

## Exploring Perceived Continuing Professional Development Needs of Teachers in the Context of Special Education Needs in Zimbabwe

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**ABSTRACT** This paper explores perceived Continuing Professional Development (CPD) needs of teachers in regular primary schools to ensure the effective teaching of learners with special education needs in Zimbabwe. Underpinned by the post-positivistic paradigm, the paper uses the survey design utilising the mixed methods approach. Data was collected through questionnaires, face-to-face interviews and focus group discussions. Findings revealed that teachers needed professional development to prepare them for a paradigm shift for the inclusive era in Special Education Needs (SNE). Teachers also needed to identify their own needs and engage in relevant CPD which incorporates their preferences. The paper recommends that responsible education ministries should ensure that the CPD needs of teachers in the context of SEN are properly identified and catered for where school CPD policies should also be put in place to better and meet the education requirements of learners.

### INTRODUCTION

Continuing Professional Development (henceforth CPD) for teachers is currently receiving global attention (Pantic et al. 2010). Emphasis is placed on engaging teachers in professional development activities to enhance their performance in the classroom (Gray 2005). The era of inclusion has made it necessary for all teachers to have the ability and skills to address the diverse needs of learners who are currently being enrolled in regular classrooms. Day (1999:4) defines CPD as consisting “of all natural learning experiences and those conscious and planned activities that are intended to be of direct or indirect benefit to the individual, group or school and which contribute, to the quality of education in the classroom.” This definition is holistic and all-encompassing in the sense that professional development covers all kinds of learning experiences, both planned and unplanned, from individual to institutional levels in order to achieve the core aims of education. These needs if properly taken care of, could lead to effective teaching of learners with Special Education Needs (henceforth SEN) in the mainstream classrooms.

The level of interest and support for CPD has taken strides throughout the world as a key component in educational reforms. Goodall (2005) points out that CPD is essential for teacher improvement and it has a positive impact on learners. McEarchern (2007) contends that the support and training available to teachers in regular schools determine the success of programs that accommodate students with special education needs. In support Steyn (2008) contends that CPD for teachers has received extensive international attention in the implementation of new and revised curricular, to improving learning in schools with complex teaching environments, and even in improving the overall performance of an education system.

Society is changing significantly in terms of enrolment figures of SEN learners in mainstream schools which are on the rise (Organisation of Economic Cooperation Development (OECD) 2005; Ebersold et al. 2011). A number of new international policies pertaining to SEN have been put in place, for example United Nations (1989): Convention on the Rights of the Child and UNESCO (1994): The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education. Teachers need to be provided with

CPD opportunities which equip them with skills for them to be able to implement such policies.

Teachers are reportedly facing new challenges in executing their classroom duties due to the diversity that now characterize the classroom. The Network of Experts in Social Sciences of Education (NESSE) Report (2012) indicates that in European countries like Scotland and Finland, learners with disabilities were now spending all of their time in mainstream classes thereby increasing the proportion of children with SEN who are included in mainstream classrooms. Alexander (2001) notes that teachers are concerned that they might not be able to meet the needs of those students because of lack of training and also because enrolments of students with disabilities are increasing in the regular schools. Unianu (2012) is of the opinion that, the increasing enrolments means that there is a need for teachers with higher and relevant qualifications for the effective teaching of learners with special education needs. Bacáková and Closs (2013) contend that, CPD plays an essential role in promoting pro-inclusion changes in education systems.

Knowles (1990), believes that adult learners are motivated by their immediate needs and interests, or actual problems that need to be solved. Professional development that provides differentiation for adult learners takes into consideration the personal and professional experience of each adult learner. Learning in this context become part of people's day-to-day activities or an integral part of people's social participation in organisations and in communities of practice, as they become involved and engage in activities at work. This approach is receptive to teachers' needs, goals and how they learn. It also promotes the school's goals and has a greater impact on changing teachers' practices. DiPardo and Potter (2003) noted that Vygotsky's theory of development serves as a fertile ground for CPD. Cultural and social contexts in which teachers operate in are also dynamic. Hence, teachers should therefore keep abreast with these changes in a changing society. Engelbrecht et al. (2007) argue that the practice based or site-school-based CPD approach is premised on the understanding that learning occurs within the normal working milieu and is largely managed by the educators in order to fulfill their immediate and specific professional development needs. Teachers also need time for CPD.

Riding in Gray (2005: 20) argues that "... good CPD should be school-based and embedded in teacher work, be collaborative, be rooted in a knowledge base of teaching, and be accessible and inclusive..." This type of CPD, organised and offered at school level, is more accessible than out of school based CPD. Teachers have an opportunity to engage in CPD activities which are directly related to their classroom practices.

In a study by Kempen and Steyn (2016) on CPD for teachers in special schools of Gauteng province, South Africa the findings revealed that professional development that took place brought about positive change in teachers' performances and student outcomes. In a related study by Belay (2016) on the contribution of teachers' CPD to quality of education and its challenging factors related with teachers at Chagni Primary Schools, Awi Zone, Ethiopia results revealed that CPD has made significant contributions to the improvement in students' achievement, classroom practices and teachers' professional competence. Khan and Ahmed (2015) carried out a study on the impact of CPD program on teachers' CPD in Pakistan. The study revealed that CPD program is extremely helpful in increasing teachers' performance at primary school level in Pakistan. In these studies results show that teachers' CPD needs are being taken into consideration.

On identification of CPD needs, Donnelley (2009) states that although teachers' needs are identified through supervision reports by school administrators or line managers and education officials, it is paramount that teachers carry out self-evaluations since these are important in the identification of CPD needs. Thus, the school head or manager is in a position to engage in discussions with teachers about their own learning during non-class contact time. The ability to identify CPD needs is viewed as a strength rather than a weakness. OECD (2009) in a TALIS (2007/8) survey found out that one of the most significant professional development need of Irish teachers was learning new skills which were commensurate with teaching students with SEN.

A Report of a Peer Learning Activity in Vienna, Austria 2 - 6 June 2013 (cited by the European Commission 2013) indicates that teachers need to be actively involved in identifying their needs and finding ways to meet them. Teacher learning becomes more relevant to the school needs if teachers analyse learners' needs and from that,

work out what competences they might need. Above all, the learning process should be owned by the teacher and professional learning should be active and continuous.

In a study conducted by Moloney and Macarthy (2010) all research participants pointed to the absolute need for both pre-service training in the area of special needs as well as on-going professional development. Practitioners identified four key priority areas among which were ongoing training to meet the specific needs of learners with disabilities. A survey of teacher CPD by Hammond (2010) reveals that teachers opted for CPD which would address their individual needs. Teachers also opted for ownership of their CPD activities which were organised within their schools.

O’Gorman et al. (cited in Pricewaterhouse Coopers 2010: 40) says, “In relation to specific professional development sought, there was a strong emphasis on information pertaining to various classifications of disability...” Classification of disabilities is complex and multifaceted, such that teachers need to be engaged in CPD so that they are able to handle SEN learners. Nisbet (cited in Wan 2011) conducted a survey to assess the professional development needs and preferences of primary school teachers in the teaching of mathematics in Queensland in Australia. Teachers reported that they preferred school-based CPD held during school-time, which focused on topics which they were dealing with in the classroom. According to research findings by Hustler et al. (2011) teachers wanted to continue to update their knowledge and skills to benefit themselves as well as their pupils. Goodall et al. (cited in Broad and Evans 2006: 9) state that, “Studies of professional learning suggest that experienced teachers have varied and unique professional needs...” There was therefore need to match appropriate professional development provision to particular professional needs. Chalchisa (2010: 2), says “each institution must have a CPD plan which outlines the CPD priorities for the year.” Thus, all schools are required to come up with CPD plans for teachers, so that there is improvement in teaching.

There are many changes in the primary school curriculum pertaining to SEN. In Zimbabwe while these changes have come as a result of the Zimbabwe Government being a signatory of international legislation on SEN, many teachers are ill-equipped to deal with such changes

(Mafa 2012). In Zimbabwe, little research has been carried out with a focus on CPD needs of teachers in the mainstream. Most studies have focused on assessing teacher attitudes on SEN. Teacher factor in the mainstream seems neglected as there is little literature available on CPD to manage special education needs. There is a dearth of empirical research on CPD needs of teachers in the context of teaching learners with special education needs. Since these are preliminary grey areas, it is the intention of this paper to navigate deeper into the perceived needs of regular primary school teachers. Thus the paper explores perceived CPD needs of teachers in regular primary schools, to ensure the effective teaching of learners with special education needs in Zimbabwe. Questions which this paper attempts to answer include, among others:

What are the CPD needs of teachers in the context of SEN? How are the CPD needs of teachers in regular primary schools identified? How relevant is the CPD which is provided and what are the teachers’ preferences of CPD activities as well as which recommendations can be made concerning perceived needs?

## METHODOLOGY

The survey design (Johnson et al. 2007) was chosen where mixed methods approach was used. Concurrent triangulation strategy was used because it enabled the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data at the same time in the research process (Creswell and Plano-Clark 2011). In terms of the population, 93 primary schools and 1457 teachers, 93 school heads and all education officers in Gweru District of Zimbabwe were the target population. From the 93 primary schools in Gweru district, 10 schools were purposively selected from which 10 Heads (referred to here as Head 1, Head 2 etc.), 150 (15 from each school) with 1 District Education Officer being considered for the study through disproportional stratified random sampling procedure. Focus group discussion participants were purposively selected on the basis of their typicality (Cohen et al. 2011). Data collection instruments used included questionnaires (distributed to teachers), face-to-face interviews and focus group discussions (Heads and DEO. Focus groups are referred to as FGD1 and FGD2 respectively. Participants in both groups are referred to as P1 up to P6.)

The Statistical Software Package for Social Scientists (SPSS) was used for data entry and analysis. Data is thus presented quantitatively and qualitatively. Thematic analysis is done to classify commonly reported perceptions and behaviours, causes, patterns and determinants on the perceived CPD needs of regular primary teachers to ensure the effective teaching of learners with SEN.

**RESULTS**

Respondents were asked to indicate whether teachers required to be equipped with skills for teaching learners with special education needs in the regular classroom or not.

Data revealed that 97.3 percent teachers indicated that they needed skills to teach learners with special needs. The high percentage of teachers who responded with a ‘yes’ indicate that CPD for teachers in the context of SEN is a necessity for the benefit of learners. To consolidate the Yes/No responses on the same item, teachers explained that there was need for such skills in the regular classroom saying ‘Teachers need to know the right methods of teaching such children.’ It was further indicated that ‘Teachers should be able to teach in inclusive settings and children should benefit.’

From these statements, it can be deduced that teachers need to be knowledgeable in SEN issues, particularly the teaching aspect. Some of the responses focused on the learners and instruction and emphasis was being placed on the learners’ needs, which can only be met when teachers have the knowledge and skills to handle these needs.

When asked, what the CPD needs of teachers in regular schools were in line with the policy of including learners with special education needs in the regular classroom, school heads identified the need for knowledge and skills. For instance,

Head 1 said ‘Teachers need training and skills in special needs education for them to be able to handle diverse classes.’ and Head 7 pointed out that ‘Teachers need further training.’

Responses from focus group discussions and from an interview with the District Education Officer (DEO) consolidated the ideas which were put forward by teachers and school heads. For example **FGD1 P4** said ‘We need to attend workshops so that we have skills to handle these children. Otherwise, just mixing these children becomes a waste of time.’

**FGD 2 P6**, added by saying, ‘We need people with those skills to come and help us in our schools.’

The DEO also confirmed that teachers should have the skills to teach different children in the regular classroom. From the information drawn from different participants, one could deduce the dire need for teachers to undertake CPD programs in order to be effective teachers.

Asked to indicate how their CPD needs were identified at their respective schools, teachers revealed that way CPD needs are identified would also influence teacher effectiveness in teaching learners with special education needs in the mainstream summarised in Table 1.

These results suggest that the teacher’s CPD needs are identified through a variety of strategies. Table 1 presents School heads’ responses to the same item as teachers, on how they identified CPD needs of teachers in their schools. Data reveal that all the school heads (100%) agreed that CPD needs were identified through Circulars from the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education. Those who indicated staff development meetings and lesson observations, self-assessments and discussions constituted 90 percent in each case, while those who said NO constituted 10 percent respectively. Heads’ direct knowledge of teachers’ strengths and development needs stood at 60 percent, which was

**Table 1: Distribution of teachers and school heads’ responses on how CPD needs are identified at their schools (n=150) teachers; (n=10) school heads**

Category Item	Teachers’ responses				Heads’ responses			
	Yes	%	No	%	Yes	%	No	%
a) Head’s direct knowledge of the teacher’s strengths and development needs in teaching	73	48.7	77	51.3	6	60	4	40
b) Lesson observation, self-assessments and discussion	101	67.3	49	32.7	9	90	1	10
c) Staff development meetings	110	73.3	40	26.7	9	90	1	10
d) Circulars from the Ministry of Education.	89	59.3	61	40.7	10	100	-	-

the lowest rated factor while 40percent indicated otherwise. These results show that school heads mostly depend on circulars to identify CPD needs for teachers closely followed by staff development meetings and lesson observations and discussions. It is noted that staff development meetings are based mainly on circulars from the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education.

Results from interviews also show that, all school heads identify CPD needs through Results-Based Management, supervision and through staff development meetings. For example, Head 2 said, 'We identify teachers' CPD needs through supervision and in staff development meetings',

and Head 3 said: 'Teachers state for themselves what they cannot do and what they need to do in order to upgrade their skills.' However, school heads indicated that some of these need especially the training needs were not being met due to lack of financial resources. School heads added that needs assessment also needed to be done so that CPD providers could meet these needs.

One of the school heads expressed displeasure at the introduction of one policy after another without enough teacher preparation. FGD1 and FGD2 confirmed that CPD needs were identified through supervision, evaluations, mentoring and through discussions during staff development meetings. The DEO pointed out that the District Office depended on new policy circulars and also on their own routine supervision of teachers. The DEO added that CPD activities were hampered by lack of resources.

In a bid to further consolidate the need for CPD for teachers, a questionnaire item on a Likert scale was included for teachers and school

heads to respond to with results shown in Table 2.

Data reveals that 97.3 percent of the participants need to learn basic and core skills in SEN. These were followed by the need to understand policy changes in SEN and the need to learn advanced and specialist skills in SEN both at 92 percent. When a skill is at an advanced level, it means a higher level in training, knowledge or skill. This was followed by the need for Action Research at 90 percent and knowledge of tools and technology in SEN (87.3%) and all the five items were rated highly.

Data also reveals that all school heads (100%) agreed that teachers wanted to learn about policy, basic skills, and core skills and also about the use of technology in SNE. 90 percent of the school heads indicated that teachers wanted to learn about advanced skills in SNE and also to engage in Action Research. Percentages of those who were undecided stood at 10 percent in two cases and there were no disagreements. The interpretation of these responses could be that participants agreed on the need for teachers to be knowledgeable about important aspects of SNE.

To substantiate on the CPD needs of teachers, school heads were interviewed on this aspect. All school heads pointed out that teachers needed to be informed and to understand policy changes in SEN, to acquire basic skills, core skills and in some instances to have advanced skills in SNE. For example, Head 7 said, 'There is need to know sign language because if you don't know, it becomes a challenge to communicate with learners.' Head 9 said, 'When we look at the deaf, if you cannot use sign language you cannot communicate with them.'

**Table 2: Responses on teachers' needs to learn and understand policy, basic skills, core skills, advanced skills, research and technology in SNE (n=150);(n=10).Key: A=Agree; Un=Undecided=Disagree**

Item	Teachers' responses						School heads' responses					
	Ag	%	Un	%	D	%	A	%	Un	%	D	%
a) Policy changes in SEN	138	92	4	2.7	8	5.3	10	100	-	-	-	-
b) Learning core skills to teach SEN in communities of practice	146	97.3	1	0.7	3	2	10	100				
c) Basic understanding of SEN	146	97.3	2	1.3	2	1.3	10	100				
d) Advanced and specialist skills in SEN	138	92	8	5.3	4	2.7	9	90	1	10		
e) Engaging with action research in SNE for classroom practice	135	90	9	6	6	4	9	90	1	10		
f) Knowledge of tools and technology in SEN, for example, Braille, hearing devices	130	86.7	11	7.3	9	6	10	100				

Focus group discussions confirmed what teachers and school heads had pointed out. For example, FGD1 P3 pointed out that 'Teachers need to have enough knowledge to cater for learners with special educational needs.' P4 responded by indicating that 'For us to be effective, we should be well equipped with the skills.' FGD2 P2 observed that,

*We are living in an advanced global village technologically. There is need for teachers to learn how to use modern technological machines for assisting these children. P1 added by saying: Instead of having a computer instructor who is not trained as teacher, it is better for me to come with my class to the computer room and teach them myself.*

The concerns raised by these participants was that teachers had remained computer illiterate despite the fact that computer skills were being taught in primary schools as a matter of policy. Teachers also needed to learn how to use new technologies that are used in SNE. The DEO also indicated that teachers needed basic skills in SNE although he acknowledged the scarcity of resources.

On rating itemized CPD needs instructors gave the following as indicated in Table 3.

Teachers considered all items to be relevant; with the need to understand individual differences of learners hence 98.7 percent. A small percentage (1.3%) indicated that understanding individual differences of learners is somewhat relevant, meaning to say a small degree or extent. 98 percent indicated the need to be able to manage behavioral problems; and 95 percent of the teachers indicated that assessing special needs learners is relevant.

Relevance of learning about classification of disabilities is 92 percent while 8 percent indicated that classification is somewhat relevant. Relevance of reflective and interpersonal skills is at

88 percent while those who say it is somewhat relevant are 12 percent. Learning in professional communities stood at 87.3 percent in term of relevance. 12 percent of the participants indicated that learning in professional communities was somewhat relevant. These results show that all the items were highly rated as relevant.

School heads also responded to the same research item on rating CPD needs of teachers in terms of their relevance as indicated in Table 3. Data from the responses by school heads reveal that learning to manage behavioural problems, learning to classify disabilities, learning to assess special needs learners and understanding individual differences were rated as relevant with the highest percentage of 100 percent for each of them. The need to learn about reflective skills is at 90 percent in terms of relevance, while 10 percent classified it as somewhat relevant. Relevance of learning in professional communities was placed at 80 percent. 12 percent of the participants indicated that learning in communities of practice was somewhat relevant. The percentages on 'somewhat relevant' were very low. This suggests that all the listed items were considered relevant to CPD for teachers as the knowledge of these would enable them to teach learners with special needs more effectively.

School heads confirmed what was revealed by teachers when they responded to the same items in face-to-face interviews. Focus group discussions responses pointed to the fact that teachers needed such skills as being able to classify disabilities, managing behavioural problems and assessment skills. The DEO indicated that teachers needed in-service training. They also needed to be equipped with reading materials so that they would be able to classify disabilities and to identify learners with learning disabilities.

**Table 3: Rating of CPD needs in terms of relevance to SEN (n=150); (n=10). Key=Relevant; SR=Somewhat Relevant**

Item	Teachers' responses				School heads' responses			
	R	%	SR	%	R	%	SR	%
a) Manage behaviour problems	147	98	3	2	10	100		
b) Classifications of disabilities	138	92	12	8	10	100		
c) Learners' assessment	142	94.7	8	5.3	10	100		
d) Understandings of individual differences of learners	148	98.7	2	1.3	10	100		
e) Reflective, interpersonal skills	132	88	18	12	9	90	1	10
f) Learning in professional communities	131	87.3	18	12	8	80	2	20

Teachers and school heads also responded to a questionnaire item on CPD preferences for teachers in the context of SEN. Table 4 summarises the results.

CPD preferences reveal that the highly preferred CPD item which stressed CPD facilitated by an expert scored 100 percent, followed by CPD held during school time at 98 percent. CPD held in their own schools and CPD where good practices are shared with workmates both stood at 96 percent. Focused and well-structured CPD stood at 74 percent. Low percentages were recorded on the category 'Somewhat Preferred.' These results suggest that teachers have CPD preferences and this should be considered when planning CPD for teachers. Data from school heads' responses on CPD preferences reveal that CPD which is focused, well-structured and CPD that is directly relevant to good practices on SEN and CPD workshops at cluster level were highly preferred (100%). These were followed by, CPD which is expert-driven, CPD held at school level and sharing good practices on CPD with workmates (90%). The other remaining items stood at 80 percent and 70 percent respectively. Very low percentages were in the 'Somewhat preferred' column.

During face-to-face interviews school heads confirmed what they had pointed out in the survey on preferences of CPD related to SNE. For example, Head 3 said, 'In our district the requirement is that we hold three staff development meetings per term. We include our staff development meeting days on the timetable.' Head 5 submitted that 'We carry out a minimum of three staff development sessions per term. This means that we can have more depending on our school term calendar.'

Focus group discussions also consolidated the issue of preferences when they also confirmed what had been indicated by teachers and school heads. For example, FDG1 P1 said, 'Workshops should be held in our schools because we have experts in special needs around' while P5 added by saying, 'Schools should have well equipped resource rooms and a specialist teacher.' FDG2 P2 observed that, 'We would prefer at least someone from another school because our special class teacher is not a specialist.' P3 focused on CPD at school level and said, 'If training is to be done it should be at school level if it is going to assist us fully. At cluster or district level we are disadvantaged because we cannot all attend.' The DEO noted the need for school-based CPD and the need for proper feedback of workshops attended by school representatives. For example, the DEO in one of the responses said, 'I feel strongly that if more CPD activities were organised at school and at cluster levels, we would be able to achieve much more than we are achieving now.' This statement suggests that CPD held within the school premises within a cluster was more fruitful than CPD which is cascaded to teachers.

## DISCUSSION

The findings above reveal that teachers need skills to teach learners with disabilities because the enrolment figures of such children are on the increase in ordinary schools due to the inclusive policy. This is in line with The Network of Experts in Social Sciences of Education (NESSE) (2012) who indicated that the number of special needs children enrolled in mainstream was increasing and learners with disabilities were

**Table 4: School heads' preferences of CPD related to SEN (n=150) (n=10). Key=Preferred; SP=Somewhat Preferred**

Item	Teachers' responses				School heads' responses			
	P	%	SP	%	P	%	SP	%
a CPD guided by action research.	142	94.7	8	5.3	8	80	2	20
b Expert driven CPD	150	100	17	11.3	9	90	1	10
c CPD held in their own schools	144	96	6	4	9	90	1	10
d Focused, well-structured CPD	111	74	39	26	10	100	-	-
e CPD held during school time.	147	98	3	2	7	70	3	30
f Sharing of good practices on CPD with workmates	144	96	6	4	9	90	1	10
g CPD that is directly relevant to good practices on SEN	140	93.3	10	6.7	10	100	-	-
h CPD workshops at cluster level	134	89.3	10	6.7	10	100	-	-
i CPD workshops at national level	114	76	36	24	8	80	2	20

now spending all of their time in mainstream classes. Haskell (2000) and Unianu (2011) are of the opinion that, the increasing enrolments means that there is demand for teachers with higher and relevant qualifications for the effective teaching of learners with special education needs.

Information drawn from participants indicate a dire need for teachers to engage in CPD programs in order to become effective teachers in SEN. Avramidis and Kalyva (cited in Travers et al. 2010), reported that teachers felt challenged when it came to including students with particular SEN and disabilities, for example, those with autism and neurological disorder. While such learners needed to adapt to the classroom situations in the mainstream, teachers also needed to acquire knowledge and skills suitable for them to handle such changes. According to Rodríguez and McKay (2010) teachers are expected to upgrade their knowledge and skills in order for them to match the current educational reforms and improve their practices (Radhakanta and Sushama 2013). In the same vein, Baěáková and Closs (2013) noted that CPD plays an essential role in promoting effective teaching for learners with special education needs in education systems. The implication would be to involve such teachers in CPD on SEN.

Forlin et al. (in Konza 2008) contend that most teachers have high expectations of themselves, and that the poorly resourced inclusion of students with such a wide range of needs sets them up to fail. Resources which make inclusion succeed include human, financial and material resources. This is supported by Hartley (2010) who contends that there is need to equip all teachers with basic knowledge and understanding of special education needs which allows them to identify and deal with problems in a productive manner when they first occur and to deal with some of the most prevalent but least severe forms of special education needs through continuous engagement in CPD activities within their schools.

Findings also revealed that both teachers and school heads took part in identifying the needs of teachers to a certain extent. CPD needs were identified through supervision, evaluations, mentoring and through discussions during staff development meetings. The District Office depended on new policy circulars and also on their own routine supervision of teachers. However,

such activities were being hampered by lack of resources. A research report by Donnelley (2009) in Scotland revealed that teachers identified their CPD needs through self-evaluation, through marking and also through peer observations. In the present study, some of the participants pointed out that teachers' CPD needs were identified through supervision, which is an aspect of quality assurance. Yip (in Wan 2011) reported that Singaporean teachers pointed out the need for a systematic way to identify their needs in their school systems. Teachers need to be involved in planning their CPD activities. Needs assessment is also necessary (Goodall et al. 2009).

In this study, needs identification seemed to be *ad hoc* and no criteria were clearly laid out in the process of needs identification. OFSTED's (2006) reported that in 29 schools studied, CPD was supposed to be continuous and would lead to improvement in different aspects of the teaching profession. To identify their CPD needs, teachers from the selected schools were asked to make lists of their strengths and weaknesses in the teaching of learners with disabilities. Teachers completed a self-assessment questionnaire and this assisted them to focus on areas which were relevant. As a result, schools were able to organise CPD activities which were in tandem with the needs of teachers. The implication is that, when planning CPD activities school heads in regular primary schools can utilise the identified good practices so that the activities are designed in such a way that they address the needs of teachers according to priority. Margolis and McCabe (2003) found out that teachers felt a sense of inadequacy when they failed to meet the needs of learners.

Findings on rating CPD needs of teachers in terms of relevance to SEN, teachers and school heads rated the listed items in Table 3 as relevant to teachers. The relevance was also confirmed in interviews with school heads and the DEO. Wenger (1998) argues that the success of organisations ultimately depends upon their ability to form as a learning system and, at the same time, take part in a broad range of extended learning opportunities within broader and associated areas. (Delport and Makaye 2009). Results from the present study revealed that professional learning communities are relevant in meeting the CPD needs of teachers in SNE.

If schools have the ability to form community of practice, such a move in the Zimbabwean

primary schools would bring about sustainable change in the way CPD needs of teachers are met. In survey of teachers' CPD, Hammond (2010) revealed that teachers place importance on CPD which addressed their individual needs. Teachers' CPD was organised and implemented at school by the teachers themselves. Teachers identified the need to be able to teach SEN learners as of high priority, followed by ICT. The focus of CPD is another important issue which should be addresses in the Zimbabwean Primary Schools. CPD activities should focus on those topics that are identified by teachers themselves.

In a study carried out by Vickerman (2007), physicians express a strong desire for CPD in a wide variety of topics and also felt the relevance of this broad range of desired CPD topics. The implication is that a wide range of CPD topics for regular teachers can be made available thereby ensuring proper intervention strategies in the teaching of learners with special needs in the mainstream. A research study carried out by Mokhele (2013) provides evidence that intensive school-based professional development programs can enable teachers to increase their knowledge and improve their teaching. UNESCO (2012) pointed out that initial teacher training for teachers does not equip them with knowledge, skills and the confidence to effectively support learners with disabilities and rarely does it prepare them to work in diverse classrooms. The ORC International (cited by Hustler et al. 2011) indicated that teachers valued sharing of good practices in teaching. They did not like the idea of cascading information to others as this was seen to be counterproductive. Moore and Shaw (in Wan 2011) found out that CPD which believed in the transmissive model was inadequate to meet teachers' professional development needs. Findings indicated that teachers valued CPD that was directly relevant to their practice. They also sought after out-of school based CPD which was facilitated by experts.

In a survey carried out by Nisbet (2004 in Wan 2011) the results showed that teachers were keen to be engaged in CPD and they preferred classroom-based topics for professional development. They also preferred professional development to be held in their own schools during school time. This is in line with the school-site-based approach where teachers can engage themselves in communities of practice.

## CONCLUSION

The study concluded that, there is a dire need for knowledge and skills in SNE among teachers in regular schools. Teachers needed to be engaged in appropriate CPD to address these needs. Teachers took part in identifying their CPD needs to a lesser extent. There was enough evidence from the findings for the research to conclude that teachers' CPD needs and interests in SNE were not being addressed fully. Teachers were not well prepared to implement the new policy of including learners with special education needs.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the findings of the research study which focused on perceived CPD needs of teachers and the conclusions which were drawn, a number of recommendations were made. The study recommends that CPD needs of regular teachers should be catered for so that they are able to teach learners with special education needs effectively. Teachers should be fully involved in the identification of CPD needs. CPD should be well structured and facilitated by experts and should be held more within schools and less frequently outside their schools to ensure maximum participation by teachers. Intensive school-based professional development programs can help teachers to increase their knowledge and improve their teaching. By placing responsibility in the hands of educators, learning activities become locally driven and self-directed, thereby situating CPD in the daily realities of site/school or classroom life. CPD in this perspective, is viewed as a long-term process that acknowledges that educators learn over time.

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