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Abstract

The number of international branch campuses (IBCs), denoting universities offering academic programmes and granting credentials from foreign educational institutions, has been on the rise. Consequently, there is an increasing demand to undertake comprehensive investigations into these entities, as the contextual factors surrounding IBCs wield considerable influence over programme efficacy and overall institutional well-being. This paper adopts an analytical approach to scrutinise the perspectives of forty academic professionals engaged in IBCs concerning the concept of continuous professional development (CPD) and the role of technology in facilitating it for educators working within the host country. This analysis is grounded in the foundational assumptions that educators in transnational educational settings must cultivate proficiency across a broader spectrum of professional domains compared to their peers teaching within domestic universities (Tran et al. 2021). The findings of this study reveal a consensus on the paramount significance of professional development among the surveyed individuals. However, despite the acknowledged importance of technological proficiency, nearly half of the participants still manifest a preference for traditional face-to-face learning modalities for their CPD, with the selection contingent upon the subject matter under consideration.

Keywords: teacher education, distance learning, transnational education, technology, professional development, university lecturers, international branch campuses

Introduction

In contemporary higher education, a growing number of students have access to higher education both in local and international contexts (Altbach et al. 2009). There is also a growing demand for transnational education (TNE), which involves the provision of education to students across distinct geographic regions via international branch campuses (Garrett et al. 2016; Cross-Border Education Research Team 2017; Osmani 2021) in many parts of the world. At the same time, with the pace at which the world is evolving, providing authentic and effective programme that can fulfil the demands of the students is essential.

In tandem with these developments, the need for academics who can effectively fulfil their roles has become paramount and underscores the importance of academics continually updating their knowledge and honing their skills (Becker et al. 2017; Lopukhova and Makeeva 2019). Consequently, numerous universities are proactively facilitating opportunities for educators and encouraging them to engage in diverse training sessions while acknowledging their participation through academic credits. Concurrently, the advent of technology has substantially expanded learning possibilities for educators, thus amplifying the imperative for perpetual improvement and self-improvement. This sustained commitment to professional development significantly enhances the efficacy of academics and their influence on student learning outcomes (Shaha Glassett and Copas 2015 cited in Osmani 2021). These educators must remain committed to enhancing their expertise to remain at the forefront of their profession.

Academics working in transnational contexts are no exception. In addition to the roles of academics in local universities, they must remain attuned to the global educational landscape and must not lose sight of the cultures and expectations of both their home and host institutions (Compton and Alsford 2022). While navigating and enhancing their understanding of transnational settings, they must concurrently maintain up-to-date skills and knowledge to meet the evolving demands of students and their universities. However, this multifaceted endeavour can be notably challenging, underscoring the indispensable role of ongoing and contextually relevant professional development, which supports and guides academics as they contemplate their mission as educators of local students within the international setting of international branch campuses.

Various avenues, such as face-to-face training sessions, online training sessions conducted by both local and international experts, webinars, professional communities,

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and technological innovations present limitless opportunities for these academics. However, a salient query arises: do academics embrace online courses as a sufficient means of professional development, and are they willing to utilise them?

In the current study, we aim to elucidate the perspectives of our colleagues in Uzbekistan regarding their professional development and their perceptions of technology and online learning as channels for advancement. Acquiring insights into their views is imperative, particularly in light of the paradigm-shifting impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which accentuated the necessity for educators to continuously update their skills and knowledge and highlighted the new-found significance of technology in teaching.

Following an explanation of the transnational higher education concept, we delve into the roles of lecturers within these institutions and outline the kinds of training and professional development that educators in transnational universities may necessitate. Analysing this specific context affords valuable insights that can inform strategic actions within Uzbekistan and offer potential guidance for other higher education institutions with similar contexts and experiences. Madsen and Adriansen (2021), based on their experience supervising PhD students in Africa, suggest that assuming that teaching and research approaches are the same in all universities is questionable and each context deserves to be studied individually. However, still valuable information can be elicited from the experience of others.

Transnational education

Transnational education, also referred to as cross-border education, predominantly transpires through international branch campuses (IBCs). An IBC is 'an entity that is owned, at least in part, by a foreign higher education provider; operated in the name of the foreign education provider; engages in at least some face-to-face teaching; and provides an entire academic programme, that leads to a credential awarded by the foreign education provider' (Lane 2011: p. 5). According to Francois (2016), transnational education aims at providing globally oriented programmes that are adapted to local needs.

The establishment and proliferation of transnational universities can be attributed to several factors. These include the reputation of the home-country institution, the perceived quality of education offered, the amenities provided, and the unique

experiential facets that differentiate these institutions from local universities in students' home countries (Wilkins, Balakrishnan and Huisman 2012; Turdiyeva 2018; Celeti, Nurmanova and Gavalyan, 2020; Bezborodova and Radjabzade 2022). Furthermore, many students anticipate enhanced employment prospects on the global stage upon graduation from such institutions (Yao and Tuliao 2019). Transnational education also represents a more cost-effective alternative to studying abroad, potentially stemming the 'brain drain' by retaining graduates within their home countries. As Yang and Welsch (2010: p. 3) aptly assert, 'the global mobility of highly skilled individuals has long been a matter of national concern', and transnational education can play a pivotal role in mitigating this concern.

Both local and international academics may find themselves teaching in a language that is not their native tongue, necessitating an effective command of that language in many cases for instructors and students alike. Since the two primary countries facilitating transnational education are the United States of America and the United Kingdom, with English being the predominant medium of instruction in the majority of IBCs (Garret et al. 2016), in many cases, English serves as the medium of instruction.

According to the Cross-Border Education Research Team (C-BERT) (2023), which aggregates data on global universities, there are currently 333 international branch campuses spanning 83 host countries. However, it is pertinent to note that 58 such campuses have closed since their inception. An in-depth examination of these closures is essential to unearth the reasons behind these failures and to derive valuable insights for the enhancement of the quality of transnational education. Competent academics arguably constitute one of the central factors contributing to this endeavour (Kahu 2013).

The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the vital nature of transnational education, particularly in the face of travel restrictions that impede the mobility of students seeking education abroad. It has further underscored the value of online learning. Before the pandemic, several countries did not accord online higher education the recognition it deserved in terms of degree accreditation. However, the pandemic has precipitated a paradigm shift, prompting institutions to acknowledge and embrace online learning modalities. In a post, Lane et al. (2021) elucidate this transition, stating '[T]the combination of acceptance and easing of restrictions on online learning positions IBCs to introduce new modalities, creating more flexibility in the teaching and learning environment'. Consequently, educators must continually

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update their knowledge concerning the effective integration of technology into their teaching methodologies, all while adhering to the standards and criteria prescribed by transnational education providers. Long-distance training and collaborative exchanges with peers can significantly expedite this process.

The value of professional development in higher education and IBCs

Quality education hinges on a harmonious convergence of effective curricula, cutting-edge facilities, highly proficient educators, and diligent students. In line with contemporary educational trends such as learner-centeredness, technology integration, and the cultivation of teacher and learner autonomy, these facets constitute pivotal drivers of pedagogical efficacy (Rashid and Yadav 2020). Moreover, within IBCs, an acute awareness of the values and demands of both the home and host countries is imperative. Expatriate academics may find their teaching style and cultural norms divergent from those of their students (Healey 2015). It can be assumed that similar concerns may apply to locally-hired staff. Certain institutional values may diverge from those of the home universities, potentially posing challenges for both educators and students. Notably, concepts such as critical thinking, learner autonomy, inclusivity, gender roles, and social justice emerge as critical issues (De Wit 2019). Educators stand as key stakeholders responsible for guiding students through these challenges without inadvertently perpetuating 'educational imperialism' (Pyvis 2011: p. 733). Consequently, the provision of high-quality pre-service and in-service training emerges as a critical prerequisite to equip educators with the requisite skills and perspectives to navigate these complexities. It may be noteworthy to pinpoint that most of the literature available focuses on the needs and demands of expat lecturers and educators moving to the host country as they have so far outnumbered the local lecturers in many countries (Wilkins and Neri 2019), while in many contexts, including Uzbekistan, the number of local educators employed at these universities is high and on the rise and the need to study their needs is pivotal.

Technology and Professional Development

Foremost among technology's contributions to professional development are the

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abundant and versatile array of opportunities it offers, primarily through online education. Online learning opportunities consist of both synchronous and asynchronous modalities, can be short to extensive, and are accessible at virtually any time, thereby facilitating asynchronous self-paced learning. They further foster global interactions, fostering cross-border exchanges of ideas and experiences (Dhawan 2020). When effectively harnessed, online platforms afford avenues for knowledge augmentation, practical skill refinement, and reflective practice. However, as Rienties et al. (2013: p. 2) elucidate, 'providing effective training for academics... is not straightforward'. This complexity highlights the need for comprehensive investigations into the impact of professional development on educator performance, particularly within the context of online professional development, a facet that remains insufficiently explored in various educational settings. Massive open online courses (MOOCs), online professional learning communities (PLCs), and communities of practice (CoPs) are among the avenues for formal and informal professional development. In addition, a study conducted by Annabi et al. (2009) suggests that developing materials for MOOCs is also considered an effective means to career progression. As such, it can be surmised that self-driven educators tend to reap greater benefits from MOOCs and technology-assisted online professional development initiatives (Luhanga et al. 2021; Vangrieken et al. 2017).

The study

As mentioned earlier, our study endeavours to augment the perceptions of academics working in transnational universities of the significance and impact of professional development on their performance. We seek to collect their views on the specific domains they deem essential for enhancing their pedagogical efficacy, technology, and online learning as vehicles for professional growth. Our motivation for this research stems from our roles as lecturers at a transnational university in Uzbekistan. Given the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the consequent requirements for educators to continuously update their competencies, along with the newfound centrality of technology in education, gathering insights from these perspectives is paramount.

Our research adopts an exploratory stance, with its focal point resting on academics operating within transnational universities in Uzbekistan. We draw extensively from

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relevant literature and incorporate data collected from a survey administered across seven transnational universities situated in Tashkent. Following an explanation of the transnational higher education framework, we proceed to elucidate the roles of lecturers within these institutions and delineate the varieties of training and professional development modalities that educators in transnational universities may necessitate. Our emphasis is directed toward unpacking the perceptions of academics operating within these institutions concerning the knowledge and skills they believe they need to develop particularly in TNEs and then the extent to which technology and online learning have contributed to their training and development. Accordingly, the research questions addressed in our study are:

1. What are the perceptions of educators in a TNE of the kind of knowledge, skills, and values they need to improve to be effective academics?
2. What are the perceptions of the educators in a TNE of the value of technology and online learning for their own professional development?

Context of the study

Uzbekistan, a Central Asian country with a population exceeding 35 million and a steadily growing economy, falls within the lower-middle-income category. Uzbek, the official language, coexists with a multiplicity of languages spoken by the general public, including Russian, Tajik, and Karakalpak. Of the 113 higher education institutions in Uzbekistan, 21 were listed as international branch campuses in 2021 (Bezborodova and Radjabzade 2022: p. 76), and this number continues to rise. The majority of these transnational universities deliver their courses in English, with Russian, Korean, and Turkish also serving as languages of instruction across Uzbekistan.

Theoretical framework

Transactional distance theory (TDT), introduced by Moore (1991), underpins the current study. Initially, Moore emphasises the significance of pedagogical and psychological proximity between educators and learners, addressing the challenges posed by geographical separation. Timely dialogue emerged as a cornerstone of TDT. Moreover, the flexibility of educational programmes, according to TDT, determines

course functionality. Greater flexibility enhances individualised attention and context relevance. Learner autonomy constitutes the final pillar, affording learners the freedom to set objectives and choose methods. In the context of transnational universities, marked by geographical separation, efficient communication between host and home campuses is essential and undeniable. The theory carries implications for both the students and the training and professional development of academics and staff in host countries as well. Pre-COVID-19, academics and sometimes students from both home and host countries physically traversed campuses, engaging in first-hand observation and face-to-face dialogue. However, the pandemic prompted increased reliance on technology for inter-campus communication, a shift that could yield both positive and negative outcomes (Carstens et al. 2021). This study examines host country academics' perceptions of the need and quality of online sessions with their home country counterparts, grounded in TDT.

Simultaneously, given the 'borderlessness' (Jean-Francois 2016: p viii) and cultural diversity inherent in transnational education markets, a culturally responsive pedagogy, advocated by Ladson-Billings (1994), assumes importance in the current study. This pedagogical approach highlights the recognition of cultural diversity in education. Given the collaborative nature of transnational education between two universities situated in distinct cultural contexts, host country educators must navigate cultural nuances. This study explores educators' awareness of cultural impact, their approaches to facilitating and guiding student learning, and the knowledge and skills they deem necessary for effectiveness (Garrison, Anderson and Archer 2000).

Research design and instrument

This study employs a self-administered, web-based survey to gather data. The survey took between 15 to 20 minutes to complete, and the respondents were promised anonymity. The questionnaire, facilitated through Google Forms, addresses several aspects: opinions on continuous professional development for higher education academics in general, CPD in transnational contexts in particular, and CPD through online learning support. Both open-ended and closed questions were used to elicit the information. In some of the closed questions seeking the opinion of the respondents, a Likert scale was used. The questions were based on the literature, detailed discussions among the writers of this article who have the experience of lecturing at a transnational

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university in Uzbekistan, and finally the agenda and organisational framework of two of the transnational universities in Uzbekistan. Before the main survey, a pilot survey was conducted among colleagues, followed by discussions for questionnaire refinement. Survey invitations were disseminated through social media channels and e-mail. Descriptive statistics assisted in analysing the responses.

Demographic information

The study employs stratified random sampling to recruit 40 lecturers teaching across seven transnational universities in Tashkent. Of these respondents, 32 identified as females and eight as males. English primarily served as the language of instruction in five of the seven universities. All except two respondents had received some form of training for professional development in the past three years. Teaching experience among respondents ranged from one year to more than 11 years.

Research findings

The first question sought the reasons that the academics had for CPD. As Table 1 demonstrates, the respondents offered a variety of reasons. Seventy-seven point five per cent of respondents cited the desire to stay updated, while 52.5 per cent sought to improve the quality of their work. Examining what they meant by the 'quality of their work', 67.5 per cent pointed to fulfilling professional needs, such as publishing and research, while 50 per cent focused on personal development, and 37.5 per cent highlighted student needs (see Table 2). While 95 per cent of respondents had received some online training, 55 per cent preferred face-to-face training over online sessions, with preferences influenced by the subject matter and need for interaction. Out of 40 respondents, 45 per cent had sought training beyond their university, even if not obligatory.

Regarding their perception of CPD, 23 respondents strongly agreed on its necessity for university academics, and 97.5 per cent believed CPD could help academics become better educators.

However, only six strongly agreed that membership in online social platforms like LinkedIn was effective.

There was a shift in the level of digital literacy among respondents during the

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COVID-19 pandemic, with more becoming advanced users, particularly in technology platforms related to teaching.

Notably, 50 per cent of respondents considered themselves fully autonomous in their work, while 47.5 per cent deemed themselves somewhat independent.

Table 1: General reasons for attending CPD courses

The main reasons for attending the professional training classes	Percentage of the responses
To keep updated	77.5%
To improve the quality of my work	52.5%
To plan my future career	32.5%
To fulfil the demand of the university I work at	22.%

Total number of respondents=40

Table 2: Specific reasons for attending CPD sessions

Reasons	Percentage
Fulfilling professional needs (e.g. need to publish)	67.5%
Fulfilling personal needs (e.g. time management)	50%
Fulfilling the needs of my students	37.5%

Total number of respondents=40

Ninety-five per cent of the respondents have received at least a part of their training online; however, 55 per cent believe that in general, they would prefer face-to-face training to online (see Chart 1).

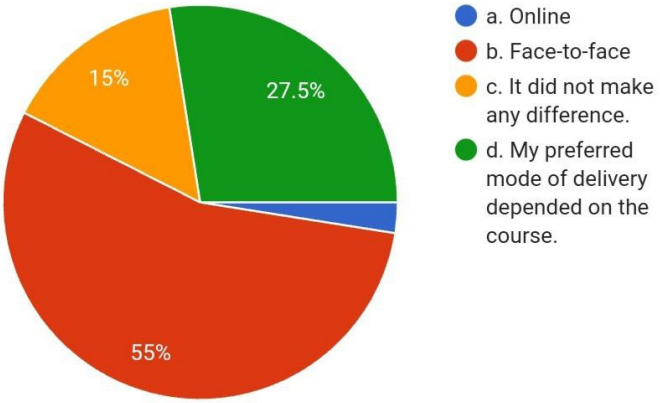

Chart 1: Mode of delivery of CPD sessions

The open-ended questions invited the respondents to elaborate on their answers. For the preferred mode of training, the most frequent main argument was that their preference depended on the subject of learning. For example, one respondent mentioned that:

> *'If the topic was on using apps to improve my teaching then online mode is perfect. But if the topic was more about other topics excluding technology integration then face-to-face is needed.'*

Another response concerning the same argument was:

> *'If the topic is related to my research and I need my questions to be answered or contribute to the discussion then I would opt for face-to-face but if the topic is not very crucial and I need to get some chunks of ideas or information then I would choose online mode.'*

The next criterion for preferring online to face-to-face learning and vice versa that the respondents provided was the type of activity that they needed to do. For example, one of the respondents believed:

> *'But if the PD course (asynchronous or MOOC/without a significantly important qualification) required a lot of reading, comprehension assessments and no synchronous training, I would prefer online mode. It is great to do the course from the comfort of home?'*

One of the supporters of face-to-face learning stated that:

> *'Face-to-face sessions can encourage learning, stimulate interest, and lively communication which can save time. There are No technical pauses, lack of personalization or limited interaction we usually have during online learning/ teaching.'*

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Another participant reported that:

> *'Face-to-face trainings trigger[s] you to study and feel more accountable - psychological push.'*

Finally, there were a few who were comfortable with both. One mentioned: *'In my opinion, the quality of the lesson depends on the knowledge of the trainer not the mode of delivery.'*

Phrases such as *'more interactive'*, *'talking to colleagues and the trainer'*, *'more fun to meet people'*, *'being part of the community'*, and *'personal touch'* were used in favour of face-to-face learning. However, those in favour of online learning mentioned *'self-paced'*, *'flexible schedule'*, *'learning to use the technology'*, and *'more comfortable'*.

Out of 40 respondents, 45 per cent have looked beyond the university for training and the same number of people would choose from the courses offered by the university even if they are not obliged to take part.

The majority believe that CPD is necessary for university academics. Twenty-three strongly agreed and also agreed that having follow-up discussions with colleagues regarding the CPD sessions is helpful. Ninety-seven point five per cent of the respondents firmly or partly believe that CPD can assist academics in becoming better educators. Despite the value they assign to professional development, only six strongly agree that membership in online social platforms such as LinkedIn is effective.

When asked to rate their digital literacy pre-, during, and post-COVID, the difference was noticeable (see Chart 2).

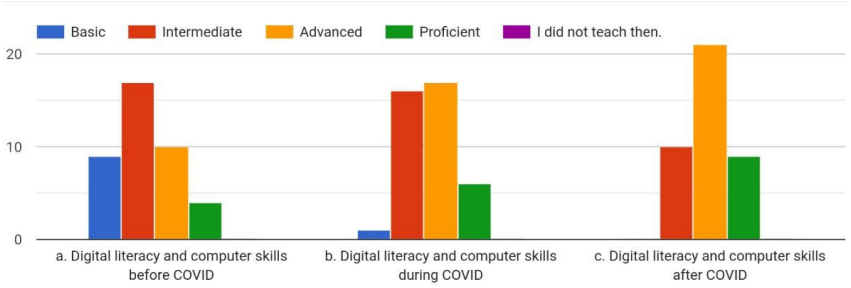

Chart 2: Level of digital literacy

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One participant on their answer and stated:

> *'Zoom or BBB were challenging tools before the pandemic but during the pandemic I got training and used them a lot. So now I feel I have become an advanced user of both.'*

Another respondent mentioned:

> *'I think my skills improved significantly because I learned how to use several platforms for various purposes - for synchronous lessons, assessment and monitoring students' progress (like LMS), recording video lessons and storing them in some platforms for asynchronous courses. I mainly started to look for them during Covid and still do.'*

However, other respondents believed that after COVID-19 they did not see the need to develop their computer skills.

> *'… before COVID I didn't have to learn technology since it was not necessary. During COVID we had to learn a lot, but it was overwhelming, therefore, many teachers [trainers] had to choose the most primitive ways of online teaching (Zoom). In my case, the university gave me carte blanche to develop a more or less sustainable system. That time I and other teachers have learned a lot.'*
>
> *'After COVID, the necessity of online teaching disappeared, therefore, I stopped growing in this area.'*

We sought their opinion about the similarities and differences between transnational universities and local universities to find out what areas of training they thought they needed. Thirty-two respondents believe that their university uses a more learner-centred approach, 29 think that their curricula are different, 19 believe that the relationship between students and lecturers is less formal, 26 think that the pressure to conduct research is more, 31 believe that technology is used more frequently, the majority think that the approaches to assessment are different, and 26 argue that the content of what they teach is different. Twenty-five believe that they are more autonomous compared to local university colleagues and 10 are not sure about it.

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Twenty-three are not sure whether more attention is paid to social justice issues and only nine think that this area is paid attention to. For culture and inclusivity too, the number of undecided people is significantly more than those who think that their universities pay attention to them (see Table 3).

Table 3: The rate of the respondents' agreement with the degree of similarity between typical local universities in Uzbekistan and the transnational university they work at

Items	Yes	No	Unsure
a. At my university, we have a more learner-centred approach to learning and teaching.	32	2	6
b. The curriculum at my university is very different.	29	2	9
c. In my university, more attention is paid to social justice issues.	9	8	23
d. In my university, inclusivity is paid more attention to.	17	5	18
e. Culture is among the issues paid more attention to at my university.	11	2	27
f. In my university, the relationship between students and academics is less formal.	19	12	9
g. The demand to publish articles is more at my university.	22	9	9
h. The demand for research is greater at my university.	26	8	6
i. Technology is more frequently used in my university.	31	4	5
j. The content of what we teach is usually different.	27	8	5
k. The approaches to testing and assessment are different.	31	4	5
l. In my university, we are more autonomous.	25	5	10

Total number of respondents=40

Only one person has received training for all of the above areas, and eight mention that they have not been trained for any of the above topics. Fifty-five per cent are willing to take online training for these topics.

In Table 4, each row represents the survey responses to various aspects of CPD, while the columns display the mean and standard deviation for each of the items. These metrics offer insights into how respondents perceive CPD opportunities.

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Table 4: Means and standard deviation for some of the survey responses

Items	Mean	SD
I think I can receive effective online training for topics such as cultural awareness and social justice.	1.55	0.67
I attend PD sessions because I feel appreciated.	3.02	1.14
Professional Development is an important part of my job at my university.	1.67	0.76
Being a member of professional social platforms such as LinkedIn helps in my PD.	2.8	1.32

Total number of respondents=40

Interestingly, 50 per cent of the respondents consider themselves fully autonomous and 47.5 per cent believe that they are autonomous to some extent. Almost all except for one believed that autonomy is very or partly important for university academics (see Chart 3).

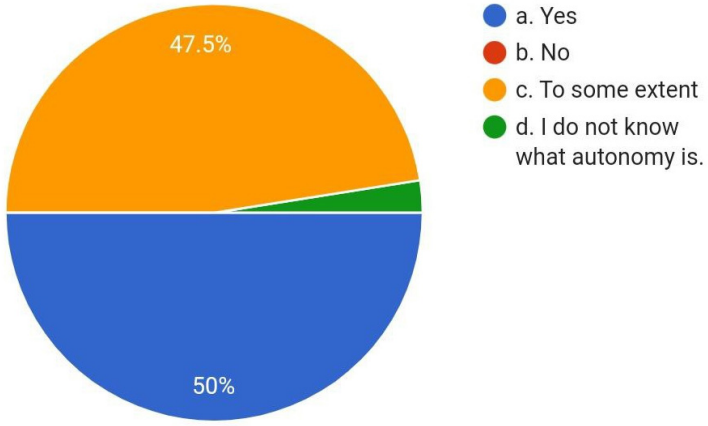

Chart 3: Academics' perception of their autonomy

Table 5 below displays the correlations (Pearson's r) between two survey items. A correlation of 0.18 between teachers perceiving autonomy and their willingness to join professional online platforms suggests a small, positive relationship.

Table 5: Correlations between feeling autonomous and CPD

	Beliefs about CPD	
	Being a member of professional social platforms such as LinkedIn helps in my CPD.	I attend CPD sessions because I feel appreciated.
Feeling autonomous	0.18	0.04

Total number of respondents=40

Some of the definitions of autonomy that they have provided are as follows:

- *Being able to create your own syllabus, teaching calendar, lesson plans for the subject you teach. You have independence over the content of the subject and how to teach it.*
- *Ability to make my own decisions about what to do.*
- *Making decisions by myself for all aspects of life.*
- *Being able to decide what you need for professional development.*
- *It is when I can set my research goal or conduct research individually with no supervision reading and analysing different sources to get the ideas for research.*
- *While I need mentoring and training (and it is valuable and indispensable), I also have some foundation I rely on - knowledge, competence and qualification. Based on my background and knowledge of what I know/don't know, can/cannot do, I autonomously (mostly) choose what I need a training with and/or apply in my teaching. But my autonomy is monitored by university curriculum.*
- *Ability to set the goals and needs and seek for possibilities to find resources to fulfill them being able to identify my professional development needs and plan PD activities, fined relevant course and attend them.*
- *I believe that an autonomous teacher is the one who decides what to teach and how to teach, in my case, I think that I am autonomous to some extent because the programme is provided by our head university, and, also, assessment is done by them only (they design tests, assessments and they check students' papers). However, I decide on subsequence of topics (I have to follow the programme, but I can decide on the order of topics), hours to spent on a particular topic, activities in the class and etc.*

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Seventy per cent believe that technology has helped them in their teaching. At the same time, 77 per cent agree that technology has helped them learn more, 65 per cent have received some training on online platforms such as Moodle, 85 per cent sometimes use YouTube videos for their professional development, and 64 per cent appreciate the fact the online trainers from different parts of the world can provide pieces of training for them.

Being independent, free to make choices, doing individual work, and deciding for oneself were the most frequent phrases used to define autonomy.

In the end, the respondents were asked to share their overall opinion about the topic and some elaborated on their thoughts. Here are some of the responses:

> *Technology plays an important role in today's life, thus professional development should take it into account and be conducted in a blended way. Follow-ups make CPD more effective, so the administration should focus on that. Certainly time is the big barrier, but if CPD is organized in a way which makes a difference in the life of the teachers, no one would skip it. Certificates, letters of Appreciation, or promotion play a big role in that. But intrinsic motivation should be there as well. Being a young mother, I could keep up with my cpd during my maternity leave with the help of technology. I could attend webinars, use apps and see its benefits for teaching and courses helped a lot.*

> *Digital literacy is essential for modern educators. To be able to use technology so that it benefits teachers, we need good trainers, those who would prepare for training sessions properly and would not rush through materials. Teachers, whose use of technology in their younger years was very limited, should not be looked down upon if they are a little slow in acquiring necessary skills.*

> *The quality of professional development is not guaranteed by the use of technology, it is facilitated by technology in some cases.*

> *PD is super important. However, trainers sometimes do not know exactly what you need. So self study could be more effective in some cases.*
>
> *Time constraints; too much pressure and the poor quality of some training sessions were mentioned more than once as deterrents to pursuing PD.*

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Discussion

The present study delved into the assessment of continuous professional development perceptions among academics engaged in transnational universities within Uzbekistan. It sought to identify the types of CPD that participants perceived as necessary in a transnational context and their willingness to engage in online CPD. Notably, a significant outcome of this investigation is the widespread acknowledgement of the value of CPD among respondents. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that the preferred training focus, for the majority, continues to revolve around the utilisation of technology within their pedagogy. Notably absent from their priorities are subjects such as culture, social justice, and the development of contextually relevant curricula and materials. This suggests a potential lack of reflection or an inclination to follow the guidance of their home institutions or trust the leadership of the host institution, thus potentially neglecting critical facets of transnational education, which emphasise collaboration and the nature of the relationship between host and home academics (Merola et al. 2023).

Furthermore, the findings suggest a relative lack of volunteer participation and vocalisation among the majority of respondents, a pattern that extends to the underutilisation of online informal professional networks, such as LinkedIn. Only a minority of respondents take these platforms seriously, possibly indicating a preference for institutional directives or more formalised training sessions. This lack of interest warrants further investigation, as it could be attributed to factors such as the absence of accreditation, trust issues, or the perception that the offerings provided by their institutions or alternative sources are sufficient. Clearly, this disinterest demands deeper scrutiny.

Despite the assumption that teacher autonomy might influence participation in informal training and online learning, the data indicate that almost all respondents consider themselves autonomous or semi-autonomous, regardless of their varying interpretations of autonomy. This, too, requires more in-depth exploration, which falls beyond the scope of this study.

The correlation between the perceived autonomy and some CPD issues indicates that the academics who perceive themselves as more autonomous in their roles may be slightly more inclined to engage with professional online platforms. This could imply that teachers who feel autonomous are also proactive in seeking out additional avenues,

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such as online platforms, for professional development and networking. However, given the modest correlation, it is essential to consider other factors that could influence teachers' decisions to join these platforms, as autonomy is just one aspect of their overall motivation and engagement with online professional communities. Due to the relatively small number of respondents, the possible differences between genders and years of experience were not studied.

Most of the existing literature on educators in transnational universities focuses on the needs of expats who relocate to teach in the host country. It may be plausible to assume that the reason for not having robust studies on the local staff teaching in TNEs is that initially, many countries that adopted TNE did not have local human resources. They had to rely on the support of foreign staff and needed to support them. Modise and Avoseh (2016: p.16), for example, discuss this case in Botswana and how their 'initial involvement in TNE was mainly one way'. However, currently, the number of qualified local academics is on the rise. Uzbekistan is a good example of such a country. Therefore, the need to study their needs and demands should also be prioritised.

To sum up, considerable efforts are necessary to stimulate meaningful professional development and networking within the academic community. The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly shifted the focus towards enhancing technological pedagogical skills, but other essential subjects appear to be relatively neglected. The pandemic's impact on technology adoption has been substantial, yet in our study the preference for face-to-face CPD sessions remains predominant for specific topics due to their perceived interactivity and productivity. There is no denying that each context has its own needs and studying them individually can contribute immensely to the education of their students. Jean Francois (2016: p.6) argues that 'transnational education involves glocally informed pedagogy, which accounts for learning style preferences and cultural dimensions, glocal awareness, glocal knowledge, and glocal competence'. To meet these conditions and prepare the grounds in TNEs, educating their educators is of prime importance. They, too, can be the exporters of knowledge and education.

Conclusion

The contemporary educational landscape underscores the vital importance of

continuous professional development for educators to augment their knowledge, skills, and values. This necessity stems from the rapid pace of technological evolution, globalisation, and the abundant information resources made accessible by technology, which, in turn, have reshaped our daily lives. These changes have also fostered a reimagining of societal norms and expectations, particularly in terms of the pursuit of knowledge. Notably, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the significance of educators equipping themselves with the requisite knowledge and abilities to navigate the unknown and better prepare their students. Moreover, it has become evident that online teaching and learning are indispensable, as evidenced by their pivotal role during pandemic-induced lockdowns, thereby necessitating educators to adapt and enhance their online teaching and student support competencies.

This study has centred on transnational education within Uzbekistan, examining the perceptions of academics in international branch campuses regarding their professional development needs and experiences, with a specific focus on distance and online CPD opportunities. Our findings illuminate a widespread recognition of the value of CPD among respondents. However, the prevailing emphasis leans towards honing technology utilisation within their educational practice, with other dimensions of transnational education often relegated to the background. Concurrently, a significant proportion of participants continue to express a preference for face-to-face CPD sessions, citing their interactive nature. In summation, the insights gleaned from this small-scale inquiry emphasise the pressing need for further exploration into the exigencies and aspirations of educators engaged in transnational settings, both regionally and globally.

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