Exploring the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Needs of Basic Schoolteachers in Ghana

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to understand teachers' perceptions of their professional development needs and examine how these needs are utilised to design CPD interventions for teachers in Ghana. The study uses a qualitative case study research approach to collect data from 25 teachers and five key informants in in-depth interviews. The results demonstrate teachers' on-going learning needs in pedagogical content knowledge, technology integration in teaching and learning, and school and student management practices. Teachers also revealed that existing CPD interventions inadequately address their specific development needs. Teachers expressed their lack of voice and self-directedness in CPD program planning, design, and implementation, which they attributed as a significant cause of CPD ineffectiveness. Thus, the study recommends that teachers' learning needs be formed as the pivot around which CPD is organised to increase teacher participation and CPD program effectiveness.

KEYWORDS

Adult Learning, Basic Schoolteachers, Ghana, In-Service Training, Participation and Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK), Professional Development Needs, Teacher Learning Needs

INTRODUCTION

The changing teaching environment is such that teachers' initial preparation is inadequate to provide them with lifetime knowledge and skill sets needed for teaching regardless of its highest quality (OECD, 2010). These changes necessitate new approaches to teaching and learning, higher educational standards, which increases teachers' responsibilities in today's schools and, at the same time, challenges their role as facilitators of learning (Kankam, 2013). To thrive and learn to adapt to these changes, teachers require appropriate support and opportunities to learn through participation in continuing professional development (CPD) activities.

Defined as activities that develop an individual's skills, knowledge, expertise, and other characteristics as a teacher (OECD, 2014), CPD ensures that teachers are part of a skilled and up to date profession. Teachers' participation in CPD therefore assists in filling their knowledge gaps while they continue to develop their expertise in teaching. To Clarke and Hollingsworth (2002), CPD participation changes teachers' classroom practices that positively affect student learning and improved

educational outcomes. However, a significant question to pose is "does teachers' participation in CPD bring about these desirable changes"?

Emerging evidence suggests that most CPD programs fail to have their intended impact on teachers' professional development (Meissel et al., 2016; Wei et al., 2010), because the contents of the programs do not satisfy participating teachers' needs (Ríordáin et al., 2017; Shriki & Patkin, 2016). Teachers now need more than generalised workshops or in-service training activities that provide information and raise awareness on some aspects of their teaching practice (Boud & Hager, 2012). Instead, teachers want practical ideas that directly relate to their classrooms' day-to-day operation and will refrain from participating in activities that do not address those needs (Guskey, 2003; Khandehroo et al., 2011). Hence, there is a need to design CPD activities that support teachers' specific classroom needs.

Implementing CPD programs that address teachers' specific needs underlies the theory of andragogy and increases teachers' motivation for participation, and program effectiveness (Shriki & Patkin, 2016; Terehoff, 2002). Teachers, as adult learners prefer to be self-directed with some degree of ownership and responsibility for their learning (Knowles et al., 1998). For these reasons, it is imperative that designing CPD activities begin by surveying the needs of their target audience. Teachers should be encouraged to identify and voice their own development needs, and the duties of facilitators and educators must be to tailor CPD programs to these needs accordingly.

With these considerations in mind, the present study sought to investigate the perceptions of basic schoolteachers (teachers from Grades 7 – 9) in the Central region of Ghana on their professional development or learning needs and whether those needs informed the design of existing CPD interventions. The investigations were framed within the following research questions:

1. What are the professional development/learning needs of basic schoolteachers in the Central region of Ghana?
2. How do these needs inform CPD intervention provided for these teachers?

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section provides pertinent literature on some key concepts involved in the study.

Teacher Continuing Professional Development

CPD of teachers is recognised as a long-term learning process, which extends beyond teachers' pre-service education at the tertiary level to in-service training at their workplace (Putnam & Borko, 2000). These learning processes involve a suite of activities that aim to develop teachers' skills, knowledge, expertise, and other distinct characteristics from their pre-service training (Caena, 2011). According to Creemers and Kyriakides (2013), CPD encompasses all forms of learning "undertaken by teachers beyond the point of their initial training" (p. 3). This includes both informal learning experiences and those consciously planned activities "intended to be of direct or indirect benefit to the individual, group or school, which contribute, through these, to the quality of education in the classroom" (Day, 1999, p. 4).

Teachers' participation in CPD activities impacts on their professional knowledge and skill sets to perform effectively in the classroom. A teacher having undertaken professional development programs gains better insight into classroom practices, and implements better instructional designs culminating in effective learning outcomes among their students. Teachers' participation in CPD activities empowers them to make complex decisions regarding practice, develop their abilities to identify and solve problems, and enhance their content and pedagogical knowledge to improve students' learning (Roesken-Winter et al., 2015; Shriki & Patkin, 2016).

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