

## **Continuing teacher development challenges- a case of Mpumalanga province, South Africa**

**By**

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### **Abstract**

The primary purpose of this study was to explore the continuing teacher development challenges with specific reference to Mpumalanga province in South Africa. A total of ten (10) school principals from primary, secondary and combined schools participated in the study. The participants were selected using the convenience sampling method, considering their distance, knowledge base and desire to contribute to the study. The study was qualitative using the interpretivism philosophy. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews employing open-ended questions. Data were analysed using the NVIVO data analysis software. The findings revealed some blind-spot challenges teachers face during and after continuing teacher development sessions that policymakers could not identify. The study recommended the need for tertiary institutions to introduce professional development as a study programme, CPTD user-friendly software, and the government should allow early retirement without penalties on a pension for senior teachers as well as linking principals' promotion to professional development.

**Keywords:** Continuing Teacher Development, South Africa, Mpumalanga Province, Integrated Quality Management System, Whole School Evaluation

### **Introduction**

Several authors have defined CPD in their perspectives using different terminology, but there are striking commonalities in these definitions. For instance, Matseliso and Jita (2010 cited in Qablan et al. 2015:1) define CPD programmes as organised efforts intended to transform educators' teaching practices in their attitudes and beliefs and the learners' ultimate progress. At the same time, Desimone et al. (2002 cited in Redman, Wiek and Redman, 2018:4) state that Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programmes for teachers are essential tools to change and improve learning and teaching from beginners to the final grade. The two definitions are 'bring about change' and 'transform teaching and learning. This study suffices to say that CPD has to do with teacher competence and improved learner results.

It is common knowledge, and academic studies have revealed that some teacher development programmes offered to educators do not serve the intended purpose. These studies indicate that some programmes are vague, not correctly or adequately researched, and even far-fetched from reality (Bernadine, 2019, Govender, 2018 and Johns & Sosibo 2018).

In South Africa, continuing teacher development is premised on the Continuing Professional Teacher Development (CPTD) policy. It is well documented that South Africa emerged from a segregated education system some twenty-eight years ago. The 'apartheid'

system characterised the education in the country along racial lines with extreme inequalities whereby children of the country's indigenous inhabitants got inferior education with fewer resources than their white counterparts (Christie, 2020).

However, in 1994 there occurred a dramatic change to the political climate in South Africa. The change in government brought about a change to the education system in the country. Various policy changes were introduced to eliminate the 'apartheid' system of education. After some years of trial and error, the Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS) was introduced in 2005 (Nass, 2017). The IQMS policy was crafted after the Department of Education realised the need to leverage the Developmental Appraisal (DA), Performance Measurement (PM) and the Whole School Evaluation (WSE) that were in place at that time. Despite such a move, the department realised some loopholes when the IQMS was implemented, thus introducing the aforementioned CPTD in 2014.

## **Aims of the study**

The study aims to explore continuing teacher development challenges in Mpumalanga province in South Africa using interviews to collect data with the ultimate goal to enhance teacher performance throughout the province.

## **Problem statement**

Professional development forms the backbone of any organisation, and educational institutions globally are no exception in this regard (Bernadine, 2019). SACE and the Department of Basic Education in South Africa realised loopholes in the IQMS hence introducing the CPTD to supplement the system (Nass, 2017). For smooth running and to achieve its purpose, the CPTD management system needs the implementers, the teachers, to be computer literate and not the other way (Bhebhe & Maphosa, 2016). In its 2018/19 Annual Report, the SACE acknowledges that few teachers recorded their Professional Development (PD) points on its system. This non-recording is attributed to a lack of computer skills, amongst other reasons. This sentiment is supported by Bernadine (2019), arguing that although all educators were trained in CPTD, it is challenging to implement it at the school level because most teachers are technophobic.

Many studies have been conducted on CPTD globally and in South Africa. However, little or no research has been done on challenges faced by teachers on Continuing Professional Development (CPD) in Mpumalanga, Gert Sibande district. Researchers like Ndlovu (2018) researched Gert Sibande on this subject. The study was: "The role of circuit managers in the professional development of principals". For that reason, this study needed to be undertaken with specific reference to teachers' challenges on CPD.

## **Literature review**

It is common knowledge that continuing professional development is core to enhancing progressive and fruitful teaching and learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Bett, 2016). Research articles report on many examples of successful implementation and positive results of CPD, but there are challenges to successful CPD implementation, which manifest themselves even in developed countries (Bett, 2016). This view is supported by Leask and Younie (2013) by stating that there is an "unacknowledged problem of providing a sustained approach to improving the quality of and access to evidence base underpinning teachers' CPD." Information

Computer Technology (ICT) integration in education depends on professional development. This statement is supported by Tondeur et al. (2016) by stating that providing ICT will not improve teaching and learning on its own. However, teachers' use of the ITC can change, and continuing professional development is essential to get the intended results. A study conducted in Bangkok by Tondeur et al. (2016)

Discovered several challenges for teacher professional development. Amongst the challenges was access to technology which results in the exclusion of some beneficiaries, often referred to as the 'digital divide'. The study also revealed that the phenomenon of globalisation in teacher development did not consider the differences in historical background and the various participants' social, economic, cultural, and political contexts. The study further unearthed the challenges of reaching out to several people for regular updates due to the constant continuous development of ICT. According to Tondeur et al. (2016), cultural, social, and environmental factors do not have technological, and educational knowledge and mastery of content. These are stumbling blocks for sustained and improved professional teacher development. Furthermore, lack of infrastructure, internet coverage, language differences and geographical divide are barriers to scaling and sustaining professional teacher development.

As stated above, implementing CPTD has its fair share of challenges like any other professional development programme. This fact is proven in a study conducted in Kenya by Bett (2016), who investigated the cascade model used in that country. The cascade model trains a certain number of teachers who must teach the rest on a specific curriculum need (Bett, 2016). The model gives an advantage to initial trainers and authorities since it is cost-effective because one can reach out to too many people in a short period. One of the challenges encountered in implementing this model was diluting the content when transferred from one group to another. Bett (2016) also alluded to the fact that many Kenyan teachers enter the profession not suitably qualified, and those experienced in teaching do not get sufficient support in their professional development. Bett further states that some African teachers are not qualified and lack appropriate teaching skills. This aspect of poor-quality teachers is further demonstrated in Mouton, Louw and Strydom (2013) by stating that South African teachers were poor performers with poor work ethics. These researchers believe that these workshops are conducted to suit the state's agenda and intended to appear as if the governments care about education. These workshops do not consider the teachers' reality and that each learning environment is unique. This statement is supported by Bett (2016), who states that cascade models cannot meet educators' needs and are based on the notion of "experts" who are lecturing "inexperienced" and "ignorant" educators. In this case, teachers are regarded as mere recipients of the information who must swallow it without questioning and go back to class and regurgitate it in a different environment.

In a South African context, the challenges are twofold. One will start with the current status quo and later deal with the legislation and policies supposed to govern its implementation. According to Beckmann (2018), it is mainly given as the fact that quality teaching and learning is a product of well-rounded and developed educators who will produce quality educators. The Progress results in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) by Howie et al. (2016) confirm Beckman's view. The study reported that South Africa came number last out of the fifty countries participating.

Beckmann (2018) further points out the relationship between teachers and the quality of education in South Africa by responding to questions like recruitment of student educators, selection criteria, the training itself, registration, appointments, professional development, and service conditions. In this study, Beckmann points out that most South African teachers can be

regarded as underperformers, and roughly 20% of them do not have the requisite qualifications for the tasks they are expected to perform.

In implementing the CPTD programme, principals must deal with quality educators to monitor and develop professionally. The legacy of apartheid had a lasting effect on the type of teachers in the education system, and some are school managers today. Beckmann (2018:4) had this to say about South Africa's distant past:

'The importance of this legacy of inequity for the reform of the education system cannot be overstated. Policymakers did not have the option of simply installing a new breed of managers and teachers imbued with the values of the new era; rather they had to work with the existing educators who in many years were underqualified and who worked within the system at the time of great stress and turmoil'.

Still, on the quality of teachers within the education system in South Africa, Beckmann (2018) pointed out that the Department of Basic Education at some point admitted that it was not aware that teachers in its employment are qualified to teach the subjects they are appointed to teach. This blind spot has a negative bearing on teachers' professional development. At the same time, SACE has the mandate to register teachers in the country. It is surprising that in South Africa, people become teachers by obtaining a university entrance grade 12 certificate and getting a full Fundza Lushaka bursary. This neglect compromises teachers' quality in the country, challenging teacher professional development. According to Spaul (2013), a quality teacher must have a degree of professionalism, the vigour to be a teacher, and competence to teach. This sentiment suggests that not anyone must be a teacher without these attributes.

On the other hand, teachers face the challenge of teacher unions' interference in managing schools and decision-making processes. Beckmann (2018) points to the fact that at some point, unions go to the extent of disrupting school programmes, challenging principals' authority and even dishing out promotional posts to fellow members. A Ministerial Task Team appointed by the Minister of Basic Education released its report on 18/05/2016 (MTT, 2016). The report revealed that the South African Democratic Teachers' Union (SADTU) was the main culprit in selling teachers' promotional posts. This deed undermines and compromises the appointment of competent and relevant professionally qualified people into these posts and can collapse the entire education system.

In a study by Bernadine (2019), both principals and teachers mentioned challenges in using technological gadgets and a lack of Wi-Fi access in accessing the CPTD system. Bernadine is supported by Bhebhe & Maphosa (2016), who concluded that a significant number of teachers and learners in most parts of the world still lack access to the use of Information Computer Technology (ICT) and are unable to meet the requisite ICT requirements that are needed for teaching and learning. These findings indicate that access to technology is still a challenge to many people worldwide. As mentioned earlier in this study, Bernadine (2019) also points to a lack of interest in professional development programmes by teachers advanced with age, citing that they are about to exit the system and CPTD will not add any value to their pensions.

## **Research design and methodology**

### ***Research design***

As alluded to earlier, the study sought to explore challenges encountered by teachers during and after the continuing teacher development sessions in the Gert Sibande district of

Mpumalanga province. Accordingly, to achieve the study's aims, a research design had to be formulated to assist in developing a plan with specifications on the methods and procedures that were to be followed in collecting and analysing data. According to Raithatha (2017), in academic research, researchers seek to define and redefine problems by formulating hypotheses or making suggestions from collecting and evaluating data to come to concrete or valid conclusions. Saunders et al. (2016:163) define research design as "the general plan on how you will go about answering your research question(s)."

The study was qualitative in nature. One of the qualitative research strategy characteristics is that the researcher collects data in the environment where participants experience the issue at hand or the problem being studied (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). That is why semi-structured interviews were employed as data collecting techniques.

The interpretivism doctrine was selected as the philosophical framework for the study. This choice is supported by Saunders et al. (2016) when they state that qualitative research design is mainly used with the interpretive philosophy to understand the participants' perceptions of reality.

### ***Target population***

The target population for the study included male and female school principals from both rural and urban primary, secondary and combined schools in the Gert Sibande district of Mpumalanga province in South Africa. A target population refers to the redefined manageable target group of the research enquiry (Saunders et al., 2016).

### ***Sampling techniques and sampling size***

The convenience purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants for the study. As stated earlier, the participants were selected by considering their zeal to participate, geographical proximity to the researchers and the possibility of possessing required information on the issue under exploration. The purposive aspect was used to choose informants based on the knowledge and experience that they were likely to possess, as supported by Dolores and Tongco (2007, cited in Johns, 2018:47). On the other hand, the convenience aspect was preferred based on the informants' geographical positioning constraints (Dolores and Tongco, 2007, cited in Johns, 2018:47). A total of ten school principals were interviewed for the study considering gender representation.

### ***Inclusion and exclusion criteria***

Data collection was conducted between January and March 2021, when South Africa was still under Covid-19 lockdown regulations. Against this background, participants with possible comorbidities were excluded from participating in the study. The determining factor was that such participants were allowed to work from home or go to work for a limited number of days per week. It would be challenging to make follow-ups with such participants. Another exclusion factor was the distance from the researcher. Participants who were too far from the researcher were excluded considering the high travelling costs that were to be incurred by the researchers.

The researchers were looking for high-quality data. Therefore, newly appointed school principals were positively discriminated against from participating in the study since they were likely to add no value based on their experiences.

To be included in the study, participants should be principals, whether male or female, in a school that is at a reasonable distance from the researchers. Such participants should have

been at least five years as school principals consider that CPTD was introduced in 2014 in South Africa.

## **Data analysis**

In analysing data, the inductive thematic analysis method was used. The decision 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 were prepared, transcribed, coded, categorised, and interpreted for the final report using the NVIVO qualitative software (Lenneberg and Korsgaard, 2019). Contents of two policy documents, namely: "Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teachers Education in South Africa (ISPFTED) (2011) and The National Policy Framework for Teacher Education and Development (NPFTEd) (2007)", were compared with the findings identified from the raw data of the study.

### ***Theme, sub-themes***

Interconnection between different themes was also created. The participants' demographic information was explored in NVIVO. The exploration of the demographic information helped the researcher ascertain who is saying what, gender, geographical location, level of computer literacy, educational qualifications, and years of experience (Hilal and Alabri, 2013). The participants' geographical location helped determine aspects of CPTD implementation against network coverage and distribution of learning resources and what the participants said about those issues in their respective employment places (Hilal and Alabri, 2013).

### ***Theme: Challenges encountered by teachers on CPD***

The challenges in the implementation of the CPTD management system appeared to manifest themselves in many forms. Firstly, there was a problem with school managers abdicating their duties and responsibilities to senior management. The second finding was on computer literacy on the part of teachers, coupled with the network coverage. It emerged that some teachers were not uploading professional development activities on the SACE-IS portal as required by the regulations. The third challenge unearthed was teacher attitude towards professional development.

### ***Sub-theme 1: Dereliction of duties***

For a start, it is worth mentioning that the findings revealed that some challenges are self-manifested by school principals either knowingly or unknowingly expecting their core duties to be performed somewhere else. For instance, some principals had this to say:

"There are challenges. The main challenge is that no one is giving a follow up to conscientise educators. I think some people need to follow up the teacher development in schools. The school development team does not do justice to the development of teachers. The team comprises teachers. Being a team does not divorce them from being teachers, and teachers usually carry out activities when the instruction comes from a higher office like the circuit or district" (#3).

"Their professional development files are not controlled. This uploading this thing we sometimes do it and at times we forget because of too much workload. We tend to remember it when departmental officials want the CPTD activities evidence" (#10).

The two findings above indicate a clear dereliction of duties by certain school managers who cannot exercise influence as principals but expect somebody from somewhere to carry out their duties.

***Sub-theme 2: Basics in computers and network coverage***

The challenges of basic computers and network coverage were juxtaposed with the teachers' age and each school's geographical location. This finding means that the older the teachers, the higher the possibility of being computer illiterate. On the other hand, the deeper the school is, the more shall be inadequate network coverage or no network. Some school principals had this to say:

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

"Challenges could be that teachers do not see any value in this practice of uploading. So long as it is not linked to remuneration or a clear explanation is given as to the value of uploading on the system their activities, they tend to focus on other things" (#5).

"Yes, there are challenges concerning uploading. Some of the teachers, especially the older ones, are reluctant to log in because they are not familiar with computers. Another challenge is that more senior teachers claim that they do not understand the training, and in most cases, they forget their passwords. They do not have a reason to bother themselves since they are about to exit the education system (#8).

This study stated earlier that computer knowledge and network coverage could not be divorced. Some principals said this about network coverage:

"The challenges are issues of network and data, and other teachers cannot use computers. That is the reason the entire school ended up not uploading on the SACE system" (#1).

Another principal added that:

From the above transcript, there is evidence that deep rural schools have compounded problems in implementing professional teacher development and running of such schools in general. Participant (#4) mentioned that no network coverage stretches beyond interacting with SACE on teacher activities to communicating with the Circuit and the District daily. This principal also said that she is the only one in management, and by implication, there is no school development team in that school. The principal further stated that:

"We are few as staff members, and I am the only one who must develop the staff." (#4).

Basics in computers on the part of teachers cannot be separated from the unequal distribution of learning and teaching resources. It would be disingenuous to conclude that teachers' lack of computer skills rests only with senior teachers. It was demonstrated in chapter two, page thirteen of this study, stating that "Amongst those was the access to technology, which results in the exclusion of some beneficiaries, which is often referred to as 'digital divide'. Data interpretation emerged that some schools within the Gert Sibande District were better resourced than others. Principals of better-resourced schools had this to say:

"In our school, we have computers, whiteboards and laptops for lesson presentations" (#1).

"The gadgets that were given to the school are assisting my teachers to capacitate themselves on IT" (#4)

"Our school is close to a Teachers' Centre, and we access the computer facilities there. We have Wi-Fi supplied by the Department of Education and teachers are developing themselves on computers. Most of the teachers do have ICT skills" (#5).

From the transcripts mentioned above, it is worth noting that these schools are luckier to possess such technological gadgets. The researcher is a school principal himself in the same circuit as participant #1, twenty-five kilometres from #4 and 98 kilometres from #5, but having a learner behind a computer in that school is a far-fetched dream.

### ***Sub-theme 3: Teacher attitude***

The study's findings indicated a positive attitude towards teacher professional development from school principals and staff members alike, except that the older generation of teachers was against anything that had to do with a change in their old methods. Some principals said the following positive things about professional teacher development:

"The response is very favourable towards CPTD. There are no extraordinary strategies; you sit down with them and tell them about the importance of professional development in the workplace. I tell them that to be a better and competent teacher, you need this kind of development" (#3).

"I would say that some are willing to develop themselves professionally because the department of education provides these courses, and I have seen teachers enrolled in such skills programmes" (#8).

However, some school principals expressed unfavourable stances on professional teacher development. For instance, one principal had this to say:

"There is little exposure. Therefore, there would not be any attitude that I will highlight. Like I said initially that such a structure in our school does not also get serious attention from us as managers. We carry on with the school's and performance's day-to-day operation and left out this critical matter behind" (#5).

From the above transcript, the principal's use of the words 'us as managers' suggests that management, with the principal included, does not positively perceive professional teacher development. In this vein, the researcher can find an overlook of a government policy linked to the aspect of 'dereliction of duties' discussed earlier in this study.

Another principal added that:

"As I said to you, the older generation who are about to exit the system is unwilling to develop themselves because they think that the department of education is bombarding them with unnecessary knowledge" (#9).

The selected schools' senior members do not see the need to develop professionally from the above extract. The phrase 'unnecessary knowledge' from the speaker suggests that some senior teachers negatively view Continuing Professional Teacher Development (CPTD), which is a challenge in implementing the policy.



## Discussion of results

According to the participants, the study results indicated that the challenges in implementing CPTD manifested themselves in different forms. The sub-themes are discussed below:

### *Sub-theme 1: Dereliction of duties*

The findings indicated that school principals allow teachers to adhere to upper structures like the circuit and the district offices. This trend manifests itself even though CPTD is compulsory for all South African teachers. The SACE Code of Ethics, Section 7(SACE, 2013: 8) is evident in stating that teachers must "keep abreast of educational trends and development". The reliance on upper structures for policy implementation undermines the quality of leadership school principals provide in implementing CPTD, as identified in (Steyn, 2011). Again, the aspect of teachers listening to upper structures compared to their immediate supervisors, the principals in this regard, indicates a lack of commitment and self-activation and without effective leadership (Hutchinson & Jackson, 2013). Furthermore, teachers must be committed and willing to learn to grow professionally and be intrinsically motivated rather than pushed by management from the upper structures of the department (Johns & Sosibo, 2019).

### *Sub-theme 2: Basics in computers and network coverage*

The findings concur with Bernadine (2019), who revealed that a significant number of teachers did not have access to Information Computer Technology and lacked basic skills in using computers. This deficiency manifests in rural and urban areas, except in some schools that happened to be fortunate and supplied with technological gadgets and have access to the internet.

The study further revealed that older teachers do not bother themselves with computer lessons and CPTD, stating they are about to exit the system (Bernadine, 2019). The phenomenon of globalisation and professional teacher development did not consider African countries' unique historical, social, economic, cult, and political backgrounds. To be on par with developed countries will not happen overnight (Tondeur et al.2016).

Network coverage has been cited as a hindrance to CPTD implementation. Participants mentioned that at some point, some schools have inadequate or no network coverage at all. It is public knowledge that besides technology, other forms of communication, like the Post Office, collapsed and became unreliable more than a decade ago in South Africa. Therefore, there is limited communication with SACE for CPTD activities.

The study results also revealed that in Gert Sibande District, there is an unequal distribution of teaching and learning resources. Some schools were far better equipped than others within the same district. Despite the significant improvement from 1994, the unequal distribution of resources indicates the state's failure to remedy the toxic legacy of apartheid (Amnesty International, 2020).

### *Sub-theme 3: Teacher attitude*

The sub-theme on teacher attitude aimed to determine if participants had a negative or positive attitude towards the CPTD management system. The findings revealed that the participants had different views on the attitude towards CPTD. Some participants mentioned a positive attitude from both management and teachers towards school professional development. The findings revealed that teachers are not pushed to participate in professional

development activities. Transformational Leadership encourages managers to inspire employees to be independent thinkers and use their judgment and intelligence while executing their duties (Gill, 2020).

On the other hand, it also emerged from the study's findings that negative attitude and absence of motivation directly impacted CPTD implementation. It emerged that management was not giving attention to professional development activities. Geldenhuys and Oosthuizen (2015) also found that teachers negatively affect CPTD, which leads to mistrust, demotivation, and frustration. The negative attitude can be attributed to how CPTD was introduced into the education system. Teachers had no say. They were told that a new system was to be introduced. Literature has proven that adults tend to develop a negative attitude when an idea or information is imposed on them during a learning process (Steyn, 2013). Mpahla and Okeke (2015) added that teachers must control and manage their professional development.

As mentioned earlier in this study, senior teachers viewed CPTD as an unnecessary burden with unnecessary knowledge patterns that will not assist anywhere during their retirement. The matter of ageing teachers with their resistance to change is the legacy of apartheid in South Africa. Policymakers had no choice but to employ policies of the new era with the kind of teachers and school principals who at some point were underqualified and worked for the education system during the dark past of apartheid (Beckmann, 2018).

## **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the study, the study recommends the following:

### ***Tertiary institutions should introduce professional development as a course.***

Participants in this study indicated a lack of professional development across the teaching profession. Therefore, it is recommended that teacher trainees have such a course during their training. Professional teacher development must then continue as an in-service training process.

### ***Early retirement without penalties on a pension for senior teachers***

This study has revealed that teachers about to retire are reluctant to engage themselves in any form of professional development and technology usage. Therefore, it is recommended that early retirement be done without penalties on the pension that the Department of Education has made as an option to be made compulsory, particularly to teachers who cannot use computers.

### ***Development of a CPTD user-friendly software***

This study's findings revealed that the CPTD portal is not user-friendly, and it is sometimes dysfunctional, and therefore teachers are struggling to upload their professional development activities. Therefore, it is recommended that a simple to use software be developed with simple features like WhatsApp.

### ***Link principals' promotion to professional development***

This study has revealed that some school managers lack professional development. Therefore, it is recommended that promotion to principal positions be linked to the number of CPTD developmental points accumulated. The 'Nyukela' middle management certificate offered by the National School of Government be made compulsory for such appointments. It is further recommended that the guiding document 'South African Standards for

Principalship' of 2015 be populated appropriately and used as a guide during interviews for promotions to principal positions.

## Conclusion

The study focused only on the challenges encountered by school principals in the Gert Sibande district of Mpumalanga province in South Africa, which is one of the four education districts in the province. The findings, therefore, cannot be generalised to the entire province. Therefore, it is suggested that future studies be conducted on the same topic in the other districts.

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