

Attitudes of Basic School Teachers in the Cape Coast Municipality Towards Staff Development Activities

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Abstract

Continuing education through Staff development activities meant to enhance skills, knowledge, abilities, and beliefs are inextricably linked to effective teaching and learning. This study sought to determine the attitude of basic education teachers in Ghana toward staff development programmes. Two hundred and twenty-two (222) basic school teachers from Upper Primary and Junior Secondary Schools (JSS) in the Central Region were selected using stratified random sampling methods for the study. The main instrument used for the collection of data was a researcher-designed questionnaire following the principles of the Likert Scale to ascertain teachers' personal characteristics and attitudes towards staff development programmes. The data obtained was analyzed using the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS). The study showed that Basic school teachers in the Cape Coast Municipality have a positive attitude towards staff development programmes. However, a more positive attitude is possible if staff development programmes are organised on regular basis and teachers are encouraged to appreciate the importance of staff development activities to the teacher and the school as a whole. The study also revealed that there is no systematic evaluation of the impact of staff development activities on the teaching practices of the individual teachers as well as the gains in students learning. There is, therefore, the need for organizers of staff development activities especially the Ghana Education Service (GES) to enforce proper supervision and evaluation of the impact of such programmes. Some recommendations are suggested on the basis of the findings.

Introduction

The greatest treasure and asset of a nation are its educational institutions. They make or mar the destiny of a nation. The strength of a nation is built on human resources developed by its educational institutions which train the brains, provide skills and open a new world of opportunities and possibilities to the nation (Ullah Khan, 2005).

Education is one of the most important tools for national development, therefore, progressive governments all over the world has been making frantic efforts to provide and promote sound educational policies as well as infrastructure that will help its people to acquire

knowledge, skills and attitudes that will enable them develop their individual potentials.

Staff development programmes are systematic attempts to bring about change in the classroom practices of teachers, changes in their beliefs and attitudes, and change in the learning outcomes of students (Smith, 2001). The importance of staff development programmes for the individual teacher and the school as a whole cannot be underestimated. But it is pertinent to note that organizing the programme is one aspect and the individual teacher's perception or attitude towards such programmes and what the individual teacher thinks he/she will gain from the programme is also another aspect of the situation which needs to be taken into consideration.

Providing the organization or institution and the school with the suitable human resources involves not only recruitment and retention, but rather the training and development of employees, prior to employment or at any time during their employment, to help them meet the requirement of their current job (Butler, 1989). In other words, the issue of staff development for teachers and other workers is very crucial when it comes to the development and improvement of the institution within which the individual worker works.

School improvement and quality education are terms that have, as yet, not been assimilated into the common parlance of education in most schools (Hopkins, 1987). Notwithstanding this, school improvement remains very crucial in every country. Since the needs and aspirations of the society keep on changing from time to time and new education standards are set regularly, it has become very necessary for educational authorities and teachers to learn new ideas and skills in order to improve the teaching and learning process in schools.

Statement of the Problem

Oftentimes, school improvement efforts focus on new programmes and procedures that will transform a school, new curriculum materials, alternative scheduling, and new methods of reporting students' achievement. Programmes and materials do not bring about change; but people do (Dufour and Barkey, 1995). According to Villegas-Reimers (2003) the recent developments and changes in the school curriculum and educational reforms will not be able to provide the expected results if those who are supposed to implement them are not given the needed training and resources to do so.

In Ghana, as in many other developing countries, a severe deterioration in the inputs in basic education and its consequent effects on learning achievements has been recorded since the late 1970s. In spite of the various governmental and donor interventions in the education sector, very little success in delivering quality teaching and learning has been recorded. The most prominent of the identified causes of low learning outcomes is teacher inefficiency and the situation calls for regular updating and monitoring of teacher efficiency through regular in-service training and programmes (Aboagye, 2004).

Over the years both public and official reports have raised mounting concerns about teacher

training and development with more emphasis on in-service training and staff development but not much in terms of research has been done to determine teachers' perception of staff development programmes and activities. This study is therefore aimed at investigating teachers' perceptions of staff development programmes.

Objectives of the Study

The study examined basic school teachers' perceptions of staff development activities in the Cape Coast Municipality of Ghana. Consequently the purpose of the study was to:

- (i) Assess how basic school teachers perceive staff development activities.
- (ii) Examine whether or not staff development activities provide additional knowledge and skills to the individual teacher.
- (iii) Examine how often teachers participate in staff development activities.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are basic teachers' perceptions of staff development programmes?
2. How often do teachers participate in staff development programmes?
3. When did teachers undertake most of their staff development activities?
4. What are teachers' perceptions regarding the degree to which staff development programmes provide added knowledge and skills?
5. What is the impact of staff development programmes on teachers?

Research Methodology

Population and Sample

The target population of the study was all basic school teachers in Ghana. But due to the financial constraints involved, the study was limited to Cape Coast Municipality in the Central Region of Ghana. A total sample of two hundred and twenty-two (222) teachers, which was made up of eighty-eight (88) males and one hundred and thirty-four (134) female teachers took part in the study. Thirty-seven (37) teachers were selected from the six educational circuits in the Cape Coast Municipality through stratified random sampling techniques.

Instrument

The research instrument was a questionnaire consisting 34 items administered to teachers to identify their professional qualifications and also to find out their teaching experiences and their attitudes towards staff development activities. The questionnaire had four sections; the first section enquired about personal data of teachers including sex, age, academic qualification, years of teaching experience and subject taught. It also identified the number of staff development programmes that teachers have attended organizers and type of staff and development programmes available to teachers. The second section explored the attitudes, perceptions and beliefs of the respondents towards staff development programmes. The third section dealt with the periods that teachers attend staff development programmes, motivation and hindrances for not attending staff development programme; while section

four looked at the evaluation and impact of staff development programmes, additional support/training to be included in future staff development programmes and suggestions about improving staff development programmes.

Methods of Data Analysis

The instrument was validated using a pilot study of some basic school teachers in the Kwahu South District who were interviewed to know whether they have similar understanding of the questions in the questionnaire. Results of the pilot study were used to modify the questionnaire after which content as well as face validity of the questionnaire were made. All the copies of the questionnaires were examined to check accuracy and completeness. The schedules were numbered serially, edited, coded and fed into the computer. The data obtained was analyzed using the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics were depicted using absolute numbers, simple percentage and cross tabulation.

Results and Discussion

The results showed that the majority of teachers were within the age range of 20 – 35 years. Out of the total of two hundred and twenty (220) teachers who provided their ages 144 (65.5%) were between the age range 20- 35 years. With a mean age of 31 years for the two hundred and twenty (222) teachers who took part in the study, it was clear that majority of the teachers were young and could have more than 25 years of active service in the teaching field. This is a great asset to staff development programmes since by virtue of their age these teachers may not have been entrenched in old ideas of teaching and therefore are more likely to adopt change during staff development programmes.

In addition, the results also revealed that 98 (44.5%) teachers have taught for between one and five years, while 86 (39%) of the teachers have taught for between six and ten years. This indicates that the majority of the teachers were very young in the teaching profession and may require different and regular forms of staff development activities as compared to their colleague veteran teachers. This confirms Barnard's (2004), claim that apprentices or newly trained teachers have more positive attitude towards staff development programmes as compared to their colleagues veteran teachers. The study revealed that veteran teachers showed a more negative attitude toward staff development programmes as compared to their colleagues apprentice teachers. This was attributed to the fact that most of these veteran teachers have been teaching the same subject for some years and therefore think they have mastered the required knowledge and skills hence they see staff development activities as unnecessary.

An encouraging finding from this study was that most of the respondents expressed positive attitudes toward staff development programmes and most of them acknowledged the importance of staff development programmes for the individual teacher as well as the student and the school as a whole.

Table 1: Teachers' Perception of Staff Development programmes

| S/N | ITEMS | Strongly Agree | | Agree | | Uncertain | | Disagree | | Strongly Disagree | | Mean |
|-----|--|----------------|------|-------|------|-----------|-----|----------|------|-------------------|------|------|
| | | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % | |
| 1 | Staff Development Programme is waste of time | 26 | 11.7 | 20 | 9.0 | 2 | 0.9 | 80 | 36 | 94 | 42.3 | 1.9 |
| 2 | Staff development programmes should be used for promoting teachers | 40 | 18.1 | 60 | 27 | 2 | 0.9 | 84 | 37.8 | 36 | 16.2 | 2.47 |
| 3 | Staff development should be compulsory for all teachers | 74 | 33.3 | 96 | 43.2 | 2 | 0.9 | 26 | 11.7 | 24 | 10.8 | 3.0 |
| 4 | Staff development programmes should be organised on regular basis | 80 | 36 | 106 | 47.7 | 2 | 0.9 | 28 | 12.6 | 6 | 2.7 | 3.18 |
| 5 | Teachers should be rewarded for attending staff development programmes | 94 | 42.3 | 88 | 39.6 | 2 | 0.9 | 26 | 11.7 | 12 | 5.4 | 3.2 |
| 6 | Staff development programmes are meant for brilliant teachers | 10 | 4.5 | 14 | 6.3 | 4 | 1.8 | 66 | 29.7 | 128 | 57.7 | 1.5 |
| 7 | Teachers should take advantage of staff development programmes to upgrade their knowledge. | 86 | 38.7 | 108 | 48.6 | 2 | 0.9 | 16 | 7.2 | 10 | 4.5 | 3.23 |
| 8 | Staff development activities should be included in the school curriculum | 52 | 23.4 | 120 | 54.1 | 4 | 1.8 | 32 | 14.4 | 14 | 6.3 | 2.96 |

Table 1 shows that 174 (78.3%) of the respondents disagreed that staff development is a waste of time. With a low mean of 1.9 the findings suggest that teachers are aware of the fact that staff development is very important for the individual teacher and the school as a whole. In addition to this, table 1 supports the statement that staff development should be

organised on regular basis. Overwhelming majority of the respondents 186 (83.7%) was in agreement that staff development programmes should be organised on regular basis. A high mean of 3.18, suggests that teachers are prepared and willing to participate in such activities if they are organised on regular basis and are made relevant to their subject area. This confirms Hargreaves and Fullan's (1992) findings on school improvement and the raising of educational standards as revolving around the issue of providing equal and sufficient opportunities to all children to learn in schools. The quest for improved and higher standards of education will materialize when the teaching staff has a positive attitude toward staff development programmes and are willing to use staff development to improve and refine their individual knowledge and skills.

Though the results from table 1 show a general positive attitude toward staff development programmes by teachers it can also be seen that there are some variations in individual item responses. A typical example is item three which deals with making staff development compulsory for all teachers. Most of the respondents acknowledged the importance of staff development programmes for teachers and the schools, but 22.5% of them were of the view that staff development should not be made compulsory. This is probably because they think making it compulsory will add additional burden to their heavy work load.

**Table 2: Teacher Participation in Staff Development Activities for 2006/2007 year
Frequency of Participation in Staff**

| Frequency of Participation in Staff Development Activities | Number (Frequency) | Percentage (%) |
|---|---------------------------|-----------------------|
| Not at all | 64 | 28.8 |
| Once | 42 | 18.9 |
| Twice | 60 | 27.1 |
| Thrice | 28 | 12.6 |
| Four and above | 28 | 12.6 |
| Total | 222 | 100 |

Table 2 shows that 18.9% and 28.8% of basic school teachers have attended only once or have not attended any staff development programme at all for the 2006/2007 academic. Also the table shows that only 12.6% of basic school teachers have attended staff development programme for four or more times in the whole academic year. The quality of teaching staff has a direct impact on the performance of students and it is therefore necessary to make concerted efforts to improve on teacher quality.

One of major reasons for many teachers not attending staff development programmes was the inability of the educational authorities to organize such programmes for teachers especially those in the rural areas. The findings suggest that lack of suitable programmes and motivation were some of the reasons for teachers' low attendance in staff development programmes.

This confirms Chambers (1997) assertion that, teachers can be persuaded to be involved in a given programme when they feel that they will be rewarded in one way or the other.

Table 3: Timing of staff development activities

| Time/Period | Number of Respondents | Percentage (%) |
|---------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------|
| During school hours | 128 | 57.7 |
| After school hours | 72 | 32.4 |
| Outside term time | 18 | 8.1 |
| Weekends | 4 | 1.8 |
| Total | 222 | 100 |

The results from table 3 indicate that 57.7% of the staff development activities for teachers were organised during school hours with about 42.3% of them been organised outside school hours, weekends and outside term time. Though the importance of staff development for the teacher and the school cannot be underestimated, the respondents however indicated that staff development programmes are organized during school hours. The organization of staff development programmes during school hours normally affects the school calendar and usually leads to loss of instructional time. Most of the lesson periods which are not taught as a result of teachers attending staff development programmes are normally not recovered. This goes a long way in affecting students especially those preparing for external examinations because teachers are not able to cover the syllabus before such examinations are written.

Table 4: Factors preventing teachers from taking part in staff development activities

| ITEMS | Number of respondents | Percentage (%) |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Lack of suitable programmes | 58 | 26.1 |
| Too much work load for the teacher | 98 | 44.1 |
| Travel Cost | 30 | 13.5 |
| Travel Time | 24 | 10.8 |
| Unwillingness to participate | 12 | 5.5 |
| Total | 222 | 100 |

Table 4 presents the obstacles that prevent teachers from participating in staff development activities. Many of the teachers (44.1%) indicated too much work load as a major factor preventing teachers from taking part in staff development programmes. Also, 26% of them indicated the lack of suitable programmes as one of the major factors which prevents them from participating in any staff development activity. Though travel time and travel cost are considered as some of the factors preventing teachers from taking part in staff development programmes, but lack of suitable programmes and heavy work load for the teacher were ranked higher. This confirms Kendall's (1989) and Darling-Hammond (1999) finding that

most teachers have a huge work load already on their shoulders; adding an additional work load of attending a staff development programme, though will be of benefit to the teachers and the school, will put too much pressure on the teacher, and teachers are normally likely to object to attending such programmes.

Table 5: Perceived Importance of Staff Development Programmes

| S/N | ITEMS | Strongly Agree | | Agree | | Uncertain | | Disagree | | Strongly Disagree | | Mean |
|-----|---|----------------|------|-------|------|-----------|-----|----------|------|-------------------|-----|------|
| | | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % | |
| 1 | Staff Development assisted me in improving students' learning | 64 | 28.8 | 128 | 57.7 | 2 | 0.9 | 18 | 8.1 | 10 | 4.5 | 3.06 |
| 2 | Staff Development has helped me to obtain important resources | 64 | 28.8 | 128 | 57.7 | 2 | 0.9 | 26 | 11.7 | 2 | 0.9 | 3.08 |
| 3 | Staff Development has improved my classroom management skills | 66 | 29.7 | 112 | 50.5 | 8 | 7.2 | 24 | 10.8 | 4 | 1.8 | 3.17 |
| 4 | Staff development has helped me to improve my teaching methods | 82 | 36.9 | 112 | 50.5 | - | - | 22 | 9.9 | 6 | 2.7 | 3.19 |
| 5 | Staff development has helped me to increase my ability to prepare students for new challenges | 64 | 28.8 | 122 | 55 | - | - | 30 | 13.5 | 6 | 2.7 | 3.2 |

Improvement in the knowledge and skills of teachers is the key ingredient to successful implementation of educational reforms and also constitutes a critical component for student success and total development of the school. Teachers acquire new knowledge and skills from different sources both formal and informal. For most teachers the main source of acquiring new knowledge and skills is through training programmes such as staff development programmes since majority of teachers normally do not have time to revise their college notes not to think about reading new materials to upgrade their knowledge and skills (Goble and Porter, 1997).

From table 5 it can be said that majority of the teachers (87.4%) were of the view that staff development has helped them to improve upon their teaching methods. Item four with a mean of 3.19 suggests that in general staff development activities help teachers to improve

their teaching methods and this can help in improving the quality of teaching and learning in the school. The search for school improvement largely depends on the training and knowledgeable of the teaching staff. It is generally accepted that there is a direct relationship between teachers' knowledge and skills and students' performance. In other words, knowledgeable teachers and staff members are able to take critical decisions and initiatives that will improve the teaching learning process in school and the total development of the school as a whole.

Majority of the respondents stated that they have learnt and gained additional knowledge in participating in staff development programmes and this will go a long way to assist them in teaching. When teachers meet it is likely that they will share ideas and learn from each other since most of the staff development programmes that teachers attend differ from one school to another. This confirms National Staff Development Council (NSDC) (2001) assertion that teachers can learn from each other and this can bring about change in the classroom practices of teachers, changes in their beliefs and attitudes, and change in the learning outcomes of students. Subsequently, this will lead to school improvement. Individual teachers can transfer the knowledge that they have acquired from such programmes to their colleagues who could not be part of the programme.

Recommendations

Based on the results of the study the following recommendations were made:

1. Educational authorities, schools, districts, and other organizers of staff development programmes should develop systematic and comprehensive staff development plans for teachers.
2. Staff development organizers should to draw up a strategic plan with a well defined set of goals and expected outcomes, and make use of follow-ups to assess whether the objectives of the programme have been achieved.
3. The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports in conjunction with the Ghana Education Service should provide financial and logistical support to individual schools and districts to assist them in organizing their own school-based staff development activities, since it is generally believed that school-based staff development programmes are more effective and comprehensive and normally takes into consideration the individual needs of the teacher as compared to the central-based staff development programmes.

Conclusion

This paper examined the perceptions of basic school teachers on staff development activities in the Cape Coast Municipality of Ghana. The study revealed that majority of the respondents appreciate the fact that staff development is one of the means through which teachers can improve their pedagogical skills. This will help in improving students' performance and the quality of education in Ghana. A major concern for most of the teachers was the need to increase the number of staff development programmes and make them more relevant to their subject area.

Furthermore, majority of the respondents have positive attitude towards staff development programmes and they are willing to participate in such programmes provided the programmes will help them acquire additional knowledge and improve their teaching methods.

School improvement depends on how well the staff is developed in terms of quality knowledge and skills which will equip them to perform their duties effectively and efficiently. The professional development of staff members especially teachers is very crucial in every school improvement plan and should therefore be pursued vigorously by educational authorities.

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