

Rhetoric or Reality: Hong Kong Primary Teachers' Participation in Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

Sally Wai-Yan WAN¹

¹The University of Nottingham, Nottingham, United Kingdom, ²Pui Kiu College, Hong Kong, Hong Kong

Background

Lifelong education has been highly emphasized in the global world. Facing complex and dynamic changes and challenges in the school nowadays (Herrity and Morales, 2004), teachers' continuing professional development (CPD) has been highlighted in the new education policy in Hong Kong. The term continuing professional development (CPD) has been widely used to refer to ongoing education and training for the professions (Earley and Bubb, 2004). There are some other associated concepts, such as teacher development, staff development and professional development, related to continuing professional development. Day (1999) has clarified the distinction between these terms and continuing professional development. He states that most of the definitions of professional development stress the acquisition of subject or content knowledge and teaching skills as its main purpose. Much emphasis has to be put on the nature of CPD as a "continuing" process for improvement in addition to the knowledge and skills gained. As an ongoing process of any kinds of education, training, learning and support activities engaged in by teachers alone or with others (Bolam, 1993; Day, 1999), CPD enhances their knowledge and skills and enables them to consider their attitudes and approaches to the education of children, attempting to improve the quality of learning and teaching. In short, CPD focuses on fostering individual competence to enhance practice and so forth facilitate dynamic changes in education (Blandford, 2000).

In alignment with the global trend in CPD, Hong Kong has put more emphasis on CPD. In recent years, the need for higher accountability and improvement in the quality of teaching has been of great concern in Hong Kong.

In 1997, Education Commission Report 7 (ECR7) (Education Commission, 1997:37) affirmed the crucial role of the school in CPD, stating that "every school should examine its own needs for teacher development". In 2003, the Advisory Committee on Teacher Education and Qualifications (ACTEQ) has initiated the Towards a Learning Profession: The Teacher Competencies Framework and the Continuing Professional Development of Teachers (ACTEQ, 2003). The framework works out a map of generic teacher competencies for both teachers and those facilitators of teachers' learning and development. Specifically, all serving teachers are required to undertake at least 50 hours of structural CPD activities and/or other modes of CPD activities. As stated, "the basic premise of the framework is the personal growth and development of teachers" (ACTEQ, 2003:24). There is no doubt that CPD is vital to all stakeholders in the process of education.

Research Questions

This preliminary study investigates Hong Kong primary teachers' perceptions of the development of the continuing professional development (CPD) strands. The study was conducted in three primary schools in order to explore teachers' participation in CPD based on the government CPD framework. The research questions include: *Does teacher participation vary in different CPD activities? What factors influence their participation in CPD activities?*

Methods

The study applies a quantitative approach, using a self-developed survey questionnaire on the basis of the CPD framework as proposed by Advisory Committee on Teacher Education and Qualifications

(ACTEQ, 2003), as followed by a qualitative approach, i.e. using focus group interviews to further explore teachers' views about their participation in CPD.

Frame

Using SPSS software, this study explores teachers' perceptions of their participation in CPD activities based on the government CPD framework (ACTEQ, 2003). The relationships between demographic characteristics (such as gender, age, years of teaching experience, teaching rank, the highest academic qualification, etc.) and their perceptions were explored with the use of Chi-square test. Followed by the results of the quantitative data, the focus group interviews are conducted and the transcripts of the interviews are analysed with the use of colour coding method for discovering emerging themes.

Research findings

As a whole, teachers identified "higher academic study" as the CPD activity that they participated the most, whilst they participated in "producing publication" as a kind of CPD activity less often.

Besides, there is no evidence that demographic factors like gender, the highest academic qualifications, teaching rank are related to teachers' perceptions of their participation in CPD activities.

The implications of school-based professional development and government policies related to CPD are discussed in the paper.