



**AN ASSESSMENT OF THE COMPETENCIES OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE DEPARTMENTS IN
FACILITATING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF TEACHERS OF ENGLISH IN
SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN KEIYO SOUTH DISTRICT, KENYA**

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Article Info:

Article Received:08/10/2014

Revised on: 18/10/2014

Accepted on: 22/10/2014

ABSTRACT

This paper evaluates the competencies of English departments in facilitating continuous professional development of teachers of English based on a study of selected secondary schools in Keiyo South District in Kenya. The study adopted descriptive survey design and was based on Adrian Holliday's social context theory. The target population comprised head teachers, heads of English departments and teachers of English in selected secondary schools. Questionnaire and semi-structured interview schedule were the main data collection tools. Secondary schools were selected using random sampling technique. Kathuri and Pals' sampling formula was employed in selecting teachers of English. Head teachers were selected using purposive sampling technique. Data was analyzed descriptively in form of cumulative frequency counts and percentages. A multiple linear regression was also computed to establish linear relationship between study variables. Findings were presented in form of tables, charts, graphs and regression equation. The study established that the language departments are capable of providing CPD to their teachers. They are headed by heads of department who have been deployed on the strength of their qualification. They ably interpret their roles as mentors, trainers, facilitators, administrators and teachers of English. They thus induct the teachers into their work leading to being proficient in among other things acquiring the skills needed for the selection and preparation of teaching materials. Teachers are helped to develop their language of teaching which incorporates effective instructional and assessment strategies. The study recommends that experience, academic qualifications and good will of teachers be considered in the selection of heads of English departments, head teachers should incorporate in their fiscal budgets support for activities of various departments in the school that foster professional development of teachers and that departments of English need to be innovative in ensuring sufficiency of the departments in teaching and learning materials.

Keywords: Assessment, Competencies, English Language Departments, Facilitating Professional Development, Teachers, Secondary Schools, Keiyo South District, Kenya

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INTRODUCTION

Education commentators and reformers have perennially called attention to the challenges encountered by newcomers to teaching. Teaching in secondary schools involves intensive interaction with youngsters; the work of teachers is largely done in isolation from colleagues. Such isolation can especially be difficult for newcomers, who, upon accepting a position in teaching, are frequently left to succeed or fail on their own within the confines of their classrooms. Other commentators go further, arguing that beginners tend to end up in the most challenging and difficult classroom and school assignments. Some have gone further to assail teaching as an occupation that cannibalizes its young. These are the very kinds of issues that effective employee entry, orientation and support programmes seek to address. Teaching has, however, traditionally not had the kind of induction programmes for new entrants common to many skilled occupations.

Induction for teachers has become a major topic in education policy and reform. This is mainly so because teaching is considered a complex work. Pre-employment teacher preparation is rarely sufficient to provide all the knowledge and skill necessary for successful teaching. A significant portion of teaching knowledge can be acquired only on the job. This view holds that schools must provide an environment where novices can learn how to teach, survive and succeed as teachers. Induction programmes aim at improving the performance and retention of beginning teachers to enhance their skills. Apart from preventing the loss of new teachers it should improve student growth and learning. The next benefit of induction goes beyond mere teaching in schools.

While teacher induction continues to receive much attention in the policy realm, empirical research on these reforms has been limited. It may not be easy to determine how widespread induction programmes are across the country, the activities, support and components the induction experiences usually include and most importantly, whether or not receiving such support has any positive effect on teachers and students. It however remains a starting point in the teaching profession from where

teaching skills knowledge and attitude are nurtured and developed. Ingersoll (2011) observes that to investigate the context surrounding teacher induction requires the best data in order to explore demographic changes in the teaching force as a whole. He further argues that there is need to analyze widespread beginning teacher induction programmes, whether or not their prevalence has increased and the types and amounts of induction beginning teachers actually get.

This paper views induction activities as part of strategies to grow teachers professionally. Ingersoll and Strong (2011) demonstrate how participating in inductive activities in the first year is effective at reducing teacher turnover. The factors with the strongest effect, according to them, are: having a mentor teacher from one's subject area, and having common planning or collaboration time with other teachers in one's subject area. On-the-job induction should be viewed as a reform whose time has come. Schools offer support, guidance and orientation programmes, but this is only to a limited degree. AS such, the increasing number of beginning teachers compels the need for induction. This does not necessarily have to be a financially draining comprehensive programme for institutions.

Statement of the Problem

At every stage in their career, teachers are unlikely to teach in ways that meet the demands of the ever changing standards for students to participate effectively as learners. Even small changes with teachers and the learning environments can make a difference to children's learning and retention in the educational system. Helping teachers to be knowledgeable and responsible enough to make needed adjustments to the learning environment is one of the changes which Kraft and Plessis (1998) refer to as the changes of the right type.

Teacher professional learning is a complex process determined by a myriad of factors. It requires cognitive and emotional involvement of teachers both individually and collectively as well as the capacity and the willingness to examine their convictions and beliefs. These occur within particular policy environments some of which are more appropriate and conducive to learning than others.

Furthermore, formal structures such as courses and workshops are considerably purposeful, while sharing experiences and strategies may serve other purposes as well.

Not all forms of professional development, even those with the greatest evidence of positive impact, are relevant to all teachers. There is thus a constant need to study, discuss and reflect on issues dealing with teachers' professional development. Such issues include the interacting links and influences of the history and traditions of groups of teachers, the educational needs of their populations, the expectations of their educational systems, their working conditions and the opportunities to learn that are open to them.

English language teachers' professional development may be regarded as a process of constructing the English language teaching practice. This cannot be a one off practice hence the need for opportunities to learn as one practices. Given the ever changing nature of schools and teaching, one must periodically reconstruct their practice. The reconstruction process is, however, hard since it requires changes in deep rooted ideas that form the basis of professional practice. This partly explains the need for continuous professional learning.

Despite the evident need for continuous professional development, not many teachers are engaged. Similarly, the frequency and depth of some professional development endeavors fall short of meeting teachers' needs. It is, therefore, prudent to determine how often English language teachers engage in professional development activities and the opportunities provided to them in response to their needs.

Teachers' professional development is connected with teachers' motivation since both lead to a form of satisfaction. Empirical studies on teacher motivation indicate widespread decreasing levels resulting in low educational quality. Bennell and Akyeampong (2007) document career development or specifically the lack of it as one of the causes of low teacher motivation. How schools respond to the critical aspect of professional as a forum of teacher motivation is part of this study. This should be able to address issues related to institutional responses critical to career

development as a basis for motivation and the institutional support which go in developing teachers. The professional growth of a teacher is a career-long process which is initiated at the pre-service education level and culminates with retirement. At different stages, teachers of English in Kenya exhibit different needs. The needs prompt differentiated approaches to their professional growth. For example they need to grasp various elements in language teaching. These include a mastery of subject matter, use of different skills in teaching in the face of diverse body of learners and their need to have them recognized as professional practitioners. These are critical aspects which require an in-depth understanding.

High expectations are placed on teachers of English. This is due to the central role that the language plays both to pupils and the community (Ayot, 1984). It is crucial that the mechanism towards achieving the high ideal is evaluated. Furthermore, the expansion of education especially at the secondary school level, has led to a drop in performance of subjects in national examinations, especially in English. This is reflected by the lack of competence in the functional use of the language. For competence to be enhanced, teachers of English require sufficient opportunities to transform their skills in a manner that translates into practical personal improvement and renewal.

The extent to which schools or departments provide opportunities for teachers' advancement and how teachers perceive these provisions require attention and investigation. This calls for a determination of the meaningful contexts which motivate teachers to hypothesize, generalize and share ideas about common experiences within departments. This is partly an instructional problem as well as a career growth concern; since intellectual and professional growth reinforce each other within existing situations in schools. The current problem lies in the nature of teaching and teacher learning. How institutions facilitate skills enhancement as a pre-requisite for enhanced classroom delivery is a critical issue which the author sought to determine. Teachers require continuous learning if they are to be effective. How schools respond to this need is also a problem requiring attention.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was conducted in selected secondary schools in Keiyo South District, Elgeyo-Marakwet County, Kenya. Like other teachers in Kenya, teachers of English in Keiyo South district public secondary schools are employees of the Teachers Service Commission. They go through similar training regimes. The study targeted teachers of English language, heads of language departments and head teachers from selected secondary schools in Keiyo South District. The schools were largely provincial (county), district and registered private schools.

According to Keiyo South District Education Board Report (2013), there were seven (7) provincial secondary schools, nineteen (19) district secondary schools and one (1) private secondary school. The same report indicates that the District had a total of eighty-five (85) teachers of English. There were two (2) teachers of English in the private secondary school, fifty-seven (57) in the county secondary schools and twenty-six (26) in the district secondary schools. The teachers of English were involved since they were the main participants in the teaching of the subject. They were considered capable of interpreting the activities which in their view resulted in their professional development.

Random stratified sampling technique was employed in selecting secondary schools. Thirty per cent (8) of the secondary schools were selected using random sampling technique. There was only 1 private secondary school and hence it was automatically selected using purposive sampling technique. The other schools were proportionately selected. The sample size of the teachers of English was determined by using the formula indicated by Kathuri and Pals (1993). The formula is as follows:

$$S = \frac{X^2 NP (1-P)}{d^2 (N-1) + X^2 p (1-p)}$$

Where:

S-Required sample size

N-The given population size (in this case, 85)

P-Population proportion of 0.50

D-Degree of accuracy (in this case, amount error of 0.05)

X²-Chi-square value for one degree of freedom at a confidence level of

0.95.

From the population of 85, 70 teachers were selected. Of these teachers, eight (8) heads of English departments in the 8 sampled secondary schools were purposively selected. Therefore, a total of 62 teachers of English were sampled for the study. Two (2) teachers from the only private secondary school were automatically included in the study. The teachers of English from the county and district secondary schools were selected proportionately. Eight (8) head teachers from the sampled secondary schools were purposively selected. The total number of respondents for this study was therefore seventy-eight (78).

Data for the study was collected through a questionnaire and a structured interview schedule. After data collection, responses from all questionnaire items were cross-checked to facilitate coding and processing for analysis using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) computer program version 20.0. Data were subsequently analyzed descriptively in form of cumulative frequency counts and percentages. A multiple linear regression was also computed to establish linear relationship between study variables. The findings were presented in form of tables, charts, graphs and regression equation.

RESULTS

Information on competencies of English language departments in facilitating professional development of teachers of English was sought in five main categories: teacher induction activities; settling down; preparation of teaching and learning materials; setting and marking of examinations; and in service training.

Teacher Induction Activities

This aspect of competency of English language departments was tested on a five-point Likert scale. A majority of the teachers of English affirmed the fact that English departments in their respective schools were efficient in inducting new teachers. Thirty-six (51.4%) teachers were strongly in agreement and 23(32.9%) were in agreement. Those who were of a contrary opinion were 11(15.7%), 6(8.6%) disagreed while 5(7.1%) strongly disagreed with this assertion. Figure 1 below illustrates these findings.

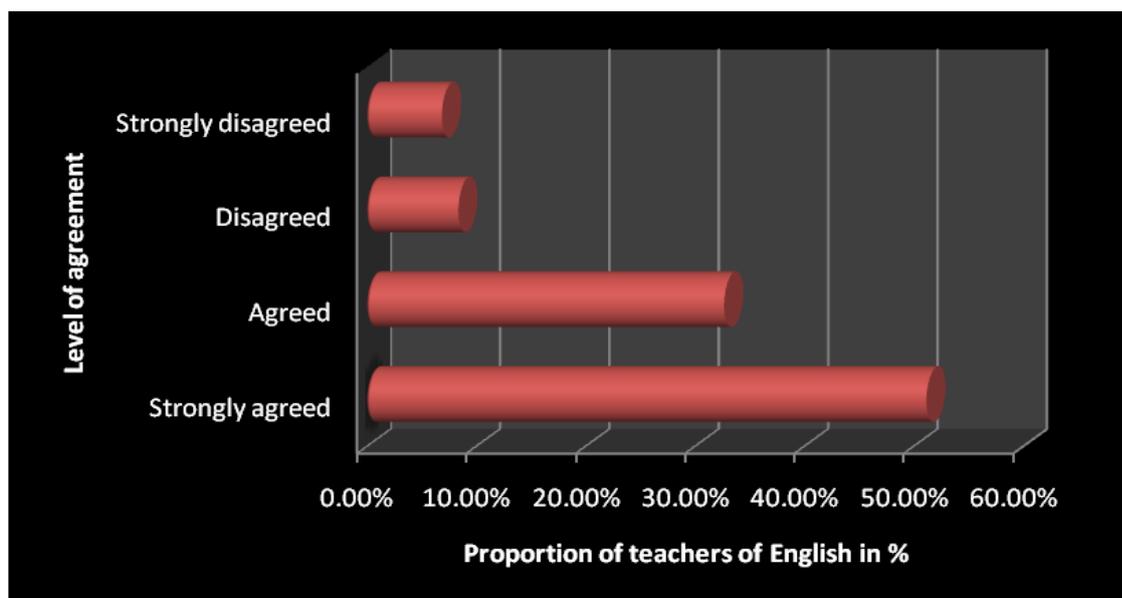


Figure 1: Teachers of English Perceptions on Teacher Induction Activities

Source: Field data, 2013

A significant proportion of teachers of English acknowledged the fact that the departments of English in their respective schools were effective in inducting teachers of English. This is supported by one of the respondents who indicated as follows:

When I reported to my current station, the head of English department showed me the classes, the library and the departmental office where I was to spend most of my time. I was showed books I was to use in teaching. The head of English department gave me a file containing samples of the documents I was expected to prepare before going to class. What I found most fulfilling is the fact that the deputy head teacher introduced me to staff members and took me to class. I was then asked to pick books and files from the store and begin making schemes because I was the only teacher of English.

These findings are corroborated by what Ingersoll (2011) observes that there is need to analyze widespread beginning teacher induction programmes, whether or not their prevalence has

increased and the types and amounts of induction beginning teachers actually get.

Settling Down

The study sought to establish the role of English departments in facilitating settling down of new teachers of English in the respective schools. The study sought to establish the extent to which departments of English were involved in enabling new teachers of English settle in their new stations. The opinions of the respondents were measured on a three-point Likert scale. Of the 70 teachers of English, 58 indicated that departments of English were to a larger extent relevant and effective in helping new teachers of English in settling down, 10(14.3%) indicated that their relevance and effectiveness was to a lesser extent while only 2(2.9%) indicated that the departments of English were neither relevant nor effective in helping new teachers of English settle down. The findings were as presented in Figure 2 below.

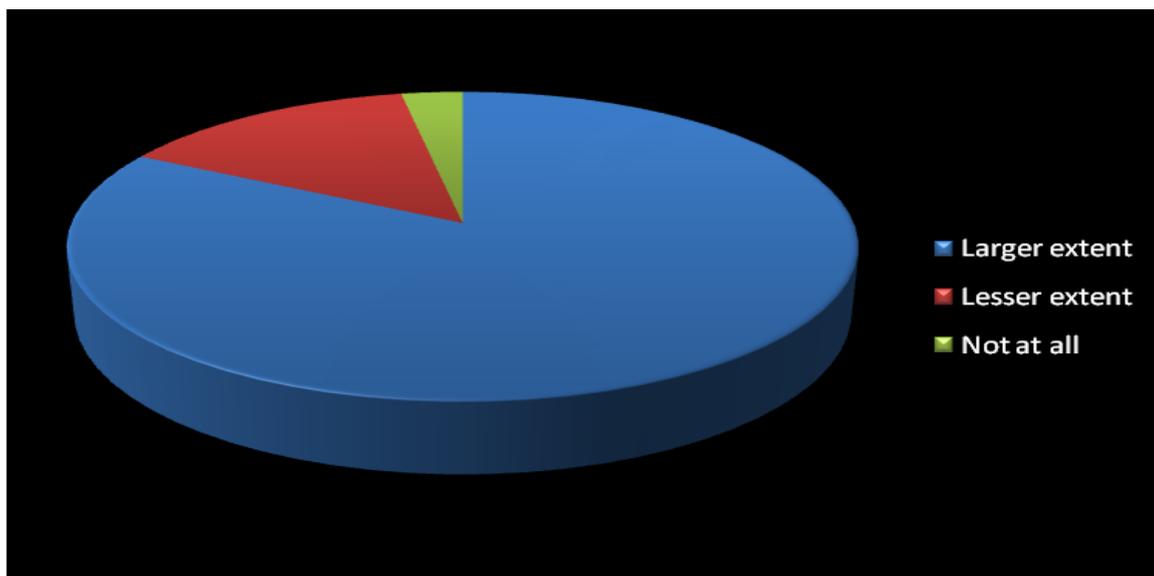


Figure 2: Extent of relevance and effectiveness of English departments in helping teachers settle

Source: Field data, 2013

Preparation of Teaching and Learning Materials

The study also sought from the teachers of English on the role that the departments of English in their respective schools play in facilitating the preparation of teaching and learning materials. This attribute was measured on a five-point Likert scale

on levels of agreement. There were 22(31.4%) teachers who agreed that the fact that departments of English facilitated the preparation of teaching and learning materials, 13(18.6%) strongly agreed, 28(40%) disagreed while 7(10%) strongly disagreed. These findings were as presented in Figure 3 below.

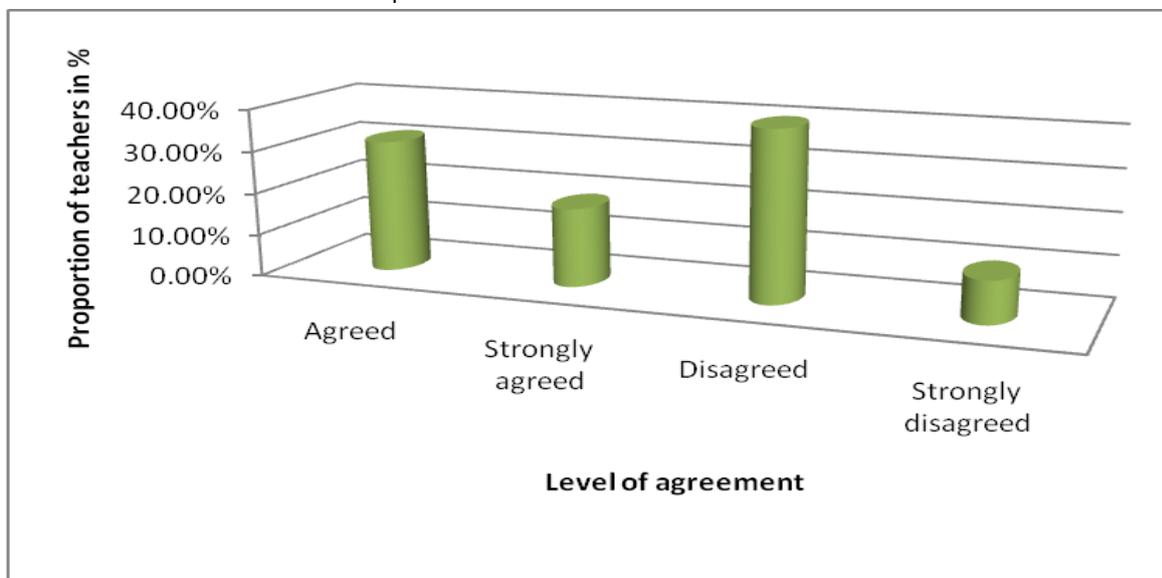


Figure 3: Level of agreement on role of English departments in preparation of teaching and learning materials

Source: Field data, 2013

There were varied perceptions of respondents on this competency attribute. Half of the teacher respondents affirmed the role of English

departments in facilitating preparation of teaching and learning materials while the other half was of a contrary opinion.

Successful language instruction does not only involve content selection and presentation of teaching material but takes into consideration other factors (Richards, 1955). Primary among these is material preparation which has to do with professional documents preparation and the preparation of teaching and learning aids. Gaining expertise in this is a reflection of one's growth.

Setting and Marking English Examinations

The study sought to establish whether departments of English in the study secondary

schools encourage team work among teachers of English in marking and setting English examinations. There were 8(11.4%) teachers who agreed to the fact that departments of English in their respective schools encouraged and facilitated teamwork in setting and marking of examinations. Another 32(45.7%) teachers were strongly in agreement, 29(41.4%) disagreed while 11(15.7%) strongly disagreed. Figure 4 presents the findings.

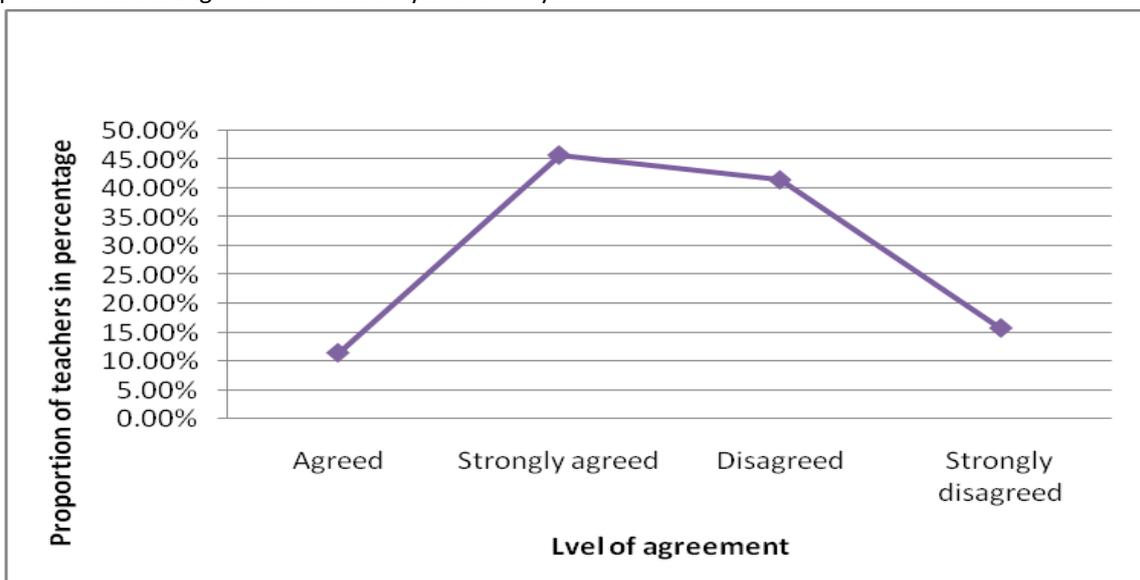


Figure 4: Level of agreement on role of English departments in facilitating teamwork in setting and marking of examinations

Source: Field data, 2013

In-service Training

Of the teachers, 7(10%) agreed to the fact that departments of English facilitated in-service training of for their professional development;

9(12.9%) of the teachers strogly agreed, 30(42.9%) disagreed while 24(34.3%) strongly disgareed, as illustrated in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Role of English Departments in Facilitating Teachers' In-service Training

Level of agreement	Frequency	Percentage
Agreed	7	11.4%
Strongly agreed	9	45.7%
Disagreed	30	41.4%
Strongly disagreed	24	15.7%
Total	70	100.0%

Source: Field data, 2013

DISCUSSION

From the study findings, the language departments are capable of providing CPD to their teachers. First, they are headed by HODs who have been deployed on the strength of their qualification. They ably interpret their roles as mentors, trainers,

facilitators, administrators and teachers of English. They thus induct the teachers into their work leading to being proficient in among other things acquiring the skills needed for the selection and preparation of teaching materials. Thus teachers are helped to develop their language of teaching which

incorporates effective instructional and assessment strategies. Examples of these include team teaching, holding meetings, setting internal and external examinations among others. Departmental CPDs situated in schools allow teachers to discuss their experiences thus building in them confidence. Teachers therefore are able to teach at various levels.

Through shared activities teachers develop their skills gradually. This is achieved through enhanced collaboration and communication among the teachers who work together. The data also reveals that by being given rooms where they operate as group and where only the HOD has an office, consultation is enhanced. There is collaboration and communication among the teachers who teach English in the different schools. This provides an avenue for shared professional learning opportunities.

The teachers also develop teaching programmes that are neither fragmented nor segmented from the general content area of English. In line with the above objective, it reveals teachers' understanding of the available activities which resulted in professional growth. These included departmental induction activities, meetings and internal workshops. Teachers least thought of personal research and online learning as part of their professional development. On their part, the Heads of department and the Head teachers considered only INSETs both internal and external. The overall findings show little variation between gender, age and the type of school taught in or the responsibilities of teachers in this record. Most teachers however felt that their schools provided opportunities for developing skills by allowing them to attend such workshops and courses. Additionally, the research findings suggested that many teachers were able to interpret their CPD accounts within an embracing professional development perspective. This seemed to be especially so among young teachers who desired to identify with any activities which enhanced their skills and made them better teachers of English, such as setting and marking exams.

The research findings also revealed that thinking about CPD could vary depending on the

status of the school teachers taught in. The responses of teachers from public schools slightly varied with those of private schools. This had more to do with how the two types of schools allowed their teachers opportunities for CPD activities. Public schools would often facilitate their teachers unlike the private ones whose facilitation was limited. Teachers of English did not characterize routine activities such as departmental meetings as CPD.

These findings are in tandem with what professionals have observed regarding CPD. In the United States, for example, Blank *et al.* (2009) report that standards based educational improvement required that teachers attend INSETs and undertake courses where deep knowledge of their subjects and the pedagogy for teaching the subject are facilitated. Similarly, Avalos (2010) acknowledges such mediations as facilitating learning and stimulating teachers to alter or reinforce teaching and educational practices in which external facilitation played a key role. The importance of understanding how teachers work together and share practices with learning purposes is reflected in studies that regard teacher networks and teams as communities of learning and peer coaching.

Key features which teachers perceived worthwhile to CPD were the relevance and applicability of the courses to school and classroom setting. Negative feelings were particularly associated with one size fits all standardized CPD provisions, which did not take account of teachers' existing knowledge, experience and needs. The CPDs most valued focused on teaching skills and subject knowledge. Few teachers took notice of activities such as research secondments and award bearing courses or international visits. This could be attributed to the little attention which the government pays to these forms of CPD among high school teachers.

Financial costs – perceived and real – distance from training opportunities and workloads were important inhibitors of access to CPD activities among teachers. Similarly, the teachers felt schools needs and national priorities had been principle drivers for CPD activities since most school managers expected the teachers' knowledge and skills to translate into improved performance of students in

examinations. These seem to have overtaken individual teacher needs. This finding is in tandem with reported findings on CPD discourse.

For example, the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (2003) notes that contrary to globally accepted assumption that teachers need to be engaged for effective professional development, in Guinea teachers were viewed as passive receptacles for knowledge and skills that they were taught by outside experts. Furthermore, it is argued that for teachers to realize maximum returns from CPD activities, they should be allowed to make decisions and initiate actions that naturally respond to their felt needs (Colleta & Perkins, 1995).

The findings also suggest that the CPD programmes by individual schools were effective in bringing on board all teachers regardless of their gender, experience and the type of schools they taught in. This boosts morale, especially since most of the training were located closer to teachers' workplace. Additionally, this provides an important intrinsic motivation as it acknowledges teachers importance as key actors in the improvement of teaching English in secondary schools. Finally, understanding of CPDs is shaped by complex interrelationships between local, structural and cultural factors (within and between schools) and teachers' career stage, age and experience. The status, knowledge and approach of the HOD and the head teacher radically affects positively or negatively teachers' understanding of the CPD. Where there were variations regarding teachers' understanding of CPD, it was felt that the CPD strategy was only just beginning to be felt. Thus the context of the school influenced not only understanding but also access to CPD.

Literature on effective CPDs concurs with the findings of the current study. For example, Lee (2000) and Brown, Edmonds and Lee (2001) argue that relevance of skills may among other things mean; teachers getting the skills to be put to immediate classroom use. This is in tandem with the prevalent practice where skills improvement is considered a mark of professional growth. Most HODs and head teachers were in agreement with

this view. English subject knowledge and other pedagogical practices resonate with these views.

These positions resonate with the relativist research paradigm which the current study adopted. In view of the fact that respondents' positions regarding departmental competencies in skills enhancement was contextually influenced, variations reflected the varying world views. The process and nature of the skills teachers acquired as a form of professional growth was relative to individual language departments.

Consequently, the author is of the view that the choices made by individual language departments in developing their members' teaching skills was not only ideological. It also illustrated how the departments functioned. Furthermore, professional growth is facilitated differently, depending on the circumstances surrounding and informing the departments which schools are in turn shaped by the social context in which they function. Thus such endowments as the availability of funds and experienced mentors are viewed as products of an enduring system rather than aspects that define all schools and departments of English across schools. The author is thus convinced that language departments are responsible for the growth of their teachers in a culturally unique way. The cultural uniqueness of language departments the context of a school has significantly given rise to effective and sophisticated learning communities in a number of contexts. This is because as some head teachers opined the context of a school determines to a considerable degree the CPD experiences and their access.

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that teachers perceive professional development as being important since it improves teachers professionally, academically and technically. However, it is apparent that it is inadequately supported and motivated. It is poorly coordinated and hardly budgeted for. Furthermore, the findings indicate a conception of teachers' professional development which combines both the raising of their qualifications and professional growth. These require nurturing and supporting at the departmental and school level. The need for support is suggested by the challenges teachers of

English face while teaching in the classroom, which demand that teachers be skilled and knowledgeable in aspects that will define their professionalism. While schools nurture certain practices, teachers of English say they have participated in professional development activities, but those are mostly, restricted to attending workshops and seminars. These vary in terms of impact, the intensity of participation and the proportion of the teachers of English attending. Furthermore, there are no documented incentives for attending INSETs even though CPD is linked to possibilities of promotion. Since it is agreed that skill enhancement translates to better results incentives to those who attend might not be a farfetched idea.

Apparently, the perceived need for professional development by teachers seems to be greater than the actual possibilities which they have. The most widespread type of professional development activity takes individual teaching staff out of their schools, to follow courses whose relevance to individual or institutional needs, and therefore impacts might be limited.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Apart from seminars, workshops and meetings, there is need for language departments to think of establishing linkages with schools, institutions and other training providers in order to think of more innovative ways of re-equipping teachers with the pre-requisite skills for teaching English. This should aim at ensuring that teachers take part in career long collaborative professional learning. Schools should review and adapt their offer of in-service learning opportunities to maximize its impact upon learner attachment.

This should make teacher learning part of the overall schools' development plans and be seen as part of regular professional activities. The use of open learning education resources should be explored, especially in circumstances of severely limited budgets. Favourable conditions should further promote in-serving learning by introducing a compulsory element of professional development in schools and by providing greater incentives for participation. Furthermore, meaningful feedback on teachers' performance should be considered as a fundamental aspect of effective professional

development systems. Feedback provides guidance and should aid teachers to build on their strengths and overcome any weaknesses. It also establishes a framework of standards defining what knowledge, skills, behaviour, attitudes and results are expected of a competent and professional teacher.

It is also recommended that induction should be embedded in career-long Teacher Education. This requires effective links with providers at both school and national level sharing a common language about the competences and qualities of effective English language teaching staff and how they can develop overtime. Thus, awareness of roles and responsibilities by all actors as well as clear objectives are key for a successful induction programme. This paper also recommends that a profile of the competences expected of in-service providers be made to enhance quality. These competences such as teaching, research, competences on teaching about teaching, pedagogy and dialectics should be viewed as critical and could form the basis of effective evaluation. Furthermore, mentoring as a form of teacher development should be enhanced within language departments. Mentors should be identified, trained and assigned to teachers with specific goals and expectations. Mentoring is a viable policy option whose usefulness is anchored on the acceptance of its complexity.

The paper further recommends that for demands placed on English language teaching profession to be met, every teacher of English should be given the opportunity to undertake proper lifelong learning. This can be achieved through the involvement of different kinds of teacher education institutions which offer one the potential for boosting the quality of teachers and their professional development. This should make teachers of English full partners in their own professional development.

The schools and the communities need to invest more in people and in this case, teachers of English. Paradigmatic change called for will not take place if the concerned actors do not develop new skills, knowledge and dispositions. Investment must therefore be made to their professional development. This could easily be achieved when language departments are considered the most

critical intervention level of educational quality improvement. This implies pushing decision making power to lower levels in the system.

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