Research Article

ATTITUDE OF BASIC SCHOOL TEACHERS TOWARD PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES WITHIN THE ASSIN NORTH DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

Teacher professional development programmes which are meant to enhance skills, knowledge, abilities and beliefs are inseparably linked to effective teaching and learning. The purpose of the study is to determine the understanding and some factors that influence the attitude of basic school teachers towards professional development programmes within the Assign North District. Thirty (30) basic school teachers comprising six (6) head teachers and twenty-four (24) classroom teachers within the district were selected using simple random sampling for the study. The main instruments used for data collection were questionnaire and an interview guide. The study was an embedded mixed method design that involved simultaneous collection of data set by a qualitative and quantitative approach. Question-by-question model was used for the analysis of qualitative data and descriptive statistic was used to analyse the quantitative data. The study revealed that teachers in the district have appreciable knowledge of professional development programmes (PDP) and a positive attitude towards professional development programmes. Some of the factors that influence teachers' attitude towards professional development training include career mobility, possible acquisition of knowledge, skills and possible networking with other teachers. It is recommended that the Ministry of Education in collaboration with other stakeholders of education and organizers of professional development training programmes should develop systematic and comprehensive professional development plans for teachers. There must be monitoring and evaluation team to visit teachers in their respective schools by the organizers after the training programmes through robust supervision. Also, teachers in the district are to be encouraged to create a network platform with the other teachers within the district to work in collaboration to be abreast with current educational issues and share ideas in connection with methods of teaching in their schools. In addition, the professional development programmes should be geared towards hands-on and practical activities to meet the particular needs of the basic school teacher. This will make basic school teachers attach seriousness towards such programmes.

Keywords: Attitude, Basic School Teachers, Professional Development Programmes.

INTRODUCTION

Quality education is a critical factor in national development (Akareem & Hossain, 2016; Sivakumar & Sarvalingam, 2010). While several factors have been identified to contribute effectively to students' achievements in examinations, it is on record that quality teachers are critically the most important factor in quality education and students' achievements (Carey, 2004). Teachers are the hub around whom the success of every instructional process revolves. There is ample evidence to show that the academic and professional training of teachers has a direct and positive bearing on the performance and achievement of learners/students (Farrant, 1980). Professional learning communities in education function in complex and dynamic contexts (Sleegers, 2013; Hairon, 2015). Professional development refers to all training, certification and education that a worker needs to succeed in his or her career. It's no secret that different jobs require different skills. Even if a worker currently has the necessary skills, he or she may need additional skills in the future. Through professional development, workers can learn these skills to become better and more efficient workers (America Hospitality Academy, 2020). Generally professional development refers to any form of continuous training offered to a professional; in this case a teacher to improve lesson delivery for effective and quality teaching and learning. The quality of supported teaching in the schools ultimately determines the extent of variations in students' performance in the schools. Operationally, Teacher professional development is the growth a teacher achieves as a result of gaining increased experience and how he/she examines teaching systematically. It was discussed in Akuoko, Dwumah and Baba (2012) that quality education is achieved

through qualified, trained, and motivated teachers. It is the teachers who largely implement instructional policies. Teachers are therefore, key in making or marring any instructional policy of an educational system. The teacher therefore becomes the major channel through which quality education of children can be affected. This places greater responsibility on policy makers and educational planners to see to it that teachers receive continuous training to improve their knowledge and skills throughout their careers. While it is assumed that policy makers and planners have a role to play in ensuring that teachers get the opportunity to undergo professional training, the nature of teachers' attitude towards professional development programmes could make or mar any good intention of the programme and hence the success of the educational system. While positive attitudes of teachers can ensure quality teaching and therefore improve student performance, negative attitudes of teachers towards professional development programmes could have an adverse effect on students' performance (Blazar & Kraft, 2017). The teacher does not exist and operate in a vacuum; he/she is the hub around whom the success of every instructional process revolves. There are several intrinsic (personal) and extrinsic (environmental) factors that influence teachers attitudes towards professional development. Studies have shown that the age, gender, teaching experiences, academic qualifications, subjects or the class a teacher teaches and other variables can influence his/her attitude towards professional development (Blazar & Kraft, 2017; Tella, 2008; Zhang, 2008). The school environment system, government policies and programmes all influence teachers' attitudes so much so that they cannot be ignored in studies analyzing successes of professional development programmes. The working conditions, promotion policies and benefits one hopes to get from such training contribute to a teacher's attitude toward professional development (Boudersa, 2016; Cohen & Hill, 1998). Professional development is necessary to fill in the gaps in

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the skill sets of teachers and continue to develop the expertise of teachers (Evers, Kreijns & Van der, 2016). Many teachers' professional development activities still seem traditional by nature, directed at the individual teacher and often not situated at the work place such as workshops, informative meetings, courses, training sessions (Reynders, Kerkhof, Molenberghs, & Van Auden hove, 2015). Research on professional development has shown that professionalization is more effective when teachers collaborate in activities that take place at the work place and are integrated into daily practice (Vanveen, Zwart & Meirink, 2010). The context, content and the processes of professional development programmes are also very important in changing a teacher's attitude towards professional development. While the concern of a newly trained teacher may focus on classroom activities by preparing and managing lessons, the experienced teacher is very likely to think about how his/her new learning will impact on the students (Smith & Gillespie, 2007). Teacher professional development should, as a matter of importance, reflect the needs of teachers, both experienced and inexperienced in order to get a positive response from teachers. The significance of teacher's continuous professional development improves teacher's educational performance and effectiveness in school (Giran, Conneely & Tangney, 2016) Teacher motivation, according to Sinclair (2008) is an attraction, retention and concentration as something that determines 'what attracts individuals to teaching, how long they remain in their initial teacher education courses and subsequently the teaching profession, and the extent to which they engage with their courses and the teaching profession'. Ahadzie in the Daily Graphic (November, 12, 2007) appealed to the government of Ghana to formulate teacher-centred policies to retain and motivate teachers. He said teachers between the ages of 21 and 35, who constitute about 85 percent of the nation's teacher population were on the verge of switching to other professions due to poor remuneration and conditions of service. Similarly, Addaih stated in an article published in the Daily Graphic (October 2, 2007) that offering of extrinsic rewards to individuals by organisations for appropriate behaviour is based on the exchange theory. This theory states that "in an exchange relationship, the employee 'gives' something that the organisation values, and in return, he or she 'gets' something that the organisation can provide" (p.25). Most stakeholders in education have always presumed money to be the only means of motivating the teacher. Addaih as cited by Addo (2008), money may be used as a reward for productivity gains or it may be related to flexibility in providing customer service. However, new paradigms call for consideration of other kinds of reinforcement. Zimmerman (2002) cited the ideas of Abraham Maslow in his 'theory of human motivation', which states that to motivate workers properly, it is important for a leader to understand which needs are important to them and which must be attended to motivate them. Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning (2017) indicates that teacher practice networks have emerged as a potential mechanism to support teacher professional learning and supplement other types of professional development available to teachers. Network organizations support teachers and their instructional practice by (a) providing access to instructional materials, (b) providing training and support in the use of instructional resources and strategies, and (c) enabling teachers to connect with a network of other teachers to support instructional improvements. Networks involve interactions between professional such as teachers and teacher educators at face-to-face or virtual meetings. Such meetings provide opportunities to meet colleagues   from different institutions and districts or states. The aim of network is to share ideas and be mutually supportive of each other. Network allow people to innovate in flexible way that are appropriate in their context (TESS-India, 2017). Developing human resources in an organisation means improving their skills, knowledge

and attitudes. This allows the organisation to remove or prevent performance deficiencies and make employees more flexible and adaptable, as well as increase their commitment to the organisation. Special attention needs to be developed to find ways of motivating people to make contributions that have long-term benefits to the organisation. In education for instance, in-service training should be institutionalized as a matter of policy.

Statement of the Problem

According to Darling-Hammond and Young (2002) formal preparation of teachers predicts higher student achievement. Unfortunately, while increased numbers of teachers are churned out of the Universities and Colleges of Education to teach in the basic schools yearly in the Assin-North District, quality of education regarding learners' achievement leaves much to be desired, according to collated Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) statistics analysed by the Ghana Education Service (Assin-North). Understanding, practicing and effectively translating what has been learnt during such professional development programmes to reflect in greater student achievement is a critical issue that needs to be examined closely. It is important that teachers are sufficiently assisted to prepare when they begin teaching and when they continue to improve their knowledge and skills throughout their career. This study was conducted to look at attitude of basic school teachers towards professional development programmes in the Assin-North District.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

- What is the basic school teacher's understanding of professional development?
- What factors influence the attitudes of teachers towards professional development?

METHODOLOGY

The Study Area

Assin North District is one of the twenty –two districts in Central region, Ghana. The district has some developmental projects currently going on. There are different ethnic groups with different socio-economic background. The economic output of the people of the district is below middle income. Majority of the inhabitants are into Agricultural activities such as cocoa and plantain farming. There are some educational institutions present in the district starting from early grade, Upper grade, Junior High and Senior High Schools. The level of education within the district is within the average group. The district can boost of just a few teachers and nurses who form part of the Public or Civil servants.

Description of the Study Design

The research is an embedded mixed method design that involved the simultaneous collection of data set by qualitative and quantitative approach but has one form of data set to play a supportive role to the other form of data. The study made use of a mixture of descriptive survey and cross-sectional research techniques to address the questions raised in the study. Descriptive survey is exploratory and is aimed at describing existing situation of the research population with respect to some research variables and to ascertain in-depth ability for the respondent to express their views.
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Sampling Techniques and Sample

The population for the study was all basic schools within the district. In selecting the respondents for the study, a simple random sampling technique was employed which allowed each and every member of the population an equal and independent opportunity of being selected for the study. Out of the ten (10) circuits in the District, two (2) circuits were selected for the study based on a quiz competition in the district. The first two winners of the competition became the circuits selected for the study. Three (3) basic schools from each circuit were selected which constituted the six (6) public basic schools in the Assin-North District (GES, Assin-North). The target population for this study was thirty (30) teachers which comprised twenty-four (24) teachers and six(6) head teachers in basic schools within the Assin-North District.

Data Collection Instruments

Instruments used in data collection were semi-structure questionnaire and interview guide. The instruments were designed to collect information from both classroom teachers and head teachers. In all, six (6) head teachers and twenty-four (24) classroom teachers in the basic schools within the District were selected for the study. The head teachers and the teachers were given the questionnaire followed by

the interview guide. The instruments used were validated by allowing selected teachers in Assin-South in a pilot study to respond to the questions and this helped to reduce the errors. Reliability coefficient for the test-and-retest conducted for the instrument were $r = 0.72$ and $r = 0.71$ which gives the true reflection of a reliable instrument. Three (3) head teachers and ten (10) basic school teachers were selected for the pilot study. The Assin-South district was chosen for the pilot study because it had similar characteristics as the Assin-North district.

RESULTS, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

The analysis of the data in this study was done using simple tables that involved processing of data from the questionnaire administered to make a meaningful interpretation. Descriptive statistics was used for the analysis. The tables were used to give a clear view of the distribution of the responses by respondents to each question in the questionnaire. The qualitative data were analyzed using computer-assisted software. The quantitative data was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) and Micro Soft Excel.

Research Question One (1): What is the basic school teacher's understanding of professional development?

Table 1: Understanding of Professional Development

ITEM	Strongly Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Agree
	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)
1. Professional development refers to any continuous in-service training offered to teachers to improve teaching and learning methods in schools.	20(66.7)	7(23.3)	2 (6.7)	1(3.3)
2. Professional development should be made compulsory for all teachers in the basic Schools.	21 (70)	6(20)	3(10)	0(0)
3.Professional development should be used as teacher promotion criterion.	12(40)	15(50)	2(6.7)	1 (3.3)
4. Professional development training programmes are mostly organized during contact hours.	5 (16.7)	14 (46.6)	8 (26.7)	3 (10)

Source: Fieldwork

The head teachers as well as the basic school teachers were asked about their understanding of professional development. The head teachers generally agreed that professional development is "improving the professional standards of teachers through in-service training, workshops further courses, among others, to upgrade their skills in teaching". They further agreed that the basic school teachers' understanding of professional development is the enrichment and upgrading of the knowledge and skills of teachers professionally. The teachers were provided with possible responses, from which they were asked to select what, in their opinion of professional development. From table 1, 27 teachers responded representing (90%) agreed to the meaning of professional development as suggested to them whilst 3 denoting (10%) disagreed on the meaning in response to the above assertion. The indication is, teachers agreed that Professional Development refers to any continuous in-service training offered to teachers to improve teaching and learning methods in schools. This corresponds to Tanner and Tanner (1987) findings that teachers' professional development is significant mainly for two reasons. Firstly, knowledge is evolving continually. Some new things come out each day which the teacher needs to refresh his/her mind for the challenges it brings. Since not everything can be taught during training at the College of Education. There is the need for the teacher to undergo some in- service training to be abreast with time. On the same Table (1), test item 2, respondents were asked whether professional development training should be made compulsory. Twenty-one (21) thus (70%) agreed whilst nine (9) representing (30%) disagreed, which implies that professional development training should be made compulsory. The finding agrees with the findings of Garba (2011) and Nsemo et al., (2013) that employees are mandated to build an attitude of continuing professional development programme when introduced and that would significantly correct the deficiencies and weaknesses affecting quality in the profession and also promote good leadership that will meet new challenges. Again, Day and Sachs, (2004) study on continuous professional development concluded that making PD compulsory help teachers to develop professional attitudes towards quality education. Test Item 3 tried to find out whether professional development training should be used as teacher promotion criterion. In response to this test item twenty-seven (27) which is 93% of the respondents either strongly agreed or agreed to the proposal while three (3) representing 7 % of the respondents disagreed. The percentage responded indicate that majority of teachers in the Assin North district agreed to the assertion that PD should be used as a criterion for promotion.

The finding is in line with Fobih as cited by Addo (2007) that certificates of evidence obtained after attending workshops/seminars is a motivation for capacity building. The knowledge acquisition from the workshop or seminar serves as a tool to teach and form the bases for promotion and not how long the person had been in the teaching service. However, this same finding runs contrary to the research finding of Hustler *et al.*(2001). Their study revealed that teachers generally felt that continuous professional development had least impact on their promotion prospects. In table 1, test item 4 inquired whether professional development training programmes were mostly organized during contact hours. (Contact hours here refers to the time spent by the teacher and the learners during the teaching and learning process). Nineteen (19) respondents representing (63.3%) agreed whilst eleven (11) representing (36.7%) disagreed to the assertion which designates that professional development programmes are organized during contact hours. In furtherance, the teachers absenting themselves from classes as a result of professional development by either going for further studies or short courses is explained by teachers that it is impeding on teacher's regularity in class hence learners are unable to finish the term activities. The finding corresponds to Tamanja (2016) and Ananga, Tamanja and Amos(2015) outcome which found negative impacts of teaching time lost as a result of teachers' participation in distance education programmes remain a significant issue which needs to be addressed by policy makers and all stakeholders in education since losing instructional time through participation in professional development has both short- and long-term impacts on learners' academic performance. The outcome of Bruno (2002), study opines that students in a classroom eventually lose the desire to learn when the regular teacher is frequently absent. This finding is very important because much as teachers are to be developed professionally it should not be at the expense of learners' instructional time. In summary, the findings of test items 1-4 show that teachers in Assin-North district had an appreciable understanding of the concept professional development.

Research Question two (2): What factors influence the attitudes of teachers towards professional development programme?

Table 2: **Factors Influencing Teachers' Attitude to Professional Development Programme**

ITEM	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)
1. I attend professional development training because of possible salary enhancement.	10 (33.3)	4 (13.3)	15 (50)	1(3.3)
2. I attend professional development training because of career mobility.	14 (46.7)	11 (36.7)	3 (10)	2 (6.6)
3. I attend professional development training because of possible acquisition of new knowledge and skills.	20 (66.7)	6 (20)	3 (10)	1(3.3)
4. I attend professional development training because of possible networking with other teachers.	7 (23.3)	15 (50)	6 (20)	2 (6.7)
5. I attend professional development training because it is compulsory and I have no choice	5 (16.7)	5 (16.7)	18 (60)	2 (6.6)

Source: Fieldwork

From item 1, it is clear that 14 of teacher respondents representing (46.7%) agreed that they attend professional development training programmes because of possible salary enhancement. While 16 (53.3%) disagreed. Assessing the responses of the teachers on the above test item, 16 respondents representing 53.3% agreed that professional development programmes are attended not due to only possible salary enhancement but build competency in their subject areas and also mastery pedagogical content knowledge. The claim supports the assertion of Lushes, Anderson and Murphy (1995) that organizations, like people, have different rhythms and personalities. Some people are highly motivated by the opportunity "to do well", while others are driven to perform by other forces including the personal ambition of key players. Therefore, many teachers (especially the young ones) are not concerned about salary alone as a means of motivation. They look for opportunities to develop themselves after teaching for some time. However, according to the findings of Huang and Cho (2010) support the claim that monetary reward also plays a key role in influencing teachers to participate in professional development programmes as minority respondents agreed that they attend professional development training programmes because of possible salary enhancement. Item 2 sought to find out whether career mobility is a reason why teachers attend professional development training programmes. From table 2, 25 (83.4%) of respondents answered in the affirmative while only 5 (16.6 %) disagreed to the assertion. This implies that majority of the respondents were of the view that career mobility is a reason why teachers attend professional development programmes. This finding confirms the submission of Pânişoară and Pânişoară,(2008), which indicate that professional mobility is an important element for the career development for teachers as well, especially since the young generation is more flexible considering the career change. On the contrary, Gobah as cited by Addo (2008) is of the view that, teaching as a profession is gradually becoming unattractive to the young ones due to poor motivation to teachers. Those who complete their teacher training do not even wait to qualify for study leave. They first move on to the University or other areas with or without study leave. Those who accept posting to the classroom are vigorously pursuing professional courses in accounting and marketing management among others, and leave the profession quietly after acquiring those professional qualifications. The test item 3 of the study was interested in knowing whether teachers attend professional development training programmes because of possible acquisition of knowledge and skills. Out of the thirty (30) respondents, over whelm majority of the teachers (26 representing, 86.7%) agreed to the assertion, only four (4) representing (13.3%) disagreed. This clearly shows that most of the teachers attend professional development programmes because of possible acquisition of knowledge and skills. This response is in line with the finding of Birman *et al.*, (2000) who attest to the fact that the degree to which professional development focuses on content knowledge is directly related to a teacher increase in knowledge and skills.

In another related study they are of the view that professional development activities that provide opportunities for teachers to complete hands-on activities are more likely to result in enhanced knowledge and skills (Birman,*et al.*, 2000; Garet*et al.*, 2001). Villegas-Reimers, E.(2003) opine that teachers acquire new knowledge and experiences based on prior knowledge and these aid teachers in building new pedagogical theories and practices. Test item 4 in table 2 tried to ascertain if networking with other teachers is why teachers attend professional development programmes, it came to light that most of the teachers attend professional development training because of possible networking with other teachers. This was demonstrated by 22 (73.3%) teachers who agreed and 8 (26.7%) who disagreed to the question posed in test item 4 of the questionnaire. Since majority of the teachers are in agreement with the fact that they attend professional development programmes because of possible networking with other teachers, this means that such programmes need to be organized regularly. In the interview conducted respondent said networking is very necessary because it builds a foundation for continued professional growth through structured contact with other teachers. This finding is in line with the research by(West Ed, Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning, 2017) which indicates teacher practice networks have emerged as a potential mechanism to support teacher professional learning and supplement other types of professional development available to teachers. Network organizations support teachers and their instructional practice by (a) providing access to instructional materials, (b) providing training and support in the use of instructional resources and strategies, and (c) enabling teachers to connect with a network of other teachers to support instructional improvements. From test item 5, respondents were asked if professional development were compulsory and if they have no choice. The response shows that most of the teachers disagreed to the statement suggested to them. 20 (66.6%) of the teachers answered in the negative, while 10 (33.3%) agreed. The results depict that teachers understand the concept professional development and therefore do attend, because of the benefit they get and not because it is compulsory but rather the teacher network they established when they attend such programmes. This result runs contrary with Garba, (2011), Nsemo*et al.*, (2013) whose result from a research conducted in the nursing profession indicates that it was expected that mandatory continuing professional development programme when introduced, would significantly correct the deficiencies and weaknesses affecting the quality of nursing care, and promote good leadership in nursing that will meet the new challenges. This can be inferred that when professional development programmeis made compulsory for teachers, it will significantly correct their deficiencies and weakness affecting the quality of teaching and promote good leadership skills in meeting new challenges. From the fore going, it could be concluded that factors that influence teachers' attitude towards professional development training includes career mobility, possible acquisition of knowledge, skills, and possible networking with other teachers.

Conclusion

The study revealed that basic school teachers within the Assin-North district have appreciable understanding of professional development programmes and encourages teachers to reflect widely on professional development in their field of study that will contribute to advancing new and fresh thinking. The study also showed that factors that influence teachers to attend professional development programmes include career mobility, possible acquisition of knowledge, skills and possible networking with other teachers.

Recommendation

It is recommended that, the District Education Directorate in collaboration with the other educational authorities, schools, Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) and other organizers of professional development training programmes need to develop systematic and comprehensive teacher professional development training for teachers and they should cascade the content learnt in their various schools. A monitoring and evaluation team should be set up by the organizers after the training programmes through robust supervision. Also, teachers in the district are to be encouraged to create a network platform with the other teachers to help them to be abreast with current educational issues and share ideas in connection with methods of teaching and diversity in their schools. In addition, the professional development programmes should be geared towards hands-on and practical activities to meet the particular needs of teachers attending the programmes.

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