

POLICIES FOR EFFECTIVE TVET TEACHER CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Despite the many initiatives undertaken to improve its quality, Kenya's Technical and Vocational Education and Training continues to face numerous challenges. Literature suggests that the persistence of these challenges can be explained in part by the deficient pedagogical competencies and limited subject knowledge in some of Kenya's TVET teachers. There is therefore a strong need for Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for TVET teachers in Kenya. In this article it is argued that Continuing Professional development (CPD) of TVET teachers in Kenya has been erratic due in part to a lack of supportive policies. An analysis of several of Kenya's key education policy documents reveals a lack of clarity in the policies meant to guide the continuing professional development of teachers. Kingdon's Multiple Streams framework, suggests that the policy gaps are as a result of policy makers lacking clear and viable policy options to stimulate and sustain CPD. Consequently, from a review of literature on effective continuing professional development, various policy options are suggested. These include clarity in the requirements for teachers to engage in CPD and a supportive rather than prescriptive policy framework that allows teachers to innovatively choose what and how they will learn. It is further proposed that career progression should be linked to professional learning. To support the development of a viable policy framework current TVET teacher learning practices and acceptability of suggested solutions should be empirically investigated.

KEYWORDS

Continuing Professional Development, TVET, Policy, Kenya

INTRODUCTION

Technical and Vocational Education and Training in Kenya continues to face numerous challenges despite the many initiatives undertaken to improve its quality. Literature suggests that the persistence of these challenges can be explained in part by the deficient pedagogical competencies and limited subject knowledge in some of Kenya's TVET teachers. There is therefore a strong need for Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for TVET teachers in Kenya.

Friedman & Phillips (2004) view Continuing Professional Development (CPD) as learning that enables the maintenance, improvement and broadening of knowledge, skills and personal attributes leading to more effective execution of professional and technical duties. Continuing professional development thus relates to the expansion of knowledge and competencies beyond those developed during initial training (Klusmann, Lüdtke, Kunter, Baumert, & Richter, 2010). Continuing professional development can thus be viewed as any learning that results in improved practice and professional growth. For teachers, CPD aims at sustained

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improvements in the academic, personal and social outcomes of students (Guskey, 2002; Timperley, Wilson, Barrar, & Fung, 2007).

Continuing professional development is thus a learning process. Learning can be formal or informal, discrete or embedded in practice. Learning can take place individually or collectively and may be self driven or mediated by an expert (Desimone, 2009a; Postholm, 2012). In a review of literature, Desimone identified five critical features of effective CPD that result in improved practice and sustained improvements in learning outcomes. Effective CPD has a strong focus on content and is delivered through active participation for a sufficient duration of time. Additionally it is coherent and entails collective participation (Desimone, 2009a).

Need for CPD and CPD policies

A key aim of continuing professional development for teachers is to bridge gaps in initial teacher education. Teacher education researchers in Kenya have however noted that despite the known gaps in initial teacher education, CPD for teachers is also not well developed (Bunyi, Wangai, Magoma, & Limboro, 2013). On the other hand, TVET teachers lack adequate skills, experience and exposure to current industry practices and modern technology. Similarly they lack sufficient opportunities to improve their professional knowledge and skills (Ferej, Kitainge, & Ooko, 2012; Ngure, 2013; Oketch & Peliwe, 2017; Sang, Muthaa, & Mbugua, 2012). While the value of continuing professional development is recognized, TVET teachers have largely been left on their own to organize their learning. Several policy documents call for the continuing professional development of TVET teachers, but these policy statements are neither specific nor translated into action (Education & Policy, 2012; GoK, 1999). Continuing Professional development (CPD) of TVET teachers in Kenya has therefore been erratic due in part to the lack of supportive policies. An analysis of several of Kenya's key education policy documents reveals a lack of clarity in the policies meant to guide continuing professional development (Njenga, 2018).

Role of Policy

Policies have been found to positively influence teachers' involvement in continuing professional development (Desimone, Smith, & Phillips, 2007; Phillips, Desimone, & Smith, 2011). Policies as a framework of rules and incentives stimulate and direct the right kind of action from diverse sets of stakeholders, sustain that action and guide the allocation of resources. By providing incentives, policies stimulate the expenditure of individual effort and resources in pursuit of defined benefits. They also demand action from the unwilling by defining sanctions and setting time frames within which action must be completed. At an organizational level, policies institutionalize action and make it independent of the good will or proclivity of leaders and administrators.

However, the policies must be right: they must define the right goals, and stimulate the right action. For example, policies that demand quantity over quality tend to discourage teachers (Appova & Arbaugh, 2018). They must also direct the allocation of resources to support desired activities. Given their powerful effects, they must be acceptable to all.

Kingdon's Multiple Streams framework, suggests that the policy gaps are as a result of policy makers lacking clear and viable policy options to stimulate and sustain CPD. Kingdon identified three conditions that must be met for a policy to be made. The first condition is the perception of the problem and the need to address it. The second is the recognition of clear and implementable solutions. And the third is the identification of appropriateness opportunity to adopt the solutions and deal with the problem.

The TVET policy of 2012, the most recent policy on TVET, states that minimum qualifications for TVET trainers will be reviewed and industrial attachment made compulsory for TVET teachers (MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION, 2012). This suggests that the problem has been identified and policy makers feel it is appropriate to address it. The policy statement, appearing in a policy document focused on broad educational issues is not elaborated and does not address CPD specifically. The lack of elaborated policies suggests that clear solutions to address the issue have not been identified (DeJaeghere, Chapman, & Mulkeen, 2006).

Problem statement

From the forgoing discussion, TVET teachers in Kenya need to improve their content knowledge so that it is relevant, current and reflects modern industrial practices. Additionally they need to develop their pedagogical knowledge and practices to not only reflect modern teaching practices but to ensure improved learning outcomes. However, despite its importance, the policy framework to guide and sustain effective continuing professional development of TVET teachers is underdeveloped. As a result, TVET teacher's continuing professional development is erratic and ineffective. Learning outcomes and quality have therefore remained low. While policy makers are aware of the problem, they lack adequate policies to address it. This article aims to contribute to the resolution of this problem by identifying and suggesting policy interventions that could improve TVET teachers' continuing professional development.

Policy Recommendations

Clarity of outcomes

Good policies identify relatively stable goals and provide clear strategies for their attainment (Lauglo, 2006). In this case the policies should clearly identify what forms of CPD are to be pursued and possibly in what ways. The effectiveness of a policy depends on its clarity, not just in terms of how it is written, but on providing sufficient detail to ease decision making. Thus, there should be no ambiguity in detailing what an individual teacher is required to do, when and how often. Otherwise ambiguity would allow unmotivated teachers to ignore the policies and instead cite multiple interpretations as a reason not to do what the policy requires then to do. There is thus a strong need to develop a single policy document that can easily be referenced to outlining the types, frequency and length of CPD for TVET teachers and management of the CPD.

Supportive policies rather than prescriptive policies

Educational policies that are prescriptive, with inbuilt targets and inspections have been shown to fail. Given the dynamic nature of teaching, more so in TVET, supportive policies approaches rather prescriptive policies are recommended (Brain, Reid, & Comerford Boyes, 2006; Nieuwenhuis, Mulder, & Berkel, 2004). A policy approach that guides professional development rather than merely prescribes specific methods and training models would therefore be more appropriate.

Possibly, the policy could outline professional development milestones achievable through methods that meet the criteria for effective CPD. Thus, teachers would have targets of what to achieve, i.e. milestones, but left to decide how to attain those milestones so long as the approaches used meet the criteria set for effective CPD.

Focus on critical features of CPD

Given the diverse learning strategies that teachers can adopt to learn (Kennedy, 2005; Postholm, 2012), it is important the policy is supportive of the diverse ways of learning. Instead of specifying specific models or strategies and thereby constraining innovation, the policy should require evidence of learning through engagement with high quality CPD. High quality CPD has been defined as CPD that leads to sustained positive learning outcomes in students (Postholm, 2012; Timperley et al., 2007) and its critical features documented (Desimone, 2009b). These features are content focus, active learning, coherence, sufficient duration and collective participation.

Thus the policy should require teachers to demonstrate that their learning had strong content focus (subject content knowledge, knowledge of how students learn and strategies of facilitating improved learning), active learning (evidence of active engagement with content), coherence (relevance and alignment with practices or developments known to support student achievement and the extant curriculum), sufficient duration and evidence of collective participation).

By defining criteria for what counts rather than defining what counts, such a policy framework will encourage innovation. Teachers can then be innovative in their learning strategies while pursuing a common goal of improving the learning outcomes of their students. The policy would simply require teachers to demonstrate their learning using a common reporting tool.

Enable teacher autonomy

As Postholm & Wæge (2016) show, teachers act autonomously, deciding what to learn and how to learn. Further, autonomy is valuable since it creates commitment. Failing to provide for that autonomy would lead to ineffective policies that are ignored in practice. Thus, in line with not predefining learning strategies, the policy should also not attempt to define content, but require teachers to demonstrate the content learnt and its relevance in improving practice and student outcomes.

Link professional development to career growth

To ensure that teachers engage in continuous professional development, career progression should be linked to explicit learning activities rather than merely the number of years worked. Professional development should be a requirement for career growth. Thus, the policy should require teachers to be registered and licenced and link the renewal of their practicing licences to continuing professional development. However, the current practice of delaying promotions and only awarding teachers who pursue higher academic qualifications by very low salary increases is not likely to work. In a similar way, teachers may be required to go for industrial attachments to ensure that they master new technological developments and modes of work organization.

Clear benefits and rewards

Good policies make benefits explicit. Thus, the presentation of evidence of attainment of pre-identified learning goals should be rewarded with clearly defined benefits. These could be rewards such promotions, rises in pay grades or other forms of career progression. Similarly, failure to produce such evidence within clearly defined timelines should trigger sanctions for failure to attain expected learning.

Address costs faced by teachers

Acceptability is likely to be influenced by factors such as the personal costs that teachers bear in their pursuit of professional development and the benefits they expect to obtain. It is therefore likely that if there are no direct personal benefits, the policies are likely to be

ineffective. On the other hand, the existence of a series of negative sanctions for those who fail to engage in professional development will likely motivate the teachers. However, such sanctions are likely to be resisted by individual teachers and their unions if funds to meet the costs associated with their professional development are not availed. When resources that teachers need to pursue professional development are not availed, it not only demotivates teachers, but it makes them question the value and commitment of educational leaders to their improved practice (Appova & Arbaugh, 2018). The costs that the teachers bear must thus be recognized and funds availed, otherwise teachers will have a strong reason to ignore the policy. Further, to ensure that the technical institutes encourage and support their teachers to continue learning, funding should be availed to the technical training institutes.

Involve stakeholders

Acceptability of the policy proposals however needs to be ascertained. It is important that the policies adopted align with the needs of stakeholders most affected. Otherwise, policies will be rejected and implementation will fail (Jie, 2016; Psacharopoulos, 1989; Viennet & Pont, 2017). The cost of developing and implementing policies that are unacceptable to teachers and institutions will be high. Other than acceptability, the local capacity of the institution to implement the policies must be assured.

Wider educational practice changes

Policies on Continuing Professional Development are also likely to be ignored when they do not align with existing practices. For example, teachers are often rated by how well their students perform in the national examinations conducted by the Kenya National Examinations Council (KNEC). The practice of summative evaluation using written examinations that test only the cognitive domain should be dropped.

Unless the evaluation system is changed to reflect practical know how, teachers are unlikely to be incentivised to acquire and develop practical skills. Similarly the management of the Technical Training Institutes are unlikely to be bothered to enforce policies on continuing professional development since they also use KNEC pass rates to assess how well teachers are working. The curriculum must also be changed from its current static form to a dynamic curriculum that readily adapts to changing technology and industry practice.

CONCLUSION

The growing demand for TVET in Kenya has increased the demand for TVET teachers. However, many TVET teachers lack the competencies need to teach effectively. Continuing professional development for TVET teachers focusing on relevant subject knowledge and practical skills is therefore required. Effective and acceptable policies to guide and institutionalize CPD therefore need to be developed.

In this article the state of CPD for TVET teachers in Kenya has been identified and the clear need for a more systematic to CPD outlined. The conditions that have contributed to the low engagement with CPD have also been suggested. In light of these, several policy options have been suggested. These include clarity in the requirements for teachers to engage in CPD and a supportive rather than prescriptive policy framework that allows teachers to innovatively choose what and how they will learn. To support the development of the policy, research to guide the identification of solutions as well as advocacy is needed. In particular the current learning practices need to be empirically investigated and the acceptability of suggested solutions investigated. Solutions that teachers will reject will be disruptive and expensive while

destroying stakeholder and public confidence. Policy research and advocacy are therefore recommended to ensure that the adopted policies are acceptable to all the stakeholders.

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