

PILOT RESEARCH PROJECT OF THE RESEARCH DEPARTMENT
OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN DEMOCRATIC TEACHERS UNION
TRAINING NEEDS ANALYSIS INSTRUMENT FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR SOUTH AFRICAN DEMOCRATIC TEACHERS' UNION MEMBERSHIP

Research Conceptualization

The question of teacher professional development has recently become a priority for government, teacher unions and other educational organizations in a quest to improve their education system. The South African educational system has undergone dramatic changes in the past decade, thereby impacting heavily on the roles and work of teachers in the classroom (Phiri, 2011). According to Villegas-Reimers (2003), educational reforms and teacher professional development share a symbiotic relationship and must go hand in hand for either both to work well. Thus, according to him, reforms without teacher development or vice0versa are a recipe for disaster, and South Africa has learnt this in a hard way.

Major educational reforms, which began with curriculum change, were introduced without adequate teacher professional development or plan for it. As a result, most teachers misunderstood and misinterpreted what they were supposed to do in this new educational dispensation (Harley & Wedekind, 2004). The Curriculum 2000 Review Committee also indicated that there was little effective training to induct teachers into the thinking of the new education system and identified insufficient teacher induction and training as one of the reasons for poor implementation of the curriculum (Chisolm, 2000). Besides, academics and researchers (Jansen, 2001; Maile & Makole, 2004; Bloch, 2010) alike have commented on the levels of complexity undertaken in South Africa, and that they are above and beyond the average level of teacher competencies.

South Africa underwent a complete overhaul of its education system, appearing to render useless most of what teachers knew and demanding new types of skills, values, knowledge levels and beliefs. It was a major departure from what used to be and it meant teachers had to re-learn almost everything. It is no wonder that teachers' professional development is today one of South Africa's educational goals for the success of its educational reforms. As Borko (2000) argues "the change in classroom practices demanded by the reform vision ultimately rely on teachers"

The South African department of education realized the centrality of teacher learning in achieving the desired change in education when it envisioned 'a teacher as a lifelong learner' to play its multiple roles (Jansen, 2001). It is therefore undisputable that teachers have to do a great deal of learning to change their beliefs and values about teaching and learning. They need to acquire new knowledge in pedagogy, content and skills as well as change their view about learners to achieve intents of the new education reforms. Guskey (2002) contends that schools can be no better than the teacher learning and professional development in both the attainment of reform goals and the improvement of teaching and learning.

South Africa presents a challenging case with its wide unequal school system. For the majority of poor schools, teachers are the best resources learners have towards a better education (McNeil, 2004). Thus, teacher professional development holds an important key for such learners. Many measures and structures are in place to provide teachers with professional development but these

are seldom utilized. For instance, the Sector Education and Training Authorities (EDTPSETA) was specifically set up to assist with better delivery of education, training and development of teachers. So was the Education Labour Relations Council's (ELRC) 2000, resolution 1 which makes provisions for 80 hours of teacher professional development in a year (Ryan, 2007) and the ELRC Integrated Quality Management resolution 1 of 2003. However, there is also a dearth of capacities to support teachers in learning their new roles and practices which makes the ETDP SETA and ELRC resolutions in many school but white elephants. The little professional development that teachers receive is conducted in a way that makes it, at best, a small gain for teachers, but at worst, greater confusion for teachers as they come out of these activities with more questions than answers.

Little (2001, cited in Villegas-Remers, 2003) analyses the professional development provided to United States of America (USA) teachers and this could be applied to what happens in South Africa. She argues that officials conceive of professional development as a process of inspiration and goal setting with already set goals and objectives of change, and those professional development activities are mainly used to motivate teachers to strive to meet them. However, these, activities rarely help teachers in terms of what and how they are supposed to do it, leaving them at the very same level of knowledge and competencies as they had before undergoing this professional development. Professional development programs more often use to get out of school, leaving teachers to look for anything that can help them to cope in their classrooms.

it is also important to recognize the fact that, over the years, educational change in South Africa has been marred by teacher-bashing, in which educational ills are attributed to some problems with the teachers and their teacher unions (Jansen). But considering that maintaining a positive stance during a change process is crucial to improvement, such improvement is only possible if people (teachers in this case) are motivated, individually and collectively, to put in the effort necessary to get results (Levin & Fullan, 2008). This view is rooted in the fact that teacher-bashing demotivates teachers as they feel attacked at the outset, thus pushing them to go on the defensive. When things get to this point, it is very difficult to engage with teachers for any meaningful improvement. this, then, precludes a crucial condition for authentic improvement, as Danielson & Hotchschild (1998, cited in Levin & Fullan, 2008:293) points out: "changing practices across many schools will only happen when teachers... see the need and commit to making the effort to improve daily practices".

Although recent statistics (DoE, 2009) reveal that 94% of South African teachers are qualified and most of them are Africans. However, the dramatic improvement in educator qualifications over the past 20 years does not appear to have had a visible impact on learner performance.

Research Statement

Based on this conceptualization of the failure of the Department of Basic Education (DoBE) to provide meaningful support to teachers, South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU), which has majority of membership (over 250 000) in the teaching sector, thereby being a major stakeholder, and because of the fact that its members are criticized for lack of professional ethics, intends to conduct a research project on teacher professional development in response to educational reforms. This research project is unique in the sense that SADTU members will be interviewed through focus group discussions and questionnaires so as to solicit their views and experiences as what contribute to relevant professional development that will enhance their teaching practices, especially those in poor and so-called underperforming schools. This is also based on the fact that SADTU regards continuing professional development of its members as an essential prerequisite for improved teaching and learning in South African schools (SADTU NEC, 2011). This does not come as a surprise considering the fact that the country has just revamped its education system through the National Curriculum Review (DoBE, 2010) and many research studies continue to reveal teacher incompetence or lack of content and pedagogic knowledge as the root cause of poor school performance in the country (Fleisch, 2007; Hoadley, 2007). The purpose of this research project is to develop a teacher needs analysis through data collection techniques such as focus group discussions and research questionnaire that will provide sufficient evidence to guide SADTU to implement teacher professional development programs for its members.

In order to raise education standards, there is a need for teachers to learn continuously and develop desired beliefs, attitudes, skills and values required. The new education system envisions teachers who are professional and proactive in identifying their areas of development needs. However, the dominant forms of continuing teacher professional development, such as fragmented department-driven workshops, seminars and university courses, have been criticized as ineffective in improving instructional quality (Schwille & Dembele, 2007). With the ushering in of a very different curriculum system, there is a dearth of system support capacities to help teachers who are also being pressurized by bureaucratic demands which do not create conducive conditions for teachers to engage in professional development (PD) activities; a realization that department-driven TD has been shown often not to be as effective as teacher-driven. It is therefore necessary for SADTU to focus its research on professional development programmes that are relevant to the needs of teachers in poor communities and underperforming schools.

Research design

This research project will adopt a qualitative research design which is a research technique which seeks insight into the problem through verbal data gathered rather than scaled, calibrated measurement. The aim of the qualitative research design is to gather an in-depth understanding of human behaviour and reasons such of such behavior (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Qualitative_research). For the purpose of this research project, the researcher aims to gather information based on the views, opinions and experiences of teachers in schools in poor communities and so-called underperforming schools about what constitute relevant professional development programmes to improve their classroom practices.

Frankel & Kelly (2000) are of the view that qualitative research is holistic in the sense that it attempts to provide a contextual understanding of the complex interrelationships of causes and consequences that affect human behavior. This research will strive to do as such by investigating the perceptions, views and experiences of teachers in poor schooling communities and so-called underperforming schools about contribute to relevant professional development that will enhance their teaching practices. In doing so, it will seek to avoid both the deliberate manipulation of variables and study the attitudes or indicators as variables isolated from the wider totality. Vulliamy, Lewin & Stephens (1990) concur by highlighting that a further consequence of these holistic emphases is that qualitative research tends to incorporate a wide variety of research techniques, even within one research project.

The strength of this qualitative research design is its ability to provide complex textual descriptions of how participants experience a given research issue. Qualitative research methods are also effective in identifying intangible factors, such as social norms, socioeconomic status, gender roles, ethnicity, and religion whose role in the research issue may not be readily apparent. In this research project, qualitative research methods will assist in identifying what constitute relevant professional development programmes based on the views and experiences of teacher in poor schooling communities and so-called underperforming schools. It will seek to answer questions such as what is professionalism; what is teacher professional development; what constitute positive learning and teaching environment, etc.

Research Methods

The research method that will be employed to collect data in this research project is focus group interviews and questionnaires. The qualitative methods investigate why and how of decision making, not just what, where and when. Focused group interviews of five teachers per group will be administered in eight schools, two primary with good aggregate results, two primary schools with poor aggregate results, two secondary schools with good aggregate results and two secondary schools with poor aggregate results in three SADTU regions per province in Mpumalanga, Limpopo, KwaZulu- Natal and Free State provinces. The focus group interviews will be based on open-ended questionnaires where the researcher will allow diversity in

responses as well as the capacity to adapt to new developments and issues. The focus group interviews will involve the researcher facilitating a small group discussion between selected participants on a particular topic. The researcher will use a tape recorder where the permission of participants will be solicited. This will allow the research to report accurately the views of the participants as the tape recorder will allow him to listen again so that he does not misinterpret the views of the research participants. In order to verify information and to get additional information, the researcher will provide participants with a questionnaire that they will have to fill after the focus group discussions. The advantage of using questionnaires to verify information provided by the focused group is that they are more objective than interviews. It is also quick to collect information using questionnaires as the researcher will collect them immediately after the participants have filled them in.

Research validation

A central issue in qualitative research is validity (also known as credibility and/or dependability). There are many different ways of establishing validity, including member check, interviewer corroboration, conformability and balance among others. In order to ensure reliability and validity of this research project, the researcher will also conduct one on one interview with principals in the identified schools to solicit their views so as to maintain objectivity of the research project. The researcher will only modify the research questions so that they can be relevant to school principals who are in different occupational positions and performing different tasks in the schools from those of the teachers.

Yvonna (1994) cautions about the importance of maintaining reliability and validity within the qualitative research by stating that it has been an exception rather than the rule, that a qualitative research report includes a discussion of reliability and validity. According to Kvale (1993) the lack of such a discussion seems to indicate that there seems to be no problem of reliability and validity. This, of course, is not true. The questions of validity and reliability within research are just as important within qualitative as within quantitative methods. As a result of this challenge, the researcher will ensure validity and reliability by interviewing both school teachers and principals to get diverse views, opinions and experiences so as to have a balanced judgment in his analysis and interpretation. The researcher will use the questionnaire to augment for information that will have been solicited in the focus group interviews.

One advantage of qualitative methods in exploratory research such as this one is that it uses open-ended questions and probing gives participants the opportunity to respond in their own words, rather than forcing them to choose from fixed responses, as quantitative methods do. In this research project, focus group discussion will allow participants to be free to state their views and opinions as there are not wrong and right answers. Their views will be probed further through follow-up questions so as to develop a full understanding of the research problem and challenges they are faced with. The researcher will ask why or how. As a result, the researcher

must listen carefully to what participants say, engage them according to their personalities and styles, and use probes to encourage them to elaborate on their answers.

Research Ethics

Nkwi, Nyamongo & Ryan (2001) advise that whenever we conduct research on people, the well-being of research participants must be our top priority. The research question is of secondary importance. This means that if a choice must be made between doing harm to a participant and doing harm to the research, it is the research that is sacrificed. In this research project, the researcher will abide by the ethics of research by asking an informed consent of participants to participate. He will inform the participants that their participation should be voluntary and not coerced and that the information of the research will be confidential and will not be disclosed to a third party. This a mechanism for ensuring that participants understand what it means to participate in a particular research study so that they can decide in a conscious, deliberate way that they voluntary participate in the research project. The researcher will abide by the principle of respect for participants whereby he will make a commitment to the participants to ensure autonomy. The dignity of all research participants will be respected. Adherence to this principle will ensure that participants are not used simply to achieve the research objectives.

Limitation of the research study

The limitation of this study is that only a few schools will participate. The reason is that this is only a pilot study and therefore intends to investigate a particular challenge of staff development and whether it really exists. Based on the severity of the research problem, a large scale research study to cover all the provinces will therefore be recommended. The researcher is therefore aware that the result of the study will not be representative of all schooling sector, however, they will provide an indicator as to the existence of the research problem. The data analysis from this pilot study will further guide the research process. The importance of this study is that it will serve as a basis to guide in the development of the intervention strategies aimed at improving the level of teaching professionalism amongst SADTU members in schools in poor communities and so-called underperforming schooling based on the skills gaps being identified.

APPENDIX A

Questionnaire for Focus Group Discussion with Teachers in Primary and Secondary Schools

TEACHER BIOGRAPHY AND PERSONAL INFORMATION

Section A

Name & Surname :.....

Age:.....

Gender:.....

Qualification:.....

Teaching Experience:.....

Occupational Position:.....

Current Studies:.....

1. Tell us about your life before joining teaching profession.
2. Where did you grow and school you went to?
3. What influence your career choice?
4. Where did you train to be a teacher?
5. What kind of social or political life did you have?
6. What was your family situation then?

CAREER INFORMATION

Section B

7. How did you get to be a teacher?
8. Why did you choose this particular school?
9. How was your initial experience in the teaching profession?
10. Did your life experiences before teaching assist you to adjust in the teaching profession?
Why and how?
11. What does it mean to you to be a teacher?
12. What does influence do you have in your community as a teacher? What role do you play
in the community, e.g. church, social club/society, etc.
13. How would you describe your school community?
14. What motivates you as a teacher?

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT INFORMATION

Section C

15. What is your understanding of a profession?
16. Is teaching a profession? If yes why? If no why?
17. Have you even been exposed to professional development as a teacher? Why?
18. What professional development programmes have you been exposed to?
19. What value did they add in your classroom practice?
20. Did they assist you to become a better teacher? If yes, how? If no, why?

TEACHERS UNION INFORMATION

Section D

21. When did you join SADTU?
22. Why did you join SADTU as a teachers' organization?
23. What motivated you to join SADTU?
24. What professional development training have you been exposed to in SADTU?
25. Did they benefit you? If yes, how? If no, why?
26. Is the union a better organization to provide professional development for its members? If yes, why? If no, why?
27. What professional development can you suggest to improve your classroom teaching?
28. Is there any suggestion that you can make to the union to assist you to become a better teacher?

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION

APPENDIX B**Questionnaire for School Principals**

1. What motivated you to choose a teaching profession?
2. How many years did you work as a teacher before being appointed as a principal?
3. How were you appointed as a principal?? Elaborate. What skills are you expected to have? Elaborate?
4. What is your view about teaching as a profession?
5. What makes a teacher to be a professional?
6. Is your teaching staff involved in professional development?
7. What constitute a relevant professional development based on your school situation?
8. How do you motivate your teaching staff for professional development?
9. Are you satisfied about professional development training that your teaching staffs engage in? If yes, why? If no, why?
10. What role can teachers' unions play in professional development of their members?

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION