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Research Article

Exploring Principals' Perceptions of Continuing Professional Teacher Development (CPTD) in Mpumalanga Province

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Abstract

The primary purpose of the study was to explore the principals' perceptions of the Continuing Professional Teacher Development (CPTD) in Mpumalanga province. Participants were selected using the convenience sampling method, and a total of ten school principals were selected based on geographical proximity, knowledge and inclination to participate in the study. The study was qualitative using the interpretivism philosophy. Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were used as data collection instruments. Data were analysed using the NVIVO qualitative data analysis software. The study findings revealed that half of the participants had positive perceptions of the CPTD management system while the remaining half viewed CPTD negatively in its current form.

Keywords: Professional teacher development, South Africa, performance measurement, Whole School Evaluation Policy, Quality Management System

1. Introduction

The South African education system has undergone numerous policy changes, since 1994, to shed the system of the remnants of the 'apartheid' Bantu education system. Amongst the changes was the implementation of the Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS) in 2005 (Naas, 2017). The intention thereof was to strengthen and address challenges of the Developmental Appraisal (DA), Performance Measurement (PM) and the Whole School Evaluation (WSE) policies that were in place at that time. However, the Department of Basic Education realised loopholes in implementing the IQMS, leading to the introduction of the CPTD in 2014.

The latest policy change was the adoption and implementation of Collective Agreement No. 2 of 2020 with the intend to pursue the resolutions of the Teachers' Development Summit of 2009. One of the summit's resolutions was that the developmental appraisal of teachers must be de-linked from

the teacher appraisal meant for wages and salary progression (ELRC, 2020). The result was modifying the IQMS, and the emergence was the Quality Management System (QMS). By implication, the CPTD management system is likely to be neglected and isolated as a stand-alone policy for teacher professional development. The reason is that teachers earn professional development points without monetary value. Therefore, it is imperative to explore the principals' perceptions of the CPTD management system, which is the study's primary objective. The Integrated Strategic Framework for Teacher Education and Development (ISFTED), of which CPTD is part, has not taken off as required. There is a possibility that some teachers, if not most, do not know about its existence.

2. Problem Statement

As alluded, CPTD is a professional management system designed to equip teachers with professional skills. However, there is no monetary value attached to the accumulated professional development points from the CPTD processes. CPTD, by its nature, is technology-based, and research has revealed that there are challenges in implementing CPTD in schools because most teachers are technophobic (Bernadine, 2019). For these reasons, the study seeks to explore the principals' perceptions of the CPTD management system in Mpumalanga province.

3. Research Question

The primary purpose of this research was to explore the principals' perceptions of the CPTD management system using a qualitative study, with interviews used as data collection instruments.

4. Contribution of the Study

Studies on CPTD have been immensely conducted, but school principals' perceptions on CPTD have been less explored. The findings of this study will assist policy makers at national, provincial, and district levels to acknowledge the principals' perceptions of the system since principals are at the site level where policies must be implemented. Knowing principal perceptions would inform policy making towards improving teacher development.

5. Literature Review

5.1 Continuing Professional Teacher Development

Continuing Professional Teacher Development (CPTD) serves as an essential and integral instrument for effective management of schools, and to enhance professionalism and competence of school managers, irrespective of whether a school is private or public (Raluswinga, 2018). Several studies have been conducted on CPTD and its effectiveness in developing and empowering teachers and school principals alike (Mashologu, 2012, du Plessis, 2013, Engelbrecht, 2016, Bernadine, 2019).

In 2011, the Minister of Basic Education and the Minister of Higher Education and Training launched the Integrated Strategic Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa (ISPFTED, 2011-2025). The document clarifies the activities that all stakeholders in education must carry out concerning teachers' professionalisation in the country (SACE, 2015). The outcome of the framework was the CPTD management system. The South African Council of Educators, which was established according to the SACE Act no. 31 of 2000, was mandated to oversee the implementation of the CPTD management processes. The mandate is in line with Section 53 of the National Policy Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa, which states that: "the South African Council of Educators (SACE), as the professional body for professional educators, will have the overall responsibility for the implementation, management and quality assurance of the CPTD System. SACE will be provided with the necessary resources and support to

undertake that role."

According to SACE (2013), to carry out its mandate, SACE is expected to do the following:

- Approve quality and credible professional development providers
- Endorse relevant and suitable professional development activities and programmes
- Allocate professional development points for such activities
- Create each teacher's CPTD account to record the professional development points that have been earned.

The CPTD management system is compulsory for all educators in South Africa, and each teacher is expected to accumulate professional development points in a three-year cycle (SACE, 2015). For this reason, teachers view the CPTD management system as a coercion tool, instead of a professional developmental instrument (Johns & Sosibo, 2019). According to SACE (2015) CPTD guidelines, in order to get the required points, teachers are required to engage in three categories of programmes and activities, namely:

- Teacher initiated activities (Personal)
- The school-initiated activities (School-based)
- Externally initiated activities (offered SACE approved service providers).

Teachers are expected to engage in professional development twice a year and report their engagement to SACE. The reporting can be done manually on a form provided by SACE or electronically on the CPTD self-service portal. The reporting is expected from May to June and October to November of each year during the three-year cycle (SACE, 2015).

It must be noted that the CPTD management system is implemented concurrently with other relevant policies, and one of those is the Quality Management System (QMS), formerly known as the Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS). The QMS came into existence because the Department of Basic Education (DBE) wanted to delink the appraisal policy for salary purposes known as IQMS from the professional development policy, known as CPTD (ELRC Collective Agreement Number 2 of 2020).

There is enough evidence to support school principals and human resource's desire to develop themselves professionally in schools. Brown and Militello (2016) conducted a study in the United States of America, and the findings revealed that principals were willing participants and initiators of professional development activities in schools. On the other hand, Roux (2018) points out that Greek educators wanted a voice in professional development activities. The willingness and the desire to have a voice indicates that principals are eager to be professionally developed.

On the contrary, Hardy (2012) accentuates that CPTD has been reduced to attending workshops and courses that state bureaucrats make available to teachers. It is socio-political practice with intrinsic political support. By implication, the writer suggests that CPTD is a political tool intended for manipulation and control.

The primary focus of the CPTD system is the professional development of teachers to improve teaching and learning. Unfortunately, this is not what happens practically. According to Tooley and Connally (2016), the education system in the United States of America has been sterling in producing quantity instead of quality professional development amongst its workforce. They further state that the American government spend millions of US dollars per annum on teacher professional development. However, there appears to be no noticeable difference between teachers who attended the professional development sessions and those who did not attend (Tooley & Connally, 2016). These findings go against the primary goal of CPTD, which is to professionally develop teachers to be competent in classroom practice and bring about change to their instructional practices.

5.2   *Perceptions of CPTD*

School principals are teachers in senior positions with added accountabilities and responsibilities in educational institutions' day-to-day running. This view is supported by Trehearn (2010), who argues

that school principals are better positioned to influence school professional development programmes by power and responsibility. Furthermore, some teachers perceive continuing professional development positively such that ownership is attached to it. This notion is supported in a study conducted by Roux (2018), which revealed that South African teachers felt in charge of professional development activities and felt recognised like other professionals in the legal, medical, and other professions. These are positive perceptions of CPTD, such that participants go beyond the scope of meetings and share best practices, thereby professionally developing one another.

On the other hand, some teachers view CPD (Continuing Professional Development) programmes as political tools intended for compliance by authorities. In this regard, teachers are passive role players who must comply with the nationally agreed standards (Zoller, 2015). This sentiment is supported in a study by Govender (2018, S1), conducted in the Uthungulu district of KwaZulu-Natal, which revealed that "teachers felt inadequately provided with sustainable professional development programmes, and had minimal meaningful opportunities for classroom support, guidance and monitoring to assist in implementing the changes required". Therefore, there is sufficient evidence that DBE's once-off and one-size-fits-all kinds of workshops do not serve the intended purpose. Furthermore, Zoller (2015) emphasises that CPD programmes must be non-prescriptive to cater for individual professional development needs, instead of teachers fulfilling the obligation to get professional development points or credits.

Furthermore, the fact of the matter is that CPTD is an electronic management system. Literature has revealed that most teachers, particularly in less developed and developing countries, are challenged in using technology. Bernadine (2019) avows that many teachers in some parts of the world, particularly in developing countries, have no access to Information Computer Technology (ICT) and are not computer literate. The South African Council of Educators (SACE) (2018/19) Annual Report revealed that few teachers were uploading their professional development activities as per the requirement.

Although too much emphasis has been placed on CPTD as a key towards required pedagogical-content, knowledge is required to meet the challenges of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR). According to Singh (2011), CPTD in South Africa has been characterised by errors and poor implementation strategies, which led to a decline in the quality of teachers in the country. At the same time, SACE (2015) states that one of the roles and responsibilities of district officials is to assist school principals and teachers to improve the quality of teaching and learning in schools. Steyn (2011a) corroborates and further states that the effective implementation of the CPTD policy rests with the quality of leadership provided by principals and district officials. However, studies have revealed leadership deficiency and lack of capacity of these government officials (Whiteworth & Chui, 2015; Steyn, 2011b). By implication, these findings suggest that CPTD is no implemented correctly by the department of education.

6. Research Design and Methodology

6.1 Research design

Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2016) distinguish research designs according to qualitative, quantitative methods or the mixed method. The qualitative method uses data collecting techniques like interviews, and data analysis procedures like categorising data. On the other hand, the quantitative method employs data collecting techniques like questionnaires, and data analysis procedures like graphs and statistics. The mixed-method combines the qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques and data analysis procedures (Saunders, et al., 2016).

Due to this study's nature, whereby data was sought from humans in their natural environment, the qualitative research method was used to address the research question in exploring principals' perceptions of the CPTD management system. The research philosophy underpinning this study is the interpretive philosophy. The interpretive philosophy calls for the qualitative method as the study

design. This argument is supported by Denzin and Lincoln (2011, cited in Saunders et al., 2016) by stressing that "Qualitative research is often associated with the interpretive philosophy".

Semi-structured interviews were used as the data collection technique. This single data collection technique is often referred to as the mono method qualitative study (Saunders et al., 2016).

According to Creswell and Creswell (2017), one of the main characteristics of the qualitative research method is that the researcher talks directly to the people and see them behaving within their natural context. They further point out that qualitative researchers collect data in an environment where participants experience the issue at hand or the problem being studied. That is what was experienced during the data collection phase. Interviews were conducted in schools that are the natural settings for the principals and the sites where they practice the CPTD management system.

6.2   Target population

A target population refers to the target group of the research enquiry (Saunders et al., 2016). In this study, the target population was the male and female school principals from primary, secondary and combined school in the Gert Sibande District in the Mpumalanga province. According to the Education Management Information Systems (EMIS) (DBE, 2021), there are four hundred and sixty-four (464) school principals in the Gert Sibande District.

6.3   Sampling technique and sample size

The purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique was used to select the participants for the study. The purposive sampling method was chosen as it enables the researcher to select participants with the relevant knowledge gained over a period of time as principals. In qualitative studies, only information rich participants would serve the purpose of the study. The sample size was ten, comprising of five male and five female principals purposively selected from primary, secondary and combined schools in the Gert Sibande District. They were chosen based on the number of years as principal, the size of the school and how far the principal lived from the location where the study was undertaken.

6.4   Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Considering that the CPTD management system was introduced in Africa South in 2014, participants should have a minimum of five years as school principals, to be included in the study. This decision was based on the assumption that such principals had accumulated enough experience to add value in solving the problem at hand. In addition to the experience, the principals possibly had an in-depth knowledge of the subject under investigation.

Another determining factor was the participants' distance from the researchers bearing in mind the ability to make follow-ups with the participants. Participants who were too far from the researchers were excluded, considering the high travelling costs that were to be incurred.

Lastly, principals from both bigger and smaller schools were included to allow for the generalisability of the study's findings to the more significant population of the Gert Sibande District.

6.5   The interviews

As alluded to earlier in this study, interviews were conducted when South Africa was under Covid 19 Lockdown Level 3 and people's movement was restricted (Department of Cooperative Governance,2020:4; 2021:5). The University of KwaZulu-Natal sent a communique discouraging direct contact with research participants whenever possible. It is for this reason that the initial plan of conducting face-to-face interviews had to be discarded. Only three of the ten interviews were conducted in direct conversation with the participants, and the rest were conducted telephonically.

Deductive pre-defined themes were coded using the NVIVO data coding process. For this paper, three pre-defined themes are discussed as follows:

6.5.1 Participants' recommendations to Gert Sibande District

In responding to the research question of this study, this theme sought to explore the participants' recommendations on how CPTD can be implemented in the Gert Sibande District. Some participants had this to say:

"I think the District must ask schools to provide topics on what workshops should be conducted, rather than generalising because we are diverse in our developmental needs" (#1).

Another participant said:

"I think we did not have enough training on CPTD. Sometimes we conducted meetings without knowing that we should be uploading documents. I think we need more training; I was once trained some years back when I was a Deputy Principal" (#4).

Another participant mentioned that:

"I think the two systems (QMS and CPTD) can be intertwined because you cannot speak of performance when development is still lacking. I will recommend that CPTD be intensified and clarified because the teachers did not welcome CPTD, since they did not know what is expected of them. The district must conduct sessions where they train teachers at length about the CPTD. The QMS and the CPTD must go together, and this must be clarified so that the two do not appear as separate entities. This must be in a way that when teachers develop professionally, then we can measure their performance" (#9).

The above statements suggest that there was inadequate training of teachers on the CPTD management system. It further points to the fact that the quality and quantity of the CPTD workshops are questionable. The participants' views have been ventilated in this study by Govender (2018, S1) by indicating that in the Uthungulu district of KwaZulu-Natal, participants felt that they were insufficiently trained on CPTD. Govender is supported by Johns and Sosibo (2019, 130), who argued that: 'Teachers perceived the CPTD as a compliance activity rather than a tool for growth and development'. These findings suggest that policymakers need to find new strategies in cascading and implementing the CPTD system.

6.5.2 Computer literacy and access to the internet

As mentioned earlier in this study, computer literacy is a challenge to most teachers, particularly the older generation. The challenge is further exacerbated by poor network coverage, especially in far-flung rural areas of South Africa. Participants of this study had this to say in this regard:

"Yes, we do have technology challenges whereby teachers are not well equipped with technological knowledge" (#1).

"My school is in a deeply rural area, and network coverage is a big challenge. We are unable to upload activities because there is no network coverage. Unless I attend the principals' meeting at the circuit office, and that is when I can upload. Our school does not have a school development team. I am the only person in management" (#4).

The above statements suggest that authorities do not consider contextual factors when policies are formulated and later on implemented. This deficiency raises the elements of compliance and coercion to comply with legislation instead of teacher development on the part of authorities.

History dictates that whenever something is forced on people, there is a likelihood of resistance and defiance.

6.5.3 *Proper planning and retraining of trainers*

Some participants mentioned that CPTD in the Gert Sibande District could be better enhanced if there should be proper planning and personnel development at the District's Teacher Development Section.

One participant had this to say:

"It can work if the district can give its programmes prior so that principals can make their annual plans considering the District plans. Unlike now, anytime you get surprised by something new during the year's cause, and you must abandon your projects and, in that principals, do not have a freedom of operation" (#2).

Another participant added that:

"I think it must begin with the section in the district. The officials there must be capacitated on what is it that is expected of them as people who must extend the same knowledge to circuits and schools. I think officials at the provincial level must capacitate the officials at the district" (#7).

As alluded to earlier in this study, there appears to be a lack of capacity and strategic leadership on some district officials (Whiteworth & Chui, 2015; Steyn, 2011b). The possibility is high that CPTD implementation is not adequately conducted.

6.6 *Data analysis*

The inductive thematic analysis method was used to analyse the data. This choice is supported by Costa (2019:9) by stating that "Thematic Analysis (TA) is useful for generating themes from qualitative data as a result of intense examination of different perspectives of participants, exposition of similarities and differences in texts and lastly generating insights". Data was prepared, transcribed, coded, categorised, and interpreted for the final report using the NVIVO qualitative software (Lenneberg & Korsgaard, 2019).

7. Discussion of Results

The research question sought to explore this study wanted to explore the principals' perceptions of professional teacher development. The results revealed that the participants had opposing perceptions of professional development regarding CPTD. The findings revealed that half of the participants viewed CPTD as a positive undertaking intended to improve teaching and learning and transform teaching and school management practices. Principals, by their positions, possess the power to influence professional development programmes' delivery (Trehearn, 2010). Again, principals have the innate desire to be active role players in teachers' professional development in their schools (Brown & Militello, 2016; Roux, 2018).

On the other hand, the other half of the participants were not favouring CPTD in its current form. The use of ICT cannot be ignored during this 21st century. The South African Council of Educators and the Council for Higher Institutions in South Africa are aware of these challenges. Nonetheless, SACE (2018/19) Annual report revealed that few teachers were uploading their professional development activities. Participants in this study questioned the nature of the workshops conducted by SACE and the Department of Basic Education (DBE) on CPTD. Teachers' one size fits all training type does not serve its intended purpose (Govender, 2018). What is striking on this aspect is that everyone is concerned about uploading activities for scoring points, including

the SACE and academics in South Africa. The National Policy Framework for Teacher Education and Development (NPFTED, 2007) mentions that CPTD implementation shall be seen to succeed in case teachers can upload professional development points, data is captured accurately, and monitoring is conducted. These researchers are not convinced that uploading professional development activities and accumulating developmental points successfully and accurately shall emerge with professionally developed teachers in South Africa (Qablan et al., 2015).

Furthermore, participants' responses revealed that CPTD as an in-service programme should be continuous. Some researchers define in-service training as intended for skill development, knowledge, and attitude improvement for improved job performance and even salary purposes, for instance, (Yilmaz & Esen, 2015). The goal of CPTD is to improve teaching and teachers' quality in South Africa (SACE, 2015).

The findings also revealed that principals perceive CPTD as an added burden to the already overloaded teachers and managers. The demanding timeframes for completing Annual Teaching Plans (ATP), monthly tests, quarterly exams, extra-classes programmes, meetings, and relentless paperwork demands from circuits, districts and provinces leave teachers limited time for CPTD activities (Phorabatho, 2013).

It is worth mentioning that the findings revealed that some participants showed a lack of knowledge of CPTD processes despite being in managerial positions and are expected to conduct teacher development in schools. One participant mentioned that 'there are no clear guidelines, and another mentioned that people must be put through certain courses. That is far from the truth. Teachers are in fact expected to use IQMS processes, now referred to as QMS to identify their professional needs for development and when they engage in such activities, they earn themselves the CPTD professional development points (DBE, 2015). Again, the Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa 2011-2015 is a blueprint document outlining all the activities and outcomes that education departments in the country are expected to embark upon in professionalising the teaching profession (SACE, 2015). These participants indicated that most teachers do not show professional development even after undergoing teacher professional development programmes (Nasution, 2014, cited in Kusmaryani, et al., 2016). This lack of knowledge by 'professionals' begs to question the processes of appointing teachers into principal positions. The participants' responses support that most were not familiar with the South African Standard for Principalship (2014), a document they are supposed to use as a guide in panels when appointing new principals. Given these findings, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) does not give strict guidelines on what kind of people must be seconded to serve as school principals. It becomes clear that some documents were produced for conformity and were not cascaded down for implementation.

8. Recommendations

The fundamental objective of this study was to explore the principals' perceptions of the Continuing Professional Teacher Development in Mpumalanga province. The study's findings revealed that half of the participants positively perceived the CPTD management system. At the same time, the remaining half did not favour the system in its current form. Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were suggested:

- Retrain educators on CPTD
  The findings revealed that the one-size-fits-all and one-shot kind of workshops conducted by the Department of Basic Education on CPTD was not yielding the intended results. It is therefore recommended that teachers be retrained, and the pieces of training must be continuous.
- Internet access and computer literacy courses
  Given the lack of computer literacy among teachers, it is recommended that introductory

computer literacy courses be conducted and funded by the state based on the Workplace Skills Development Programme.

- Proper provincial, district and circuit annual planning
  The findings have revealed that school programmes are halted because principals have to respond to the upper structures' instructions at any time of the year. Therefore, it is recommended that annual plans from upper structures be drawn on time and be cascaded down to schools to align their plans accordingly to minimise disturbances to school plans.

9. Conclusion

The study focused only on the perceptions of school principals of continuing professional teacher development. Future studies can be conducted to understand other stakeholders' perceptions in education like provincial, district, and circuit officials, teacher unions, school governing body formations, and other interested parties in education.

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