THE EXTENT TO WHICH PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES PROMOTE QUALITY TEACHING AND LEARNING IN SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to explore how Continuous professional development (CPD) programmes are monitored and evaluated to check if they have attained the desired outcome on promoting quality teaching and learning leading to enhanced student achievement in South African schools. The Teacher-Change Theory provided a framework to develop a deeper understanding of educator CPD. The study was based on a qualitative research approach. The interpretive paradigm and case-study research design were adopted. The researchers employed three research methods of data collection namely; individual interview, focus group and documentary evidence. The sample consisted of 5 principals and 10 educators from 5 schools to give a total sample size of 15. The research engaged purposive sampling technique. The researchers chose thematic data analysis. Professional development of educators was regarded as crucial in developing professional skills. Furthermore, it was looked upon as a direct contribution to student achievement. On the basis of the findings of this study, some recommendations were made. The primary recommendation of this study is for continuous professional development to be systematically monitored and evaluated to determine the effectiveness of the programme so that future programmes may be improved.

Keywords: Continuous professional development, Evaluation, Monitoring, Educator change, Student achievement.

INTRODUCTION

The role of the educator in the success of every student is of paramount importance in all educational situations. A part of the success of every educator is highly dependent upon his or her knowledge and skill (Collin et al., 2012). Furthermore, a part of every educator's knowledge and skill is dependent upon his or her training. However, schools can no longer sorely rely on educators having undergone some teacher education training; educators need to continually update their knowledge and skills throughout their careers (Haslam, 2010; Steyn, 2010; Cooper, 2016, Hasha & Wadesango, 2020). Continuous professional development (CPD) of educators as human resources is a vital factor in attaining school effectiveness. This factor is crucial in schools where the kind of education that children receive is heavily dependent on the quality of the teachers.

Professional development may mean different things to different people. Definitions would ideally add clarity and reduce confusion by establishing shared meanings. Villegas-Reimers (2003) defines continuous professional development as;

...those education and training activities engaged in by primary and secondary-school teachers and principals, following their initial professional certification, and mainly or exclusively to improve their professional knowledge, skills and attitudes in order that they can educate children more effectively

Guskey (2000) similarly defined professional development as,

"...those processes and activities designed to enhance the professional knowledge, skills and attitudes of educators so that they might, in turn, improve students' learning."

As may be observed, the above definitions interpret professional teaching development as a 'process,' meaning to say it is systematic, deliberate as well as organized (Whitehouse, 2010; Collin et al., 2012; Shaha et al., 2015, Darling-Hammond et al., (2017). The common denominator is that the staff skills and competencies are improved upon in order to produce outstanding educational results for students. Additionally, CPD is lifelong in one's working life. Therefore, professional development of educators is the cornerstone for the provision of quality teaching and teaching (Bernadine, 2019). It also implies that educators never cease to learn. CPD therefore, puts emphasis on lifelong learning 'zeroing-in' on student achievement. In education, the term professional development may be used in reference to a wide variety of specialized training, formal/informal education or advanced professional learning intended to help educators, principals and other educational personnel improve their professional knowledge, competence, skill and general effectiveness (Evans, 2002; McDonough et al., 2010; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017)).

With reference to schools, we view CPD as those education and training activities engaged in by primary and secondary school teachers and principals, following their initial professional certification. That is mainly or exclusively done to improve their professional knowledge, skills and attitudes in order that they can educate children more effectively. Educational technology and curricula, for instance, are constantly changing, making it challenging, for educators to keep with trends and practices in the field (Mizell, 2010). Continuous professional development comes handy in transforming educators into better and more apt educators by enabling them to create relevant and tailored course instructions for today's students (Tsotetsi & Mahlomaholo, 2013; Huish, 2014). The assumption with professional development is that when educators discover new teaching strategies, they are able to go back to the classroom and make changes to suit the needs of their learners. In fact, research shows that an inspiring and informed educator is the most important school-related factor influencing student achievement, so it is critical to pay close attention to how both new and experienced educators are supported (Edutopia, 2008; Mestry et al., 2009, Hasha & Wadesango, 2020).

Professional development may happen in a variety of ways. Formally, it can take place at a workshop, seminar, meeting or conference. Informally, it can occur through conversations, readings, observations or even feedback. The importance of continuous professional development is to become more educated in one's desired profession. Huish (2014) proposed that it is important for educators to engage in some form of professional development for the gain of being educated, as opposed to dragging oneself to attend because it is either mandatory or for the benefit of earning some reward for attendance. With the internet and increased technology in the classroom, for instance, new ideas and tools are being explored and

implemented on a daily basis, rendering it crucial to stay up to date. Ideally, professional development programmes should energise and excite educators about what it is that they are teaching (Mestry et al., 2009; Tsotetsi & Mahlomaholo, 2013, Hasha & Wadesango, 2020).

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The purpose of the study was to determine how professional development programmes are monitored and evaluated to check if they attain the desired outcomes on promoting quality teaching and learning.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research adopted a qualitative case study as its research design. The researchers employed the purposive sampling technique. The population from which the study sample was drawn is defined as all Pietersburg Circuit secondary schools in Polokwane urban. Five schools were drawn from the population to make a sample for study. The 5 schools comprised of 3 public secondary schools and 2 independent schools. The sample consisted of 5 principals and 10 educators to give a total sample size of 15. Data was collected through interviews and focus-group. Audio recordings of interviews and discussions were transcribed.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Monitoring and Evaluating Professional Development Programmes

Study findings showed that informal CPD evaluations prevailed in schools, but the majority of responses alluded to the total failure by schools to institute deliberate, formal, organized/planned and documented evaluations. In the majority of cases, what was confirmed were gleaned reflections and inferences from the general learner performance? The educators indicated that their students had benefited significantly from educator CPD indulgence, but there was no documentary evidence of a statistical nature, nor an improved pass-rate or improved student performance of any kind apart from improved learner discipline. Similar sentiments were raised in both the focus group discussions as well as individual interview sessions.

The research findings across the respondent spectrum established that there is little agreement about how CPD programmes should be evaluated. Considering that professional development must be measured both in terms of the training action itself and in terms of the behaviour change outside the training situation, evaluation is viewed as one of the most complex mental skills. However, evaluation has to determine the effectiveness of the CPD programme so that future programmes can be improved upon. In other words, evaluation assigns worth or value to the CPD programme or activities. Evaluations determine if the needs of the programmes are being met and provide evidence that learner achievement has indeed improved.

When asked if they had any kind of monitoring, evaluation or supervision system for continuous professional development, all principals in the study acknowledged that they had. On being probed to give details, Principal X's response was:

We monitor to see if our professional development programmes have assisted us realise the desired output. Sometimes we have to wait for a year or two to check on professional development impact on pass-rate. With, for example, smart-boards, monitoring is continuous, it is on-going to gauge on impact and supply constant assistance to educators in need. Already, students were thrilled by the white-boards and disruptive tendencies in class have significantly declined. It has brought some sense of order and discipline, but we are not sure for how long.

Principal J laid claim to monitoring CPD programmes through performance appraisal undertakings as well as through staff meetings when educators gave feedbacks on their experiences with particular professional development programmes. The principal pointed out that the evaluations therein were not formalized without much elaboration.

Principal P asserted that their school had developed a monitoring tool code-named "*work-output*" that checked on the number of students' written exercises as a curriculum coverage pacesetter. In their supervisory endeavors, HODs checked the work of educators for professional development compliance. They mainly checked learner written exercise books and reported to the vice principal who in turn reported to the principal.

Principal E acknowledged that their school had only embarked on earnest CPD in 2019, so they had not instituted a system in place to assess or evaluate professional development effectiveness. Principal O put claim that end of term staff meetings at departmental level were the only platform to discuss professional development effectiveness. However, there were no written documents to substantiate the claim. The educator respondents from the same school corroborated their principal's assertions.

Generally, educator respondents confirmed the claims put forward by their principals in as far as evaluating professional development effectiveness was concerned. Educator Y stated, "*Basically we engage educator feedbacks in departmental or staff meetings as a reflection mechanism. We analyze student performance via tests or exams to check for any disparities in performance prior to, and after professional development.*" Educator Y went on to say, "*Formally…no, but informally…yes. We assess mainly through student performance. We just feel it or experience the positives or the negatives and sometimes pass on comments; but not in a formal caucus.*" In agreement, Educator Z reiterated that student performance mainly through tests and examination analysis assisted in measuring professional development effectiveness.

Respondent M had this to say, "*When a delegate on externally-initiated CPD programme returns, he or she staff-develops colleagues. At some point, the school collectively or in departments reviews the impact of the CPD programme. Unfortunately, there are no documented reviews that I know of. It is mere discussions, sometimes informally in the staff room.*" Once again, the character of the brand of 'evaluations' prevailing in schools is clear; CPD programmes tend to be informally evaluated.

With prompting and probing, most of the respondents seemed to view judging learner response or performance as the ultimate means by which to evaluate the effectiveness of any professional development that the school may have put through. Some respondents felt that the IQMS (Integrated Quality Management System) monitoring tool sufficed in gauging CPD impact. Others felt that learner attitude, reaction and change in response to the new dispensation were sufficient indicator to the effectiveness of the CPD activities that may have been put through.

As if to claim that they informally evaluated CPD effectiveness, many respondents put forward several challenges they experienced at the implementation stage of CPD programmes. Challenges raised during individual interviews were equally confirmed in focus group discussions. In a manner that could be considered, CPD programme 'evaluation', Respondent N stressed, "*On abolishment of corporal punishment, we are in a dilemma on how to put our students to order. The alternative methods and tactics don't ever seem to work. It can be very frustrating.*"

Respondent F highlighted challenges he faced in implementing in the classroom setting what he had learnt from CPD as finance and time constraints as well as a general lack of

resources. He also felt that student behaviour tended to hamper efficient implementation of CPD. In apparent support, Principal E equally felt that financial constraints to procure some CPD recommended gadgets was a stumbling block in maximizing the benefits of CPD. Large unbearable class sizes, learner indiscipline and inadequate time are some of the major drawbacks frequently cited as hindrances to effective implementation of CPD.

Disruptive tendencies by students received the greatest emphasis as a major impediment. Respondent P echoed the complaint common among respondents when he stressed, "*Serious challenges indeed coming from disruptive, in-disciplined students. Such students upset the teaching process in many ways; literally sabotaging educator attempts.*"

To justify claims towards informal evaluations they carried out, respondent Y stated, "*Smart-boards are a challenge with the technical aspect. Am still in a learning process and have a lot to master. Learners tend to get carried away by the smart-board, often preferring to marvel at the intricacies of the board rather than listen to the educator. Attention becomes divided.*" Educator K similarly reiterated this claim by pointing out, "*New teaching methods demand modern technology such as PowerPoint or white-boards, but such is not available in this school.*"

Respondent Z informally evaluated a CPD programme he attended recently and put forward his pre-implementation evaluation as, "*Some facilitators really struggle with content. Put differently, the facilitator knowledge base was below mine. That's easy to tell, but you can't help it. One is expected to attend and pretend to benefit. These are some of the dilemmas we face as subordinates.*" Educator L felt that at times there was no need to evaluate at all because, "*The school does not always permit me to practice CPD acquired skills and knowledge; sometimes preferring to stick with the traditional chalk-and-board approaches. The school won't procure the white-boards due to financial constraints.*"

By evaluating CPDs, it is possible to determine the weaknesses and shortcomings and hence come up with strategies for improving those weaknesses. Support of any programme hinges on monitoring and support mechanisms put in place to ensure effective implementation (Guskey, 2002; Haslam, 2010; Selemani-Meke, 2011, Hasha & Wadesango, 2020). Monitoring should be given adequate attention to ensure that any challenges educators may face at implementation phase may be shared with the programme facilitators (Mullins et al., 2010). Follow-up support should be handy (Guskey, 2002). CPD programme organizers need to provide continued follow-up support to educators to put in practice what they learnt from CPD. Support allows those engaged in difficult processes of implementation to tolerate the anxiety of occasional failures and revise their approaches (Selemani-Meke, 2011, Hasha & Wadesango, 2020).

With prompting and probing, most respondents were able to articulate the effectiveness of CPD evaluations in that the desired outcomes of the programmes can be identified, and evaluation would determine whether they were accomplished. In so doing, the programme facilitators may be informed on how to improve professional development. Both findings and literature showed that evaluations assist in obtaining a better understanding of CPD. Additionally; evaluation provides adequate reviews and support in ensuring effective CPD. The apparent inadequacy in CPD evaluations in the findings suggest that CPD evaluations need to be implemented formally. It was interesting to note that focus group discussions as well as individual interviews raised similar sentiments.

DISCUSSION

Failure to evaluate professional development programmes mean that a lot of feedback may go missing to both the facilitators as well as the recipients. The criteria by which professional development programmes are evaluated should be determined by the training aim or objectives. Most training programmes attempt to accomplish several objectives. There is need to find out how well the participants have liked the programme then evaluate or investigate to establish their reactions. Considering the participants are the consumers of the service, their reaction and/or perception is an important indication of the worth or quality of the CPD programme. The reactions may be captured, collected or obtained when participants, for example, complete a simple questionnaire at the end of the workshop. The systematic investigation of the merit or worth also tends to establish the worth or merit of embarking on the CPD programme in the first place (Guskey, 2002).

On the other hand, how well participants grasp specific information should be evaluated just as students acquire knowledge and skills. The guiding question would be, "*To what extent did the participants learn and retain the information or skills presented in the professional development programme?*" One could use the "*true-false*", multiple-choice questions or request a brief written account to establish the amount of learning that took place and was retained. If the CPD programme fails to satisfy intended beneficiaries' needs, a determination should be made as whether this was due to the design or the delivery of the CPD programme, or due to some other cause (Visser et al., 2013, Hasha & Wadesango, 2020).

Additionally, change in behaviour can also be investigated. The guiding question would be, "*To what extent did the behaviour of the participants change as a result of the professional development programme?*" Observation is one way in which behaviour may be objectively be evaluated. Participants may also be given a self-report questionnaire where they assess their own changes in behaviour.

Lastly, we may want to establish the results that may have been achieved as a result of the professional development programme. Professional development programmes are crucial because they determine the performance of an organization. There is need to find out whether the school actually now performs more effectively or efficiently because of the training effort or if there are other factors influencing performance. The guiding question would be, "*Does the professional development engagement result in reduced costs, improved production, more collegiality, more student achievement or some other factor?*"

Collin et al., (2012) underscore the importance of monitoring and evaluating CPD by stating:

...life-long learning or CPD is only possible where employees have systematic and valid information about their capabilities, that is to say, if they are able to form accurate self-perceptions, to carefully identify the qualities they need for future career success, and if they are able to adapt their behaviour accordingly.

Professional development programmes associated with gains in student learning frequently provide educators with feedback and reflection as a means of empowering them with informed decisions on making changes to their practice (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Feedback and reflection, as in monitoring and evaluation, help educators move more thoughtfully toward the expert visions of practice that may have been learned about during CPD. Monitoring and evaluation may be facilitated through analyzing student work. Analyzing student work collaboratively tends to give educators opportunities to develop a common understanding of what instructional strategies may or may not be working, and for whom.

Some respondents claimed that the practice of informal self-reflection on CPD programmes all the same allowed them opportunities to inquire into their own practice as well as on student performance. In other words, participants claim that they engaged informal self-reflection as a means of measuring if the needs of the CPD programmes were being realized. In the spirit of CPD programme evaluation, findings further suggest that changes in educators' practice and student outcomes need to be viewed as an interactive process as improvement in one area further reinforces changes in the other, and that this process works both ways. All respondents agreed that positive feedback realized through CPD programme evaluation enhanced educator confidence in changing teaching practices and developing knowledge and skills base. Concisely, the need for CPD to be formally and adequately evaluated received high approval from all participants. It was the wish of respondents that systematic evaluation of CPD programmes on educator knowledge and skills as well as student achievement be instituted.

CONCLUSION

Research findings conclude that there was no formal monitoring and evaluation of continuing professional development programmes in all the schools. No school could produce documentary evidence of monitoring and evaluation of CPD activities whatsoever. Instead, schools claimed to have held informal reflections on some CPD programmes when they saw it fit to do so. However, all respondents echoed the importance of monitoring and evaluation as support and feedback mechanisms to enhance the effectiveness of educators' CPD. All participants were agreed that CPD would be more meaningful if it were monitored and evaluated to check if the desired impact was being realized.

RECOMMENDATIONS

CPD evaluation has to be undertaken to determine the effectiveness of the programme so that future programmes may be improved. The criteria by which professional development programmes are evaluated should be determined by the CPD objectives. Most CPD programmes attempt to accomplish several objectives such as knowledge upgrading, skills development, changing behaviour, policy clarification or providing new teaching methods or information towards some aspect of teaching/learning. Consequently, CPD evaluation should pursue such key result areas.

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