

Teaching Strategies for Rural Dysfunctional Schools: Can Teachers Make a Difference?

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ABSTRACT While there are strategies and models for teachers advocating for promotion of effective teaching in schools, these have not been successful in improving the quality of teaching in public secondary schools. The aim of this study was to develop a model which promotes the quality of teaching through teachers' professional development. Quantitative data was collected through closed-ended self-administered questionnaires. Two hundred teachers were sampled through simple random sampling procedure. Results show that though teachers were attempting to improve the quality of teaching in dysfunctional schools in rural areas, their efforts have been short lived. A model to assist in improving teachers' skills and the quality of teaching through their professional development has been developed. The model shows that teachers must be involved in the planning, conception and implementation of their professional development to improve their teaching skills. Teachers' professional development linked to promotional development would improve the quality of teaching and learning. The model promotes teacher observation process while teaching in class to improve skills.

INTRODUCTION

There are different kinds of teacher professional development models that have been and are still being developed and implemented in different countries to promote and support effective teachers' professional development from the beginning of their career until they retire (Villegas-Reimers 2003). These teachers' professional development strategies for effective teaching in schools have not been successful in improving the quality of teaching in rural dysfunctional public secondary schools. Rural schools are disadvantaged when considering several aspects which affect teacher performance including resources and HIV/AIDS status of teachers (Lumadi 2014) and personal professional development (Ravhuhali 2014) and increase in teenage pregnancies (Mbulaheni et al. 2014). A school becomes dysfunctional when, due to abnormal or impaired functioning, it fails to accomplish the true purpose of teaching and learning for which it was instituted (Pretorius 2014). Pretorius (2014) writes further that dysfunctional schools are characterised by unstable management conditions, inappropriate or lack of leadership, lack of vision, an unhealthy school climate and culture, and low staff and learner morale. Caena (2011) believes that there are key professional learning activities that enable teachers to tackle rapid changes which incorporate aspects

such as keeping teachers updated, allowing them to experiment and reflect on their practices and allow them to be innovative and to share knowledge among themselves. Caena (2011) states that there are prerequisites conditions which affect teacher learning (Balcazar and Nopo 2015) and can be linked with teacher professional development in which teachers improve their skills in the teaching of subjects they specialise in (Lumadi 2014) thereby benefiting the learners in the school. These conditions are psychological factors, thus teacher cognition and motivation, and organisational factors such as leadership, teacher collaboration, staff relationships and communication, locus of control, opportunities for teachers' learning (Caena 2011).

Porter et al. (2000) state that one of the strategies for effective teaching in rural schools is to ensure that See comment in PubMed Commons belowteachers are immersed in the subjects they teach, and have the ability both to communicate basic knowledge and to develop advanced thinking and problem-solving skills among their students in order to carry out the demands of education reform (Porter et al. 2000). Smith and Gillepsie (2007) note that there are two models of teachers' professional development for effective teaching which can be used to assist teachers to gain the needed knowledge, skills and strategies to bring about quality teaching and learning.

Mundry (2005) proposes that there should be a shift in beliefs about professional development to ensure that the professional development programmes are able to efficiently prepare teachers to impart thought-provoking content and to safeguard that all learners are able to meet the necessary criteria. Visscher and Coe (2002) state that teachers should be provided with opportunities to claim ownership and control over their own professional practices in order to sustain quality teaching and learning in schools.

Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995) indicate that in order to safeguard that professional development initiatives are able to bring about the set and expected standards for scholastic transformations, policies must support the modifications asked by teachers. As observed by Westaway (2015), the quality of schools differs fundamentally, and so are the policies in those schools. However, the policies must address the need to generate new opportunities or arrangements and openings outside and within the schools. These opportunities should include teachers' networks, inter-professional partnerships where the policies need to back-up the emerging systems of assessment, responsibility and advancement amongst teachers (Villegas-Reimers 2003).

Little (2001) states that policies that support educational reforms should at all times embrace incentives for teacher review, prospects for teacher analysis, teacher capacity for leadership in innovation and inquiry, respect for teacher authority, flexible school structure, receptive and caring administration, time, assets and supervisory flexibility.

Rodríguez and McKay (2010) propose some of the professional development activities that can be used by teachers to provide effective teaching in their schools. These professional development activities include mentoring, coaching, and peer observation, and opportunities for reflection which can be carried out or delivered individually, in pairs, or in groups (Rodríguez and McKay 2010). Birman et al. (2000) noted that professional development should incorporate dynamic learning prospects for teachers which include opportunities to observe and be observed while teaching. Subject teachers should be subjected to for classroom observation, whereby an administrator may just come in the classroom to check if the teacher is able to achieve all the obligatory necessities as shown

in the check list of criteria developed by a particular institution (Birman et al. 2000). Mavuso (2004) and Boaduo and Babitseng (2007) note that it is imperative that the Department of Education (DoE) should develop appropriate intervention strategy for teachers' professional development in their schools to ensure that teachers are provided with opportunities to exercise some forms of autonomy in articulating their professional needs (Mavuso 2004; Boaduo and Babitseng 2007). However, literatures by Du Preez and Roux (2008), Pierce and Hunsanker (1996) and Hooker (2010) show that in South Africa, teachers do not enjoy autonomy over curriculum development and are not in any way involved in the conception of their professional development programmes, whether in the form of the new curriculum or a professional development programme aimed at the promotion of quality teaching and learning.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a quantitative survey design. The population for this study consisted of curriculum specialist level 1 educators, heads of departments, deputy principals and principals from schools in the Vhembe District of the Limpopo province. Simple random sampling strategy was used to select two hundred (200) teachers from both primary and secondary schools. A five-point Likert scale, self-constructed questionnaire consisting of thirty two statements was used to establish how teachers can make a difference on effective teaching in rural dysfunctional schools to promote quality teaching and learning. The five-point Likert scale measures ranged from strongly disagree (0) through disagree (1), not sure (2) agree (3) to strongly agree (4). Data was analysed with the computer loaded with SPSS programme. Results were presented through tables showing frequencies and frequency percentages.

RESULTS

The respondents' age ranged from 20 to 51 years and above with teaching experiences ranging from 1-16 years and more. The majority (40%) of respondents who participated in the study, as shown in the below have either Primary / Secondary Teachers' Diploma as their highest professional qualification. Thirty-six (36%) of re-

spondents have Standard Ten or Grade Twelve as their highest academic qualification while 34.5 percent of the respondents have Bachelor of Education Honours as their highest academic qualifications. Tables and figures are used to present data for the study. Results are presented with the help of tables and figures.

1. Planning Professional Development Initiatives to Promote Learning

The majority (82%) of respondents (Table 1) indicated that teachers should plan their own professional development initiatives to promote their own learning.

Table 1: Teachers' professional development planning

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Strongly agree	57	28.5
Agree	107	53.
Not sure	15	7.5
Disagree	19	9.5
Strongly disagree	2	1.0
Total	200	100.0

2. Linking Teacher Professional Development with Financial Rewards

More than three quarters (86%) of respondents (Table 2) agreed that teachers' professional development should be linked to financial rewards.

Table 2: Link professional development to financial rewards

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Strongly agree	84	42.0
Agree	88	44.0
Not sure	16	8.0
Disagree	10	5.0
Strongly disagree	2	1.0
Total	200	100.0

3. Academic professional development

A little more than half of respondents (53.5%) (Table 3) agreed that teachers must be forced to further their studies as part of professional development in promoting quality teaching and learning in schools.

Table 3: Academic professional development

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Strongly agree	47	23.5
Agree	60	30
Not sure	18	9
Disagree	55	27.5
Strongly disagree	20	10
Total	200	100.0

4. Linking Teachers' Professional Development with Promotional Opportunities

The majority, 82.5 percent, (Table 4) of respondents indicated that teachers' professional development should be linked with teachers' promotion.

Table 4: Teachers' professional development must be linked with teachers' promotion

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Strongly agree	89	44.5
Agree	76	38
Not sure	10	5
Disagree	19	9.5
Strongly disagree	6	3
Total	200	100.0

DISCUSSION

Respondents agreed that the selection for attendance of workshops should take into consideration teachers' classroom needs. Berry et al. (2010) suggested that in order to have a professional development for more effective teaching, such professional development initiatives or programmes should be teacher-led, selected by individuals or groups based on needs related to the subjects and students they teach. One of the primary focuses of such professional development programs should be on issues related to student learning (Hawley and Valli 1999). Teachers' needs should always take priority for interventions to emerge which might be perceived as inadequate to meet the needs of the teachers (Baird and Rowsey 1989; Rhodes and Benicke 2003). However, Rodríguez and McKay (2010) cautioned that experienced teachers are likely to need professional development that affirms the knowledge, experience, and intuitive

judgment they have cultivated during their careers. These results suggest that teacher professional development should take into consideration different teaching experiences; teaching levels and different academic qualifications of teachers for it to be sustainable. This would ensure that professional development workshops do benefit teachers with regard to their classroom needs, and would serve to avoid what Baird and Rowsey (1993) call 'the unsatisfactory objectives of professional development programmes' which are always not congruent with teachers' personal and classroom needs.

These results (Table 1) suggest that teachers should be the one who should plan their own professional development initiatives rather than having those initiatives planned by other people and such initiatives should take into consideration their own classroom needs. School-based in-service training, as part of professional development of teachers, should ensure that teachers are involved in the identification and articulation of their own training needs (Milondzo 2003; Ravhuhali 2014). Mc Diarmid (1995) concurred to this and noted that for teachers to make progress in their developmental process of learning new practices, they need to feel that they can critically assess their own practice. Teachers need to feel that there are opportunities for growth and promotion for them to stay motivated in undertaking their own professional development initiatives (Kutame et al. 2014). School administrators should provide guidance to teachers' professional development. Jones (1990) indicated that school administrators, in their efforts to improve teachers' professional development, need to create public support for long-term, sustained professional development.

Teachers feel good and motivated and their mental health (which is vital in sustaining quality teaching and learning) is promoted (Kutame et al. 2014) when they are involved in the conception and implementation of their own professional development initiatives while being supported by the school management and financially by the Department of Education. When teachers are involved in conception and implementation of teachers' professional development programmes; such professional development will require teachers' actions for it to be more effective (Pierce and Hunsanker 1996). The majority (82%) of respondents agreed (Table 1) that

teachers should be involved in the conception and implementation of teachers' professional development programmes. The involvement of teachers in the conception and implementation of teachers' professional development programmes enables them to share materials and ideas as well as discuss challenges and solutions (Hooker 2010). Attendance of professional development workshops must take into consideration their classroom needs. Studies by Du Preez and Roux (2008) and Ravhuhali (2014) show that sometimes teachers feel that new ideas about curriculums are imposed on them without being offered an opportunity to contribute. This helps teachers to become models of lifelong learners (Hooker 2010). These results may suggest that involving teachers in the conception and implementation of teachers professional development programmes is one of the key strategies towards sustaining growth of teacher skills to promote the quality of teaching and learning. This strategy allays fears and avoids making teachers feel that they are left out from the processes that affects their professional development. However, if a professional development program is not developed directly by teachers themselves, they should at least have a high degree of input (Boyd 1993).

Teachers (Table 2) want to see professional development linked to additional financial rewards and salary progression so that they may be motivated (Mizala and Nopo 2014; Ravhuhali 2014). Teachers' continuous professional development in Poland, Portugal, Slovakia and Slovenia are clearly linked to career advancement and salary increases (OECD 2010). In countries such as Luxembourg and Spain, teachers who enrol for a certain amount of training are eligible for a salary bonus while in some other countries; credits may be acquired via participation in continuous professional development programmes and are taken into account for purposes of promotion (OECD 2010).

More than three-quarters (82%) of respondents agreed that teachers should have classroom observation as part of professional development, after which they should be given a feedback on how they should improve. Teachers must be willing to be observed while teaching in class. Guidance by the school administrators must be given based on the observations by peers in order to improve the teaching skills while

promoting the quality of teaching and learning. Israel (2012) found that the most positive benefit of teacher-to-teacher observation is that it makes teaching a public rather than a private act. Professional development should incorporate active learning for teachers which include opportunities to observe and be observed while teaching; to plan classroom implementation, such as practicing in simulated conditions, and developing lesson plans; to review student works; and to present, lead and write, thus, for example, present a demonstration, lead a discussion or write a report (Birman et al. 2000; Bourke 2001). Teacher observation should be part of professional development strategies which enables teachers to acquire new skills and then model those to their colleagues in the classroom, watching each other teach and providing regular feedback to each other.

Results (Table 3) suggest that teachers need to be encouraged to further their studies as part of professional development in promoting quality teaching and learning in schools. However, Noh et al. (2004) and Baird and Rowsey (1989) note that imposing a training programme on teachers without considering their needs makes little sense, as teachers always complain that a lot of time being is being spent during in-service programmes and activities. Broad and Evans (2006) cautioned that teachers, as adults learners, might be much less likely to be motivated to learn if they feel disconnected from the content, or that their prior, personal knowledge and experience is not valued, or no investment or engagement in the activity, or if they believe it is not relevant to their needs, so that there had to be some form of engaging and encouraging them to further their studies.

These results are consistent with the results which shows that the majority, 83 percent, of respondents felt that linking teachers' professional development initiatives with teachers' salary progression encourages teachers to develop their teaching skills through involvement in those professional development initiatives. These findings show that teachers want to see professional development being linked with promotion in their workplace. The results may suggest that teachers want to be rewarded with promotion and also salary progression (Ravhuhali 2014) upon completion of a professional development training as that encourages teachers to develop their teaching skills. In line with these

results Eurydice (2008) noted that in some other countries of the world such as Belgium, regular participation in professional development training is taken into account in the promotion of teachers (Table 4). These results may also suggest that one of the strategies that can be used to enhance teachers' positivity towards their professional development in promoting quality teaching and learning in our schools is by linking teachers' professional development with teachers' promotion.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that teachers need assistance on strategies for teaching learners in rural schools. The researchers developed the following strategy for teachers' professional development guided by the results from this study, which should assist teachers with strategies for teaching learners in rural dysfunctional schools.

1. The planning processes and conception of the Teachers' Professional Development needs to involve teachers. Teachers' Professional Development initiatives should be done in collaboration with institutions of higher learning.
2. Both the schools and the Department of Basic Education should constantly support teachers in their quest to undertake professional development initiatives. Orientation, induction, mentoring and coaching as part of professional development should be provided to newly appointees.
3. Both young and old, less and most experienced teachers should be self-motivated to undertake the Teachers' Professional Development for effective teaching and learning, planning their own the Teachers' Professional Development to promote own lifelong learning.
4. Teachers should be given rewards in the form certifications, remunerations (financial rewards), personal growth and career development, and improved teaching knowledge, skills and strategies.
5. When teachers are self-motivated to undertake the Teachers' Professional Development initiatives by the quest to gain more pedagogical and subject content knowledge, and are financially supported by the schools, Department of Basic Education and the Department of Higher Education and Training

through bursaries and scholarships, they will continue to be engaged in their professional development for quality teaching and learning.

6. Teachers' professional development needs to be evaluated after 2-3 years of its conception and implementation to check for its effectiveness in equipping teachers with pedagogical and subject content skills and knowledge in promoting quality teaching and learning.
7. When teachers are adequately supported by their schools, Department of Basic Education and the Department of Higher Education and Training, and are equipped with pedagogical and subject knowledge and strategies which enable the enhancement of teaching skills through teachers' professional development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study recommends that teachers' should be involved in the conception and implementation of teachers' professional development programmes to ensure that new ideas about curriculums and professional development are not seen to be imposed upon them. This can ensure that teachers are being offered an opportunity to contribute and share their experience of what works in their practice and what does not.

Teachers should plan their own professional development initiatives to promote their own learning and it must be within themselves to ensure that they continue to upgrade and to update themselves with current educational dynamics, through further studies and other professional development initiative available.

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