable insights into the key success factors in faculty professional development in Ugandan universities, it is important to acknowledge several limitations that may influence the interpretation and generalization of the findings.

Qualitative Scope and Sample Size: The study employed a qualitative design with purposive sampling of 56 participants from ten universities. While this approach enabled rich, in-depth exploration of participants' perspectives, it limits the generalizability of the findings to the broader population of faculty and administrators across all Ugandan universities. The study does not claim statistical representativeness but rather aims for analytic generalization based on the depth of insights.

Self-Reported Data: The data were derived from self-reported experiences and perceptions collected through interviews. While this provides valuable subjective insights, it is also subject to response bias, such as social desirability or selective recall. Participants may have overstated positive experiences or

underreported institutional weaknesses, particularly in settings where power dynamics exist between faculty and administrators.

Context-Specificity: Although the emergent conceptual framework is highly relevant for the Ugandan context, its transferability to other countries or regions must be approached with caution. Differences in higher education systems, policy environments, resource availability, and institutional culture may affect how applicable the success factors are elsewhere. The model is best seen as adaptable, not universally prescriptive.

In light of these limitations, several directions for future research are recommended. Future studies could adopt a mixed-methods approach to complement qualitative insights with quantitative measures of program effectiveness, participation rates, and outcomes. Longitudinal research designs would also be valuable in examining the sustained impact of faculty professional development programs over time, particularly in relation to teaching quality, research productivity, and career progression. Additionally, comparative studies across countries in Sub-Saharan Africa could provide deeper insights into how contextual, policy, and resource differences shape the success of faculty professional development initiatives. Overall, addressing these areas in future research would strengthen the evidence base for designing, implementing, and sustaining effective faculty professional development programs in diverse higher education contexts.

6. CONCLUSION

Through interviews with administrators and faculty members from Ugandan universities, this study investigated the critical success criteria in faculty professional development programs. The themes that emerged provided insight into the vital components that make professional development programs effective. The results highlight the significance of program personalization, opportunities for continuous learning, active participation, peer cooperation, institutional commitment and support, technological integration, and evaluation for ongoing improvement. These findings underscore the multifaceted nature of effective FPD, showing that success depends not only on content or delivery methods but on broader institutional ecosystems that support continuous, relevant, and collaborative professional learning. By synthesizing these themes into an empirically derived framework, this study contributes original knowledge to the field, particularly within the African context, where literature on localized faculty development success models remains limited. The study reaffirms and extends theories of adult learning and organizational support, demonstrating how these frameworks manifest uniquely in under-resourced, rapidly evolving higher education systems like Uganda's. Faculty are not passive recipients of development but active agents whose growth is shaped by institutional policies, peer relationships, and the relevance of learning experiences.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1. For Institutional Practice

- Integrate FPD into institutional strategy: Universities should embed FPD into their core mission and allocate dedicated resources, time, and leadership attention to its design and implementation.
- Promote relevance through needs assessment: Institutions should regularly consult faculty to identify specific training needs, ensuring that programs are aligned with teaching, research, and leadership responsibilities.
- Foster peer-led learning models: Facilitating mentorship programs, communities of practice, and faculty learning circles can build internal capacity and reduce overreliance on external consultants.
- Strengthen monitoring and evaluation: Systematic evaluation of FPD initiatives beyond attendance tracking should be established to assess impact and inform continuous improvement.
- Expand access through technology: Investment in digital infrastructure and training is essential to enable flexible, equitable access to development opportunities, especially for staff in remote or teaching-intensive roles.

7.2. For Policy Development

- National policy support: The Ministry of Education and the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) should develop or enforce policies that mandate structured, continuous professional development across all universities.
- Incentivize participation: Policymakers and university governing bodies should consider linking FPD participation to promotion, appraisal, or academic recognition, while avoiding punitive approaches.
- Support institutional collaboration: Inter-university partnerships, consortia, and communities of practice at national and regional levels could enhance resource sharing and innovation in FPD.

7.3. For Future Research

- Cross-country research within East Africa or across other Sub-Saharan African nations could validate or adapt the framework developed in this study, contributing to a broader continental perspective on faculty development.

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