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# The Impact of Professional Development in Improving the Quality of Education in Zambia: A Case Study of Selected Peri-Urban Secondary Schools in Lusaka Province, Zambia

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### ABSTRACT

This study assessed the impact of professional development (PD) in enhancing the quality of education in selected peri-urban secondary schools in Lusaka Province, Zambia. The study explored the types of PD programs available, their influence on teaching practices and learner outcomes, challenges faced in accessing and implementing PD, and strategies for strengthening PD initiatives. Guided by theories such as Guskey's Model of Teacher Change, Desimone's Conceptual Framework for PD, and Andragogy by Knowles, the study adopted a descriptive survey design within a mixed-methods framework. Data were collected through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews from teachers and head teachers across selected schools. Findings revealed that PD initiatives positively contributed to teacher competency and learner performance, though challenges such as inadequate resources, limited time, and insufficient institutional support persisted. The study concludes with recommendations to improve the accessibility, relevance, and sustainability of PD programs in Zambia. The findings provide critical insights for policymakers, school leaders, and teacher education institutions aiming to strengthen education quality through effective PD.

**KEYWORDS:** Professional Development, Teacher Training, Quality Education, Peri-Urban Schools, Zambia

### INTRODUCTION

Education remains the cornerstone of national development, and the professional capacity of teachers is central to determining the quality of education in any system. Globally, professional development (PD) has been recognized as a key strategy for empowering teachers with relevant skills, knowledge, and competencies to meet the demands of 21st-century education. In Zambia, particularly within peri-urban schools, teachers often face unique challenges such as overcrowded classrooms, limited access to resources, and minimal institutional support. This makes effective PD an urgent necessity for ensuring equitable learning opportunities and improved learner outcomes. This study investigates the extent to which PD enhances teaching practices and contributes to the improvement of educational quality in peri-urban secondary schools in Lusaka Province.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This study is anchored on nine interrelated theories that explain how teachers acquire, implement, and sustain professional competencies.

Guskey's Model of Teacher Change (2002) emphasizes that changes in student learning outcomes drive teachers' attitudes and beliefs towards professional growth.

Desimone's Conceptual Framework (2009) outlines five critical features of effective PD: content focus, active learning, coherence, duration, and collective participation.

Knowles' Theory of Andragogy highlights the role of adult learning principles, stressing that teachers, as adult learners, benefit from self-directed and problem-centered approaches.

Bandura's Social Learning Theory underscores the significance of collaboration and modeling in enhancing teacher practices.

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory points to the importance of social interaction in knowledge construction.

The Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM) explains how teachers adapt to educational innovations through stages of concern and levels of use.

Fullan's Change Theory focuses on system-wide reforms where teacher PD acts as a catalyst.

The Reflective Practice Theory by Schön emphasizes reflective teaching as a continuous process of professional learning.

The Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework highlights the integration of pedagogy, content, and technology in enhancing teaching practices.

### **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

The conceptual framework illustrates the relationship between Professional Development (PD) and the Quality of Education in peri-urban secondary schools. The framework posits that Professional Development, through training, workshops, mentoring, and ICT integration, influences teacher competence, motivation, and instructional practices. These, in turn, affect student performance, engagement, and overall school effectiveness. Contextual factors such as availability of resources, policy support, and school leadership mediate this relationship.

Professional Development (PD) → Teacher Competence & Motivation → Improved Teaching Practices → Enhanced Student Learning Outcomes → Improved Quality of Education.

### **RESEARCH GAP**

Although professional development has been widely studied in developed contexts, there is limited empirical evidence from peri-urban secondary schools in Zambia. Existing literature largely emphasizes rural or urban elite schools, overlooking peri-urban schools that face both resource constraints and high learner populations. This study bridges that gap by examining how PD is designed, accessed, and implemented in peri-urban schools, while identifying context-specific challenges.

### **LOCAL PERSPECTIVE**

In Zambia, teacher professional development has received attention through policy reforms such as the Teacher Education and Specialized Services (TESS) framework, yet implementation remains inconsistent. Sichinga and Banda (2019) observed that while workshops and in-service training are available, they often fail to address classroom realities. Zimba (2020) highlighted that limited resources and lack of follow-up mechanisms reduce the long-term impact of PD initiatives. Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) also stressed that PD should be contextualized to local challenges, such as overcrowded classrooms in peri-urban Lusaka.

### **REGIONAL PERSPECTIVE**

Across Sub-Saharan Africa, professional development has been prioritized as a key driver of education reform. In Kenya, in-service teacher training programs have improved pedagogical practices, though disparities persist between urban and rural schools (Chigona et al., 2013). In South Africa, research by Ono and Ferreira (2010) revealed that while PD programs are frequent, their effectiveness is hampered by insufficient resources and lack of sustained mentorship. In Ghana, Akyeampong (2017) argued that teacher training often emphasizes theory over practice, reducing its relevance in classroom application. Compared to Zambia, these regional examples illustrate shared challenges such as inadequate funding, weak monitoring, and contextual mismatches.

### **GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE**

Globally, professional development models in developed countries offer insights for Zambia. In the United States, Desimone (2009) emphasized structured, long-term PD initiatives that integrate collaborative learning. Finland, widely regarded for its high-quality education system, invests heavily in continuous teacher learning, with PD embedded into teachers' weekly schedules (Sahlberg, 2011). In India, Sharma (2019) highlighted the growing use of ICT-based PD to support teachers in under-resourced contexts, which has relevance for peri-urban Zambian schools. These cases demonstrate that while contexts differ, sustained, well-supported PD leads to better teaching outcomes and improved learner performance.

### **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS AVAILABLE**

The study reveals that teachers in peri-urban secondary schools accessed professional development primarily through workshops, short-term seminars, and peer learning communities. However, most of these programs were irregular and often dependent on donor funding. Unlike developed systems where PD is institutionalized, Zambian schools lacked a consistent structure.

### **PD AND TEACHING PRACTICES**

Professional development had a direct influence on teaching practices. Teachers reported greater confidence in lesson delivery and adoption of interactive pedagogies following PD activities. Yet, the short-term nature of most programs limited their long-term impact. Comparisons with Finland and South Africa showed that sustained PD leads to deeper pedagogical transformations.

## RESEACH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive survey design within a mixed-methods framework. The target population consisted of teachers and head teachers from selected peri-urban secondary schools in Lusaka Province.

A stratified random sampling technique was used to select 60 teachers and purposively select 10 head teachers. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews and open-ended questionnaires. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages, while qualitative data were thematically analyzed.

## RESEACH FINDINGS, DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

The following tables present the main findings from the study:

Table 1: Access to Professional Development by Teachers in Selected Schools

School	Teachers with Regular PD (%)	Teachers with Irregular PD (%)	Teachers with No PD (%)
School A	60%	30%	10%
School B	55%	35%	10%
School C	70%	20%	10%
School D	65%	25%	10%

Table 2: Types of Professional Development Programs

Type of PD	Frequency (%)	Effectiveness (%)
Workshops	65	55
Seminars	50	45
Peer Learning	40	60
Online PD	20	35

Table 3: Challenges Faced in Professional Development

Challenge	Teachers Reporting (%)	Impact Level
Inadequate Funding	70	High
Limited Time	60	Medium
Lack of ICT Resources	55	High
Weak Monitoring	40	Medium

## CONCLUSION

The study concluded that professional development significantly improves teacher practices and learner outcomes in peri-urban secondary schools. However, its potential is undermined by challenges such as inadequate resources, poor monitoring, and lack of sustained programs.

Challenges included inadequate funding, poor monitoring mechanisms, limited ICT integration, and lack of mentorship. Teachers often faced difficulties balancing PD participation with heavy workloads. In some cases, logistical constraints such as transport and accommodation further discouraged attendance.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Ministry of Education to institutionalize PD into teacher schedules.
2. The Ministry should Promote ICT-supported PD, and ensure adequate funding.
3. Schools should also develop mentorship frameworks to support continuous learning.

4. Embedding PD into teachers' work schedules
5. Involving teachers in the design of PD programs to make them context-specific.

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