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An Investigation into Barriers to Implementation of School-based Continuing Professional Development in Selected Secondary Schools in Zimba District, Zambia

By Owen Kashoti, Moses Changala & Margaret M. Sakala

Abstract

The study sought to investigate barriers to effective implementation of school-based continuing professional development in selected secondary schools in Zimba district of Zambia. The study objectives were to identify forms of school-based continuing professional development; establish barriers to effective implementation of school-based continuing professional development; and suggest measures to mitigate barriers to effective implementation of school-based continuing professional development. A descriptive mixed method research design was employed. The sample was 57 respondents comprising 9 heads of department, 30 teachers and 18 pupils from 3 secondary schools in Zimba district. The district was selected because of its strategic location and accessibility in Southern province, coupled with the district authorities' emphasis on the school-based continuing development programme. Data was collected using in-depth and semi-structure interviews guides. The data was analysed by content analysis and results presented using key concepts and narrations. The study revealed that forms of school-based continuing professional development in schools included lesson study, in-service training meetings, subject associations, teacher group meetings and lesson demonstrations. Barriers to effective implementation of school-based continuing professional development were work overload, limited time, negative attitude towards the programme and lack of reference materials. Suggested measures to mitigate barriers to effective implementation of school-based continuing professional development included increased monitoring of relevant activities, adequately supporting subject coordinators and working out action plans. The study recommended strengthening of school-based continuing professional development by harmonising it with other school programmes, purchasing relevant reference materials and allocating adequate time for its activities.

Key words: Barriers, effective, implementation, school-based continuing professional development

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Introduction

The main purpose of this article is to examine barriers to effective implementation of school-based continuing professional development in selected secondary schools in Zimba district, Zambia. Teaching is fundamentally a process of human interaction. In spite of the availability of several materials that could be provided for teaching and learning, it would still call for a teacher who is skilled in teaching. The teaching profession can be rewarding and worthwhile only if the teacher has skills to reach the child's heart while teaching. A skilled teacher provides an opportunity to develop the student's thinking skills and thinking strategies which is a foundation for thoughtful learning. The teacher with good teaching skills is usually one with high esteem (Ministry of Education, 2009). He/she should also be confident and competence in his/her subject area.

School-based continuing professional development is one of the effective ways of improving education as far as teaching is concerned as it targets self-development, group and eventually institutional development (Ministry of Education, 2009). Each school is unique and is not the same as the school next door as they have different learning needs and aspire for different desires as evidenced by the mottos that schools reflect on their billboards. Effective management of school-based continuing professional development becomes imperative for the school management team, if they have to become a better performing school. Based on the principle that a better performing school is a well managed school since it manages its school curriculum in a most effective and efficient manner: the same principle should apply to the management of the school-based continuing professional development. The head teacher with his / her school management team should take up the task of managing the school-based continuing professional development as their responsibility and be accountable for it (Ministry of Education, nd.). Teacher education is a continuing process that must be extended throughout the individual's years of actual teaching. The foundation laid in the pre-service programme may be sound and adequate as a start, but it is not sufficient for life. As with other professionals, teachers have a responsibility, to themselves and to their profession, to deepen their knowledge, extend their professional skills, and keep themselves up-to-date on major developments affecting their profession. A vital education system is not static, but dynamic, promoting change, in response to the needs and expectations of society, in such areas as subject content, pedagogical approaches, pastoral care for pupils, assessment procedures, school organization and management, and relationships with parents and the community (Ministry of Education, 1996). This implies that teachers should also be dynamic in their approach to teaching and how they related to their learners and the community.

Professional development consists of all natural learning experiences and those conscious and planned activities which are 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. It

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is the process by which, alone and with others, teachers review, renew and extend their commitment as change agents to the moral purpose of teaching. It is also a process by which teachers acquire and develop critically the knowledge, skills and emotional intelligence essential to good professional thinking, planning and practice with children, young people and colleagues throughout each phase of their teaching lives (Day, 1999). Teachers are also expected to keep abreast with changes in curricular and related aspects, especially in this age of new information communication technologies.

Continuing professional development can be classified into three main types. These are direct teaching, such as courses and workshops; learning in school, such as peer coaching, critical friendships, mentoring, action research, and task-related planning teams; and out of school learning, such as learning networks, visits to other schools and school-university partnerships (Leiberman & Woods, 2002). It is, therefore, an integrated and holistic programme which is meant to equip teachers with appropriate and relevant knowledge, skills and competencies to enable them perform their work better. It also promotes cooperative effort and interdependency among teaching staff and other players in the education system.

Education in general and quality education in particular, is a means for enhancing the well-being and quality of life for the entire society. However, in Zambia, the status of education has been characterised by low student achievement in national and international studies (Chavula, 2016). Furthermore, one of the challenges facing schools is the demand for the provision of quality education. Schools are being challenged by educational reformers to implement teaching and learning strategies that will prove effective for both teachers and pupils (Kabeta, Manchishi & Akakandelwa, 2013). The significance of continuing professional development in the education system can, therefore, not be overemphasised.

Statement of the Problem

There has been great concern about the quality of teaching in schools in Zambia. The general poor performance year in and year out is unacceptable considering government's effort to educate the masses and reduce illiteracy levels. Lamentations by society over pupils' poor performance are genuine. School-based continuing professional development is one of the effective ways of improving education as far as teaching is concerned as it targets self-development, group and institutional development (Ministry of Education, 2009). However, barriers to effective implementation of school-based continuing professional development in Zimba district were not explored and documented, hence the relevance of this study.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate barriers to effective implementation of school based continuing professional development in selected secondary schools in Zimba district of Zambia.

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Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study were to:

1. Examine forms of school-based continuing professional development programmes in selected secondary schools in Zimba district.
2. Identify barriers to effective implementation of school-based continuing professional development in selected secondary schools in Zimba district.
3. Find out measures to be put in place to overcome barriers to effective implementation of school-based continuing professional development in selected secondary schools in Zimba district.

Literature Review

Literature was reviewed in line with the following themes: school-based in-service training of teachers, teachers as professionals, effective continuing professional development, features of professional development, and barriers to effective continuing professional development.

School-based in-service Training of Teachers

School-based in-service training refers to activities taking place physically within a school in which the team consists of teaching staff colleagues; and the problems tackled are those arising in the school (Milondzo, 2003). According to Milondzo, keen teachers in many countries have deepened their knowledge and extended their skills by judicious use of subject advisers, inspectors of education, external advisors and consultants to their advantage. Milondzo further contends that the use of clients and agencies that are outside the school for professional training programmes for their teachers does not necessarily respond to the development needs of the teachers.

School-based in-service training programmes should be initiated by school principals, teachers, support staff, and sometimes the community. Such programmes evolve through participatory and co-operative planning among the school personnel supported by senior administration staff. An active school is constantly reviewing and reassessing its effectiveness and ready to consider new methods, new forms of organisation and new ways of dealing with problems that arise. It will also give time and attention to induction of new members of staff, not only those in their first year of teaching but all those who are new to the school (Ibe, 1990). Enhancing teaching skills is not only desirable in the interest of teaching the child, but also essential for sharpening ones' personal development and each other in issues pertaining to professional development. In the long run, followed by series of lesson study and implementation in class, it is hoped that teachers will come up with proper strategies of learner-centered teaching and learning.

Fishman, Marx, Best & Tal (2003) assert that continuous research on teachers' professional development will help to create an empirical knowledge base that links various forms of professional development to effective teacher learning. However, having the knowledge of effective forms of teachers' professional development alone is insufficient to ensure successful

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professional development for teachers. Buczynski & Hansen (2010) argue that for any professional development to be effective, teachers must practice their professional experiences.

Teachers as Professionals

There is a body of evidence of the growing advocacy for teachers to engage in continuous professional development in the efforts to maintain the level of their professionalism. Cardno (2005), for example, states that professional development for teachers is important to ensure the sustainability and growth of teaching profession while Boyle, White & Boyle (2004) assert that the continual deepening of knowledge and skills is an integral part of the professional development of any professional working in any profession.

Dean (1991) defines the term 'profession' as an occupation which requires long training involving theory as background to practice, has its own code of behaviour and has high degree of autonomy. Paramount to this definition is the emphasis on the significance of learning the theories of teaching to inform teachers' teaching practice. His definition of the term 'profession' also implies that for teaching to be considered as a profession, it is mandatory that teachers are offered continuous learning opportunities that expose them to the theories of education to develop their practice. Dean emphasises that professional development for teachers needs to be strongly grounded to the theory. Goodson (1997) supports this notion by explaining that at its best, theory works back to informed and improved practice and cautions that separation of the theoretical knowledge from practice will affect the idea of teaching as a profession.

Defining the term professionalism in the manner that best describes the work that teachers do proves to be a challenging task as the literature appears to be divided in the approaches used. Hargreaves (2000), for example, has established the link between professional development and teacher professionalism by looking at the different phases of teachers' professionalism. He asserts that the idea of 'professionalism' refers to the quality of teaching and the conduct, demeanour and the standards that guide it. In addition, Hargreaves (2000) argues that the idea of teacher professionalism has evolved in the past years due to the changes that are constantly taking place in the world's education system.

This increased expectation in the quality of education sees more teachers facing the prospect of having to teach in ways they had not been taught themselves (McLaughlin, 1997). For this reason, many teachers are starting to turn more to each other for professional learning, for a sense of direction, and for mutual support. Consequently, this has caused the shift in the nature of teaching from working alone in the isolation of their classroom to working in collaboration with their colleagues. This collegial relationship also changed the form of teachers' professional development. Instead of having off-site workshop for individual teachers, recent professional development programmes are designed to be more collaborative in nature (Hargreaves, 2000). Teachers are, therefore, not expected to work in isolation but in collaboration with their peers and other relevant stakeholders, if they are to be more effective.

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Effective Continuing Professional Development

Literature has revealed research that focused on the examination of the features of some of the best practices in relation to teachers' professional development (Garet *et al.*, 2001; Hawley & Valli, 1999, Wilson & Berne, 1999). Desimone (2009), for example, points out the fact that there is a growing consensus on the features of professional development that are believed to result in the changes in teacher knowledge and practice and possibly students' achievement. Desimone then proposes that these common features of effective professional development are measured to assess the effectiveness of any professional development programmes, no matter what types of activity they include.

Features of Effective Professional Development

A number of features of professional development are discussed in literature. However, for this study, the following features are described:

Content Focus

There is a widespread agreement among scholars for teachers' professional development to be largely viewed as knowledge and skills development (Desimone *et al.*, 2002; Garet *et al.*, 2001; Timperley *et al.* 2007). The literature reviewed exhibits a strong advocacy for teachers' professional development to be understood as opportunities for learning (Fishman *et al.*, 2003). Professional development for teachers needs to give them the opportunities to learn from their own practice by way of self-reflection in addition to preparing them for their new roles and responsibility (Garrett & Bowles, 1997). Teachers are also expected to be innovative and resourceful in their work in order to make the teaching and learning process more relevant and exciting.

Fishman *et al.* (2003) add that teachers' professional development needs to focus on the enhancement of their professional knowledge, beliefs and attitudes so that they will be able to improve their student learning. This reinforces Hargreaves and Goodson (1996) earlier statement that professional learning for teachers will enrich their knowledge base, improve their teaching practice, and enhance their self-efficacy and commitment to quality service. In general, the content focus of any teachers' professional development falls into two categories. Fishman *et al.* (2003) explain that the first category of content focus refers to the knowledge related to general teaching work such as assessment, classroom organisation and management and teaching strategies, while the second category refers to the subject content itself. This is consistent with the teaching and learning process in which learners interact with their teachers, acquire relevant knowledge and skills and demonstrate mastery of these aspects through assessment and task performance. Therefore, there is a complementary relationship between continuing professional development and the teaching and learning process.

Assessment is a major component of all the core studies covered as through their assessment skills teachers are able to judge the impact of their changed practice on student learning (Timperley *et al.*, 2007). The authors explain that teachers' sound assessment skills make it possible for them to make ongoing adjustment to their teaching practice so that it can be

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more effective. Consequently, knowledge content has become the most significant component of any form of teachers' professional development programme. Borko (2004) argues that having a strong emphasis on knowledge content is critical to the success of any professional development experienced by teachers. This is because participation in professional development programmes is believed to allow teachers the opportunity to renew their knowledge base while at the same time introducing new knowledge and skills into their repertoire to continuously improve their conceptual and teaching practice.

Active Learning

Numerous researches conducted to study the forms of high quality teachers' professional development conclude that reform-type professional development is more effective in changing teaching practice (Hawley & Valli, 1999; Helmer *et al.*, 2011). The traditional form of teachers' professional development is criticised for not being conducive enough to foster meaningful changes to their teaching practice (Birman *et al.*, 2000; Desimone, 2009, 2011; Kwakman, 2003). This happens as the activities designed do not provide teachers with ample opportunities to engage in active learning which is believed to be a crucial factor in sustaining the changes made to their teaching practice (Fullan & Mascal, 2000). This assertion is supported by several other authors' suggestion that professional development for teachers need to provide them the opportunity to become active learners (Harris *et al.*, 2011; Sparks & Hirsh, 1997; Villegas-Reimers, 2003). This implies that teachers should be active learners even as they are 'transmitters' of information and knowledge to their learners.

Birman *et al.* (2000) explain that professional development that incorporates active learning for teachers also includes opportunities to observe and be observed during teaching. Guskey (1995) adds that professional development for teachers needs to provide them the opportunity to get regular feedbacks on the changes made to their teaching practice. Guskey believes that this approach is able to change teaching practice compared to professional development programmes conducted in the forms of large group presentations, training programmes, workshops and seminars.

Collective Participation

Collective participation refers to the participation of teachers from the same department, subject or grade in the same professional development programme. Birman *et al.* (2000) assert that collective participation in professional development is more likely to afford opportunities for active learning and are more likely to be coherent with the teachers' other experiences. According to Garet *et al.* (2001) teachers' professional development that involves collective participation, especially for teachers in the same school, is believed to help them sustain the changes made to their teaching practice. They explain that this is because teachers are more likely to have more opportunities to discuss the concepts, skills and problems arise during their professional development experiences

In other words, collective participation in teachers' professional development programmes also engenders collaboration among the teachers. Hargreaves (1994) for example,

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discusses the use of collaboration as one of the ways for teachers to improve their teaching practice. One of the advantages of collaboration is that it increases the capacity for reflection which is argued to be a critical point to teachers' professional learning experience. Collective participation in professional development also gives teachers more opportunities to learn from each other's practice.

Kwakman (2003) says that feedback, new information or ideas do not only spring from individual learning, but to a large extent also from dialogue and interaction with other people. This reinforces Hargreaves' (1994) assertion that collaboration can be a powerful source of professional learning: a means of getting better at the job. In addition, collaboration in school also increases efficiency as it eliminates duplication and removes redundancy between teachers and subjects as activities are co-ordinated and responsibilities are shared in complementary ways.

Barriers to Effective Continuing Professional Development

The school is said to be the most suitable place for teachers to develop professionally as new teaching competencies can only be acquired in practice (Kwakman, 2003). However, despite the advocacy for teachers' professional development to be centred in practice, Ball & Cohen (1999) argue that it does not necessarily imply situations in classrooms in real time. Instead, they suggest that better learning opportunities for teachers can be created through strategic documentation of practice. They recommend, among others, the collection of concrete records and artefacts of teaching and learning that teachers could use as the curriculum for professional inquiries.

Professional development programmes also help teachers to become more knowledgeable in the subject content taught. In addition, reflective practice and constant evaluation of their teaching practice are also believed to lead to a better lesson structure to effectively meet the students' needs (Harris *et al.*, 2011; Powell *et al.*, 2003). However, barriers to effective school-based continuing professional development have been recorded. Bredeson (2002) points out that continuous learning opportunities for teachers to enrich and refine their professional knowledge and practice is often undermined by the lack of time, money, and appropriate structures. Odden *et al.* (2002) contend that in such a system, administrators are not able to isolate spending solely for continuing professional development. This implies that, much as schools would like to promote continuing profession development programmes and activities in the mainstream, there are other competing programmes which also require time and resource allocation, some of which are considered more pertinent to the teaching and learning process.

Methodology

The study employed a descriptive mixed method research design. The sample was 57 respondents comprising 9 heads of department, 30 teachers and 18 pupils from 3 secondary schools in Zimba district. In-depth and semis-structured interview guides were used to collect data. The data was analysed by content analysis and results presented using key concepts and narrations.

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Findings and Discussion

This section presents the findings and discussion of findings in line with the study objectives.

Forms of school-based continuing professional development programmes

The study revealed that schools under study had common school-based continuing professional development which included lesson study, teacher group meetings, subject association meetings and lesson demonstrations. The main rationale behind school-based continuing professional development is that teachers ought to be challenged to change their teacher-centered methods to learner-centered methods of delivering lessons. Dean (1991) contends that for teaching to be considered as a profession and teachers as professional, it is fundamental that they continuously experience professional development throughout their career. Kwakman (2003) adds that keeping up with ideal teaching trends is a core responsibility of professionals and that the knowledge base underlying professional work relies on the input of new information since it is subject to continuous improvement. The study further revealed that most teachers indicated that they greatly benefited from school-based continuing professional activities by way of enhancing their teaching skills and competencies, despite facing some challenges. This finding shows that school-based continuing professional development has a positive effect on teaching and learning as it promotes the practice of self-reflection amongst teachers. This is consistent with Powell *et al.* (2003) who assert that teachers generally identify the ability to reflect more deeply on their practice as the immediate impact of continuing professional development.

Professional development experienced by teachers enables them to continuously make self-assessment of their own practice. They are more exposed to and have access to various teaching strategies and techniques that they are able to adapt to their students' needs. Birman, Desimone & Garet (2000) point out that professional development plays a key role in addressing the gap between teachers and standards-based reform.

Barriers to effective implementation of school-based continuing professional development

The study revealed that barriers to effective implementation of school-based continuing professional development included work overloads, limited time, negative attitude towards school-based continuing professional development activities by some teachers' and lack of reference materials. The study indicated that there were a lot of gaps in the way school-based continuing professional development activities were being carried out in the school under study. The schools operated without proper libraries and had insufficient teaching and learning materials. Bredeson (2002) asserts that continuous learning opportunities for teachers to enrich and refine their professional knowledge and practice are often undermined by the lack of time, money, and appropriate structures.

The study also revealed that school-based continuing professional development activities were not given priority in the schools. For example, these activities were often placed under the instructional support category in the budget which also included other categories such as curriculum development, instructional supervision, computer technology and media. This

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implied that school-based continuing professional development activities were not so ‘visible’ as priority was often given to the other aforementioned activities which were considered more crucial to the operation of schools and the teaching and learning process. Odden *et al.* (2002) posit that in such a system, administrators are not able to isolate spending solely for continuing professional development.

Measures to be put in place to overcome barriers to effective implementation of school-based continuing professional development

The respondents were asked to suggest measures aimed at mitigating barriers to effective implementation of school-based continuing professional development. They suggested that there should be increased monitoring of school-based continuing professional development activities by school authorities and Ministry of Education officials to ensure their smooth and effective running. They also suggested that subject coordinators, should be supported and encouraged to prepare school-based continuing professional development action plans in order to guide and structure the activities.

The respondents further suggested that the significance of school-based continuing professional development should be emphasised and that every teacher should be encouraged or compelled to participate in them. They added that school-based continuing professional development activities should be conducted as often as possible in any given academic term. Birman *et al.* (2000) posit that coherence professional learning experiences enable teachers to sustain the changes made to their teaching practice as they encourage continuous communication among teachers. They add that the coherence of professional development experienced with other professional development experiences is linked to improved teaching practice among teachers.

This finding further strengthens the argument for teachers’ professional development to be tailored to teachers’ specific needs as it matches the teachers’ new knowledge with their existing knowledge. This, in turn, would create a more meaningful experience for them and enable them enhance their pedagogical skills. Ball & Cohen (1999) state that teaching cannot be wholly equipped by some well-considered body of knowledge and argue that teachers need to learn how to use what they learned about students’ work and idea in order to inform and improve teaching. Additionally, Feiman-Nemser & Remillard (1995) stress that since this knowledge is situated in practice, it must be learned in practice. In fact, changes to teaching practice are difficult to sustain if teachers are not given sufficient amount of time to consolidate the new knowledge and skills gained and to have it embedded in their practice (Garet *et al.*, 2001; Timperley *et al.*, 2007). There is, therefore, need to prioritise and allocate adequate time and resources to the school-based continuing professional development programme.

Conclusion

The study concluded that although school-based continuing professional development programmes were taking place in secondary schools in Zimba district, there were a number of barriers that affected its effective implementation. It also concluded that school-based continuing

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professional development was not given the importance or prominence it deserved *vis-à-vis* other school activities, hence its relatively lower status. The study also concluded that teachers had less time to attend to continuing professional development activities largely because they had heavy teaching loads besides other commitments.

Recommendations

The study recommended that school-based continuing professional development should be strengthened by harmonising it with other school programmes, hence giving it more prominence and important. It also recommended the purchase of relevant reference materials and allocation of adequate time for school-based continuing professional development programmes and activities. The study further recommended that a nation-wide study be conducted to establish challenges and barriers to effective implementation of school-based continuing professional development but with a gender dimension.

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