



## RETHINKING THE QUALITY OF TEACHER DEVELOPMENT

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### *Abstract*

*Teacher Development as being important because it improves the teacher professionally, academically and technically. Teacher profession is constantly changing and constantly being redefined in different ways by different voices at different times. Learning is the core of rethinking teacher professionalism. \Historically, teachers have had limited opportunities to work with their peers in collaborative and cooperative ways. Activism involves participation, collaboration and cooperation from both within and outside the profession. It requires risk taking, fighting, passion, determination and energy for ideals that enhance education. Teacher Professional Development provides opportunities for teachers to explore new roles, develop new instructional techniques, refine their practice and broaden themselves both as educators and as individuals.*



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### **Need for Commitment to the Profession**

If teachers do not enjoy their work and have doubts about their careers, they should reexamine their attitudes and intentions and, one hopes, they will renew their commitments to education. By so doing, they will convince themselves once again that teaching is not simply an ordinary job; it is the profession that they willingly choose to pursue. Teachers should actively join in curricular development, instructional design, theoretical inquiry, and technical planning, as well as policy making. They should have certain organized ways in which they can participate in the formation of the controlling aims, methods, and materials of the school system of which they are a part. Therefore, teachers' organizations have a very important role to play in the advancement of the teaching profession.

### **New designs for teacher education will need to rest on strong partnerships with key stakeholders.**

The best conditions for successful partnerships in teacher education occur when faculties of education maintain close ties with schools, thus deeply engaging other faculties in the university as well as strengthening community linkages in teacher preparation. Increasing globalization and the emergence of the knowledge economy are calling into question traditional perspectives on the transformational capacity of education systems and the

conceptions of teaching as a profession and the roles of teachers. In essence principles and strategies must be put in place to ensure productive and successful partnerships in teacher preparation. More importantly too, governments at various level have key roles in facilitating partnerships in teacher education.

### **Meaning of teacher professional development**

Definitions about Teacher Professional Development differ according to educational traditions and contexts. In education systems where teacher education programs are well established, Teacher Professional Development is described as a process embracing all activities that enhance professional career growth (Rogan & Grayson 2004; Teclé 2006) or as formal and informal experiences throughout the teacher's career (Hargreaves & Fullan 1992; Arends et al. 1998). Teacher Professional Development is defined as a process of improving both the teacher's academic standing as well as acquisition of greater competence and efficiency in discharging her/his professional obligations in and outside the classroom. In both the advantaged and less advantaged systems it includes the processes, organizational mechanisms and practices that are aimed at providing support to the teacher for the improvement and smooth discharge of her/his duties. Organizational mechanisms are the mechanisms for monitoring continuous development of the teacher. These may take the form of planned and scheduled short term training programs and seminars aimed at meeting various professional needs of the teaching force. Practices, on the other hand, include the formal mentoring programs developed in situ e.g. advice that the teacher gets from the head teacher, or ward education officer.

### **Importance of teacher professional development**

There is agreement among scholars about the importance of the teacher and her/his competence in the teaching-learning process. The teacher is the heart of classroom instruction (Hawes 1979; Galabawa 2001; URT 2007). The effectiveness of the teacher depends on her competence (academically and pedagogically) and efficiency, (ability, work load, and commitment), teaching and learning resources and methods; support from education managers and supervisors (Rogan 2004; Van den Akker & Thijs 2002; Mosha 2004). Teacher Professional Development provides opportunities for teachers to explore new roles, develop new instructional techniques, refine their practice and broaden themselves both as educators and as individuals.

### **Factors influencing teacher professional development**

Villegas-Reimers (2003) identifies conceptual, contextual and methodological factors that contribute to a successful professional development program. Conceptual factors relate to

how change, teaching, and teacher development are perceived, while contextual factors refer to the role of the school leadership, organizational culture, external agencies and the extent to which site-based initiatives are supported. Methodological factors relate to processes or procedures that have been designed to support Teacher Professional Development. Teacher's motivation is the most important of all factors. A teacher's intrinsic drive towards self improvement cannot be matched with any amount of pressure from the educational managers. For real Teacher Professional Development, the teacher herself/himself has to perceive it positively. The teacher has to see and accept the need to grow professionally. A teacher who perceives professional development positively is eager to attain new knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, and dispositions. Within such dispositions there is pride, self – esteem, team spirit, commitment, drive, adventure, creativity, and vision. All these attributes have to be owned by the teacher (Mosha 2006). Teacher's perception depends on self-evaluation, the influence and support of school leadership, and school culture. Support of the school management is crucial for promoting teacher development and high quality education. If school managers are empowered they will be able to play their social and technical roles more efficiently (Blasé & Blasé 1999; Mosha 2006). School management capacity is the ability of the leadership to perform its duties including supporting Teacher Professional Development at the school. The school head is the key player or backbone of a school and the main executive of School Management. The overall effectiveness of the school is directly influenced by the Head Teacher. Her/his roles include to facilitate, broker, provide resources, encourage, command, question, coach, and cheerleading (Dillon-Peterson 1986). She/he is like the spring to the watch and an engine to the ship. She/he is the heart of school and School Management. The Head Teacher should be well knowledgeable and skilled on management issues. She has to attend various seminars, workshops, meetings, and courses on management and administration.

### **Challenges towards Quality Teacher Professional Development**

Challenges towards quality teacher professional development are varied in nature and character:

#### ***The disdained responsibility***

There appears to be a lack of clarity about the sole responsibility for the development of quality teachers professionally. For decades now, this has remained a paradox. More specifically, the puzzle revolves around the question of under whose responsibility should teachers' professional development fall.

***Poor teacher's motivation***

Teachers' motivation is the most important of all factors. A teacher has to see and accept the need to grow professionally. After all, a teacher who perceives professional development positively is eager to attain new knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, and dispositions. Within such dispositions there is pride, self-esteem, team spirit, commitment, drive, adventure, creativity, and vision. These attributes are associated with teaching professionalism (Moshia 2006).

***Time and scheduling constraints***

Time is one of the major barriers repeatedly mentioned in most of the organised professional development programmes due to competing work priorities and duties. More significantly, professional women teachers fail to attend Professional Development programmes due to family obligations, or the prohibitive long distance of travel when the training is conducted in far away centres.

***Lack of organizational support***

Institutional management is not always supportive and, sometimes, lacks the expertise to properly manage Professional Development Programmes. Moreover, Professional Development Programme requests have been poorly handled. For example, sometimes release letters for teachers to attend the Professional Development Programmes have been granted when the candidates were already time-barred.

***Widespread moral problems related to teachers***

Much of the available literature acknowledges the ethical character of teaching and/or education. Teachers generally fail to live up to the highest moral standards of their profession. They do not do what is expected of them as professionals by the society. No matter how competent one might be, failure to lead ethical lives taints the image of the teaching profession and undermines teacher professional development programmes. Hence, there is an urgent need to integrate an ethical dimension in all quality teacher professional development programmes.

***Inadequate opportunities***

Every teacher has the responsibility and obligation to deliver quality education. In this respect, every worthy teacher has a right to quality teacher professional development. However, despite its contribution to the development and sustainability of quality in the education sector, there is evidence of inadequate opportunities to access and participate in teacher professional development programmes. Opportunities to access and participate in quality teacher professional developments are rare or not there at all.

## **Conclusions**

Teachers face a number of challenges while teaching. Overcrowded classrooms, lack of relevant textbooks, lack of skills to handle certain topics in the revised curricula and inability to handle pupils with special needs stand out as the biggest challenges. Teacher Professional Development support must target these areas while the central and local governments address the infrastructural and logistical support. At the moment, opportunities for professional development are ad hoc, irregular, unfairly distributed, unplanned and uncoordinated. Teacher Professional Development should be incorporated in the strategic plan at all levels and should be budgeted for. Quality teacher professional development programmes help practising teachers to update and familiarise themselves with new developments in education in terms of pedagogy, theories, and content. This is very important because teachers need to be acquainted with new developments to be able to prepare students who can function and succeed in an increasingly globalised world. Quality teacher professional development might serve as a panacea to poor quality education in schools, colleges and universities. To that effect, two essential conditions must be met: i) all school, college and university teachers must be given opportunities to participate in quality teacher professional development; and ii) teacher professional development schemes must be organized according to teacher professional needs. It is clear that teaching and notions of teacher professionalism in the future will require new and different ways of operating and that teachers and academics will need to develop new ways of talking about the work of teaching.

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