Barriers to Teachers' Participation in Continuous Professional Development and its Implication for the Quality of Teaching in Public Secondary Schools, Njombe Town Council

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Abstract

This study investigated the barriers to teachers' participation in continuous professional development (TCPD) and their implications for the quality of teaching in public secondary schools. The study was guided by the Social Constructivist Theory and adopted a qualitative research approach using a case study design. Data were collected from three public secondary schools involving 12 participants, including three heads of schools and nine teachers, who were selected through purposive sampling. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data, and the data were analyzed thematically. The findings revealed that teachers face several barriers to participating in TCPD, including time constraints, heavy workload, financial limitations, lack of leadership support, policy-related challenges, and logistical issues. The study concludes that teachers' participation in TCPD is hindered by personal, institutional, and systemic barriers, which ultimately affect the quality of teaching. The study recommends that

policymakers should review and revise existing policies to address teachers' workload and time constraints. School administrators should streamline approval processes and provide incentives to encourage teachers' participation in TCPD programmes. In addition, sufficient funding should be allocated to support continuous professional development programmes.

Keywords: barriers, continuous professional development, public secondary schools, qualityof teaching, teachers' participation

1.0Introduction

The education system has been undergoing continuous reforms due to ongoing developments, increasing diversity, and the growing emphasis on effectiveness, accountability, and transparency (Yüner, 2022). Teachers' Continuous Professional Development (TCPD) is one of the key factors contributing to the success of these reforms (Bautista & Ortega-Ruiz, 2015). Research consistently shows that TCPD plays a significant role in improving the quality of teaching, students' learning outcomes, and overall educational effectiveness (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; OECD, 2019).

To meet the changing demands of education, teachers need to continuously improve their knowledge and skills. This aligns with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, which aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. The goal also emphasizes the importance of continuous professional development for teachers through regular training and capacity building (Du Toit, 2015). The need for TCPD has increased due to several factors, including

curriculum reforms, pedagogical innovations, changes in student demographics, inclusive education policies, and the increasing demand for 21st-century skills such as critical thinking, collaboration, and digital literacy (Ambon et al., 2024).

Despite the importance of TCPD, the quality of teaching depends not only on pre-service teacher education but also on continuous in-service professional development. However, teachers across the world face various challenges that limit their participation in TCPD programmes. UNESCO (2018) reported that 68% of teachers worldwide expressed a need for further training in Information and Communication Technology (ICT), while 61% indicated a need for training on teaching learners with special educational needs. Similarly, Boeskens et al. (2020) found that teachers identified limited time, inadequate resources, and insufficient support from school administrators as major barriers to participation in continuous professional development. Likewise, Kraft et al. (2018) reported that teachers who participate in high-quality professional development are more likely to implement evidence-based teaching practices in their classrooms. However, many teachers still struggle to access and actively participate in professional development opportunities (Desimone & Garet, 2015).

In Africa, challenges facing teachers' continuous professional development are mainly associated with limited financial resources, inadequate infrastructure, and high teacher attrition rates, all of which affect teachers' participation in TCPD programmes (Komba &Mwakabenga, 2019). Likewise, a study conducted in Sub-Saharan Africa found that TCPD implementation was constrained by inadequate funding, insufficient training

opportunities, and limited support from school administrators (Mwila et al., 2022). Similarly, Adu-Agyemang and Osei-Poku (2018) reported that teachers' participation in TCPD in Ghana was influenced by school leadership, collegial support, and access to learning resources.

In Tanzania, the government has continued to prioritize improving the quality of education through TCPD. This commitment is reflected in the Education and Training Policies of 1995 and 2014, which emphasize sustainable in-service training as an important strategy for improving teachers' professional competence (Kapinga, 2019; Mwajoba, 2023; MoEST, 2017a). Despite these government efforts, several studies indicate that many teachers in Tanzania continue to face significant barriers to accessing TCPD opportunities, which limits their professional growth (Komba &Mwakabenga, 2019).

Dachi (2018) observed that once teachers are posted to schools in Tanzania, very few return for formal learning or participate in structured in-service professional development. The study further reported that approximately 52% of teachers in public schools and 58% of teachers in non-government schools had never participated in professional development activities. Furthermore, only 6.4% of teachers in the public sector had attended in-service professional development programmes during the previous five years. Similarly, Mosha (2016) reported that Teachers' Resource Centres (TRCs), established to improve teachers' instructional knowledge and skills, continue to

face several challenges, including inadequate funding, shortages of qualified personnel, and insufficient teaching facilities.

Likewise, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST, 2017b) reported that only 19% of the country's 268,766 teachers were allocated funding for professional development. More recently, Shukia and Komba (2023) noted that TCPD programmes in Tanzania remain inadequate, irregular, and poorly coordinated. The study further identified inadequate funding, limited incentives, poor planning, and weak follow-up mechanisms as major factors hindering the successful implementation of TCPD initiatives.

Evidence from Kapinga and Kimaro (2019), Matiba (2024), and Kannonyele (2023) further indicates that teachers in Tanzania face limited training opportunities, inadequate resources, low motivation, and insufficient support from school administrators. These challenges continue to limit teachers' participation in continuous professional development programmes.

Therefore, this study was conducted to explore the barriers to teachers' participation in continuous professional development in public secondary schools in Njombe Town Council. Specifically, the study sought to identify the major barriers affecting teachers' participation in TCPD and explore possible solutions for improving the quality of teaching. Understanding these challenges is expected to contribute to the development of more effective TCPD programmes that support teachers' professional growth and improve teaching quality in public secondary schools.

2.0 Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by the Social Constructivist Theory (SCT), developed by Lev Vygotsky (1978). The theory explains that learning occurs when individuals actively construct knowledge through interaction, inquiry, and experience rather than passively receiving information (Fosnot, 2013). It emphasizes that social interaction and collaboration with more knowledgeable individuals play an important role in cognitive development, enabling learners to acquire new knowledge and skills (Vygotsky, 1978). The theory further assumes that knowledge is socially constructed and that learners actively participate in developing their own understanding (Saleem et al., 2021). Therefore, SCT highlights the importance of collaboration, interaction, and shared experiences in promoting learning and professional growth.

The theory was considered relevant to this study because teachers' professional development occurs through interaction, collaboration, and the sharing of knowledge and experiences with colleagues. Continuous Professional Development (TCPD) provides opportunities for teachers to learn from one another, reflect on their teaching practices, and improve their professional competencies. Guided by SCT, this study explored how teachers experience and overcome barriers to participating in TCPD programmes. The theory also helped explain how collaborative learning environments can enhance teachers' professional growth and improve the quality of teaching in public secondary schools.

3.0Materials and Methods

This section presents the materials and methods employed in the study. It describes the research approach, research design, participants, data collection methods, data analysis procedures, and ethical considerations used to investigate the barriers to teachers' participation in continuous professional development and their implications for the quality of teaching in public secondary schools.

3.1 Research Approach and Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research approach because it allows an in-depth exploration of teachers' experiences, perceptions, and personal reflections. The approach is suitable for answering "how" and "why" questions rather than "how many" or "how much" questions (Moser &Korstjens, 2017). Through interviews, the researcher obtained rich and detailed information that enhanced understanding of the barriers affecting teachers' participation in continuous professional development programmes.

The study also adopted a case study research design because it enables researchers to investigate contemporary phenomena within their real-life contexts, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clearly defined (Yin, 2018). Furthermore, the case study design is appropriate for answering "how," "why," and "what" questions while providing an in-depth understanding of the specific context of teachers' participation in TCPD.

3.2 Participants

The target population comprised teachers and heads of schools from three selected public secondary schools. Following the principle of data saturation, the study involved 12 participants, including nine teachers and three heads of schools, who were purposively selected from the three schools.

The inclusion of both teachers and heads of schools was important because they are directly involved in the teaching and learning process and are key stakeholders in the implementation of continuous professional development initiatives. Teachers provided first-hand information on the challenges they experience in participating in TCPD programmes, while heads of schools shared their experiences regarding school policies, administrative support, and institutional challenges related to teachers' professional development. The perspectives of these two groups provided a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing teachers' participation in TCPD and their implications for the quality of teaching.

3.3 Data Collection Methods

The study employed semi-structured interviews as the only data collection method. Interviews were conducted with 12 participants, comprising nine teachers and three heads of schools. This method was selected because it allows an in-depth exploration of participants' experiences, opinions, and perceptions. It also enabled the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the barriers affecting teachers' participation in continuous professional development and how these barriers influence the quality of teaching.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on their knowledge and experience with continuous professional development programmes. Heads of schools assisted in identifying teachers who had relevant experience with TCPD. Teachers were selected because of their direct involvement in classroom teaching and their experience with professional development activities. Heads of schools were included because of their knowledge of school policies, administrative support systems, and the implementation of TCPD programmes within their schools.

4.0 Data Analysis and Ethical Considerations

The study employed thematic analysis following the six-step framework developed by Braun and Clarke (2006). This method was selected because it enables researchers to identify, analyse, and interpret patterns and themes within qualitative data.

The analysis began with familiarisation, during which the researcher carefully read all interview transcripts to gain a thorough understanding of the collected data. The researcher then generated initial codes by identifying important concepts and ideas related to the research objectives. These codes were grouped into meaningful categories to develop themes that addressed the research questions. The identified themes were reviewed, refined, defined, and appropriately named to ensure they accurately represented participants' experiences. Finally, the researcher interpreted the findings by linking the themes to the research objectives and existing literature. To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, the researcher applied strategies that addressed the criteria of credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability.

Ethical considerations were also observed throughout the study. The researcher obtained an introductory letter from the Office of the Director of Postgraduate Studies at Ruaha Catholic University. The letter enabled the researcher to seek permission from the Regional and District authorities before conducting the study in the selected public secondary schools. Permission was subsequently granted by the relevant school authorities, allowing the researcher to collect data from the participants.

5.0 Result and Discussion

The findings revealed that teachers face several barriers that hinder their participation in Continuous Professional Development (TCPD) programmes. These barriers include time constraints, heavy workload, financial constraints, lack of leadership support, policy-related challenges, and logistical issues. Collectively, these barriers limit teachers' participation in professional development programmes, restrict their professional growth, and ultimately affect the quality of teaching. The findings are presented and discussed below.

5.1 Time Constraints

The study found that time constraints were one of the major barriers preventing teachers from participating in continuous professional development programmes. Teachers reported having limited time because of demanding teaching schedules and the short notice often given before training sessions.

One teacher explained:

> Sometimes, mandatory TCPD sessions are announced on very short notice, leaving teachers with little time to prepare or adjust their schedules. This abrupt planning causes logistical challenges, as teachers must balance training attendance with their teaching responsibilities. Moreover, the lack of available substitute teachers makes it difficult for them to participate without disrupting classroom instruction and learners' progress (Interview, T1SC, 29th July 2025).

These findings indicate that poor planning and inadequate scheduling make it difficult for teachers to attend professional development activities while fulfilling their teaching responsibilities. As a result, teachers have fewer opportunities to update their knowledge and teaching skills, which may negatively affect the quality of instruction. These findings are consistent with Guzman and Aguilar (2025), who reported that teachers often struggle to balance their daily responsibilities with opportunities for professional learning because of limited time and competing work demands.

5.2 Workload for Teachers

The study identified heavy workload as another major barrier to teachers' participation in continuous professional development programmes. Teachers reported being overwhelmed by teaching responsibilities, administrative duties, and extracurricular activities, leaving little time and energy for professional learning.During the interview, one head of school highlighted this concern:

> Teachers often have heavy teaching schedules, administrative duties, and extracurricular responsibilities that leave little time for professional development programmes. This overload reduces their availability and motivation to engage in additional training sessions beyond regular working hours, ultimately limiting their capacity to benefit from continuous professional development (Interview, HSB, 3rd July 2025).

These findings suggest that excessive workload limits teachers' opportunities to participate effectively in TCPD programmes. Without flexible schedules and adequate institutional support, teachers are unable to balance their teaching responsibilities with professional development activities.

These findings agree with Komba and Mwakabenga (2019) and Klink et al. (2017), who found that teacher professional development is difficult to implement successfully when school policies do not adequately address workload and timetabling challenges. In Tanzania, teachers are generally not allocated dedicated time for professional development, which further limits their participation.

5.3 Financial Constraints

The study further revealed that financial constraints significantly limit teachers' participation in TCPD programmes. Many teachers reported that they could not afford the costs associated with attending training programmes, including registration fees,

transport, accommodation, and learning materials.During the interview, one head of school remarked that:

> *Teachers' participation in continuous professional development is largely constrained by limited resources. Insufficient financial support restricts opportunities for attending training sessions, accessing learning materials, and covering related costs such as transportation and accommodation, thereby reducing teachers' engagement in professional growth programmes* (Interview, HSB, 21st July 2025).

These findings show that inadequate financial support discourages teachers from participating in professional development activities. Limited funding reduces teachers' motivation and restricts their access to learning opportunities that could improve their professional competence.

These findings support those of Guzman and Aguilar (2025) and Soodmand and Ghasemi (2020), who reported that financial challenges are among the major barriers preventing teachers from participating in professional development programmes, especially where teachers are expected to finance their own training.

5.4 Lack of Support from Leadership

The findings also showed that inadequate leadership support discourages teachers from participating in continuous professional development programmes. Teachers felt that

school leaders provided limited encouragement, recognition, and financial support for professional development. During the interview, one teacher shared that:

> Lack of support from leadership is the major barrier to my professional development as a teacher. I have been funding my development programmes, which is burdensome. It's discouraging when my effort is not prioritized, making me feel undervalued. What I believe is that investing in teachers' development is crucial for the school's success (Interview, T3SC, 15th July 2025).

These findings suggest that teachers become less motivated to participate in TCPD when they receive little encouragement and support from school leadership. Recognition, guidance, and financial assistance from school leaders are important factors that promote teachers' engagement in professional learning.

These findings are consistent with Soodmand and Ghasemi (2020), who emphasized that strong institutional support and committed leadership are essential for successful teacher professional development.

5.5 Policy-Related Challenges

The study also identified policy-related challenges as barriers to teachers' participation in TCPD programmes. Teachers reported that bureaucratic procedures, rigid administrative policies, and lengthy approval processes delayed or prevented their participation in training activities. One head of school commented:

> Rigid national policies, often linked to bureaucratic government procedures governing training initiatives, pose a major obstacle to teachers' participation in continuous professional development. Lengthy approval processes and strict administrative requirements delay the organization and implementation of TCPD programmes. As a result, many teachers miss valuable learning opportunities, which in turn limits their professional growth and the effectiveness of TCPD initiatives (Interview, HSA, 3rd July 2025).

The findings indicate that bureaucratic procedures and inflexible administrative systems reduce teachers' access to professional development opportunities. Delays in approval processes discourage participation and weaken the implementation of TCPD programmes.

These findings agree with Komba and Mwakabenga (2019), who argued that the existing policy framework in Tanzania does not clearly provide practical strategies for implementing sustainable teacher professional development. Similarly, Gabriel (2023) observed that bureaucratic inefficiencies, weak institutional capacity, corruption, and resistance to change continue to affect the implementation of public programmes in many developing countries, including professional development initiatives.

5.6 Logistical Challenges

The study further revealed that logistical challenges hinder teachers' participation in continuous professional development programmes. Teachers identified inadequate

transport arrangements, poor coordination, limited availability of substitute teachers, and short-notice scheduling as major logistical barriers. One teacher explained:

> Sometimes, mandatory TCPD sessions are announced on very short notice, leaving teachers with little time to prepare or adjust their schedules. This abrupt planning causes logistical challenges, as teachers must balance training attendance with their teaching responsibilities. Moreover, the lack of available substitute teachers makes it difficult for them to participate without disrupting classroom instruction and learners' progress(Interview, T1SD, 29th July 2025)

These findings indicate that poor planning, inadequate coordination, lack of transport, and the absence of substitute teachers significantly reduce teachers' participation in TCPD programmes. Such challenges make it difficult for teachers to attend training while fulfilling their teaching responsibilities.

The findings are consistent with previous studies showing that logistical and structural barriers continue to limit teachers' participation in professional development programmes (Hardman et al., 2015; Opoku et al., 2021). Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) also emphasized that effective professional development requires proper planning, consistent scheduling, and strong institutional support. Likewise, studies conducted in Tanzania have shown that limited transport, lack of substitute teachers, and weak administrative support continue to hinder teachers' participation in TCPD programmes (Kapinga, 2019; Komba &Mwakabenga, 2019; Shukia& Komba, 2023).

6.0 Conclusion

Development (TCPD) is affected by several personal, institutional, and systemic barriers, which ultimately influence the quality of teaching in public secondary schools. At the individual level, teachers face challenges such as heavy workload, limited time, financial constraints, and low motivation resulting from inadequate support and recognition. At the institutional level, limited leadership support, insufficient funding, and inflexible school practices reduce teachers' opportunities to participate in professional development programmes. In addition, systemic barriers, including bureaucratic procedures and lengthy approval processes, further restrict teachers' access to TCPD opportunities.

Addressing these barriers requires collaborative efforts from policymakers, education authorities, and school leaders. Strengthening policy implementation, increasing institutional support, providing adequate funding and creating favourable conditions for teachers to participate in TCPD will enhance teachers' professional growth and improve the quality of teaching in public secondary schools.

7.0 Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

Policymakers should review and revise existing policies to reduce teachers' workload and address time constraints that limit participation in Continuous Professional Development programmes. School administrators should simplify approval procedures,

provide adequate support, and introduce incentives that encourage teachers to participate in professional development activities.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology should allocate sufficient financial resources to support TCPD programmes. The Ministry should also ensure the availability of substitute teachers during training sessions so that teachers can attend professional development activities without disrupting classroom instruction. Furthermore, TCPD programmes should be planned based on teachers' professional needs and interests to improve their relevance, effectiveness, and participation.

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