

# Professional Development and Empowerment among Secondary School Teachers in Mkuranga District, Tanzania

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## Abstract

The study explores professional Development and empowerment among secondary schools teachers. Qualitative approach was employed to gather information on teachers' empowerment, professional development, and factors limiting professional development. The target population was secondary school teachers, Head of Secondary Schools and Educational Officials in Mkuranga District, Pwani region. The study sample size was 52 respondents. Data were collected through in depth interview, questionnaire, non-participant observation, and documentary review. Content analysis was used to analyse data. The study findings show that observation visits and qualification programme were the main types of professional development among teachers. Teachers' empowerment was found in the improvement of classroom teaching, handling of students' matters, self-efficacy, status, and problem solving. Inability in innovative teaching practices was found among teachers. Structural factors such as inadequate support for professional development, inadequate resources, teaching workloads, and cultural factors such as learning culture, collaboration culture, and trust between teachers were some of the constraints to professional development among teachers. The government and Non State actors should support teacher professional development programmes in order to empower teachers and to ensure quality in students' educational achievement and performance.

**Keywords:** Professional development, empowerment, Teachers, Tanzania

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## 1. Introduction

Teacher professional development and empowerment are important in transforming education (Shaimemanya, 2017). Not only are empowered teachers in charge of their own development, but they are also powerful agents of change. Their knowledge and competencies are important in restructuring education process (Tindowen, 2019; Braga, Jones, Bulger & Elliot, 2016). UNESCO (2017) shows that there are competencies that enable an individual to be proactive, self-organised, and focused in different contexts and situations. These competencies include knowledge, capacities, skills, motives, and affective dispositions. They can be developed and acquired through actions based on experience and reflections.

Balyer, Ozcan and Yildiz (2017) argue that empowerment is a crucial issue in professional development since empowered teachers can discover their potential and limitations for themselves as well as developing the required competences in their professional development. In addition, empowered teachers have the ability of exploiting opportunities for professional growth, feel efficient and effective in the classroom, and have the capacity of influencing students (Tindowen, 2019). Therefore, empowerment has positive influence on teachers' perception towards their knowledge, skills, and talents in helping and establishing programme for their students.

URT (2017) shows that the major goals of teacher professional development in Tanzania are to bring changes in classrooms practices of teachers, a change of teachers' attitudes and beliefs, and a change of students' learning outcomes. The Teachers Development Framework identifies two major types of professional development in Tanzania. The first is direct professional development for in - service teachers which includes workshops and seminars that target at disseminating skills and new knowledge, and allowing reflections, innovations, and problem solving. This is done through meetings at wards or district levels. The second type is school level professional development, which is also referred to as community learning. This allows teachers to collaborate with other peers within the school environment. Community learning aims at the achievement of teacher improvement and enhancement of students learning resulting from the efforts towards education reforms in Tanzania (URT, 2017). Thus, Teacher professional development aims at improving teachers professionally, academically, and technically. It combines an increase of teacher's academic qualifications and professional growth (Komba & Nkumbi, 2008).

Moreover, teacher professional development nurture a culture of learning as it allows teachers to develop their knowledge, skills, and the belief that learning is important and useful (Gracia & Weiss, 2019). It enables teachers to be more efficient and effective in their career as it increases teachers' dedication, satisfaction, and professionalism. It also increases teachers' ability to help students' learning and performance (Darling-Hammond, et. al., 2017; Gracia & Weiss, 2019). Thus, professional development is one of the important influencing aspects in student learning and achievement. However, structural issues (resources, time, external support and workloads)

and cultural issues (culture of learning, culture of collaboration) have continued to hinder teacher development in Tanzania (Komba & Nkumbi, 2008; Dachi, 2016; Komba & Mwakabenga, 2019).

Despite the efforts of empowering teachers through professional development, little is known regarding the manner in which teachers are exposed to professional development opportunities (Komba & Nkumbi, 2008, Komba & Mwakabenga, 2019). Time allocation, inadequate resources including funding for professional development are still a challenge in Tanzania and in Mkuranga District in particular. This study therefore explores teacher professional Development in secondary schools. Specific study objectives include, first to assess teachers' participation in professional development (i.e. seminar and workshops, Qualification programme, Observation visits to other schools, Mentoring /peer observation, coaching, and action research) in secondary school. Second, to assess teachers' empowerment including abilities in teaching practices in classroom, handling students' matters, status, self-efficacy, problem solving, and innovativeness. Third, to analyse factors that limit teacher's professional development.

The study therefore, responds to sustainable development goal number four that targets at ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promotion of lifelong learning for all. This study focuses on the cognitive and behavioural learning objectives, which target on understanding the important role of education and life learning opportunities for all and the application of the acquired knowledge in different situations. That is, the use of formal, non-formal, and informal learning as drivers of sustainable development and improvement of people's lives (UNESCO, 2017). The study is also in line with the Tanzania Education and Training policy 2014, which emphasises on quality education and education opportunities for all (URT, 2014). In addition, the study responds to the Teachers Development Management Strategy (TDMS) priority objectives focusing on the provision of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) for professional development of teachers at all levels (URT, 2017).

### ***1.1 Teacher Empowerment***

Empowerment refers to a social process that enables individuals to gain ownership over their actions, develop the necessary self-confidence of overcoming challenges, and accomplish tasks (Hackman & Johnson, 2013). Thus, an empowered individual has knowledge and skills to act and handle situations in a positive way. Empowerment in this study is conceptualized as teachers' abilities of taking charge of their personal and professional development and growth and of solving their own problems.

Empowerment process involves modifying the environment, building intrinsic motivation and making resources available (Braga, et al., 2016). The restructured working environment empowers a participant to exchange ideas with their peers, enables an individual to assume high level of responsibility and to have a sense of ownership of the development process. Moreover, intrinsic motivation enable individuals to engage in activities, which they value, feel confident, have choices, and see outcomes of their work (Hackman & Johnson, 2013). Hence, competence is important in increasing motivation during empowerment process. Likewise, the provision of resources (funds, time, and facilities) is important in facilitating the accomplishment of tasks in the empowerment process. It also allows proper planning of activities. For example, allocation of resources for professional development allows participation of teachers in workshops and other training programmes (Braga et al., 2016).

### ***1.2 Teacher Professional Development***

Teacher professional development refers to teachers' learning, how they learn and apply the acquired knowledge and skills. It is an ongoing process of education, training, learning, and support activities aimed at promoting teachers' professional knowledge, competencies, attitudes, beliefs, and values (Avalos, 2011). Teacher professional development is also defined as formal and informal educational experiences that increase and enhance professional knowledge and skills (Rao & Namamba, 2017; URT, 2017). Further Darling-Hammond, Hyler and Gardner (2017, p. 2) define professional development as structured professional learning that results in a change to teacher's knowledge and practices and improvement in student learning outcomes. Thus, it involves the processes and activities of enhancing professional knowledge, skills, and attitudes of teachers in order to enable them improve students' learning. Teacher professional development is conceptualised in this study as training and learning activities that allow teachers to engage constructively and responsibly in their career leading to the achievement of students and school objectives.

Teacher professional development is important in school improvement and the teacher is the most influential actor for learners' outcomes. It enables teachers to update their skills in teaching methods, technologies and in handling students' learning challenges. Thus, it raises classroom effectiveness (King, 2019). However, teacher professional development is influenced by different factors including contextual, content and process factors. Contextual factors include (organizational, school culture and learning system). Content factors include (new skills, knowledge, experiences and attitudes). Process factors involves (designing, implementation and assessment of learning activities (Dachi, 2016; Postholm, 2018).

### 1.3 Theoretical Framework

The study is guided by Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory, which explains the relationship between an individual and his/her environment. According to the theory, personal factors such as behaviour, affective and cognitive functions can affect the environment and activities undertaken in a particular environment (Bandura, 1999). Personal factors also affect the choices and decision made by individuals. The theory emphasises on cognitive processes in human and environment interactions. For example, self-efficacy, which is a person’s capability and belief in performing certain actions, is based on cognitive processes. Thus, teachers’ self-efficacy (skills and knowledge) can influence how teachers perceive themselves as capable of making choices for their professional development. Teachers who have high levels of self-efficacy tend to persist in achieving their goals despite the challenges facing them. They are likely to accept innovative ideas and self-development. Thus, Bandura’s Social Cognitive Learning Theory is adopted in this study as a reference point for exploring professional development among teachers in order to have understanding of how teachers engage in professional development and what challenges teachers encounter in the implementation of professional development.

## 2. Methodology

This study employed qualitative research design to explore teachers’ empowerment, the types of professional development, and the factors limiting professional development among teachers. Qualitative approach allows exploration and understanding of social or human problem facing individuals or a group of people (Creswell, 2018). The target population was secondary school teachers, Heads of Secondary Schools and Educational Officials (Ward and District Educational Officers) in Kimanzichana and Mkuranga Wards in Mkuranga. The study sample size was 52 respondents. Purposive sampling technique was used to obtain key informants who had relevant information based on their respective positions. Respondents were selected based on availability and willingness to participate in the study. Both primary and secondary data sources were used. Different methods were used to collect data from the respondents, one of which was in depth interview to key informants and teachers in order to capture the nature of teacher professional development and the challenges encountered through the process. Interviews were also used to obtain information on teachers’ attitudes and behaviour towards professional development. Checklists were used to guide the interviews. The second method was questionnaire, which was used to obtain information on teacher empowerment through professional development and the limiting factors for teacher professional development. The third method was non-participant observation, which allowed understanding of activities that were targeted for professional development. A review of various documents was another method. The documents included both written and electronic materials such as policy documents, Government publications, Journal articles, and textbooks. Respondents’ interview was coded based on their opinion regarding teacher empowerment and professional development. Data was then sorted and the information obtained was organized into themes. Content analysis was used to analyse data. Descriptive summary of the information obtained from the respondents was then interpreted to get the findings and general study conclusions. Tables and quotes were used to present the findings.

## 3. Findings and Discussion

This section presents the study findings and discussions on teacher empowerment, professional development, and the limiting factors for teacher professional development in Mkuranga District in Tanzania.

### 3.1 Teachers Professional Development

The study investigated teachers’ participation in professional development for the past two years. The study findings are presented in Table 1.

**Table: 1 Teachers’ Participation in Professional Development (n=42)**

Professional Development Types	M	F	T
Observation visits to other schools	12(28.6)	9(21.4)	21(50.0)
Qualification programme	10(23.8)	8(19.0)	18(42.9)
Mentoring and peer coaching	6(14.3)	5(11.9)	11(26.2)
Seminar and Workshops	4(9.5)	5(11.9)	9(21.4)
Action research	4(9.5)	3(7.1)	7(16.7)
Education Conferences	3(7.1)	4 (9.5)	7(16.7)

M=Male F=Female T= TotalNumber in brackets are percentages

The study findings in Table 1 show that observation visits (50 percent) and qualification programme (42.9 percent) are the main types for professional development participated by about a half of teachers in Mkuranga. However, participation of female teachers in observation visits to other schools was slight lower (21.4 percent) than was the case with male teachers, who were about a third (28.6 percent) of the respondents. The same trend was found in teacher participation in qualification programme. This trend is attributed to social norms and gender

relations that constrain females opportunities in education. A study on female teachers in Tanzania also revealed unequal participation of males and females in training of teachers. This encouraged gender inequality. Female teachers faced different capability constraints than men due to social norms that assign women domestic and childrearing responsibilities (Tao, 2017). This has implications to teachers' classroom practices and behaviours particularly among female teachers.

Other types of professional development, which were reported, by more than 20 percent of the respondents include mentoring and peer coaching, and participation in workshops and seminars. Darling-Hammond et al., (2017) revealed that peer coaching and mentoring allows observations of teachers' practices, provision of support, reflection, constructive feedback, and recommendations that target at improving teaching practices. Therefore, they improve teaching professional skills through preparation of experienced teachers and promotion of teamwork and communication skills among teachers.

Participation in education conferences and Action research was found to be low (16.7 percent) among teachers in the study area. This suggest that majority of teachers were not engaged in individual or collaborative research activities related to their teaching activities. Likewise, education conferences were attended by a small number (less than 20 percent) of teachers in the study area. This is because of limited professional development opportunities, inadequate information, willingness, and readiness to attend. The findings of this study correspond with the study findings of Hathorn and Dillon (2018) who revealed that individual support and time allocation to work on classroom based research were barriers to action research process. In addition, decisions that teachers make out of action research contribute in changes in curriculum and teaching methods.

### 3.2 Teachers empowerment

Regarding teachers empowerment, the respondents were required to rank their perceived empowerment after participation in professional development in the last two years. Table 2 presents the results in details.

**Table: 2 Perceived Teachers' Empowerment (n=42)**

Teacher Empowerment	Ranking	
	Good	Fair
Ability in classroom teaching	35(83.3)	7(16.7)
Ability to handle students' matters	36(85.7)	6(14.3)
Improvement in self- efficacy	30 (71.4)	12(28.6)
Ability in problem solving	29(69.0)	13( 31.0)
Improvement in status	28(66.7)	14(33.3)
Innovativeness in teaching	15(35.7)	27(64.3)

Numbers in brackets are percentages

The research findings in Table 2 show that, three quarters of teachers who participated in professional development activities in the past two years reported improvement in classroom teaching and ability in handling students' matters (85.7 and 83.3 percent respectively). In addition, more than a half of teachers reported improvement in self - efficacy, status, and problem solving ability. The study findings are consistent with the findings in a study by Tindowen (2019), which revealed that empowered teachers had high level of self- efficacy and professional growth. They have ability and power to handle various situations and overcome challenges. Thus, they can work together to achieve school objectives.

Regarding innovativeness, the study found that innovation in teaching was least practiced by teachers despite their attendance in professional development programmes. This was reported by a third (35.7 percent) of the respondents. This suggests that teachers' unwillingness to move away from traditional teaching practices continued to be a challenge. This has implications in the provision of quality education through innovative and effective teaching methods. As Ellis, Souto-Manning and Turvey (2019) suggest, technological advancement call for innovation in education. Innovative practices in teaching such as the use of ICT, students' engagement, feedback, and assessment contribute in improving teaching quality. Moreover, Maas, Cobb, Krainer and Potari (2019) reveal that innovative teaching approaches are usually introduced in the context of a new curriculum, teacher education and professional development programme. To them innovation is the process that involves support on teachers' learning, which is monitored, analysed, revised, and adapted in school and classroom context during implementation process.

### 3.3 Factors Limiting Professional Development among Teachers

The study findings on the factors that limit professional development among teachers were categorised into structural and cultural factors. Table three presents the results.

**Table: 3 Factors Limiting Professional Development among Teachers (n=42)**

Factors	M	F	T
<b>Structural</b>			
Inadequate support	9(21.4)	9(21.4)	18(42.9)
Inadequate resources	7(16.7)	5(11.9)	12(28.6)
Workloads	5(11.5)	3(7.1)	8(19.0)
Inadequate time	2(4.8)	2(4.8)	4(9.5)
<b>Cultural</b>			
Learning culture	10(23.8)	11(26.2)	21(50.0)
Collaboration culture	9(21.4)	9(21.4)	18(42.9)
Trust between teachers	6(14.3)	8(19.0)	14(33.3)

M=Male F=Female T= Total Numbers in brackets are percentages

On structural factors, inadequate support for professional development (42.9 percent) was revealed as a major structural barrier reported by about a half of the respondents in the study area. Other structural factors include inadequate resources for professional development and teacher workloads. Teachers reported that professional development was a challenge because there were limited funds and support from the employer. In addition, it was too expensive for teachers to afford it. Furthermore, inadequate time due to family responsibilities was reported by less than ten percent of teachers as a limiting factor for professional development.

Darling-Hammond et al., (2017) also found that lack of resources was a barrier for professional development among teachers. It was also difficult for teachers to integrate professional development along with teaching activities due to tight work schedules. Other scholars (i.e. Louws, Meirink, Van Keen and Van Driel, 2017; Komba and Mwakabenga, 2019) also found that teaching workloads limited teachers' opportunities from attending various professional development programmes. This has implications on participation rates in professional development and effectiveness in teaching and students achievement.

As for cultural factors, learning culture was found to be a major factor impeding teacher professional development. A half of the respondents reported that learning culture is not practiced among teachers in their schools. This has implications on teachers' readiness and interest in the participation in professional development. A study by Chanani and Wibowo (2019) found that learning culture involves values and practices that support and encourage individuals to improve knowledge, competences, and performance level. Thus, it creates knowledge sharing and increases the ability of individuals to embrace and adapt to changes.

In addition, collaboration culture was practiced by about a half of the respondents. Collaboration is an important factor in professional development and learning. It increases teachers' skills, self-confidence, and improvement in academic work. It also allows teachers to share innovative ideas regarding teaching and learning. Hence, it positively influence development of competencies and improve teachers' knowledge (Hauge & Wan, 2019; King, 2019; Hathorn & Dillon, 2018).

The findings show further that trust between teachers was practiced by a third (33.3 percent) of the respondents. This implies that teachers really share teaching techniques and the challenges they encounter during teaching and learning process. This has implications in classroom teaching particularly to junior staff. A study by Park and So (2014) shows that trust allows peer sharing of knowledge, ideas, and exchange of teaching techniques. Thus, the findings suggest that a trusting school environment and trust between teachers have positive effects in professional development (Hauge & Wan, 2019).

In depth interviews with Heads of School and Educational Officers show that resources constraints continued to limit professional growth and development among teachers. For example, one male Head of School had this to say,

*“Professional development is very important for upgrading teachers professionally... Availability of funds has been a barrier in achieving our targets. The number of teachers and workloads that we have in our school limit participation in continuous professional development even at the school level...”*  
 (March 2019)

This implies that availability of resources is still a challenge to professional development among teachers. Teaching workloads and limited resources continued to hinder teachers' participation in professional development activities. This has implications in professional growth and empowerment among teachers.

The findings obtained through in depth interviews with teachers also show that access to professional development opportunities was a challenge among teachers. A female teacher had this to say,

*“I did not attend any professional development programme for the past four years. I have never had the opportunity of accessing new knowledge and skills”* (March 2019)

The findings suggest that professional development opportunities are limited in secondary schools. This has implications in students learning and teaching in terms of quality of teaching and students achievements. As King (2019) suggests, despite the constraints of participating in professional development, teachers have to take the responsibility for their own professional development through learning and enhancement of interpersonal

relationships with their peers, students, and parents. Teacher professional development should therefore target at empowering teachers to take ownership of their own practice and adhere to their moral purpose of teaching and learning.

#### 4. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study explores professional Development and empowerment among secondary schools teachers. Based on the study findings, it is concluded that observation visits and qualification programme were the main types of professional development for about a half of the teachers in Mkuranga. However, participation of female teachers in these programmes was found to be slight lower than was the case with male teachers. Teachers' participation in mentoring and peer coaching, workshops and seminars, education conferences, and Action research was found to be less than a third.

The study findings also show that three quarters of teachers who participated in professional development activities in the past two years reported improvement in classroom teaching and in the ability of handling students' matters. In addition, more than a half of teachers reported improvement in self-efficacy, status, and problem solving ability. However, innovation ability was found to be slightly lower as reported by less than a half of the respondents.

The findings show further that inadequate support for professional development was the leading structural factor limiting professional development among teachers. Other factors included inadequate resources for professional development and teacher workloads. In addition, inadequate time due to family responsibilities was reported as a limiting factor for professional development.

The government and Non State actors should support professional development opportunities among teachers in order to ensure quality in teaching and students' achievements. President's Office – Regional and local government should also revisit school schedules in order to increase opportunities for professional development activities including mentoring and peer coaching and action research which can be done at school or district level.

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