

The Rurality of Continuing Professional Teacher Development (CPTD)

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ABSTRACT This paper draws from a completed study that assessed the effectiveness of the current strategies for implementing CPTD programmes in rural junior secondary schools in a rural Education District of Eastern Cape Province. The researchers argue that the rurality of the continuing professional development of teachers resonates from the comprehensive failures of specific education policies in addressing various historical challenges of life in rural South Africa. Rural schools are confronted with poor schooling conditions, high levels of illiteracy, lack of parental participation, poor transportation, non-attendance and shortage of teachers. Resulting from the introduction of numerous new curriculums in South Africa, rural schools' inadequacies alongside the inconsistencies in the rural-urban education policies' dichotomy and implementation have been significantly exposed. The paper concludes that it would seem most plausible to suggest that the professional development needs of rural teachers should be addressed differently in rural areas. Some recommendations have been suggested.

INTRODUCTION

The introduction of educational changes has shown pronounced differences between schools, rural and urban ones in particular. Inequalities between rural and urban education indicators are on the increase in developing countries including South Africa. Schooling in rural contexts is significantly different from those in the urban and some schools have found the educational changes more challenging than others. According to Lind and Stjernstrom (2015), schools in rural places are confronted with increasing constraints relating to shrinking population, isolation and distance. However, to understand the facts of rural therefore, researchers are first required to identify a theoretical perspective that encapsulates the ideals of rurality (Kozioł et al. 2015). Without achieving this imperative, knowledge of the rural would be limited if not speculative.

The purpose of this paper is to highlight some of the complexities of schooling in a rural context. The paper is informed by some of the empirical evidences from a concluded fieldwork that assessed the effectiveness of the various strategies for implementing programs aimed at ensuring continuing professional teacher development, hereafter referred to as CPTD in rural junior secondary schools in one rural Education

District in the Eastern Cape Province. The researchers hope that by doing this, the discussions would contribute to the ongoing efforts to generate information and knowledge to facilitate and enhance the teaching and learning quality in rural schools in South Africa. Moreover, Azano and Stewart (2015) argue that by doing so, efforts to recruit teachers to work in rural schools are sustained.

Objectives of the Study

The purpose of the study in regards to the larger study that influenced this paper was to assess the effectiveness of the strategies for the implementation of CPTD programs in junior secondary schools in one rural Education District in the Eastern Cape Province. Specifically, the study sought to:

- i) Assess the effectiveness of the strategies for implementing continuing professional teacher development programs in schools in this particular Education District.
- ii) Establish the strategies preferred by teachers to make the implementation of continuing professional development programs effective in order to meet their needs.

The Meaning of Rurality

The concept of rurality is one that has brought about much controversy and differing

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sentiments among researchers as a result of its complexity (Chikoko 2008; Carson 2009; Burton and Johnson 2010; Caena 2011; Hlalele 2012b; Islam 2012; Hlalele 2014; Azano and Stewart 2015). Notwithstanding such ongoing arguments and perhaps any semantic controversies persisting among writers, it is common sense that an understandable meaning of rurality has to bear a distinguishing feature between urban and rural contexts. In this regard, Khau (2012) contends rurality as an attribute that people easily attach to a place based on their perceptions about its remoteness and how far for instance, they are from the metropolitan areas. From these attributes of space, the general life of an inhabitant constitutes agricultural practices where they earn low wages with no future prospects of retirement investments according to Hlalele (2012). The Department of Education (DoE) (2005: 9) notes the following features as typical of those found in rural places to include:

Distance to town; topography; settlement patterns; access to communication and information technology; transport infrastructure; access to service and facilities; the health; educational and economic status of the community; access to lifelong learning opportunities; social conditions; and activities of the political, cultural and civil society organizations.

There exists a plethora of definitions on the subject of rurality in various studies (see Harmon et al. 2007; Barter 2008; Harmon and Schaft 2009; Hayes 2009; Burkett 2011; Islam et al. 2011; Adu and Okeke 2014; Hlalele 2014). However, the researchers of the present paper thought that the view by the Department of Basic Education (DBE) (2011) is the version that comprehensively captures their position on the concept of rurality within the South African context. According to the DBE (2011), rural areas are remote and relatively underdeveloped with many rural communities. Their schools are poor and disadvantaged, lacking basic infrastructure for sanitation, water, roads and transport, electricity and information and communication technologies (ICTs). Although this definition can be regarded as an acceptable one from the department's point of view, almost all these definitions commonly revolve around the issue of space as an isolated one. That's why one cannot dispute the expansion of rural definition to include areas of dense settlement created by apartheid-driven land resettlement policies as an emphasis on earlier

mentioned particular features of rurality (DoE 2004a, 2005; Gardiner 2008). This situation narrates the disparities, which exist between urban and rural schools with the latter on the disadvantaged end. Hence, Chikoko (2008: 1) posits rurality as "a multifaceted term deserving to be deeply and contextually understood".

Although narrower than the South African context, defining rural by the international world seems to depend on how different countries view and experience it because of its bearing on their life situations. For instance, numerous studies contend that the international literature defines rural as a space where human settlement and infrastructure occupy only small patches of the landscape, and economic activity is dominated by primary production (McQuiggan 2007; Megginson and Whitaker 2007; Zafeirakou 2007; Burton and Johnson 2010; Menlah and Mays 2010; Adedeji and Olaniyam 2011; Eckert and Petrone 2013). Within this context of rurality it would be common sense to argue that the quality of socio-economic status as well as the quality of the environment will both influence and be influenced by the quality of the education system. This is the situation, which normally overruns rural livelihoods because a high level of poverty would invariably lead to low level of investment plus its corresponding poor schooling experiences for both teachers and learners. The consequences are that poor education outcomes reinforce poverty and inequality, which has already been visible in South Africa for generations (DoE 2007, 2008; ECDDoE 2012). The next sub-section looks at rurality in the context of education.

Rural Education in South African Context

According to van der Westhuizen (2012), the spatial inequalities created by the apartheid government in South Africa left rural schools, as located in the resettlement areas, confronted with challenges that the education system was not designed to handle. This was what du Plessis and Conley (2007) earlier mentioned when they argued that despite the existence of an innovative and rights-based curriculum and policy framework for the transformation of education, the legacy of this inherited system continues to exist. On this basis, spatiality can therefore not be seen in isolation without referring to the people living in it because it is the people who have

problems in these social spaces (DoE 2004a; Lau 2006; Marsden 2006; Lee 2011; Jacobs and Hart 2012). In other words, real life demands in the rural settings make education activities difficult to handle. This happens even though the new system of education, which intended to normalize learning and transform teaching, has been introduced in South Africa (Blanton and Harmon 2005; DBE 2008; Davids 2009; Boaduo 2010).

Furthermore, Moletsane (2012) argues that massive changes in the education system that also meant to bring about social changes, have not addressed the systemic challenges in rural settings. The situation bears such negativity even though there has been a great deal of enthusiasm about the liberalization of education and the move towards quality learning. All the teachers were found to be excited about the new education system with its policies. In fact, Chikoko (2008) shares the same sentiments by noting that conditions that allow teachers to cope with the multiple challenges and demands constantly placed on them are still in existence. Hence, Ebersohn and Ferreira (2012) stress that there are visible disadvantages for teaching in rural settings, which evoke countless images of barriers, hardship and despair. This calls for attention to teacher professional development efforts to invest in helping teachers become leaders of learning for better implementation of the education policies (Chikoko 2008). However, the situation will only become conducive when the seemingly chronic low-resource environments receive the greater attention. Feeling the same sentiments, Ebersohn and Ferreira (2012) call for attention that should culminate towards the removal of rural isolation as it hinders rural education development in all sorts of manners. For the conditions to remain unchanged in rural education could be devastating because rural schools are not set to produce desired results.

To Pillay and Saloojee (2012), teachers working in rural areas feel that they are not cared for because they tend to define themselves according to the context in which they work, a situation, which carries a demotivating factor in learning and teaching. When the government thinks of positive intervention, a much better stance is to allow for the voice of the teachers to be heard as it can make a difference. Within the frame of neo-liberalism, which calls for the emancipation of the individual, the voices of the teachers ap-

pear to be the most important factor in enabling that the intervention strategies may be directed appropriately to the needs of the rural teachers that ensure gradual but steady CPTD. Thus, with the voices of the rural teachers seen as germane to the emancipation of rural education, the hitherto top-down approach to CPTD programs that allows education outsiders with little knowledge about the profession and often no experience in teaching to define what is best for the teaching profession would have been eliminated. Once the rural teachers' voices are pitched appropriately, it is thought that further discussions and debates around rural education as well as teaching and learning will no longer exclude the participation of teachers themselves.

Studies have shown that rural schools differ from one another in more ways than one (Hudson and Hudson 2008; Marmon and Schaft 2009; Msila 2010; Adedeji and Olaniyam 2011; Msila and Mtshali 2011; Koziol et al. 2015). Given this fact, it would seem invariably that organizational dynamics could vary dramatically from one rural place to another. Notwithstanding these variations, Pillay and Saloojee (2012) argue that because of their professional engagement, rural teachers are capable of using their experiences to turn constraints into opportunities for change. This is evident when some rural schools were seen to be competing favorably well with some urban schools in achieving the desired outcomes (DBE 2011). Hence, all policy formulations aimed at the emancipation of rural schools should first engage with rural teachers themselves. It equally confirms that the expertise of rural teachers can be used to build teacher communities of practice where teachers can be given opportunities to develop others (Atay 2006; Armour and Yelling 2007; Banks and Smyth 2010; Adu and Okeke 2014; Lind and Stjernstrom 2015).

From an empathetic perspective, the present researchers would argue that it is the teachers themselves who understand their conditions of work. It would thus seem most plausible to suggest that teachers themselves must be engaged with directly in order to understand their everyday lived experiences within the rural settings. Pillay and Saloojee (2012) contend that allowing the perspectives of teachers to prevail in their school practices produces knowledge that make new meanings and create possibilities for change in rural schooling. In this sense, Khau (2012) highlights that allowing teachers to par-

ticipate in decision-making towards their professionalism results against an education that zealously mobilizes attachments to rurality. This is what Pitsoe and Maila (2012) refer to as a bottom-up approach where the teachers' voice is heard in all circles of education. They also consider teacher professional development to shift from behavioristic towards a constructivist approach. By allowing this opportunity, an intrinsic perception by teachers and others concerned with education is that rural education is an attribute that is attached to a rural place and as such it can never be removed (Pennefather 2008; Ntombela 2011; Reid and Cakwe 2011; Selemani-Meke 2013; Selemani-Meke and Rembe 2014; Azano and Stewart 2015).

By implication, the above concerns and suggestions are a call to refrain from treating rural education as equal to urban education until such a time when rural education reaches an equal status of development with the urban. But it is equally important to note that despite numerous efforts that intend to support the development of rural schools, very few changes seem to be occurring in this regard in rural areas (Mentz et al. 2012). It should therefore be a priority to improve rural education by submitting to the call to include rural teachers in every step towards change and development. Such an idea emanates because rural schooling is unique and it is the teachers in these schools who know their specific needs, while they too are the ones experiencing challenges in the rural places (Marsden 2006; Lessing and de Witt 2007; Mbuyuza et al. 2010). These sentiments reflect that rural schools operate without the quantity and quality of support and resources available from the education authorities. Be that as it may, any genuine intervention aimed at the enhancement of the plight of rural schools and their teachers must necessarily rely on the expertise of teachers. That in itself appears to be the only way to enable the rural schools to benefit from such intervention programs.

However, it should be noted that the spatial boundaries along which the past politico-legal policies redefined South Africa still bear negative impacts on the current South African education system (Jacobs and Hart 2012). It would therefore seem that although post-1994 the education development programs have endeavored to eliminate disparities in education, many of the differences between urban and rural schools

as well as between urban and rural teachers still linger on. Numerous studies suggest that the challenges resonate with the implementation of curriculum reform policies where planning and design do not always engage with the teachers themselves and as a result fail to cater for the needs of rural schools (Broad and Evans 2006; Amedzo 2007; White and Reid 2008; Adedeji and Olaniyam 2011; Burkett 2011; Zeelen et al. 2014; Koziol et al. 2015). Moreover, Surty (2011) concedes to this understanding when he claims that rural areas are characterized by various factors that negatively influence the delivery of quality education.

The fact that rural areas are remote and relatively underdeveloped under the new South African socio-economic policies means that more intervention and new strategies are needed to tackle the problem. In line with this, Islam (2012) concedes that a critical element within the schooling system relates to how education authorities are prepared to address the diverse needs of producing teachers for changing times. For such a cause, Islam (2012) further states that there are concerns that traditional models of teacher education are not fully capable of producing teachers for changing times, and specifically for the rural schools. It is these views that led Burkett (2011) to proclaim that professional development has come under close scrutiny since the advent of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Such a purpose came with the understanding that rural schools and teachers are faced with unique challenges of time, place and distance. These are all features that isolate and pose difficulties to rural schooling within the South African context.

To reason on this status of the rural education context, Ncube (2013) cites an example of rural Zimbabwean schools where he asserts that the challenge to understand the concept of rural education emanates from the absence of rural education research. In other words, what is known about rural education from empirical evidence appears limited, and much of the discussions relating to rural education in the context CPTD appear to be speculative rather than empirically backed (Ncube 2013). Moreover, much of what is currently known of rural education appears to be inferred from research wherein samples are predominated by the urban dwelling population of teachers resulting to the fact that limited awareness of rural teaching and learn-

ing activities among education authorities prevails. Such a situation, as stipulated by Pennefather (2008), navigates diverse school contexts, which constitutes a great challenge to rural schools. This appears to be the main reason why Wallin (2008) argues for research on rural education that addresses a practical critique of current trends in school improvement.

Therefore, to find a solution to rural education challenges, Chikolo (2008) supports the development of research endeavors that seeks deeper understanding of rural settings from the perspective of education, and a need to interrogate the notion of rural education. Without research that specifically addresses the context of rural education, Pennefather (2008) argues that the diversities in terms of teachers, pupils and school contexts will continue to pose great challenges for rural education. This is one of the reasons why Moletsane (2012) claims education in rural South Africa as an endeavor that has not really improved the lots of the rural dwellers. Secondly, Moletsane (2012) notes that initiatives meant to bring about social change in rural areas, including those concerned with teacher education and curriculum implementation have not addressed the systemic issues of schooling in rural places, resulting in difficulties in real transformation for the majority of the South Africans residing in most of the rural places.

Rural Dimension of CPTD

Education transformation in South Africa has revealed pronounced differences between schools. Wallin (2008) perceived this context as something usual in developing countries where changes in the education system are taking place. As far as Gardiner (2008) and Msila (2010) are concerned, the diversity which shows rural schools to be on the receiving end of inequality has led to challenges in the implementation and sustenance of changes. These views are echoed by van der Westhuizen (2012) and Msomi et al. (2014) who established the existence of huge gaps inherent in the South African education insofar as the implementation of the new programs of development are concerned.

In support of these views, Gardiner (2008) asserts that policymakers and education authorities never considered how the particular needs of rural schools can be met with the overall state policy of a single education system. Notable is

the fact that rural schools are attended by black learners who are taught by black teachers. However, in the midst of all these challenges, van der Westhuizen (2012) argues that these schools are disadvantaged and ill resourced. Moreover, van der Westhuizen (2012) also notes that these are schools that work without libraries, computer facilities and electricity. Notwithstanding these challenges, they also work alongside some of the well-resourced schools from the previously advantaged schools.

Thus, having noted the real differences between urban and rural schools, Islam (2012) supports earlier concerns by Gardiner (2008), White and Reid (2008) and Burton and Johnson (2010), which maintain that teacher initiatives in education remain mostly ineffective since they do not address systemic challenges. Despite these concerns, Loucks and Matsumoto (2010) consider teacher development as central to transforming education in South Africa. Given this fact, it is therefore imperative that CPTD programs for effective schools need to account for place as part of the teacher education curriculum. On the other hand, Zafeirakou (2007) argues that teacher development needs to take place on school site in order to equip teachers with the necessary skills for classroom teaching. This is a view, which has received support from many researchers like Barter (2008), Compion et al. (2012), Steyn (2013) and Zeelen et al. (2014) who argue that on school site professional development is appropriate in order to give space for self-reflection and self-reflexivity to particular teachers within particular space.

Earlier, Steyn (2008) had indicated that teacher development requires building professionalism through collective reflection on practice and through development of support structures at the workplace. This workplace practice idea is a better opportunity for rural teachers as, by definition, rural is far from town where workshops are usually being held. It is therefore valuable to share ideas in order to assist each other as van der Westhuizen (2012) and Msomi et al. (2014) claim that teachers are not clear about policy documents. The researchers also suggest that it is imperative for the curriculum documents to be clear and for such documents to give a balanced weighting across cognitive levels. Amongst these imperatives is the fact that in the developing world, continuing professional teacher development (CPTD) is generally rooted in the

personal growth model (Symeou 2008; Timperley 2008; Banks and Smyth 2010; Tamilenthil and Mohanasundaram 2011). This is by far the best CPTD shape as it recognizes the fact that needs may be different from those of teachers in other areas or in different contexts and times.

It is therefore not surprising that the DoE (2004) admits that the core democratic professionalism is an emphasis on collaborative, co-operative action between teachers and other stakeholders. This is a school-based circle and network of professional development, which is also ongoing in other developing countries (DoE 2004; Broad and Evans 2006; Coolahan 2007a; Hirsh 2012; Hlalele 2014; Koziol et al. 2015). Thus, it is notably that the constituents for such a model certainly exist in South Africa. Although the clustering of schools for development and support is taking place at the district level (DoE 2008), a fundamental principle of rural education in South Africa is that it should be community based (Steyn 2009).

Such community-based sentiments are a response to the living circumstances in rural places, which differ from one another. Thus, Islam (2012) asserts that the teachers' professional development with no links to ground realities makes it difficult for teachers to teach effectively in a challenging context. Gardiner (2008) also states that the Department of Education must not rely on higher education institutions for CPTD, as these institutions are unable to address the needs of rural communities in their programs of development. The main factor here is that the partnership between the Department of Education and higher education institutions does not offer solutions to the realities on the ground. In essence, teachers in rural schools often work under conditions that are solitary and without much material or human support. It should therefore be understood that improving the professional practice of teachers requires actions that address the unique context and conditions in rural schools (Harmon et al. 2007). Hence, DoE (2004, 2008) and Wallin (2008) unilaterally agree that practical training based on the realities of the classroom and ongoing on-the-job support is the critical factor in any successful teacher development education.

The Context of the Study

Continuing professional teacher development (CPTD) is a program of continuing learn-

ing and training in order to ensure high-level expertise to enable teachers to keep their professional skills and knowledge up-to-date (Coolahan 2007a; Islam et al. 2011; Hirsh 2012; Islam 2012). CPTD has been variously defined as activities that increase the skills, knowledge and understanding of teachers, and their effectiveness in schools and also promote continuous reflection and re-examination of professional learning (Harmon and Schaft 2009; American Foundation of Teachers 2010; Adu and Okeke 2014; Azano and Stewart 2015; Koziol et al. 2015).

In exploring the South African context, the implementation of CPTD in rural South Africa is perceived as yielding no positive desired outcomes (DoE 2005). However, this situation seemed to be exacerbated by the absence of lines of demarcation when designing development programs between urban and rural schools. Such a situation leads to the supposedly ascribed inferior status to rural schools even after over 20 years of democracy. What is visible in this context is that rural schools find the implementation of CPTD programs to be more challenging than in other contexts (Gardiner 2008) due to the lack of level grounds for implementing such policy.

The birth of democratic South Africa in 1994 resulted in the massive transformation of the education system with the intentions of redressing the imbalances and social injustices of the past and also to meet the global challenges of economic development (Taylor et al. 2007; Maistry 2008; Taylor 2011). With the amalgamation of different Departments of Education, a single non-racial Department of Education was formed resulting in significant policy changes in the education sector (Steyn 2008a; Mestry et al. 2009; Nkambule et al. 2011; Reid and Cakwe 2011). One of the major developments was the adoption of the new curriculum, which led to the development of new curriculum policies (DBE 2011; EC-DoE 2013). A new curriculum known as Curriculum 2005 (C2005) was ultimately introduced and implemented (DoE 2009; DBE 2012).

The inherent flaws in the development of C2005 became evident in situations where pupils were unable to read, write and count at their appropriate grade levels (DoE 2009). Teachers also did not know what to prepare and what to teach in the classrooms (Burton and Johnson 2010; Msila 2010; Pitsoe and Maila 2012). C2005 was ultimately reviewed by the Education Ministry resulting in new versions of the curricu-

lum, one after the other, namely, the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS), National Curriculum Statement (NCS) and lastly, Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) (DoE 2009; WCED 2012). Revision of these versions came from the shortcomings in implementation.

In the process of education reform, implementation of any curriculum is dependent on the teachers who will implement it (Islam et al. 2011; Mentz et al. 2012; Mukeredzi 2013; Azano and Stewart 2015). Teacher development then became a necessity (DoE 2009). Azano and Stewart (2015: 2) argue that for effective transformation of the rural schools to happen, “teacher candidates from rural backgrounds are more likely to be successful in rural schools”. To overcome the hindrance in the transformation process caused by the lack of skills, knowledge and understanding therefore, the Department of Education suggested well-coordinated Continuing Professional Teacher Development (CPTD) programs, commonly known as the Working Paper 2010 (DoE 2010). The aim of such well coordinated CPTD programs according to Padwad and Dixit (2011: 10) involves:

Planned, continuous and lifelong processes whereby teachers try to develop their personal and professional qualities, and improve their knowledge, skills and practice, leading to their empowerment, the improvement of their agency and the development of their organizations and their pupils.

CPTD programs are vital when built on collaboration, collegial interactions and the fostering of relationships. This means that the forms of models of CPTD should reflect the necessity and importance of using both the off-school site and on-school site CPTD programs. Engelbrecht et al. (2007) and Hardman (2011) outline the CPTD models, which have been adopted in South Africa with an attempt to change the teacher classroom practice. The transmissive model, which is using the cascade CPTD model, has been seen to take the prominent stage of CPTD in South Africa (Hlalele 2012b; Mukeredzi 2013; Selemani-Meke 2013). This is so although this approach is characterized by not being a centralized CPTD as the information is cascaded from top to bottom through the use of workshops. Engelbrecht et al. (2007) acknowledge that the cascade model failed to prepare either officials or school-based teachers for the imple-

mentation process. For this reason, Hardman (2011) advocates for in-service strategies and continuing professional development that are school based. Within this understanding, the transitional and the transformative models of CPTD, mentioned above, are better placed as school-based and of great assistance in the development of teachers.

The initial education reform in post-apartheid South Africa envisaged the successful implementation of the new curriculum. This implementation of the new curriculum culminated to the introduction of CPTD programs meant to shift teachers from the old traditional classroom practices to the suitable outcome-based (OBE) practices in order to improve both teacher and learner performance. The move is also meant to equip teachers with new knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, relationships, and their thinking, understanding and maturity. The implementation of CPTD programs has been ongoing and all the teachers in the Eastern Cape have been trained. Strategies employed by the Eastern Cape Department of Education (ECDoE) to implement CPTD programs include the use of cascade model, workshops, cluster meetings, mentoring, peer coaching and self-evaluation. Focusing on the context in which CPTD is employed, literature reiterates a renewed focus on teacher education with strong connections to the local context (Maistry 2008; Steyn 2013). Inversely, implementation of CPTD takes place on-school site and or conversely, implementation of CPTD takes place off-school site. Both the on- and off-school site strategies are continuing and ongoing in the Eastern Cape Province. Maistry (2008) further maintains that CPTD does not only rely on teachers learning from one another, but it relies on the prior knowledge, wealth of potential and experience of each other, which can be built upon and incorporated into further initiatives.

Despite the CPTD programs in place, the Education District where this study was conducted is characterized by the underperformance of teachers, which is evidenced by a string of poor matric results (DoE 2011). All the strategies for professional development of teachers in this time of education reform seem not to be working. This is despite the assumption that there is continuing professional teacher development in place. It was therefore imperative to assess the effectiveness of the strategies for implementing Continuing Professional Teacher Development

for rural junior secondary school teachers in one of the rural Eastern Cape Education Districts. The researchers through this paper aim to contribute to the growing body of knowledge in the area of CPTD that will impact the improvement of the quality of the rural teachers as well as the policy and practice of rural education.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology that the study leading to this paper followed was a qualitative approach. In this approach, the design was a case study design, which was defined as a single-bounded entity to be studied in detail (Blaikie 2010). Through this kind of methodology, participants in a particular study will have the opportunity to interpret their daily lives. The approach also has the ability to see people, and their interpretations, perceptions, meanings and understandings, as the primary data sources. More so, the approach allows for an in-depth understanding and deep immersion in the environment of the participants. It was therefore undoubtedly that this study focused on human actions that take place in the context-specific settings of rural community schools and how their actions are influenced by their settings. Within this understanding, interpretivism gives the researcher an opportunity to adopt an inter-subjective epistemology and the ontological belief that reality is socially constructed (Kvale 2007; Kumar 2010; Creswell 2014).

OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSION

Moletsane (2012) contends that while undergoing education reform changes, the new paradigms of change acknowledge the challenges faced by underdeveloped communities. Such situations would recognize that individuals and groups in rural areas also have strengths, skills, knowledge and resources that can be used to develop and implement interventions for social change. Judging by the performance of rural schools as compared to urban schools, rural schools are on the receiving end of mitigating factors that lead to their underperformance (Chikoko 2008; Burton and Johnson 2010; Adejebi and Olaniyam 2011; Koziol et al. 2015; Lind and Stjernstrom 2015).

In exploring the aims of CPTD programs for the Department of Education, one major purpose was to close the gap pertaining to all the desired outcomes for schooling, but rural schools are

not in any way near growth and development (DoE 2011). The contents for such a situation are caused by the neglect rural schools are receiving when it comes to the planning and design of teacher development programs (du Plessis 2007; Engelbrecht 2007; Gardiner 2008; Azano and Stewart 2015). In fact, their way of life, which entails their needs, has been taken for granted when education reform changes resulted to the introduction of CPTD programs.

In further exploring the current policies of change, Pennifather (2008) has noted that in the existence of enormous positive changes in different sectors of society, there are still considerable differences in terms of learners' socio-economic backgrounds, school infrastructure and resources, qualifications of teachers and shortage of teachers. All these challenging factors are no exclusion to the challenge of teacher education faced by rural teachers. Yet, the international world felt strongly that teacher education should be school-based in order to increase the strength of the awareness of the need for a closer link between theory and practice (Chikolo 2008). Such an argument attests that when thinking about developing teachers of rural settings, it should be realized that schools are not the same, even though all categories of schools fall under one education system. Chikolo (2008) further asserts that when education contexts differ, the challenge is to make education in rural settings as competitive as current and as cutting-edge as education anywhere else.

This is in line with Islam (2012) who noted that time and again, teachers have advocated the importance of linking teacher education with the local context and have contended that many of the current practices lack context-based reflective preparation for teachers. Within this understanding, Timperly (2010) asserts that changing practice and developing the skills of professional inquiry require in-depth understanding of the area of implementation. This is learning which resonates around the involvement of a variety of activities that are designed to promote acquisition of the target knowledge and skills.

CONCLUSION

A large part of the country of South Africa remains rural with societies living a different life compared to their urban counterparts. Following the introduction of reform changes in education in the post-apartheid period, the notion

of rurality remains the same as ever before. Whilst the introduction of education reforms was meant to redress the imbalances of the past policies in education, research results show that the introduction of the concept of continuing professional teacher development has not been thoroughly researched via the notion of rurality. This reflects bias towards urban areas where research findings seem to suit conditions other than rural communities. It is unquestionable that rural areas have unique context, which have different needs in unique contexts. CPTD is aimed to enable teachers to improve their practices in order to improve teaching and, in turn, to achieve the desired learner outcomes. These intentions are being implemented through the use of short-term transmissive models of professional development, which are yielding no positive results for rural schools. The education researchers should bear in mind that CPTD is a policy, which intends solving critical educational problems throughout South Africa, irrespective of the geographical location. This sentiment attests to the challenge to allow teachers to negotiate their role in the decision-making processes of their professional development.

POLICY AND RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

Rural teacher perspectives had not been considered when teacher professional development was planned and designed. Policymakers and stakeholders within the school are challenged to come up with a better policy that will enable the active engagement of teachers in matters that concern the improvement of teaching and learning.

It is noted that high quality programs that are very good and that actively engage rural meanings in the context of education and schooling rarely exist. As a result, education policymakers are again challenged to ensure that such policy that will guarantee the continuing development of the professional teacher is put in place.

Although many interventions programs have been applied, little has changed on the perspectives of rural schools. Further research is therefore required to capture the views of various stakeholders in teaching and learning on various ways to enable the improvement of the quality of teaching and learning in the rural communities.

Policies to ensure that all CPTD programs reflect the needs of both the rural schools and the teachers in such schools should reflect the various needs and experiences of teachers in such local contexts.

It is also desirable that the Department of Education makes more funds available for the adequate financing of CPTD programs that would be on-site based and enjoys wider coverage to enable many rural teachers to benefit from such site-based programs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that education policymakers must value the fact that quality education is dependent upon teacher professional development.

It is also recommended that decisions for teacher professional development should not be made in isolation but be in collaboration with all the education stakeholders, including rural communities. More so, for professional development to be effective, it should value the uniqueness of all societies.

Teacher professional development should not be out of school site because such exercise does not cater for the needs of individual schools and teachers. This attests that professional development belongs to a constructivist approach, which is in the form of contextual perspective.

Finally, it is equally recommended that programs of teacher development should be seen by all as a case of human rights that must be accessible to all teachers.

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