

In-Service Training: An Essential Element in the Professional Development of Teachers

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Abstract

This paper reports on the intervention of teaching and assisting teachers to acquire more knowledge to enhance their skills through the in-service training (INSET) and continuing professional development (CPD). It also presents a report on questionnaires administered to approximately 200 teachers in the basic schools. The questionnaires were to find out how often they participate in INSET/CPD programmes. Data for the study were collected from these teachers who are being offered the Diploma Sandwich Programme organised by the Teacher Education Division in Ghana. The emergent picture is that more than 60% of the teachers are in favour of getting more training, acquiring new attitudes and skills in order to help them excel in their teaching profession and sharing their gained information with other colleagues and pupils/students they teach. Finally, probable suggestions and recommendations are made to assist the authorities concerned to adapt the best strategy to organise and sustain the INSET/CPD of all categories of teachers not only in Ghana but also in other developing countries and in countries that seem to be already developed.

Abstrak

Artikel ini melaporkan intervensi pengajaran dan bantuan kepada guru untuk memperoleh lebih pengetahuan untuk meningkatkan kemahiran mereka melalui latihan dalam perkhidmatan dan pendidikan berterusan profesional. Ia juga membentangkan satu laporan terhadap soal selidik yang telah diedarkan kepada lebih kurang 200 orang guru di sekolah rendah. Soal selidik bertujuan untuk mengenal pasti kekerapan guru melibatkan diri di dalam kedua-dua program. Data kajian diperoleh daripada guru yang mengikuti program diploma bertindih yang dianjurkan oleh bahagian pendidikan guru di Ghana. Gambaran yang diperoleh menggambarkan lebih 60% guru bersetuju mereka mendapat lebih

latihan, memperoleh sikap dan kemahiran baru untuk membantu mereka maju di dalam profesion perguruan dan dalam masa yang sama berkongsi maklumat yang diperoleh dengan rakan-rakan lain dan pelajar mereka. Akhir sekali beberapa cadangan yang mungkin diketengahkan untuk membantu pihak yang berkaitan untuk memperkenalkan strategi yang terbaik untuk menganjurkan kedua-dua program latihan bukan sahaja di Ghana tapi juga di negara-negara lain.

Introduction

Every educational process must have qualified teachers as a portion of the ingredients essential for the goals of the process to be measured and achieved. The teachers responsible for the process must equally be accorded a very high priority. Generally, it could be argued that the nature of the teaching profession makes it expedient and imperative for all teachers to engage in continuing career-long professional training. One must not forget that specific needs and the ways in which they could be sorted out will differ according to circumstance, personal and professional histories and current dispositions. Teachers should therefore be encouraged to participate in a wide range of informal and formal activities which will help them in processes of review, renewal, enhancement of thinking and practice and more especially, being committed both in mind and heart.

One must not lose sight of the fact that one major function of all categories of teachers is to make sure that they inculcate in their students the need to study hard. Teachers should also instill in their students the drive for lifelong learning as this could go a long way to build the appropriate human resources for the nation. With this in mind, there is therefore the need for all teachers to show commitment in their job and enthusiasm for continuing professional development (CPD). This is because CPD will assist all teachers to keep abreast of changes in their own countries and in other parts of the world. Again, it would enable them to have an awareness of the curricula and instructional modes. CPD is essential because it can help maintain and enhance the quality of teachers and the tasks that are performed by the heads of the various institutions. It therefore includes, among other things, learning from experience, becoming competent and developing in classrooms and schools. It also includes the more formal

accelerated learning opportunities available through internally and externally generated in-service education and training activities.

Literature Review

The Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary gives a simple definition of teaching to be a situation where people are shown how to do something so that they will be able to do it themselves. It goes on to say that it is a process where people are given information about a particular subject or assisted to learn something. From the definition, one can say that this type of teaching can be carried out in or outside the classroom.

It could be argued that if teaching is to be done, it must be done well. To this end, Hargreaves (1997) contended that among other things, good teaching should involve emotional work. It should also be infused with pleasure, passion, creativity, challenge and joy. Throughout the world, people learn new things everyday. This makes teaching and learning go on all the time whether the teaching is done consciously or unconsciously, formally or informally. Approaches to teaching in the different parts of the world vary. For this reason, each country has its own way of going about it and training special people to impart valuable knowledge to its future leaders. Since the world has come to realise that it is when useful knowledge has been imparted to the inhabitants of a country that it would benefit from its manpower, people are officially trained to become teachers. It is in the light of this that in Ghana for instance, the Director general of the Ghana Education Service has challenged teachers to advance their teaching skills in order to cope with the rapid advancement in technology Bannerman-Mensah, (2008). He stressed that would enable them adopt a multi-dimensional approach to meet the various learning abilities of students and pupils. Teachers should note that with the recent technologies and its changes taking place all over the world, the school system should prepare its students to meet their personal needs and those of the community in which they live. For this reason, it could be argued that INSET for teachers should be such that in addition to teachers seeing themselves as imparting knowledge to pupils and students, they should play a guidance role and provide guidance for their pupils/students. Teachers should be motivated in order to excel during INSET and also in their everyday teaching. The essence of education is actually a holistic training of the individual's soul, body and mind to ensure that the

individual becomes useful to himself/herself, the society and wherever he/she finds himself/herself.

In-service Training (INSET) and Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

From time immemorial, the teaching profession has been in existence in all countries throughout the world. Currently, in both developed and developing countries, approaches to teaching have become more systematised and formalised. As a result, all professional teachers are expected to go through some initial training and induction. In this type of training, students are made to go through a particular type of programme which has the aim of achieving the set goals of the country's education system. This happens in both developed and the developing countries. To cite an example, in England and Wales, the INSET/CPD of teachers has been carried out for the various categories of students and teachers in training not only in basic and secondary schools but also in the universities. Thus as far back as 1902, training colleges provided professional training courses while the universities provided academic courses leading to degrees (Dent, 1977). The United States of America, Canada and New Zealand have their teacher training models. Again, in Bangladesh, the "education for all" policy yielded good results as enrolment in primary schools rose from 76% in 1991 to 97% in 2001. Other programmes related to quality teacher training were all geared towards the teaching of science and mathematics in some target areas; this eventually affected the teaching ability of both teacher trainers and school teachers in the country for the better.

Similarly, in Vietnam, the Lower Secondary Education Programme has the aim of making the programme more sustainable by improving the quality of teachers. This has been possible, among others, "through institutionalising regular in-service training and improving the effects of teacher training institutions in addressing teachers' needs". In Botswana, there is a growing demand for short courses to upgrade and refresh the skills of the workforce (www.tessaprogramme.org). All these are geared towards professional development. This includes the largely private, unaided learning from experience through which most teachers learn to survive, become competent and develop in classrooms and schools, as

well as informal development opportunities in schools and externally generated in-service education and training activities.

A closer look at the INSET programme by Manu (1993) suggested that in Ghana, INSET mostly focused on programme implementation and helping participants to pass their promotion examinations. Such programmes are mostly organised by the Ghana National Association of Teachers (GNAT) Teacher Education Division, the Institute of Education, the Institute of Educational Planning and Administration and the District and Regional Education Office. Other researchers, like Day (1993), assert that INSET/CPD consists of all natural learning experiences and those conscious and planned activities which are intended to be of direct or indirect benefit to the individual, group or school which contributes to the quality of education in the classroom.

Objective of the Study

The study was conducted to find out how often teachers participate in the INSET/CPD programmes in Ghana. It also attempted to find out some of the perceptions teachers have on INSET training and whether they deem it interesting and beneficial.

Research Methodology

The questionnaire and informal interviews were used to solicit information from the participants. This is because they were found to be the most appropriate and suitable to answer the research questions posed.

The Sampling Technique

The study had its target population to be all teachers in the basic and secondary schools who are still teaching. As such, the researchers selected a sample of 200 teachers (100 from the basic schools and 100 from the secondary schools).

The participants were selected randomly even though the researchers made sure that both sexes were incorporated. Again, the researchers realised that using random sampling would be much easier, more convenient and give similar results if the research was conducted with different teachers in the same programme.

Instruments Used

A twenty item questionnaire was designed for the teachers going through the diploma sandwich programme. Personal and demographic data were sought and placed at the beginning. Most of the items in this category were of the fixed alternative type. The participants were therefore given some alternatives and asked to select only one of them. The rest of the questions attempted to find out from the participants their own perceptions and personal experiences about the INSET/CPD of teachers within the current educational system. A five Likert Scale was provided for participants to tick only one of the answers on the scale. The Statistical Package for the Social Scientist (SPSS) programme was used as the researchers realised that it is a quick and reliable way of processing the data.

Analysis of Results

The research ethics were taken into consideration. As such, the researchers sought the informed consent of the principals of the institutions and the participants before administering the questionnaires. An aspect of the research on the literature concerning INSET/CPD courses was reviewed. The data were later analysed in the course of the research. The contents were coded to reflect the themes that had a bearing on the original questions.

Out of the 200 teachers, 100 questionnaires were given to males and 100 to females. This was to ensure some amount of gender balance. A total number of 88 males and 92 females responded. In all, 20 participants failed to hand in their responses to the questionnaires.

It is interesting to note that the majority of the participants were in the age group of 20–30 years whilst a few were above 45 years of age. About 90% had gone through the Certificate “A” 3 Year Post Secondary Programme successfully but had not embarked on any CPD since then. Only 40% of the population had attended an INSET/CPD programme within the last three years. Similarly, 24% of the total population had embarked on an INSET/CPD programme between 2002–2007 (4–6 years ago). Another 24% said the last time they attended an INSET/CPD programme was over 12 years.

On the whole, more than 70% of the participants said they agreed that INSET is beneficial and interesting and that it actually contributes to CPD. It came to light that 28% of the participants said they strongly disagreed that teachers should contribute financially towards their own professional development. Finally, 64% were in favour of seeking CPD till they went on retirement.

Discussion of Findings

Discussion

Teachers must be provided with growth opportunities if they are to be encouraged to meet learning needs effectively. If teachers are to develop, attention must be paid to their thinking, moral purposes and skills as change agents as well as their pedagogical and management skills and the leadership and cultural contexts in contexts in which they work. Again, if schools are to be part of the lifelong learning community, they have to be concerned with the lifelong development of all their members. The provision of time and opportunity as well as the dispositions and abilities of teachers to learn from and with one another inside the workplace and from others outside the school are key factors in CPD (Halstead and Reiss, 2003). In the absence of these, their abilities and capabilities would diminish. It could therefore be argued that if teachers are to develop, attention must be paid to their thinking, moral purposes and skills as agents, their pedagogical and management skills and the leadership and cultural contexts in which they work.

Suggestions and Recommendations

Continuous teacher development is crucial for any country that has the aim of improving on its manpower and capacity building. As such, INSET should be incorporated into the academic calendar in order to make teachers aware that there is the need for them to attend INSET which should actually seek to bring joy to the hearts of teachers as such training would assist them to be more committed to their jobs.

INSET could be linked to promotion and a wide range of incentives to help teachers appreciate what it can do for them and how they can benefit from it. As it is generally accepted that the way teachers impart knowledge

has an impact on pupils/students performance in school, there could be more INSET programmes to enable teachers to acquire more skills to improve their teaching performance.

It could be argued that the various boards of trustees should be able to take their position as consumers. In this vein, they would be able to look for efficient INSET providers who will supply training which will be more relevant and specific to the need of the teachers. This could be achieved if the boards are able to enquire what knowledge, skills and abilities are essential for their staff to enable them to do their job competently.

Many teachers have expressed concern about their net income being low as compared to other establishments not only in developing countries but also in some developed countries. There have also been limited chances for professional development. These, coupled with other factors, actually impede the idea of attracting excellent performers to the teaching profession and retaining those who are already in the profession. The government could focus on trying to improve the quality and intake of pre-service training by offering incentives and restructuring the career path. The INSET/CPD system needs to be properly structured.

Generally, it could be asserted that the INSET/CPD of teachers is beneficial not only to teachers but also to the school-going population. This is because apart from other issues, this assists teachers to share their knowledge and skills with other colleagues who may not have the chance of attending the programmes. It also enables teachers to improve their teaching performance. Teachers who attend INSET apply the knowledge gained and this helps transform their teaching in many ways. For instance, they are able to prepare more teaching learning materials, which they use to enhance their teaching. This in effect helps pupils/students understand their lessons better. It is accordingly in the interest of the school, the teachers and the students that more INSET should be planned and organised either by the head, the district education authorities or the government to give all teachers a fair chance of participation.

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the leadership and cultural contexts in which they work. Again, if schools are to be part of the lifelong learning community, they need to be concerned with the lifelong development of all their members.

Suggestions for Future Research

In future, it will be expedient to find out the general perceptions of teachers in secondary and tertiary institutions and how INSET/CPD can help transform teachers, students and the society at large.

Summary and Conclusion

This study has looked at what INSET/CPD is. It has also recognised how important it is in teacher education as well as in the life of the teacher, student and the nation in terms of the training given to teachers. It could be argued that all teachers need to attend INSET as part of their CPD.

Again, it is worth noting that INSET/CPD is an indispensable element in teacher education. This is because INSET/CPD can be used to improve the organisational structure, policies, physical facilities, and class or school routines. It is no wonder therefore that Dehlor (2007) asserts that 'there are strong demands for teachers to continuously update their knowledge and skills due to the introduction of new curricula, changes in the characteristics and learning needs of students, new research on teaching and learning and increased pressure for accountability of school teachers and school performance. During INSET, teachers could be introduced to new teaching concepts and practices. Again, teachers could be educated on desirable teaching and learning methods. Providers of INSET could continue to develop a variety of CPD activities. This would help teachers to acquire many new skills which they could in turn share with their fellow colleagues and also help the pupils/students improve on the knowledge they have already acquired. Again, INSET/CPD also enables teachers to build their own understanding of what constitutes high quality teaching to make their own judgement about what should be taught and how it should be delivered.

Finally, it could be argued that CPD should be seen as a long-term investment in developing teachers' skills and professionalism. As such,

there could be a national planning framework for CPD as this would make available a fair share of the programme to the majority of teachers. Additionally, it would help employers to acquaint themselves with the type of knowledge, skills and abilities that are important for their staff to enable them to do their job competently. It is a good idea that the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) is currently funding the three-year INSET programme in Ghana. Proper measures should therefore be taken to ensure the sustainability of the programme wherever it is undertaken. If INSET is to be highly effective in both developed and developing countries, more opportunities should be created for all categories of teachers to enable them develop and acquire the necessary knowledge and skills which they can impart to those they come into contact with. This is because INSET is the way forward to ensure that quality teaching is carried out in both the developed and the developing countries, of which Ghana is no exception.

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