

TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: KEYS TO BASIC SCHOOL TEACHERS' CURRICULUM PRACTICE SUCCESS IN GHANA

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ABSTRACT: *It is generally acknowledged that promoting teacher quality is a key element in improving primary and secondary education. Therefore the study sought to investigate teachers' continuous professional development (CPD) and its influence on their classroom practices at the Kassena-Nankana West District in Ghana. From a population of 310, 93 basic school teachers were sampled using the simple random sampling technique. Questionnaire and interview guide were used for data collection. Descriptive statistics and Pearson Product-Moment correlation were used. Findings revealed that teacher effectiveness was significantly relegated to effective teaching in basic schools. Similarly, basic school teachers reported that professional development programmes were relevant to their classroom management practices. Consequently, this study concluded that capacity building programmes should be promoted regularly to build basic school teachers capacity for effective teaching.*

KEYWORDS: Teacher Professional Development, Teacher Quality, Basic Education classroom Management.

INTRODUCTION

Global challenges such as hyper-competition, technological innovation, and economic crunch present stimulus for change in human endeavors. Change that requires continuous learning to enable individuals to adapt to such global challenges and their environments (Galbraith & Fouch, 2007). Indeed, teachers also face enormous workplace challenges orchestrated by constant technological innovations and the demands of the 21st century. The speedy shifts in the way things are done have forced organizations, institutions and businesses to demand more efficiency from their employees (source). The global challenges evidently require teacher bodies such as the Ghana Education Service (GES) to employ creative approaches to update staff knowledge and build capacity through continuous professional development. Teachers' continuing professional development (CPD) has become a major focus within the school reform and school improvement literatures because of the belief that student learning and success are due, in large part, to the effectiveness of teachers (OECD, 2009). Generally, teacher professional development refers to ongoing learning opportunities available to teachers and other education personnel to enhance individual's skills, knowledge, expertise and other characteristics as a teacher (OECD, 2009; Schostak, et al, 2010; & Opfer & David, 2011). Professional development is seen as an essential mechanism for enhancing teachers' content knowledge and improving their classroom practices. If student learning is to be improved, then one pathway for doing so is the provision of more effective professional learning activities for teachers in schools; where these activities result in positive change for teachers and their pupils (Opfer & David, 2011). In Ghana, the Anamuah-Mensah's Report) the government recognizes the need for the training and development of quality human resource for the implementation and achievement of the recommendations.

The quality of education depends on the ability, hard work and dedication of the teacher (Rahman, Jumani, Akhter, Chisthi, & Ajmal, 2011). Commenting on the important roles teachers play in achieving a nation's educational goals, Rahman *et al* (2011) explain that, the academic qualifications, knowledge of the subject matter, competence and skills of teaching and the commitment of the teacher have effective influence on the teaching and learning process. This explains why teachers are expected to be competent in their classrooms. It also justifies the urgent need for the professional development (PD) of teachers. By emphasizing learning and the development of teachers, schools are able to ensure that learning processes contribute to the attainment of goals and the enhancement of quality and learner performance in schools (Browell, 2000; Cullen, 1999). Policy makers and education leaders are convinced that if they are going to make significant improvement in the quality of education, good teachers are critical (Kaff, 2004). The future of every nation's development depends on the quality of education it provides for its young children. The Government of Ghana (GoG) having identified education as a key development tool of the nation and aiming to ensure free access to quality basic education has worked tirelessly over the years to achieve these goals. As a result, policies such as the abolition of school fees, introduction of the capitation grant and the school feeding programme were introduced by the Ghana government.

In 1999, an evaluation of the World Bank-Supported Primary School Development Project (SPSDP) indicated that teachers were not meeting professional expectations. The study reached the conclusion that the management and utilization of instructional time was a fundamental problem which undermined the quality of education in public schools. Similarly, poor instructional quality has also been identified a major problem for Ghanaian schools. The teacher is the central figure around whom the success or otherwise of every instructional activities revolves. It is therefore necessary to provide training opportunities for teachers at all times so as to improve their performance in the classroom. Several studies have acknowledge that promoting teacher quality is a key element in improving primary and secondary education (Akeampong, 2003; Caena, 2011; Shriki & Lavy, 2012; Rahman *et al*, 2011; Ridley, 2011; Sharp, 2009; Shulman, 2000; Steyn, 2008).

Consequently, the Ghana Education Service (GES) has since 2005 developed a framework for the implementation of in-service education and training (INSET) policy for basic education. The aim is to establish an institutionalized structure for continuous professional development of basic school teachers. However, in spite of these efforts by Ghanaian government to improve teaching and learning in the public basic schools, it appears that these interventions are not yielding the desired returns because students' performance in the basic education certificate examinations (BECE) in the Kassena-Nankana West District public schools continues to decline (see Figure 1). For instance, 3.93% decline rate was recorded in pupils' basic examination results between 2008/2009 and 2009/2010 academic year in the district.

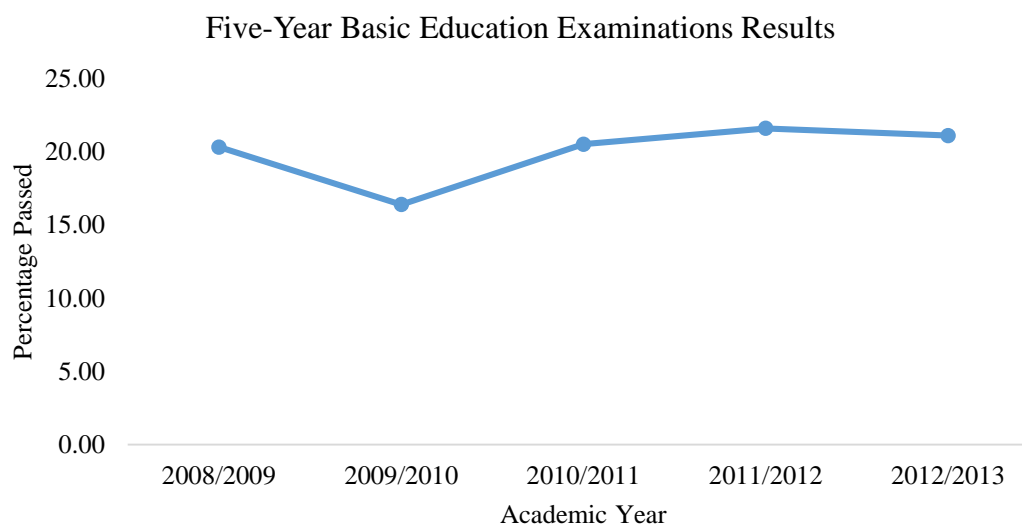


Figure 1: Results of Students in BECE from 2008 to 2013 in the Kassena-Nankana West District of Ghana.

Addressing the trajectory of pupils' performance in schools, Cobbold (2007) is of the view that the governments has to recruit an adequate number of well-qualified, highly competent, stable and dedicated teachers in order for it to achieve the aims of educational policies such as the FCUBE for all school going-age children and the model secondary schools policy which focuses on expansion of physical infrastructure and enrollment. In an attempt to address this issue of poor students' performance in the district, many interventions have been put in place by the Ghana Education Service (GES) directorate in the district Kassena-Nankana West District to address the pedagogical and content knowledge of teachers though teacher professional development. Professional development embraces almost anything that is deemed relevant to improve the skills of the classroom teacher in order to facilitate and improve his/her performance. According to Tanner and Tanner (1987), teachers' professional development is significant mainly for two reasons. Firstly, knowledge is evolving continually. Some new things come out each day which the teacher needs to refresh his/her mind for the challenges it brings. Since not everything can be taught during the teachers training in college, there is the need for the teacher to undergo some form of on-the-job training to be abreast of time. Secondly, the authors purport that principles and practices of teaching were more involving than what the teacher receives during the pre-service preparatory phase in college. The real challenges of teaching are in the classroom, where the new teacher requires understanding to overturn the challenge. Well-structured professional development has been associated with changes in teachers' practice, pedagogical skills improvement and pupils' achievement (Bolan & Weindling 2006:113;; Guskey, 1989).

Contrary findings have also been reported about professional development (Rahman *et al* (2011) found out that marginal increases in-service training have no statistically or academically significant effect on either reading or math achievement, suggesting that modest investments in staff development may not be sufficient to increase the achievement of elementary school children in high poverty schools. Another study conducted by Harris & Sass (2006) cited in (Rahman *et al*, 2011) who studied the effects of various types of education and training on the ability of teachers to promote student achievement, found out that there is no

evidence that either pre-service (undergraduate) training or the scholastic aptitude of teachers influences their ability to increase student achievement.

Therefore, this study felt that empirical research is needed to evaluate the effectiveness of government interventions aimed at improving pupils' examination performance in the Kassena-Nankana West District of Ghana. It is against this background that this study was undertaken to evaluate the influence of teachers' continuous professional development on their classroom practice in Ghana using a case study approach. The study has implications for educational stakeholders and human resource development experts who are focused on improving access and quality of education globally.

METHODOLOGY

Population and Samples of the Study

The population for this study comprises seven circuits and 98 public basic schools in the Kassena-Nankana West District of Ghana. The targeted population for this study was all basic school teachers in public basic schools in KNWD. The accessible population in this study was all public junior high schools (JHS) and all teachers in public JHS in the KNWD. According to the statistical data obtained from the District Education Directorate there are 310 teachers including head teachers in the 42 public JHS in the district. The composition of the teachers includes 255 males (185 trained and 70 untrained) and 55 female teachers (34 trained and 21 untrained). The study used 14 schools (33%) out of the 42 JHS using the simple random sampling approach from the seven circuits in the district.

Asamoah-Gyimah and Duodu (2007) suggested that, for most quantitative studies, a sample of 10% to 30% to the universe size is desirable. Hence, 30% ($n = 93$) of the accessible population were selected for the study. Indeed, 68% ($n = 63$) were male males (56 trained and 7 untrained). The female participants comprised 27% ($n = 25$) trained and 5.4% ($n = 5$) untrained teachers. The age profile of the teachers included 22 – 29 years olds (males = 33) and 21 females. Also, 30-39 years olds were 27 males and eight females. Three respondents (2 males and 1 female) were 40 – 49 years old and one male participant was in the 50 – 59 years group.

Research Instruments

A questionnaire and interview guides were used for data collection in this study. The final administered questionnaire measured teachers' management skills under sub-themes such as planning and preparedness, teaching and assessment strategies, and classroom management skills, and teacher quality. Using a 5-point Likert scale with (Strongly Disagree-1, Disagree-2, Uncertain-3, Agree-4 and Strongly Agree) in relation to teacher professional development intervention. The Cronbach's alpha values of the aggregated factors spanned between 0.644 and 0.849 for the questionnaire used. According to Leech, Barrette and Morgan (2005), alpha value of 0.70 and above indicates a reasonable internal consistency and alpha values between 0.60 and 0.69 indicate minimally adequate reliability. Ary, Jacobs and Razavieh (2002) explain that if the results are used to make decisions about a group or for research purposes, reliability coefficients of 0.50 to 0.60 are accepted. Aside the individual alpha values of the aggregated factors which were reliable, the overall internal consistency of the instrument (questionnaire) was 0.89.

According to Creswell (2007) an interview is a method of field investigation which involves person-to-person interaction between researchers and respondents during which specific questions are asked for specific answers. An interview can either be structured, semi-structured or unstructured (Asamoah-Gyimah & Duodu, 2007; Karma, 1999; Kusi, 2012; Twumasi, 2001). For this study the semi-structured interview was used. Asamoah-Gyimah and Duodu, (2007) described the semi-structured interview as the most appropriate format for getting into a particular situation in the early stage of the investigation because it is more flexible than the structured interview format. Kusi (2012) is of the view that the semi-structured interview is flexible to a greater extent and offers the interviewees the opportunity to express their views, feelings and experiences freely. The overarching question posed to teacher participants in this study sought to investigate their understandings of continuous professional development.

RESULTS

Benefits of Continuous Professional Development Programmes to the Teachers' Curriculum

The study sought to examine how teachers transfer their professional development knowledge to their classroom practices. The findings are presented in Figure 2.

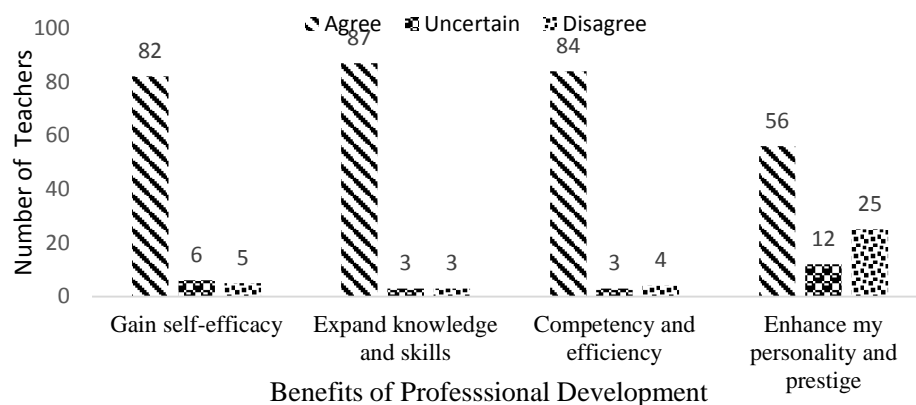


Figure 2: Teachers' Application of Professional Development Knowledge in Curriculum Practice

The overwhelming majority of the respondents reported favorable outcomes from teacher professional development programmes organized in the Kassena-Nankana West district. When teachers were requested to indicate their approval of the roles of professional development in curriculum practice, 28% (n = 87) indicated their agreement on how training programmes helped them expand their knowledge and skills in the classroom. Similarly, 27% (n = 84) reported that their competency and efficacy were increased due to their participations in teacher professional development programmes in their districts. However, 68% (n = 25) of teacher respondents disagreed that teacher professional development did not enhance their personality and self-esteem.

A one-on-one interview sessions with eight teachers (critical cases) also supported the findings of the survey data reported in Figure 1. All the eight teachers interviewed affirmed that

continuous professional development programmes they have attended benefited them in several ways. For instance, anecdotal reports from Teacher 8 states, “*first of all you learn new ideas that increase your knowledge. We learn [sic] new teaching strategies that us competent and efficient in the classroom. It [teacher professional development] also makes you confident and independent in the profession [teaching]*”. Similarly, another teacher indicated that “*I believe it [professional development] has increased my knowledge, it has improved my experience and my teaching methods too have been enhanced*” (Teacher 1).

The Relationship between Professional Development and Classroom Practice

The second research question sought to describe how teachers manage the teaching and learning environment (classroom) during the teaching and learning process to enhance students’ understanding in relationship with their teacher professional development training. Figure 3 indicates that majority of teachers (between 76 and 86) agreed that professional development programmes had contributed immensely in their curriculum practices in classroom preparation, management, instruction, and assessment. However, 36 teachers were undecided whether teacher professional development indeed influenced their curriculum practice in the school system.

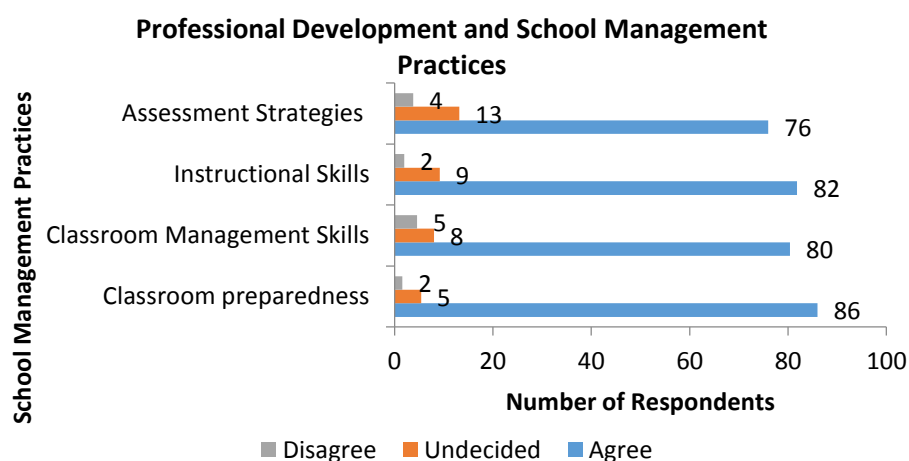


Figure 3: Relationship between professional development and curriculum practice.

Results of Hypothesis 1

Hypothesis 1 examined the relationship between teacher quality and effective teaching among basic school teachers. Table 1 shows the results of Hypothesis 1 using Pearson’s product moment with a significant relations between the two variables. Consequently, a strong positive association ($r = .787, n = 93, p < 0.01$) was reported between teacher quality and effective teaching. This implies that teacher quality was significantly influenced by their professional development knowledge in this study. This is consistent to Association of Teachers and lecturers report (2012), which stipulates that teaching profession draws on theoretical understanding and knowledge in order to adapt teaching practices and methods to pupil need. Hence, the more teachers become professionally knowledgeable, the more likely their ability to choose appropriate teaching practices and methods to support pupils or students.

Table 1: Correlations Output between Effective Teaching and Teacher Quality

Correlations			
		Effective Teaching	Teacher Quality
	Pearson Correlation	1	.787**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
Effective Teaching	Sum of Squares and	2209.032	2034.677
	Cross-products		
	Covariance	24.011	22.116
	N	93	93

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The benefits of teacher professional have been highlighted (Browell, 2000; Cullen, 1999; & Kaff, 2004). Consequently, this study has affirmed professional development's contribution to teachers' classroom practice in a Ghanaian setting. Indeed, with fast technological innovations and changing teacher curriculum practices, teachers' knowledge in modern approach to teacher education needs constant upgrading for increased productivity. Therefore, the significant association between teacher's professional knowledge and teacher quality is relevant for professional practice.

The study concludes that teacher quality and effective teaching are important in improving teaching and learning goals in the school system. Also, teacher professional development should not be underestimated in building teachers' capacity in any school system. Finally, this study recommends that human resource development professionals should integrate school management practices such as assessment management, classroom preparedness, and new instructional strategies should be the focus of teacher professional development programmes in Ghanaian schools.

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