

Collaborative Practices as a Teacher Professional Development Pathway: A Study of Selected Secondary Schools in Tanzania

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Abstract

This qualitative case study investigated collaborative practices (CPs) among secondary school teachers, focusing on their role in enhancing teachers' professional development (PD). The research employed interviews and focus group discussions, along with thematic analysis, to gather and analyse data from thirty purposively selected participants, including heads of departments (HoDs) and heads of secondary schools (HoSSs) across three sampled secondary schools in Ilala Municipality. The results revealed three prevalent CPs among secondary school teachers: coaching, teaming, and mentoring. Teachers embraced these practices to address educational challenges and enhance their teaching knowledge and skills. The study advocates for broader integration of CPs as a professional development strategy with the potential to enhance instructional efficacy among secondary school teachers in Tanzania.

Keywords: *teacher interactions, teacher learning, instructional development, professional growth*

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Introduction

The teaching profession demands not only initial teacher training programmes but also continuous professional development strategies to ensure that teachers enhance their subject content knowledge. Given the increasing diversity in classrooms and the global demand for quality teaching, traditional training approaches for in-service teachers may no longer be effective (Kinyota, Kavenuke & Mwakabenga, 2019). Workshops

and seminars, common in traditional training, have been poorly coordinated, resulting in limited improvements in teachers' classroom practices (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012).

Teachers require regular participation in professional development (PD) programmes that offer sustainable learning opportunities, allowing them to improve teaching practices and implement education reforms (Ayubayeva, 2018; Dachi, 2018; Mahato, 2021; Shakenova, 2014; Wong, 2012). Recognising PD opportunities in teachers' working environments as a vital aspect of lifelong learning is crucial for enhancing teacher performance (Fentiman, Surgue, Wyse & Dachi, 2013). Collaborative practices (CPs), where teachers work in groups at their workplaces to share expertise and experiences, emerge as an effective way to foster teacher PD. Through CPs, teachers can exchange knowledge, address pedagogical challenges, and learn from each other, ultimately improving their teaching abilities (Burton, 2015; EdVestor, 2014).

Secondary school teachers in Tanzania undergo two years of training at the diploma level, while those pursuing a degree complete a three-year programme. This training equips student teachers with an understanding of educational values, theories, philosophies, and methodologies, contributing to their knowledge and skills acquisition in specific subject specialisations (Dadi, 2015). The government places significant emphasis on the continuation of teacher professional development (PD) practices, as highlighted in both the Education and Training Policy (ETP) of 1995 (MoEC, 1995) and ETP 2014, aiming to ensure teacher quality and professionalism. Despite sporadic in-service programmes conducted nationwide, several issues have plagued these initiatives. The primary challenge lies in the limited reach of these in-service programmes, leaving a considerable number of teachers without professional training for up to 10 years (Kinyota, Kavenuke & Mwakabenga, 2019).

In Tanzania, the commonly practised model of teacher PD is known as the traditional model, encompassing workshops, seminars, subject associations, and short courses conducted outside the school environment. Typically, these are one-time events lasting a few days, with the goal of enhancing curriculum, pedagogies, teaching skills, and knowledge among teachers (Anangisye, 2011; Orlando, 2016). Despite its widespread use, the traditional model is criticised for being unfocused, superficial, fragmented, and more information-centric than research-based, often failing to bring about the intended changes in teaching practices (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; William, 2010). Additionally, it is perceived as expensive, limiting accessibility for many teachers, and its sustainability is often compromised when government funding or project support is phased out. Furthermore, some PD programmes may not align with teachers' contextual needs (Komba & Mwakabenga, 2019). Given these drawbacks, there is a growing recognition of the need for collaborative, school-based PD programmes to

enhance the professionalism of secondary school teachers in Tanzania. The Tanzanian government, in alignment with global trends, has embraced school-based PD practices as part of its education policies (MoEVT, 2008). Diverging from traditional models, school-based PD involves activities within the school context, allowing teachers to pinpoint their specific needs and fostering collaborative interactions to implement curricula effectively (Kinyota, Kavenuke & Mwakabenga, 2019; Rugambwa, 2022). This approach is exemplified in countries like Zambia and South Africa, where school-based PD practices are favoured due to their perceived cost-effectiveness and responsiveness to teachers' immediate needs compared to traditional models (Ministry of Education, Republic of Zambia, 2009).

The Education Sector Development Programme (ESDP) of 2008-2017/2018 marked a significant effort to establish school-based PD practices. A key strategy within this programme involved the establishment of mentoring services for secondary school teachers, emphasising collaboration between experienced professionals and novices (MoEVT, 2008). This collaborative mentoring practice aims to enhance teachers' capabilities, skills, and values, contributing to the overall improvement of education quality (Grimble, 2017; Kennedy, 2016; Nest, 2012). Hence, the ESDP policy aimed to ameliorate the prevailing situation through its explicit recognition of the "low stock of knowledge by diploma/degree graduate teachers" (MoEVT, 2008, p 58). The proposed strategy within the ESDP sought to enhance the capabilities, skills, and values of teachers, with a targeted implementation goal set for the year 2012 (Dadi, 2015).

Furthermore, the National Framework for Continuous Professional Development (NFCPD) for practising teachers was instituted with the aim of providing a unified strategy for continuous professional development (CPD), ultimately enhancing education quality in Tanzania (MoEST, 2017). Within this framework, CPD is considered experiential, regular, ongoing, sustainable, supported by administrators, teacher-informed and designed. One notable type of CPD outlined in the NFCPD is school-level PD, particularly through Community of Learning (CoL). CoL is seen as a powerful avenue for teacher PD, emphasising collaborative learning embedded in the school context addressing relevant needs of teachers, students, and schools (MoEST, 2017). While these policies are still in the process of implementation, their inclusion in government documents indicates Tanzania's recognition of school-based PD as a fundamental approach to fostering teachers' professional growth, with the overarching goal of enhancing the quality of teaching and learning across the nation.

This paper emphasises the role of teacher collaborative practices, specifically focusing on a methodical procedure where teachers work together to enhance instructional strategies. Collaborative Practices (CPs) approach involves systematic collaboration among teachers to achieve shared learning objectives (DuFour, 2005; Orlando, 2016). Kapinga (2012) underscores CPs as essential instructional professional development to

enhance teacher performance. Other collaborative learning programs for teacher professional development include Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), Communities of Practice (CoP), Lesson Study (LS), and Collaborative Learning Communities (CLCs). In PLCs, teachers engage in regular, systematic, and sustainable cycles of inquiry-based learning to develop individual and collective teaching capacities, allowing them to explore strengths and weaknesses collaboratively (Hairon et al., 2017; Brodie & Chimhande, 2020).

A review of studies on the impact of teacher CPs type of CPD in countries such as the USA, Scotland, England, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa, and Namibia among primary and secondary school teachers highlighted their contribution to improvements in teachers' performance and students' behaviours (Cordingley et al., 2005). Joyce and Showers (2002) add that CPs may influence the use of training in teachers' classroom settings, specifically through methods such as peer coaching and action research, which can promote changes in the classroom context. As a result, CPs are highly valued as a means of involving a broad spectrum of teachers in achieving shared professional goals. CPs also play a pivotal role in enhancing teachers' instructional practices and nurturing leadership capacities within their communities (Williams, 2010; Bouchamma, Savoie & Bosque, 2012).

In Tanzania, Ndunda's study (2022) in Morogoro Urban revealed that PLCs were a successful PD strategy for teachers to collaborate and improve their teaching. Research shows that Communities of Practice (CoP) bind teachers into a collective whole, fostering collaborative activities and knowledge construction for improving professional practices (Looi, Lim & Chen, 2008). Nihuka's study (2011) noted that CoP, characterised by school-based training, allows teachers to easily relate new pedagogical content knowledge to their natural setting. Additionally, Lesson Study (LS) involves live observation of classroom lessons by a group of teachers, where one teaches while others observe, make notes, and collect data for feedback sessions aimed at teaching improvement (Lewis, Perry & Murata, 2006).

In general, research on teachers' PD in Tanzanian schools (Anney, 2013; Ibrahim, 2010; Kibona, 2018; Lema, 2016; Rugambwa, 2022) demonstrates that teachers participate in CPs to find solutions related to teaching, including understanding the subject content, developing lessons, and teaching techniques. Studies also show that there is a potential benefit for PD among teachers who engage in school-based CPs (Awit, 2013; Sawele, 2021; Rugambwa, 2022). Despite this, there is a scarcity of information on CPs being conducted among secondary school teachers as a means of their professional growth. Therefore, this study aimed to explore CPs used by teachers and seek their views on CPs as a means to PD.

This study sought to respond to the following research questions:

- i) What are the existing collaborative practices used by teachers in secondary schools?
- ii) What are teachers' perspectives on collaborative practices as a means to support their professional development?

Theoretical Framework

This study is underpinned by Wenger's Social Theory of Learning (STL). Wenger's (2000) STL emphasises learning as situated in a particular physical and social context and distributed across the individual, other than persons, and tools with communities of practice. In this context, the communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly. Wenger's STL encompasses four components: meaning (learning as experience), practice (learning as doing), community (learning as belonging), and identity (learning as becoming). As such, learning should be an integral part of people's participation in groups as practice and in organisations interacting for the purpose of developing one another.

This theory supports this study because, through CPs, teachers come together to learn, create a social environment, interact, assist, construct strategies and solve teaching and learning challenges with the shared goal of mutual help and professional development (Shakenova, 2017; Stewart, 2014). STL emphasises that learning occurs within a particular social environment through group discussion, shared understanding, and collaborative activities to work with new ideas. Within this framework, CPs become integral to teachers' learning experiences, thereby enabling their professional development. When teachers are provided with an opportunity to collaborate in schools, they learn and produce knowledge related to their profession, which is influential in developing learning relationships. Hence, the current study investigated teachers' perspectives on how different collaborative practices can be used to enhance their teaching practices within secondary schools.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research approach with a case study design. A case study design was employed to shed light on CPs as teacher PD pathways in secondary schools. In this context, a case was CPs regarded as teacher PD pathway among secondary school teachers. The units of analysis were categories of participants, including heads of schools and heads of departments from three selected public secondary schools in Ilala Municipality. Ilala Municipality was purposively selected because many teachers were found to face challenges in improving teaching and

learning, just like many teachers in the country. Another reason was its relatively larger number of secondary school teachers when compared to other municipalities or districts in the country. Due to this, it was possible to find diverse subject teachers who were likely to be participating in CPs. This became convenient for the researchers to reach and recruit the target participants. Public secondary schools in Ilala Municipality have heterogeneous teaching staff. In this context, all schools were ranked based on the number of teachers per teaching subject. This made three secondary schools (A, B, and C – Pseudo names) to be purposely selected. In each selected school, nine (9) teachers who were heads of departments and one (1) head of school were purposively selected to make a total of 30 participants for this study. All participants were purposively selected depending on the virtue of their knowledge, information consideration, and pedagogical leadership responsibilities in their respective schools.

In this study, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) served as the primary methods for data collection. The interview guide included open-ended questions, offering flexibility to gather in-depth data from Heads of Departments (HoDs) and Heads of Secondary Schools (HoSSs). This approach allowed the researchers to maintain a conversational flow, seeking clarification and ensuring comprehensive information was elicited. The in-depth interviews provided valuable insights into critical issues, including teachers' awareness of CPs in their schools and their perspectives on CPs as a pathway to PD. Interviews with HoSSs were conducted in their respective offices during working hours at agreed-upon times, while interviews with HoDs were scheduled through prior consultation, accommodating their availability during school hours.

FGDs, conducted among HoDs, facilitated the sharing of experiences, ideas, and the expression of beliefs, meanings, and values to arrive at a collective understanding of their perspectives on CPs as a pathway for teacher PD. This method was chosen for its appropriateness in encouraging open discussion and capturing critical information not always evident in face-to-face interviews. Discussions took place under a canopy of trees in all three selected schools. Both interview responses and focus group discussions were recorded, with notes taken to enable a thorough examination of participants' statements and nuances in their expressions (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The assumption underlying this approach was that participants from both categories would offer distinct views on the study phenomena.

The collected data were analysed thematically following the six stages of data analysis proposed by Clarke and Braun (2013). The stages included data familiarisation, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing a research report. Audiotapes and field notes that contained interview and FGD data were carefully listened to and read several times, respectively,

and then transcribed. All thirty transcripts and audio recordings were organised and coded to fit the study's purpose. Coded nodes were read and re-read to identify major themes. Data were analysed into familiar patterns and themes. This data analysis technique helped the researchers to sort out similarities and differences in participants' views. Analysis to develop the story was based on a theme in relation to the study objective and research questions to ensure there was not much overlapping between themes. Extracts from interviews and FGDs supported key themes in reporting.

Ethical considerations for this study included securing a research clearance from the University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. The researchers also secured a permit from the Dar es Salaam Regional Administrative Secretary in Ilala Municipality to conduct the study in three sample secondary schools. The researchers also ensured that participation in this study was voluntary. Confidentiality of participants' information and their names were maintained anonymously only for use in this study.

Findings and Discussion

The findings and discussion are based on the main two themes as presented below.

Existing Collaborative Practices Used by Teachers in Secondary Schools

The findings revealed that teachers engaged in three types of CPs, namely (i) teaming, (ii) coaching, and (iii) mentoring. Teachers did the three prevalent CPs to assist them in overcoming diverse challenges in classroom teaching.

Teaming collaborative practice

Participants acknowledged that teamwork and collaboration took place and were practised in their schools. It was noted that a few teachers were not participating in teams because of having bigger workloads. Through teaming, teachers were able to work on the challenges they encountered while planning lessons, work schedules, teaching materials, and numerous complex subject topics. When departments had a shared topic to cover in the same class, teaming was practised amongst them, as argued by one of the heads of the department:

In our school, we usually share experiences by working as a team with other departments. These are the ones in which we share some topics in similar classes. For example, physics and mathematics teachers meet and seek assistance from each other, especially on the topics that were taught in those subjects. At this point, mathematics teachers in a physics class observe and learn teaching techniques on particular topics from the physics teacher. In physics, we reviewed questions with students and realised some questions were not well answered in the national exams (interview, HoD, School A).

Another head of the department claimed that some teachers could not engage themselves in team collaborative work or interactions because there were few in their department.

Our school has only two English teachers. Most of the time, we are busy teaching, and the time for discussion or solving teaching issues is minimal. This makes us dependent on individual efforts to tackle any difficulty that arises. It is only during all staff seminars or simple training that we are able to attend because it involves all teachers (interview, HoD, School B).

The quotes show that teachers used teaming as a collaborative technique to facilitate their instruction and pick up new skills from peers. At the same time, few teachers failed to participate in teamwork because of time and tight schedules. Teamwork enabled teachers to acquire new methods for completing challenging assessments in science courses when students were required to undertake practical work. Students were able to use their newly learned information and abilities in the classroom. This made practical sessions simpler, more entertaining, and easier to understand.

This study has shown that teachers had the chance to review the syllabus in terms of its content and the delivery method. They came up with solutions to classroom issues while working in collaborative teams. This enhanced not only student learning and topic comprehension but also improved teachers' instructions in the classroom. The findings also revealed that working in teams is a more practical working experience in which teachers have to share, build, and identify working solutions collaboratively. These align with Kibona's (2018) study, which discovered that science and mathematics teachers organised team activities in which they not only prepared lessons and teaching materials but also taught particular topics in teams to enhance their instruction. Similarly, Steyn's (2015) study in South African primary schools revealed that teachers established teams in which they discussed and reflected on new teaching techniques with new objectives that aided in both teacher development and student learning. The teaming collaborative practice worked better in South African schools because teachers were not overwhelmed with teaching work (Walker, 2016).

Coaching collaborative practice

The findings revealed that some teachers had coaching responsibilities, which enabled teachers to meet and talk about classroom teaching problems. In this situation, experienced subject experts give consultation sessions to teachers where they interact and discuss teaching issues. After that, a follow-up effort is made by the coach to monitor the progress of that particular teacher. Within this framework, coaching is characterised by skills improvement, which focuses much on skill development in a specific area of teaching. It is also goal-oriented and intended to achieve a specific objective for teachers' professional growth, involving observation and constructive feedback for improvement. It can also take a short-term focus on addressing specific

challenges. The practice involved a group of teachers and individual teachers who came into contact with the coach for consultation. Consequently, those who were being coached made significant contributions to the coach, making it a complementary strengthening activity.

Teachers stated that coaching focused not only on skill improvements but also on how to enhance students' learning in appropriate ways. This indicated a coaching responsibility in addition to teaching topic knowledge and methodological skills. The practice gave teachers new teaching knowledge and experience, as noted below:

When I joined this school, it was challenging to handle discipline cases. The students were very naughty, which made me apply some harsh punishments (strokes). One advised me on how to apply simple punishments without using lots of my energy. With my fellow teachers, we made a follow-up action on every punishment we provided to see its effectiveness. This teacher had knowledge of psychology in managing discipline, which has really helped teachers in this school in handling discipline and student learning (interview, HoD, School C).

The quote illustrates how other teachers were able to learn various methods of student discipline from an experienced teacher. Teachers received coaching services on predetermined topics to enhance discipline and alter specific student behaviours. A coach was consulted by a group of teachers participating in the exercise. Teachers developed a shared responsibility and a vision for learning. This is because coaching gives teachers a chance to explore various educational strategies, evaluate their success, and make changes as needed. This is comparable to a study done by Kagoda and Ezati (2014), which found that teachers saw coaching as a way of helping one another. This was in the development of teacher skills, strategies or techniques generally conducted during conferences, lesson observation and post-conference.

Mentoring collaborative practice

The findings disclose that new teachers were welcomed into the teaching profession by being given support to settle into their teaching methods and become familiar with the setting. In this context, mentoring involves a small group of teachers and one-on-one based more on interactions and dialogues. The mentees (teachers) share similar professional needs and goals, which are collectively mentored by an experienced teacher (mentor). The practice allows collaborative learning and support among mentees while ensuring that mentees receive individualised guidance and support to meet individual needs.

The task of giving new teachers all the information they required to increase their understanding of what the school accomplishes on a daily basis fell on the school heads. This welcoming and settling responsibility was done in cooperation with the

schools' academic master/mistress and HoDs, as noted by one head of school:

New and transferred teachers are welcome by the head of school and directed to the academic master's office, who explains to them what concerns effective teaching. The head of the department takes over issues concerning lesson plans, schemes of work and the teaching materials needed. In a department, a new or novice teacher is attached to an experienced one who is willing to work closely with the new teacher. This makes it easier to make a follow-up and find out how well new teachers are doing. We call them mentors because they assist when teaching needs arise (interview HoSSs, School B).

The quote above attests that teachers view mentoring as a collaborative practice, which makes new teachers feel comfortable and equips them with knowledge of the teaching profession. The HoSSs office evaluated new teachers' lesson plans and observed their classrooms to support them. In addition, another teacher would mentor a new or inexperienced teacher in an effort to ensure that they felt comfortable and supported in their new surroundings. Mentoring is a collaborative professional development strategy insisting on a long-term supportive relationship between a mentor and a mentee with the aim of guiding them to improve their teaching practices through experiences.

During mentoring, issues related to classroom teaching were discussed and collaboratively solved by mentors or mentees. This implies that mentoring assisted teachers in realising their strengths and flaws through professional talks with their mentors. It served as a method of tracking new teachers' performance in the classroom and determining whether they require additional support. Despite this, the findings unveiled that mentoring was done among teachers to improve their professionalism. Further, taking part in mentoring enhanced teachers' knowledge of their subjects and pedagogy. The findings concur with a study conducted by Nest (2012), which found that the potential to advance teachers' PD with a mentor helps to inspire a mentee. Supporting this, Hudson et al. (2012) asserted that mentoring practices worked as a channel for teachers' PD due to the understanding of competence among professionals.

Teachers' Views on Collaborative Practices for Professional Development

Regarding teachers' views on CP PD, the study revealed the following themes:

Improved instructional practices among teachers

The findings demonstrated that teachers acknowledged that acquiring knowledge from various interactions with colleagues had improved their teaching efficiency. They insisted that collaborative practices gave them a chance to share professional knowledge and experiences so that they may benefit from them and enhance classroom instruction. Indeed, taking part in collaborative activities benefited them because of the knowledge they gained from contacts with colleagues and one-on-one conversations.

Most of them noted that other teachers introduced various approaches to teaching challenging topics. This made classroom teaching and student learning considerably. Conversely, when teachers are incredibly knowledgeable in the subjects they teach, the process of teaching becomes simple and joyful, as clarified in a focus group discussion by one of the heads of the department:

There is a time when you enjoy teaching because you have mastered the content and delivery mode gained from interacting with fellow teachers. It is because we have many ideas to improve our teaching. Even without attending seminar, training or workshops, as you know, some content presented in the seminar are irrelevant or not well understood by most of us (FGD, School A).

The preceding quote demonstrates a clear improvement among teachers in their classroom practices. The findings revealed how cooperative interactions explore teachers' classroom abilities. They learn more about their profession without having to rely on scheduled seminars, workshops, and out-of-school training. Interacting with teachers provides suggestions for how to organise students into manageable groups for effective learning. The findings are similar to those of Ayubayeva (2018), who found that CPs had contributed to teacher improvements, which was linked to their professional growth. Nevertheless, as they engage in exploring and sharing strategies and techniques, they solve subject matters and master subject content. Williams (2010) contends that teachers in collaborative teams reflected upon their instructional practices. However, interactions with students were also found to improve the teaching and learning process after identifying challenges arising during the discussion in the facilitation processes in classrooms. This kind of instructional improvement was regarded to be vital to teachers learning and development.

Teachers' sense of responsibility

The findings revealed that CPs assisted teachers in becoming more responsive and helpful to students and other teachers during classroom teaching. Learning new topics and using creative teaching methods in the classroom has increased because teachers' improved reactivity to what they teach. The majority of teachers acknowledged that their professional obligations had increased. They admitted that currently, teachers stay longer in school accomplishing their teaching plans, engaging in collaborative discussions and solving subject challenges. Being responsible implies working collectively in planning, consultation and providing time for interactions with the aim of achieving together as one of the heads of the department stated:

We agreed that no one should fail to deliver in the classroom. Since I have gained much from our interactions, when there is a need for my help, I am ready to assist my colleagues. The aim is to improve one another and improve our teaching as we want our school to perform better in the National exams. Thus, we should work hard to make this possible (Interview, HoD, School A).

The quote implies that through CPs, teachers are made responsible for promoting students' learning and providing what is expected of them for their students. The findings also disclosed that for teachers to be in a position to teach successfully and ensure that students understand, they should be encouraged to study new things and seek advice from other teachers. Teachers deliberately engage in collaborative PD opportunities in their schools due to a sense of ownership that was sparked by responsibility. They contribute to their students' success and their schools. Generally, teachers' engagement in professional dialogues increased awareness of their teaching profession. It improved their sense of responsibility to their fellow teachers as a team that is constantly learning and developing. The findings concur with Ayubayeva's (2018) study, which reported that teachers who engage in collaborative professional interactions develop a sense of responsibility and keep themselves together for knowledge gain. Also, the findings showed that teacher-professional collaborative interactions aimed to improve teachers' teaching activities and student improvement. This is consistent with Burton's (2015) study, which reported that shared responsibility for student learning emerged as a means for teachers to diagnose student needs. Hence, the responsibility among teachers was to uplift one another for their effectiveness and student improvement, which had an impact on teacher PD.

Professional relations among teachers

The findings revealed that professional relations among teachers were viewed as an ability to approach a teacher and get assistance on planning lessons together, preparing teaching materials and aids and organising collaborative sessions. This kind of relationship was found to lead to professional improvement among teachers as they expand their catalogue, more strategies, profound content and a wide range of skills. However, it was found that some teachers were not engaging in collaborative practices. This made it difficult for them to have regular interactions with their fellow teachers, which was reported to inhibit their professional relations, learning, and development. Despite this, the majority of teachers had opportunities to gain new knowledge and skills in their subjects based on what was presented. Within their school environment, teachers were free to approach each other for teaching discussions and problem-solving. One member of the FGD commented that:

During our discussion, we understood one another, and we were able to ask for more clarification from the topic presenter or subject expert. We have the freedom to inquire more about group understanding, which also benefits individual teachers. This is because we have developed a kind of professional relationship (FGD, School C).

The excerpt above shows that group relations contributed to improving teachers' confidence during planned collaborative teaching and learning processes. This is due to the fact that many teachers encouraged their colleagues to face classroom challenges

embedded with skills, experiences and pedagogies pertinent to their subjects. Conversely, at the departmental level, the emphasis was on teachers to master what they taught. This was done before a teacher entered the class for a lesson where the sharing of the content was conducted. The practice gave teachers more assurance as they entered the classroom. The findings corroborate Stewart's (2014) argument that a sense of cohesion among members of a collaborative team is vital in establishing a feedback loop and providing learning opportunities for improvement. Knight (2011) further points out that when all collaborative team members are devoted to the same goals and tasks, the resistance to constructive criticism is reduced. Similarly, when there is a spirit of collaborative interactions among teachers, skills development and professional relationship occurs, allowing teachers to learn regularly (Mahato, 2021).

Improving novice and new teachers' knowledge and skills

The findings disclosed that CPs implemented in schools helped new and inexperienced teachers acquire professional experiences, knowledge, and skills. This is because interactions and shared talks about teacher development enabled novice teachers to learn from more experienced and veteran teachers and obtain concrete experience. The findings also showed that CPs assisted teachers in adjusting to new teaching environments as they gained abilities, information and experiences in the field.

The findings showed that apart from a warm welcome given by their school administration, other practices directly engaged them in learning and skills acquisition. The process facilitated their professional growth within their new school environment. All heads of schools revealed that their schools involved novice teachers in collaborative plans which improved their teaching practices, as expressed by one of the heads of school:

We have a plan for new and novice teachers who join our schools. After the necessary introduction and provision of school information, they get assistance with lesson preparations, lesson notes and teaching aids. It is the responsibility of the head of the department to provide necessary assistance. Also, experienced and older teachers play a bigger part in enriching new and novice teachers with lesson preparations and facilitation plans (Interview, HoSSs, School B).

The quote above implies that assisting novice teachers in improving their teaching was possible. This resulted from the helping spirit among teachers caused by teacher participation in collaborative interactions within the school. Teachers felt responsible for their colleagues and exhibited readiness to assist them in overcoming diverse teaching challenges. Apart from that, all HoSSs insisted that mentoring novice/new

improved the learning and professional growth of both mentor and mentee because they all had something to gain and share, as was stated by one of the heads of secondary school:

Helping new teachers is a good practice, and we now use it in our school culture. I have been a mentor to one teacher with whom we shared a lot inside and outside the classroom. I gained some new experiences from him, too, since he had just come from the college (interview, HoSSs, School B).

The quote implies that while novice teachers join schools with their prior knowledge and experiences, they need to be oriented to real teaching environments. Some of them join the teaching profession with limited knowledge and skills despite the fact that they have some new teaching methodologies from their former teaching colleges, which are beneficial to experienced teachers. This agrees with Wenger and Synder (2000), who discovered that newcomers to an institution wanted to learn from other “old-timers” in an institution. They strive to align their experiences with the competence of these people at the institution. This is because new teachers and novice ones not only need to fit into the environment but also add professional knowledge to their teaching practice since the competence of old timers at the institution pulls the experience of the newcomers. This coincides with Anney’s study (2013), which suggested school-based professional learning and development practice, which is more collaborative. This way, collaborative learning helps both unqualified and novice teachers to develop the appropriate skills and knowledge needed for their teaching profession.

Conclusions

This paper concludes that secondary school teachers conducted CPs within their schools. The aim was to enhance and improve their teaching skills and knowledge of the subjects. Such CPs were done in small discussion groups and one -on-one interactions, which were termed *teaming*, *coaching*, and *mentoring*. It was noted that participating in CPs helped teachers solve teaching difficulties, which contributed to their knowledge and skills needed to engage students in the learning process. However, some teachers tended to fail to engage in CPs because they were occupied with teaching loads and were reported to be few in the department. This study posits that, for effective teacher participation in collaborative professional activities, there is the need for competent authorities not only to reconsider teachers’ workload to enable them to plan and participate in CPs on time but also to ensure the availability of resources for collaborative activities in schools. This study has highlighted that teachers who engaged in CPs improved their professional effectiveness, encompassing improved instructional capacity, increased teacher sense of responsibility, developed teacher professional relations and enhanced professional skills and knowledge among teachers. This study builds on other previous empirical studies highlighting the need

for teacher commitment to collaborate with others and additional support needed to bolster teachers' belief in each other's strengths in solving daily teaching challenges.

Recommendations

The emphasis on engaging teachers with PD practices at their workplaces is documented in various policy documents. For example, collaborative professional learning, which is pointed out in the policy document NFPCPD, is regarded as a means of enhancing teachers' learning and improvement. The framework may consider including aspects of teaming, coaching, and mentoring as a broader range of collaborative professional learning opportunities in schools. By doing so, teachers will form active and collective learning, which allows teachers to learn from each other experiences and expertise, as supported by Wengers' STL.

At the school level, teachers need to be well conversant with the practices for effective planning and participation in actual collaborative professional learning activities among them. This can be done through the provision of in-house training on the practices by experts. School administrators might consider adopting teaming, coaching and mentoring in order to provide teachers with additional individualised and group support to add to their profession.

Since the current study was limited to three public secondary schools, which were purposively selected with a total of 30 participants, a larger number of teachers from public secondary schools who share the same characteristics as indicated in the study's selection criteria may be considered in other studies to maximise the probability of transferability of the study. The study findings noted that novice / new teachers benefited from the collaborative environment that was found in their schools. Further studies can be conducted to assess the comparative professional development benefits of CPs among groups of teachers, particularly experienced and less experienced in public secondary schools. The findings could help determine the perceptions among teachers, which may influence practice decisions.

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