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Promoting Teacher Professional Learning in Tanzanian Schools: Lessons from Chinese School-Based Professional Learning Communities

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Abstract

This paper reports on the history, features, and challenges of School-Based Professional Learning Communities (SBPLCs) in China to elicit lessons for Tanzania towards improving in-service teacher professional development. Based on the Chinese SBPLCs, this review aims to provide some insights to educational planners and teachers in Tanzania on how to establish and maintain effective school-based professional learning. This analysis used 30 journal articles published over the past twelve years (2006-2017) to provide research-based evidence. The findings indicate that Chinese schools have registered significant achievements in SBPLCs by supporting teacher collaborative learning and research in both rural and urban areas. As Tanzania strives to promote school-based teacher professional development, several lessons are worth learning. Thus, the study recommends that the country endorse professional learning at the school level by developing explicit in-school policies, allocating time for teacher-learning, offering financial and material support to teachers, and encouraging teachers to take charge of their professional learning.

Keywords: *Chinese school-based professional learning; professional learning communities; Tanzania; teacher professional development*

1. Introduction

Learning to teach is not only destined for initial teacher training programme but also requires a career-long continuous professional development. In fact, it is widely recommended that in-service teachers should participate in regular professional learning for engendering effective classroom practices, and implementing numerous education reforms (Vescio et al., 2008; Wong, 2012; Zhang et al., 2016; Zhou, 2014). In addition, global economic challenges have increasingly been exerting pressure on teachers to prepare a competent workforce. In consequence, local and international agencies require

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teachers to employ learner-centred pedagogies and assume roles of facilitators to enhance the quality of teaching (Wong, 2012). In this regard, teachers' engagement in regular professional learning is an important aspect for keeping them knowledgeable to nurture competent students.

With increasing classroom diversity and demand for quality teaching, traditional training approaches to in-service teachers may no longer be effective. One-time teacher training programmes, such as workshops, are popular across the world (Gaible & Burns, 2005; Villegas-Reimers, 2003). Nevertheless, these programmes have been poorly co-ordinated and, as a result, they have failed to help teachers improve their pedagogical practices (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2001; Joyce & Calhoun, 2010). In many cases, such hit-and-run workshops (Darling-Hammond, 2008) do not always reflect actual teachers' working environment, as teachers have been recipients of knowledge (Leu, 2004).

Therefore, teachers need assistance to participate in well-designed professional development programmes (Hargreaves et al., 2013) that embrace sustainable learning opportunities. In fact, there is consensus in research that teachers can change pedagogical practices when their learning time is maximised, and formal structures—such as courses, workshops and forms of training—reflect their professional needs (Gu & Wang, 2006; Vescio et al., 2008; Wong, 2012; Zhang et al. 2016). Based on this understanding, on-going teacher professional learning can be guaranteed when geared towards satiating professional needs, and when executed in work contexts (Guskey, 2014).

In Tanzania, the 1995 educational and training policy clearly stipulated that after the initial teacher education, continuous in-service teacher learning is compulsory, and several attempts have been instituted to improve the implementation of this policy to advance teacher education (Hardman & Dachi, 2012; Hardman et al., 2015; URT, 2008). In particular, the emphasis on on-the-job training seeks to update teachers' teaching knowledge and skills mainly to boost the delivery of quality of education services. Moreover, the Tanzania government (URT, 2008) insists on teachers being made aware of treating effective professional learning as a matter of personal initiative, and therefore they need support to practice it.

Notwithstanding its intent, the government has confessed that "… the focus of in-service training programmes has reached only a small section of teachers leaving many teachers staying up to 10 years without [benefiting from] any further training" (ibid: 26). Similarly, Anangisye (2011: 149) has underscored that "… opportunities to access and participation in quality teacher professional developments are rare or not there at all." Based on micro-studies carried out in Tanzania (Kafyulilo, 2013; Msonde, 2011; Mwakabenga, 2018), it appears that teachers might have been engaging in different forms of school-based professional learning within school contexts. Nevertheless, a study by Hardman et al. (2015) indicated that Tanzania lacks an established formal structure that may guide effective implementation of this school-based professional learning.

Another possible explanation of inadequate professional learning for teachers in Tanzania is that their learning is strictly confined to formal training formats such as seminars, with

other informal learning opportunities that occur in schools rarely counted or remaining largely unorganised. Surprisingly, the assertion that these training sessions do not help teachers in Tanzania to change their classroom practices has significantly been documented over the years (Komba & Nkumbi, 2008; Msonde, 2011; URT, 2007). In fact, this lack of adequate training constitutes one of the main factors behind poor teachers' pedagogical practices and performance of students in schools (Sumra & Katabaro, 2014).

Tanzania established a Teacher Development Management Strategy (TDMS2008-2013) to revise the management of in-service teacher education for all education levels. Consequently, a team of researchers was commissioned to investigate and suggest an appropriate approach to effective Tanzania in-service teacher education. A pilot study conducted on primary school teachers by this team recommended the use of school-based teacher professional development for relevant and sustainable teacher learning (Hardman & Dachi, 2012; Hardman, et al., 2015). However, this school-based professional learning has yet to be formalised in Tanzanian schools. Interestingly, teachers, as learners, continue to learn somehow from their respective workplaces, even in the absence of well-structured professional learning activities (Hoekstra et al., 2009; Ingvarson, 2003; Moeini, 2008). Since Tanzanian teachers might be engaging in some forms of learning within their schools, we found the need for this review to offer some insights into how school-based professional learning could be improved and sustained that could inform educational planners, decision-makers, school managers and teachers themselves.

In this regard, Tanzania can pick a leaf from the Chinese experience. The Chinese school-based professional learning is a teacher learning mode that is situated within teachers' working environment. The Chinese School-Based Professional Learning Communities (SBPLCs) offer life-changing experiences that allow teachers to engage in ongoing professional learning alongside their routine teaching job. The SBPLCs in China exist at different administrative levels, and have been in place since the 1950s to maximise teachers' professional learning and classroom teaching (Wong, 2012, 2014; Yan & He, 2011). China has also integrated some Western ideas of teacher professional learning community, which makes the SBPLCs flexible and dynamic.

Generally, there is no single effective model of teacher professional development (Leu, 2004). Similarly, even the Chinese SBPLCs could not be claimed to be a perfect model for addressing all teachers' professional development issues. Although we acknowledge that there are some other good examples of countries to emulate, this study chose China due to several reasons. Firstly, China's school-based professional learning has penetrated into even remote and poorly resourced areas (Sargent & Hannum, 2009; Wang, 2015). Secondly, China has had a reportedly long history of SBPLCs compared to the West (Gu & Wang, 2006; Wong, 2010b; 2012; 2014), which credits it with being more experienced in teacher learning communities. Thirdly, unlike the US and other countries in Europe, Chinese schools are advantaged in terms of time, space, and incentives for SBPLCs (Sargent & Hannum, 2009). Fourthly, SBPLCs in China have existed in the form of teachers' writing papers for publication and knowledge dissemination. Interestingly, these papers have been used as a means of appraising and promoting teachers (Sargent & Hannum, 2009). Fifthly, China has recently demonstrated enormous improvement in students' performance in the Programme

for International Student Assessment (PISA), and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2012). Such performance is associated with quality teaching that is largely contributed by SBPLCs. Overall, the choice of China is justifiable on multiple grounds and, hence, an intriguing study area.

Learning from other countries—especially from Western and Asian countries that rank top in education—has been a common and helpful practice in the field of teacher education (Darling-Hammond, 2008; Hiebert & Stigler, 2017). Towards this end, this review is consciously undertaken while considering the differences in economic, political, and socio-cultural features between China and Tanzania. Regardless of the differences, the management of SBPLCs in remote rural places in China reflects the poorly resourced teachers' working environments in Tanzania. More significantly, China's teacher SBPLCs have been contributing to the improvement of classroom practices and, thus, Tanzania can gain some tips on the management of effective teacher professional development from its experiences. This review was guided by two questions: (i) In what ways are Chinese SBPLCs conducted? and (ii) What lessons can Tanzania draw from Chinese SBPLCs to improve its teacher professional development?

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Concept of School-Based Teacher Professional Learning

Globally, school-based professional learning is increasingly a collaborative approach to teacher learning that embraces different forms of learning. However, a considerable number of scholars suggest that there is no single definition that accurately describes school-based teacher professional learning. As a result, teacher learning has accumulated several terms. For example, in Western literature, school-based professional learning is commonly referred to as professional learning communities (Avalos, 2011; Gu & Wang, 2006; Wong, 2010a; Wong & Tsui, 2017; Zhang & Pang, 2016; Zwart, Korthagen, & Attema-noordewier, 2015). In China, this teacher learning is popularly known as school-based professional learning communities (SBPLCs) (Qiao & Yu, 2016; Wong, 2010a), whereas in some parts of the world it is known as community of practice (Cheng & Wu, 2016). However, these forms of professional learning share the same underlying philosophy: that learning is co-constructed by teachers when they interact in a given social and cultural environment. As such, the concept of school-based professional learning needs to be contextualised due to variability in practice, and best described regarding its features. The main assumption is that learning is situated within the teachers' working environment, where they collaborate to learn and reflect on their practice with the purpose of improving it. Therefore, for the purpose of this review, the terms 'school-based professional learning' and 'SBPLCs' are commonly used to refer to collaborative teachers' professional learning that focuses on addressing student learning needs in schools.

2.2 Features of School-Based Teacher Professional Learning

An understanding of the common features of school-based professional learning is critical as it provides a composite picture on how teachers can engage in effective professional learning. Recent (see, for example, Avalos, 2011; Croft, Coggshall et al., 2010; Owen, 2014; Robinson, 2014; Song, 2012; Wong, 2010b) has identified a number of essential interrelated features that guarantee effective school-based professional learning. These

shared features, which contribute to successful and well-developed teacher professional learning, include shared vision and values, teacher autonomy, collaborative learning, and supportive leadership.

2.2.1 Shared Vision and Values

Shared vision and values make teachers willing to contribute to experiences and expertise, while being guided by the common goal of promoting students' learning. Teachers demonstrate collective responsibility in attending to teaching and learning challenges by improving their professional knowledge and skills (Owen, 2014; Song, 2012; Timperley, 2011; Wong, 2010b). Shared vision and values undergird successful collaboration in teacher professional learning demands teachers' "shared sense of purpose" (Song, 2012: 82) and working towards common goals; the main goal being the improvement of students' outcomes (Song, 2012; Wong, 2010b). According to Song (2012), the focus on students' learning is not only a goal of teacher learning, but also a component that measures the success of school-based teacher professional learning.

2.2.2 Teacher Autonomy

Another important feature of school-based professional learning is related to the notion of teacher autonomy. Hargreaves et al. (2013: 19) have argued that teacher autonomy refers to "taking initiatives, acting independently and making critical inquiries", features that are essential in engendering successful teacher professional learning. Some scholars note that autonomy enhances teachers' self-confidence, collaborative spirits and commitment to improving professional learning practices (Cheng & Wu, 2016; Hargreaves et al., 2013). Respect and trust among teachers and school leadership are also essential ingredients in fostering teacher autonomy over their professional learning (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Vangrieken et al. (2017) have contended that trust and respect influence members' willingness and confidence in sharing knowledge with others, listening to others, and developing positive attitudes towards the community itself. Respecting other people's points-of-view creates a good atmosphere for teachers' autonomy because it can allow them to interact in free and productive ways (Wang, 2015). Conversely, a culture of disrespect and mistrust hinders the teachers' willingness to take risks and shoulder responsibilities to control their professional learning.

2.2.3 Supportive Leadership

Supportive leadership is important in cultivating and sustaining a culture that supports school-based professional learning (Owen, 2014; Vangrieken et al., 2017; Wang, 2016). Along with other features, Owen (2014) assert that supportive leadership—such as the establishment of structures for friendly communication, sufficient meeting time, socialisation, support, and empowerment for newly and experienced teachers—is essential in ensuring the success of teacher learning. Moreover, supportive leadership ensures that teachers remain committed to their professional learning goals and values. In their analysis of effective features of professional learning, Vangrieken et al. (2017) highlighted the need for providing leadership support in teacher professional learning at the school level. Thus, a supportive leadership is also pivotal in improving teachers' senses of autonomy and collaborative learning.

2.2.4 Collaborative Learning

Collaboration is another important feature of school-based professional learning that facilitates the teachers working together to achieve common goals. Literature discusses the aspect of collaboration in terms of collaborative culture in teacher professional development (Avalos, 2011; Owen, 2014; Wong, 2010a, 2012, 2014). With regard to the idea of collaborative culture, Vangrieken et al. (2017: 54) treat "dynamics and group composition" as important aspects of collaborative cultures. They further argue that good interpersonal relationships between teachers and facilitators of professional learning are crucial in successful collaboration. Wang (2015: 908) has distinguished 'genuine collegiality' from 'contrived collegiality' as important aspects of collaborative culture. Contrived collegiality is characterised by too much compliance to administrative orders and structures (Lee et al., 2014; Wang, 2015; Zhang, Yuan & Yu, 2016). Such administrative orders and structures, according to Wang (2015), tend to be inflexible and sometimes unrelated to the context of teachers' collaboration. Genuine collegiality, on the exact opposite, hence its ability to enhance effective teacher learning through genuine collaboration that fosters teacher creativity in their learning activities.

Collaborative learning entails teachers learning together by observing each other's lessons, collective lesson preparations and solving other problems related to improving practice and students' learning (Cheng & Wu, 2016; Song, 2012; Wong, 2012; Zhang et al., 2016). Shared personal practice as a form of collaborative learning focuses on the learning needs of teachers and students. For instance, teachers' shared learning practice may involve the discussion of students' work to devise strategies for improving their academic performance. Referring to it as 'shared knowledge', Wong (2012: 348) contends that shared personal practice depends on other features such as respect and trust, supportive leadership, and collaborative culture.

2.2.5 Summary

The analysis of the main features of school-based teacher professional learning forms the basis for understanding professional development systems that exist in China and Tanzania and how they relate. In short, extant literature indicates that teacher learning in a school context can be enhanced through promoting the role of teachers in their learning, while receiving requisite support.

3. Method

The paper used the document analysis method: "… a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents…. [with the purpose of] … eliciting meaning, gaining understanding and developing empirical knowledge" (Bowen, 2009: 27). We used the Beijing Normal University Library English homepage URL: http://202.112.82.89/ to retrieve a list of journal articles which we use in this study. Key phrases such as 'teacher professional development in China', 'professional development in China', 'teacher professional learning communities', 'school-based professional learning in China' and 'teacher professional learning communities in China' guided a general search that produced more than 4,690 materials, including dissertations/theses, books, book reviews and journal articles.

We paid attention to journal articles published over the past twelve years (2006-2017) to capture how Chinese SBPLCs have recently evolved over time. However, overall, other journal articles and related literature published before 2006 were cited in the introduction and methodology sections, as well as to support the findings from the journal articles reviewed. The document search started with a guiding theme 'understanding teacher professional development in China'. Thus, by reading abstracts, introduction, and methodology sections, we selected and read the first three articles by Avalos (2011), Wong (2010b) and Wong (2012). These articles guided the selection of other articles. The three articles were those that came first in our search, and familiarised us with different terms that describe SBPLCs. This familiarisation gave us similar key terms for conducting further searches. In that respect, we began to focus our search on the core features of SBPLCs. As new data emerged, we refined the themes and sub-themes. Having reviewed 30 journal articles, the next review yielded similar results. Thus, we considered the 30 journal articles as a basis for our theoretical saturation.

Methodologically, of the 30 journal articles reviewed, 21 were empirical studies (15 used qualitative and 3 used quantitative approaches whereas another 3 employed mixed research methods). The rest were theoretical journal articles. In terms of the findings, we gathered information such as background information, features of SBPLCs, factors and challenges of SBPLCs and historical development of SBPLCs in China. We continued to review the abstracts and whole journal articles, while taking note of issues related to the topic under study. We used the constant comparative method (Charmaz, 2010: 188) to look for differences, similarities and patterns between categories and data. In addition, we continually refined and redefined the categories until the final themes related to our research questions were generated.

While remaining open to other emerging themes, we used the four core features of school-based professional learning—as described earlier—and the two research questions that guided this review as a framework for analysing data and organising findings of the present study. Additionally, we included other themes that emerged such as the historical development of SBPLCs in China, factors influencing SBPLCs and challenges facing SBPLCs in that country. We included these themes based on their relevance to our research questions. Together with the four core features of school-based professional learning, we then used these themes to provide insights into teacher professional learning in Tanzania, the crux of this paper.

4. Findings and Discussions

4.1 Approaches to Chinese Teacher SBPLCs

Chinese teachers rely on SBPLCs as a time-tested approach to the provision of in-service teacher education. While a significant attention of research on SBPLCs in the West is associated with the mid-1990s (Wong, 2014), China has had a long history of school-based teacher professional learning dating back from the 1950s (Gu & Wang, 2006; Wong, 2010b; Wong, 2012). Although there is still debate on their quality, efficacy and potential to influence teacher change, Wang (2015) argued that SBPLCs are also common in remote areas. Sargent and Hannum (2009) have also confirmed that Chinese SBPLCs have penetrated even in rural and poorly resourced locations.

Indeed, since the 1950s the Chinese SBPLCs have been geared towards improving teacher competency, and traditionally go by the name of *jiayanzu,* i.e., Teaching Research Groups (TRGs) (Wong, 2010a). TRGs are institutionalised in Chinese schools as an integral part of teachers' daily practices. These TRGs are subject-based and teachers have to organise learning activities on weekly basis in a fixed time slot (Huang & Bao, 2006; Wong, 2010b, 2012; Wong & Tsui, 2017; Zhang & Pang, 2016a). Wong (2010b) asserted that within each subject's TRGs, there are *beikezu*—collective lesson preparation groups (CLPGs)—organised according to grade levels. The TRGs have organised activities such as collective lesson planning meetings, open lessons (*gongkaike*), and lesson observation. Therefore, the central focus of these groups is on a subject-matter and pedagogical-content knowledge (Wong, 2012). Outside sources such as university scholars, researchers and teacher educators are, sometimes, invited in TRGs to bring in their expertise (Zhang et al., 2016). The goal is to ensure that TRGs are kept on track by updating and equipping teachers with contemporary knowledge and teaching practices.

Another interesting approach to school-based professional learning is action education or *xingdong jiaoyu* in Chinese. This approach combines teacher professional learning and teaching research (Gu & Wang, 2006; Wong, 2010b). Action education is similar to TRGs, with an added research component. Action education is also implemented through *keli* (Exemplary Lesson Development), whereby teachers and researchers in groups (*keli* groups) participate in a process of "lesson planning, lesson delivery and post-reflection and lesson re-delivery" (Huang & Bao, 2006: 280). Action education operates as a form of action research in which the primary goal is bridging theory and practice. Gu and Wang (2006) have summarised action education as starting with the school or teachers inviting researchers who work with teachers to discuss subject topics, and later consider a specific lesson of their choice aimed to improve teachers' knowledge of educational theory. Teachers and researchers participate in observation and revisions of lessons, with the revised lessons being re-observed and re-revised through discussions. This learning cycle is repeated until targeted skills are mastered.

An appraisal system is another interesting area of teacher learning in China. In China, the appraisal system has two main intentions—professional development and personnel management. Moreover, teachers' evaluations are based on four categories of moral conduct, duties, achievement and competence (Zhang & Ng, 2011). For instance, under achievement and competence, teachers are expected to undertake teaching research in activities such as observing each other's lessons and sharing information on how to improve their teaching practices. Evaluation procedures involve teachers' self-evaluation followed by evaluation within their respective departments (Zhang & Ng, 2011). Appraisal results affect how teachers are rewarded, ranked, and promoted. Through this system, teachers' efforts in areas such as teaching and research are recognised throughout the China central government, provinces and districts (Zhang & Ng, 2011). According to Zhang and Ng (2011), the 2011 Ministry of Education guidelines in China stipulate that the appraisal systems should enhance teacher development. The emphasis is on components of the appraisal system such as teaching, research, collective learning, and rewards in school-based professional learning practices.

Related to the appraisal systems is the production of publications. According to Wong (2014), teachers' publications have contributed to school-based teacher professional development through the improvement of the teachers' knowledge base and practice. In this regard, Wong (2014) noted that writing for publications constitute an interesting aspect of school-based teacher professional development in Chinese schools compared to the Western context. Teachers are encouraged to write essays and embark on case studies that help to disseminate the teachers' knowledge and practices. As a reward, good publication records lead to teachers' promotions (Sargent & Hannum, 2009; Wong, 2014). The dissemination of knowledge enhances the sharing of knowledge and practices among the schools throughout the country.

The SBPLCs in China have also been supported in different ways to ensure that teachers sustain their learning. Teacher participation in SBPLCs in China has also been strengthened through the allotting of special time for teacher learning and the use of in-school policies that guide learning communities (Sargent & Hunnam, 2009; Schleicher, 2012). The importance of time and policies for teacher learning is discussed in detail in the following section.

Nevertheless, SBPLCs as an approach to Chinese teacher professional learning must contend with some challenges. Regardless of these challenges, SBPLCs in China still provide helpful information that can inform the teachers' in-service training in Tanzania. For example, Wang (2015) indicated that the scarcity of resources needed for carrying SBPLCs activities out have mainly been a major reason for less attention paid to teacher professional development. The findings from Wang also shed more light on the teachers' perceptions of professional development and involvement in school-based research projects. Moreover, Lee et al. (2014) found that most of the teachers had less inclined to make their own decisions on their professional learning: instead they mostly opted to follow orders from higher authorities. Indeed, the Chinese teachers' were predisposed 'to obey and respect authority' (Wong, 2012: 358) to avoid unnecessary conflicts (Zhang & Pang, 2016b), which in turn leads to lack of creativity.

Similarly, Zhang et al. (2016) reported that SBPLCs in China faced challenges such as teachers' passiveness, teachers' reluctance to change and isolated professional culture. In fact, many teachers in China are unwilling to expose their weaknesses when sharing knowledge and feedback with others due to worries that they would be embarrassed. These tendencies reflect the challenge of contrived collegiality (Hargreaves et al., 2013; Owen, 2014 & Wang, 2015), whereby excessive organisational structures, directives and guidelines can have adverse impacts on the teachers' autonomy, creativity and innovation. Similar observations were also emerged in a study by Zhang and Pang (2016b). Overall, the researchers found that, although school leaders encouraged and supported teachers' collaborative activities in SBPLCs, excessive administrative requirements hindered their creativity and innovation.

Although Chinese SBPLCs were generally perceived as convenient for achieving teacher change (Song, 2012; Wong, 2010a; 2012), teachers seemed to be reluctant. In this regard, literature has well established that teachers' beliefs are resistant to change (Avalos, 2011;

Gu & Wang, 2006; Huang & Bao, 2006; Wong, 2012), hence making it too hard for them to learn new information that is inconsistent with their pre-conceived knowledge and beliefs. However, the truth is that for teachers to develop professionally they must be willing to change their beliefs. For instance, the challenges to implement an 'innovative curriculum' (Huang & Bao, 2006: 279), such as those in the National Mathematics Curriculum Standards and the Chinese Ministry of Education (2010-2020) education reform, demand teachers' willingness to embrace necessary change in their beliefs and practices. These reforms emphasise on pillars such as developing students' problem-solving skills, innovation and creative tendencies (Huang & Bao, 2006, Lee et al., 2014; Wong, 2012). As in other parts of the world, these reforms exert pressure on teachers and school leaders to teach in ways that are consistent with such pillars.

Although school leaders in China mentioned external resources and financial constraints, teachers reported limited collaboration time as the main challenge to SBPLCs. All these challenges can have negative implications for implementing effective school-based professional learning. For example, enough collaboration time is needed for teachers to conduct classroom observations, collective lesson planning and feedback meetings. According to Zhang et al. (2016), the challenge of time is contributed by many factors including accountability policies that shift leaders' and teachers' attention to competition, on the basis of high stakes inherent in examinations. In the same study, leaders reported that schools in suburbs had less access to external support from university researchers and educators and, hence, lacked external expertise that could, otherwise, help improve and add value to professional development activities. However, Sargent and Hannum (2009) indicated that China has invested relatively more time and incentives in improving SBPLCs. Thus, Chinese schools have advantages over their counterparts in the US and Europe in terms of time, space and incentives for school-based professional learning worth emulating particularly in resource-poor contexts of Tanzania.

4.2 Lessons from Chinese SBPLCs to Teacher Professional Learning in Tanzania

From the situation of SBPLCs in China discussed, Tanzania needs to adopt and adapt some of the best Chinese practices in a bid to create effective school-based professional learning of its own that could work best in its particularised context. Although there are signs of efforts being made in Tanzania to establish structured school-based professional learning following the recommendations made by Hardman et al. (2015), there are several ideas worth learning from China's SBPLCs.

4.2.1 Formalising Professional Learning at the School Level

In China, SBPLCs have been an integral part of the formal education structure, in which professional learning activities are organised within and outside the school walls (Sargent & Hannum, 2009). Indeed, formalising SBPLCs in China has made engagement in professional learning a duty of teachers (Wong, 2010a). In general, therefore, it means that school management and teachers are responsible for ensuring that professional learning activities are ongoing. Thus, the key message from the Chinese structure is that it is important for the Tanzania government to establish such systematic professional learning programmes at the school level.

Although from a socio-cultural perspective, Tanzanian teachers might be engaging in professional learning when interacting at their workplaces (URT & UNESCO, 2014), formalising and authorising these learning activities will hold teachers accountable for their professional learning capable of, in turn, impacting positively on the students' learning. Indeed, research has shown that teachers are not only required to teach, but also to learn for promoting effective teaching practices and outcomes (Livingston, 2016). Therefore, the most favourable condition for sustaining school development is to empower teachers and their leaders to conduct SBPLCs (DuFour & Eaker, 2009). After all, Engaging in haphazard experiential professional learning does not necessarily guarantee tangible impacts (Kolb, 2015). In support of this view, Hargreaves et al. (2013) also suggest that there is a need for a thoughtful systematic approach capable of enabling teachers to engage in meaningful professional learning.

4.2.2 Developing an Explicit Teacher Professional Development Policy

National policy statements need to be linked to actual practices prevailing in Tanzania's schools for them to be realised. Regrettably, neither the previous Tanzania national education and training policy of 1995 nor the new policy of 2014 has spelled out in explicit terms how the ongoing and compulsory in-service teacher education could be achieved. As a result, teacher learning has continued to be optional in practice. Even a number of strategies that were intended to improve in-service teacher development, such as the introduction of training departments in teachers' colleges and reviving teacher resource centres (TRCs) have not documented significant changes (URT, 2007). It is apparent that the rather limited professional development extended to in-service teachers in results from the lack of a clear direction concerning the roles of teachers and leaders in professional learning.

In China, for example, policy reforms determine the sustainability of SBPLCs and associated duties. Sargent and Hunnam (2009: 260) concur with this view by affirming that "… the policy environment in which schools operate also has implications for institutional support for teacher collaboration." Similarly, Gu (2013) states that school principals on China mainland, such as in Shanghai, have an obligation to create favourable conditions to promote teachers' professional learning. Furthermore, Pang et al. (2016) asserts that school principals have been responsible for deciding on the type of professional learning and monitoring of the SBPLCs implementation in Hong Kong. Therefore, policies and/or guidelines are crucial in ensuring SBPLCs are effectively organised and executed in Tanzania.

4.2.3 Allocating Specific Time for Teacher Professional Learning in Schools

In China, teachers get time to work on their professional learning at school. For instance, in Shanghai, one of the four municipalities under the direct administration of the central government of China, each teacher is expected to engage in 240 hours of professional development within five years of being hired (Schleicher, 2012). This implies that each teacher has at his or her disposal 48 hours for professional development per year. This gives teachers special time to partake in their learning at least every week. Likewise, reports from several countries in Europe and the United States have indicated that professional learning thrived when teachers had separate time for participating in such endeavours (OECD (2009). On the one hand, it may be challenging for teachers in Tanzania to participate in school-based professional learning when time is not officially scheduled

in the school calendar. In this regard, scholars suggest that if professional learning is not allotted specific time, school management and teachers themselves have to make it available (Desimone, 2009; McLaughlin, 1997; OECD, 2009; Tallerico, 2005; Zhang et al., 2016). In a context where teachers are allotted specific time for professional learning, among others, teachers may learn together how to handle teaching issues collaboratively.

4.2.4 Offering Financial Support to Schools for Teacher Professional Learning

The success of school-based professional learning activities depends on the financial assistance teachers get to cater for their teacher professional earning needs. Although funding is not the only factor for teacher professional learning, it remains crucial in enhancing teacher learning programmes. In this regard, China has been investing in SBPLCs to sustain teacher learning. Such investment is also evident in countries with substantial development in teacher professional learning such as Australia, Canada, Finland, New Zealand, and Singapore, which have significantly invested in teacher education. For example, 98 percent of the funds for teacher professional development programmes in Finland come from public sources (Darling-Hammond, 2017). In Tanzania, however, researchers have reported that the government has continued to budget poorly for in-service teacher education (Koda, 2012; Komba & Nkumbi, 2008). As a result, teachers' professional learning has continued to suffer.

Although the shortage of funds and other resources has also been reported to affect SBPLCs for teachers in China, teacher learning has been facilitated and sustained by school leadership, policy reforms and individual teacher initiatives. For example, in their large-scale study that involved rural-based schools in China, Sargent and Hannum (2009: 273) found that professional learning communities thrive even in one of China's most resource-constrained rural regions. Here, the important lesson for Tanzania is that school leaders and teachers themselves need to be empowered to create alternative resources and environment that are conducive enough for professional learning activities. For example, there are knowledgeable teachers in schools who can be resourceful enough and bail out their colleagues. As Guskey (2014) has suggested, these self-driven innovativeness and initiatives can be used in running internal seminars at the school level. This, and other similar practices, suggests that there are ways of minimising the costs for teacher professional learning.

4.2.5 Encouraging Individual Teacher Initiatives to Engage in Professional Learning

Tanzania could also adopt teacher appraisal as a strategy for encouraging the teachers' regular participation in school-based professional learning, as China's SBPLCs have demonstrated. As such, teachers can be asked to indicate the types of professional learning activities they performed, and then be rewarded for their exemplary efforts. The OECD (2010) also points out that even in countries such as England, the US, Korea, Ireland, Belgium and Switzerland, teacher participation in regular professional learning serves as a means for appraising teachers for promotion purposes. This practice exemplifies how teachers' sense of responsibility over their professional learning is construed. Having professional learning milestones in the appraisal forms and recognise them will make Tanzanian teachers and their leaders more committed to the teaching profession and to fostering professionalism that has a desired effect of enhancing academic performance amongst the students. However, as Karugaba (2015) has cautioned, there is a need to

improve competencies of heads of school on the appraising process in Tanzania to effect professional learning practices and ensure that the process is judicious and fool proof.

4.2.6 Enhancing Available Professional Learning Activities

Evidently, China's SBPLCs are grounded in research activities. Schleicher (2012) reported that administrators in Shanghai in China accentuate on action-research activities that are conducted by teachers themselves in schools to identify student-learning issues and find solutions accordingly. This action-research has been the main tool through which teachers improve their professional practices in Chinese schools. Research has shown that collaborative action-research can be the best format for enhancing professional learning at schools where teachers investigate classroom-based issues to promote their teaching (Herbert & Rainford, 2014). However, a great deal of learning and change of cultural practices is required for teachers to embrace and practice research activities in Tanzania's schools: inescapably teachers need to be taught how to conduct researches through systematic procedures.

Apart from research, there are several learning practices that need to be upgraded. As Eraut (2011) argues, when professionals such as teachers perform their teaching job, learning is a by-product of that job. Eraut (ibid.) underscores the value of the many unstructured learning activities that occur in the school settings such as asking questions, reflecting, receiving and giving feedback. In short, proper arrangement needs to be done by all the stakeholders in Tanzania to assist teachers execute and benefit from effective professional learning in the light of the Chinese SBPLCs and lessons gleaned from positive experiences and attendant results poorly.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Overall, schools in China have made gigantic strides in fostering SBPLCs. In this regard, document analysis has indicated that most schools in China, including those located in remote and poorly-resourced locations, participate in teacher professional learning activities that embody SBPLCs features. These achievements are attributable to China's long history of school-based teacher professional development, strong government support, and commitments on the part of teachers and school leaders. Thus, the onus is on Tanzania to learn from China the positive aspects that have made that country success in enhancing teacher learning so that it can also improve its own versions of SBPLCs by putting into practice the six underlined lessons. Moreover, if the country is to improve teaching through teacher professional learning, the government needs to invest heavily in and increase its commitment to fostering SBPLCs, just like what the government of China has been doing all along.

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