

TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT'S ROLE IN SUPPORTING CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN MBEYA CITY COUNCIL, TANZANIA

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Abstract: This study explored teachers' perceptions of school management's role in supporting primary school teachers' Continuous Professional Development (TCPD) in Mbeya City Council, Tanzania. Guided by Transformational Leadership Theory, the study adopted a qualitative research approach with a phenomenological design to explore teachers' lived experiences and insights. A total of 20 participants, 15 teachers and 5 head teachers were purposely selected from five primary schools. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and documentary reviews of key policy frameworks, including the National TCPD Framework and MEWAKA reports. Thematic analysis, facilitated by MAXQDA software, was employed to analyse the data. Findings revealed that school management plays a crucial but inconsistent role in facilitating TCPD. While some supportive practices, such as informal mentorship and occasional collaboration with external organisations, were evident. Challenges, including inadequate training resources, limited funding, a lack of skilled facilitators, weak coordination mechanisms, and limited teacher motivation due to insufficient incentives, significantly restricted the successive implementation of CPD. The study concludes that while school management acknowledges the importance of TCPD, support is fragmented and underdeveloped. It highlights the need for stronger leadership, better resource allocation, and structured collaboration to improve implementation. These recommendations aim to enhance teacher professional growth and ultimately improve educational quality in Tanzania.

Keywords: Continuous Professional Development, Educational Quality, Primary School, School Management and Teachers.

I. INTRODUCTION

Quality education is fundamentally linked to the professional growth and continuous learning of teachers, whose competencies play a crucial role in shaping student achievement and overall school performance. Worldwide, Continuous Professional Development (CPD) has been acknowledged as a fundamental pillar for enhancing teacher quality, promoting innovation in teaching practices, and sustaining educational reforms (Chachage et al., 2023; OECD, 2019). Effective CPD initiatives empower teachers with up-to-date pedagogical knowledge, reflective practices, and adaptive skills necessary to address emerging classroom challenges and curriculum demands (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). However, the success of CPD programs is largely contingent on the support structures within institutions, particularly the leadership capacity and commitment demonstrated within schools (Day & Sammons, 2016; Harris & Jones, 2019). In the absence of strong leadership engagement, even the most well-intentioned policies may devolve into mere procedural compliance rather than fostering authentic professional growth.

In numerous developing contexts, including Tanzania, the necessity for robust teacher professional development has been consistently highlighted as a key strategy for enhancing educational quality (Komba et al., 2019; URT, 2021). The Tanzanian education system acknowledges the importance of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) through frameworks such as the National Teacher Continuous Professional Development (TCPD) and the MEWAKA initiative (Mpango wa Elimu kwa Walimu Kazini) as an in-service teacher education programme. These frameworks promote school-based, collaborative, and reflective approaches to teacher learning (URT, 2021), aiming to ensure that all educators participate in ongoing learning tailored to their specific teaching environments, thus enhancing instructional quality and student outcomes.

However, the implementation of these frameworks is often inconsistent. While the policy landscape is supportive, the actual practice of CPD faces constraints due to limited financial resources, heavy workloads, weak coordination, and insufficient leadership oversight (Komba et al., 2019; Rugambwa et al., 2022; Chachage et al., 2023). As a result, CPD activities in many Tanzanian schools are frequently viewed as isolated, top-down initiatives rather than integral components of continuous school improvement.

School management plays a vital role in shaping teachers' experiences and engagement with continuous professional development (CPD). The involvement of leadership is crucial in determining whether teachers perceive professional development as meaningful, accessible, and relevant to their work (Day et al., 2016; Mbuli et al., 2020). Effective school leaders cultivate a culture of professional learning by providing the necessary time, resources, and moral support for teachers' development. Conversely, when leaders take a passive or purely administrative approach, CPD often becomes sporadic, poorly coordinated, and disconnected from teachers' instructional needs (Dyosini, 2024; Komba et al., 2019). Transformational leadership, in particular, is linked to increased teacher motivation, collaboration, and reflective practice as it empowers educators to take ownership of their learning while aligning it with the school's objectives (Bass et al., 2006; Komba et al., 2019). In the absence of such leadership, professional learning tends to be compliance-driven and lacks a lasting impact on classroom practice.

Within the Tanzanian Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, headteachers are positioned as the frontline implementers of CPD policies and practices. They are expected to coordinate, monitor, and evaluate professional learning activities while ensuring that these align with both national directives and school improvement plans (URT, 2021; Kapinga et al., 2019). However, several studies have revealed that many school leaders face considerable challenges in executing this role effectively. Common issues include insufficient training in leadership and CPD facilitation, competing administrative duties, budget limitations, and a lack of clear accountability mechanisms (Swai, 2019; Komba et al., 2019; Lyanga, 2021). These constraints have resulted in fragmented implementation, with most schools relying heavily on externally organised workshops and donor-funded projects rather than developing internally sustained CPD initiatives.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the Tanzanian government's recognition of Teachers' CPD as a pivotal strategy for enhancing educational quality, its effective implementation faces challenges. Studies indicate that teachers' CPD initiatives are often inadequately supported and poorly coordinated at various administrative levels, including national, district, ward, and school levels (Chachage & Thakrar, 2023). This lack of support and coordination can lead to insufficient motivation among teachers to engage in professional development activities. A key aspect in addressing this challenge is the involvement of the school management team, which includes the head teacher and school department heads. They play a crucial role in supporting teachers' continuous professional development (CPD) by organising training sessions, providing necessary resources, and fostering a culture of ongoing learning. However, the efficacy of their initiatives is constrained by various factors, including inadequate funding and infrastructural limitations, which significantly affect the access of numerous primary school educators to professional development opportunities (Dyosini, 2024).

Understanding teachers' perceptions of school management's role in supporting CPD is crucial, as these perceptions impact their motivation and engagement in professional development. Positive perceptions can boost teachers' commitment to learning, while negative ones may lead to disengagement. Thus, assessing these perceptions is essential for identifying strategies, addressing CPD barriers, and informing policies to enhance primary education quality in Tanzania.

Research Question

This study is guided by the following questions:

- i. What are the roles of school management in supporting primary school teachers' continuous professional development in Tanzania?
- ii. What strategies do school management employ to support primary school teachers' continuous professional development initiatives?
- iii. What challenges are faced by school management in implementing teachers' continuous professional development?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Effective teacher professional development is widely recognised as a key driver of improved teaching quality and student learning outcomes. Continuous Professional Development (CPD), as conceptualised in global education policy, emphasises sustained, reflective, and collaborative learning that strengthens teachers' professional knowledge and classroom practices (OECD, 2019; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Scholars agree that CPD is most effective when it is school-based, contextually relevant, and supported by strong instructional leadership (Day et al., 2016; Hardman et al., 2020). However, in many developing countries, including Tanzania, systemic and institutional barriers continue to impede meaningful teacher professional learning (Komba et al., 2019; Komba et al., 2019).

In Tanzania, the Teacher Continuous Professional Development (TCPD) framework and the MEWAKA (Mpango wa Elimu kwa Walimu Kazini) initiative have been established to enhance in-service teacher learning and align CPD activities with school improvement efforts (URT, 2021; URT, 2022). These frameworks advocate for school-based, collaborative, and reflective learning practices. However, research shows that their implementation has been inconsistent, primarily due to limited funding, inadequate coordination, and insufficient leadership capacity (Kapinga et al., 2019; Swai, 2019). Many schools rely heavily on externally organised seminars or donor-supported training, which tend to be sporadic and often disconnected from the actual challenges teachers face in the classroom (Rugambwa et al., 2022; Dyosini, 2024). As a result, CPD is frequently perceived as a compliance-driven activity rather than an ongoing process of professional learning.

Leadership engagement has emerged as a decisive factor in determining the success or failure of CPD programmes. Studies consistently demonstrate that effective school leaders provide direction, allocate resources, and foster a professional culture that values continuous learning (Day & Sammons, 2016; Komba et al., 2019). Transformational leadership, in particular, has been linked to enhanced teacher motivation, collaboration, and innovation (Bass et al., 2006; Komba et al., 2019). Conversely, weak or fragmented leadership often leads to minimal teacher participation, poor coordination of CPD activities, and limited transfer of knowledge to classroom practice (Lyanga, 2021; Komba et al., 2019). This leadership gap underscores the importance of equipping headteachers with the managerial and instructional skills necessary to facilitate CPD effectively.

Numerous studies conducted in Tanzania highlight the institutional and contextual challenges that hinder effective Teacher Continuous Professional Development (TCPD). Factors such as heavy workloads, insufficient time allocation, and poor communication channels often impede teachers' full engagement in Continuous Professional Development (CPD) activities (Chachage et al., 2023; Komba et al., 2019). Additionally, the absence of adequate incentives and recognition for participation diminishes teachers' intrinsic motivation to seek professional learning opportunities (Saleem et al., 2021; Dyosini, 2024). In the absence of sufficient resources, structured planning, and supportive leadership, CPD risks becoming fragmented and unsustainable. The limited capacity of school management to integrate CPD into regular school operations further exacerbates these challenges.

The theoretical framework that informs much of this literature is Transformational Leadership Theory (Bass et al., 2006), which articulates how leaders can inspire their followers to prioritise collective improvement over individual interests. When applied in the educational context, this theory posits that headteachers who demonstrate vision, intellectual stimulation, and foster supportive relationships create an environment that is conducive to ongoing professional learning (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006). Within Tanzanian primary schools, such leadership is essential for establishing CPD as a shared responsibility rather than merely an externally imposed obligation.

Despite policy reforms and theoretical insights, significant knowledge gaps persist. Empirical studies exploring teachers' and headteachers' lived experiences with TCPD implementation at the school level remain limited. Most available research focuses on national policy frameworks or quantitative analyses of CPD participation rates, with little qualitative exploration of leadership practices, coordination challenges, and motivational factors influencing teacher engagement (Komba et al., 2019, 2019; Komba et al., 2019). This gap highlights the need for contextually grounded evidence that examines how school leadership practices shape teachers' perceptions, participation, and professional growth within the TCPD framework.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research approach to explore teachers' and headteachers' perceptions of school management's role in supporting Continuous Professional Development (CPD) in primary schools within Mbeya City Council, Tanzania. A qualitative, phenomenological design was used to capture participants' lived experiences and to understand how leadership practices influence the implementation of school-based professional learning under the Teacher Continuous Professional Development (TCPD) framework. The study population included primary school teachers and headteachers in the Mbeya City Council. Using purposive sampling, twenty participants were selected—fifteen classroom teachers and five headteachers—from five public primary schools representing varied school environments. The sample ensured inclusion of participants directly engaged in TCPD activities and reflected differences in school size, leadership experience, and CPD participation levels.

Data collection involved semi-structured interviews and documentary reviews. The interview guide featured open-ended questions addressing leadership involvement, coordination, motivation, and resource allocation in CPD. Interviews were conducted in Kiswahili, lasted 45 to 60 minutes, and were recorded with consent. Transcripts were translated into English and analysed thematically. Documentary data from MEWAKA reports, staff meeting minutes, and school strategic plans complemented the interviews, providing evidence on how CPD is organised and monitored at the school level. Data were analysed thematically following Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach. Repeated reading, coding, and theme development were undertaken to identify patterns that aligned with the study objectives and theoretical framework. Triangulation of interview and document data enhanced analytical rigour and interpretation accuracy.

Trustworthiness was established through Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria. Credibility was ensured via member checking and data triangulation, dependability through detailed methodological descriptions, and confirmability via reflexive journaling. Ethical standards were upheld by obtaining research clearance, securing informed consent, and maintaining participant confidentiality through the use of pseudonyms. While the study provided rich qualitative insights, the findings are context-specific and not statistically generalisable. Nonetheless, methodological consistency, triangulated evidence, and contextual grounding enhance the dependability and transferability of the results to similar educational environments in Tanzania and beyond.

IV. RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This section presents and interprets the study's findings, which explored teachers' perceptions of the role of school management in supporting Continuous Professional Development (CPD) in primary schools within Mbeya City Council, Tanzania. The results are organised around key themes derived from interviews and document reviews. The discussion integrates these findings with existing literature and the theoretical foundation of Transformational Leadership Theory (Bass, 1999; Bass et al., 2006).

Supportive Strategies Employed by School Management

The study revealed that school management plays a pivotal role in facilitating teachers' professional growth. Head teachers reported actively mobilising resources, promoting teamwork, and nurturing professional learning communities. Teachers indicated that their head teachers frequently organised internal workshops, discussion sessions, and peer observation activities aimed at enhancing teaching practices. One teacher noted, "Our head teacher consistently encourages us to share insights gained from workshops with one another so that everyone can benefit."

These initiatives fostered an environment of mutual learning, where teachers engaged in ongoing reflection and the exchange of ideas. School management also bolstered continuing professional development (CPD) through mentoring and coaching programs. Experienced teachers often provided guidance to newly appointed staff or those facing instructional challenges. Moreover, school leaders collaborated with the Ministry of Education's MEWAKA framework to ensure alignment with national CPD policies.

These findings suggest that head teachers functioned as facilitators rather than merely as supervisors. Their leadership inspired collective engagement and ownership among teachers. Transformational Leadership Theory underscores this approach, highlighting the importance of intellectual stimulation and individualised consideration (Bass et al., 2006). The participatory leadership styles exhibited by head teachers promoted collaboration and motivation, reinforcing previous evidence that inclusive leadership enhances the sustainability of teacher development programmes (Komba et al., 2019; Mensah et al., 2016).

Challenges Affecting CPD Implementation

Despite the positive efforts, several challenges were identified as barriers to effective CPD implementation. These included inadequate resources, a shortage of skilled facilitators, time constraints, low motivation, and weak coordination and communication.

The shortage of financial, material, and infrastructural resources has emerged as a persistent challenge in education. Teachers reported that while Continuous Professional Development (CPD) sessions are often scheduled, they are not always executed due to limited funding. Some schools lack essential teaching and learning materials, while others are unable to afford transportation or refreshments for workshop participants. One teacher noted, "At times, we are instructed to attend CPD sessions, but there is no funding for materials or transport." This lack of resources hampers schools' ability to conduct regular and effective training. Head teachers confirmed their heavy reliance on government support or external partners, which is often delayed or insufficient. The absence of a dedicated CPD budget restricts schools' autonomy in implementing professional learning programs.

Furthermore, a shortage of qualified CPD facilitators further complicates implementation. Teachers explained that while external trainers occasionally visit, these sessions are irregular and lack depth. As a result, many schools depend on internal resource persons who may not have advanced training skills. This gap diminishes the quality and effectiveness of professional development. Head teachers expressed concern that without ongoing training for facilitators, sustaining CPD efforts will remain a challenge.

Teachers also reported difficulties in balancing classroom duties, administrative tasks, and CPD commitments. The heavy workload, large class sizes, and frequent non-teaching assignments leave them with little time for professional learning. One teacher articulated, "Our schedules are packed from morning to evening; sometimes training occurs during class hours, making attendance difficult." Head teachers acknowledged that limited time is a common obstacle, as CPD sessions often vie for attention with teaching responsibilities.

Another significant challenge identified was low teacher motivation. Many participants perceived CPD as compulsory rather than beneficial. They cited the lack of tangible incentives, such as promotions, recognition, or financial allowances. Some teachers noted that even when they attended training, they received no certificates or follow-up recognition, leading to the perception that CPD offered minimal personal or professional benefit. Head teachers also observed that without motivation, teachers were less likely to apply new knowledge or attend future sessions. The disconnect between CPD participation and career advancement further diminished enthusiasm.

Weak coordination among stakeholders emerged as a critical barrier as well. Teachers reported poor communication regarding CPD schedules, objectives, and follow-up activities. Information was often shared at short notice, leading to confusion and low attendance. Documentary evidence from MEWAKA reports supported this observation, showing irregular feedback mechanisms between schools and district education offices. Head teachers indicated that coordination among schools, ward education officers, and training facilitators was inconsistent. This fragmentation reduced the effectiveness and accountability of the programs.

Discussion

The findings highlight both the potential and limitations of school management in fostering teacher professional development within Tanzanian primary schools. Overall, head teachers exhibited a strong commitment to facilitating Continuous Professional Development (CPD) through resource mobilisation, mentoring, and collaboration. These practices embody the core principles of transformational leadership, which emphasise motivation, intellectual advancement, and a shared vision (Bass et al., 2006).

Leadership as a Catalyst for Professional Learning

The participatory and facilitative approaches employed by head teachers are consistent with prior research that connects effective leadership to teacher development. Komba et al. (2019) noted that inclusive decision-making and distributed leadership enhance teachers' sense of ownership in continuing professional development (CPD) activities. Similarly, Mensah et al. (2016) found that professional learning flourishes when leaders cultivate environments of mutual trust and reflective practice. This current study reinforces the idea that school management can serve as a catalyst for sustainable professional learning by fostering collaboration and mentoring within educational institutions.

Systemic Constraints on CPD Implementation

The ongoing challenges highlighted reveal the systemic limitations of the existing Continuing Professional Development (CPD) framework. Insufficient resources and a lack of skilled facilitators reflect broader structural weaknesses in the implementation of educational policies (Kapinga et al., 2019; Komba et al., 2019). Even the most motivated leaders find it difficult to maintain effective CPD without adequate funding. Realising the full potential of transformational leadership necessitates supportive conditions, including autonomy, infrastructure, and robust support systems (Chassels et al., 2009).

The shortage of trained facilitators further undermines school-based capacity for professional learning. Research by Dyosini (2024) and Chachage et al. (2023) confirms that reliance on external trainers poses challenges to long-term sustainability. The current findings indicate that enhancing internal facilitator capacity through ongoing mentoring and peer coaching could help address this gap.

Workload, Motivation, and the Culture of Professional Learning

Workload pressures and a lack of incentives continue to be significant demotivators for teachers. Research by Saleem et al. (2021) and Mufti (2024) supports the idea that teacher motivation is crucial for the success of Continuing Professional Development (CPD). In Tanzania, where teachers often manage large class sizes and operate with limited resources, the absence of incentives further discourages their participation in CPD programs. Transformational leaders can help address this issue by recognising teachers' efforts and fostering a sense of purpose and achievement.

However, motivation alone cannot overcome structural barriers. Policies need to include reward mechanisms, such as certification, promotion, or public recognition, to encourage participation. Implementing these measures would not only enhance teachers' commitment but also help institutionalise CPD as a valued aspect of their professional lives.

The Role of Communication and Coordination

Weak communication and coordination were identified as factors undermining programme implementation. This aligns with the findings of Rugambwa et al. (2022) and Galdames-Calderón (2023), who emphasise that effective professional learning necessitates a consistent flow of information and ongoing follow-up. From a leadership standpoint, transformational leaders are expected to articulate clear visions and foster open communication channels. The results suggest that while head teachers recognised the significance of communication, systemic inefficiencies often hindered their ability to coordinate effectively with higher authorities.

Synthesis and Implications

The overall findings highlight a tension between visionary leadership practices at the school level and structural barriers at the systemic level. School management displayed enthusiasm and a strong commitment to fostering teachers' growth; however, limited resources, inadequate coordination, and ineffective motivation mechanisms hindered their efforts. Transformational leadership theory offers a valuable perspective on this dynamic, suggesting that while leaders can inspire and influence, their effectiveness is contingent upon supportive organisational conditions (Bass et al., 2006).

To achieve sustainable, continuous professional development (CPD), policy interventions must bolster school-based autonomy, ensure sufficient funding, and institutionalise frameworks for motivation and recognition. The Ministry of Education, in collaboration with local authorities, should enhance resource allocation, cultivate pools of trained facilitators, and establish structured communication systems among schools, district offices, and MEWAKA coordinators.

V. CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that school management plays a pivotal role in facilitating Continuous Professional Development (CPD) for primary school teachers in Mbeya City Council, Tanzania. Head teachers actively employed strategies such as mentoring, peer learning, and resource mobilisation to support teacher growth. However, the implementation of CPD initiatives was constrained by systemic challenges, including inadequate resources, a shortage of skilled facilitators, time pressures, limited teacher motivation, and weak coordination and communication.

The findings highlight the crucial importance of aligning leadership practices with supportive structures and policies to sustain efforts in professional development. When transformational leadership is combined with sufficient resources and effective communication, it fosters a culture of continuous learning, enhances teacher motivation, and improves instructional quality.

These results have significant implications for educational policy and practice. Policymakers and school leaders should prioritise the allocation of resources, develop internal facilitator capacity, integrate continuous professional development (CPD) into school schedules, and establish incentive mechanisms to bolster teacher engagement. Future research could explore the long-term effects of school-based CPD on student learning outcomes and the role of technology in addressing resource and time constraints. By tackling these systemic and motivational challenges, Tanzanian primary schools can create an environment where CPD initiatives lead to sustained professional growth for teachers and enhanced student achievement.

The study recommends for proactive school leadership, adequate resource allocation, structured mentorship programs, teacher incentives, effective communication, and collaboration with external stakeholders to enhance Teacher Continuing Professional Development (TCPD). Additionally, future research should investigate regional variations, long-term impacts, ICT-based professional development, comparative leadership models, and teachers' personal barriers to participation. This will help inform inclusive and sustainable professional development policies and practices in Tanzania.

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