CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT NEEDS FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS IN KENYA

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ABSTRACT

With the widespread use of English across the world, it has become essential to raise English language teachers’ awareness and sensitivity with regard to the strategies they need to deploy in designing their activities and adjusting their teaching so as to take into consideration the current status of English as a world language. Although many of these strategies can be learnt through teacher reflection, others such as subject knowledge matter, pedagogical expertise and understanding of curriculum and materials cannot. Professional development should therefore go beyond individual reflection to include new trends and theories in language teaching; familiarization with development in subject matter knowledge; and critical examinations of the way the schools and languages programme are organised and managed. This article discusses the views of teachers regarding the teaching of English in Kenya, what they consider as their CPD needs, challenges and suggestions for improvement. It makes use of data collected from interviews with teachers of English, policy documents as well as interviews with CPD providers who had direct influence on the teachers’ work.

Key words: Integrated curriculum, continuing professional development, School-based CPD, Community of Practice

INTRODUCTION

Educational researchers are constantly theorizing the teaching and learning process creating a need for teachers to keep abreast of the emerging knowledge base in order to refine their conceptual understanding and practical skills. One of the key elements of these developments is the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) of teachers. Arguments for CPD include the notion that good teaching methods have a significant positive impact on how and what students learn (Guskey, 2000). The movement towards school based CPD programmes has been described as the best approach to improved teaching as it addresses the shortcomings of the traditional CPD practices. With the expanding research on the effectiveness of school based CPD in the western world, it has become imperative that the developing nations embrace the approach. It is, however, reasonable to argue that CPD policies emerging from the developed world may not be a clear solution to teacher problems in the developing nations due to the differing circumstances and teacher perspectives on the work they do. An exploration into the CPD experiences of the teachers of English in Kenya confirms that current CPD practices are not satisfactory and the movement towards school based CPD will not provide a quick fix to teacher CPD needs unless reasonable resources are directed towards capacity building for all the people concerned.

Definition of CPD

Continuing Professional development is a term used to describe all the activities in which teachers engage in, during the course of a career, which are designed to enhance their work (Day and Sachs 2004). The main argument for CPD of teachers has been that teachers keep learning from practice and become experienced in every passing year in their careers. CPD therefore involves a wide range of activities and training programmes or methods used to help teachers develop professionally throughout their career. Kelchtermans (2004) describes this as a learning process in which results not only become visible in one’s professional practice but also in one’s thinking about the how and why of that practice. CPD is a long-term process that includes regular opportunities and experiences planned systematically, (Guskey 2000, Villegas-Reimers 2003) to promote growth and development in the profession.
Citing Sparks and Loucks-Horsley (1990) Villegas-Reimers (2003) gives characteristics of effective professional development as follows:

- Programs conducted in school settings and linked to school wide efforts.
- Teacher participating as helpers to each other and as planners with administrators of in-service activities.
- Emphasis on self-instruction with differentiated training opportunities
- Teachers in active roles, choosing goals, activities for themselves
- Emphasis on demonstration, supervised trials and feedback
- Training that is concrete and ongoing.
- Ongoing assistance and support available on request

BACKGROUND

History of English in Kenya

The use of English can be traced back to Kenya’s colonial period. During this period, the missionaries, and the colonial government, were the chief providers of Western education (Bunyi 1999). English then had a significant role as the language of the master and of administration. Currently the English language plays a key role in Kenya’s legal, economic and education system (Michieka, 2005). In education, it is not only one of the important subjects in the curriculum but is the medium of instruction. It is, however, estimated that only 16% of Kenyans, know English as a second language (Sure & Webb, 2000). Speakers of English mainly live in the urban areas and in more developed areas of the country.

English is still a marker of higher socio-economic class and there is a clear correlation between proficiency in English and the number of years one has spent in the education system, since school exposes people to more English (Bunyi, 1999).

The current education policies mandate the use of vernacular in linguistically homogeneous areas for the first three years of school, though implementation of this has not been effective (Michieka, 2005). There is continued concern over the role of indigenous languages in education (Aldiou, 2006; Bunyi, 1999; Kioko et al., 2008) with calls for a review of policies in order to provide an education system that draws on the language, culture and experiences of the African child. Success in academic learning through the official language is dependent upon the extent to which the school accepts and makes provision for other languages and cultures, (Cummins 2000). It is also dependent on teaching which supports the child’s comprehension in a gradual process towards the kind of cognitive learning practices required in school, along a continuum from context-embedded to context-reduced and from cognitively undemanding to cognitively demanding.

Mixed feelings are, however, expressed towards languages of instruction in Kenya. Those who support the use of English in early years of education have given; English as the language used in textbooks and examinations, it creates opportunities for employment and offers the ability to engage in wider communication (Muthwii 2004) as some of the long-term benefits of English. In contexts where practical benefits of the use of mother tongue during the early years have been experienced including reduced truancy and dropout rates, and improved student-teacher communication (Kioko et al., 2008), parents are apprehensive that their children would be disadvantaged if the system was not applied across schools (Graham 2009). It is clear that strengthening the use of the local languages in instruction requires a change in attitudes and the concerted effort of the policymakers, stakeholders, parents and teachers.

Language situation in Kenya

The Kenyan population comprises 42 ethnic groups which account for the indigenous languages spoken in the country. The largest groups in order of size are the Kikuyu (22%), Luhyia (14%), Luo (13%), Kalenjin (12%), Kamba (11%), Kisii (6%), Meru (6%), other African and non-African (1%) (CIA, 2010). There are also other non-African languages such as English, Gujarati and Arabic. It is however, not easy to produce accurate statistics for speakers of each language due to continued movement and resettlement leading to either bilingual or multilingual groups (Sure & Webb, 2000).

English has the highest status in Kenya as it is associated with the elite and employment. In formal settings, both English and Kiswahili are commonly used. Local indigenous languages are considered lowest in status and are often used in informal settings. In urban settings, ‘Sheng’ a pidgin which draws mainly on Kiswahili and English, is used as an identity marker among the youth. Originating in the early 1970s in the slum areas of Nairobi (Ogechi, 2005), Sheng is gaining popularity across social classes and even in neighbouring countries. Many commentators on Kenyan education claim that Sheng has a detrimental effect on student performance in both Swahili and English (Momanyi, 2009).
The existence of many languages is regarded as an important element in Kenyan cultural identity (Bunyi, 1999) although, for some, this is viewed as a root source of the tribal conflicts experienced in the country in the past (Kioko et al., 2008). These varied views and attitudes have far reaching implications for language classroom practices and education in general.

Kenya Secondary School English Curriculum
The Kenya Secondary School English Curriculum is based on an integrated approach to the teaching of English and Literature. It involves using literature to teach English and using English to teach literature in symbiotic relationship (Okwara, Shiundu, & Indoshi, 2009). The curriculum requires that teachers of English also teach literature. It is, however, noted that, despite the importance attached to English, the required standards have not been achieved, thus highlighting the need for a review of existing language policies and teacher practice. Weaknesses in English reading have been blamed for students’ poor performance across the curriculum. There has been concerns over the usefulness of the English language in promoting Kenya’s rich and varied cultures – this being the main objective of Kenyan education (Bunyi, 1999; Michieka, 2005) – and over its effectiveness as a language of instruction (Alidou, 2006).

In view of the above issues, there is need to review the existing language policies and teacher practices. It is clear that our understanding of language and culture is constantly changing. Teachers must have opportunities to update their knowledge and practices. For instance, language teachers need to keep abreast of effective instructional practices that are based on the constantly evolving research on second language acquisition and learning. They also need to be equipped with a body of knowledge which allows them to present the learners with a critical view of the linguistic and cultural situation in their context (Richards & Farrell, 2005). These can only be achieved by effective CPD programmes and activities for teachers.

CPD for teachers in Kenya
CPD for teachers in Kenya is often achieved through courses, workshops and seminars organized locally or at regional level depending on what the Director for Quality Assurance considers to be the requirements of the post holders. The control, organization, and management of CPD, often referred to as in-service teacher education, is primarily the responsibility of the Quality assurance, a department of the Ministry of Education headed by the Director Quality Assurance (Ministry of Education, 2005). The directorate is responsible for initiating appropriate in-service programs to make up for the shortcomings detected in education. Other organizations involved in in-service training of teachers in liaison with the Inspectorate include the Kenya Education Staff Institute (KESI), the Kenya Institute of Education (KIE).

In-service education in Kenya tends to consist of a specialized tailored course of study or a selected learning agenda to achieve a specific goal. These programmes have been criticized for having ill-defined objectives, inappropriate practices, inadequate evaluation and follow-up and lack of support for educators (Wanzare, 2000; Onderi & Croll, 2008). The training activities are said to be far removed from the schools. Also, these programmes do not fully address the needs of the majority of Kenyan teachers who have very little input into the selection and design of the course content organized by the various external agents involved in in-service training programs (Wanzare, 2000; M.O.E, 1994).

CPD as a Community of Practice (CoP)
Communities of practice (CoP) are, according to Wenger (1999), groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly. It is a mechanism through which beliefs, attitudes and practices can be reformed. In education CoP involves collaborative sharing of ideas and finding solutions to problems (Edwards, 2009; Wright, 2007) and willingness of its members to assume responsibility for colleagues’ growth and development (Grossman, Wineburg, & Woolworth, 2001).

For successful CPD, a democratic approach is required where teachers are allowed to take ownership of change as part of a CoP (Edwards, 2009). Fullan (2007) in a similar vein observes that a school-based professional community can offer support and motivation to teachers as they work to overcome the tight resources, isolation, time constraints and other obstacles they commonly encounter. He further argues that for change to be meaningful, and sustainable, CoP must extend beyond the school to the wider community such as other schools at local and national levels while Edwards observes that the role of parents and children as essential partners in reform at school level should not be overlooked. Guided by these principles, this study
therefore explored the teachers’ views and practices regarding their CPD needs, what they considered as their CPD needs, challenges and suggestions for improvement.

METHOD

This study used a qualitative ethnographic case study approach to explore and assess the current CPD practices for English teachers in Kenya. The study aimed to create an awareness geared towards bringing change in both policy decisions and instructional innovation. The study, which was conducted over a period of four months, involved teachers, head teachers, Quality Assurance Officers and staff from the Kenya Institute of Education (KIE).

Two schools, a National school, and one District school, participated in the study. The participants included 12 teachers of English and 2 head teachers from the two secondary schools. Other participants who provided data for cross-contextual comparison included: two personnel from the Quality Assurance and Standards Office (QASO) at the district, and two at national level; and one personnel from the Kenya Institute of Education. These participants were selected because they were directly involved in the design and provision of CPD programmes for teachers.

Data were collected using observation, focus group discussions, individual interviews and document analysis. Observations in this study took two forms: observation of formal CPD programmes at the school and outside the school, and observation done on a daily basis on the grounds that CPD involves a community of practice where teachers work in collaboration for a common goal. Three CPD events were observed at each school, and one at provincial level.

Two focus groups were conducted in each participating school, one for teachers of English and the other for teachers of other subjects. Although the researcher’s interest was in teachers of English, other subject teachers were included in order to find out whether CPD issues affecting teachers of English also run across the curriculum. Documents were used to compare policies with practice. They included minutes of meetings, workshop reports, work descriptions, school annual reports, teaching materials, and many other kinds of written items that confirmed links between education policies and the teachers’ practices.

FINDINGS

English and culture

One of the challenges facing the teaching of English in Kenya, as well as other contexts where English is learnt as a second language and used as the language of instruction, has been the decision on what culture is promoted in the education system (Bunyi, 1999). In most education systems across the world, cultural transmission has been identified as one of the most fundamental functions of education (Kenyatta, 1953). In Kenya, for instance, one of the seven national educational goals states:

Education should respect, foster and develop Kenya’s rich and varied cultures. It should instil in the youth of Kenya an understanding of past and present culture and its valid place in contemporary society (K.I.E, 2002b).

According to Fanon, (1967), to speak a language means to assume the culture of the native speakers of that language. The question arising is thus which culture is being supported by Kenyan English teaching classrooms, and how effective is English as a language of instruction, in culture transmission in a multicultural context. Here, the concept of culture refers to three characteristics: the local culture of the learners, that of non-native English-speaking teachers, as well as English-speaking cultures. Bunyi, (1999) thus observes that, for the goal of teaching African cultural values to be achieved, indigenous languages should be given a central place in education; otherwise, schools will be fostering in their children the values of the native speakers of English.

Those who are in favour of the inclusion of foreign language culture in language classrooms argue that culture and language cannot be separated from one another (Byram & Fleming, 1998). They claim that the culture of the foreign language should be involved in language teaching practice for a full understanding of the language forms that are presented to learners. It provides learners with a holistic view about how and when to use the language.

McKay, (2003), on the other hand, emphasises the involvement of the learners’ local culture in English as a foreign language classrooms. She maintains that each country where English is taught as an international language should take the responsibility to select and develop language materials together with appropriate language teaching methods within the context of the learners’ local
culture. Although the Kenya integrated English curriculum supports (McKay, 2003) position, some of the language policies adopted in the schools seem to work to the contrary. Some schools in Kenya have adopted an English only policy in the schools where the use of any other language within the school is punishable. This is based on the argument that the use of one language not only creates harmony but also improves the students’ proficiency in the language. For instance, in Mavuko School, it was against the school rules for students to use vernacular. The only language that was allowed in the school by the students was English. The students were allowed to speak Kiswahili on Fridays only. The deputy head teacher explained this policy as follows:

... we have students from different language backgrounds. To create harmony, we only allow them to communicate in a language that’s familiar to everyone….exams are not set in the local languages so we encourage them to speak English because that’s the language of instruction and exams.

If (Fanon, 1967)’s view that culture and language are inseparable, such practice would suggest that the goal of cultural transmission is far from real. No doubt, the school had good intentions; their goal was to help students become more proficient in English, the language of the curriculum and the language of examinations. But the effect of such practices was the denigration of indigenous languages, hence devaluation of the local culture. This practice points to major issues affecting language policy and practice in education. Teachers need to understand the role of language in culture transmission and how they can utilize the existing languages to achieve this goal; thus CPD in this area would be significant.

Language norms

The other issue emerging from the teaching of English in Kenya is the question of language norms, as opposed to the norms suggested by the integrated curriculum, namely British Standard English. A major challenge to the English teacher is that it is the teacher’s responsibility to work out ways of harmonising the teaching of English language and literature in the integrated approach to the teaching of English. For instance, sometimes literary language does not conform to the standard language. Local literary works, for instance, are written using aspects of a local variety of English (Kachru, 1994). Also, oral literature often departs in significant ways from the standard written language. This begs the question of which standard language – British, American or some other variety is being promoted. The English-language textbooks used for instruction in Kenya are based on the British Standard version of English. If the literary materials are to act as a basis for teaching language skills as required in the integrated English-language curriculum, then the teachers need to be adequately prepared with the skills of harmonising the differing linguistic norms. This discussion then leads us to the next section on teacher preparation.

Teacher preparation

The role of English as the language of instruction and examinations, demands that learners have competence in the language in order to thrive in the education system that is exam oriented. Teachers have the task to understand how language is used in content areas and share their understanding with the learners. Although the teachers in this study agreed that the objectives of the English curriculum were well intentioned, they expressed that there were complexities in the actual classroom delivery. They considered that the pre-service preparation they received was not sufficient. The teachers claimed that their pre-service training did not prepare them fully to the integrated approach to teaching English and Literature because the two subjects (English and Literature) are taught as separate subjects at university. The teachers therefore said that they needed ongoing in-service in this area. Their views were expressed by various teachers are as follows:

... the integrated curriculum has got a noble objective. It is motivating to learners because it promotes the learning of language as it occurs in real life. What we got at pre-service teacher training is however insufficient and perhaps outdated. We need continuous workshops and seminars to update our knowledge because the whole issue of the integrated syllabus is complex.

Other teachers argued that due to the integrated approach, there was not sufficient time for studying and examining aspects of English and literature effectively. In order to overcome the challenge, they suggested that since English and literature were different subjects, there was a strong need to separate them. They further argued that some teachers were naturally talented in English language while others were good in Literature; hence, there was need to have teachers exploit their talents in areas they were more comfortable to teach.

The teachers also suggested that one of the first steps towards the better offering of the integrated English curriculum was the tailoring of pre-service
teacher education curriculum to the needs of the secondary schools. English and Literature should not be taught to the teacher trainees as separate subjects and that they should be trained on how the approach applies in classroom situations.

Examinations pressure

The general perspective of education system in Kenya today seeks to have an academically excellent student. The quality of teaching tends to be evaluated in terms of how many students pass the national examinations (Eshiwani G., 1993). Every Kenyan would strive to have his/her child admitted to a top ‘performing’ school. Every year, at the announcement of examination results, schools are ranked according to academic performance. Cases of poor performance are associated to failure on the head teachers and teachers of the schools concerned (Lydiah & Nasongo, 2009). Little regard is paid on the unequal distribution of resources which tends to disadvantage some schools; a factor that leaves the affected teachers a discouraged lot.

The teachers in the study for instance expressed that pressure to perform well in examinations had compromised the objectives of learning. Success was measured by the overall grade attained at the end of the course. The teachers, for instance, reported that there was no relationship between the objectives of the integrated English curriculum and the examinations the learners were subjected to. The target of the teachers, learners as well as the parents seemed to be the immediate outcome of the examinations and not the national education goals. The consequence of this mismatch between learning outcomes and the national education goals was illustrated by one of the officials from the KIE in reference to the violence experienced in Kenya after the 2007 election results as follows:

... one of the objectives of the curriculum is imparting values and morals to the learners but if we are imparting values and morals to these people so that they could go and attack their neighbours, isn’t the curriculum we are running wanting? Does it really address the goals of education about patriotism?

Teacher A on the same note reported that teachers were held accountable for any failure in the examinations and, as a result, much focus was placed on the examinations as opposed to the broader objectives of learning. He said the following:

Basically teaching in Kenya is exam oriented...we are [more] preoccupied with the outcome of the test than the outcome of learning. When students do well in the examinations, parents as well school Board of Governors will always demand an explanation; why did the students fail...

The same sentiment is echoed by Teacher O:

... our system is exam oriented and our learners are not exposed to an environment where they are left to learn independently. Our focus is teaching for exam purposes rather than for educational goals which should be, producing learners who can use the skills learnt to live independently in the society.

According to teacher M the issues of examination oriented way of teaching was due to competition for limited opportunities.

..., teachers are accused of exam oriented way of teaching and students, for exam oriented way of learning but they forget to look at what has caused it. There is stiff competition for opportunities out there. Only those who do well in exams are able to enjoy the limited opportunities...

Teacher M and Teacher A disapproved of the mode of assessments (summative) used to assess the students’ achievement saying it did not reflect ability to create knowledge but rather reflected knowledge as a commodity to be transmitted. They proposed an overhaul in the entire examination system. Their suggestion was to have more than one examining bodies so as to overcome the weaknesses of the KNEC (Kenya National Examination Council).

Language of instruction

On the question whether the language of instruction was the cause of students’ failure in the examinations as claimed in previous examination reports (Daily Nation, 14 August 1993, cited in (A. Mazrui, 2004), the teachers expressed different views. While some admitted that poor mastery of the language of instruction was a contributing factor, others blamed it on the students’ culture of learning. Teacher K for instance had the following to say:

...the problem is not mainly on the language of instruction but rather the nature of learners we have in this century. With the emergence of modern technology, students want to have it easy; We have totally lost the reading culture that dominated our time in school. Having no computers, televisions and the
like, most of our time was spent discovering things by reading books. Our students don’t read and that’s why their knowledge is narrow and when it comes to explaining concepts, they lack information to back up their points.

Teacher R, however, had a different view. He noted that if the learners were receiving instruction and writing their examinations in their local languages, they could be doing much better. The challenges they experienced in learning in a foreign language were that they were struggling to understand, interpret and explain concepts passed to them using a foreign language.

The above view was shared by majority of teachers who argued that students should not be penalised for committing language errors, but instead, emphasis should be put on content, an idea others thought would be compromising the education standards and render the students uncompetitive in the job market.

Teaching English across the curriculum

Argument for literacy across the curriculum has been that if all teachers across the subjects were involved in the literacy learning, it would have a positive effect in literacy particularly and academic achievement in general (Wright, 2007). This position, however, calls for wide teacher ‘buy in.’ (May & Wright, 2007). The teachers have to see a need for effective literacy practices, to understand what this will involve and to show an awareness of the current situation for the learners with regard to literacy skills. The teachers in this study expressed the opinion that the teaching of English was meant to be a responsibility of all subject teachers. They, however, reported that, although it was the language of instruction and almost all the examinations, other subject teachers did not take much interest in how the students used it in their oral or written work. This attitude was seen by the teachers of English as evidence of the absence of a community of practice in the school as a whole. Their comments included the following:

Issues of spelling, punctuation, handwriting, neatness in writing, should be a collective thing as the effects would not only be on English as subject but also across other subject. (Teacher A)

The teachers expressed the view that they lacked reference materials related to their professional development as the school libraries only stocked course books and reference materials for the students. If the teachers needed any materials that touched on their professional growth or subject area, they had to visit libraries outside the school. Time was, however, a limiting factor during the school term. Teachers instead opted to take study leave as a move to facilitate their professional development, although most did not stay long in the schools after their studies.

Subject based CPD programmes

The teachers said that, as things were, there were very limited subject related in-service courses and that these in-service courses reached only a negligible proportion of the target audience. According to the district QASO, subject-based CPD was often rejected in favour of information-based CPD relating to policy changes and school development plans due to limited budgetary allocation from the Ministry. This led to limited opportunities for personal development, and lack of motivation on the part of teachers. This understanding of the situation, however, stands in contrast to the practice claimed by one QASO official:

I analyse performance in different areas of the English curriculum, I assess which area is wanting and then I hand over to the person organising in service training. It is however a bit tricky here because in service cannot be done on English alone. So that is why in this department I will collect my data and somebody else’s data and then conduct in service for all the teachers.

As a result, the teachers viewed the existing CPD programmes as unsatisfactory because they did not address their needs.

Teacher’ views on school-based CPD

A range of activities was viewed as school routine rather than CPD practices. For instance, according to the head teachers of City and Mavuko schools, teachers were expected to hold at least two departmental meetings and two whole school meetings per term. In addition to the cascading programmes, speakers were occasionally invited to come and give talks to the teachers besides the cascading programmes. Observations of these activities, however, indicated that these made little contribution to change in classroom approaches or subject knowledge as attention seemed to be focused
on syllabus coverage, examination performance and issues of the schools such as student discipline.

Lack of relevant knowledge about school based CPD on the part of the teachers was a question of concern. At the time of this study, KESI had just finished a one week workshop with the school heads on curriculum implementation for all school heads where the idea of school based CPD was introduced. According to Teacher R, who attended the workshop on behalf of the head teacher, the new innovation was meant to decentralise CPD provision to the school level. Head teachers were required to assume the role of the directors of the school based professional development committees. They were to liaise with QASOs at the district level to form CPD committee within their schools. The committee was expected to oversee the CPD activities within the school. This, according to Teacher R, was not practical given the limited induction that was provided at the workshop. She made the following comment:

... I think they have to provide the training first – maybe train the Head Teachers on how they can go about it, who can then introduce it in the schools.

An interview with Teacher R’s head teacher, on the same issue revealed strong opposition. According to him, besides lacking the necessary expertise to lead the school based Quality Assurance, he also felt that the teachers would not take his position seriously since he experienced the same problems. He blamed the CPD providers for imposing ideas without due planning.

...we don’t get proper training for new search new programmes. You have to come as a teacher, look at the logistics of implementing it. Sometimes if there are financial implications, we leave it to external trainers since the school does not have a budget of such.

City school was represented by the school deputy principle at the same workshop. He was, however, not a participant in the study (he was not a teacher of English) though the principal confirmed that he was informed about the idea. His view was that the department of QASO was directly responsible for the CPD of the teachers and saw it as an added responsibility on his part:

‘Well it could be a good idea but why the head teachers and not the people concerned doing it?’

Rather than brush it away like Teacher N, he had given his Deputy the go ahead to try it with the willing teachers and was waiting for feedback. Further follow up indicated that teachers were not willing to embrace the idea. The deputy head teacher further noted that he did not see any prospect of rapid progress, given his existing responsibilities as deputy principal and the limited information available regarding the implementation process. Teacher R’s deputy head teacher, reported that she had tried it with the heads of departments with no success as observed below:

I think teachers would need a lot of motivation because if we are talking of HOD’s they are busy running their departments... So they wonder why they should have another extra responsibility. The rest of the teachers on the other hand feel that the heads of departments should take the role since they were paid responsibility allowance.

From the teachers’ perspective, the establishment of the school based CPD was simply a response to yet another demand imposed upon them by the policy makers. This draws us to the attention of the existing literature on the effectiveness of school based CPD. It is argued that school based CPD is effective in terms of cost and relevance but much has not been given with regard to implementation in contexts that are economically disadvantaged.

The interviews revealed that without wide teacher ‘buy-in’ CPD initiatives are bound to fail. Trainers need the necessary knowledge and skills to be able to address the relevant issues. The teachers, on the other hand, need to be sensitised to the reasons and benefits of school based CPD. This would create readiness which would later lead to CPD programmes that are geared towards altering their thinking, attitude and behaviour in relation to their pedagogic teaching skills, a process that would not only require reasonable amount of time but also adequate planning, resources and significant preparation. Only in this way, can school based CPD be an effective tool in teachers’ professional development.

MATTERS OF CONCERN

Three further issues of note emerged from interviews with the teachers: externally driven CPD policies, teachers understanding of what constitutes CPD, including their preference for traditional external provision; the selection of the content of
CPD; and the relevance of CPD to their needs and interests.

School-based CoPs or external provision?

A recurrent theme in interviews with teachers concerned their understanding of what constituted CPD – externally provided workshops and courses, or on-going support of colleagues as part of a CoP. Data gathered from observations of departmental meetings in the two schools suggested that teacher learning was considered to be an external activity, rather than an on-going part of professional life. The main issues addressed during these meetings included: syllabus coverage, assessment, and teaching strategies.

Even though it was made clear what was to be explored under the umbrella of CPD, the teachers’ responses also revealed that they perceived CPD as externally organised programmes. For instance, when Teacher K was asked, to describe some of the CPD activities and activities he had been engaged in, he reported that he had not had any involvement since he came to the school. It was clear from his response that his understanding of the concept of CPD was limited because the previous week, as part of my data collection procedure, I had observed a departmental meeting where he was in attendance. When I reframed my question to ‘the strategies he used to ensure quality teaching and improved performance in his subject’, he then listed them to include staff meetings, talking to colleagues, self-directed study, etc.

Similarly, at the time I interviewed Teacher Z, her school was hosting a group of teacher trainees from Canada as part of an exchange programme involving teachers of English from City School and a teacher training institution in Canada. The focus was on teaching English as a second language. The group had been engaged in classroom observations and discussions with the teachers on matters relating to the teaching of English over the period of one week. Teacher Z, however, did not mention this programme as part of the CPD practice and only when probed further as to whether she or her school was involved in any partnerships with other institutions, did she realise that she had forgotten to mention this particular group.

In response to my questioning, teachers did in fact report that they were continuously learning from colleagues new pedagogical approaches to teaching. They admitted that there was need for on-going learning in their subjects within the school, but they argued that the structure and norms of the schools created situations in which community learning was limited. For instance, in City School where senior teachers, heads of departments, and departments were located in separate staffrooms, interactions were limited to fleeting encounters at lunchtime, tea time or to the rushed minutes before and after school. In cases where teachers met as departments, focus was on professional practices as opposed to subject content.

They insisted, however, that the best source of support for updating knowledge of their subject knowledge was something to be done outside school, during teacher training, in service courses and related programmes. Thus teachers in Mavuko School felt that they were being left behind since they were not able to attend most of these externally organised programmes which their counterparts in national schools often participated in. They reported that such CPD programmes happened irregularly, sometimes once a year or even once every two years, and that they tended to focus on issues that were not relevant to their context. In addition, since these programmes only attracted particular participants (teachers who could afford the cost and time), it was widely felt that the teachers who most needed such engagement were often the least likely to participate.

Another factor in the development of school-based CPD was variation in teachers’ grade level, subject area, prior education, and type of student served. The variations contributed positively in terms of group knowledge and negatively in building a community of practice. Teachers in the study schools had varied qualifications ranging from diploma holders, bachelor’s degree holders to Masters’ degree holders. In addition, there were those who had worked as teachers for as long as twenty years while others for as short a period as three years.

The variations however seemed to work against CoP as noted in the following comment:

We try to work as a team but sometimes when you try to bring in a new idea, people don’t take it positively. They take it as though you are trying to impose your knowledge on them...and it’s worse when your leader feels intimidated by her/his little education. So the best thing is to cool down as you wait for an opportunity to arise from elsewhere and go...

The teachers were also asked what they felt about the issue of assuming responsibility for colleagues’ growth and development. Their responses
indicated that teachers’ responsibility was towards
students, not colleagues. They admitted they were
always involved in sharing ideas and solving
problems as a team but these were all targeted at the
students and that if, in one way or another, they
contributed to individual growth and development,
then it was, as one teacher put it, ‘a by the way thing’.
In their view, professional growth was the
responsibility of the individual and occasionally the
CPD providers.

Observation of their daily interactions,
however, provided evidence of collaborative learning
more especially at the departmental level. For
instance, in City school, teachers in the English
department shared a lot amongst themselves. Take the
case of teachers trying to discuss a student’s use of
American English in his written compositions, unsure
of the best approach to use given that he had done
much of his schooling in the United States of
America. Suggestions included remedial teaching.
The discussion spilled over into criticism of the idea
of having to stick to one variety of English. This
discussion and others that included issues of
assessment, common mistakes in students’ work, and
sometimes issues relating to social life, all exhibited a
CoP dimension.

In response to the question whether they
worked collaboratively with teachers of the other
subjects to improve students’ language, the teachers
reported that it was rare. Teacher A reported that the
other subject teachers were unwilling to help,
claiming that content, and not language was important
as far as their subjects were concerned. He, however,
attributed the teachers’ uncooperativeness to the
incompetency in the subject: ‘the teachers themselves
are equally struggling with the language’.

Departments therefore only acted as subsets
of the wider school CPD. The School CPD applied
when all teachers were involved in issues that affected
the whole school, for example discipline, examination
performance or students’ welfare in general. The
parents, as part of the school CoP, were involved in a
range of activities such as: acting as members of the
schools Boards of Governors (BOG); giving talks to
students during Guidance and Counselling programmes; liaising with teachers to discuss students
welfare through Parents Teachers association (PTA);
discussing students’ academic progress with teachers,
buying learning materials, joining teachers in school
celebrations and so on. In matters of learning, Teacher
A admitted that bringing to class people from outside
– especially in oral literature – would make learning
more authentic but expressed that they were
constrained by time and the pressure to complete the
syllabus:

Selection of content
Participants in this study reported that the
content, the venue, the methods and the pace of
instructions were pre-specified. The CPD providers
made the decisions with regards to the topics that
teachers should be trained on, allowing participants to
only choose from the proposed topics the ones that
interested them. As expressed by Teacher R, there
was little consultation regarding what was to be
included in the CPD programmes. Hence, most of the
available CPD programmes did not address teachers’
needs.

They usually say they consult teachers but I
don’t know when they consult because I have
never been, and if they do, different schools
have different needs.

The above concerns were shared by the rest of
the teachers in Mavuko School. They felt that they
were discriminated against because consultation only
happened with a few schools that were easily
accessible.

Relevance of content
Teachers tended to differ in views regarding
the relevance of CPD programmes, some describing
them as irrelevant, repetitive, or too brief. The same
concerns are raised by other teachers: ‘It is like before
I attend, I already know what’s going to happen’
(Teacher Z); ‘Most of the courses are lecture methods;
you go there sit and listen and come back’ (Teacher
E). Teacher O further noted that since teachers were
not involved in topic selection, their ‘buy in’ was
minimal: ‘...You can take cows to the river but you
can’t force them to drink the water.

CONCLUSION
Interviews with teachers revealed that despite
policies advocating school-based models, CPD
remains traditional involving one-off workshops and
courses on preselected topics with little follow-up.
CPD in externally organised programmes, however,
offer only one aspect of professional development
while ignoring other needs and interests. Attempts to
introduce or strengthen school-based CPD, however,
are faced with inadequate school level supervisory
capacity. The underlying principle here is that school
based CPD though portrayed as cheap has far
reaching costs. It is only when resources are directed
towards capacity building at all levels- national,
district, and schools- would CPD have a meaningful effect on teacher attitudes to learning and classroom improvement. It is only when resources are directed towards capacity building at all levels- national, district, and schools- would CPD have a meaningful effect on teacher attitudes to learning and classroom improvement.

In addition, the research has shown that some of the major challenges facing the teaching of English include harmonising the teaching of English language and literature to achieve the national education goals. It has shown that pre service training did not prepare teachers sufficiently for the integrated approach. In addition, pressure for examinations, inadequate subject-based CPD programmes, workload, and the lack of a community of practice among the staff were cited as some of the challenges experienced in their work. They therefore suggested, a review of the integrated curriculum taking into account the teachers’ views about it, linking pre-service training to the secondary school curriculum, separating the two subjects - English and Literature -, and overhauling the whole examination system, as possible ways of tackling these challenges.

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