



## Attitude And Perception Towards Professional Development Activities Among Academic Staff Of Health Sector Faculties In University of Gezira

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### ABSTRACT

*Professional development sustains staff competence through continuing improvement of knowledge, skills and performance. Notable improvements in education almost never take place in the absence of continuing professional development (CPD). The aim of this study is to assess attitude and perception of the academic staff of health sector faculties at Elrazi campus in University of Gezira towards professional development activities. It was a descriptive exploratory, cross-sectional, study including all the academic staff of health sector faculties at Elrazi campus in Wad-Medani city, University of Gezira. Questionnaire was designed to include, personal data, interest and motivation for CPD, internet services, cause of promotion and work-overload. Questions about different activities of CPD were included, e.g. number of courses or workshops being attended, research conduction over the past four years, and reading of scientific journals, and facilitation of these activities. It was found that, almost all teachers (96%) were interested in CPD. Over half (53%) of the academic staff attended more than 6 courses or workshops about CPD, 47% of the staff members preferred combined experts facilitator from the institute and from outside for CPD courses/workshops. These courses/workshops were facilitated by the university according to 72% of the staff members. 69% of the staff members admitted that, the university did not facilitate or support researches; as they expected despite this 62.5% of the staff members conducted a research over the past four years and 45% of the staff members had been promoted because of research. Only 45% of the staff read scientific journals regularly. Commitment and support from administrators is vital for success of CPD activities.*

### KEYWORDS :

#### Introduction

Professional development (PD) is defined as "the process of improving staff Skills and competencies needed to produce outstanding educational results for students". (Golding, 2006). Educators must keep abreast of the important advances that are occurring in education. (Golding, 2006). UNESCO's aim in the field of staff development is to promote co-operative and innovative action so as to strengthen the quality and relevance of higher education, both now and in the coming years. (Jennifer et al, 1994). Currently, there is a growing interest in considering how best to assist the learning for professional occupations across universities worldwide. This interest is arising from the increased emphasis within higher education institutions on programmes that aim to prepare students for specific occupational outcomes usually for the professions, and growing expectations that these graduates will be job ready and able to engage in and move smoothly into effectively practicing their profession. (Billett, 2011). University of Gezira began its path exploring problems of society, training professional cadre capable of utilizing the potential of the rural areas of Sudan and conduct basic and applied scientific research to serve the rural community, if, CPD is supported by faculties this can impact health by aligning the curriculum with community needs and develop strong cadre of community health workers and hence patient benefits. The aim of this study is to assess the attitude and perception of academic staff of health sector faculties, of University of Gezira to-

wards CPD.

#### Materials & Methods

This study was conducted in health sector faculties of Gezira University in Wad Medani city, (Elrazi campus) Gezira State, Sudan, about 180 Km, south east of Khartoum, during the period of September 2014 to February 2015. Gezira University, is the second governmental university in Sudan, it was established in the year 1975 with four faculties, to serve the community. It is descriptive, exploratory, cross-sectional study. The Study Population was the academic staff of health sector faculties at Elrazi campus, (Faculty of Medicine, Pharmacy, Applied Medical Sciences, Medical Laboratory Sciences and Dentistry). The academic staff of faculty of dentistry consists of two associate professors, seven assistant professors and seven lecturers. Faculty of applied medical sciences has two associate professors, ten assistant professors and ten lecturers. Faculty of Medicine has 18 professors, 18 associate professors, 24 assistant professors and four lecturers. Faculty of Pharmacy has one professor, two associate professors, eight assistant professors and eight lecturers. Faculty of Medical Laboratory Sciences has academic staff consisting of 20 members, two associate professors, five assistant professors and 13 lecturers. The total number of academic staff in all health sector faculties at Elrazi campus was 141 members during the study period. All academic staff members of health sector faculties at Elrazi campus were included in this study. The total number of the academic staff from health sector

faculties who responded to the questionnaire and contributed to this study was 80, with response rate of 55%. Semi-structured questionnaire was sent to all academic staff in health sector faculties at Elrazi campus. The questionnaire was designed and validated. Questions were divided into specific domains of interest including academic staffs demographics; interest in CPD and motivation to CPD courses or work-shops, different activities regarding CPD like attendance of courses or work-shops, reading of scientific journals, conduction of researches, and cause of promotion. The SPSS statistical programme using Microsoft Windows 16.0 was used to process and analyze the data from the questionnaire. For clearing the data and check up variables, descriptive statistic was used; extreme values were removed from further analysis adjustment. Descriptive statistic was also used for cross tabulation and chi square test was used for analytic comparison between two variables for statistical difference and this was assessed by calculation and interpretation of the P-Value. A P-Value of less than 0.05 was statistically significant.

**Results**  
**The demographic data of study population is shown in (table 1).**  
**Table (1) Demographic Data of the study population.**

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age (years)		
31 – 40	37	47
41 – 50	19	23
51 – 60	17	22
More than 61	7	8
Gender		
Male	49	61
Female	31	39

The number of professors in the sample was 11% (9), associate professors, 22.5% (18), assistant professors 32.5% (26), and lecturers 34% (27).

96% (77) of teachers were interested in continuous professional development.

**Figure (1) Attendance of courses or workshops about CPD**

The reason for motivation to have professional development courses was as follows: 29(36%) teachers wanted to obtain qualification, (certificate), 10(12.5%) teachers liked to enjoy the social engagement during the course, 16(20%) teachers were interested in the subject, 15 (19%) teachers were motivated because they liked to be promoted and 10 (12.5%) teachers liked to get experience to go abroad. This is shown in fig. (2)

**Figure (2) Reason for motivation to have CPD work-shops/courses**

Type of facilitator for CPD courses 12(15%) teachers preferred expert colleague from the same institute, 11(14%) liked expert from outside the institute but from inside the country, 37(47%) liked combined experts, 19 (24%) preferred international expert.

**Figure (3) Decision to undertake a course/workshop**  
CPD courses/workshops were facilitated by the university according to 56(72%) members of the academic staff and funded personally by 22 (28%) teachers, as shown in fig. (4)

**Figure (4) CPD courses/workshops facilitation**  
Sixteen teachers (20%) preferred teaching over research, 11 (12.5%) preferred research over teaching while 53 of them (67.5%) preferred both.

**Figure (5) University support & facilitation for researches**  
50 (62.50%) of the staff members conducted a research over the past four years while 30 (37.50%) did not.

Table (2) Shows correlation of academic status and conduction of research over the past four years

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	3.185 <sup>a</sup>	3	.364
Likelihood Ratio	3.263	3	.353
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.275	1	.259
N of Valid Cases	76		

a. 1 cells (12.5%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3.20.

P-Value = 0.36 (Not significant)

Thirty six, (45%) of the academic staff had been promoted because of research, 22 (27.5%) because of long years of duration, 22 (27.5%), had not been promoted yet. Career promotion did not add any financial benefit according to 44 (55%) members of the academic staff while it did among 36 (45%) members.

Thirty six, (45%) of the academic staff used to read scientific journals regularly.

**Discussion**

The total number of the academic staff participated in this study was 80, 61% were males and 39% were females. The majority (47%) were in the age group 31-40 years. 92% were married (table 1) and 57% had children at school age. Regarding the academic status, the majority were lecturers (34%), followed by assistant professors (31%), associate professors (22%) and professors (13%). Almost all teachers (96%) were interested in continuous professional development and this means that the academic staff liked to be up to date in the field of professional development. Over half of the academic staff (53%) attended more than 6 courses or workshops about professional development, while only 4 teachers (5%) in the study population never attended a course or workshop about professional development, (fig.1). This result indicated that, the academic staffs were keen to attend workshop and courses about CPD. In the study which was carried out by Wilbur K, among pharmacists in Qatar in 2010, he found that 75% attended live local educational programmes in the past two years. (Wilbur K, 2010).

The most important reason for motivation to have professional development courses was to obtain qualification in 36% of the teachers, and this can be explained by the fact that, the majority of the sample size were young group lecturers, the second reason was interest in 20% , the third reason was promotion in 19% of the staff members ,and 12.5% of teachers were motivated to get experience to go abroad.(fig.2). This was similar to the results of a study conducted by Anne' O'Donne, for the academic staff in Liberty college in Ireland, where personal development was the prime motivation in 40% of teachers. (O'Donohue, 2006).

The decision to undertake professional development courses was part of CPD plan in 40% of the staff members, part of the university requirement in 37.5% and was spontaneous decision in 22.5% of the staff. (fig.3).This result showed that the academic staff had good perception about CPD and it was part of their professional development plan. This was the same as the study carried out by Anne' O'Donne, among academic staff in Liberty College in Ireland, where; the majority of the academic staff (58%) decided to take PRD as part of their own professional plan. (O'Donohue, 2006).

Approximately half of the academic staff members, (47%) preferred combined experts facilitator from the institute and from outside the institute for CPD courses, 24% preferred international expert facilitator, 15% preferred expert colleague from the same university and 14% preferred expert facilitator from outside institute but from inside the country. This result meant that the academic staff members wanted to get the maximum benefit from combined experts in professional development. This is in contrast to the study done by Anne' O'Donne, in Liberty College in Ireland, where the majority (62%) of the academic staff preferred outsider expert with experience in education. (O'Donohue, 2006).

CPD courses/workshops were facilitated by the university according to 72% of the staff members and funded personally by 28% of the teachers; (fig.4). This meant that the university encouraged the academic staff members to have professional development by funding the courses and workshops. Two third (67.5%) of the academic staff member preferred both teaching and research, this is typical of university teacher as being teacher and researcher .

Minority (31%) of the academic staff agreed that, the university facilitated and supported research as they expected while majority (69%) did not agree, (fig.5). Sixty two and half percent (62.5%) of the staff members conducted a research over the past four years. This indicated that despite, lack of support from the university, the academic staff was conducting researches. There was no significant difference between academic status (P-Value 0.36), and research conduction, (tables 2). This was similar to the study performed in 2008, by McNicholl MP, et al in Northern Ireland, in NHS Trust, they found that over half of the respondents stated they had participated in a research project. (McNicholl MP, et al. 2008).

Nearly half of the staff members, 36 members (45%) had been promoted because of research, 27.5% because of good long service. On the other hand 55% of the staff thought that career promotion would not add any financial benefit to them. It was clear that, motivation for CPD might be affected because of this; and the administrators should have a budget for financial support for any staff member promoted because of performing different activities of CPD.

Regarding reading scientific journals regularly only 45%; of the staff read scientific journals regularly, this is in contrast to the study carried out by Bcuk, D, and Newton in United Kingdom where 87% of the doctors in the study read scientific journals regularly. ( Bcuk, D, Newton T, 2002). It was also unlike the results of the study performed in 2008, by McNicholl MP, et. al in Northern Ireland, in NHS Trust, they found that a significant number read health care journals. (McNicholl MP, et al. 2008). This result indicated that scientific journals might not be available in the library for the staff, in addition only approximately half of the staff had internet services at their offices.

### Conclusion and recommendations

Almost all academic staff members in this study were interested in continuous professional development and attended courses or workshops about professional development and these courses were facilitated by the university. Minority of the academic staff agreed that, university facilitated and supported research as they expected. Over half of the staff members in this study conducted a research over the past four years and there was no association between academic status and research conduction. Approximately half of the staff members were promoted because of research. Nearly half of the academic staff read scientific journals regularly. Resourcing of continuous professional development and supportive services, such as research funding and scientific journals availability should be a priority for the administrators of University of Gezira. There should be a special library or an office for studying and writing for the academic staff in each health sector faculty with improvement of infrastructure. Each staff member should have an individual professional development plan to ensure effective professional development and training. There should be a co-ordinator for CPD, making a link between the leaders of health sector faculties and the administrators of the University of Gezira. Development of partnership and collaborative activities in the field of CPD with other health sector faculties inside and outside the country should be the apriority for the leaders of health sector faculties.

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