

Opportunities for the Continuous Professional Development Among Public Senior High School Heads in the Cape Coast Metropolis

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Abstract

The study sought to find out the culture of continuous professional development among public senior high school heads in the Cape Coast Metropolis, Ghana. The population of the study was all school heads of public senior high schools in the Cape Coast metropolis and their assistants as well as 1 training and development officer from the municipal directorate of education office totalling 41 respondents. A combination of purposive and census sampling was used for the study. The study established that, different opportunities existed for the continuous professional development of the school heads however, these were not institutionalized and demanded that school heads fish them out and explore them for their benefit and professional growth. The study revealed that continuous professional development is important and of relevance to school heads and must be given critical attention by educational authorities. It was therefore recommended that various actors and interest groups in education must pull their resources together in helping the school heads to constantly and continuously develop themselves by encouraging the school heads to undertake CPD programmes. This encouragement can be in the form of organising CPD programmes at no cost and awarding participants at the end of completing such programmes.

Keywords: *Continuous professional development (CPD), Opportunities for continuous professional development, school heads.*

Introduction

In terms of the provision of education, development should entail betterment of knowledge, skills, and attitudes to improve the quality of education provided (Akhmedov, 2021). For schools to succeed and to meet the ever-rising demands of a 21st century society, school heads being the leaders of the schools must be more professionally and personally competent than ever before (Thurman, 2021). To guide their schools and students toward a productive future, school heads must have clearly defined values and be dedicated to continually upgrading their own knowledge

and skills, and those of their colleagues in schools. Heaney (2014) and Lee (2015) are of the opinion that school heads, by engaging in continuous professional development (CPD) will be committed to identifying the professional development needs of their staff and provide appropriate professional programmes to meet these needs. These researchers believe that school heads can push for the necessary change in the schools by engaging in CPD themselves. It is therefore important for school heads or leaders to constantly upgrade themselves in performing their duties.

According to Steyn and Van Niekerk (2020), professional development describes ongoing development programmes that focus on a whole range of knowledge, skills and attitudes required to educate learners effectively. It refers to the participation of educators or educational leaders in development opportunities in order to be better equipped as educators and educational leaders. Steyn and Van Niekerk's (2020) definition of professional development presumes that professional development is a nonstop and an ongoing activity, but there is a difference between professional development and continuous professional development. Whereas professional development (PD) can be a single shot event CPD is an ongoing and continuous event that takes place until a person leaves his or her profession. Bush and Oduro (2016) observed that there was seldom any formal leadership training and school heads were appointed on the basis of their teaching record rather than their leadership potential. They further suggest that induction and support are usually limited and school heads have to adopt a pragmatic approach.

School heads involved in the day-to-day management of their schools need to take time to reflect on their personal growth as leaders and managers. The expansion of information and technology over the years have also demanded so much from school heads and heads of educational institutions about their abilities to adapt to changes that are necessary to stir-up the best in teachers and the rest of the staff to the realization of the national and institutional goals (Abu-Duhou, 2017). Blank and de las Alas (2019) are also of the view that educators should be able to adapt to changing practices and ways of doing things best. To these researchers, change is a necessary tool to development and advancement because one cannot afford to do the same old things (or pretend not to be seeing the demands of the global village) the same way and be expecting to have different results. Boyle, Lamprianou and Boyle (2015) further state that the continuous development of professionals' skills and knowledge is a crucial element of improvement in all professions. Hoy and Miskel (1992) also posit that a true professional does not stop learning since the expansion of knowledge has led to the formation of more complex organisations which require trained specialists in order to achieve set objectives. They are of the view that any good professional will adopt and adapt to changes. The school head's roles have become more complex and crucial than ever before because nowadays they have to meet the challenges of this constantly changing scenario of the world.

Heads of schools play a vital role in school improvement. This is because they influence the quality of educational programmes, the professional growth of teachers and the general school climate. Secondary education is a very important sub-sector of the education system; therefore, effective management becomes a prerequisite for achieving desired objectives. The professionalization of school heads can thus be considered as the strategically most important process to transform education successfully.

Statement of the Problem

It is the goal of every educational institution and for that matter the Ghana Education Service (GES) under the Ministry of Education (MoE) to provide high-quality education to every student. To do so, it requires an adequate supply of competent individuals who are willing and able to serve as teachers and heads of schools. Unfortunately, in Ghana, teachers are promoted to the position of school headship without any training in educational administration and leadership. The Ghana Education Service (GES), the body that superintends over conduct pre-tertiary education has no requirement for a prospective school head to complete a specified preparatory programme in educational administration or leadership. Rather, appointment to such positions is based on a criterion among which years of experience feature prominently (GES Council, 2019). This shows that the appointment of school heads in Ghana is generally primed based on an operating assumption that good teachers can become effective managers and leaders without specific preparation. Kowalski (2018) for instance notes that teaching experience does not ensure that a person has the technical, analytical, and human relation skills required for school administrators. There is, therefore the need to examine the culture of continuous professional development among Ghanaian public-school heads.

Many studies on staff development in education have focused on the basic and primary school levels (Oduro, 2013; 2018; 2019). But where there is a study conducted on professional development to senior high school staff all have concentrated on teachers (Desimone et al. 2016; Murtaza, 2017; Ghoneim Sywelen & Witte, 2013; Komba & Nkumbi, 2021). However, little has been done in relation to senior high school heads. The current study is an attempt to fill this void left by previous studies.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to find out the culture of continuous professional development among public senior high school heads. Specifically, the study investigates opportunities for continuous professional development among public school heads in the Cape Coast Metropolis, Ghana.

Research Questions

Two research questions were formulated to guide the study. They are:

1. What opportunities for continuous professional development exist for school heads?
2. How useful or relevant is continuous professional development to the school heads?

Methodology

Research Paradigm

This study was underpinned by the pragmatist paradigm. As opined by Creswell and Plano-Clark (2013), every research project requires a basis that is found in the researchers' worldview or philosophical underpinnings, whether explicit or implicit. The researchers believe that, the pragmatist paradigm is more applicable for the current research. In its simplest form, the pragmatists paradigm states that, the overarching approach to research is to mix the collecting process and analysis within the research process (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2013).

Pragmatism aims to refute ideas like truth and reality focusing on what works as the truth in terms of research issues under consideration (Christ, 2013). The pragmatist worldview is justified in this case because of the nature of the current study. This is because, the pragmatist

paradigm excels in situations where complex and pluralistic social environments necessitate analysis informed by various viewpoints (Christ, 2013). This study exemplifies the pragmatic worldview since it collects data using both quantitative and qualitative approaches and incorporates the concept of many realities (ontology) by reporting varied perspectives from study participants (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2014). Second, knowledge is based on the participants' subjective viewpoints as expressed in interview findings (Esterberg, 2012). Third, the nature of the research (axiology) is exposed by acknowledging the researchers' interpretation in accordance with that of the participants (Corbetta, 2013). Fourth, the research method employed is defined by a combination of deductive and inductive data collection and analysis procedures that provide greater strength than any of the two methods alone (methodological). Finally, the study is rooted in pragmatist worldview since it is built around research questions with the goal of responding to them in a variety of ways that are deemed suitable and applying the findings in ways that will assist individuals who will benefit from the research (Christ, 2013).

Research Design

The current study employed sequential explanatory mixed method design to gain a broader and more in-depth understanding the culture of continuous professional development among public senior high school heads. Specifically, the study investigated opportunities for continuous professional development among public school heads in the Cape Coast Metropolis, Ghana. The explanatory design is a two-phase mixed method with a quantitative phase and a qualitative phase later. This design aimed to collect qualitative data that would be augmented by qualitative data in order to produce more trustworthy and valid results (McCusker, & Gunaydin, 2015). The study's first phase included a quantitative description of the culture of continuous professional development among public senior high school heads. A questionnaire was used to collect quantitative data.

Following the quantitative results, an in-depth qualitative analysis was conducted to explain the original quantitative results; such as significant results, outlier results, or expected outcomes (Rittichainuwat & Rattanaphinanchai, 2015). This design begins quantitatively and so, the researchers placed greater emphasis on the quantitative methods than the qualitative methods. In the final analysis, data from both phases will be used resulting in more detailed results (Arthur, 2012). As a result, the quantitative and qualitative approaches were employed to complement each other, and these provided detailed information to guide the study.

Population

The target population for the study comprised all school heads of public senior high schools in the Cape Coast metropolis and their assistants (in charge of academics, domestic and administration) as well as 1 training and development officer from the municipal directorate of education office totalling 41 respondents. A statistical record obtained from the Cape Coast Metropolis Education Office as at 2022 indicates that there are 10 public senior high schools with 10 school heads and 30 assistant school heads. Table 1 below gives a detailed description of the target population by school.

Table 1: Target Population by Schools

School	Number of School Heads	Number of Assistant School Heads	Total
Adisadel College	1	3	4
St. Augustine's College	1	3	4
Holy Child School	1	3	4
Wesley Girls' High School	1	3	4
Ghana National College	1	3	4
Mfantsipim School	1	3	4
University Practice SHS	1	3	4
Efutu Senior High School	1	3	4
Ogua Secondary Technical Academy of Christ the King	1	3	4
Total	10	30	40

Source: Cape Coast Metropolis Education Office, 2024

Sample and Sampling Procedures

The sample size for the study was 41, and included public school heads and assistant school heads of senior high schools in the Cape Coast metropolis and one (1) training and development officer from the municipal directorate of education office. Among the 40 school heads and their assistants, some perform administrative duties as well as teaching in the classroom while others perform administrative duties only. The Cape Coast Metropolis was specifically chosen for the study under the assumption that secondary education started here and has achieved a lot after its establishment. Also, the best performing secondary schools are said to be located here. The University of Cape Coast is recognized as the first university for training teachers and with the establishment of the Institute for Educational Planning and Administration to train educational leaders for the country, the researcher presumes that the heads of the secondary schools located in Cape Coast might have taken the opportunity of this to constantly upgrade and update themselves in performing their duties as heads or educational leaders of the various schools. A combination of purposive and census sampling was used for the study. The census sampling procedure takes into consideration the entire population of the study (School heads and their assistants, and the training and development officer from the municipal directorate of education office).

The census sampling was used to invite the school heads, their assistants and the training and development officer to respond to the questionnaire and interview. This sampling method was used because of the relatively smaller size of the population. The training and development officer was purposively sampled for the interview because the training and development officer has specialized knowledge on the topic under study and could give relevant information to address the issue in the topic since the training and development officer is in charge of training and development of school staffs in the metropolis and have knowledge about the programmes in store for the heads. According to Henning, Van Rensburg and Smit (2020), purposive sampling involves selecting people who fit the criteria of desirable participants based on their experience or knowledge. Andrade (2021) is also of the view that purposive sampling is a type of sampling in

which the researcher selects the elements to be included in the sample on the basis of relevance to the research topic. Mweshi and Sakyi (2020) opined that the power of purposive sampling is to select information-rich participants. Based on the definition given by these researchers the training and development officer was purposively chosen for the study.

Data Collection Instruments

The researchers used the questionnaire and semi-structured interview guide to collect data from the school heads and their assistants as well as the training and development officer from the municipal directorate of education office respectively after permissions were given. The questionnaire was personally constructed by the researchers based on the research questions. The questionnaire comprised a combination of close and open-ended questions which were used for the school heads and their assistants. The close-ended items in the questionnaire were employed by the researchers because the researchers aimed at ensuring uniformity in the responses provided consequently preventing any kind of subjectivity. Also, closed-ended questionnaires can be answered more easily and quickly by respondents (Baburajan, Silva & Pereira, 2020).

The questionnaire was divided into sections as far as the research questions formulated to guide the study were concerned. A 4-point Likert scale of the close-ended question rated strongly agree (4), agree (3), disagree (2) and strongly disagree (1), was employed. The Likert scale had options for the respondents to tick their choices to the individual statements relating to the research questions. The questionnaire was chosen for the school heads and their assistants because of their busy schedules and it saves time. Besides, all of them are literate and could read and answer the questions accordingly. Apart from the advantages that have been listed above, questionnaires have their weaknesses; for example, there is the question of validity and accuracy (Burns & Grove, 2013). The responses by the respondents might not reflect their true opinions but might answer what they think will please the researcher, and valuable information may be lost as answers are usually brief.

The training and development officer from the municipal directorate of education office was interviewed since he was the only person and more importantly because the researcher needed in-depth information from him. The face-to-face interview was semi-structured. According to Bearman (2019), semi-structured interviews allow the interviewer to focus on the research questions, and yet open up new opportunities for further questions. These researchers have suggested that in a semi-structured interview, respondents should be asked the same questions, but in a more conversational way. In this study, the researchers used the semi-structured type of interview to allow flexibility and to enable the researchers ask further questions when the need be.

Validity and Reliability of the Instruments

For the face and content validity of the questionnaire to be ensured, the items were subjected to scrutiny with the objectives of the study as a yardstick. To ensure reliability, the questionnaire was pilot tested in the Effutu Municipality and the Gomoa West District all in the Central Region. After computation of the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, a measure of reliability yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.71 which falls within the 0.70 postulated by Fraenkel, Wallen and Hyun (2011) to be the minimum acceptable figure for statistical analysis. It was based on this that the questionnaire was used for the study.

Pilot testing of the questionnaire enabled the researchers to identify weaknesses emanating from the instrument due to ambiguities in wording and effecting the necessary corrections thereof. Also, Items with very low reliability were taken out. The questionnaire was pilot tested in three schools in the Effutu Municipality and the Gomoa West District all in the Central Region. Effutu Municipality and the Gomoa West District were selected for their proximity and the fact that they share similar characteristics of large school population with regards to students, personnel, quality of teaching and administrative staff and adequate facilities just as the Cape Coast Metropolis. The questionnaire was personally administered and collected during the pilot study. The validity and reliability of the semi-structured interview guide were ensured by also subjecting the items to scrutiny in line with the objectives of the study as a yardstick.

Data Collection Procedure

The questionnaire was personally administered by the researchers to all the respondents in the various schools. This was to ensure that the questionnaire reaches the exact respondents. Upon arrival at the various schools, the researchers introduced themselves as a way of creating rapport with the respondents, briefed the respondents on the purpose of the visit and ensured them that the responses provided to the questionnaire will be treated with absolute confidentiality, gave them their copies and humbly requested for their co-operation. The copies of the questionnaire were left with the respondents to be completed. The researchers personally collected the completed questionnaire after a phone call and visited the schools. The questionnaires were retrieved after three weeks.

In conducting the interview, all responses were written down in a book specifically designated for that. This is because the respondent refused that the interview be recorded digitally. Several attempts by the researchers to convince and assure the respondent's anonymity so as to record the interview digitally were unsuccessful. The interview lasted for one hour instead of 30 minutes because the researchers had to write down the responses to each question before proceeding to the next. The interview was conducted with the help of the semi-structured interview guide that was made available to the respondent prior to the date of the interview. This made the whole process less tedious because the respondent had already gone through the questions to be asked. Moreover, the questions were straightforward. Some answers by the respondent demanded the researchers to probe further which gave clearer and more information on the questions and answers provided. There was also flexibility in asking the questions since the interview was semi-structured.

Data Analysis

The data obtained from the two instruments used in the study were analysed separately. The researchers went through the questionnaire collected from the respondents on the field to check if the required number was received and whether all the questions had been answered. The collected data from the questionnaire were coded and analysed using IBM SPSS version 27 software. Since the study was a descriptive one, descriptive quantitative analytical tools, such as frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviation were used to measure the direction of responses. Tables were also used to illustrate the findings of the study. The data analysis was then linked to each of the research questions and discussed. The open-ended responses were also analysed using the IBM SPSS version 27 by grouping responses that were related as one, coding

them and imputing the responses in SPSS. Both closed and open-ended items in the questionnaire were analysed quantitatively by using SPSS.

The written responses obtained from the face-to-face interview with the training and development officer from the municipal directorate of education office were analysed. The analysis was done in a systematic manner by first rewriting the responses by the respondent since the researchers used short hands during the interview. The researchers then read through the responses for each item by the respondent to record the key issues or ideas. The researchers analysed responses to the questions from the interview. A report was written afterwards according to the evidence generated from the respondents.

Results and Discussions

Research Question One: What Opportunities for Continuous Professional Development Exist for School Heads?

This research sought to find out from school heads the various opportunities that exist for their continuous professional development.

Table 2: Opportunities that Exist for the Continuous Professional Development of School Heads

Statement	M	SD
I undertake accredited university programmes from within the country	2.91	0.981
I undertake distance learning programmes from outside the country	1.63	0.690
I am often coached by an expert	2.69	0.758
I pursue short-term resident courses	1.91	0.887
I work collaboratively or in a team with other colleagues outside my school to upgrade myself	2.74	0.886
I work collaboratively or in a team with colleague staff within my school to upgrade myself	3.00	0.939
I am mentored by someone	2.97	0.857
I undertake personal research/study into professional practice to enrich myself	3.29	0.667
I go for workshops	3.11	0.676
I engage in face-to-face discussion with other colleagues	3.23	0.646
I go for study visits in other schools	2.06	0.765
I attend national conference/seminars/events	3.06	1.056
I undertake on-the-job learning	3.14	0.648
I take time off for self-reflection	2.69	0.900
I engage in network meetings with colleagues outside the country via the internet/telephone	2.00	0.686
I read professional journals and books	3.06	0.765
Total	2.72	0.382

Source: Field Data, 2024

The overall mean and standard deviation of the responses of the school heads on opportunities for continuous professional development existing for their professional growth rated 2.72 and 0.38 respectively. It can be deduced that majority of the school heads agreed on the statements that sought their responses on the opportunities for continuous professional development existing for their professional growth and their responses did not differ much from each other concerning the statements. From the responses of the school heads opportunities for continuous professional development, it can be said that the opportunities include; working collaboratively or in a team with other colleagues within and outside their school to upgrade themselves, undertaking personal research/study into professional practice to enrich themselves, attending workshops and national conference/seminars/events, undertaking accredited university programmes and events, coached by an expert, mentored by someone, engaging in face to face discussion with other colleagues, undertaking on-the job learning, taking time off for self-reflection and reading professional journals and books.

Excerpt from the face-to-face interview with the Cape Coast Metropolitan Training and Development Officer revealed that the opportunities that exist for Continuous Professional Development of school heads were; in-service training, online study, workshops, orientation programmes and providing training on management for school resources as well as leadership. Below is the excerpt;

“Some of the opportunities are in-service training, online study and workshop. Currently, the continuous professional development programmes that GES have for the senior high school heads include; orientation programmes, providing training on management for school resources and leadership in schools” (Metropolitan Training and Development Officer, Cape Coast).

The responses provided by the school heads on the opportunities that exist for their continuous professional development resonate with the findings of researchers who have made conducted researches on the opportunities for continuous professional development. For example, Villeneuve-Smith, West and Bhinder (2009) listed CPD programmes from which school heads can access for their continual professional and personal growth to include; mentoring, attending conferences, seminars and workshops, peer learning, reading journals or articles, taking formal education courses, team self-assessment and undertaking joint training exercise with other schools.

Research Question Two: How Useful or Relevant is Continuous Professional Development to the School Heads?

This research sought to find out from school heads the usefulness or relevance of continuous professional development from their perspective. To solicit the responses of the respondents, they were asked to briefly explain in written form why they think continuous professional development is useful or relevant for their professionalism. In presenting the findings for this research question similar responses were put together and given a common code. This was to aid easy analysis. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Usefulness or Relevance of Continuous Professional Development to the School Heads

Usefulness of CPD	N	%
Provides the opportunity to learn new ideas and trends in the educational system and use them to improve situations in my school	7	20.0
CPD helps to keep me informed and abreast with current unacquired skills to achieve set goals	11	31.4
CPD helps me to work effectively	9	25.7
CPD broadens my horizon	6	17.1
It equips me with new strategies to meet the increasing challenges in the school	2	5.7
Total	35	100

Source: Field Data, 2024

Table 3 shows the usefulness or relevance of continuous professional development to the school heads. It was revealed that 7(20.0%) of the school heads viewed CPD as useful because it provides the opportunity to learn new ideas and trends in the educational system and use them to improve situations in their school. Secondly, it was found that 11(31.4%) designated that CPD helps to keep them informed and abreast with current unacquired skills to achieve set goals. Thirdly, 9(25.7%) of the school heads stated that CPD helps them to work effectively. Fourthly, 6(17.1%) described that CPD broadens their horizon and finally, 2(5.7%) specified that CPD equips them with new strategies to meet the increasing challenges in the school.

The data from the interview brought to light that continuous professional development provides the heads of senior high schools in the Cape Coast Metropolis the opportunity to learn new ideas and trends in the educational system and use them to improve situations in their school, helps them to be abreast with new knowledge in school management, helps them to work effectively, increases their knowledge base and equips them with new strategies to meet the increasing challenges in the school. He stated that;

“I think continuous professional development provides the opportunity to learn new ideas and trends in the educational system and use them to improve situations in their school, helps them to be abreast with new knowledge in school management, helps them to work effectively, increases their knowledge base and equips them with new strategies to meet the increasing challenges in the school” (Metropolitan Training and Development Officer, Cape Coast).

Researches on the subject under discussion laid emphasis on the usefulness or relevance of continuous professional development. For example, Calhoun (2002), Easton (2002), Farkas, Johnson, Duffelt, Foleno and Foley (2001), Foster, Loving and Shumate (2000) as well as Hoffman and Johnston (2005) supported the argument that school heads need continuous professional development to support their efforts toward improving the entire school system and to revamp their commitment to maintaining positive learning communities. Similarly, the findings resonate

the view of Vandenberghe (1995) who maintained that it is, therefore, necessary for them to continually.

Conclusions

From the findings, it can be concluded that varying opportunities existed for the continuous professional development of the school heads however, these were not institutionalized and demanded that school heads fish them out and explore them for their benefit and professional growth. The study concluded that continuous professional development is important and of relevance to school heads and must be given critical attention by educational authorities.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions drawn from the study, the following recommendations have been made.

1. The Ghana Education Service (GES) and those in authority must give critical attention to the programmes that exist for the continuous professional development of the school heads as well as those listed by the school heads as the most valued CPD programmes and resources and logistical support should be geared towards ensuring and organising such programmes. This will increase the interest of the heads to engage themselves in CPD programmes.
2. The study portrayed that continuous professional development is relevant and of great importance to the school heads. It is therefore recommended that various actors and interest groups in education must pull their resources together in helping the school heads to constantly and continuously develop themselves by encouraging the school heads to undertake CPD programmes. This encouragement can be in the form of organising CPD programmes at no cost and awarding participants at the end of completing such programmes.

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