BRITISH COUNCIL

Community of practice for teacher educators research report

——

The professional development needs of teacher educators at a Higher Teacher Training College in Cameroon

Focho Gladys Ngwi

20 July 2020

#TeachingEnglishInsight

Introduction

Quality education goes beyond mastery of subject content; it is expected to also equip students with life skills which will enable them to realise their full potential later in life. This largely depends on the quality of teachers and teaching. In view of the rapid changes in curriculum and pedagogy, professional competencies of the teacher are expected to be regularly updated during initial training and in-service programs. In light of this, it is the task of teacher educators to ensure the professional development of all their teachers but teacher educators themselves are lacking in the ability to guarantee their own professional growth.

According to Woodward (2009), the role of a teacher educator develops naturally from a teacher who has had practice working with different class sizes, levels, materials, contents and contexts in general. Experience of teaching in the primary or secondary school sector invariably facilitates the job of training teachers. In the same vein, the *Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Framework for teacher educators* (British Council, 2017) indicates that it is necessary for teacher educators to have a foundation of teaching skills. The above underlines the fact that ideally, teacher educators should be trained, experienced teachers and if that is not the case, then professional development in teacher training becomes vital.

In Cameroon, as in other contexts, many teacher educators are university professors with doctorate degrees but no teacher training or teaching experience in primary/secondary schools (Tambo, 1995; Ndame, 2019; Wiysahnyuy, 2019). As Tambo explains, for lack of qualified teacher educators, the Cameroon government recruits university graduates without any professional training to teach in teacher training colleges, secondary and primary schools. This practice has continued even in recent times as documented by Ndame and Wiysahnyuy.

This research work investigates the professional development needs of teacher educators at a Higher Teacher Training College in the North West Region of Cameroon. The problem simply put is: they train the teachers, but who trains them? How do they upgrade their skills? What kind of continuing professional development (CPD) activities do they need to engage in?

Literature Review

Although much has been published on continuing professional development, the scale is tipped towards the CPD of teachers to the disadvantage of teacher educators. However, research indicates that teacher educators need certain competencies, some of which can be effectively acquired in teacher training schools. Ng and Lam (2015) talk of pedagogic skills and rich experience as essential for an individual to be an effective teacher educator. The British Council (2017) recommends that teacher educators, in addition to other competencies, should have a foundation of teaching skills, practical experience and an understanding of how teachers learn. In the opinion of Galaczi, Nye, Poulter and Allen (2018) teacher educators should have such competencies as the knowledge of teaching, training, teacher development and the assessment of teaching. Similarly, in the Cameroon context, Tchombe (1998) acknowledges that indicators of quality teacher educators include professional preparation and pedagogic practices.

All of the above indicates that a teacher educator should be a trained teacher, have an academic degree in the field of education or have teaching experience in the absence of the first two. In fact, the literature indicates that teacher educators ought to be teachers upgrading their teaching roles (Woodward, 2009; Galaczi, Nye, Poulter and Helen, 2018). Failure to meet at least one of the above criteria is a strong indication of the need for CPD for teacher educators. This is in addition to the fact that research uncovers speedy and constant changes in the field of teaching and learning, which teacher educators need to keep up with if they and their student teachers are to stay current and relevant.

The British Council's Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Framework for teacher educators (2017) gives guidelines to the competencies of a teacher educator and to achieve these he/she must engage in some CPD activities. Continuing Professional Development activities take various forms, some common to both teachers and teacher educators and others peculiar to, or generally used by the latter. Drawing from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Teaching and Learning International Survey Questionnaire (2018), common CPD activities include: seminars, workshops, conferences, induction/mentoring, peer observation and professional reading. For teacher educators working in higher education, CPD is marked by other activities such as: research/publication, membership of academic associations/communities of practice, refresher courses, sabbaticals, team teaching, book/abstract reviews, thesis supervision and instructional supervision (Mussazi, 1982; Chang, Jeon and Ahn, 2014). Teacher educators should be engaged in a range and variety of CPD activities from these perspectives in order to develop their ability to train teachers at the university to teach in primary and secondary schools.

Methodology

The research aimed to find out the needs and perceptions of CPD, of lecturers who train teachers at a Higher Teacher Training College. It was a survey which targeted the teachers of the institution made up of trainers of teachers of various subjects offered in secondary schools in the general education sector in Cameroon. However, my interest was in English language teaching, so the sample consisted of all teacher educators in the English Department and those in the Education department since they train teachers in pedagogy and other education courses. Thus, the purposive sampling technique was used to obtain 17 trainers who taught English language and literature courses and 8 who taught education courses giving a total of 25 participants.

Two research questions guided the study: the first was 'In what ways do teacher educators upgrade their professional competencies?' and the second 'What are the perceptions of teacher educators of Continuing Professional Development? To answer the research questions, a questionnaire was developed in line with what constitutes CPD of teachers in Higher Education and primary/secondary schools as seen in the literature, particularly drawing from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)'s 'Teaching and Learning International Survey' (TALIS). Background information sought to identify if respondents were trained teachers, had a certificate in education or had taught in a primary/secondary school (these being the basic prerequisites for teacher educators). The second part of the questionnaire was meant to find out the nature and regularity of CPD activities of these teacher educators (which

should give an indication of their CPD needs). The third part of the questionnaire was an assessment scale of the teacher educators' perception of different CPD activities common to university lecturers generally, but also relevant to teachers of primary/secondary schools. This CPD assessment scale was a modification of that of Prince and Berrett (2014 p.38), who advance that for each CPD activity a teacher or teacher educator must either be aware of it (1 point), understand it (2 points), be engaged in it (3 points), integrate it in professional activities (4 points) or use it for leadership (5 points) in mentoring younger colleagues. The modification was as follows; twenty-five CPD activities were listed against the perceptions above for respondents to identify where they find themselves. Secondly, the points for rating were suppressed with the intention of using percentages for analysis to give a clearer picture of the extent of trainers' perceptions of each CPD activity.

The data was collected through the administration of the questionnaire to all 25 participants. Phone calls were made to explain the purpose of the research and to get their consent to send them the questionnaire. Some questionnaires were sent through emails and others as hard copies. All 25 questionnaires administered were returned giving a return rate of 100%.

Findings

Preliminary data indicates that out of 25 teacher educators, 23 had doctorate degrees, 09 were trained teachers and 14 had some teaching experience in a primary or secondary school. Those trained or with teaching experience were mostly trainers teaching education courses, with most of the English lecturers being untrained. The results are presented in the table below.

Table 1: Academic/professional background of teacher educators

S/N		PhD Degree		Teacher training		Experience in primary or secondary school	
1	Language trainers (N=17)	16	94%	02	12%	01	06%
2	Trainers in education (N=08)	07	88%	07	88%	07	88%

With regards to the first research question all respondents (100%) indicated that in the past five years, they attended yearly pedagogic seminars organised by the university, while 10% had attended other kinds of seminar. As for conferences, 95% had taken part in various conferences. Only 5% listed teaching practice supervision, research, book review and curriculum design/review

as CPD activities they had engaged in. On average, in the past three years 90% of the teacher educators had performed only one CPD activity, most of which lasted three days or less.

To answer the second research question on perceptions of CPD, respondents were required to indicate, for each activity, if they were simply aware of it, really understood it, were competent in it, used it regularly or prepared others to use it. The results are presented in the table below.

Table 2. Trainers' perceptions of CPD

CPD assessment scale (Modified from Prince & Barret, 2014 p. 38).

S/N	CPD Activity	Awareness		Under-standing		Engaged		Integrated		Leadership	
	*N=25	You have heard or read about the particular professional behaviour		You know what it means and why it is important		You demonstrate competence in this professional behaviour		Your high level of competency on this professional behaviour consistantly informs what you do at work		You help others to develop in this professional behaviour	
1	Research (academic)	00	00%	02	08%	12	48%	08	32%	03	12%
2	Thesis supervision	00	00%	02	08%	04	16%	14	56%	05	20%
3	Instructional supervision	00	00%	15	60%	05	20%	03	12%	02	08%
4	Publication	00	00%	02	08%	06	24%	15	60%	02	08%
5	Attending conferences/ seminars etc.	00	00%	01	04%	15	60%	05	20%	04	16%
6	Facilitating conferences/ seminars etc.	10	40%	10	40%	02	08%	02	08%	01	04%
7	Teacher evaluation (by authorities)	05	20%	17	68%	02	08%	01	04%	00	00%

8	Teacher evaluation (by students)	06	24%	10	40%	03	12%	04	16%	02	08%
9	Induction/ Mentoring	06	24%	10	40%	04	16%	02	08%	03	12%
10	Departmental meetings	00	00%	01	04%	03	12%	20	80%	01	04%
11	Higher certificate or degree	00	00%	01	04%	10	40%	10	40%	05	20%
12	Peer observation	13	52%	07	28%	00	00%	03	12%	02	08%
13	Action Research	07	28%	11	44%	03	12%	02	08%	02	08%
14	Self-tutoring	02	08%	06	24%	10	40%	04	16%	03	12%
15	Reflective teaching	15	60%	03	12%	05	20%	01	04%	01	04%
16	Teacher exchange programs/ Sabbatical	14	56%	07	28%	02	08%	01	04%	01	04%
17	Membership of Professional Associations	05	20%	10	40%	06	24%	02	08%	02	08%
18	Review of books, proposals etc.	15	60%	05	20%	03	12%	02	08%	00	00%
19	Online courses/ webinars	08	32%	10	40%	05	20%	02	08%	00	00%
20	Curriculum/ program design or review	12	48%	08	32%	01	04%	02	08%	02	08%
21	Course book writing	03	12%	06	24%	04	16%	06	24%	01	04%

22	Use of portfolios	15	60%	05	20%	02	08%	01	04%	02	08%
23	Development of instructional materials	06	24%	12	12%	03	12%	02	08%	02	08%
24	Tests development/ administration	13	52%	06	24%	02	08%	02	08%	02	08%
25	WhatsApp groups/comm unity of practice	03	12%	08	32%	10	40%	02	08%	02	08%

From the above table, more than 50% of the teacher educators in this study are simply aware of some CPD activities, having read about or heard about them. These include: reflective teaching (60%), use of portfolios (60%), review of books/proposals (60%), tests develoment and administration (52%) and peer observation (52%).

According to the assessment scale, 'understanding a CPD activity' is defined as knowing what it means and its importance. This level of perception has a higher rating and more than 50% of teacher educators understood the role played by teacher evaluation by authorities (68%) and that of instructional supervision (60%).

The next level of perception, in terms of rating is 'engaged' meaning the individual is well versed with this CPD activity. Attending conferences (60%) was the only activity that recorded more than 50%.

A higher level of perception is 'integrated' where the individual uses this CPD activity regularly. More than 50% of trainers indicated departmental meetings (80%), publications (60%) and thesis supervision (56%).

The highest level of perception is one of leadership since the individual helps others to develop. There was no CPD activity where more than 50% of teacher educators indicated leadership.

In summary, for the various CPD activities, teacher educators had different perceptions ranging from low to high as indicated by awareness, understanding, engagement, integration or leadership.

Discussion

This study set out to find out the professional development needs of teacher educators in a Higher Teacher Training College with a focus on those in the English Department because they train English language teachers for secondary schools. Background information shows that only 12% of these teacher educators have any kind of teacher training and just 6% had teaching experience in the primary or secondary sector. This is contrary to the recommended qualities of teacher educators (Nye, Poulter and Helen, 2018; British Council, 2017; Ng and Lam, 2015).

To answer the first research question, seminars and conferences seem to be the main CPD activities for these teacher educators. Follow up discussions on the phone reveal that these seminars and conferences were more of an academic nature related to University teaching rather than about secondary school teaching. Furthermore, 90% of these attended only one seminar a year organised by the university (not the department). Lastly, two or three days of seminars a year seems insufficient for effective CPD. Thus, these trainers need diverse and more appropriate forms of CPD to widen their horizon in terms of professional upgrading.

To answer the second research question, this study revealed that the teacher educators were more conversant with CPD activities common to higher education: research, publication, thesis supervision, conference/seminars, departmental meetings and the quest for higher degrees. This is in line with Chang, Jeon & Ahn (2014) who go further in saying that teacher educators engage in these activities because as university lecturers it is essential for promotion.

Another observation from the results is that these teacher educators are not fully exploiting self-directed CPD activities, such as self-tutoring; reflective teaching; membership in professional associations; online courses/webinars; and professional whatsApp groups and communities of practice. Surprisingly, the situation holds true for teacher educators who teach English courses and those of education. Another surprise was that one high ranking teacher educator had attended only two seminars and had nothing to say about non-mandated forms of CPD. This brings to light what Hayes and Chang (2012) document about professors who see no need for CPD, since professorship is for life.

Taking all of the above into consideration, it is obvious that teacher educators of the Higher Teacher Training College are in need of regular, systematic and varied forms of professional development, especially in themes related to primary/secondary school teaching.

Conclusion

This study has revealed that those who train teachers in the Higher Teacher Training College need to be reskilled through CPD. These teacher educators do engage in some CPD activities that could be interpreted as top-down since these constitute part of their professional obligations. There is therefore a need for them to transform their professional development by embracing a bottom-up approach and being more engaged in self-directed CPD activities as cited above. As Fullan (1991) says, professional development should be a mix of formal and informal experiences. Seminars and workshops need to be organised for them in this regard. Given that most of the English language teacher educators in this study have limited or no skills in pedagogy and curriculum issues for primary/secondary schools, the authorities have the responsibility to include these in their seminar programs. If primary/secondary school teachers have to keep abreast of recent developments in the field to be more effective, then those who train them should take the lead. To achieve the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goal on quality education, the quality of teachers and teaching must be improved through quality teacher training provided by teacher educators who engage in meaningful self-directed professional development.

References

British Council (2017): Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Framework for teacher educators.https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/sites/teacheng/files/Teacher%20Educator%20Framework%20FINAL%20WEBv1.pdf Accessed 06-03-2020

Chang, K., Jeon, Y. & Ahn, H. (2014): Investigating continuing professional development for teacher educators in South Korea: opportunities and constraints. In Hayes D. (ed.) Innovations in the continuing professional development of English language teachers. 271-297 https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/sites/teacheng/files/pub_E168%20Innovations%20in%20CPD_FINAL%20V2%20web.pdf Accessed 07-03-2020

Fullan, M. (1991). *The New Meaning of Educational Change.* Toronto: Teachers College Press.

Hayes, D and Chang, K. (2012) Theoretical perspectives on and international practice in continuing professional development for English teachers. *English Teaching* 67 (1), 107–129.

Galaczi, N., Nye, A., Poulter, M., and Allen, H. (2018). 2 The Cambridge Assessment English Approach to Teacher Professional Development | © UCLES https://www.cambridgeenglish.org/Images/539683-perspectives-teacher-professional-development.pdf Accessed 07-03-2020

Tambo, L. (1995). Models and Practice in Initial Secondary Teacher Education in Cameroon *Teacher Education Quarterly* 22 (1), 59-67

Musaazi, J.C.S. (1982). The theory and practice of educational administration. Nigeria: Macmillian

Ndame, T. (2019). Managing Professionalism in Teacher Education: Issues of Teacher Identity Development in Cameroon. *European Journal of Education Studies* 6(3), 9-23

Ng, R.Y. and Lam, R.Y. (2015): Train-the-Trainer: A Study of the Professional Skill Competencies and Psychological Qualities of Teacher Trainer. International Journal of Learning and Teaching 1 (1), 38-41

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2018): Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS). https://www.oecd.org/education/school/TALIS-2018-MS-Teacher-Questionnaire-ENG.pdf Accessed 06-03 – 2020

Prince, E. and Barrett, A. (2014). Continuing professional development in action: an Indian experience. In D. Hayes (ed.), Innovations in the continuing professional development of English language teachers. pp 19-44. Available at:
http://englishagenda.britishcouncil.org/sites/ec/files/B413%20CPD%20for%20Teachers_v2.pdf
Accessed 08-03-2020

Ricky Yuk-Kwan Ng, R.Y. & Lam, R.Y. (2015). Train-the-Trainer: A Study of the Professional Skill Competencies and Psychological Qualities of Teacher educator. *International Journal of Learning and Teaching.* 1(1), 38-41

Tchombe, T.M. (1998). Progressive Transformative Teacher Education In Cameroon http://www.educationdev.net/educationdev/Docs/Cameroon.PDF Accessed 04-03 -2020

Woodward, T. (2009). Experienced teachers sometimes ask themselves the question, 'Am I ready to be a teacher educator... *The Teacher educator.* 20(2), 7-10.

Wiysahnyuy, L. F. (2019) "Professional Development of Teacher educators in the Higher Teacher Training College Bambili (Cameroon)". International Journal of Humanities Social Sciences and Education (IJHSSE). 6(7), 55-62. Available at http://dx.doi.org/10.20431/2349-0381.0607006. Accessed 20-03-2020