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Promoting teacher professional development in Ghana: The way forward

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Abstract

This paper seeks to draw the attention of educational stakeholders to promoting teacher professional development: the way forward in the education system. It was learned that preparing students to become better technicians for the manufacturing industries in the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) depends on the teachers' professional knowledge and skills. Teacher professional development develops the teacher's skills, knowledge, expertise and other characteristics needed to empower the student. Therefore, the paper covers the ways of promoting teacher professional development among educators. The paper highlights introducing more collaboration and professional development, making professional development of teachers compulsory and more directed to teacher quality and school support.

Keywords: Fourth Industrial revolution, professional teacher development, knowledge, skills

Introduction

The world is rapidly changing, and the old ways of doing things may not go with the current changes. Similarly, the role and functioning of schools are changing, and so is what is expected of teachers (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2009) ^[1]. Teacher training alone will never change how education is delivered in the classroom. Real change requires time and resources to make sure the change sticks (Kenan Foundation Asia, n.d.). In-service teacher professional development (TPD) can be pivotal in supporting teachers to be effective educators (Hennessy *et al.*, 2022) ^[7]. Teacher professional development involves the activities that develop an individual's skills, knowledge, expertise and other characteristics as a teacher (OECD, 2009) ^[10]. Teachers must be refreshed and empowered with the appropriate and updated knowledge, technology and skills necessary to prepare students to become better technicians for the manufacturing industries in the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) through professional development.

Professional development improves students' academic performance through improvements in teachers' professional knowledge (Osei-Owusu, 2022) ^[12]. Further, Akpem *et al.* (2021) ^[3] revealed that a highly significant positive relationship exists between teachers' participation in teacher professional development and teaching and learning. The Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report shows that Ghana has embarked on an ambitious set of reforms towards the development of teacher standards (UNESCO, 2022a) ^[14]. The Pre-Tertiary Teacher Professional Development and Management (PTPDM) policy, which was drawn from the 2008 Education Act (Act 774), aimed to provide some standards and guidelines for teachers' professional development activities (Abakah *et al.*, 2022) ^[1]. It is also relevant to mention that in 2018 a new teacher education reform was introduced known as "The Cabinet Memorandum on Policy on Teacher Education Reform" (CMPTER). This new policy captures "The National Teachers Standards" (NTS). Unlike the PTPDM, it includes teachers' professional values with an emphasis on teachers' critical and collective reflection on practice to improve their personal and professional development through lifelong learning and Continuous Professional Development (CPD) (National Teaching Council (NTC), 2017; Abakah *et al.*, 2022) ^[1]. The Ghana government's efforts through these policies seek teacher professional development by providing the best training with high-impact teaching practices, hands-on mentoring, and international standard curricula and materials to truly change how teachers teach, ensuring a 21st-century education for Ghanaian students.

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Despite the Ghana government's concerted efforts towards teachers' professional development, teachers' participation in professional development programmes has not been encouraging, thus affecting teaching and learning. Abakah *et al.* (2022) ^[1] conducted a study titled "Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Practices among Basic School Teachers in the Central Region of Ghana". The study revealed that teachers' participation in CPD activities is minimal due to unavailable CPD offerings, lack of pre-requisite data on CPD activities and lack of schools' support. Again, a study by Abonyi *et al.* (2020) ^[2] on "Exploring work environment factors influencing the application of teacher professional development in Ghanaian basic schools" revealed a lack of time due to rigid and inflexible school timetables, teacher workload, and inadequate teaching and learning resources constrained effective transfer of professional development of teachers. Lastly, a study conducted by Gyimah & Ayinselya (2022) ^[6] on "Teacher professional learning (PL), a tool for managing teachers to improve pupils' learning: the views of teachers in Ghana" revealed teachers were confronted with challenges such as inadequate and inappropriate PL resources, poor support and lack of motivation. It can be traced from these studies that there are several factors hindering teachers' promotion of their professional development. Such factors need to be given much attention to ensure that teacher professional development thrives in Ghana's school system.

A true reflection of the consequences stemming from the issues discussed above is exhibited in students' performance in mathematics and reading at the basic school level. According to the 2015 national Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA), at least half of school children in the country could not read a single word by the end of Primary 2. Only 2 per cent could read grade-appropriate text with fluency and comprehension - either in a Ghanaian language or in English (Ghana Education Service, 2016) ^[5].

Again, Ghana's 2016 National Education Assessment (NEA) showed that 45 per cent and 29 per cent of P4 and P6 pupils, respectively, are below minimum competency in mathematics for their grade level (Ministry of Education National Assessment Unit, 2016; Social Impact, 2018) ^[13]. Also, the GEM report indicated most children could not acquire primary literacy and numeracy skills until the end of primary school in Ghana. By the end of the second grade (P2), 77% of students could not read a single word, and most pupils struggled with foundational reading skills; less than 2% were able to read with fluency and comprehension. In mathematics, while pupils did reasonably well on number identification and addition or subtraction of two single-digit numbers, 73% of pupils could not correctly answer a question involving the subtraction of at least one two-digit number (UNESCO, 2022b) ^[15].

Teaching and learning in the school environment can be improved by ensuring that professional development needs are collaborative, long-term, and content-driven (Akpem *et al.*, 2021) ^[3]. For teachers to succeed in their day-to-day teaching, they need to be engaged in sustainable and intensive professional development within the school system (Akpem *et al.*, 2021) ^[3]. GEM report indicated improving teacher and school training as one of the key policy areas identified as having the potential to strengthen and enhance learning in Ghana (UNESCO, 2022a) ^[14]. For these reasons, this study focuses on effective ways of promoting teacher professional development in Ghana.

Ways of promoting teacher professional development

Introduce more collaboration and professional development

By purposely incorporating opportunities for collaboration and quality professional development, well-designed teacher policies can build professionalism (Tournier *et al.*, 2019; UNESCO, 2021) ^[16, 14-15]. When teachers work together in a collaborative and mutually supportive environment, their motivation and confidence can begin to build (Crehan, Tournier, and Chimier, 2019; Education Commission, 2019; STiR Education, n.d.; UNESCO, 2021) ^[16, 14-15]. Teacher networks have been found to increase teachers' time in the classroom, leading to gains in actual teaching time (Jeevan, 2017; UNESCO, 2021) ^[14-15]. Collaboration can lead directly to senior teachers providing meaningful professional development for their junior colleagues (Tournier *et al.*, 2019; UNESCO, 2021) ^[16, 14-15]. Professional development should include relevant topics that teachers can use; otherwise, it could have a demotivating effect by seeming to teachers to be a waste of time and resources (UNESCO, 2021) ^[14-15]. Many opportunities can be presented to teachers as they can share ideas, resources, expertise, etc., on quality lesson delivery. It offers teachers the ability to hone their skills and deepen their competencies.

Compulsory professional development

Teachers' professional development may be, or may not compulsory. Some professional development may be deemed compulsory because the skills and knowledge the development activities aim to enhance are considered essential for teacher quality. In some cases, teacher certification may even require participation in such activities. It can also be necessary for teachers to exercise their professional judgement by identifying and taking part in development activities which they feel are most beneficial to them. A high degree of compulsory professional development may indicate a more highly managed professional development system with less discretion for teachers to choose the development they feel they need (OECD, 2011) ^[10]. The relevance of teachers' professional development to the teacher and the students cannot be underestimated; hence there must be policies in place to ensure that teachers participate in professional development programmes that promote quality education.

School support

Continued professional development of teachers is generally regarded as a function of school leaders who can influence the culture and organisational structure of the school. A school leader plays a critical role in the area of teacher professional development, and it reflects upon the success of the school. The Professional Development of teachers is an essential DNA of successful schools. School leaders are expected to cultivate a school culture conducive to the teachers' professional development (Chrysalis, 2021) ^[4]. Teachers can meet during the workday. When teachers engage in professional development at their schools with their colleagues, they can learn from each other, support one another, and hold each other accountable for applying what they know. Learning during the school year makes it easier for educators to use what they learn immediately within their workplaces to benefit students directly (Morrison, 2021) ^[9].

Moreover, providing purposeful staff development programs and one-on-one staff coaching can help create an environment where teachers can strive to achieve their full potential (Chrysalis, 2021) ^[4]. Schools can schedule time for educators' learning in many ways. For example, some arrange daily schedules to allow for standard planning times when teachers can meet during the workday (Morrison, 2021) ^[9]. The school is essential in the aspect of empowering teachers continuously. Thus, the school provides opportunities for teachers to meet regularly during the school day to review what they learned and support one another in implementing new practices. Hence, school leaders and teachers must not undermine the school's role in teachers' continuous professional development.

Educational implications

1. The Ghana Education Service should introduce more collaboration and professional development programmes for in-service teachers at the per-tertiary education level.
2. Professional development should be directed towards teacher quality.
3. School leaders should always seek for the professional development of their teachers.

Conclusion

Professional development improves students' academic performance through improvements in teachers' professional knowledge and skills. It is better to empower students with the appropriate and updated knowledge, technology and skills necessary to become better technicians for the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) in the future. To effectively promote teachers' professional development, introduce more collaboration and professional development, make professional development of teachers compulsory and also much focus paid school support.

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