
An Investigation into Factors Militating Against Effective and Efficient Implementation of Successful Continuous Professional Development Programmes in South African Schools

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ABSTRACT

Continuous Professional Development (CPD) basically refers to continuing education and career training after a teacher has entered the workforce, in order to help the teacher to develop new skills and knowledge and stay up to date on career trends (Bernadine, 2019; Saleem, Guy & Dogar, 2021). Essentially CPD ensures that teachers continue to be proficient and competent in their profession while in turn furnishing students with skills and knowledge that would enhance learner progress and success. This study endeavours to contribute to developing knowledge in the field of CPD studies with a particular view on monitoring the impediments on effective implementation of CPD. The desktop research method was engaged. Basically, the desktop research involved collecting data from existing credible published resources. The authors sourced and reviewed literature on the topic from journal articles, published theses, books, magazines and newspapers. On the basis of the findings of this study, some recommendations were made. The primary recommendation of this study is to create CPD opportunities that promote teacher collaboration to inculcate a culture of collegiality, trust and knowledge sharing.

Keywords: *Continuous professional development, desktop research, impediments, effective, efficient, student success, collaboration, collegiality*

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

“It is universally accepted that teachers are major facilitators of educational activities. Teaching being an interactive activity based on learner and teacher means that the teaching/learning and school curriculum revolves and evolves around the educators” (Steyn, 2008; Steyn, 2010; Johns and Sosibo, 2019; Saleem et al, 2021). “That puts teacher quality as a powerful factor that matters significantly for student learning and success”.

“The role of the educator in the success of every student is of paramount importance in all educational situations”. “A part of the success of every educator is highly dependent upon his or her knowledge and skill” (Collin et al., 2012; Saleem et al, 2021). CPD is “the cornerstone for quality education to be realised in every school and the teaching fraternity is not an exception to the rule”

(Steyn, 2008; Bernadine, 2019; Tyagi and Misra, 2021). Furthermore, a part of every educator’s knowledge and skill is dependent upon his or her training. “However, schools can no longer solely rely on educators having undergone some teacher education training; educators need to continually update their knowledge and skills throughout their careers” (Haslam, 2010; Steyn, 2010; Cooper, 2016).

In order to avoid possible misconceptions by the readers, the term professional development is contextually defined below so that it is understood as used in this research. Professional development may mean different things to different people. Definitions would ideally add clarity and reduce confusion by establishing shared meanings. Kennedy (2009:41) defines continuous professional development as:

“... the conscious updating of professional knowledge and the improvement of professional competence throughout a person’s working life. It is a commitment to being professional, keeping up to date and consciously seeking to improve. Continuous professional development is the key to optimising a person’s career opportunities for today and for the future. It focuses on what you learn and how you develop throughout your career”.

Guskey (2000:16) agrees, adding that professional development is, *“...those processes and activities designed to enhance the professional knowledge, skills and attitudes of educators so that they might, in turn, improve students’ learning”.*

As may be observed, the above definitions interpret “professional teaching development as a ‘process,’ meaning to say it is systematic, deliberate as well as organised” (Whitehouse, 2010; Collin et al., 2012; Shaha et al., 2015). The common denominator is that the staff skills and competencies are improved upon in order to produce outstanding educational results for students. Additionally, CPD is lifelong in one’s working life. “Therefore, professional development of educators is the cornerstone for the provision of quality teaching and learning” (Bernadine, 2019). “It also implies that educators never cease to learn, CPD therefore, puts emphasis on lifelong learning zeroing-in on student achievement.” “In education, the term professional development may be used in reference to a wide variety of specialised training, formal/informal education or advanced professional learning intended to help educators, principals and other educational personnel improve their professional knowledge, competence, skill

and general effectiveness” (Evans, 2002; McDonough et al., 2010; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017)).

“Educational technology and curricula, for instance, are constantly changing, making it challenging, for educators to keep with trends and practices in the field” (Mizell, 2010). “Continuous professional development comes handy in transforming educators into better and more apt educators by enabling them to create relevant and tailored course instructions for today’s students” (Tsotetsi & Mahlomaholo, 2013; Huish, 2014). “The assumption with professional development is that when educators discover new teaching strategies, they are able to go back to the classroom and make changes to suit the needs of their learners. In fact, research shows that an inspiring and informed educator is the most important school-related factor influencing student achievement, so it is critical to pay close attention to how both new and experienced educators are supported” (Steyn, 2008; Mestry, Hendricks & Bisschoff, 2009, Bernadine, 2019, Johns & Sosibo, 2019).

“There are many forms of CPD programmes or activities available. These include workshops, consultation, expert coaching, peer coaching and courses that may enhance existing teacher professional qualifications” (Bernadine, 2019; Johns and Sosibo, 2019; Tyagi and Misra, 2021). “CPD activities further consist of demonstrations and peer observation, mentoring, inductions for beginner teachers, job rotation, teamwork, clustering of schools and school visits as well as designing and executing school improvements projects, lesson studies, reflective supervision and technical assistance” (Bernadine, 2019). “CPD programmes prevailing in schools may be summarized into three broad approaches namely, school-initiated, educator-initiated and externally-initiated”.

This research originates from the calls for more emphasis on educator professional development to support student achievement. “The notion of educator CPD is part of a wider debate on educator professionalism. The South African education system is in dire need of competent educators with relevant knowledge, skills and abilities to manage and develop their learners” (Steyn, 2008; Boaduo, 2010; Steyn, 2010). “Teachers in present day South Africa are expected to be reflective and change oriented thereby to meet the government and public demand for quality education” (Steyn, 2010). “This situation signifies the importance of CPD aimed at improving the quality of the teaching/learning process in particular, and improving the quality of education in general”.

“During the apartheid era, the South African education was organised into racially and ethnically divided sub-systems” (Bernadine, 2019). Since 1994, the education system was rationalised into one single education system. The introduction of a revised curriculum required teachers to have new knowledge and applied competence. It was on the basis of this that it was found to be critical that all teachers needed to enhance their skills for the delivery of the new curriculum. It was also emphasised in the National Policy Framework for Education and Development in South Africa that a large majority of teachers needed to strengthen their subject base, pedagogical content knowledge and teaching skills (Bernadine, 2019). “In South Africa, Continuing Professional Teacher Development (CPTD) is a system that encourages teachers to grow professionally”. According to SACE (2013), “CPTD is managed by the South African Council for Educators (SACE). The purpose of this study is therefore to identify the possible challenges that educators face in the implementation of CPTD and suggest improvement measures to the system”.

“When discussing CPD it is imperative that we are aware of the pros and cons of the system in limiting effective and efficient CPD programmes”. “While participants spoke passionately about CPD in research conducted in Limpopo Pietersburg Circuit secondary schools, they also heightened the difficulty at implementation due to time constraints, scarce resources and meagre funding amongst others” (Hasha, 2020). Many researchers have reported different hampering factors for CPD like time constraints, inaccessibility to programmes, lack of teacher motivation, as well as lacking in financial support (Steyn, 2008; Bernadine, 2019; John and Sosibo, 2019; Saleem et al, 2021; Tyagi and Misra, 2021). “Also identified as hindrances include unsupportive managers/officials, negative staff attitude, unavailability of programmes, family commitments and unsafe work environments” (Tyagi and Misra, 2021). “The intensity of these constraints increases where there is no systematic educational policy provisions”.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

To establish the factors that inhibit the implementation of CPD in South African schools.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

“Professional development of educators is a focal point of school improvement initiatives” (Steyn, 2010; Vracar, 2014; Huish, 2014). “The National Framework for Teacher Education and Development (2007) attempted to address the need for suitably qualified educators in South Africa. Hence, it is on record that the Department of Basic Education (DBE) in the Republic of South Africa challenges schools to accelerate progress in student achievement to meet stakeholder expectations”. The DBE (2017) analysis of the 2016 matric results for the Pietersburg Circuit in Polokwane indicates an average circuit pass rate of 78.4%; however, further

analysis shows “a worrisome low pass rate with some schools. For instance, Mango High School had 36%; Guava School 42.9%; Lemon 36.4%; Orange 57.2%; Apple 59.2%; and Grape Fruit Secondary School with 39.7% pass rate. Hence, this study was conducted to explore the influence of CPD programmes in enhancing student achievement.”

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This is a desktop research method that involved collecting and examining information that already exists on the internet, libraries, published journals and periodicals, magazines, published government reports and theses. It also draws on recent academic papers, books and reports from international organizations. Desktop research is secondary research where the researchers reviewed what other researchers had established. The data was found to be pertinent in providing baseline information in understanding CPD.

REVIEW AND DISCUSSION OF RELATED LITERATURE

In order to have more insight into the problem under investigation, a review of the related literature that focuses on the key concepts used in the current studies is necessary. The literature is based on what has been said by other authors about professional development. The purpose of the literature review is to acquire insight into the various literature based on professional development of the teaching personnel. “The assumption being that the body of evidence accumulated over decades would ideally provide research-based conclusions that can guide the development of effective continuous professional development programmes” (McDonough et al., 2010; Salo & Ronnerman, 2013; Cooper, 2016).

IMPEDIMENTS ON SUCCESS OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Guskey and Yoon (2009) assert “research syntheses confirm the difficulty of translating professional development into student achievement gains despite the intuitive and logical connection”. “The complaints about professional development have been well documented and most often cite several shortcomings, barriers or impediments that tend to militate against effective and efficient implementation of educator continuous professional development programmes”.

“Insufficient time leading to hurriedly put-up professional development programmes tend to compromise on the effectiveness of the programmes” (Guskey & Yoon, 2009; Gates & Gates, 2014). “Time is essential to effective professional development, and obviously, educators need time to deepen their understanding, analyse students’ work and develop new approaches to instruction” (Guskey, 2003; Cole, 2004; Macheng, 2016; Moonasar & Underwood, 2018). However, significant contrary evidence exists on abundant supply of time in implementing professional development. “For instance, a research analysis showed that differences in time spent in professional development activities were unrelated to improvements in student outcomes” (Guskey, 2003). In other words, “the amount of time spent in professional development was unrelated to achievement. While effective professional development surely requires time, it is clear that the time must be well organised, carefully structured and purposefully directed” (Guskey, 2003).

Research on educators, according to Guskey (2003), shows that “individual educators can collaborate to block change or inhibit progress just as easily as they can to enhance efficient process of professional development”. Mainly, educators value opportunities to work together, reflecting on their practices by sharing strategies and

exchanging ideas in promoting collegiality and collaboration. “For collaboration to bring its intended benefits, it too needs to be structured and purposeful, with efforts guided by clear goals for improving student learning” (Guskey, 2003; Berry et al., 2010; Burns; 2015).

Educators in undeveloped to developing countries or nations referred to as Third World, tend to face enormous barriers to quality professional development. Burns (2015:2) referred to such environments as, “...*fragile and crisis contexts*...” Burns (2015) “identified four barriers to educators’ professional development in fragile contexts as listed and expounded below”.

Difficult working conditions

Low, delayed or irregular remuneration, overcrowded classrooms and lack of teaching and learning materials may all contribute to difficult working conditions. Such conditions (both discretely and cumulatively) are often highly demotivating for educators and tend to affect educator characteristics, which are critical to effective teaching performance. Some educators become educators by necessity, and not by design. “Such educators may lack a strong professional identity or the desire to strengthen that identity, even in environments where respect for educators is high and even where education is seen as important or restorative” (Guskey, 2003; 2005; Burns, 2015; Bernadine, 2019).

Furthermore, if educators are poorly prepared for their profession and receive little or inadequate professional support, they may lack confidence particularly so if they teach students with acute emotional and academic needs. Burns (2015) asserts that such calibre of educators may doubt their own efficacy or ability to produce an intended result. As a result, student-educator relationships and the quality of

teaching and learning may be undermined thereby compromising on student learning.

Burns (2015) put forward a claim that “difficult working conditions, low status, gender bias, amongst others, often prompt educators to look for alternative work or resist any attempts to enhance increased professionalism”. Educators may view professional development as not resulting in their improvement in their own practice or leading to promotion

Systematic challenges

Fragile education systems are often characterised by poor leadership, limited administrative capacity or inadequate budgets. “Any attempts at professionally developing educators may render the effects nullified by problems associated with low quality and a limited variety of the tools used to observe and supervise educators and provide them with feedback about their teaching” (Caena, 2011; Burns, 2015; Johns and Sosibo, 2019).

Conflict

“Not every country is in literal conflict. However, professional development, for instance, offered to one social group at the exclusion of another may actually contribute to the exacerbation of some form of tension” (Burns, 2015). Racially segregated communities or inherited racially discriminatory tendencies (as is in almost all post-colonial states in Africa) are a potential for conflict.

Poorly designed professional development

“Poorly designed professional development programmes often are characterised by budget constraints, the lack of qualified facilitators, volatility and a host of other logistical challenges” (Burns (2015). Policy makers and donors may often have a misunderstanding about the best practices around educator learning. “Continuous professional development

programmes disconnected from policies around educator recruitment, assessment, retention and support may be futile” (Guskey & Yoon, 2009; DeMonte, 2013). Such programmes may be viewed by educators as low quality or irrelevant.

DeMonte (2013:4) put forward “shortcomings in effecting professional development programmes that tend to impede against efficient implementation;

- When it is usually disconnected from the everyday practice of teaching. Such kinds of training programmes are unlikely to positively influence teaching and improve student learning. Professional learning should honour the expertise of educators by taking into consideration educator prior knowledge and skills.
- When it is too generic and unrelated to the curriculum or to the specific instructional challenges that educators face. Ideally professional development programmes need to be aligned to the curriculum, school goals, assessment and other professional learning activities.
- When it is infrequent and implemented as a one-time event or led by an outside consultant who drops in to conduct a workshop and never returns to the school. Continuous professional development activities should include follow-up and continuous feedback.”

Based upon research conducted by Gates and Gates (2014), both educators and school administrators identified a number of barriers to moving closer to their ideal professional learning experiences. For educators, the most often-cited barriers are insufficient time, lack of financial resources to pay for the professional development they needed, learning that is not customised enough to the content they teach. “Together

with, the skills they need to develop, and a lack of continuity between professional development sessions” (Guskey & Yoon, 2009; Gates and Gates, 2014; Macheng, 2016). School administrators mostly cited a lack of time, training and resources as key barriers.

Below is a list of research responses established by Gates and Gates (2014:12), “indicating barriers to effective professional development of educators. The top three were the most cited, with the bottom three being the least cited.

- There is not enough time built into educators’ schedules for professional development.
- School administrative tasks make it difficult for school leaders to spend enough time on instruction.
- School leaders do not have enough time to support educator professional development effectively.
- School leaders do not receive enough training and support on how to develop the professional development at schools.
- School leaders have not received enough training on how to provide coaching and feedback to educators.
- School leaders do not have a clear understanding of the development needs of specific educators.
- The district (Department) does not allocate sufficient financial resources to professional development.
- The district’s (Department) professional development priorities change too often.
- Finding the right external professional development resources for schools is very challenging.
- District leadership does not make professional development a priority.
- External professional development providers are of poor quality”

A study conducted by Macheng (2016) on barriers of continuing professional development of educators in junior secondary schools in Botswana established the following as major barriers.

Time constraints

“It emerged that time is a constraint with regard to professional development of educators” (Guskey, 2000; Guskey, 2003; Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Burns, 2015; Bernadine, 2019; Johns and Sosibo, 2019). Sufficient time should be availed for educators to engage in professional development programmes. In addition, educators need abundant time to make professional development an on-going part of their work on a daily basis. “Nevertheless, educators in countries such as Germany, Japan and China have significant amount of time to engage in professional development activities” Macheng, 2016). In these countries, educators have smaller classes enabling them to spend part of the day conferring with students and colleagues on professional development matters.

Financial constraints

“Inadequate funding of educator development activities was also identified by research studies as one of the barriers to professional development of educators” (Steyn, 2008; Bernadine, 2019; Johns & Sosibo, 2019; Saleem et al 2019; Tyagi & Misra, 2021). The situation is made worse in situations where the government through the Department of Education may be the sole funder of professional development of educators.

Lack of support by school leadership

“Unsupportive school leadership emerged as one of the barriers of the professional development of educators”. One of the key roles of instructional leaders is to avail opportunities for educators to grow professionally. “Support by school management is critical in promoting

educator development and high-quality education” (Macheng, 2016). “When the school leadership is weak, it also tends to weaken the educators’ morale and services” (Berry et al., 2010; Bernadine, 2019; Tyagi & Misra, 2021).

Lack of expertise

Lack of trained personnel to manage professional development programmes is another issue of concern. According to Macheng (2016), “education managers are essential in capacitating school management. Their responsibility is to interpret and supervise the implementation of educational policy at their level of administration”. “They are expected to guide, direct and advise educators on professional development matters” (Guskey, 2003; Cole, 2004; DeMonte, 2013). However, for the principals or other school managers to deliver on their mandate, they need themselves to be knowledgeable and skilled for the job

Lack of ownership by educators

“Another barrier to professional development established by research studies is lack of educator ownership of professional development initiatives” (Steyn; 2008; Bernadine, 2019; Johns & Sosibo, 2019; Tyagi & Misra, 2021). “Educators were of the view that they had minimal to no input in the decisions about “what?” and “how?” of the professional development activities they had to participate in” (Guskey & Yoon, 2009; Berry et al., 2010; Caena, 2011). “One of the critical assumptions of the adult learning theory is that adults have a deep need to be self-directing as active participants in the learning process” (Trotter, 2006; Malik, 2016). Put in another way, adult learners (educators) dislike circumstances in which they feel that other people are imposing their will on them.

Unstructured in-service programmes

“Unstructured in-service programmes also surfaces as a barrier of professional development of educators” (Steyn, 2008; Bernadine, 2019). “Currently there is no policy framework at national level in Botswana, which directs continuing professional development of teachers” (Macheng, 2016). However, South Africa has such policy frameworks.

RECOMMENDATIONS

“Promoting a positive school climate is likely to have a significant benefit to both educators and students. Harmony amongst the teaching staff and management is ideal for effective implementation of CPD in schools (Bernadine, 2019; Johns & Sosibo, 2019). Educators are more likely to take part in CPD when they work in user-friendly school environments.

The researchers’ advice to the DBE is to establish and operate provincial CPD committees to advise on policy priorities, resource allocation, funding and budget matters and to monitor progress of CPD implementation plans. In addition, the committees must undertake training needs analysis, monitor, and evaluate the effectiveness of CPD. The annual budget plan should include clear fund allocations for educator scholarships/bursaries/grants and loans at provincial level. Focus must shift onto teachers in low-income and crisis-affected contexts for sponsorship (Burns, 2015).

Time constraints was highlighted in literature as prohibitive to effective implementation of CPD. Providing a variety of opportunities for professional development could make the much-desired difference. Internet studies and providing study-leave to attend full-time college and university courses could be another option. A link should be established with teacher centres for teachers to access technological resources with ease” (Bernadine, 2019).

CONCLUSION

In seeking to meet teachers’ professional development requirements, policy makers and other CPD office bearers and practitioners need to consider both how to support and encourage participation, and how to ensure that CPD programmes match teachers’ perceived needs (Steyn, 2008; Bernadine, 2019; Saleem et al, 2021). This must be balanced with the cost in terms of both finance and time. The challenge is to encourage a collaborative and participative culture where teachers are actively involved in joint activities and discussions in sharing knowledge and skills so as to improve the competence of teachers to enhance student achievement (Steyn, 2008). CPD can be a vehicle for teaching improvement and student success if it is prepared and given in an expert manner on a regular basis.

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