

# Teacher professional development for the new school improvement: Botswana

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This article focused on the training needs of serving teachers for the enhancement of school performances. It sought to achieve this by involving a selected group of teachers and head teachers in the completion of a questionnaire. The questionnaire was reinforced by interviews conducted on a few teachers and head teachers. The study concluded that for teacher development programmes to achieve their intended goal of improving the teaching and learning processes, they should of necessity be based on the actual problems teachers encounter in the classroom. Not only should in-service programmes target teachers, but head teachers also need training on an ongoing basis to strengthen their managerial capacities.

## Introduction

This article focuses, in the main, on the need for teacher development for the new challenges in the delivery of instructional programmes. It examines in the first instance the history of teacher preparation and development in Botswana, then moves on to examine the concept of teacher development. It concludes by summarizing the key issues to emerge in the discussion.

## Background

Teacher development in Botswana must be referenced to the historical lack of a grounded education system. Botswana, a small developing state in Southern Africa, attained its political independence in 1966. From 1885 it existed as a Protectorate under the British Government (Ramsay *et al.* 1996). The development of education in general and of teacher education in particular during this period was pitiful to say the least. The archaic education system then, which emphasized basic numeracy and literacy to only a small section of the population, is largely responsible for this. Partly contributing to the low quality of teacher development was Botswana's almost total dependence on another country (Britain) for its national revenue. According to the Transitional Plan for Social and Economic Development of 1966, at the time

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of Independence, Botswana's total annual recurrent budget expenditure stood at a measly R12,793000.00 (South African currency). The *per capita* income then at current prices has raised many-fold from about P70.00 to P9 800.00 in 1995–1996 (Republic of Botswana 1997/1998–2002/2003).

The 1951 Bechuanaland Protectorate (present Botswana) Annual Report shows that in 1950 out of 487 primary school teachers, only 195 were qualified. A significant number were expatriate teachers, mainly from South Africa. Secondary education at the time was just beginning at St. Joseph's College, Moeng College and Seepapitso Secondary School. In 1966, expatriate teachers, as would be expected of a fledgling and emerging education system, also dominated secondary schools. In 1966, of the 1624 teachers in primary schools, 825 were trained. Only 43 of the 66 teachers employed in secondary schools were graduates (Republic of Botswana 1966). By the late 1980s, the situation of trained teachers had significantly improved as the national university, founded in 1977, was beginning to establish its educational presence. Today there is a total of 8000 Botswana teachers serving in secondary schools (Republic of Botswana 2001). For the first time in the history of teacher deployment in Botswana, a surplus of trained teachers has been reported, to the extent that the hiring of graduates into the teaching service is longer automatic (*The Botswana Guardian*, Staff Reporter, 2004).

The teacher over-supply can be attributed to two reasons. Firstly, to the opening of two colleges of education in the early 1980s, and secondly, to the much expanded teacher preparation programmes at the University of Botswana. The drastic improvement in manpower supply in a space of less than 20 years is a remarkable achievement by any educational standards, given that in 1965 'there were only 16 students capable of undertaking higher education' and 'only 40 citizens holding degrees' (Republic of Botswana 1966). This state of affairs confirms the poor state the education system was in.

Given the self-sufficiency in teacher supply, the shift should, in the context of this article, now be on the quality of the teacher at the secondary level. Government alone cannot satisfy the training needs of all serving teachers. The numbers are just too big and government does not have the financial capacity to provide in-service training for all deserving teachers. Basic education for all up to the junior secondary school level and the demand for tertiary education by the high school leavers both claim a large share of the Ministry of Education annual budget (education in Botswana is provided free from the primary school to the tertiary level).

The involvement of school heads as teacher developers at the school level is, therefore, a serious option to be considered for teacher in-service training. This option only cannot cut on costs, but has the potential to speed up the quality of the teacher development education faster than had in-service been the sole responsibility of government. For the goals of in-service to be achievable, school heads as the lead people, will first need to be adequately developed. Presently, not all school heads have formal training in educational management.

Botswana has recently changed its reliance on the Cambridge Overseas School Certificate examination system to a locally based Botswana General Certificate of Secondary Education examination. A change in an examination system necessarily means a change in the curriculum and *vice versa*. Such changes often result in changes in the teaching methods, lesson plans and textbooks, and many other related changes. Teacher development at the level of schools, to meet the challenges of the new curriculum changes, is therefore self-evident. Now that there is an obvious

need for teacher development at the school level, school heads should work out criteria for selecting teachers for participation, for at the secondary schools, teacher qualifications, the teachers' performance and their experience can be very diverse.

### Purpose of study

This study aimed to get participants' views on:

- (i) the criteria to be used to select teachers for in-service training;
- (ii) the need to train school heads for in-service training;
- (iii) who should conduct in-service training for teachers; and
- (iv) the value of teacher in-service training to the teaching process.

### Literature review

Literature from the West on school improvement and management does not always suit the conditions and contextual realities of developing countries, particularly the political, cultural and economic conditions, because it was written in different circumstances, observed Harber and Davies (2001). However, since the education systems of most countries in the Sub-Sahara region are modelled on the Western education systems, the literature is still relevant to a great extent. As is typical of young developing countries such as Botswana, literature on school effectiveness and teacher development in particular is still very miniscule. This is the reason why Western literature somewhat dominates this article. The article draws mainly from literature on staff development and school development planning. The two issues are very much linked and are mutually reinforcing.

Until the mid-1990s, school-based workshops were not a common feature in Botswana secondary schools. They were usually held at headquarters and for only a few selected senior teachers from the different schools. The first in-service training programme that deliberately targeted teachers of all levels followed the introduction of the School Development Project in 1993. The project, which was technically and financially supported by the British and Botswana governments respectively, was aimed at improving school performances by raising the standard of school management (British Council 1991). The assumption was that following training, school heads would be able to adequately run school-based workshops for their teachers on an ongoing basis.

The school development plan in Botswana is now government policy upon which school-based in-service training for teachers is based. School development planning can raise students' achievement by focusing on the teaching and learning processes (Hopkins *et al.* 1994). In the process, 'staff gains new knowledge and skills' (Hargreaves and Hopkins 1991: 12), and this increases the level of teacher efficiency and effectiveness (Potter and Powell 1992; Carnall 1995). As the teachers increase their cognitive and technical skills through in-service training, they become better teachers and this benefits the students (Cusack 1993). The strong correlation between a competent teacher and improved student achievement purported by Carlin (1992) further emphasizes the need for continuous teacher development. Cusack (1993) further argues that effective school managers are

those who continuously monitor and evaluate the teaching processes. This way, heads get to know the training needs of their teachers sooner rather than later and take appropriate action. The propositions that: 'No matter how good a teacher is, that teacher can become better' (Carlin, 1992: 55) and that: 'Even the very best of teacher education cannot equip one for a lifelong career ...' (Wideen and Andrews 1987) and that this is a concern for the effective head teacher, form the basis of the discussion on teacher development.

'There cannot be development without developing the developer' (Wideen and Andrews 1987: 107). The school head is the developer in the broader context of teacher development at the level of the school. Although the head may not personally conduct workshops, as the overseer of the curriculum implementation, s/he constantly needs new knowledge, information and managerial skills to lead teacher development activities confidently. Quite a considerable number of secondary school heads in Botswana need qualifications in educational management. Deliberate action, however, to equip heads with professional qualifications to enhance their effectiveness in instructional leadership is in process (Republic of Botswana 1993). Until 1999, an arrangement between the Ministry of Education (Botswana) and the University of Bath (England) for the latter to train school heads in educational management at Master's level has been very successful. A few heads have benefited from this arrangement. A similar flexible mode programme offered by the University of Botswana has now replaced the Bath programme.

Without the right teacher attitude towards work, school improvements efforts such as in-service training for teachers cannot work. In Botswana, more than the political and economic circumstances Harber and Davies (2001) talked about, work ethics is, arguably, the biggest impediment to innovation implementation, as evident in the following concerns by the Minister of Finance and Development Planning and the Assistant Minister of Presidential Affairs, respectively:

The general consensus is that productivity in Botswana's public sector is way below average. If productivity had been a measure of a salary increase, Botswana public sector was not going to be awarded even a penny ... productivity in the public sector is going towards paralysis. (*Business and Financial Times*, Botswana, 2003–2004: 19)

## Methodology

### *Data collection, sampling and data analysis*

The research design was a qualitative type that sought the views of informants on the subject to be investigated. Qualitative research designs are descriptive. Their data, which include interview scripts and open-ended questions, are presented in the form of words that describe and explain situations (Carlson and Ducharme 1987; Bogdan and Biklen 1992, 2003). The use of text or words rather than numbers arises from questions that focus on the 'what', 'how' and 'why' that seek to obtain what Erickson (1986, cited in Bogdan and Biklen 1992: 32) refers to as 'participant perspective'.

The target population of the study was made up of in-service coordinators; heads and teachers of secondary schools in Botswana. To avoid sampling bias between schools, the target population was stratified by region. The existing regions that

divide schools are the north, west, central, south central and southern. From the 233 public secondary schools (206 junior and 27 senior) in the country, 15 were randomly selected (three from each of the five regions). One of the three in each region was a senior secondary school and the other two were junior secondary schools.

All schools have a teacher in-service coordinator. This teacher and the school head were automatically included as informants by virtue of their strategic and critical positions in school-based teacher development initiatives. The three teachers from each of the participating schools were selected on the basis of their active involvement in school-based in-service programmes, as recommended by their heads. The researcher had preferred to get data from people who are knowledgeable in teacher development school endeavours. Such people, according to the researcher, were more likely to make more informed contributions to the research findings. The purposeful sampling strategy used to obtain quality data by engaging a certain category of people and not another in this study is associated with Patton (1990) and Gay and Airasian's (2000) technique of purposeful sampling. Altogether, there were 75 respondents to the study. From this sample, seven participated in the interview and 68 in the semi-structured questions. The seven interviewees were randomly selected from the in-service coordinators sample group (3); the teacher sample (2); and the school heads' group (2), in order to spread views.

Permission from the school authorities had been obtained prior to collecting data. Heads were also requested to solicit the cooperation of the coordinators to administer the questionnaires on behalf of the researcher. The heads were also asked to identify teachers who in their opinion worked closely with the coordinators. The questions were pilot-tested with a school that was not to take part in the final exercise. The pilot helped identify the appropriateness and determine the level of difficulty of the questions to the respondents. To some extent this enhanced the validity of the study. The questions were mailed to the schools and returns were to be made using a pre-stamped envelope for each participating school.

As informants responded to the 'what', 'how' and 'why' questions, certain patterns emerged. The data were therefore analysed by grouping together the emerging similarities from the same theme.

### **Summary of findings**

This section incorporates findings from both the interview and from the semi-structured questionnaires. All the schools completed and returned the questionnaires but not all the questionnaires from the individual participants were returned. Nineteen (19) questionnaires were not returned. All interviews were carried out as planned. The findings are presented under the four aims of the study stated earlier. Because of the descriptive nature of the data, it was not always possible to quantify the data in all cases. Adjectives such as 'most', 'significant' and so on were used where the quantification of data was not possible.

#### *Criteria for selecting teachers for in-service*

A head of department in Botswana secondary schools oversees the academic activities of a cluster of subjects such as such, mathematics, and agriculture or history,



geography, and social studies. The senior teacher at Grade 1, on the other hand, supervises only one subject. The latter is therefore more a specialist than the former. Two contrasting but fairly balanced views emerged from the findings. One group of respondents representing all the three population samples but evidently excluding school heads suggested that recommendations for teachers to attend in-service training should be based on their individual length of service. The 'older' teachers need more in-service training than those new in the job. As the constant curriculum changes imply a change in the teaching methods, 'older' teachers would need to keep abreast with new teaching strategies. This view is further justified by the comment: 'Older teachers have a tendency of saying they have been successful using certain teaching method and wonder why they should change their winning formula.'

Another group that also included respondents from all the three sample groups was of the view that in-service training should be extended to all teachers irrespective of length of service or level of qualification, but that selection for attendance should be based on the assessed needs of teachers. Almost half the teachers and coordinators and eleven heads subscribed to this view. Justifying this view, one wrote: 'There are as many new weak teachers who need help in their teaching as they are old ones.' All teacher respondents but nine – nine coordinators and five heads – said that teachers ought to participate when considerations for in-service are made. Most of the heads, on the other hand, held that the teachers' supervisors are better placed to recommend who should participate in in-service training.

The motivation for teachers to participate in their personal development can be attributed to two things. Firstly, they expressed involvement and responsibility for their training needs doubting perhaps the objectivity of the criteria used by heads when recommending teachers for further training and even for promotions. Such doubt or suspicion may be borne out of a system that is not transparent. The system does not allow teachers access to what the supervisor has said about them to those who made final decisions on progression or further education. Where there is secrecy people are bound to be suspicious. Secondly, it can be attributed to the recently introduced performance system, which bases teachers' rewards on performance.

#### *Who should be involved in the training of teachers?*

The majority view was that when it comes to conducting teacher school-based workshops, it is not a question of who is more senior; rather it is a question of who has the knowledge and skills in the area. In addition to the knowledge and skills possession, respondents expressed a general preference to colleagues in the same school over outsiders or consultants because outsiders, they argue, may not be familiar with the actual problems the teachers experience. 'Familiarity does not always breed contempt, a fellow teacher can do a better job,' remarked one. Another said: 'Learning becomes more effective when the learners are free with the teacher.' The role of the head in school-based workshops should be restricted to the organizational part of the training, unless s/he is an authority in the area. S/he ought to play a facilitating role of creating a climate that favours a free exchange of ideas among teachers and ensuring that resources are available.

### *Value of in-service training*

Almost all the respondents view teacher in-service training endeavour as a developmental and supportive strategy to the teacher. This view is implied in comments such as: 'It blends theory with practice'; 'It is a very practical exercise as teachers are engaged in solving problems they actually have experienced'; 'Because of its practicality, in-service training improves curriculum implementation'; 'It equips teachers with new teaching methods that can vary the teaching and this can motivate the students'; 'It can rejuvenate both the teacher and the teaching.' Because of the role in-service plays in improving the teaching process, one respondent suggested: 'In-service training should be regarded as an on-going or lifelong process.'

### *Training needs for school heads*

Generally, respondents suggested that schools as complex organizations need leaders who are knowledgeable, adaptable and with good organizational and personal skills. These skills, the respondents proposed, can be acquired through re-training. Typical comments to this effect were: 'Even the highest academic qualification cannot replace training in management'; 'Like teachers, school heads also need on-going in-service training.' However, findings from all the four themes above did not show any difference in the respondents' views between urban and rural schools, between large and small schools, between gender, and the respondents' educational qualification.

## **Discussion**

Hopkins *et al.* (1994) and others mentioned in this study, and the majority of the respondents to the study, have recognized the important link between the individual teacher and the school organization. Teacher professional development as a continuing process is increasingly regarded as critical in creating more effective schools and in raising the standards of students' achievement. Now that Botswana has achieved self-sufficiency in the supply of teachers, perhaps it is time to step up the strengthening of serving teachers' professional skills and increase their effectiveness. The literature on staff development theory and the findings of this study have revealed that learning, and teacher learning in particular, is a continuous and cyclic process because of the ever-changing teaching methodologies necessitated by the regular reforms in school curricular. Wideen and Andrews (1987) and Carlin (1992) have been respectively cited in this study as saying: 'even the very best of teacher education cannot equip one for a lifelong career'; and, 'no matter how good a teacher is that teacher can become better.' Respondents' views on teacher professional development were characterized by expressions such as: 'learning is a lifelong process' and 'learning as a continuous process'.

For teacher in-service programmes to achieve their good intentions, consultation between teachers and those who seek to develop them should be engaged. This way, teachers would feel they are part of their own professional development. Strictly speaking, the teacher and not the supervisor knows better what s/he needs in terms of improving his/her teaching. By involving the teacher in conducting the needs

assessment, one is locating in-service training at its most relevant situation of teaching and learning because the new learning will be practical and relevant to the classroom experiences of the teacher. Besides, teachers are adult learners who need to be treated ethically and respected as self-directed persons who know what can and cannot work for them. It is therefore proposed, against this argument and against the findings, that one effective way in which teachers can be meaningfully engaged in designing their own in-service programme is through a classroom observation exercise agreed between the teacher and the supervisor.

The findings of the study suggest that schools are complex institutions manned by leaders who are not necessarily experts in all the different areas of teaching. To this end, the findings propose that schools need synergy to be more effective. Put another way, heads need to problem-solve together with other staff. Senior members of staff who are specialists in the different fields should be delegated the responsibility to conduct needs assessment for teacher professional development. As the overseer in the school, the head should be more concerned with facilitating, guiding, advising and creating an environment that is conducive for teacher learning. Leaders who have been successful in engaging their subordinates are usually those who have formally learnt management systems. Similarly, school heads need to formally learn management systems, as one respondent rightly observed: 'Even the highest academic qualification cannot replace training in management.'

Whereas it is encouraging to realize that teachers seek participation in their professional development by running school-based workshops, input from other professionals such as university and college lecturers can add weight and value to the workshops. These others possess theory that would, as one respondent put it, 'blend theory with practice'. Perhaps the local university could broaden its present in-service programme it offers to the mathematics departments in schools to other subjects.

The findings have also shown that the longer teachers remain in the classroom, the more they become complacent in their teaching. This is evident in the statement made in the findings that: 'I have been successful using this method ... why should I change my winning formula?' This comment best describes attitudes by some workers in the Botswana public sector (including teachers), as intimated in the literature review section of this article. In the context of this argument, the view made in the findings, that in-service training ought to be a must to all regardless of experience and qualification, is therefore very valid. The importance of teacher development for school improvement has also been strongly supported by Hopkins *et al.* (1991), Carnall (1995) and by Cusack (1993). Carlin (1992) has appropriately summed it up as 'the strong correlation between a competent teacher and improved students' achievement.' Improved students' achievement, as the findings reveal, is the result of the practicality of the exercise to problems teachers face in the classroom. This further cements the need for supervisors to involve teachers in identifying areas in which they feel they (the teachers) need help. Inasmuch as it is vital to target teachers who have served longer, it is equally necessary to extend in-service training to all teachers. As intimated in the findings, learning is an ongoing process.

### Conclusion

Although the sampling methods do not allow generalization beyond the population of schools that were sampled, they do however raise important questions for school



heads across a broader context. If the results found here hold up in other schools, then those who are responsible for teacher development at the school level (heads) ought to view in-service programmes in a more serious light. The results of this study suggest that school in-service training is the beginning of teacher development and that it is intricately linked to students' achievement. The study concludes that teacher professional development and school effectiveness are inextricably connected. That is, as teachers improve their teaching skills and methodologies, students' standards of achievement are also raised, and this has an impact on school improvement. The fact that curriculum changes are constant and require new approaches to teacher instructional delivery, teacher professional development ought to target all teachers irrespective of their individual length of service and qualification, but at varying degrees. The teachers, it was argued, should own in-service training, and as such it needs to be based on assessed classroom problems experienced by the teacher. This is particularly so in Botswana, where recent reforms, both structural and technical, have occurred in the education system involving, among other things, changes in the teaching curriculum and the examination system. Whereas it is recognized that government has a responsibility to develop the teachers, schools are more suited to assume this responsibility given other obligations government has that compete for limited financial resources. Also, as school heads are on the site of implementation, they can easily and readily identify relevant training needs of the teachers. However, the study has argued that for school heads to be in a position to effectively guide teacher in-service training, they will first have to be trained in general management issues.

### Implications for further research

As the study conducted was of a small scale, involving only 15 schools from 233 secondary schools in the country and 75 participants, it is not possible to draw generalized conclusions based on quite limited study. Further research on the subject could consider widening the scope of the study by involving more schools and a larger population sample.

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