Challenges Experienced in Implementing School-based Continuing Professional Teacher Development in Fort Beaufort Education District in South Africa

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ABSTRACT This study employed an interpretive paradigm to investigate the challenges experienced by teachers in implementing school-based continuing professional teacher development in the Fort Beaufort education district in South Africa. Semi-structured interviews were administered to 40 participants from ten different schools. The findings of the study revealed that most of the participants were unable to implement continuing professional teacher development programs for various reasons, such as inadequate training in the implementation process, a lack of resource materials, and insufficient time for professional development initiatives. The results also revealed that the implementation of school-based continuing professional teacher development requires not only an institutionalised advocacy but also a deep reconceptualization in order to provide the type of support that is urgently required to meet the professional development needs of high school teachers in South Africa.

INTRODUCTION

Professional development for teachers was designed to offer teachers new opportunities for peer learning through a reflective dialogue and adopts the principles of effective continuing professional development (Haßler et al. 2015). Through Continuing Teacher Professional Development (CPTD), teachers received support and skills necessary to enhance the quality of teaching and learning (Hennessy et al. 2015; Heystek and Terhover 2015; Mansour et al. 2014; Impedovo et al. 2016; Hennessy et al. 2015). The emphasis on CPTD is to support the post-2015 development agenda to improve quality of teaching and learning (UNESCO 2014; Schweisfurth 2015; Hennessy 2016). Continuing Professional Teacher development has also been given serious research attention in South Africa and other African countries (DBE 2011; Adu and Okeke 2014; Mpahlwa and Okeke 2016; Mansour et al. 2014; Jita and Mokhele 2014; Heystek and Terhover 2015; Haßler et al. 2014; Hardman 2015; Selemani-Meke and Rembe 2014).

At present, the trends are increasingly shifting towards school-initiated professional development in which schools are encouraged to adapt school-based continuing professional development (SBCPTD) programs to foster change in their classroom practice (McLaughlin and Talbert 2006; Engelbrecht et al. 2007). South Africa has also embraced SBCPTD programs as a means of developing teachers and promoting life-long learning (Fletcher and Zuber-Skerrit 2007; Steyn 2009). SBCPTD programs are designed to assist and support teachers in their quest for competence, as well as provide support and opportunities for development to ensure continued growth (Stoll et al. 2006).

According to Engelbrecht et al. (2007), SBCPTD programs are essentially a teacher-initiated grassroots exercise. However, there is no clear guideline for coordinating the programs effectively for teachers to learn and develop professional expertise in the face of inadequate teacher support, a lack of time and heavy workloads (Mastropieri and Scruggs 2005; Singh 2010). Hardman et al. (2015) studied the implementation of school based teacher development in Tanzania. They found that teachers who participated showed significant pedagogical practices and positive attitude towards learners.
The present study focused on investigating the challenges experienced in implementing SBCPTD programs for high school teachers. The key motivation behind this research was to look at a good practice when implementing SBCPTD programs in ten selected high schools. The focus on good practice in research is new, especially on SBCPTD implementation within the South African context. While many studies have been conducted on the implementation of continuing professional teacher development (CPTD), few have systematically investigated SBCPTD programs, especially in poor rural schools with difficult working conditions, inadequate resources among others (Engelbrecht et al. 2007; Ono and Ferreira 2010; Onwu and Mogari 2004; Villegas-Reimers 2003). Although SBCPTD programs are currently being implemented in some high schools, the programs have yet to be fully and effectively implemented to meet the desired goals.

One of the problems is that very little time is allocated for the programs even though they comprise both formal and informal learning activities. Largely it appears that little importance is attributed to the implementation of SBCPTD programs at the school level. From the reviewed literature, it would seem that despite the introduction of and advocacy for the adoption of SBCPTD programs, the implementation process has not being easy (Mastropieri and Scruggs 2005; Singh 2010). Given this scenario, it is necessary to investigate the challenges experienced by teachers in implementing SBCPTD programs.

This study was part of a broader study that examined the implementation of SBCPTD in selected high schools in the Fort Beaufort education district. Hence, the main objective of this paper was to investigate the challenges experienced by teachers in implementing SBCPTD.

**METHODOLOGY**

**Research Design**

The study adopted a qualitative research design, using a case study, through the administration of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with participants. The research design discussed in this paper was chosen based on its ability to offer an in-depth and detailed justification for the phenomenon and so permits the researchers the opportunity to carry out verbal descriptive analysis. The case study revealed a number of common themes in the challenges experienced in implementing SBCPTD.

**Research Participants**

The research participants consisted of 40 teachers, including principals, heads of department and members of senior management teams, from ten selected high schools in the Fort Beaufort education district in the Eastern Cape. The researchers interviewed the participants to solicit information about the phenomenon under study. The schools and the participants were purposively selected.

**Research Instrument**

In order to gain a deeper insight into, and a broader perspective of, the challenges experienced by teachers in implementing SBCPTD programs, the researchers used semi-structured interviews to obtain the qualitative data. The in-depth personal interviews with each of the participants were conducted during school hours in the principal’s office. The interviews facilitated direct interaction between the researchers and the interviewees and the interview format allowed the researchers to obtained rich qualitative data. The researchers found the interviews insightful, as they made it possible to discover and record the lived experiences of the participants concerning the challenges they came up against (Mears 2012). The semi-structured interview procedure permitted the researchers, firstly, to ask a series of structured questions before probing deeper using open-ended questions. As a data gathering technique, the flexibility and adaptability of the semi-structured interview enabled the researchers to probe for deeper responses, as well as to follow up leads, elaborate on original responses, obtain additional and more detailed data, and clarify answers (Creswell 2014).

**Procedures**

Permission was obtained from the Fort Beaufort Education District. The researchers also obtained permission from the principals of all the selected schools to organise dates for conducting the interviews. Data were collected from all participants during official working hours using
handwritten notes and tape-recorded interviews. All the interviews were audio taped and transcribed, and all the participants were asked to review the transcripts for verification and to sign the agreement forms allowing the researchers to use the interview data (Creswell 2014).

Data Analysis

The process of data analysis for this paper began by transcribing the audiotaped interviews verbatim. The researchers crosschecked the results with the participants and the raw data from the interview were analysed thematically using descriptive analysis (Creswell 2014). Patterns, similarities and differences emerged, which serve to illustrate the realities, challenges and potential of SBCPTD in South African high schools.

RESULTS

Three main themes became evident in the answers to the research question: ‘What are the challenges experienced by high school teachers when implementing school based continuing professional teacher development?’ These themes include lack of training or expertise to implement SBCPTD, lack of resources and lack of time due to a heavy workload.

Challenges Teachers Encounter Due to Lack of Training/Expertise

The study sought to establish the challenges encountered by teachers in implementing SBCPTD programs in their schools. Data elicited from participants across the sample schools indicated that teachers experienced several challenges in implementing SBCPTD programs. They shared the view that the major obstacle to the proper implementation of SBCPTD programs is a lack of trained or qualified personnel. The data revealed that teachers require sufficient capacity as well as specific training, especially those key teachers involved in facilitating the implementation programs. From the major role-players interviewed, some distinct responses emerged on the challenges encountered. Participants acknowledged the lack of training/expertise when implementing SBCPTD programs. Some of the responses are presented as follows:

As one of the facilitator of SBCPTD programs in my school, we were not trained on how to implement SBCPTD programs, as a result, we lacked expertise and this weakened the implementation process.

The SBCPTD implementation in my school are limited, there is no consistency, no internal development due to lack of training/expertise and had reduced the programs to a compliance exercise with limited or no professional development.

The expertise regarding the implementation of SBCPTD programs offered at my school is minimal. There are certain areas of professional development especially subject areas that require input from experts. We need professional and expert guidance of qualified and trained personnel to provide us with the necessary knowledge and skills.

Lack of training is the greatest challenge we face when implementing SBCPTD programs. It is a serious setback to us teachers after so much advocacy of SBCPTD. An untrained teacher cannot give what he/she does not have. Hence, it becomes difficult to implement effectively.

Challenges Teachers Experience Due to a Lack of Resources

The researchers investigated the problems teachers experienced with SBCPTD because of a lack of resources. Participants revealed that their schools were under-resourced with insufficient textbooks and they claimed that teaching and learning resources were always inadequate. The following are some of the participants’ responses:

If you have a well-resourced school and all the necessary tools, equipment and materials requirements are made available and put into practice by teachers during and after the SBCPTD activities then the programs would be success.

We cannot do more than we are doing now. Just have a look around you, there is nothing in this school, no resources, and we are understaff. So to do more than is required of us is asking the impossible.

We are understaffed, no resource, the classrooms are not in good condition, no furniture. The only thing that is going well in this school is our ability to work together in compliance.

A good number of the interviewed participants stressed the importance of good leadership: “Strong school leadership and teacher buy-in is essential to create a positive school culture in the implementation exercise.”
Some of participants’ comments in this regard are highlighted as follows:

We have dedicated and committed teachers, it has been a great help even though they do not have the specialised skills to implement the SBCPTD programs.

There is a strong school culture of trust and support here at my school. We work together because we trust and have mutual respect for one another, which makes the implementation of SBCPTD possible and effective despite the challenges.

Challenges Teachers Experience Due to a Lack of Time and a Heavy Workload

Participants’ views reflect a number of commonalities on issues regarding time and workload, which limited the implementation of SBCPTD programs. They complained that teachers’ time-consuming administrative burden, especially of school principals and their deputies who are the sole facilitators of SBCPTD programs, reduces the implementation programs to merely a compliance exercise. Data revealed that the school principals’ administrative duties were viewed as cumbersome, time-consuming and distracting attention from the purpose and essence of the teaching and learning activities. Data also revealed that although SBCPTD programs are good for teacher professional development, teachers complained that they do not have the time to carry out the process formally and in full, nor do they have the set of skills needed to express their development needs.

School principals shared this view, adding that the time invested in administrative work amounted to more than the time spent on classroom activities. This, in their opinion, is not what is supposed to happen because their basic primary assignment is teaching and learning, which they claim they rarely do. On the other hand, with regard to the SBCPTD programs, they felt that the biggest challenge was that they had little or no time for their implementation on a continuous basis owing to lack of time and the existing workload.

Some participants admitted that they do not have the time due to their own workload and nor do they have the capacity to fully assist their colleagues. They revealed that what they do is just the necessities. However, interviewed participants emphasised that the time invested in assisting and supporting their colleagues through SBCPTD was believed to be considerable. They expressed the view that education district officials do not prioritise needs, as well as displaying a lack of commitment and support for schools with the practical aspects of SBCPTD programme implementation.

DISCUSSION

This paper investigated the challenges experienced by teachers in implementing SBCPTD programs at selected high schools in the Fort Beaufort Education District in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. The study established that one of the challenges facing teachers in implementing SBCPTD programs was a lack training/expertise. Steyn (2009) explains that for any SBCPTD implementation to be effective, trained experts and specialists in both subject content and pedagogical knowledge must facilitate the program. Teachers felt that they did not have sufficient training to carry out implementation effectively and that this limited their efficiency and affected their teaching and learning activities. The results of this research revealed that teachers have to be sufficiently trained specifically in planning, organising, executing, and evaluating SBCPTD programs. According to Ha•ler et al. (2015), teachers should regularly go through in-depth process of critical reflections.

This finding supports Laukkan’s (2008) argument that teachers should be highly trained, be experts in their field, and have mastery skills to cope with student diversity. In general, teachers should be well trained, recognise value in the training they receive, be able to understand the subject matter, know how to implement it effectively, and be able to work and help learners to learn. It also emerged that the education district officials have to be committed to the implementation of SBCPTD programs. In addition, they need to identify and prioritise teachers’ needs by organising training specifically on SBCPTD for teachers.

The researchers observed that the lack of training/expertise in relation to teachers’ likelihood of linked to the ineffectiveness of the implementation process. Nevertheless, teachers still manage to implement the programs regardless of the challenges. This lack of training/expertise definitely poses a serious problem to the implementation of SBCPTD programs in high
schools across the country. The literature reveals that because teachers have undergone training during their in-service years, it follows that they should be well informed on how to implement the programs at the school level (Ginsburg 2010). However, the scenario in this study is quite different. Many of the teachers do not have sufficient capacity (DOE 2010) that would enable them to implement SBCPTD programs at the school level. The greatest challenge for the South African government in the post-apartheid era has been the education and training of teachers (Fletcher and Skerritt 2007). The researchers are of the opinion that SBCPTD is seen as a learning area that does not demand much training or expertise from the teachers.

Issues related to a lack of resources also emerged as part of the challenges teachers experienced in the implementation of SBCPTD programs. The participants indicated that their schools were under resourced. When they wanted to put into practice what they had learnt from the SBCPTD exercise, they failed to do so effectively because of resource limitations. They simply failed to express their confidence in their capacity, skills, and knowledge and their ability to tackle the challenges they might encounter in the present school climate with rapidly developing fields of knowledge and approaches. This also becomes problematic when the students fail to understand information conveyed by teachers without teaching aids or tools such as textbooks. Students also had difficulty fully understanding difficult topics without a textbook to help them. It has been argued that no meaningful teaching and learning can take place without adequate resource materials and funding (Johanson and Adams 2004). Education officials can make a positive impact by supplying schools with adequate finance to procure resource materials such as textbooks, teaching aids and stationery to enable teachers and learners to play their role effectively in the implementation process (Fitzsimmons as cited in Ward 2007). Naker and Sekitoileko (2009) support this and stress that for training programs to be successfully implemented; resources should be available for teachers both during and after training.

This paper shows that a lack of time and the heavy workload are the other challenges faced by teachers in implementing SBCPTD programs. Finding time for the implementation of any SBCPTD difficult (Du Plessis et al. 2007). The involvement of teachers in SBCPTD programs is a huge commitment and the teachers in the study had only engaged in training for a short period to discuss issues of concern. In addition, it was found that SBCPTD programs were not conducted at times that were convenient for staff and the time spent on the programs was inadequate even though the teachers decided upon the content of the training. The data revealed that teachers wanted to keep on improving because they could, on their own, organise their collaborative activities. The finding from this study is corroborated by other studies that indicates development agenda post-2015 shift from increasing access to improving quality (UNESCO 2014; Schweisfurth 2015; Hennessy 2015).

Therefore, more time was required to implement changes in classroom practice and classroom culture. If a regular time is set aside for teacher collaboration it may help to ensure that lessons are more highly polished, learners’ needs are better met, and the curriculum is cohesive from year to year (Maistry 2008). According to King (2014) who used evidence-based framework to evaluate the impact of teacher professional development. She found that lack of skills and tools determine how professional development is conceptualize and posited that there is a need to evaluate framework that can support teachers, schools and policy-maker on professional teacher development.

**CONCLUSION**

The emphasis of this study was on the challenges experienced by high school teachers in the implementation of SBCPTD programs. Results from the study revealed that the issue of inadequate training/expertise is one of the major impediments to the implementation of SBCPTD programs. The findings of this study thus show there is an urgent need for teachers to be trained to facilitate the SBCPTD programs that will help improve teacher professional development as well as the teaching and learning activities.

Regarding the time available for these programs and the teachers’ workload, the study noted that time for consultation, observing colleagues or engaging in SBCPTD activities was not incorporated into the school schedule; despite the fact that time is an essential component for learning to occur. It takes time to implement programs and for changes in practice and
classroom culture to occur, thus the more time invested the better the results. Similarly, it was established that the sampled schools lacked resources, making the implementation exercise challenging for teachers. Resources are vital to the success of any SBCPTD programme; hence, providing schools with resources would be a positive step toward encouraging and motivating teachers to engage in SBCPTD.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the findings and the discussions generated from the interviews held with participants from the selected high schools, the following recommendations are made to improve the implementation of SBCPTD programs:

- The government of South Africa, as one of the statutory bodies, which has embraced the ideal of SBCPTD, programs as one of the teacher initiatives that would bring about change in classroom practice, should reconsider its training structure for the implementation of SBCPTD.

- The Department of Basic Education (DBE) should make all education stakeholders aware of the implementation of SBCPTD programs and their importance for teacher development.

- The DBE should employ qualified people to carry out the training for all practising teachers in South African schools. In addition, the key teachers responsible for facilitating SBCPTD programs should specifically be trained on how to implement the programs efficiently.

- The DBE should create an enabling legislation to support the implementation process. This is necessary because at present there is not enough time for SBCPTD in schools. However, by aligning professional development efforts, and by including job-embedded time, improvement would be possible.

- Schools should intensify the SBCPTD training programs for teachers to empower them with the knowledge and skills required for effective teaching and learning.

- Schools should be provided with the resources they require for implementing SBCPTD programs.

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