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A Comparative Study of In-Service Teacher Training Approaches in Selected Countries and Iran

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ABSTRACT

The present study aims to compare in-service teacher training approaches in selected countries, namely Japan, Finland, the United Kingdom, and Iran. This research employs a qualitative comparative method based on Bereday's approach, with the selection of countries guided by the strategy of "different social systems, different educational outcomes." To enhance the validity and reliability of the data, peer review and researcher self-review methods were employed. The first finding indicates that Japan, Finland, and the United Kingdom have successfully implemented innovative technologies, practical and collaborative training programs, and feedback-based assessments. In contrast, Iran's in-service teacher training system relies more on theoretical and traditional approaches. Research evidence and expert analyses highlight the necessity of revising curricula, incorporating modern technologies, and increasing teacher participation in course design. The second finding shows that Japan and Finland emphasize experiential and research-based learning, while the United Kingdom focuses on professional standardization and managerial skill development, whereas Iran's system predominantly emphasizes financial incentives in in-service teacher training. In conclusion, enhancing the effectiveness of in-service teacher training in Iran requires a shift from theoretical to practical approaches, fostering teacher involvement in content design, utilizing modern educational technologies, and implementing performance-based evaluations. Comparative benchmarking from successful countries can inform the development of effective and contextually adapted policies.

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1. Introduction

Given the extensive and rapid changes in contemporary societies, educational systems are inevitably required to evolve and reconsider their approaches to effectively meet the complex needs of the twenty-first century. Within this context, teachers, as one of the fundamental pillars of educational systems, play a decisive role in achieving educational goals and ensuring the quality of the teaching–learning process. The responsibilities of teachers go beyond the mere transmission of knowledge; they must also be competent morally, socially, and professionally to prepare future generations for life in an ever-changing world (Icka & Kochoska, 2024).

In this regard, in-service teacher training has emerged as a key component of professional development. Recognizing its importance, many educational systems worldwide have designed structured programs to continuously update teachers' knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Mikhail Alimbayev, 2024). These programs are not limited to participation in formal courses but constitute an ongoing, flexible process that integrates experiential, interactive, and technology-based learning (Chachar et al., 2023; Stoliarenko et al., 2023).

Neglecting continuous teacher training can have serious and widespread consequences for educational quality and student development. A primary outcome is the reduced ability of teachers to respond to the evolving needs of students and new challenges, particularly considering rapid technological changes and the emergence of innovative instructional methods in learning environments (Linca, 2023). Teachers lacking up-to-date knowledge and skills are less able to implement effective teaching strategies that align with the diverse abilities of students, leading to decreased instructional quality, diminished student motivation, and increased educational inequalities (Cedeño-Rivadeneira & Mendoza-Loor, 2024). Additionally, the absence of continuous professional development may undermine teachers' self-confidence and professional motivation, subsequently affecting the quality of their interactions with students (Montgomery, 2020). Over the long term, this situation can result in job dissatisfaction, professional burnout, and even attrition from the teaching profession.

Numerous international studies have confirmed the significance of teacher professional development in enhancing instructional quality and learning outcomes. Darling-Hammond, Hyler, and Gardner (2017) demonstrated that effective professional development programs have a direct impact on improving teacher effectiveness. Jensen et al. (2016) found that high-performing educational systems implement continuous teacher training programs in a comprehensive and structured manner. Fullan and Hargreaves (2016) emphasized the necessity of sustained professional support for the success of educational systems, while Desimone and Garet (2015)

showed that interactive and experiential learning significantly improves teaching skills and increases teacher job satisfaction. Opfer and Pedder (2011) also highlighted that continuous professional development through diverse learning models can empower teachers to tackle classroom challenges more effectively.

In Iran, despite the emphasis in national policy documents, the in-service teacher training system faces multiple challenges. Habibiazad, Keyhan, and Talebi (2021) point to a lack of motivation, weaknesses in program design, and the misalignment of training content with actual needs. Hejazi et al. (2022) emphasize the limited methods, reliance on lectures, and insufficient attention to practical training. Shirazi et al. (2013) and Parmouz (2016) cite the absence of evaluation standards, resource shortages, and lack of program dynamism as reasons for reduced effectiveness. Furthermore, Pasalari, Azizi, and Gholami (2022) reported in a comparative study that teacher training in Iran is largely theoretical, evaluative, and non-interactive, whereas in developed countries, programs are research-based, practical, and technology-driven.

Despite these studies, a clear gap remains in the domestic literature. Most prior research has either focused on the effectiveness of courses, highlighted challenges, or lacked a structured, content-based, and evaluative comparison between Iran and other countries. Therefore, conducting a systematic and analytical comparative study on in-service teacher training is essential. Accordingly, the present study aims to conduct a comparative analysis of the in-service teacher training systems in Iran and three selected countries (Japan, Finland, and the United Kingdom) to identify similarities and differences and provide a model for improving and localizing this system in Iran. This study addresses the following research question: What are the similarities and differences between Iran's in-service teacher training system and those of the selected countries (Japan, Finland, and the United Kingdom)?

2. Research Method

The present study employed a qualitative comparative research design, conducted using Bardy's four-stage approach. The study sample included Japan, Finland, the United Kingdom, and Iran, selected based on the strategy of "different social systems, different educational outcomes." This selection was motivated by the diversity of educational systems, notable advancements in in-service teacher training, economic and social differences, and distinct educational policies. Each of these countries operates with specific approaches to teacher education, the use of technology, and social interactions, enabling a comprehensive comparison and an analysis of their varied impacts on educational quality. The inclusion of Iran as a representative developing country allows for the examination of its particular challenges and needs in teacher training. Data collection was

conducted through document analysis, reviewing all relevant national and international reports, official documents, and peer-reviewed articles published between 2006 and 2024. Sources were accessed via the official websites of ministries of education and international databases such as ERIC (Education Resources Information Center), Google Scholar, JSTOR, Scopus, Web of Science, and PubMed. These resources were utilized to ensure access to credible information and scholarly research in various educational domains, particularly in-service teacher training. To enhance the validity and reliability of the data, peer review and researcher self-review methods were employed, which helped .

3. Findings

Stage One: Description

In the descriptive stage, the study conducted a detailed and comprehensive examination of the in-service teacher training systems in Iran, Japan, Finland, and the United Kingdom. This stage involved a structural, content-based, and operational analysis of these systems to gain a deeper understanding of existing approaches.

The training and updating of teachers' knowledge and skills to respond to the evolving needs of society and to enhance the quality of the education system is of paramount importance. This necessity is particularly emphasized in light of rapid technological, social, and cultural changes (Mainali et al., 2024). Countries such as Japan, Finland, and the United Kingdom, recognized as exemplary educational systems, have developed diverse models of in-service teacher training characterized by specific structural and operational features, emphasizing the professional quality of teachers. In contrast, despite efforts made in teacher education, Iran still faces significant challenges, including the absence of a coherent and effective system for in-service teacher training, a lack of educational resources, and insufficient professional support for teachers.

In Japan, the in-service teacher training system is designed according to the official policy of the National Strategy for Teachers' Professional Development, published by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) in 2016. This document emphasizes that teachers should continuously participate in collaborative learning programs, research-based teaching, and technological skills updates (MEXT, 2016).

In Finland, the professional development framework for teachers is based on the National Core Curriculum for Teacher Education, developed by the Finnish National Agency for Education (EDUFI). This framework emphasizes lifelong learning, professional autonomy, and the integration of theoretical and practical training (EDUFI, 2016).

In the United Kingdom, the Teachers' Professional Standards (DfE, 2011/2021) serve as a reference document for in-service training and professional development. These standards provide a framework for evaluating teachers' competencies and designing training programs.

In Iran, in-service teacher training is defined within the framework of national policy documents such as the Fundamental Transformation Document of Education (Supreme Council of Education, 2011), which emphasizes enhancing teachers' professional, ethical, and technical competencies.

In the selected countries, in-service teacher training programs are generally based on advanced educational strategies, research-oriented approaches, and a focus on actual classroom needs. For instance, Japan's educational system emphasizes lifelong learning and enhancing teachers' individual responsibility (Zhao, 2024). In Finland, training programs are designed around social interaction and collaborative learning (Liu, 2024). In the United Kingdom, teacher training is reinforced through modern technologies and professional networks. These approaches have proven effective in developing teachers' skills and addressing the needs of students and society (Andriichuk et al., 2024).

Research by Darling-Hammond and Rothman (2011) indicates that Japan's education system maintains high quality due to its emphasis on continuous teacher professional development. In this system, teachers regularly participate in in-service courses, allowing them to update their teaching methods and share experiences with colleagues. This process not only enhances teaching skills but also improves student learning outcomes. Sahlberg (2011) highlights the key role of continuous teacher training in Finland's educational system, noting that Finnish teachers, as professionals, actively engage in learning and updating their skills. This approach fosters a dynamic and creative classroom environment, contributing to improved teaching quality and student learning outcomes.

A study conducted by Pedder et al. (2016) examined the impact of professional development standards on teachers in the United Kingdom. The research demonstrates that professional development standards, which emphasize improving student learning outcomes, play a crucial role, particularly in providing high-quality training and support for teachers. The findings indicate that while existing policies can enhance teaching quality, fully realizing the potential of professional learning requires further changes in approaches and educational systems. It is emphasized that teachers must continuously access high-quality training and supportive resources to operate more effectively in classrooms; in other words, teacher professional development should be designed not only to improve instructional skills but also to focus on its impact on student learning.

Japan

In Japan, the in-service teacher training system is designed as a systematic and comprehensive process based on the official policies of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT). According to the Guidelines for Teacher Training and Development, published by MEXT in 2016, teacher training programs should be continuous, practical, and aligned with the social needs of the country (MEXT, 2016). This system emphasizes experiential learning, group collaboration, and hands-on training. Teacher training programs are designed and implemented by universities, local education councils, and professional organizations, with teachers regularly participating in these courses (Ishihara & Kawaguchi, 2022). Key features of this system include:

- Lifelong Learning: Emphasis on continuous learning and the ongoing enhancement of teachers' professional competencies throughout their careers.
- Experiential Learning and Knowledge Sharing: Teachers engage in group and field activities to exchange experiences and learn from one another.
- Attention to Local Needs: Training content is designed with consideration of the cultural and regional contexts of schools.
- Application of Modern Technologies: The use of digital tools, virtual learning platforms, and even artificial intelligence in course design represents a major advancement in this system (Miscalencu, 2024).

Overall, the official policies of MEXT play a decisive role in structuring the in-service teacher training system, and Japan has provided a successful model for professional teacher education by integrating traditional practices with modern technologies.

Finland

Finland, which possesses one of the most advanced education systems in the world, has implemented a model based on professional teacher participation and autonomous learning. According to the National Core Curriculum for Teacher Education, developed by the Finnish National Agency for Education (EDUFI), in-service teacher training should emphasize lifelong learning, professional autonomy, research orientation, and technological integration (EDUFI, 2016). The information presented here is based on official documents and data collected from international databases such as ERIC, Web of Science, and Scopus. Within this framework, Finnish teachers play an active role in designing, evaluating, and updating training programs, reflecting the

high status of the teaching profession in the country (Laivuori et al., 2024). Key features of this system include:

- Professional Autonomy: Teachers, as educational experts, have considerable freedom to choose their professional development pathways.
- Collaborative Learning: Training programs are designed in groups, and teachers exchange experiences and develop team skills through peer interactions.
- Emphasis on Digital Competencies: Training related to modern technologies is prioritized, including the use of digital tools to enhance teaching and classroom management.
- Research-Oriented Approach: Programs are designed based on evidence and scientific findings, encouraging teachers to apply research outcomes in real classroom settings (Niemi, 2013).

This approach has positioned Finland as an innovative model for teacher education, fully aligned with social, cultural, and technological developments.

United Kingdom

The in-service teacher training system in the United Kingdom is designed with a focus on professional standardization and teacher advancement. The country employs diverse methods for delivering training, including face-to-face, online, and blended approaches (Pedder & Opfer, 2016). The main features of this system are:

- Professional Standardization: All teachers are required to participate in programs that lead to formal professional certifications.
- Leadership and Management Skill Development: Training programs aim to strengthen teachers' managerial and leadership abilities.
- Use of Modern Technologies: The UK extensively employs online training and digital tools to provide teachers with easier and more effective access to courses.
- Professional Networks: Establishing teacher networks for knowledge exchange, experience sharing, and collaboration on joint projects is a priority (James Relly, 2021).

Iran

In Iran, the in-service teacher training system is designed with an emphasis on religious and educational values. Despite efforts to improve the system, it still faces several challenges (Moiinvaziri, 2018). Key features of this system include:

- Traditional and Lecture-Based Approach: Training courses are generally classical and lecture-oriented.

- Limited Resources and Infrastructure: Lack of access to advanced educational resources and inadequate infrastructure restricts program effectiveness.
- Emphasis on Ethical and Educational Topics: Programs mainly focus on moral and educational issues, with less attention to practical and applied skills.
- Financial Incentives: Participation in courses is often driven by financial incentives or career-related benefits, which serve as the primary motivation for teachers to attend (Hejazi et al., 2022).

Table 1 – Comparative Overview of the Structural, Content, and Implementation Features of In-Service Teacher Training Systems in selected countries

Country	Structural Features	Content Features	Implementation Approaches
Japan	- Lifelong learning - Experiential learning and knowledge sharing - Focus on local needs - Use of modern technologies	Practice- and group-based learning	**Opportunities:** Enhances collaboration and knowledge exchange **Challenges:** Aligning modern technologies with traditional methods
Finland	- Teacher professional autonomy - Collaborative learning - Emphasis on digital skills - Research-oriented approach	Independent and research-based learning	**Opportunities:** Strengthens digital and research competencies **Challenges:** Adapting new methods to individual and societal needs
United Kingdom	- Professional standardization - Development of leadership and management skills - Use of modern technologies - Professional networks	Standardization and professional development	**Opportunities:** Utilizes technology for easier and more effective access **Challenges:** Coordinating standards with individual teacher needs
Iran	- Traditional and lecture-based approach - Limited resources and infrastructure - Emphasis on ethical and educational topics - Financial incentives	Ethical and moral education	**Opportunities:** Reinforces religious and ethical values **Challenges:** Lack of modern resources and insufficient focus on practical skills

This table provides a structured comparison of in-service teacher training systems across different countries, highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of each system in terms of structure, content, and implementation strategies.

Stage Two: Interpretation

In this section, the aim is to analyze the impact of social, cultural, economic, and political factors on the continuing professional development (CPD) systems for teachers in the selected countries (Japan, Finland, United Kingdom, and Iran). This analysis, by examining the history, educational policies, and specific characteristics of each country in the field of teacher professional development, provides a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities present in these systems. For each country, the influence of factors such as educational culture, social structure, government policies, and educational institutions on the design and implementation of CPD programs is examined. This analysis is based on credible sources, including scientific articles, government reports, and international research.

Japan

In Japan, continuing professional development for teachers is considered a core element for improving the quality of education and professionalization. Historically, Japan has emphasized the interaction between educational culture and government policies (Ishihara & Kawaguchi, 2022). The Japanese educational system is influenced by various social and cultural factors, including respect for teachers, group-oriented values, and a strong work ethic. Additionally, social changes and local needs play a significant role in shaping this system (Miyazaki et al., 2021).

- Social and cultural impacts: Japanese culture highly values teamwork and respect for teachers. These values have led to a widespread organization of teacher CPD in the form of group-based and experiential learning (Zhou & Dong, 2024).
- Government policies and their impact: In recent decades, the Japanese government has implemented policies supporting teacher CPD, emphasizing new technologies, lifelong learning, and research-based professional development. These policies respond to changing societal needs and educational challenges, such as an aging population and increasing cultural diversity in classrooms (Park & O, 2024).
- Challenges: A major challenge in Japan is aligning traditional teaching methods with new technologies and rapid social changes, particularly in rural areas (Hija, Shima, & Arakaki, 2023).

Finland

Finland, with its unique educational system, is recognized as one of the most advanced countries in the world in education. By enhancing teacher professional development, it has achieved significant improvements in teaching quality. Social and political factors strongly influence teacher CPD in Finland (Karapetyan & Nikoyan Hakobyan, 2024).

- Social and cultural impacts: Finland has a culture of trust in teachers, granting them substantial autonomy in designing educational programs. This culture significantly improves teachers' motivation and teaching quality (Laivuori et al., 2024).
- Government policies: The Finnish government has established CPD systems based on research and teachers' real needs, placing teachers on a path of self-directed and continuous professional growth. Finnish educational programs emphasize research-based approaches, collaborative learning, and the development of individual teacher skills (Lavonen et al., 2020).
- Challenges: One challenge is the rapid alignment of societal needs with traditional educational systems. While Finland has generally succeeded, some difficulties remain in implementing educational innovations (Dagerty et al., 2023).

United Kingdom

In United Kingdom, the educational system has moved toward standardization and a focus on teachers' professional needs. This trend has faced significant social and economic influences, including the need to improve teaching quality in response to economic challenges and social changes (Riordan, 2022).

- Social and cultural impacts: In United Kingdom, cultural and social changes, such as increased immigration and cultural diversity, have significantly increased the need for continuous professional development (CPD) for teachers to effectively manage multicultural and diverse classrooms (Amin et al., 2024).
- Government policies: In recent decades, United Kingdom has emphasized standardizing teacher education and has developed professional certification systems to enhance teaching quality. These systems allow teachers to strengthen their managerial and leadership skills through specific training programs (Yarychev, 2024).

- Challenges: A key challenge is balancing standardized training with individual teacher needs. Efforts to increase control and standardization can sometimes reduce teachers' creativity and motivation (Tao & Burtseva, 2024).

Iran

In Iran, continuing professional development for teachers faces numerous challenges, many of which stem from economic, cultural, and social constraints. Despite efforts to improve the CPD system, significant structural problems remain (Haghighi Shirazi et al., 2013).

- Social and cultural impacts: In Iran, CPD is strongly influenced by religious and educational culture. Traditionally, training programs emphasize religious, ethical, and moral values. At the same time, understanding and acceptance of social changes and educational innovations encounter resistance in some areas (Vahidi et al., 2024).
- Government policies: Although the Iranian government has programs aimed at improving teacher CPD, challenges such as limited financial resources and technological infrastructure persist. In some regions, access to digital resources and online courses is insufficient (Pasalari et al., 2022).
- Challenges: One of the major challenges in Iran, especially in remote and underprivileged areas, is limited access to modern technologies and operational difficulties in CPD programs. Additionally, the overemphasis on value-based and ethical content has reduced the focus on teachers' practical and professional skills (Yadavar et al., 2014).

Table 2 – Summary of the Interpretative Analysis of Continuous Professional Development Systems for Teachers in Selected Countries

Country	Social and Cultural Impacts	Government Policies	Challenges
Japan	- Emphasis on group collaboration and respect for teachers - Cultural values such as respect for instructors and teamwork	- Support for lifelong learning and research-oriented training - Government policies to enhance teaching quality	- Adapting modern technologies to traditional methods - Challenges in rural areas and achieving balanced regional development
Finland	- High trust in teachers and autonomy in designing programs - Culture of collaborative and practice-based learning	- Research-based programs and needs assessment for teacher training - Emphasis on research and lifelong learning	- Aligning social needs with traditional teaching methods - Continuous updating of educational systems
United Kingdom	- Challenges arising from cultural diversity and immigration - Need to improve social and managerial skills	- Standardization of teacher training and professional certification programs - Professional networks to enhance teacher collaboration	- Balancing standards with individual teacher needs - Effects of standardization on reducing teacher creativity
Iran	- Emphasis on religious and ethical education - Resistance to educational and cultural innovations	- Limited financial resources and technological infrastructure - Fragmented efforts to enhance continuous professional development	- Infrastructure limitations and restricted access to digital educational resources - Insufficient focus on practical and professional skills in training programs

Based on the various interpretations of continuous professional development (CPD) systems in the selected countries, it can be concluded that each country has adopted different approaches according to its social, cultural, and political contexts. In developed countries such as Japan, Finland, and United Kingdom, these systems focus primarily on collaborative learning, research-based practices, and the use of modern technologies. In contrast, Iran still faces structural and infrastructural challenges that require serious attention and reforms.

Stage Three: Juxtaposition

In the juxtaposition stage, the information collected in the descriptive phase and analyzed in the interpretative phase is systematically and structurally organized. This stage enables a detailed examination of the key similarities and differences among the CPD systems for teachers in the

selected countries (Japan, Finland, United Kingdom) and Iran. The information is organized around the main research themes and key variables.

1) Objectives of the Continuous Professional Development System

- **Japan:** Development of practical skills, enhancement of teachers' academic and practical abilities, and promotion of individual and group responsibility (Agranovich et al., 2024)
- **Finland:** Promotion of professional autonomy, equal opportunities for teachers, and emphasis on lifelong learning aligned with contemporary needs (Laivuori et al., 2024)
- **United Kingdom:** Professional standardization, improvement of practical and managerial skills, and promotion of professionalism among teachers (Zhang, 2024)
- **Iran:** Empowerment of teachers, focus on religious and ethical values, and improvement of general teacher competencies (Khorshidi et al., 2016)

2) Educational Content

- **Japan:** Training content focuses on practical experiences, local and cultural topics, and modern technologies (Togawa et al., 2011)
- **Finland:** Content includes digital skills, creative thinking, and innovative research (Hilppö et al., 2022)
- **United Kingdom:** Courses emphasize teaching skills, use of technology in education, and managerial methods (Junger et al., 2023)
- **Iran:** Training content focuses on religious, ethical, and social values, with limited attention to practical and technological topics (Kazempour et al., 2018).

3) Methods of Delivering Continuous Professional Development

- **Japan:** Group-based learning, experience exchange, and hands-on activities (Sekita, 2023)
- **Finland:** Interactive, collaborative, and research-oriented training with an emphasis on creativity (Heikkilä, 2021)
- **United Kingdom:** Use of online learning, blended courses (face-to-face and virtual), and professional teacher networks (Ashworth et al., 2018)
- **Iran:** Traditional lecture-based methods with in-person attendance and limited use of online training (Ashrafi et al., 2016).

4) Role of Teachers in Designing and Implementing Courses

- **Japan:** Teachers play an active role in experience exchange and knowledge sharing (Matějka et al., 2024)
- **Finland:** Teachers participate in designing and implementing training programs based on their own needs (Säily et al., 2021)
- **United Kingdom:** Teachers' role is mostly as participants in standardized programs, though their feedback is considered to improve courses (Swift et al., 2024)
- **Iran:** Teachers have a limited role in course design and mainly participate as recipients of training (Baniasad-Azad et al., 2016)

5) Use of Technology in Continuous Professional Development

- **Japan:** Extensive use of advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence and digital learning in training programs (Luong et al., 2024)
- **Finland:** Special emphasis on digital learning and adoption of new technologies (Kupiainen et al., 2022)
- **United Kingdom:** Use of online platforms and digital tools to facilitate learning (Deichakivska et al., 2024)
- **Iran:** Limited use of digital technologies, with greater focus on traditional methods (Mosalanejad & Ahmady, 2019)

6) Assessment and Feedback

- **Japan:** Assessment is based on practical performance and the impact of training on teachers' instructional skills (Ishihara & Kawaguchi, 2022)
- **Finland:** Evaluations are conducted in a 360-degree (comprehensive) manner, emphasizing constructive feedback (Tarhan et al., 2019)
- **United Kingdom:** Diverse assessment tools are used, providing precise and targeted feedback (Rigopoulos, 2022)
- **Iran:** Evaluation is mostly based on attendance and theoretical tests, with less focus on practical effectiveness (Asri, 2024)

Final Analysis of the Juxtaposition Stage

This stage revealed multiple similarities and differences between the selected countries and Iran:

Similarities:

- All countries recognize the importance of continuous teacher development for improving educational quality and professional competency.
- Training programs in all countries include workshops and group-based learning.
- Emphasis on lifelong learning and enhancing teachers' skills is evident across all systems.

Differences:

- Japan, Finland, and United Kingdom heavily utilize technology and innovative methods in CPD, whereas Iran still relies on traditional methods.
- In Finland and Japan, teachers actively participate in designing and implementing courses, while in Iran, this role is minimal.
- United Kingdom and Finland emphasize standardization and professionalism, while Iran focuses more on religious and ethical values.

Table 3 – Comparative Structured Overview of Teacher Continuous Professional Development Systems in the Proximity Stage

Topic	Japan	Finland	United Kingdom	Iran
Objectives of Continuous Professional Development	Developing practical skills, enhancing scientific and practical abilities, increasing individual and group responsibility	Promoting professional autonomy, providing equal opportunities, emphasizing lifelong learning	Professional standardization, improving managerial skills, promoting professionalism	Empowering teachers, focusing on religious and ethical values, improving general competencies
Educational Content	Practical experiences, local and cultural topics, advanced technologies	Digital skills, creative thinking, innovative research	Teaching skills, use of technology, management methods	Religious and ethical topics, social values, less emphasis on practical skills and technology
Methods of Delivery	Group learning, experience exchange, practical activities	Interactive, participatory, research-based, emphasis on creativity	Online learning, blended courses (face-to-face and virtual), teacher networks	Traditional, lecture-based, physical classroom presence, limited use of online learning
Role of Teachers in Courses	Active role in experience exchange and knowledge sharing	Participation in designing and implementing courses based on needs	Participants in standardized programs, feedback considered for course improvement	Limited role in course design, mainly recipients of training
Use of Technology	Extensive use of advanced technologies (AI,	Digital learning, adoption of new technologies	Online platforms, digital tools	Limited use of digital technology, greater focus on

	digital learning)			traditional methods
Assessment and Feedback	Practical performance and impact of training on teaching skills	Comprehensive 360-degree evaluation, constructive feedback	Diverse assessment tools, precise and targeted feedback	Evaluation based on attendance and theoretical tests, less focus on practical effectiveness

Table 4 – Key Features, Main Focus, Challenges, and Opportunities of the Teacher Continuous Professional Development Systems in Iran, Japan, Finland, and the United Kingdom

Country	**Key Features**	**Main Focus**	**Challenges and Opportunities**
Japan	- Lifelong learning - Practical experience and knowledge sharing - Focus on local needs - Use of advanced technologies	Practice- and experience-based group learning	Opportunity: Strengthening collaboration and knowledge sharing Challenge: Adapting advanced technologies to traditional methods
Finland	- Teacher professional autonomy - Collaborative learning - Emphasis on digital skills - Research-oriented	Independent and research-based learning	Opportunity: Enhancing digital and research skills Challenge: Aligning new methods with individual and social needs
United Kingdom	- Professional standardization - Development of leadership and management skills - Use of modern technologies - Professional networks	Standardization and professional development of teachers	Opportunity: Leveraging technology for easier access Challenge: Balancing standards with individual teachers' needs
Iran	- Traditional and lecture-based approach - Limited resources and infrastructure - Emphasis on ethical and educational topics - Financial incentives	Ethical and educational training	Opportunity: Strengthening religious and ethical values Challenge: Lack of modern resources and insufficient focus on practical skills

Stage Four: Comparison

The comparison stage focuses on identifying and analyzing the similarities and differences of teacher continuous professional development (CPD) systems in the selected countries (Japan, Finland, the UK) and Iran. This comparison was conducted in terms of goals, educational content,

implementation methods, teachers' roles, use of technology, and assessment, in order to clearly highlight the strengths and weaknesses of each system.

1. Similarities

Importance of Continuous Professional Development

All countries recognize teacher CPD as a key element for enhancing teaching and learning quality within their educational systems. The shared goal among all countries is to empower teachers to address the new and complex demands of classrooms.

Courses and Workshops

In all countries, organizing courses and workshops for teachers is a core component of CPD programs. In Japan, Finland, and the UK, these courses are largely practical and hands-on (Cripps, Imai, & Toland, 2023), whereas in Iran, the approach is mostly theoretical (Afshar, Fazelimanie, & Doosti, 2017).

Impact on Teaching Quality

All countries emphasize that CPD improves teaching methods and overall educational quality. In Japan and Finland, this impact is reinforced through research-based approaches and teacher interaction (Agranovich, Syzdykbaeva, Ageyeva, & Tyan, 2024), while in the UK it is strengthened through standardization (Kostadinovic, 2019), and in Iran, CPD impact is often linked to financial incentives (Haghighi Shirazi, Bagheri, Sadighi, & Yarmohammadi, 2013).

2. Differences

Educational Goals and Philosophy

- Japan: CPD is based on experiential learning, collaborative culture, and local innovations. The primary goal is to develop teachers' practical skills to meet cultural and social needs (Dan, 2020).
- Finland: The focus is on professional autonomy and lifelong learning. Teachers actively participate in designing and selecting courses, which enhances both motivation and the effectiveness of CPD programs (Zelenin, 2019).
- UK: CPD goals emphasize professional standardization, development of management skills, and improving teaching efficiency (Zhang, 2024).

- Iran: The focus is on values-based and religious topics and empowering teachers for theoretical training, while less attention is given to practical and specialized skills (Ashrafi & Kamelnia, 2016).

Educational Content

- Japan: Content emphasizes local and cultural issues, advanced technologies, and hands-on learning (Ogawa, Fujii, & Ikuo, 2013).
- Finland: Content includes digital skills, creative thinking, and research-based methods to respond to contemporary societal needs (Värri, Kinnunen, Pöyry-Lassila, & Ahonen, 2019).
- UK: Course content covers practical teaching skills, the use of technology in teaching, and educational management (Lugg-Widger, Munnery, Townson, Trubey, & Robling, 2022).
- Iran: Content focuses more on values-based and religious topics and less on practical skills and technological competencies (Hosseinian, Nili, & Sharifian, 2019).

Implementation Methods

- Japan: Training is mostly conducted through group workshops and practical project-based activities (Takizawa, Bambling, Teoh, & Edirippulige, 2023).
- Finland: Methods are largely participatory, interactive, and research-oriented.
- United Kingdom: Training is delivered in a blended format (online and face-to-face) and utilizes teachers' professional networks.
- Iran: Methods are primarily lecture-based and traditional, with limited use of modern technologies (Pasalari, Azizi, & Gholami, 2022).

Teachers' Role in Course Design

- Japan and Finland: Teachers play an active role in designing and implementing courses.
- United Kingdom: Teachers receive training within standardized systems, but their feedback is considered for program improvement.
- Iran: Teachers' roles are limited; they are mostly recipients of training (Pasalari, Azizi, & Gholami, 2022).

Use of Technology in Continuous Professional Development

- Japan and Finland: Extensive use of advanced technologies, including artificial intelligence and digital tools, to enhance training effectiveness.
- United Kingdom: Use of online platforms and digital tools to deliver blended training.

- Iran: Limited use of technology due to inadequate infrastructure and reliance on traditional methods (Hosseinian, Nili, & Sharifian, 2019).

Assessment and Feedback

- Japan and Finland: Assessments are mainly practice-based and involve constructive feedback.
- United Kingdom: Diverse assessment tools are employed with emphasis on continuous performance improvement.
- Iran: Assessments mostly rely on theoretical exams and course attendance, with limited attention to practical effectiveness (Pasalari, Azizi, & Gholami, 2022).

3. Final Comparative Analysis

Similarities:

- All countries emphasize the importance of CPD and its positive impact on teaching quality.
- Training courses in all countries include workshops and group-based educational programs.

Differences:

- In Japan, Finland, and the UK, teacher CPD is implemented systematically with innovative and practical approaches, whereas in Iran traditional approaches still dominate.
- Teachers play a prominent role in course design in the selected countries, but their role is limited in Iran.
- Technology use in the selected countries is extensive, while in Iran it is highly limited due to infrastructure constraints.
- Assessments in the selected countries are practice-oriented and feedback-driven, while in Iran they are mostly theoretical and exam-based.

Table 5 – Comparison of Teacher Continuous Professional Development Systems in the Comparative Stage

Comparison Axis	Similarities (Commonalities)	Differences (Country-specific Analysis)
Philosophy and Objectives	In all countries, continuous professional development (CPD) is considered essential for improving teaching quality, responding to educational changes, and fostering teachers' professional growth.	Japan emphasizes experiential learning and a collaborative culture; Finland focuses on professional autonomy and lifelong learning; the UK prioritizes standardization and efficiency enhancement; Iran emphasizes value-based and religious education with a theoretical orientation.
Content	All countries utilize courses and workshops for teacher training.	Japan's content is local and technology-oriented; Finland's is research-based and creative; the UK's is practical and integrates technology and skills; Iran's content is mostly theoretical with limited focus on practical skills.
Implementation Methods	Training is delivered through workshops, courses, or a combination of methods.	Japan employs group-centered and project-based approaches; Finland uses interactive and research-oriented methods; the UK delivers blended (online and face-to-face) programs; Iran relies mainly on lecture-based and traditional methods.
Teachers' Role	Teachers are considered central to professional development in all countries.	In Japan and Finland, teachers play an active role in course design and implementation; in the UK, they participate in decision-making; in Iran, teachers are primarily recipients rather than designers.
Educational Technology	Technology is accepted as a complementary part of the training process.	Japan and Finland apply technology extensively and innovatively; the UK uses digital platforms; Iran's use is limited due to infrastructure constraints.
Assessment and Feedback	Assessment is a key component of training for improving teachers' performance.	In Japan and Finland, assessments are practice-based and feedback-oriented; the UK uses diverse and targeted evaluation tools; Iran relies mainly on theoretical exams and course attendance.

By clarifying the commonalities and differences among the selected countries (Japan, Finland, the UK) and Iran, this table provides a comprehensive framework for an in-depth analysis of teacher continuous professional development systems.

4. Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that the continuous professional development (CPD) systems for teachers in Japan, Finland, and the United Kingdom are structured, goal-oriented, and aligned with contemporary teacher needs. In contrast, despite ongoing efforts, Iran's CPD system remains largely traditional, lecture-based, and minimally integrated with modern educational technologies. These results are consistent with Darling-Hammond, Hyler, and Gardner (2017), who emphasized the necessity of designing participatory, practical, and research-based professional development programs. In the countries under review, these features are fully implemented, leading to notable improvements in teachers' skills. Similarly, the findings align with Fullan and Hargreaves (2016), who identified continuous professional development as a cornerstone of effective educational systems. Another point of convergence is with the OECD (2019) report, which highlights continuous assessment, technology integration, active teacher participation, and lifelong learning as key indicators of successful teacher education systems. These components are well-established in Japan, Finland, and the UK, whereas Iran has not yet fully implemented them.

Domestically, the results resonate with the studies of Habibiazad et al. (1400) and Pasalari et al. (1401), who emphasized that challenges such as non-practical content, lack of needs assessment, low teacher participation in program design, and ineffective evaluation methods hinder the effectiveness of CPD in Iran. This study confirms these findings, highlighting the persistent limitations of the Iranian system.

Overall, the results suggest that Iran needs to revise the content, implementation structure, assessment methods, and use of modern technologies in its teacher CPD programs. Emulating successful international models, involving teachers in program design, and incorporating feedback-oriented evaluation could significantly enhance the quality of Iran's teacher education system.

Continuous professional development is a critical component of professional growth and educational quality improvement, preparing teachers to face educational and societal challenges effectively. The comparative analysis of teacher CPD systems in Japan, Finland, the UK, and Iran revealed that, despite a shared recognition of its importance, these countries differ substantially in goals, methods, and implementation approaches. Similarities include an emphasis on teacher empowerment, specialized workshops, and the role of CPD in improving teaching quality. However, structural and content-related differences significantly impact the effectiveness of these systems. In Japan, Finland, and the UK, CPD is systematic, goal-oriented, and responsive to the needs of teachers and students, whereas in Iran, traditional lecture-based approaches remain dominant.

In Japan, CPD programs emphasize experiential and collaborative learning, highlighting teachers' roles in exchanging experiences, learning from peers, and adapting to local and cultural needs. Advanced technologies, including artificial intelligence, are extensively used to enhance training quality. In Finland, teacher professional autonomy is central; teachers have freedom in selecting, designing, and implementing CPD programs, with a focus on research-based, interactive, and creative learning experiences. This approach ensures that Finnish teachers remain adaptive to evolving educational environments. In the UK, CPD is built around professional standards and the integration of digital technologies, with specialized teacher networks and blended learning approaches providing opportunities for improving instructional and managerial skills.

Conversely, Iran's teacher CPD system faces multiple challenges. Programs are predominantly lecture-based and theoretical, with limited emphasis on practical or skill-oriented methods. Inadequate technological infrastructure, limited access to modern educational tools, and minimal teacher involvement in program design reduce the effectiveness of the system. Teacher evaluation primarily relies on course attendance and theoretical examinations, whereas in the selected countries, comprehensive, practice-based evaluation systems are in place. These challenges highlight the need for fundamental reforms in Iran's CPD system to align with global trends and societal needs.

The analysis of various CPD approaches in the selected countries demonstrates significant differences in program design and implementation. In advanced educational contexts such as Japan, Finland, and the UK, CPD is not only continuous but also emphasizes practical application and innovative technologies. These countries utilize digital tools and modern technologies to expose teachers consistently to educational innovations. Teachers in Japan and Finland are treated as researchers, actively participating in practical projects and research-based learning to improve their instructional practices using empirical evidence. In the UK, emphasis is placed on professional standardization and managerial skill development, enabling teachers to manage classrooms, lead educational initiatives, and supervise learning processes more effectively. Evaluation in these countries is feedback-oriented and emphasizes active teacher participation, ensuring both scientific and practical efficacy.

In comparison, Iran's CPD system remains largely theoretical and traditional. Teachers primarily engage with content-heavy, classical courses, often relying on textbooks and lectures rather than innovative technologies and practical experiences. While practical, research-based, and applied learning is a priority in the reviewed countries, Iran faces significant challenges that limit the effective enhancement of teachers' competencies. These findings underscore the urgent need

for a comprehensive review of educational content, the adoption of new technologies, and modern teaching methods to improve teacher professional development in Iran.

Another major difference between the selected countries and Iran lies in the emphasis on practical and research-based learning. In Japan and Finland, teacher training is closely integrated with research activities, and teachers actively engage in investigative processes. This approach enables teachers to apply research findings practically in their classrooms. Particularly in Finland, where teacher education is considered a research-oriented and scientific profession, teachers regularly participate in scientific and research projects, which has contributed significantly to the quality of education. In these countries, learning is continuously evolving and adapting to emerging needs, with teachers actively involved in educational processes. In contrast, Iran's system primarily emphasizes theoretical and rote learning, providing limited opportunities for research and practical experiences. This limitation may be a key factor preventing Iranian teachers from fully leveraging new research-based insights in their teaching practices.

Another notable finding is the use of practical assessments and continuous feedback in the selected countries. In advanced educational systems, teacher evaluation is conducted not only through written and theoretical assessments but also practically, with an emphasis on performance-based feedback in classrooms. These evaluations help teachers identify strengths and weaknesses and guide improvements in instructional quality. In Japan, Finland, and the UK, assessments are continuous throughout the year, based on clear criteria, and grounded in actual teacher performance. Teachers are also actively involved in designing training courses and programs for instructional improvement, ensuring that programs are evidence-based and aligned with real classroom needs. Conversely, in Iran, assessments are typically limited to the end of courses and are predominantly based on written exams, which have minimal impact on improving teaching quality and enhancing teacher competencies. These differences highlight the necessity for serious reform in teacher evaluation and feedback systems in Iran.

Finally, one of the most critical aspects emphasized in the selected countries is active teacher participation in the design of training programs. Teachers in Japan, Finland, and the UK not only participate in learning activities but also play a substantial role in planning and designing professional development programs. This participation ensures that training programs address the actual needs of teachers and students more accurately. In Iran, teacher involvement in course design and evaluation is limited, which results in many programs failing to meet real educational needs, and overall teaching quality remains below international standards.

Based on these findings, Iran can strengthen its CPD system by adopting approaches from the selected countries. Designing courses grounded in teachers' actual needs and involving them in program planning and implementation can significantly enhance motivation and effectiveness. Moreover, emphasizing practical, workshop-based learning, as in Japan, and integrating modern technologies with blended learning approaches, as in the UK, can substantially improve the efficiency of CPD programs. Developing comprehensive assessment systems with feedback mechanisms can further measure the impact of these programs on teacher performance and, ultimately, teaching quality.

In conclusion, advanced countries have established efficient and adaptive CPD systems through innovative, technology-driven, and participatory approaches that respond to rapid social and technological changes. In Iran, transitioning from traditional methods to innovative approaches is essential to achieve similar effectiveness. By investing in technological infrastructure, designing courses aligned with contemporary teacher needs, and employing performance-based feedback, the CPD system can become a powerful tool for professional growth. Such reforms not only enhance teacher competencies but also improve student learning outcomes and elevate Iran's educational system in the international arena.

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