

# TEACHER-LED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AMONG TEACHERS OF ENGLISH IN BUNGOMA SOUTH SUB-COUNTY, KENYA: CHALLENGES

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## Abstract

*Effective teaching requires the educator to continuously increase their knowledge of how students think and learn, of the subject matter, instructional practices and assessment procedures. For some time now, the only available opportunities especially in the developing world context are those held away from the school and which are developed to address needs which education officials feel that teachers have. This model of teacher professional development has received a lot of criticism leading to new trends that have been tried and examined in the West and Asian contexts. This paper is drawn from a study that introduced teachers of English in Bungoma South sub-county, Kenya to teacher-led professional development. It brings out the challenges of doing this in a developing world context, with the hope that the findings will be useful in restructuring future professional development opportunities.*

*Key words: Teacher-led professional development; Teachers of English; challenges; Bungoma South sub-county.*

## I. Introduction

Worldwide, education systems have come under scrutiny especially in regard to the quality of graduates that leave the schools at the end of every academic year. The prominence and scope of interest in this subject are illustrated by a growing body of empirical evidence and articles that seek to explain the factors that influence students learning outcomes (Putnam & Borko, 2000; Johnson, 2006). Consistent in the findings of these studies is the central role played by an effective teacher in determining student learning outcomes, as well as impacting the students' lives positively. The effectiveness of a teacher is closely linked to their content knowledge, their knowledge of how students learn that content and the use of classroom practices that enable all students to learn (Meiers, 2007). The implication of these views for education stakeholders is that ways must be found to improve the effectiveness of teachers, if there is to be any hope of producing quality graduates of education systems.

Scholars in the field of teacher learning like Mizell (2010) posit that, "Good teaching is not an accident...it is a result of study, reflection, practice and hard work" p.10. This view agrees with the idea that teachers ought to be learners in a continuum starting from their initial preparation and

going on throughout their teaching career. Indeed, literature on teacher professional development concur on the view that if the teacher's classroom practice is to improve, then teachers regardless of their length of service must engage in professional development (Fullan, 2007; Harwel, 2003). This view has resulted in governments and ministry of education officials worldwide, making efforts to develop and organize professional development (PD) experiences for their teaching force. However, as Borko (2004) points out, the PD opportunities that have been made available for teacher for some time now are those termed as traditional PD, where the teacher is a passive recipient of knowledge that may not even address their challenges with classroom practice.

On the other hand, despite the efforts to provide support to the teaching fraternity, most teachers are still unable to benefit from professional development opportunities citing inability of PD to meet individual challenges with practice, the focus on improving learning outcomes while ignoring instructional practices of teachers, time and poor scheduling of the programs (Podhorsky & Fisher, 2007). This situation is even more evident in the developing world contexts where it is documented that limited numbers of teachers are selected to attend the trainings thus affecting the expected gains from such opportunities; inability of the PD opportunities to meet the needs and expectations of the teachers; lack of follow up support that results in the inability of teachers to apply new knowledge and, overdependence on donor support to run PD projects that eventually collapse once donors withdraw (Kiige, 2019; Ajani, 2018; Rarieya and Tukahirwa, 2006). To surmount these challenges, scholars like Ushie (2009) makes a strong case for partnership learning when she posits that it allows teachers to identify their own training needs and draws on their experiences and experiments, leading to active learning and collaboration.

To address the weaknesses in traditional PD modes and guided by research findings, developing countries have implemented a number of institutionalized INSETs in the past decade with the support of their development partners. These efforts are well documented, albeit with criticism in regard to the irregularity of the trainings; the top-down approach used to arrive at training needs; the focus on science and mathematics teachers while ignoring English and humanities; overdependence on expatriate expertise; over-reliance on cascade training that resulted in dilution and distortion of content and, the evaluation attached to the PD (Ono & Ferreira, 2010; Gathara, 2011). All these have affected the realization of change and thus the quality of teachers especially those teaching English and humanities has remained an issue of concern despite the institutionalization of PD.

This is the case in Bungoma South sub-county, Kenya where studies on student performance in national examinations reveal poor performance in subjects like English (Juma, 2016; Matere, 2011). The consistent recommendation emerging from such studies has been the call for more in-service training for teachers with the hope that this will change the quality of teachers and hopefully improve learning outcomes for the students. This unfortunately has not been realized. This article has emerged from an action research study where twelve teachers of English in Bungoma South sub-county, Kenya were introduced to teacher-led professional development with the hope that by charting their own path to improvement, they can teach better and differently. The research question that guided this article is:

- (1) What are the challenges faced by teachers of English who lead their own professional development?

## **II. Literature Review**

A review of literature on teacher professional development studies show concurrence on the importance of teacher learning especially in regard to meeting the needs of the ever changing world of school and education (Mizel, 2010; Fullan, 2007). However, contention has been in regard to

how the experiences should be structured and with what level of effectiveness, so as to improve the practice of the teacher. The findings from the numerous studies have provided what we now know about practical strategies that have been tried and worked elsewhere and which can be replicated for effective teacher professional development.

Literature on teacher learning concur on the view that the forms of PD that have been available to teachers are the formal/traditional ones which have received a number of criticisms from literature (Gathumbi, Mungai & Hintze, 2013; Leliveld, 2006; Bett, 2016). For example, Putnam & Borko (2000) describe traditional PD as “woefully inadequate...” p. 3. This conclusion is based on the findings that traditional PD is fragmented, does not take into account how teachers learn and its organization lacks the input of the teacher who is the target of the learning experience. However, some literature suggests that traditional PD “...is not useless, but it can never be powerful enough, specific enough or sustained enough to alter the culture of the classroom or school” (Fulan, 2007; 1).

On the other hand, consensus is emerging among researchers and practitioners about the characteristics of what is termed effective PD like: allows for active learning of new teaching strategies; provides opportunities for collaboration among teachers; includes follow-up support and continuous feedback; involves teachers in planning the PD experience; takes place over an extended period of time; is site-based and, allows the teacher to try out new behavior in a non-threatening environment (Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon & Birman, 2002; Darling-Hammond, 2006). These characteristics point to PD that is likely to be found in school-based experiences.

Literature reveals the existence of teachers who have found ways to help their students learn and who can then share these strategies and practices with colleagues while also providing support in the implementation process (Westbrook, Durrain, Brown, Orr, Pryor, Boddy and Salvin, 2013; Harwel, 2003). This is in agreement with arguments made in theories of adult learning like that of Mezirow (1991) and Kolb’s (1984) theory which emphasize the centrality of experiences in providing practical knowledge that forms collaborative learning. However, it is also a truism that school experiences can have the characteristic of being random, unpredictable and unplanned (Wilson & Berne, 1999) and therefore the need for a structured way of applying them.

Also emerging clearly from studies is the discovery that for teachers, the challenge is not the uptake of new knowledge but the implementation of the new skills and application of new knowledge in their classroom with their learners (GulamHussein, 2013). The implication of this is that the structure of PD for teachers must provide for the opportunity for integration of new ideas and practices in a teacher’s classroom with follow up support. An example of such an initiative in Kenya is the Strengthening of Mathematics and Science in Secondary Education (SMASSE) which has been a subject of numerous studies that have suggested its restructuring to have a bottom-up approach to enable ownership by teachers, the removal of the cascade model of sharing knowledge and scheduling regular training (Kiige, 2019; Mutambaki, 2014).

In the past decade however, a considerable body of knowledge has emerged on alternative professional development approaches, tools and spaces, although most of this is from the West and Asia, with very little from developing world contexts. Some of the strategies that have been applied and studied include lesson observation, lesson study, peer coaching and team teaching (Zaare, 2012; Arslan, 2018; Garber, 2014; Degan, 2018). Japanese education policies place a lot of emphasis on strategies like lesson study and peer coaching which have been found to have potential for sustained PD; develop communities of teachers who inquire into their practice; engenders a sense of ownership of any improvement attained and, creates a sense of responsibility towards ones’ students and colleagues (Lewis et al, 2009 cited in Doig and Grove, 2011).

Another strategy is action research which has gained a lot of popularity especially in the West where it has enabled teachers to be conceptualized as ‘knowers’ and ‘thinkers’ rather than ‘doers’ of actions generated by ‘outsiders’ to the practice. In their seminal work, Carr & Kemmis (1986) cited in Koshy (2005) contend that action research is an integral part of the professional development of teachers as it allows generation of knowledge to produce change in practice. Research studies consistently demonstrate that action research fits in the collaborative model of teacher learning that can lead to the emancipation of the individual teacher first, then colleagues (Okoth, 2009; Segal, 2009). Alongside action research, reflection has also gained importance as a tool for enabling transformative thinking and learning that is linked to good practice (Ashraf & Rarieya, 2008). According to Mathew, Mathew & Peechattu (2017), reflection is important because experience alone does not necessarily lead to learning and so the teacher must be deliberate about learning by mulling over their actions.

On-line spaces are also rapidly expanding as tools of informal PD for teachers based on the framework of constructivism, distributed cognition and communities of practice (Pereira & Santana, 2013; Alenazi, 2018). Additionally, they are emerging as platforms for harnessing social capital which is important in teacher professional development that relies greatly on collaboration and sharing as a way of offering professionally (Alberth, Mursalim, Siam, Suardika & Ino, 2018). However, in a literature review of on-line communities of practice Saifuddin (2016) found the following barriers that challenge the effectiveness of on-line PD: teachers’ lack of technological skills, limited access to computer and internet resources and services, ethical issues regarding the content shared and lack of a personal touch to the communication process. Yet even with these barriers, on-line PD has found support in literature especially for enabling the teacher to engage in communication and interaction with colleagues outside working hours, to watch model lessons and to find critical support in communities of learners.

Another emerging space for teacher professional development is the concept of teacher study groups where collaborative groups of teachers meet to reflect and dialogue about their concerns with practice (Ospina & Sanchez, 2010; Torres-Guzman & Hunt, 2006). Study groups are hinged on the assumption that knowledge is constructed in communities of practice through social interaction and that learning is mediated by the difference in perspectives among participants and thus participation is the best way of learning (Torres-Guzman & Hunt, 2006). The key advantage of study groups is the fact that it is a space for bottom-up professional development that is driven by teacher professional needs (Ospina & Sanchez, 2010).

This present study was informed by the above findings as well as the fact that the teachers participants have with them varied experiences in the teaching profession that could contribute significantly to their interactions. The duration of the current study was especially informed by the finding that teacher learning is a process that could involve iterative actions that require extended time, unlike one-off PD experiences.

### **III. Methodology and design**

The study took an action research design in order to explore the process of teacher-led professional development by involving teachers of English in Bungoma South sub-county in active learning and collaboration. Action research provides an opportunity for self-inquiry, experimentation and reflection that is likely to lead to increased understanding of one’s practice as well as student learning (Hendrick, 2006; Wilson, 2009). This was important for the study which sought to engage the research participants in what is termed ‘insider research’ (Mills, 2007). The design also provided an opportunity for emerging theoretical and researched information on teacher-led

professional development to be tried out in the practices of teachers of English in a developing world context like Bungoma South sub-county, Kenya.

The study was carried out in Bungoma County of Western Kenya, one of the forty-seven counties created under the new constitution of Kenya 2010. Due to the rigors of action research, the study delimited itself to Bungoma South sub-county, one of the nine sub-counties in Bungoma county. This locale was selected because students in this sub-county have consistently performed poorly in English in the terminal examinations at the secondary school level, a factor that has resulted in persistent recommendations by researchers for more in-service training for the teachers. Yet even with such efforts, the results have not shown any improvement.

This study involved two teachers of English in each of the identified six secondary schools. Initially, two schools were to represent the three categories of secondary schools that exist in the country and which include extra county, county and sub-county schools. However, this was not realized due to reluctance by some gatekeepers to involve their teachers in 'an extra task' because they claimed these teachers were already overburdened by their teaching loads and other school responsibilities. Despite this, the study ended up with one extra county school and five sub-county secondary schools. The participants were 5 females and 7 males, with varying ages, levels of professional training and years of teaching experiences. The twelve teachers were identified by their school Principals from the total number of teachers of English in a particular site. The researcher also identified and worked with two critical friends who engaged in objective discussions of the findings and discussions in the report (McNiff, Lomax & Whitehead, 2003).

Data collection for the study was done using three research instruments to ensure that as much information about the phenomenon was collected with a view to increase the accuracy of the study (Hendricks, 2006). The research instruments used were questionnaires, interview schedules and observation guides which helped to provide corroboration with the hope that results from one source of data would be supported by the results from another source. The claims made by this study are from themes that emerged after analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data.

#### **IV. Study Implementation**

The action research study happened in 3 Phases.

##### ***Pre-intervention Phase***

The pre-intervention phase aimed to establish the experiences of the participating teachers with available professional development opportunities. At the same time, this phase was an opportunity for the teachers to identify and write down their challenges with classroom practice. A self-administered questionnaire was given to each of the participants in order to obtain an understanding of their experiences. An analysis of the questionnaires resulted in face to face interviews with each of the teachers, which were then transcribed and read alongside the questionnaires. The findings from this situational analysis were used to plan the intervention phase.

##### ***Intervention Phase***

This phase was informed by the findings of the pre-intervention phase where all the participants cited occasional challenges in their classroom practice for which they lacked a channel of mitigating them. In addition, it emerged that the participants had only been exposed to workshops where information was shared with them as passive learners and thus they had no experience of learning together and supporting each other. Therefore, the first action in the intervention phase was to introduce them to strategies of collaboration through a training facilitated by the researcher and based on research supported strategies. The training introduced the teachers to the importance of collaborating in improving their classroom practice and to four strategies namely: classroom/lesson observation, peer coaching, lesson study and team teaching. To increase their interaction as they

navigated through teacher collaboration, a WhatsApp platform titled Teacher Collaboration was created and participants were enrolled. The teachers then worked in pairs to assist each other in the areas of instruction and content where they had identified challenges. This phase happened in 5 cycles of planning, acting, observation, reflection and re-planning that were mainly done by the teachers with the support of the researcher. Each cycle was planned to implement a single collaborative strategy.

Cycle one consisted a lesson in the classroom of each of the teachers that involved them in lesson observation without assigning a grade to their performance. The process involved three stages: First was the pre-observation stage where the two teachers had a discussion and description of what they each considered as challenges in their teaching of English language content. The second stage was the classroom observation where one teacher taught while the other observed the agreed aspects while making notes on a schedule developed for this purpose. The third stage involved a professional dialogue between the two teachers on what was observed, what went well and what needed improvement and how the improvement was to be done. It is at this point that the participants would decide on what strategy to use to address the identified gaps in practice.

Cycle two was a lesson aimed at addressing the challenges identified in cycle one using either peer coaching, team teaching or lesson study. The most preferred strategy by the teams was peer coaching, where the observing teacher would demonstrate ways of solving the earlier identified challenges in the practice of the colleague. The process began with a planning session to set the convenient time, lesson and content to be taught. The peer coach would then create a lesson plan and proceed to teach the lesson while the teacher with the challenge observed and made notes. The teachers later had a discussion at the end of the lesson to share what was observed. Each teacher also captured the process of the peer coaching in their reflective journals. This process was then repeated in the class of the coach, who would then become the observer.

Cycle Three was a lesson planned to enable the teachers to teach as a team by combining their expertise in lesson delivery. The process involved planning for the lesson, identifying convenient time and then teaching. The process of having two teachers teach one lesson has challenges and so most teams allocated more time to this strategy by using 80 minutes or double lessons. This was then followed by the teachers discussing their observations of the process and writing their observations in their reflective journals. The team then agreed on when to have a lesson using the same strategy in the other teacher's classroom.

Cycle four was a lesson planned to enable the teachers engage in lesson study. The lesson study process involved identification and discussion of a gap in content knowledge by learners; designing the first research lesson; enacting this research lesson and observation; discussing the observations and agreeing on what needs to be done differently; enacting the second research lesson and discussing this lesson. This process can be repeated until the team is satisfied with the changes observed and especially evidence of improved understanding of the concept by the students. This strategy would then be executed in the classroom of each teacher in the team.

Cycle Five was a lesson planned in each of the research sites to allow the researcher observe the teachers using any of the collaborative strategies in their classroom. The process required the participants to plan for the lesson, select a strategy to use, identify convenient time and implementing it in the presence of the researcher. The researcher captured the observations by use of an observation schedule and wrote details as field notes. After the lesson, the participants and the researcher held a discussion session about the process on what went well, what did not go well and what can be done better next time. The participants and the researcher also wrote their observations and learning in their journals, as part of their reflections.

### ***Post intervention phase***

The Post-intervention phase sought to establish the experiences of the teachers as they charted their own path to improvement in classroom practice. Using a self-administered questionnaire, audio-recorded face-to-face interviews for the pair of teachers and recorded reflections by teachers as captured in their reflective journals, the researcher was able to get some understanding of their experiences.

## **V. Findings**

This study set out to determine the challenges of engaging practicing teachers in leading their own professional development. The findings shared here emerge from the experiences of the participants and the observations of the researcher. Pseudonyms have been used for the research participants and their schools. Research data revealed the following sources of challenges:

### ***Scarcity of Time***

Data from the post-intervention interviews indicated that time was a key challenge for all the twelve teachers as they sought to chart the path to their professional development. For Ms. Raquel, the challenge was finding time to meet with her colleague Mr. Richie and plan how to implement the strategies. She said:

...this is a big school with many activities and you realize that most of the time, you are occupied. So you realize that it was a bit hard to meet with the other teacher and learn. To synchronize that time, sometimes I am busy and he is free or he is busy and I am free. So synchronizing was a bit hard. But at the end of the day we managed (Post-intervention interview, 20/6/2019).

Mr. Richie had challenges with finding time to respond to postings on the WhatsApp Teacher Collaboration platform:

So you are only overtaken by time... it becomes a matter of forgetting, not that you failed to appreciate, you have appreciated but you did not have time allocated to it... (Post-intervention interview, 20/6/2019).

Ms. Sophie and her colleague tried to solve the challenge of time by organizing to have other teachers give them lessons which they would repay later. She said:

...the challenge I encountered was, maybe I am to go and observe madam and perhaps I have a lesson coming up, it becomes a challenge, I am forced to look for extra time or maybe look for someone else to go in for me in my lesson as I observe then later I will cover up my lesson (Post-intervention interview, 21/6/2019).

For Ms. Raquel and her colleague, even managing time during the collaborative sessions in class was challenging:

Time was another challenge, because the lesson was so interactive, the students tended to derail it out of excitement. This was kept in control by ensuring learners did not take too much time discussing one issue (Journal entry, 20/3/2019).

### **Busy schedules and Heavy Teaching Workloads**

Data from both the pre-intervention and post-intervention interviews, together with notes from the researcher's diary show that most of the teachers were very busy in their individual schools. This is evident from Table 1 that shows the teaching loads and other responsibilities held by teachers.

**Table 1: Teaching loads and Responsibilities held by Teachers**

| School      | Population | No. of Teachers of English | Teacher/Student ratio | Name of Teacher             | No. of Lessons per week | Positions held  |
|-------------|------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|---|
| Uwezo Sec   | 1538       | 10                         | 1:139                 | Mr. Richie<br>Ms. Raquel    | 23<br>22                | -Head of Department (H.O.D) languages<br>-In charge Library   |
| Tumaini Sec | 520        | 3                          | 1:173                 | Mr. Prolific<br>Ms. Belinda | 24<br>18                | -H.O.D Languages<br><br>-Class teacher, In-charge music training  |
| Fanaka Sec  | 637        | 3                          | 1:159                 | Mr. Ariel<br>Mr. Adrian     | 20<br>20                | -Head of Subject (H.O.S) English, Games master<br>-Boarding Master  |
| Mshindi Sec | 1000       | 5                          | 1:200                 | Ms. Sophie<br>Mr. Enzo      | 28<br>20                | -H.O.S English, Music trainer, member Disciplinary committee<br>-class teacher, assists in music training |
| Wema Sec    | 500        | 4                          | 1:125                 | Md. Celestine<br>Ms. Celine | 15<br>20                | -Class teacher, In-charge Guidance and Counselling<br>-Class teacher, Coach Volleyball                    |
| Pendo Sec   | 420        | 3                          | 1:140                 | Mr. Akes<br>Mr. Antonne     | 14<br>22                | -H.O.D languages, Drama and Music trainer, class teacher<br>-class teacher, Assistant drama club patron   |

The researcher also noted that the research participants seemed dependable as they were always engaged in school activities and would be entrusted with the role of representing their Principals in meetings outside the school. To explain why he could not find time to plan and teach with Mr. Antonne, Mr. Akes said:

...the challenge was lack of time as mentioned and we do different things like my co-teacher is in boarding, I am in co-curriculum, those sections keep one busy...when your collaborating teacher is ready to do some things, you are busy elsewhere and so it was a challenge (Post-intervention interview, 1/7/2019)

For Mr. Prolific, personal reasons interfered with the time he would have used to engage in journaling or interaction on the WhatsApp platform. He said:

May I first confess my sins, that when it comes to WhatsApp, sorry the whole beautiful study came up when I was also deeply involved in another study that at times, I would open the wall 2 or 3 days after everybody had shared their experiences (Post-Intervention interview, 19/6/2019)



It was evident throughout the study that the first term in the school calendar is the busiest. The researcher noted scheduled termly activities that included first term ball games, choir competitions at the zonal and district levels and preparations for term two drama festivals. Most of the teachers were trainers or coaches in these activities and therefore they were sometimes away for training meetings or held practice sessions at the end of the school day when they were expected to meet and plan for their collaborative lessons.

### Teacher Beliefs and Attitudes

Data from post-intervention interviews brought out the perceptions of the teachers towards the effort of leading their professional development. To some of the teachers, developing their own plan of learning and improving their practice was a demanding job which came in between their daily activities. This is captured in the words of Mr. Antonne, who said:

...Just like mwalimu has said, inconveniences like when we are supposed to be doing other things and activities in our school program, we are actually forced to do the strategies and as he said, it was involving (Post-intervention interview, 21/6/2019).

According to Mr. Antonne and his colleague, implementing the strategies of collaborative teaching was an inconvenience and an interference in their 'normal' daily schedule, a factor that implies that they struggled. Ms. Raquel corroborated this idea of interference with reference to her school Uwezo high school, an extra county school in Bungoma south sub-county:

What I did not like is the interruption of my daily planning and activities. You see now, it seems as if I have to introduce a new program into my activities, considering this is a big school with many activities and you realize that most of the time you are occupied... (Post-intervention interview, 20/6/2019).

The teachers' responses towards the activities that were intended to help them engage in continuous learning revealed reluctance to in cooperate change in what they are used to. For Mr. Ariel, journaling was a challenge which he almost termed foreign, and an activity that cannot be undertaken and managed by an African. This excerpt captures his views:

Researcher: Now, there was the issue of journal keeping. How was it like for you?

Mr. Ariel: Like a typical African, it was a challenge, I have to be honest and say.

Researcher: Why are you making it an African problem?

Mr. Ariel: I am not making it an African problem but surely it was a challenge although I tried.

Researcher: Now, if it was a challenge to a teacher of English, what of other teachers?

Mr. Ariel: I don't want to imagine that they may be stranded, maybe they can manage with ease compared to what I did but I realized it was a good thing and I wrote once in a while (Post-intervention interview, 1/7/2019)

On the other hand, interview data and the researcher's notes show that the views above were connected to individual participants and at other times represented a team from a single school. For example, the team from Uwezo High school seemed to embrace the strategies and despite having reservations in some activities, they went out of their way to try out all the strategies and recorded their experiences. Ms. Raquel shared this:

...I must add something...maybe we were doing it (*collaborating*) but we were not aware. Last year we did a lot of team teaching with Form 4 because I remember we would gather them in the academic park and we would all interact with the students...and it helped a lot. Later on we were celebrating good grades...it actually helped (Post-intervention interview, 20/6/2019).

Mr. Richie, also a teacher in Uwezo High school corroborated Ms Raquel's views by saying:

...for one, we want grades, we are competing nationally with others and they are engaging different strategies. So we have to be smart in planning and among the things to put in place is a strategy of sharing content, to ensure that what the other person has mastered you allow them to share so that

you learn from one another. Through interaction, it helps to drive content faster... (Post-intervention interview, 20/6/2019)

### **A Weak Discussion Culture**

Data from the lesson observation forms and the researcher's journal notes show that most of the teachers had challenges with engaging in discussions, either with one another or with the researcher. The lesson observation forms used by the teachers had a feedback section where they were expected to capture their discussions of what they observed, what went well, what needs to be changed and how this should be done. Samples of the forms show very sketchy information and sometimes the teachers provided superficial recommendations to deal with the gap in practice. This was also evident in the teachers' reluctance to engage in a discussion on the WhatsApp platform where some participants had posted challenges they had with their practice. This is illustrated in a query posted on the platform on 4<sup>th</sup> March 2019 by Mr. Richie:

How do I treat the issue of overcrowding, such that I can't effectively and satisfactorily reach each child and so manage marking, considering that English is taught daily?

The response to this inquiry was given on 10<sup>th</sup> March 2019 as follows:

Our classes are all big like yours but we manage by ensuring that all students bring their books for marking and then we take them back to class where we ask the students to exchange books then we mark together. This will enable the teacher to at least handle less work otherwise teaching English is a demanding subject.

While the above response seems to offer a solution to the issue raised by Mr. Richie, it falls short of providing the rationale for the teacher's action, a factor that does not offer a convincing reason for Mr. Richie to try out the proposal. Another example is from a post by Mr. Antonne on 10<sup>th</sup> March 2109, where he said:

Last week while reviewing what I had taught, I got disappointed as a majority of the boys could not remember simple aspects of the plot. I ended up wasting almost the entire lesson while trying to lecture them on importance of having interest in what we were teaching. At the end of it all I could not do my lesson as I had planned. I request for ideas on how to handle this in future.

This posting did not receive a response until after a week when the researcher engaged the teachers on the WhatsApp platform in questions and answers that sought to provide solutions to the situation. Data from the WhatsApp platform showed a few sentences being posted by the teachers in response to the researcher's questions and, generally lack of details in the proposals.

### **Learner responses towards Collaborative Teaching**

Data from post-intervention interviews and journal entries by the teachers indicate they noticed how their students responded to their new practices in class. Mr. Antonne's entry on 13/3/2019 associated the inactivity in one lesson where he was observed by his colleague to the fact that students were perplexed and unsettled. This was his observation:

Today we had a lesson observation and I was observed by Mr. Akes in Form 3 Red, where I taught Transitive Verbs. My colleague observed that I had a challenge with questioning and time management. This was because the class was not very lively and being our first lesson observation, learners seemed perplexed and didn't relax throughout the lesson. I therefore opted to re-teach the lesson.

Ms. Sophie corroborated this through her observation below:

...the issue of girls' reactions, actually when I went and told them that we are coming here the three of us, they were shocked, you could read their faces they were asking how? Why? But at the end of the day they came to realize that there was something good. (Post-intervention interview, 19/6/2019)

It is important to note that early in the study, students appeared perplexed by collaborative teaching, but this changed as the study progressed and was replaced with excitement and active participation by learners. For Mr. Richie, he had the feeling that students were not just enjoying the presence of two teachers but were also engaged in a comparison of teaching styles and even content knowledge. This is what he said:

...sometimes you know learners instead of focusing on content, they may as well end up comparing and of course missing the point. The learner may end up thinking, who is the better teacher of the two? Sometimes, even the good intentions of involving a colleague may end up losing the objective of learning as the child focusses on other things...you know learners, these young ones have a tendency to compare (Post-intervention interview, 20/6/2019).

This view was not confirmed by the students since they were not participants in this study but could be informed by the experiences of Mr. Richie as a student. However, as the study progressed during the term, the teachers observed that students seemed to enjoy lessons as observed by Mr. Adrian who captured it in his reflective journal on 16/5/2019:

It was a Form four revision lesson where we covered paper three. According to what I observed, it was a success. The things that made me to be satisfied with the experience are:

- the excitement of learners seeing the two of us ready to teach them at a go in the same lesson
- willingness of learners to take part in the lesson through role play, question and answers and general contribution

The above excerpts bring out the challenges that emerged during the implementation of teacher-led professional development. Below is the discussion.

## **VI. Discussion**

At the beginning of the action research study, it was clear that the participants had only experienced PD through attending workshops and seminars which were organized for them by education officials. While this is a common scenario in most developing world contexts, literature emerging from the West and in some Asian countries show a shift towards PD emerging from the teachers' needs and led by the teachers themselves. The choice of teacher-led professional development for teachers of English in Bungoma South sub-county, Kenya was informed by the desire to try out this alternative and to identify emerging challenges.

The study findings show that while the research participants made efforts to learn and teach collaboratively, one of the greatest challenges they faced was the scarcity of time during planning and implementing the learning. This finding is consistent with the findings of scholars like Gulamhussein (2013) that time is never adequate in PD, especially at the implementation stage where the teacher needs support over an extended period of time. This finding suggests that any effort to improve practice should not be confined to a limited time frame nor should it be hurried, as time is required to produce effects that can be counted as improvements in classroom practice or enhanced learning outcomes. This then explains why traditional PD programs have been described as 'inadequate' since they happen for a short duration of time and follow-up to support the implementation of new learning is usually not a factor of consideration.

Clearly evident from Table 1 is the fact that the research participants were very busy due to the heavy teaching loads and other responsibilities they held in the schools. This could explain their struggle with time and sometimes they seemed to lack the drive to engage in discussions verbally or in written. This confirms the findings by many studies that busy schedules can be an impediment to efforts by a teacher leading their improvement as they take up their time and usurp energy (Jang, 2006; Hismanoglu, 2010). While school schedules are usually prepared in advance and made clear to the educators, personal schedules may sometimes be abrupt and requiring immediate attention. However, schedules will always be there as they are useful guides to how things run and should

therefore not be used as excuses for not planning and engaging in professional development. What needs to happen is that teachers should be deliberate about finding time for their professional development, given its importance in making them effective in practice as well as enhancing the learning of their students.

Some excerpts above give us a sneak preview of the feelings of the teachers about engaging in activities that would lead to their own professional development. Clearly, most teams struggled with the process which they felt was demanding, an interference in their daily activities and even foreign. This could probably be due to the fact that the teachers are used to having their professional development programs organized for them and thus leading it placed a great demand on them. Additionally, teachers are used to one-off development programs that run for a short duration and so the idea of a continuous program that took slightly over one term could not sustain their enthusiasm. What this means is that the idea of life-long learning that is self-driven is still far from being grasped by the teachers and thus the need for training in this direction.

On the other hand, the positive attitude by some teams provides a different perspective. The team of Mr. Richie and Ms. Raquel from Uwezo high school negotiated for time despite their busy schedules and were able to implement collaborative teaching and journal keeping. This could be understood as a result of a school culture that supports collaboration and seeks to maintain a competitive place among other well performing schools in the nation. This culture seems to find support from the Uwezo High school Principal who was among those who supported the involvement of their teachers and institution in the study. The implication here is that teachers are likely to engage in activities that find support from their milieu and especially the school administration. While Principals are not governors or gatekeepers of learning, they however have a duty to encourage, nurture and support teacher learning for the sake of school improvement (Bredeson, 2000).

Data analysis of the written feedback in journal entries, lesson study reports and the WhatsApp platform showed shallow sharing of ideas. This could possibly be as a result of the culture of Kenyan teachers who are socialized to disseminate knowledge but not to engage in critical discussions, except when these discussions involve politics of the nation or their teaching conditions. This concurs with the findings of a study that Park & So (2014) carried out among South Korean teachers which established that the most difficult part of collaborative learning is engaging in careful analysis of the practice and suggesting practical solutions. In the current study, the teachers indicated that they did not have adequate time to engage in discussion, however, their records did not show effort to focus on salient features of their practice that required to be addressed. This can be understood as a result of their constant reception of ideas where they are not required to make any contribution or criticism. The implication of this is the need to introduce critical discourse as an area of study in initial teacher preparation to enhance the abilities of the teachers to engage in critical discussion.

Research findings like those of Jang (2006) seem to support the observation where teachers felt that their students were comparing them, a factor that affected their self-confidence. This comparison could be a natural response to having two entities that are different in their performance and impact, a factor that lends itself to comparison. In addition, being a novel way of teaching, it is expected that the students would respond in some way and later on settle to the idea of having two teachers taking them through a lesson. While Mr. Richie acknowledged in the excerpt that they had not been compared openly, he however seems to suggest the need to educate students on the benefits of having collaborative teachers so as to help them focus on learning and not comparing.

**VII. Conclusion**

This study has made significant conclusions. First, that while time has been isolated as a challenge, it is not unique to the developing world context and thus teachers must be very deliberate in setting aside time for collaborative learning and teaching. Secondly, that attitude change needs to be inculcated at initial teacher preparation if teachers are to learn together and also study their practice. Third, that learner responses towards collaborative teaching is a natural response that can be changed by demystifying the practice and sharing the benefits with the learners. All these changes will require time to show.

The findings have implications for any teacher who sets out to lead their own professional development because they will need to make efforts to surmount these challenges and others, given that the ultimate objective is to improve practice and enhance student learning. For the school administration, these findings will require them to make efforts to lighten the workload for the teachers to enable them focus on learning to improve practice. For all the stakeholders, it is imperative to bear in mind that an effective teacher plays the greatest role in determining student learning outcomes in a way that no other factor has been known to do. Therefore, no challenge should be too big to surmount when the goal is to enhance teacher effectiveness.

**Words-8332**

**Declaration of Conflicting Interests**

The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

**Funding**

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article

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