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PROFESSIONAL SELF DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES OF BASIC EDUCATION TEACHERS IN ABIA STATE, NIGERIA[i]

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Abstract:
The study sought to determine the professional self-development activities engaged in by basic education teachers in Abia State of Nigeria. Four research questions and three hypotheses guided the study. The subjects consisted of 345 teachers purposively drawn from a population of about 6500 teachers to reflect the variables of sex, location and experience. A 20-item checklist constructed and validated, with a reliability co-efficient of 0.86 was the instrument for data collection. Analysis of data was done using percentages for the research questions and z-test for the hypotheses. Findings revealed that the basic education teachers were more interested in the government sponsored teacher-professional-development activities than in those that would cost them personal funds. Significant differences existed in the activities engaged in by teachers according to sex, location and experience. Appropriate recommendations were made on ways of encouraging teachers to engage in professional self-development activities as to do so improves the quality of our teachers and by extension our educational system.

Keywords: professional self-development, basic education teachers

1. Introduction

Teacher training and teacher development are two main teacher education strategies. Freeman (1989:37) in distinguishing between them asserts that whereas teacher training

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addresses the more "trainable" aspects of teaching, based on knowledge and skills, teacher development is concerned with generating change with regard to the more complex constituents of teaching, that is, awareness and attitude. Underhill (1986:1) sees teacher development as the process of becoming "*the best kind of teacher that I personally can be*", while Rossner (1992:4) argues that "*teacher development is not just to do with language or even teaching, it is also about language development, counseling skills, assertiveness training, confidence building, computing, meditation, cultural broadening, almost everything, in fact*". Contributing to the clarification of the idea, Avalos (2011) holds that at the core of professional development (PD) is the understanding that PD is about teachers learning, learning how to learn and transforming their knowledge into practice for the benefit of their students' growth. For him, professional development, like anything worth pursing in life, is personal and situated, complex and difficult to do well.

As teachers, we all want to grow professionally. We want to keep on improving on our capabilities, hence the all-important issue of professional development. Every teacher knows his/her areas of professional strength and weakness. That underscores the need for a teacher to establish his/her own PD goals. Cox (2017) in encouraging goal setting by teachers identifies nine teacher professional developments goals that are likely to be of use to both teachers and students. These include: avoid teacher burnout, give students some reign (decision making authority), integrate technology tools, involve parents more, create online presence, cultivate relationships with colleagues, incorporate mindfulness, encourage more play; make learning fun, and reflect.

Gonzalez (2015) in a more elaborate work on goal-setting for teachers who are not interested in self-improvement lists 8 paths to self-improvement. Once you have established what your professional development needs are, you may then proceed to apply those paths which include:

1) Strengthen your technical skills (through Google and other social media);
2) Brush up your pedagogy (by learning more about teaching and learning);
3) Improve your classroom management (through self-study/private reading);
4) Get more politically active (in educational activism);
5) Adjust your mindset (to be more positive about teaching);
6) Freshen up your slide presentation;
7) Work towards national board certification;
8) Get organized (by organizing your time, files, project and classroom).

Basic Education in the Nigerian formal education system covers the first nine years of education. This includes the six years of primary and three years of junior secondary education. This period is very critical in the life of the individual because the quality of the educational experiences obtained at this time largely shapes the future of the learner. It becomes necessary therefore, that teachers who teach learners at this level should be of the best quality if the noble goals of education must be realized or attained by the school.

Given the dynamism that characterizes developments in the theory and practice of education, the knowledge explosion of the 21st century, the developments in science,

and Information Communication Technology, and the compelling need for teachers to keep abreast of these trends, particularly as they apply to the field of education, professional development remains a "must-do" for teachers.

Nigeria has over the years been investing in the professional development of teachers because it is beyond doubt that quality teachers beget quality school leavers (FRN, 2013). The teacher professional development approaches had adopted a number of models, including the.

1) Standardized Teacher Professional Development (TPD) or cascade model or train-the-trainer approach
2) Cluster-School model in which capacity is offered to schools within clusters in some proximity.
3) School-Centered Teacher Professional Development – where training takes place within individual schools.
4) Individual or Self-Directed Teacher Professional Development where we encourage individual teachers to support themselves in professional improvement. (Mkpa, 2017)

The ideal thing is that government should support teachers towards professional development, given the enormous benefits of quality teachers in the development of the nation. Indeed the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) in Nigeria has over the years been doing its best to support teacher professional development. However, such support does not impact deeply on the professional ability of most teachers in the country. Not only are the teacher professional development (TPD) opportunities most irregular, in addition, funding for the TPD continues to dwindle as a reflection of the economic down-turn in the country.

The reality therefore, is that if teachers must develop sound professional competence, they must go beyond the limited professional opportunities offered by the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC). Individual teachers must make personal efforts to improve on their professional competence.

There are several areas of professional competence in which teachers need support. The areas would vary from one teacher to another. In general however, such areas as the following are likely to be vital: knowledge of the subject matter; that is content knowledge, lesson planning, instructional strategies, motivational techniques, assessment of learning outcomes, development of evaluation instruments for cognitive and non-cognitive learning outcomes, production and effective utilization of instructional materials, disciplining children, attending to children with special needs, utilization of ICT in teaching etc.

2. The Problem

In a self-directed TPD, the individual teacher decides on which areas of professional competence he/she is interested in and goes ahead to plan to assist oneself learn as much as can be learned in order to improve on one's ability. Decisions are also taken on what approaches to self-development are feasible for the teacher. This study addresses

the question of the variety of professional self-development approaches adopted by teachers at the basic education level.

More specifically, the study sought to determine the professional self-development strategies generally adopted by various teachers. It also sought to determine whether such factors as sex, experience and location of teachers affected their professional self-development strategies. To this end, the following four research questions guided the study.

2.1 Research Questions

1) What professional self-development programs do basic education teachers generally engage in?
2) What professional self-development programs do male and female basic education teachers engage in?
3) What professional self-development programs do basic education teachers in urban and rural areas engage in?
4) What professional self-development programs do more experienced and less experienced basic education teachers engage in?

2.2 Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated to guide the study:

1) There is no significant difference in the types of professional self-development programs engaged in by male and female basic education teachers.
2) There is no significant difference in the types of professional self-development programs engaged in by basic education teachers in urban and rural areas.
3) There is no significant difference in the types of professional self-development programs engaged in by more experienced and less experienced basic education teachers.

3. Methodology

Abia is a state in Nigeria with a population of almost four, million people largely interested in the education of their children. The study was a survey. From the population of 6500 teachers in the state public schools at the upper basic education level, we drew a purposive sample of 345 bearing in mind the variables of sex, experience and location (115 males and 230 females, 240 more experienced and 105 less experienced; 110 urban residents and 235 rural residents).

We considered ten years and above to represent more years of teaching experience and below ten years as those of less experience. Teachers resident in the urban areas of Aba, Umuahia and Ohafia metropolis were taken to represent the urban dwellers while those in the other areas with less infrastructural development and typically rural areas, were taken to constitute the rural sample.

The instrument for data collection consisted of a 20 item checklist developed by the researchers and containing two sections. Section A, the personal data, sought information on

Name of the school, Sex of the teacher, Name and town/community/LGA of the school where the teacher teaches, Name of the teacher (optional), Date the teacher was employed by government/years of teaching experience, Status/salary grade level of teacher.

Section B of the instrument contains on the left hand side a listing of all possible professional development activities (PDA) which teachers could engage in. On the right hand side, the respondents are expected to: indicate which of the PDAs they had engaged in in the previous eighteen months.

The instrument was face-validated by three expert colleagues in the Faculty of Education, Abia State University Uturu, Nigeria. To establish the reliability of the instrument, it was administered twice to 30 basic education teachers not included in the sample of the study over an interval of three weeks. Their scores on the two administrations of the instrument were correlated using the Pearson's Product Moment correlation coefficient which yielded an index of 0.87. This was considered high enough for our purpose. 345 copies of the instrument were distributed to the teachers and all were retrieved, dully completed, and used for the data analysis.

3.1 Method of Data Analysis

Data collected for the study were analyzed using percentages and frequency tables to answer research questions, while z-test was used to test the tenability of the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

Research Question 1: What professional self-development programs do basic education teachers generally engage in?

Table 1: Professional Self Development Activities of Teachers (PSDAT) in the Last Eighteen Months (18) months

S/N	Professional Self-Development Activities of Teachers.	Frequency	%
1.	Workshop/conference/seminar sponsored by government.	206	59.71
2.	Self-Sponsored workshop/conference Seminar	0	0
3.	Support from the senior colleagues	271	78.55
4.	Support form peers	213	61.74
5.	Sharing professional experiences with colleagues	205	59.42
6.	Study of educational books/journals	182	52.75
7.	Peer assessment of teaching	5	1.45
8.	Training in materials production	28	8.12
9.	Group discussion of class challenges	117	33.91
10.	Action research on effective strategies	9	2.61
11.	Observation of expert teachers	33	9.57
12.	Obtaining and using feedback from students	21	6.09
13.	Mentorship by superior teachers	74	21.45
14.	Watching educational television programs	67	19.42

15.	Visit to other schools for more experience	0	0
16.	Online professional training packages	3	0.87
17.	Use of videos/CDs on best practices	7	2.03
18.	Self-tutorial on aspects of ICT	89	25.80
19.	Enrolment in ICT proficiency courses.	136	39.42
20.	Learning from social media	0	0

From the findings, as revealed in table 1 above, the most frequently adopted strategies by the teachers for professional self-improvement include support from senior colleagues, support from peers, sharing professional experiences with colleagues and workshops/conferences/seminars organized by government. Moderately applied strategies include group discussions of class challenges, self-tutorials on ICT, enrolment in ICT proficiency courses, watching educational television programs. Strategies that have never been applied by any teacher include self-sponsorship to conferences/seminars, visit to other schools for more experience and use of social media, other vital strategies not being adopted include registration for online courses for professional implement, use of videos/CDs on best practices, action research on aspects of teaching strategies and peer assessment of teaching.

Ordinarily it should sound surprising and most unexpected that teachers do not want to invest in self-improvement practices. However, the peculiarities of the working conditions of the teachers in some states in Nigeria, including Abia State where this study was conducted, can convincingly explain the situation. As we write this paper, the primary school teachers in Abia State were paid their last salary four months ago while the secondary school teachers were paid last seven months ago. There are cases in which both husband and wife are teachers, and they have children in schools and lots of other responsibilities. It therefore becomes very difficult if not impossible for teachers to undertake self-sponsored workshops/conferences or even any professional self-development activity that involves financial expenditure. Much of what the teachers do is to engage in petty business activities-trading, farming, private tutorials to teach other children for some fees, etc. as survival strategies.

Many cannot afford the money to acquire computers- desktop or laptop, or even smart phones with which to embark on those on-line self-improvement activities that would utilize the computer. For most teachers, therefore, once they dismiss from school, they jump into other economic activities that seek to provide additional income but which may not be related to the teaching profession.

Research Question 2: What professional self-development programs do male and female basic education teachers engage in?

Table 2: Professional Self- Development Activities Engaged in by Male and Female Teachers

S/N	Professional Self Development Activities of Teachers (PSDAT)	Male N = 115		Female N = 230	
		Freq.	%	Freq.	%
1.	Workshop/conference/seminar sponsored by government.	43	37.39	173	75.22
2.	Self-Sponsored Workshop/Conference Seminar	0	0	0	0
3.	Support from the senior colleagues	44	38.26	227	98.70
4.	Support form peers	77	66.96	136	59.13
5.	Sharing professional experiences with colleagues	74	64.35	131	56.96
6	Study of educational books/journals	49	42.61	133	57.83
7.	Peer assessment of teaching	1	0.87	4	1.74
8.	Training in materials production	6	5.22	22	9.57
9.	Group discussion of class challenges	24	20.87	93	40.43
10.	Action research on effective strategies	3	2.60	6	2.61
11.	Observation of expert teachers	6	5.22	27	11.74
12.	Obtaining and using feedback from students	5	4.35	16	6.96
13.	Mentorship by superior teachers	21	18.26	53	23.04
14.	Watching educational television programs	20	17.39	47	20.43
15.	Visit to other schools for more experience	0	0	0	0
16.	Online professional training packages	1	0.87	2	0.87
17.	Use of videos/CDs on best practices	3	2.60	4	1.74
18.	Self-tutorial on aspects of ICT	48	41.74	41	17.83
19.	Enrolment in ICT proficiency courses.	69	60.00	67	29.13
20.	Learning from social media	0	0	0	0

The responses from the male and female teachers appear to follow the same pattern as the overall responses by all teachers. However, more of the female teachers (75.22%) attend government sponsored workshop, seminars than the male teachers (37.39%). More female teachers (98.7%) tend to receive professional support from their senior colleagues than their male counterparts (38.26%). Furthermore, more male teachers (60%) enroll in ICT proficiency courses than female teachers (29.13%). None of the two groups has ever undertaken a self-sponsored workshop/seminar conference nor has any visited any other school in order to learn from or share ideas with colleagues there.

Research Question 3: What professional self-development programs do more experienced and less experienced basic education teachers engage in?

Table 3: Professional activities of more experienced and less experienced teachers

S/N	Professional Self Development Activities of Teachers (PSDAT)	More Experienced N = 240		Less Experienced N = 105	
		Freq.	%	Freq.	%
1.	Workshop/conference/seminar sponsored by government.	151	62.92	55	52.38
2.	Self-Sponsored Workshop/Conference Seminar	0	0	0	0
3.	Support from the senior colleagues	173	72.08	78	74.29
4.	Support form peers	119	49.58	94	89.52
5.	Sharing professional experiences with colleagues	117	48.75	88	83.81
6.	Study of educational books/journals	78	32.5	104	99.05

7.	Peer assessment of teaching	0	0	5	4.76
8.	Training in materials production	7	2.92	21	20.00
9.	Group discussion of class challenges	51	21.25	66	62.86
10.	Action research on effective strategies	9	3.75	0	0
11.	Observation of expert teachers	3	1.25	30	28.57
12.	Obtaining and using feedback from students	9	3.75	12	11.43
13.	Mentorship by superior teachers	13	5.42	61	58.10
14.	Watching educational television programs	25	10.42	42	40.00
15.	Visit to other schools for more experience	0	0	0	0
16.	Online professional training packages	0	0	3	2.86
17.	Use of videos/CDs on best practices	2	0.83	5	4.76
18.	Self-tutorial on aspects of ICT	23	9.58	88	83.81
19.	Enrolment in ICT proficiency courses	42	17.5	94	89.52
20.	Learning from social media	0	0	0	0

The less experienced teachers appear to be more enthusiastic or willing than the more experienced ones in obtaining support from peers, sharing professional experiences with colleagues, studying, educational books, journals and other reading materials and having group discussions on classroom challenges, mentorship by superior teachers, self-tutorials in aspects of ICT and enrollment in ICT proficiency courses. We would normally expect that their newness in the profession would inspire them to seek more enthusiastically ways of becoming better teachers hence their higher percentage frequency scores. However, in the idea of self-sponsorship to conferences, the two groups scored 0%. This can be explained by the lack of funds for basic needs as observed above.

Research Question 4: What professional self-development programs do basic education teachers in urban and rural arrears undertake?

Table 4: Professional Self-Development Activities undertake by teachers in Urban and Rural Areas

S/N	Professional Self Development Activities of Teachers (PSDAT)	Urban Teachers N = 110		Rural Teachers N = 235	
		Freq.	%	Freq.	%
1.	Workshop/conference/seminar	74	62.27	132	56.17
2.	Self-sponsored workshop/conference Seminar	0	0	0	0
3.	Support from the senior colleagues	93	84.55	178	55.74
4.	Support form peers	58	52.73	155	65.96
5.	Sharing professional experiences with colleagues	76	69.09	124	52.77
6.	Study of educational books/journals	48	43.64	134	57.02
7.	Peer assessment of teaching	2	1.82	3	1.28
8.	Training in materials production	9	8.18	19	8.09
9	Group discussion of class challenges	39	35.45	78	33.19
10	Action research on effective strategies	4	3.64	5	2.13
11.	Observation of expert teachers	19	17.27	24	10.21
12	Obtaining and using feedback from students	9	8.18	12	5.11
13.	Mentorship by superior teachers	12	10.91	62	26.38

14.	Watching educational television programs	19	17.27	55	23.40
15.	Visit to other schools for more experience	0	0	0	0
16.	Online professional training packages	3	2.73	0	0
17.	Use of videos/CDs on best practices	6	5.45	1	0.43
18.	Self-tutorial on aspects of ICT	68	61.82	21	8.94
19.	Enrolment in ICT proficiency courses.	84	76.36	52	22.13
20.	Learning from social media	0	0	0	0

The teachers' resident in the urban areas showed greater interest in participating in self-tutorial on aspect of ICT (61.82%) than those in rural areas (8.94%). A similar trend exists with respect to enrolment in ICT proficiency courses where in urban areas, 76.56% of the teachers enrolled as against 22.13% of teachers in rural areas. The pattern in most other strategies remains largely similar between the two environments.

The trend is not unexpected because in the urban centers lots of opportunities of exposure to modernity exist which teachers would be interested in benefitting from in order to be more proficient in their jobs. As the teachers interact with peers, friends, associates, etc. who show interest in the ICT and related programs, they get to become influenced to become inclined to the same activities. The rural environment hardly offers such opportunities due to the general lack of modern facilities. The relative scarcity of electricity in the rural areas poses a major challenge to the rural dwellers in the utilization of computer-related activities.

4. Testing of Hypotheses

Hypotheses 1: There is no significant difference in the types of professional self-development programs engaged in by male and female basic education teachers.

Table 5: Summary of z-test analysis on the mean response of the types of professional self-development programs engaged in by male and female basic education teachers

Teachers	N	$\overline{X}$	SD	Level of sig	Df	z-cal	z-crit	Decision
Male	115	26.00	26.50					
				0.05	343	91.13	1.96	Significant
Female	230	62.21	67.76					

Table 5 revealed summaries of subject, mean, standard deviation and z-test of difference between the mean responses of the types of professional self-development programs engaged in by male and female basic education teachers. The calculated z-test value used in testing hypothesis stood at 91.13, while z-critical value stood at 1.96 using 343 degree of freedom at 0.05 level of significance. At 0.05 level of significance and 343 degrees of freedom, the calculated z-value of 91.13 is greater than the z-critical value of 1.96. Consequently, the researcher rejected the null hypothesis, and concluded that there is a significant difference in the types of professional self-development programs engaged in by male and female basic education teachers in favour of female teachers.

Hypotheses 2: There is no significant difference in the types of professional self-development programs engaged in by basic education teachers in urban and rural areas.

Table 6: Summary of z-test analysis on the mean response of the types of professional self-development programs engaged in by basic education teachers in Urban and rural areas

Teachers	N	$\overline{X}$	SD	Level of sig	Df	t-cal	t-crit	Decision
Urban	110	32.79	32.86					
				0.05	343	-57.22	1.96	Significant
Rural	235	55.53	60.14					

Table 6 revealed summaries of subject, mean, standard deviation and z-test of difference between the mean responses of the types of professional self-development programs engaged in by basic education teachers in urban and rural areas. The calculated z-test value used in testing hypothesis stood at -57.22, while z-critical value stood at 1.96 using 343 degree of freedom at 0.05 level of significance. At 0.05 level of significance and 343 degrees of freedom, the calculated z-value of -57.22 is greater than the z-critical value of 1.96.

Therefore, the researcher rejected the null hypothesis, and concluded that there is a strong significant difference in the types of professional self-development programs engaged in by basic education teachers in urban and rural areas in favour of those in urban areas.

Hypotheses 3: There is no significant difference in the types of professional self-development programs engaged in by more experienced and less experienced Basic Education Teachers.

Table 7: Summary of z-test analysis on the mean response of the types of professional self-development programs engaged in by more experienced and less experienced Basic Education Teachers

Teachers	N	$\overline{X}$	SD	Level of sig	Df	t-cal	t-crit	Decision
More Experienced	240	43.26	56.28					
				0.05	343	-3.18	1.96	Significant
Less Experienced	105	44.53	38.59					

Table 7 revealed summaries of subject, mean, standard deviation and z-test of difference between the mean responses of the types of professional self-development programs engaged in by more experienced and less experienced Basic Education Teachers. The calculated z-test value used in testing hypothesis stood at -3.18, while z-critical value stood at 1.96 using 343 degree of freedom at 0.05 level of significance. At 0.05 level of significance and 343 degrees of freedom, the calculated z-value of -3.18 is greater than the z-critical value of 1.96. Therefore, the researcher rejected the null hypothesis, and concluded that there is a strong significant difference in the types of

professional self-development programs engaged in by more experienced and less experienced Basic Education Teachers in favour of the less experienced teachers.

5. Discussion

From the forgoing, we can see that many of our basic education teachers have a long way to go towards professional self-development strategies. Since many are available only to benefit from government-sponsored workshops and seminars, and the finances of government are not able to support such teacher-development programs as frequently as necessary, out teachers are unlikely to benefit optimally from the strategy. We need to encourage our teachers to regard professional self-development as a critical issue that holds the master key to their professional improvement as teachers. No amount is too great/much to be invested in the program that seeks to produce better teachers for our nation.

We had identified a number of strategies which our teachers can and should adopt in order to become better and more proficient teachers (Mkpa, 2015). These include internal supervision, discussing, sharing, team planning, team teaching, peer observation, demonstrating, workshops, seminars and mentoring. Teachers should make serious efforts to get more actively involved in many of the strategies that seek to increase their proficiency as teachers.

No one succeeds in isolation of theirs. We encourage teachers to heed the advice of Danielson (2009:30) which states that:

> *"Giving teachers the opportunity to engage in focused professional conversation is a great avenue to teachers' effectiveness. Of all the approaches available to educators to promote teacher effectiveness the most powerful (and embedded in all the others) is that of professional conversation. Reflective conversations about practice require teachers to understand and analyze events in the classroom. In these conversations, teachers must consider the instructional decisions they have made and examine student learning in the light of these decisions."*

We need to encourage this type of conversation among teachers and in doing so guide them to focus on such issues as

- What constitutes important learning?
- What causes learning?
- How are students motivated?

When, during the conversation, questions such as the above are discussed by teachers in relation to student learning and what teachers should do to achieve improved learning, a model gradually develops for professional development. Teachers through the conversation are able to evaluate their own professional practice based on their new perspective of what constitutes effective teaching and professional behavior.

6. Conclusion

The future of any nation and indeed the world is in the hands of teachers. The quality of the teachers' work determines the quality of the Socio-economic development which a nation can expect to attain. This explains why, as a developing nation, Nigeria must encourage her teachers to attain the highest possible level of professional excellence.

While we acknowledge the central role of the federal and state governments in the task of teacher professional development, we need to let our teachers know the following facts:

1) There is a limited financial capacity of the governments to fund teacher professional development.
2) Every professional, especially teachers, ought to strive for personal/self-improvement because any knowledge gained by a professional remains the personal and private possession of the said professional.
3) Teachers must move with the times professionally by keying into modern innovative ICT trends, otherwise the times will leaves them behind.
4) Teachers, must strive to be far ahead of their students who are almost all familiar with modern technologies of knowledge acquisition and so can easily acquire information even on their own without the support of their teachers.
5) Professional development equips the teacher with greater confidence with which to be very successful in the teaching tasks and so should be taken very seriously by every teacher.
6) Each teacher should know his/her areas of professional need and so lead the way in pursuing the goal of professional self-development; in order to satisfy those needs.
7) The teaching job calls for a lot of sacrifice including of one's resources of time, energy and finances to attain professional self-improvement.

6.1 Recommendations

In the light of the findings, we recommend as follows:

1) Government should make it mandatory for all teachers to engage in regular professional development programs, doing so at least once every year.
2) Attendance to or participation in teacher development programs should be a major criterion for assessing the professional adequacy of the teachers.
3) A deadline (say, of 2 years) should be set for all teachers to become computer literate so that they can benefit from the huge opportunities exiting online for teacher professional improvement.
4) Government should assist teachers procure laptops, possibly by subsidizing the cost for them.
5) Schools should be encouraged to engage seminars and workshops that educate teachers on a wide-range of professional self-development options open to them.

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