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# Teacher Professional Development in Tanzania: Challenges and Opportunities

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## Abstract

This chapter is about teacher professional development in Tanzania. The authors have examined the current status of teacher professional development in Tanzania, focusing on predominant perspectives on the concept and provision modalities. In addition, the authors have identified challenges facing teacher professional development in Tanzania, most of which seem to be systemic. The challenges include lack of explicit policy and guidelines for teacher professional development, limited knowledge on teacher professional development among teacher professional development stakeholders, predominance of traditional approach to teacher professional development, and ineffective organization of teacher professional development activities. It is, thus, concluded that a number of opportunities are available for effective teacher professional development in Tanzania. These include strengthening the available institutions responsible for teacher professional development, making use of different teacher professional development providers available in the country to promote professional development activities for teachers through a harmonized scheme and capitalizing on the use of different communication networks and the national optic fiber to promote self-directed teacher professional development.

**Keywords:** teacher, professional development, challenges, opportunities, Tanzania

## 1. Introduction

There are different ways to define teacher professional development. According to [1], teacher professional development could be conceived as an essential mechanism for enhancing teachers' knowledge and instructional practices through carefully designed programs. In the same light, [2] views teacher professional development as a process through which teachers learn, learn how to learn, and transform their knowledge, competences, and skills into practice, with a view of enhancing students' achievement of learning outcomes. Other scholars, such as [3], perceive professional development for teachers as a key vehicle through which teaching is improved, hence improving student achievement. In the context of this chapter, teacher professional development entails all learning experiences which are geared towards developing teachers' knowledge, skills, competences, and other attributes in order to enable them cope with educational reforms and facilitate achievement of learning outcomes during teaching and learning.

It is generally accepted among teacher educators, scholars, and researchers that teacher professional development is an important component for the success of

any reforms intended for an education system. All countries around the globe have forms of teacher professional development. The reason for having such initiative is that teachers face challenges resulting from changes taking place in education systems. The changes range from subject matter knowledge and pedagogical approaches to the use of technology in teaching and learning. Thus, teachers need to be developed continuously in order to keep them updated on both national and international trends in education.

Like any other countries, Tanzania has, for many years, strived to conduct in-service teacher professional development in order to have the teachers aligned to the emerging changes in school curricula and advances in science and technology, especially the use of information and communication technology in teaching and learning.

In this chapter, the authors analyze teacher professional development in Tanzania, focusing on the current status, challenges, and available opportunities.

## 2. Teacher professional development in Tanzania

In Tanzania, teachers are trained either in teacher education colleges or higher education institutions. Teacher education colleges train teachers at the levels of certificate and diploma, while higher education institutions, including universities and university colleges, train teachers at Bachelor's degree level and beyond. Teachers from both paths are employed to work in schools and colleges where continuing professional development is required for enhancing their knowledge, skills, and competences. The following subsection highlights the status of teacher professional development in Tanzania.

### 2.1 Status of teacher professional development in Tanzania

A quick scan of the status of teacher professional development in Tanzania reveals two perspectives: First, the idea of teacher professional development seems to be understood mainly in terms of aligning teachers with changes in school curricula. Teachers are subjected to teacher professional development programmes only when changes have been made in the school curricula. This implies that, at other times, teachers do not have opportunities for teacher professional development. Experience from authors of this text—who also worked as school teachers in Tanzania for some years—shows that, in some places, teachers have not attended any teacher professional development programmes for a good number of years. This is mainly due to lack of opportunities and motivation as one of the primary school teachers in Morogoro, Tanzania, had this to state:

*“...I was employed 6 years ago to work in this school. Since then, I have never attended any professional development programme. My college mates, who work in other schools, told me that they face the same challenge...”*

Regarding motivation for professional development, another teacher, from a secondary school in Iringa, Tanzania, stated that:

*“... There is no motivation for taking part in professional development programmes. I do not find any difference between those who get the opportunities to attend teacher professional development programmes and those who do not. For example, attending teacher professional development programmes is not a requirement for promotion. Why should I bother?”*

Quotations from the two teachers imply that teachers are neither professionally bound nor motivated to attend teacher professional development programmes. Something worth noting is that even the self-directed form of professional development is not only patchily practiced in schools but also uncoordinated.

Aligning teachers with changes in school curricula is a commendable thing. However, it is not supposed to be a one-shot event—conducted only when changes have been introduced in the school curricula. In the intrinsic nature of professional development, the process ought to be continuous because teachers need to be developed not only in subject matter and pedagogical knowledge but also managerial skills and thinking skills which are crucial for effective teaching and learning.

The second perspective regarding the status of teacher professional development in Tanzania is that most of the teacher professional development programmes implemented in the country are donor funded. Some examples are as cited by [3], which include the Quality Education Improvement Programme in Tanzania (EQUIP-T), funded by DFID; Literacy and Numeracy Support Programme (LANES), funded by Global Partnership in Education (GPE); and School Based In-Service Training (SBIT), funded by UNICEF, to mention a few. This seems to be a challenge, considering that when the projects phase out, the sustainability of teacher professional development programmes is adversely affected. Moreover, some of the organizations do not necessarily provide professional development programmes which are reflective of the teachers' contexts.

In addition to the two perspectives on the status of teacher professional development in Tanzania, there is something worth mentioning. It is about the presence of many organizations—internally or externally oriented—which offer programmes intended for teacher professional development in Tanzania. According to [4], there were more than 100 organizations by October, 2019, providing teacher professional development in Tanzania. Nevertheless, a snapshot of the professional development programmes offered by these different organizations reveals the following features: First, the coverage of areas involved in the programmes is uneven. Most of the programmes are implemented in urban areas, leaving the rural areas unreached. Some of the regions mostly covered by the professional development programmes include Dar es Salaam, Kilimanjaro, Arusha, Dodoma, Mwanza, Kagera, and Mbeya. It is also worth noting that even within the areas reached by the programmes, the coverage is uneven, hence fragmenting teachers into groups of those frequently benefitting from teacher professional development programmes and those who do not. Secondly, there is a duplication of efforts and resources among providers of teacher professional development programmes. It seems that the different organizations do not collaborate even when they work within the same area. For example, if one of the organizations develops teacher professional development materials which could be shared, there would seem to be no need for the other organization to invest resources on the same. Instead, other organizations could use the available resources for other activities, including scaling up the programmes to other areas. However, in the current practice, each organization works on its own *modus operandi*. Lastly, it is evident that the provision of teacher professional development programmes in Tanzania is uncoordinated. Although, by establishment, the Tanzania Institute of Education is charged with the responsibility to coordinate in-service training for teachers, it seems that guidelines are missing to have this mission achieved. Therefore, it could be deduced that, despite the good efforts by different organizations to promote teacher professional development in Tanzania, there is a need to harmonize the programmes for better results.

The following subsection highlights some of the main challenges facing teacher professional development in Tanzania.



## 2.2 Challenges facing teacher professional development in Tanzania

As pointed out earlier, teachers are the cornerstone of any educational reforms [5], and thus, they need to engage in continuous and meaningful professional development. Unfortunately, many Tanzanian teachers hardly engage in adequate and ongoing professional development activities ([6–9]. The in-service teacher professional development sector has been facing numerous challenges that have acted as barriers to teacher learning. Most of these challenges are systemic, though varying in terms of geographical location, subjects, and education levels. The subsequent subsections present the major challenges of teacher professional development in Tanzania.

### 2.2.1 *Limited knowledge on teacher professional development*

While most Tanzanian teachers and school leaders have indicated increasing demand for professional development [10–13], they lack knowledge of what professional development for teachers really entails. Teachers do not have a proper understanding regarding the concept, scope, and features of teacher professional development. Furthermore, they do not have an understanding of how best they can participate in professional development as beneficiaries of training packages and as managers of learning programmes. Researchers [14, 15] in Egypt and Zambia, respectively, realized that lack of proper information about professional development affected teachers' participation in learning. Studies conducted in Tanzania have revealed that teachers' understanding of professional development is narrowed to the so-called traditional in-service trainings, such as seminars and workshops [6, 16, 17]. In this sense, teachers are not aware of a variety of professional development opportunities available within their working environment. A wide range of professional development opportunities include peer classroom observation, coaching, discussions, networking, as well as classroom-based action research.

Moreover, school management finds it difficult to support professional development for teachers learning if they are not conversant with the nature of professional development programmes, benefits, and implementation modalities.

Thus, due to limited knowledge of professional development, teachers assume that they are mere recipients of professional development programmes. This is different from places, such as Singapore, New Zealand, and Finland, where teachers are in charge of their professional development.

### 2.2.2 *Predominance of traditional approach to teacher professional development*

The traditional approach to professional development has withstood the test of time, since it has served the purpose of training in-service teachers worldwide. Teacher professional development programmes such as workshops, seminars, conferences, and upgrading teachers' qualifications are the most popular forms of professional development in Tanzania. However, the government has admitted that the overreliance on traditional approach has prevented many teachers from engaging in adequate professional development. To date, the ad hoc in-service teacher training with little focus on teacher professional learning needs has not offered enough support to teachers with their daily classroom practices [18–20]. In practice, most professional development training programmes in Tanzania tend to use a top-down style of which rarely focuses on specific needs of teachers. The professional development courses generally occur separately from the realities of school or classroom challenges, and many trainers do not follow up to see how well the teachers are implementing the acquired skills or competencies.

Although seminars have been popular professional development programmes in Tanzania, like in many African countries [21–23], they are not adequately provided to teachers [10, 12, 24]. Ref. [25] commented that usually training programmes are offered to a small section of teachers. If there are no effective means and resources to cascade learned information, the training programmes could likely benefit only a particular group of teachers.

### *2.2.3 Ineffective organization of teacher professional development activities*

Most of the teacher professional development challenges in Tanzania emanate from poor organization of learning activities at national and school levels. Tanzania does not yet have an overall framework for governing effective implementation of teacher professional development. Poor organization of teacher professional development activities is related to lack of robust teacher professional development policy and strategic plans; difficulties in teacher professional development timetabling; insufficient budget for teacher professional development; and lack of harmonized scheme for teacher professional development provision.

#### *2.2.3.1 Lack of robust teacher professional development policy and strategic plans*

Tanzania does not have a stand-alone national policy for teacher professional development as it is the case with information and communication technology in education. Instead, the teacher professional development policy statements are incorporated in the national education policy [26]. However, the policy does not explicitly articulate ways for implementing successful teacher professional development. It would, thus, seem that a poorly organized policy cannot guarantee quality teacher professional development programmes.

Tanzania Education and Training Policy of 1995 stipulates that professional development shall be compulsory to all teachers [26]. However, strategic plans do not support the achievement of this objective. Despite the introduction of Education Sector Development Programme in 1997, teacher professional development has continued to be episodic across Tanzania. Ref. [9] reported that “the focus of in-service education has reached only a small section of teachers, leaving many teachers staying up to 10 years without any further training” (p. 26). Likewise, the Teacher Education Development and Management Strategies of 2007 and 2013 developed some actions that have not significantly impacted teacher professional development [9, 27]. Thus, strategic plans for guiding stakeholders in establishing and implementing meaningful teacher professional development are missing. For instance, recommended strategies in the aforementioned policy document do not objectively indicate how teacher-driven professional development can be conducted at the school level. Moreover, the policy does not clearly state who is responsible for teacher professional development implementation between teachers, school leaders, nongovernment organizations, and institutions [28]; thus accountability for poor performance in professional development is compromised.

Failure of schools to translate centralized teacher professional developing policy into teachers’ working environment has also hindered its implementation. Therefore, schools need support in order to put the policy in contexts. A good example can be drawn from Hong Kong where the government uses a “soft” approach that allows schools to decide on policies about their own professional development strategies and allows teachers to have professional autonomy [29].

#### *2.2.3.2 Difficulties in teacher professional development timetabling*

It is difficult to facilitate teacher professional development in the situation where policies and plans are silent on timetabling issues. Teachers and school leaders need guidance on how to integrate professional development programmes in their busy teaching schedules. Even so, demanding teacher workloads may have prevented teachers from attending training programmes within or outside school premises. Considering the timetabling challenge, other countries, such as Malaysia, Canada, China, Belgium, Japan, Australia, and Singapore, have scheduled specific time for teacher professional development [30–32]. This is different from Tanzania where teachers are not offered special time for professional development. Nevertheless, in the presence of proper management plans, teachers can devote time for professional development after class hours or during break time [33–35].

#### *2.2.3.3 Insufficient budget for teacher professional development*

Tanzania cannot establish quality teacher professional development without well-designed means for accessing resources. Professional development programmes are essentially expensive as they require adequate funding [36, 37]. A plethora of literature has underscored the shortage of financial support due to limited budget for teacher professional development in Tanzania [20, 38–40]. The challenge is not only with the overall funding but also effective use of limited available resources to enable teachers engage in professional development. Local and international studies, however, have shown that teachers can engage in continual professional development with a few available resources [8, 41]. Sufficient resources for professional development can only be possible if professional development plans are effectively organized.

#### *2.2.3.4 Lack of harmonized scheme for teacher professional development provision*

Tanzanian government, through its educational institutions and private organizations, is responsible for organizing teacher professional development. However, there is no harmonized scheme that would control stakeholders in the provision of teacher professional development programmes. As stated earlier in this chapter, different providers have goals which may not align with national curriculum or teachers' specific needs. As [16] highlighted, most of donors' training programmes are not responsive to teachers' professional learning needs. Likewise, the popular professional development programmes in Tanzania are donor-driven, and teachers have been regarded as recipients of training packages [30, 42]. To address this challenge, it is high time the government develop a framework for harmonizing all teacher professional development activities in the country.

#### *2.2.3.5 Inadequate preparation of pre-service teachers for professional development*

Ineffective teacher professional development in Tanzanian schools is partly attributed to failure of initial teacher education to adequately prepare student-teachers to take their professional development roles. Student-teachers are not trained how to practically plan their professional development, establish learning programmes at school, seek learning opportunities, execute learning activities, as well as evaluate the impact of their learning on their students' learning. This is so because initial teacher education does not provide adequate time to student-teachers to engage with teaching practice [43, 44]. The initial training education programmes are too demanding as there is much content to be covered within a

limited time [21]. Upon completion of the initial teacher education, teachers find that they have not learnt much regarding professional development matters.

### **3. Opportunities for effective teacher professional development in Tanzania**

Despite the observed shortfalls in the provision of teacher professional development in Tanzania, there are opportunities that could be used to make it more impactful to teachers, as detailed in the following subsections:

#### **3.1 Presence of institutions**

There are institutions which are legally entrusted with the task of either overseeing or executing teacher professional development activities. These include the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology, President's Office Regional Administration and Local Government, universities, Tanzania Institute of Education, and teacher education colleges, to mention a few. For example, the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology, among others, is responsible for the formulation of policies guiding the provision of education in the country. Thus, in the context of teacher professional development, the ministry can develop a comprehensive policy for teacher professional development, specifying the scope, goals, focus, modality, and different actors and their roles. In the same light, Tanzania Institute of Education, which is responsible for the coordination of teacher professional development, can develop a framework and guidelines to be used by different teacher professional development providers across the country. The Institute of Education can also review teacher education curricula to include a component that will introduce pre-service teachers to teacher professional development matters during their initial teacher education training. The same can also be done to the universities which develop curricula and offer teacher education programmes at bachelor's degree and beyond. Therefore, it would seem that the presence of these institutions is a great opportunity for the enhancement of teacher professional development in Tanzania, if their capacity is strengthened.

#### **3.2 Presence of many teacher professional development providers in Tanzania**

The presence of many teacher professional development providers in the country could also be an opportunity. As we have noted earlier, there are different providers in different parts of the country, implementing teacher professional development activities. What seems to be missing is effective coordination of the activities performed by the different providers—a situation emanating from lack of guidelines to harmonize the provision of teacher professional development programmes. Therefore, if the different providers are coordinated and guidelines are in place, the presence of such many teacher professional development providers in Tanzania could be a great opportunity as many teachers across the country could be reached at once and participate in teacher professional development programmes.

#### **3.3 Availability of different communication networks and national optic fiber**

The availability of different communication networks and the national optic fiber provide another great opportunity for the enhancement of teacher professional development in Tanzania. Teachers, wherever they are, can now get connected through different communication networks and participate in self-directed



teacher professional development. Also, the presence of the national optic fiber provides an opportunity for Internet connectivity in schools—through which teachers can search for, and share, learning materials, which can be used to enhance their knowledge, skills, and competences. What is needed, therefore, is the creation of conducive environment for self-directed teacher professional development to take place. This could be done through the construction of supportive infrastructure and provision of computers and gadgets in schools.

#### **4. Conclusion**

In this chapter, it has been delineated that teacher professional development is important for the realization of any reforms in education. In Tanzania, teacher professional development is predominated with a traditional approach, involving seminars and workshops, and common when there are new changes introduced in the school curricula. This is contrary to the intrinsic nature of teacher professional development which is supposed to be continuous. The authors have also indicated that teacher professional development in Tanzania is characterized by the presence of many providers, including internal and external organizations. The providers are, however, not coordinated, and they are unevenly scattered in the country, fragmenting teachers into those who benefit from the provided teacher professional development programmes and those who do not. Moreover, the authors have stated that lack of explicit policy and guidelines for teacher professional development, limited knowledge on teacher professional development among stakeholders, predominance of traditional approach to teacher professional development, and ineffective organization of teacher professional development activities are the main challenges facing teacher professional development in Tanzania. The authors, then, point out opportunities which can be used to enhance teacher professional development in Tanzania as the presence of institutions responsible for teacher professional development; presence of different teacher professional development providers across the country; and availability of different communication networks and the national optic fiber.

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