

## Professional Development as a Tool for Promoting Quality Teaching and Learning: Teachers' Perspectives

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**ABSTRACT** In South Africa the relevance and contribution of teachers' professional development in promoting quality teaching and learning is perceived by teachers with discontent. There have been continued calls by teachers' unions for total disengagement of the Department of Basic Education (DBE)'s teachers' professional development (TPD) workshops which are perceived to be unfruitful and unproductive. This quantitative survey paper was aimed at exploring the effect of teachers' professional development on the promotion of teaching and learning. Questionnaires were utilised to collect data from two hundred teachers selected through simple random sampling procedure in the Vhembe District. The results indicate that teachers acknowledge the importance of TPD that they often participate in as such initiatives broaden their pedagogical knowledge and enhancing their teaching skills. This paper recommends that professional development of teachers tailored around area of specialisations, should remain the focal point in achieving quality teaching and learning in schools.

### INTRODUCTION

Teachers' professional development in South African schools has been introduced as the country tried to address the issues of redress and the continuous poor quality of teaching in most schools (Ryan 2007). Department of Basic Education (DBE) (2015), in its annual performance plan 2015-2016 has so far plans to implement teacher development framework geared towards equipping teachers with content-related training on an ongoing basis. This has been reconceptualised due to failures of the so-called traditional 'one-shot' approaches which were seen as inadequate and inappropriate in the context of current educational reform efforts (Dass 1999). One of the worrying factors is that while continued professional development (CPD) programs and models are developed nationally and internationally there has been continued dissatisfaction with teacher professional development (Newman et al. 2000; Fishman et al. 2001; Bantwini 2009; Borko 2004).

Professional development of teachers is now seen as intellectually superficial disconnected from deep issues of curriculum and learning and

most seriously fragmented and non-cumulative (Ball and Cohen 1999). Furthermore school visits reports indicate that the implementation of the Integrated Quality Management Systems (IQMS) policy regarding teachers' professional development has been poorly implemented even after years of training and conducting workshops (Mahlangu 2009). One of the biggest challenges to the implementation of effective professional development which promotes the quality of teaching and learning has been identified as the lack of capacity and resources (Ryan 2007). In South Africa, the relevance and contribution of teachers' professional development in promoting quality teaching and learning is perceived by teachers with discontent. Zdonek (2016) claimed that this perception is such that some teachers do not bother to implement what they have gained from the PD practices. Zdonek (2016) suggested that teachers should be provided with ample time to discuss and reflect on how they are able to incorporate the given area of development into their classroom practice.

There have been continued calls by teachers' unions for total disengagement of the Department of Basic Education (DBE)'s teachers' professional development workshops. These workshops were dubbed as 'unfruitful' thus making it interesting to explore the effect of teachers' professional development on the promotion of teaching and learning.

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## Review of Literature

Teachers' professional development is an intentional on-going and systematic process of formal and informal education training learning and support activities taking place in either external or work-based settings. While teachers are regarded as the key and the most pivotal profession to all nations, there is a dire need for them to be skilled with knowledge as they continue to progress in their careers (Department of Education UK 2016). The Western Cape Education Department (WCED) (2016) highlighted that the professional development programmes of teachers need to focus on the in-service training and development programmes which are specifically aimed at enhancing both content knowledge of the teachers and teaching methodology.

Aminudin (2012) stated that TPD is proactively engaged in by qualified professional teachers, school principals and other school leaders alone or with others and this has direct or indirect benefit to the individual, the teacher, the school, and the nation as well. Zdonek (2016) reasoned that teachers should be provided with opportunities and to assess progress toward the goals they have set.

Steyn (2004) argued that all professions require a continuous update of knowledge and skills; teaching is no exception. Like other professionals teachers need to update their pedagogical skills and content knowledge (Sachs 2007). Steyn (2004) stated that it is universally acknowledged that educators' knowledge and skills are subject to deterioration and new developments in educational thinking rendering teachers' skills and knowledge outdated and inefficient. Professional development is therefore needed to keep teachers up-to-date on developments in their subjects on pedagogy technology in the teachers' code of conduct and education in general. Steyn (2004) cited in Ryan (2007) also noted that teachers will not change the way they teach unless they learn new ways to teach. Professional development influences and positively affects teachers' behaviours and attitudes in that they become more critically aware and have an increased tolerance level. Teacher effectiveness positively affects learner academic achievements.

Considerable literature has since shown that teacher professional development is essential for individual teachers as well as for holistic

school development and improvement (Ryan 2007). Hargreaves (2000) reiterated that this calls for new teaching content and new styles of teaching. It is important that teachers undergo effective continuous professional development to keep up-to-date with the changing times.

There are many professional development models for teachers advocating for quality teaching and learning. Villegas-Reimers (2003) concurred with this and indicated that there are different kinds of models that have been and are still being developed and implemented in different countries to promote and support teachers' professional development from the beginning of their careers to retirement. Smith and Gillespie (2007) mentioned two models of TPD (traditional professional development and job-embedded professional development) that can be used to assist teachers to gain the needed knowledge skills and strategies to bring about quality teaching and learning. This has in turn prompted the need to advocate for an effective teacher professional development model for better and quality teaching and learning.

## Teachers as Keys for Provision of Quality Teaching and Learning in Schools

Inceçay and Bakioglu (2010) argued that schools depend solely on the professional development of its teachers. Moreover if teachers do not develop professionally their classes would not show any improvement either (Fullan and Hargreaves 1996). Malm (2009) noted that the quality of teachers and their teaching are the most important factors for student outcomes. As teachers in a school environment improve their teaching and share their practice with colleagues the collective wisdom in that quality of teaching in schools increases (Inceçay and Bakioglu 2010). Thus teachers are the most important people to increase or decrease the learners' success and their self-respect (Day 1999 in Inceçay and Bakioglu 2010). Effective construction and reforms of teachers affect their professional development (Inceçay and Bakioglu 2010). Personal and professional development of teachers is seen to have more impact on students in terms of skills' development self-development and classroom behaviour. The McKinsey report by Barber and Mourshed (2007) emphasized the fact that the main driver of the variation in student learning in school is the teacher and fur-

ther pointed out that even in good school systems students that do not progress quickly during their first years at school do so because they are not exposed to teachers of efficient calibre and stand very little chance of recovering the lost years. Barber and Mourshed (2007)'s McKinsey reports highlighted that the quality of an educational system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers and that in order to improve the outcomes instruction need to be improved as well. Moreover, McKinsey reports pointed equivocally that achieving universally high outcomes is only possible by putting in place mechanisms to ensure that schools deliver high-quality instruction to every child. However, Lessing and De Witt (2007) stated that teachers do not necessarily see teachers' training as a lifelong process of critical thinking reflection and self-direction. Therefore they rely only on rote learning of meaningless facts in their preparation for the teaching profession (Lessing and De Witt 2007).

### **Teacher's Professional Development and Quality Teaching and Learning**

The Teacher Development Summit Report (2009) indicated that quality learning is about engendering the quality of thinking feeling and acting individuals committed to the development of self, home, family community and wider society. Quality learning is promoted through teaching which respects diversity of intelligences of societies of communities of individuals of subjects and of disciplinary relationships (Teacher Development Summit 2009). Professional development which incorporates professional learning enables teachers to deepen their professional knowledge and changing their instructional practices (Timberley et al. 2007). Professional learning programmes always incorporate a focus on subject matter knowledge of teaching understanding how students learn that subject matter and how to present and convey that content in meaningful ways (Borko 2004; Cohen and Hill 2000).

Since South Africa became a democratic country, delivery of quality of education has been a much debated issue. Pitsoe and Maila (2012) argued that the quality of education is tied to holistic teacher professional development. This suggests that if we are to talk about the quality of education which is a direct result of quality

teaching and learning teachers need to be engaged in holistic professional development. Pitsoe and Maila (2012) added that holistic teachers' professional development focuses on four levels namely: the environment, the "self" content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge. Delannoy (2000) asserted that when teachers are trained they must be exposed to all the theoretical practical and ethical dimensions of their practice. The content of the training must be based on an analysis of the job description and its delivery mode (Pitsoe and Maila 2012). Dellanoy (2000) in Pitsoe and Maila (2012) further explained that professional development efforts should not only be limited to teachers or embracing entire districts but should as well be focused and targeted at schools in their entirety (Delannoy 2000). Teachers' professional development initiatives should therefore be driven by clear coherent plans bridging broader strategic goals with locally perceived needs.

South African teachers need to be equipped with a significant number of skills which include classroom management and leadership policy implementation curriculum issues in order to cope with the daily challenges faced in outcomes-based classrooms (Pitsoe and Maila 2012). Kriek and Grayson (2009) asserted that South African teachers require simultaneous development along three dimensions namely content knowledge, teaching approaches and professional attitudes. However when professional development programmes are provided it should be borne in mind that teachers' needs differ from one another; for example the training needs of farm school teachers and semi-urban/urban teachers differ significantly. Teachers should be developed in accordance with their contexts (Pitsoe and Maila 2012). Pitsoe and Maila (2012) maintained that from a policy perspective education policy aimed at educational change only becomes a reality once it has been implemented at the micro (classroom) level. Zdonek (2016) stated that one of the nuisances of PD is that once it is given once or twice, there's never a follow-up with teachers to ascertain whether they are able to implement what they have gained from such activities. Despite all this, teachers still see the positive aspects of TPD as it broadens their pedagogical knowledge. Smith (2001) noted that teachers are indeed the key role players in this implementation phase and they are unfortunately more often than not the

silent voices in this process ignored and discounted at this stage of educational change.

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study was a quantitative survey collecting data through questionnaires from 200 teachers selected through simple random selection in Vhembe District. Once permission to collect data was granted by the DoE's District Senior Manager of Vhembe the researchers further asked permission from the participating teachers before explaining in detail the purpose of the study. The researchers also requested teachers to complete a consent form before questionnaires were handed to them to complete in order to demonstrate their willingness to participate in the study.

### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The data from the study was presented in percentages using the following themes: Teachers undergoing professional development programs; Teachers' professional development is broadening teachers' pedagogical knowledge; Teachers' professional development provides teachers with strategies to improve student's learning; Teachers' professional development as a useful strategy for teachers to improve learners' understanding; Teachers' professional development workshops and increase in knowledge to engage with learners in the classroom; Planning own professional development initiatives to promote own learning; and Teachers must be involved in the conception and implementation of their professional development programmes.

The results as shown in Table 1 indicate that the majority (83.5%) of respondents agreed that

they have undergone teachers' professional development programs. These findings may well indicate that teachers have engaged themselves in teachers' professional development programs.

Teachers' professional development workshops help to increase their knowledge to teach and to broaden their pedagogical knowledge and improve learners' understanding. The results may suggest that respondents have undergone professional development programs in their quest to gain knowledge to engage well with learners in their classes and they have done so as they value the PD programs as important in their teaching careers.

However these findings are inconsistent with Steyn (2008) who is critical of teachers' professional development in South Africa where such PD programmes or workshops' initiatives are only utilised to train teachers in the implementation of new policies. These are policies which include OBE NCS and currently CAPS without improving teachers' classroom practice. Steyn (2008) also lamented that many of the PD programmes have been determined by the number of official workshops or the number of participants. In line with Steyn's (2008) findings the Report of the Ministerial Committee on Rural Education (2007) also indicated that by 2007 the vast majority of teachers in South Africa have limited access to PD.

Steyn's (2008) findings reflected that when participants were asked if there is enough time for teachers to attend workshops for their professional development some participants indicated that most PD workshops are conducted during the course of the week and always start at 12h00 or 13h00 to 14h00 or 15h00 which constitutes only 2 to 3 contact hours. These are times during which teachers are tired as they have been teaching since morning. Some are tired due to travelling long distances to workshops venues. Participants also indicated for example that a PD workshop that is meant to be conducted in 1 to 3 years is conducted in 1 to 3 days which does not help teachers in acquiring the much needed knowledge and skills. In its Revised Five-Year Strategic Plan 2015/16-2019/20, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) commits itself to keep curriculum changes to a minimum as a means that will enable teachers to develop the core skills and competence to deliver the curriculum (DBE 2016). This might be the positive step which could limit the number of

**Table 1: Teachers undergoing professional development programs**

<i>Teachers undergoing professional development programs</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
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

TPD workshops that teachers were expected to attend as curriculum has been in constant changes since the dawn of democracy.

Results showing teachers' professional development help teachers to broaden their pedagogical knowledge are given in Table 2.

**Table 2: Broadening teachers' pedagogical knowledge**

<i>Broadening teachers' pedagogical knowledge</i>	<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

The results reflected in Table 2 indicate that the majority (92%) of respondents agreed that teachers' professional development helps teachers to broaden their pedagogical knowledge. These results suggest that teachers see the importance of professional development as part of the initiative that they can use to expand and broaden their science of teaching thus their pedagogical knowledge. These findings are consistent with Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1992) who noted 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 these findings literature by Villegas-Reimers (2003) showed 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. In its Revised Five-Year Strategic Plan 2015/16-2019/20, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) 2016 underscored the need for teacher development that are tailored to build teacher subject knowledge and provide training in effective teaching methods (DBE 2016). These results also show that teachers are positive about the professional development initiatives as their art and science of teaching (pedagogical knowledge) is broadened through such PD initiatives.

An overwhelming majority (95 percent) of respondents in Table 3 agreed that teachers' professional development provide teachers with strategies to improve how students learn. These

**Table 3: Teachers' professional development provides teachers with strategies to improve student's learning**

<i>Strategies to improve student's learning</i>	<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

results suggest that teachers see the importance of professional development in order to bring about and improve students' learning. These results may also support the findings in Table 2 which show that teachers perceive professional development as an important aspect in their teaching career with regards to providing them not only with broadened pedagogical knowledge but also with strategies that can help them to improve their students' learning. In line with these findings literature Whitcomb et al. 2009; Joyce and Showers (2002) suggested that professional development programs enhance teachers' abilities to predict how students may approach specific tasks anticipate student errors and determine the effect of instructional strategies on students. Joyce and Showers (2002) suggested that professional development for teachers is based on curricular and instructional strategies that have a high probability of affecting student learning and students' ability to learn. Furthermore, the Alberta Teachers' Association (2016) stated the vast number of professional development focus on issues related to pedagogy, curriculum and student assessment, social justice, leadership and staff development, teacher education and induction, technology integration, and educational accountability. Motshekga (2016) highlighted the need to roll-out ICT programmes through Operation Phakisa so as to ensure that the skills of teachers are developed and modernised to be on par with the needs of the changing world. It still remain to be seen if such commitments will be undertaken given that they have been part of rhetoric statements on several budget speeches delivered in the past.

The results reflected in Table 4 show the majority (91.5%) of respondents agreed that teachers' professional development is a useful strategy that teachers can use to improve learn-

ers' understanding. These findings are consistent with Carpenter et al.'s (1989) results which 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. In line with these results, the Honourable Minister of Basic Education in South Africa, Ms Motshekga (2016), emphasised in her Basic Education Budget Vote Speech for the 2016/17 Financial Year the need 'to improve the quality of teaching and learning through better teacher support, development, utilisation and supply, as well as better materials provisioning, and infrastructure development, preservation and maintenance'. These results could also suggest that teachers perceive PD in a positive way.

**Table 4: Teachers' professional development is a useful strategy for teachers to improve learners' understanding**

<i>Strategies to improve learners' understanding</i>	<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

Respondents were asked to indicate whether they agree or disagree that teachers' professional development workshops help to increase their knowledge to engage with learners in the classroom. Their responses are presented in Table 5. The findings in Table 5 show that the majority of respondents (95%) indicated that teachers' professional development workshops help them as teachers to increase their knowledge and view this as useful when they engage with learners in the classroom. These results suggest that teachers are positive about professional development workshops as they see such initiatives as helpful. Thus teachers see PD as a key in providing them with skills and strategies in promoting quality teaching and learning in their schools particularly their classrooms. These results are consistent with Harwell (2003) who articulated that professional development deep-

ens teachers' knowledge of the subjects being taught sharpening teaching skills in the classroom and also help teachers keep up with developments in the individual fields and in education generally. National Association of Professional Teachers of South Africa (NAPTOSA) (2016) lamented that the majority of teachers in South Africa are unable or unwilling to teach effectively, mainly due to inadequate subject knowledge and pedagogic content knowledge. This challenge could be traced back to the inadequate teacher training that the majority of teaching corps were subjected to and received during the apartheid era. It is through effective TPD initiatives that such shortfalls can only be addressed.

**Table 5: Increase in knowledge to engage with learners**

<i>Increase in knowledge to engage with learners</i>	<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

The findings by Opfer and Pedder (2010) and Boyle et al. (2004) also showed that teachers' knowledge improves after participating in PD. Cordingley et al. (2007) also agreed with these findings and indicated that teachers' professional development always have a positive effect on students' motivation to learn and improved engagement in classroom activities. These results also suggest that teachers see the importance of professional development workshops as these provide them with insight and knowledge to improve learners' understanding once their pedagogical knowledge is broadened as discussed elsewhere in this study.

The results showing that teachers should plan their own professional development initiatives to promote their teaching and learning are presented in Table 6 above. The majority (82 percent) of respondents in Table 6 agreed that teachers should plan their own professional development initiatives to promote their own learning. These results suggest that teachers should plan their own professional development initiatives rather than having those initiatives planned by other people. Tolley (2016) reasoned that

some of the teachers often complain about their PD citing that they feel like they are being treated like children as if they don't know what they're doing in their classrooms. In addition to her research, Mokhele (2013) argued that teachers should not only be involved in the planning of the CPD programmes but that the programmes should be aligned with their own personal circumstances and motivations. McDiarmid (1995) further concurred with 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. Furthermore for this to happen teachers need to be part of a larger learning community that is a source of support and ideas - a community that consists of administrators, students, parents, school councils, school boards, and business people (McDiarmid 1995). Herzberg (1959) articulated that teachers need to feel or to have a feeling that there are opportunities for growing and promotion for them to stay motivated in undertaking their own PD initiatives.

**Table 6: Teachers should plan their own professional development initiatives to promote their teaching and learning**

<i>Planning own professional development initiatives</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Strongly agree	57	28.5
Agree	107	53.5
Not sure	15	7.5
Disagree	19	9.5
Strongly disagree	2	1.0
Total	200	100.0

The results showing that teachers must be involved in the conception and implementation of teachers' professional development programmes are presented in Table 7. An overall 91.5 percent majority of respondents in Table 7 agreed that teachers must be involved in the

**Table 7: Teachers must be involved in the conception and implementation of teachers' professional development programmes**

<i>Involvement in the conception and implementation</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Strongly agree	75	37.5
Agree	108	54.0
Not sure	15	7.5
Disagree	2	1.0
Total	200	100.0

conception and implementation of teachers' professional development programmes. The results may indicate that teachers want to plan their own professional development initiatives. However 82 percent of respondents want to be involved in the conception and implementation of such initiatives. They also suggest that attendance of professional development workshops should take into consideration their classroom needs. In line with these results a study by Du Preez and Roux (2008) showed that sometimes teachers feel that new ideas about curricular are imposed on them without them being offered an opportunity to contribute. Pierce and Hunsanker (1996) stated that when teachers are involved in the conception and implementation of teachers' professional development programmes such PD will require teachers' actions for it to be more effective. That will enable teachers to share materials and ideas as well as discuss challenges and solutions thereby helping them to become models of lifelong learners (Hooker 2010). However considerable literature (Du Preez and Roux 2008; Pierce and Hunsanker 1996; Hooker 2010; Ryan 2007) shows that in South Africa teachers do not enjoy complete autonomy over curriculum development; they are also not in any way involved in the conception of any professional development programmes. These results may suggest that involving teachers in the conception and implementation of teachers' PD programmes can be one of the key strategies towards sustaining positive perception of teachers on their PD. This could also help to allay fears and to avoid making teachers feel that they are left out or are being isolated from the processes that involve them and that is supposed to be undertaken and implemented by them and for their benefit especially the benefit of their institutions.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the data collected and analysed teachers who participated in the study believe that professional development is helpful in broadening their pedagogical knowledge. The results suggest that teachers regard the importance of professional development as part of the initiative that they can use to expand and broaden their teaching skills. Acknowledging the importance of TPD in broadening teachers' pedagogical knowledge show that teachers are pos-

itive with regards to the professional development programs and initiatives that they often participate in.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper recommends that professional development of teachers tailored around area of specialisations, should remain the focal point in achieving quality teaching and learning in schools. There is a need for the Department of Basic Education to act upon its commitments such as better teacher support and development, as shown in its strategic plans, if the professional development of teachers is to be effective to an extent that the quality of teaching and learning is improved. ICT programmes that are supposed to be rolled out through the Operation Phakisa need to be acted upon in order to help skill teachers in line with the changing world of technological advancements. The professional development programmes of teachers should not be a 'top-down' activity dictated to teachers by the Ministry of Basic Education, but such initiatives should involve them from the conception and implementation of such programmes. Teachers should actively plan their own professional development initiatives to promote their subject content knowledge and pedagogic knowledge to enhance the quality of teaching and learning in their classrooms. Adequate incentives and scholarships for further studies should be put in place to encourage teachers to participate in such professional development initiatives.

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