

Teachers' Perceptions of the Impact of Continuing Professional Development on Promoting Quality Teaching and Learning

F. Ravhuhali, A.P. Kutame and H.N. Mutshaeni

*School of Education, University of Venda, Thohoyandou, Limpopo, South Africa 0945
E-mail: rasglennie@yahoo.com*

KEYWORDS Content Knowledge. Teachers' Skills. Teacher Evaluation. Classroom Teaching

ABSTRACT The aim of this study was to investigate teachers' perceptions of the impact of Continuing Professional Development on promoting quality teaching and learning. This study adopted a mixed method approach using both quantitative and qualitative research designs. Closed-ended self-administered questionnaires and interview schedule were used to collect data. Two hundred teachers were sampled through simple random sampling procedure to complete the questionnaires, while ten teachers participated in face-to-face semi-structured interviews. The results show that teachers recognise the impact of professional development in broadening their pedagogical and content knowledge, teaching skills and strategies to improve student's learning. Results also show that teachers are undergoing professional development initiatives in order to gain financial rewards. The study concludes that teachers have positive perceptions of their professional development even though they are not being supported adequately by Department of Basic Education and their schools. The study recommends that adequate financial rewards be put in place to encourage and motivate teachers when furthering their studies as part of Continuing Professional Development. Further research into the factors influencing teachers furthering their studies as part of professional development in South Africa should be undertaken.

INTRODUCTION

Major (2015) states that the high-achieving education systems around the world are those which are investing heavily in the learning and Professional Development (PD) of their teachers. It is through this good quality professional development that real improvements in teaching and attainment take place.

Major states the following regarding the importance of professional development to teachers:

We need teachers who have both subject and pedagogical knowledge and who have a career pathway that recognises, as in other professions, that their professional development doesn't stop when they qualify but is renewed throughout their career. Too often, professional development is seen as something to fill the statutory training days rather than an integral part of every teacher's career. We all have a responsibility to get this right. In many countries, teaching is now a Masters level profession (2015:10).

Despite the good things about PD, teachers' perceptions on the impact of professional development in promoting quality teaching and learning vary from one teacher to another. There has been mixed perceptions amongst teachers in South Africa regarding the promotion of qual-

ity teaching and learning through their professional development. Teachers perceive the relevance and contribution of their professional development with discontent. Professional Development programmes in South Africa has revealed evidently that the majority of teachers are unable to reflect critically on their own practice or to try out new solutions to solve problems they come across daily (Steyn 2008). Button (2010) notes perceptions of teachers have the potential to shape the world they inhabit and are shaped tremendously by social forces. Such social changes can result in teachers having skewed or biased perceptions of some of the people they deal with on a daily basis as well as teaching (Gnawli 2008). Button (2010) indicates that changes in teacher salaries and pension funds can affect teachers on a deep level, causing them to feel that society does not appreciate the difficulty of their job.

Barnard (2004) and Richards (2002) indicate that many teachers are resistant to transformation, specifically to professional development activities, as they do not see the importance of staff development in their profession and simply don't see a reason why they should grow professionally. Archibald et al. (2011) state that fragmented system of standards, assessments, and teacher evaluation in professional development programme are some of the issues that

are frustrating to teachers and are hindering the application of their professional learning.

Teachers might perceive that it is ineffective for them to engage solely in individual learning experiences isolated from their colleagues and lacking follow-up and feedback (Archibald et al. 2011). Archibald et al. (2011) indicate that even though the structures and opportunities for effective professional learning are good, they might prove to be inadequate without teacher motivation to engage in those experiences. Archibald et al. (2011) add that teachers must have a sense of achievement and should always see growth and advancement opportunities in their work to motivate them to engage themselves in the professional development programmes as stated in Herzberg's Two-factor Theory (1959).

Price (2008) argues that among other reasons, teachers' feeling of being isolated when professional development programmes and or initiatives are planned creates one of the most formidable roadblocks to change and professional development. This is due to the fact that it is a common practice for professional development to be planned by the principal, districts, provincial or national government with the sole intentions of achieving dramatic improvements in classroom teaching and student performance (Price 2008). Murphy (2002) and Rivero (2006) state that the majority of professional development initiatives are simply 'one size fits all courses' which are traditionally short-term, disjointed, and are often held outside of the school day, in physical locations and contexts that are far removed from the classroom. Gates and Gates (2014) indicate that much of the professional development initiatives are simply not working the benefit of teachers. Teachers often view such professional development offerings irrelevant, not effective, and most important of all, not connected to their core work of helping students learn (Gates and Gates 2014; Ravhuhali 2014).

Reeves (2005) states that another explanation for teachers' doubt is the disappointing history of professional development. Teachers think that they are being offered once-off professional development systems that are failing to provide the support necessary to sustain educational change and reform (Reeves 2004). As Gonzalez and Darling-Hammond (1997) observed, "most teachers have experienced one or more sessions in which experts from outside the

schools present ideas...in the manner of traveling salesmen".

Reeves (2005) adds that teacher cynicism may well colour their attitudes toward all professional development initiatives, regardless of the subject matter. Thus, considering teachers' history with professional development, innovative pre-service and in-service training for teachers should be an educational imperative. Archibald et al. (2011) note that it is unfortunate that despite all this teachers' dissatisfactions, some countries still continue to deliver professional learning activities that are not marked by the defining characteristics of high-quality professional development and fail to include an accountability mechanism (Archibald et al. 2011). Adding miseries to the teachers' dislike, such professional activities occur in large-group settings away from classrooms and schools (Elmore 2002). At some point teachers are being asked to do things they don't know, at the same time, are not being asked to engage their own ideas, values and energies in the learning process, something that is always seen as a shift in professional development from building capacity to demanding compliance (Elmore 2002). Elmore (2002) further indicate that in some other occasions administrators can create professional development as training in discrete skills those teachers feel have limited or no applicability to their real work.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a concurrent mixed method design in which both quantitative survey and qualitative phenomenological approaches were utilised. The survey design was utilised as it is regarded as an excellent vehicles for measuring perceptions and orientations in a large population, in this case teachers (Babbie 2010). Phenomenological design was also suited to this study as it is aimed at understanding and interpreting the meaning that teachers give to their everyday lives (de Vos et al. 2005). This was done to ensure methodological and data triangulation, and most importantly to strengthen the study's validity, reliability and trustworthiness, and greater credibility of the findings. The population for this study consisted of both primary and secondary schools teachers in Vhembe District. A simple random sampling procedure was used to select respondents and participants to

this study. Two hundred teachers were sampled from a population of 800 teachers from both primary and secondary schools in the Vhembe District of Limpopo Province (South Africa). Closed-ended Teachers' Perceptions Questionnaire with five point Lickert scale was utilised for quantitative data collection, while interview schedule was used for qualitative data collection. Ten teachers participated in face-to-face semi-structured interviews. A computer loaded with Statistical Package for Social Science version 21 was utilised for Quantitative data was analysis. Frequencies, frequency percentages and cross tabulations (to establish significance levels) was done. Atlas.ti was utilised for Qualitative data analysis.

RESULTS

Broadening of Teachers' Pedagogical Knowledge

The results reflected in Table 1 indicate that the majority (92%) of respondents agreed that teachers' professional development helps teachers to broaden their pedagogical knowledge.

Table 1: Professional development and pedagogical knowledge

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Strongly agree	97	48.5
Agree	87	43.5
Not sure	13	6.5
Disagree	3	1.5
Total	200	100.0

These results are in line with qualitative findings which show that professional development of teachers helps teachers to acquire skills to teach better. One participant who is Curriculum Specialist level 1 primary school teacher had this to say:

It is the development of teachers to acquire more skills about their careers and to promote quality teaching and learning in schools, and the upgrading and development of teachers' skills for competency in their field and efficiency in their areas of operation at schools.

Provision of Teaching Strategies to Improve Student's Learning.

The majority (95%) of respondents in Table 2 agreed that teachers' professional development provides teachers with strategies to improve how students learn.

Table 2: Professional development and student's learning

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Strongly agree	106	53.0
Agree	84	42.0
Not sure	7	3.5
Disagree	3	1.5
Total	200	100.0

Teachers' Professional Development is a Useful Strategy to Improve Learners' Understanding

The results reflected in Table 3 show the majority (91.5%) of respondents agreed that teachers' professional development is a useful strategy that teachers can use to improve learners' understanding.

Table 3: Professional development and learners' understanding

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Strongly agree	81	40.5
Agree	102	51.0
Not sure	13	6.5
Disagree	3	1.5
Strongly disagree	1	.5
Total	200	100.0

Teachers' Professional Development workshops help to increase teachers' knowledge to engage with learners in the classroom.

The findings in Table 4 show that the majority of respondents (95%) indicated that teachers' professional development workshops help them to increase their knowledge which is useful when engaging with learners in the classroom.

Table 4: Teachers' professional development workshops

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Strongly agree	115	57.5
Agree	74	37.0
Not sure	4	2.0
Disagree	5	2.5
Strongly disagree	1	.5
Total	200	100.0

These results are supported by qualitative findings where one participant who is a Curriculum Specialist level 1 primary teacher who indicated that through the professional development ini-

tiatives she was able to gain some knowledge to can teach.

When the participant was probed as to why other teachers are critical of the professional development workshops this was her response:

Yes, we might not be happy with the one day workshops...but what choice do we have? At least I always come back with something and can do one-two three things.

Teachers Have Undergone Professional Development Programs

The results as shown in Table 5 indicate that the majority, 83.5 percent, of respondents agreed that they have undergone teachers' professional development programs.

Table 5: Teachers and professional development programs

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	67	33.5
Agree	100	50.0
Not sure	16	8.0
Disagree	15	7.5
Strongly disagree	2	1.0
Total	200	100.0

These findings indicate that teachers have engaged themselves in some kinds of teachers' professional development programs. However, one participant who is a head of department was very critical about the kind of some of these professional development programs they have undergone. A head of department (Secondary school Head of Department) had this to say:

To be honest with you, it is very much pathetic. I don't know whether I can call it a program or just another ordinary meeting where we were/are gathered to be told to do things which are needed to be completed in three to five years and it was/is enforced in one day, and you cannot say that is development program because development programmes takes different stages.

Teachers who Improve Their Teaching Skills Through Further Studies, Teach Better

The majority of respondents (88%) in Table 6 agreed that teachers, who improve their teaching skills through further studies, teach better.

Table 6: Further studies and professional development

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	110	55.0
Agree	66	33.0
Not sure	15	7.5
Disagree	6	3.0
Strongly disagree	3	1.5
Total	200	100.0

However, qualitative results show that teachers bemoan the kind of support they receive from the Department of Basic Education which is seemingly not assisting all the teachers who are furthering their studies. One of the participants who is a secondary school Deputy Principal had this to say:

Since the Department of Education is not providing all the teachers with bursaries, the least it can do to motivate teachers is to provide better salaries on completion of a professional development program, as the cash bonus for upgrading one's qualifications is not good enough.

Teacher Professional Development enhances teachers' quality of teaching in their learning areas. Teachers' professional development programs enhance teachers' quality of teaching in their learning areas. Qualitative results also show that most of the participants perceive that professional development programs enhance teachers' quality of teaching in their learning areas. One participant who is a primary school Principal who had this to say:

Because teaching is an on-going process, teachers should acquire new ideas, more knowledge and skills on how to deliver the subject content in their classes effectively and that can only be achieved only if teachers are furthering their studies.

DISCUSSION

The results reflected in Table 1, indicate that the majority (92%) of respondents agreed that teachers' professional development helps teachers to broaden their pedagogical knowledge. These findings are consistent with Cochran-Smith (2005) who note that the emerging paradigm of professional development aims to develop teachers' knowledge and pedagogical practices with a specific focus on improving student

achievement. In line with findings from considerable literature (Villegas-Reimers 2003; Jita and Mokhele 2014; Ravhuhali 2014) shows that experienced teachers' pedagogical content knowledge and pedagogical content beliefs can be affected by professional development programmes and that such changes are associated with changes in their classroom instructions and student achievement.

The majority (95%) of respondents in Table 2 agreed that teachers' professional development provides teachers with strategies to improve how students learn. Teachers should be empowered and trained (Lumadi 2014) to handle any activity promoting the quality of teaching and learning. In line with the findings, Whitcomb et al. (2009) and Joyce and Showers (2002) note that professional development programs for teachers is based on curricular and instructional strategies that have a high probability of affecting students' learning and ability to learn and enhance teachers' abilities to predict how students will approach specific tasks, anticipate student errors, and determine which instructional strategies may or may not work for particular students.

In agreement with Pretorius (2014) the results reflected in Table 3 show the majority (91.5%) of respondents agreed that teachers' professional development is a useful strategy that teachers can use to improve learners' understanding. Pretorius (2014) indicates that every school should have a plan for the continuous professional development of its teaching staff in place. The findings by Carpenter et al. (1989) show that professional development programs which are focused on student thinking can help teachers increase their understanding of children's mathematical understandings and misconceptions enhance their ability to build on children's understanding in their teaching, and improve students' problem-solving skills.

The findings in Table 4 show that the majority of respondents (95%) indicated that teachers' professional development workshops help them to increase their knowledge which is useful when engaging with learners in the classroom. Harwell (2003) articulates that professional development deepens teachers' knowledge of the subjects being taught, sharpen teaching skills in the classroom and also help teachers keep up with developments in the individual

fields, and in education generally. The findings by Opfer and Pedder (2010) and Boyle et al. (2004) also show that teachers' knowledge improves after participating in professional development changes in teacher attitudes and beliefs as a result of participation in the professional development activities (Jita and Mokhele 2014; Ravhuhali 2014), they can also be observed, which may include changes in 'planning', 'teaching style' and 'assessment practices'.

The results as shown in Table 5 indicate that the majority of teachers (83.5%) agreed that they have undergone teachers' professional development programs. These findings indicate that teachers have engaged themselves in some kinds of teachers' professional development programs. However, the qualitative results show that teachers were very critical of professional development programs they have undergone. Teachers cited lack of adequate time for professional development initiatives, in agreement with Phillips (2014) as they are only exposed to professional development initiatives that only last for few hours for something that is supposed to be done in three to five years. Inadequate teaching is of the factors deemed to produce overall dysfunctionality (Westaway 2015). Teachers value times spent on planning as critical and therefore want that their time be spent on engaging in tailored, high-value professional development programmes (Phillips 2014). Steyn (2008) was also critical of teachers' professional development in South Africa where such professional development programmes or workshops initiatives are only utilised to train teachers in the implementation of new policies such as Outcomes Based Education, National Curriculum Statement and now Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement, and not to improve teachers' classroom practice. This is also supported by the Report of the Ministerial Committee on Rural Education (2007) which indicates that by 2007, the vast majority of teachers in South Africa had limited access to professional development.

The results in Table 6 show that the majority of teachers (88%), who improve their teaching skills through further studies, teach better. These findings in Table 6 are supported by literature (Bolam and Weindling 2006; Jita and Mokhele 2014) who indicated that a well-structured professional development can lead to successful changes in teachers' practice, school improvement and improvements in pupils' achievement.

Smith and Gillespie (2007) also found that teacher preparation such as certification or degree in the subject that the teacher is teaching, for example, a degree in Mathematics rather than a degree in education, as well as the level of formal education and level of experience plays an important role in teacher quality and student achievement. However, qualitative results show that teachers bemoan the kind of support they receive from the Department of Basic Education which is seemingly not assisting all the teachers who are furthering their studies. Qualitative results show that teachers perceive that the Department of Basic Education is not providing all the teachers with bursaries to study further or salary increments at the completion of further studies as part of professional development initiatives.

The majority of teachers (84%) perceive that professional development programs enhance teachers' quality of teaching in their learning areas. The results indicate that teachers are able to provide and promote quality teaching and learning in their classes through professional development. Considerable literature (Ingvarson et al. 2005; Jita and Mokhele 2014; Ravhuhali 2014) state that professional development for teachers is a vital component of educational policies that is able to enhance teachers' quality of teaching and learning in our schools. The results are supported by Ravhuhali (2014) who found that teachers perceive the importance of professional development as it helps them to acquire new ideas, more knowledge and skills on how to deliver the subject content in their classes effectively, something that can be achieved only if teachers are furthering their studies.

CONCLUSION

Even though teachers are not being supported adequately by Department of Basic Education and their schools, they perceive the impact of professional development positively. Both experienced and inexperienced teachers recognise the positive impact of professional development in broadening their pedagogical and content knowledge, and teaching skills and strategies to improve student's learning. Teachers are undergoing professional development initiatives in order to gain financial rewards and not necessarily to develop themselves profession-

ally to promote quality teaching and learning in schools.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Teachers should be provided with adequate time for professional development workshops. Teachers should be supported by both the Department of Basic Education and their schools. Teacher Professional Development should be linked with financial rewards such as increment in teachers' salary and promotions. Teachers should be involved in the planning and conception of their continuing professional development, taking into consideration their own classroom needs, and be involved in the implementation thereof. Teachers should be subjected to voluntarily classroom observation as part of professional development. Teachers should be provided with enough time to attend workshops for their professional development. It is also recommended that further research into the factors influencing teachers' furthering their studies as part of professional development in South Africa.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We acknowledge the National Research Foundation for funding this project.

REFERENCES

- Archibald S, Cogshall JG, Croft A, Goe L 2011. High-Quality Professional Development for All Teachers: Effectively Allocating Resources. Research and Policy Brief. From <<http://www.tqsource.org>.retrieved> (Retrieved on 29 September 2014).
- Babbie E 2010. *The Practice of Social Research*. 12th Edition. Belmont, California: Wadsworth.
- Boyle B, Lamprianou I, Boyle T 2005. A longitudinal study of teacher change: What makes professional development effective? Report of the second year of the study. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 16: 1-27.
- Boyle B, While D, Boyle T 2003. A Longitudinal Study of Teacher Change: What Makes Professional Development Effective? University of Manchester, Institute for Political and Economic Governance, *Working Paper No. 1*. Manchester: University of Manchester.
- Bolam R, Weindling D 2006. *Synthesis of Research and Evaluation Projects Concerned with Capacity-building Through Teachers' Professional Development*. London: General Teaching Council for England.
- Barnard R 2004. *A Qualitative Study of Teachers' Perceptions of Staff Development in Three Public North-*

- east Tennessee Elementary School Districts*: PhD Thesis, Unpublished. Johnson City: East Tennessee State University
- Button A 2012. Theories on Teacher Perception and Social Change. From <<http://www.the.academia.edu/perrydenbrok/papers/170398htm>> (Retrieved on 17 September 2012).
- Carpenter P, Fennema E, Peterson PL, Chiang C, Loeff M 1989. Using knowledge of children's mathematics thinking in classroom teaching: An experimental study. *American Educational Research Journal*, 26: 499–531.
- Cochran-Smith M, Lytle SL 1992. Communities for teacher research: Fringe or forefront? *American Journal of Education*, 100: 298-324.
- De Vos AS, Strydom H, Fouche CB, Delpont CSL 2005. *Research at Grass Roots: For the Social Sciences and Human Service Professions*. 3rd Edition. Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.
- Elmore RF 2002. Bridging the Gap Between Standards and Achievement: The Imperative for Professional Development in Education. From <http://www.ashankerinst.org/Downloads/Bridging_Gap.pdf> (Retrieved on 31 March 2006).
- Gates B, Gates M 2014. Teachers Know Best: Teachers' Views on Professional Development. From <<http://collegeready.gatesfoundation.org/sites/default/files/Gates-PDMarketResearch-Dec5.pdf>> (Retrieved on 13 April 2015).
- Gnawli L 2008. Teachers as Social Change Agents. British Council BBC. From <<http://www.the.academia.edu/perrydenbrok/papers/170398.htm>> (Retrieved on 17 September 2012).
- Harwell SH 2003. *Teacher Professional Development: It's Not an Event; it's a Process* Vice President, Professional Development. *CORD, The National Staff Development Council's Standards for Staff Development*. Revised Edition. The DART Model, 2002. Florida Department of Education.
- Herzberg F, Mausner B, Snyderman BB 1959. *The Motivation to Work*. New York: John Wiley.
- Ingvarson L, Meiers M, Beavis A 2005. Factors affecting the impact of professional development programs on teachers' knowledge, practice, student outcomes and efficacy. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 13: 1-28.
- Jita LC, Mokhele ML 2014. When teacher clusters work: Selected experiences of South African teachers with the cluster approach to professional Development. *South African Journal of Education*, 34(2): 1-15.
- Joyce B, Showers B 2002. *Student Achievement through Staff Development*. Alexandria, Virginia: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Lumadi MW 2014. Reversing the trend of dismal performance in disadvantaged schools: A curriculum evaluation exercise. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 5(6): 243-249.
- Major LE 2015. Developing Teachers Improving Professional Development for Teachers: Improving Social Mobility Through Education. The Sutton Trust. January 2015.04.13 From <http://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/DEVELOPING_TEACHERS-FINAL.pdf> (Retrieved on 13 April 2015).
- Murphy M 2002. Let's change staff development to professional learning. *Principal*, 81: 16-17.
- Opfer VD, Pedder D 2010. Benefits, Status and Effectiveness of Continuous Professional Development for Teachers in England. *The Curriculum Journal*, 21: 413–431. From <<http://www.dx.doi.org/10.1080/09585176.2010.529651>> (Retrieved on 26 December 2012).
- Phillips V 2014. Teachers Know Best: Teachers' Views on Professional Development. Impatient Optimists. From <<http://www.impatientoptimists.org/Posts/2014/12/Teachers-Know-Best-Teachers-Views-on-Professional-Development#comment-1763330432>> (Retrieved on 20 April 2015).
- Pretorius SG 2014. Educators' perceptions of school effectiveness and dysfunctional schools in South Africa. *Journal of Social Science*, 40(1): 51-64.
- Price BP 2008. *Teacher Perceptions of the Impact of Professional Development and Teacher-Student Relationships on School Climate*: PhD Thesis, Unpublished. Auburn: Alabama University.
- Ravuhali F 2014. *Teachers' Perceptions on the Impact of Professional Development on Promoting Quality Teaching and Learning*. PhD Thesis, Unpublished. Thohoyandou: University of Venda.
- Reeves JR 2005. Secondary teacher attitudes towards including English-language learners in mainstream classrooms. *Journal of Educational Research*, 99: 131-141.
- Richards J 2002. Why teachers resist change (and what principals can do about it). *Principal*, 81: 75-77.
- Rivero V 2006. Teaching your staff. *American School Board Journal*, 193: 54-55.
- Smith C, Gillespie M 2007. Research on Professional Development and Teacher Change: Implications for Adult Basic Education. From <<http://www.ed.gov/teachers/how/tools/initiative/factsheet.pdf>> (Retrieved on 26 June 2011).
- Steyn GM 2008. Continuing professional development for teachers in South Africa and social learning systems: Conflicting conceptual frameworks of learning. Department of Further Teacher Education. University of South Africa, Pretoria. *Koers*, 73: 15-31.
- Villegas-Reimers E 2003. *Teacher Professional Development: An International Review of the Literature*. Paris: UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning.
- Westaway A 2015. Towards an Explanation of the Functionality of South Africa's 'Dysfunctional' Schools. *Grocotts Mail*, 23 January 2015, Grahamstown.