

Exploring the Outcomes of the Continuous Professional Development Diploma Programme in Effective School Leadership in Rwanda

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Abstract

This study explored the outcomes of the Continuous Professional Development (CPD) diploma programme in Effective School Leadership on headteachers' professional performance. It follows a qualitative research design. In-depth interviews and direct observation were used to collect data from a sample of 40 respondents, all purposively selected from Nyabihu district, in the Western Province of Rwanda, including 25 primary and secondary school headteachers, 11 sector education inspectors and four teachers. The study revealed that the programme is relevant to the daily practices of headteachers. It indicated that the acquired knowledge influenced headteachers' approach to leadership, improved existing school leadership practices and new initiatives were undertaken by headteachers after benefiting from the programme. The findings, however, revealed some challenges that need to be addressed to make the programme more effective. Based on the study findings, recommendations were made for an integrated and comprehensive approach by all education partners to address the aforementioned challenges.

Keywords : Outcomes, School leadership, Continuous Professional Development, headteacher, Professional Performance.

Introduction

One of the best strategies to achieve quality education is to strengthen school leadership (Ndlovu, 2017; The Flemish Association for Development Cooperation and Technical Assistance VVOB, 2018). School leadership involves different people occupying various roles and functions such as headteachers and deputy head teachers. VVOB (2020b) teaches, that school-based mentors (SBMs), school subject leaders (SSLs), heads of departments, teachers and learners' representatives who lead various teams and clubs are part of the school leadership.

School leadership plays a critical role in school performance (Ibrahim & Shaikah, 2012; Onderi & Makori, 2013). Consequently, interest in school leadership has grown globally because of its impact on the educational systems' performance (Earley, 2016). In this context, governments across the world attempt to continuously develop school leaders, especially headteachers and deputy headteachers, through in-service professional development programmes, with a view to improving the quality of education. Thus, Continuous Professional Development (CPD) remains an ongoing requirement for headteachers because their needs change as they move through distinct stages in their careers following their first appointment (Earley & Weindling, 2007).

In the same vein, the government of Rwanda through Rwanda Basic Education Board (REB) and University of Rwanda-College of Education (UR-CE), in collaboration with the Flemish Association for Development Cooperation

and Technical Assistance (VVOB) embarked on a Continuous Professional Development (CPD) diploma programme lasting for one year for education leaders (headteachers and deputy headteachers) in a new multi-year programme of "Leading, Teaching and Learning Together (LT²)" 2017-2021. These joint deliberate efforts aim at having skilled and competent school leaders who are well prepared to improve the quality of education. Therefore, it is of critical importance to know if that CPD diploma programme made changes in the ways headteachers manage and lead their schools.

The study was conducted in Nyabihu district, one of the 17 beneficiary districts of the CPD programme across the country. The study wants to answer the four research questions : 1) How do CPD diploma programme graduates perceive its relevance to their daily practices as school leaders? 2) What are the outcomes of the CPD diploma programme in relation to the five professional standards for effective school leadership 3) What are the challenges hindering the effective implementation of the acquired competencies from the CPD diploma programme ? 4) How do CPD diploma programme graduates think hindering challenges can be overcome for better performance as school leaders ?

It is of paramount importance to conduct this study in Rwanda which aspires to be a knowledge-based economy (MINECOFIN, 2012). To achieve this noble vision, education sector reform in general and performance in particular have been one of the priority areas for promoting quality education through effective school leadership. This in-service school leadership training programme is expected to equip headteachers, with the required leadership competencies to effectively improve the performance of their schools. As Gungor and Yildirim (2016) observed, in-service training is a cost-effective approach to headteacher training that provides them with an opportunity for professional adaptation to new changes in educational administration, better preparation to new developments in principalship, increased efficiency, as well as professional satisfaction.

Apart from the merits of in-service training, Terhart (2013) expresses a great disappointment when school leaders who benefited from in-service leadership training, display no zeal for change or when they experience forms of resistance against change. It is important therefore to know whether there are visible steps undertaken by trained headteachers towards the desired change as a result of CPD programme or whether there is resistance to its implementation. Besides, though the government of Rwanda, in collaboration with its key educational partners, has been working tirelessly to improve leadership skills through CPD programmes, there is no scientific evidence on what is being done in practice after the completion of this programme. Yet, immediate behavioral change would be a predictor of future results.

Literature Review

Developing Skills for Effective School Leadership : CPD in Perspective

“If schools are to change to meet their increasingly urgent needs, educators will have to become active learners as significant change will require them to alter their attitudes and behaviors” (Easton, 2008). Particularly, school leaders are especially important in times of rapid change (VVOB, 2018). Thus, they need continuous professional development as an imperative for effective performance so as to continually update their competencies to meet the demands of this changing world. Rowland (2017) emphasized that continuous improvement and learning for headteachers proved to be beneficial for students and teachers as well as policy implementation and cultivating healthy and supportive school communities. The author highlighted the need to plan targeted, meaningful, and ongoing professional development programmes for headteachers.

CPD Diploma in Effective School Leadership in Rwanda

The CPD diploma in effective school leadership in Rwanda is a one-year programme of four modules, which was designed and implemented in a tripartite partnership with VVOB, REB and UR-CE. The programme targeted school head teachers and deputy head teachers of 17 districts countrywide namely Musanze, Nyabihu, Rubavu, Ngororero, Kamonyi, Nyanza, Gisagara, Nyaruguru, Rusizi, Nyamasheke, Karongi, Gicumbi, Gatsibo, Nyagatare, Rwamagana, Kayonza and Kirehe (VVOB, 2019). The programme revolves around the five key professional standards for effective school leadership: 1) School leadership and parent/community involvement. 2) Setting the strategic direction of the school. 3) Managing the school as an organization; 4) Leading learning; and 5) Leading teaching. These standards represent the role of the school leader in Rwanda and help school leaders to know what is expected from them so as to make the necessary efforts to perform according to the expectations explained in the standards (VVOB, 2020b). Thus, the intent of this study was to examine how school leaders especially headteachers perform with regards to the five professional standards, which form the backbone of the CPD programme.

Effective CPD Programme in Education

For Hunzicker (2010), effective CPD programme for headteachers needs to be (1) job-embedded, which makes it both relevant and authentic; (2) instructionally focused, emphasizing student learning outcomes; (3) collaborative, emphasizing both active and interactive learning experiences, often through participation in learning communities; and (4) ongoing, involving a combination of contact hours, duration, and coherence. According to VVOB (2020a), effective CPD is about learning opportunities that should 1) engage and motivate (head) teachers, 2) support them to reflect upon and develop their own practices, 3) reflect and promote the growth of mind set, 4) satisfy their desire to develop professionally and improve; 5) empower the colleagues to prepare for change, 6) consider different contexts in which learning takes place, 7) consider interests, personality, self-esteem and fellow (head) teachers' roles outside the school,

8) develop a culture of continuous improvement such as taking initiatives, searching for and trying out new ideas and strategies, and discussing their work openly, 9) take the individual through the four stages of competence: 1) unconscious incompetence when someone is doing something wrong without knowing he/she is doing it wrong; 2) conscious incompetence when someone is doing something wrong and knows he/she is doing it wrong 3) conscious competence when someone is doing something right and has to consciously focus on doing it in the right way; and 4) unconscious competence when the individual has enough experience with the skill and can perform it so easily or do it unconsciously. In line with the above characteristics, this study aims at demonstrating its effectiveness by exploring observable actions of head teachers as a result of the programme.

Assessing School Leadership Professional Performance

The professional performance of head teachers can be examined against professional school leadership standards. Effective headteachers should be able to exhibit evidence of their performance for each standard. In this regards, VVOB (2020b) provided evidence or indicators of headteachers professional performance for each professional standard. These indicators help to gain a better understanding of the relationship between CPD programme and professional performance. Therefore, a headteacher who benefited from CPD programme will showcase evidence of behaviour change in his/her daily performance. The researchers believe that after undergoing this programme, headteachers were equipped with the necessary tools to perform in all dimensions as per the standards. Hence, the present study needs to explore the relevance of the CPD diploma programme to the daily work of headteachers who benefited from it and applied the five standards for effective school leadership.

Challenges in Effective School Leadership

A number of studies outline current challenges facing headteachers. Tirri et al. (2021) identified challenges related to teacher collaboration, cooperation with families, student engagement, the well-being of school community members, and cooperation with external bodies. Dea and Basha (2014) mentioned a lack of support, commitment, incentives, understanding, and collaboration among stakeholders. Bush (2022) highlighted balancing system demands with leadership for learning, navigating pressures for autonomy and accountability and increasing pressures from families and the wider society as challenges facing headteachers. The present study intends to identify the challenges hindering the effective implementation of acquired competences from the CPD programme and strategies to overcome them.

Theoretical Review

This research is built upon the Lewin's individual change management theory (Taloo, 2007), which describes change as a three-stage process starting from 1) unfreezing, 2) moving, or changing and 3) refreezing. Carroll (2013) explained that the unfreezing stage involves the awareness of the need to change and the mindset change. Moving or changing seeks alternatives, demonstrates change, and decreases forces that affect change negatively. Refreezing integrates and stabilizes a new equilibrium into the system so that it becomes a habit and resists further change.

Referring to this study, in stage one, it is assumed that the CPD programme raised school leaders' awareness of the need to change and provided them with the required competences to change their way of leading schools. Head teachers reflected on and challenged their current practices and the CPD programme would have played a critical role in triggering this introspection and subsequently the need to change their routine practices. Indeed, as Senior (2002) argues, the focus of the unfreezing stage is on changing usual modes of thinking as a result of heightened awareness of the need to change. Therefore, it is believed that school leaders left their routine after undertaking school leadership training programme and embraced new practices. The leadership training programme stimulated them to leave aside or change routine practices and adapt to new practices learnt. In the second stage, school leaders consider making changes that will most likely contribute to achieving the goals of their schools. Harper (2001) proposed that for effective change to take place, management must ensure that all relevant stakeholders are given the opportunity to be engaged in decision-making and problem solving in a collaborative manner. As they generally benefit from school leadership training programme, school leaders involve the wider school community in the decision-making process. In the last stage, changes that have been adopted in the second stage are being reinforced and sustained. Everyone in the school community has witnessed the benefits of new changes which in turn instigate them to fully participate in school improvement journey with a view to attaining the desired school vision. This research therefore intends to see whether these expected behaviour changes are observable in the daily performance of headteachers who benefited from school leadership CPD program.

Methods

Research Design

This study follows a qualitative research design to explore the outcomes of the CPD diploma programme offered to primary and secondary headteachers in Nyabihu district.

Study Population and Area

The study engaged with a total of 40 respondents purposively selected. They include all 25 headteachers of primary and secondary schools in Nyabihu district who were already trained in the CPD diploma programme for effective school leadership in the first cohort of 2018. The researchers believed that they have already started implementing what they learnt in training sessions. Respondents also involve 11 Sector Education Inspectors (SEIs) who were immediate supervisors of headteachers in their respective sectors. The researchers believed that headteachers' behaviour change would have been seen by their immediate SEIs supervisors. The selected SEIs had, in their respective sectors, headteachers who were trained in the CPD programme. Moreover, four teachers made up of 1 school-based mentor and three heads of departments as people who work closely with headteachers were also purposively sampled. By virtue of their positions, they were deemed to hold useful information on the topic under investigation. Nyabihu district

was also purposively selected as the study site because it is one of the 17 districts of the CPD programme intervention, and it is a rural district. The researchers were interested in learning from rural experiences.

Data Collection Methods and Analysis

Data were collected using in depth-interviews with headteachers, SEIs, and teachers as well as direct observation through participation in PLCs sessions. Framework Analysis Method was used for qualitative data analysis. To ensure validity of the research tools, researchers conducted a pilot study on same respondents as the actual study but in Rubavu district which benefited the programme. The results of the pilot phase were used to refine the research tools. Besides, researchers adequately and systematically used original data where possible. For reliability, the researchers set the interview guide referring to the research aim and questions which were given to other senior researchers for approval.

Ethical Considerations

The researchers contacted concerned participants for convenient appointments for data collection, after getting a formal authorization from the project manager of the VVOB-Rwanda office and Nyabihu district officials. Participants were requested to fill in and sign an Informed Consent Form before the administration of research tools. The informed consent binds the researchers to the obligation of ensuring anonymity and confidentiality. It was also made clear that the information collected will be used for academic purposes only.

Study Findings

Relevance of CPD Diploma Programme in Effective School Leadership

The CPD programme covers all dimensions of the school leadership, and the content informs headteachers' current practices.

All interviewed headteachers acknowledged that CPD diploma programme in effective school leadership is relevant to their daily practices. They reported that the programme helped them to know the scope of their responsibilities, what to do and how to do it. They highlighted that the CPD programme covers all aspects of the school leadership including setting strategic direction for the school, leading learning, leading teaching, managing the school as an organization, and working with parents, other schools, and the wider community. All headteachers indicated that the content of the CPD programme informed their current practices. In other words, their daily duties and responsibilities match well with the content of the programme. One headteacher confirmed that *“as a result of the training, we are working towards the school vision, mission, and values on the basis of a shared school improvement plan”*.

Mindset Change to Headteachers' Approach to Leadership

Headteachers reported that they have changed their approach to leadership after the training. One headteacher said: *“before the training, leadership responsibilities were carried out by headteachers alone but after the training they*

become aware that they should work with all school community members and stakeholders to improve school performance". Respondents said that headteachers are no longer considered as bosses, but they changed the way of interacting with their staff, they communicate in a friendly way, and are now facilitators.

The mindset change is also reflected in the understanding that some school issues can be solved without waiting for the outside support. After the CPD programme, headteachers realized that they could deal with issues that are within their ability. The most cited examples include the organization of CPD for teachers where they used to wait for official and formal kind of training organized by higher administrative levels, but now they regularly organize them within their schools. In some cases, the mindset change has led to the construction of classrooms by the school and community (parents) with or without little intervention from outside. As one headteacher illustrated, *"knowing that parents have a role to play in the management of the school and the education of their children and empowering them to participate in the school decision making, make them responsible for the school activities"*. This sense of responsibility has eased the way parents participate in school activities and commit themselves to school development endeavors.

The outcomes of the CPD Diploma Programme in Effective School Leadership on Headteachers' Professional Performance

Posts of the school vision, mission, and core values in schools

All headteachers argue that through the CPD programme they realized the need to have a shared vision which is clearly communicated to and understood by all stakeholders. One headteacher said: *"A shared strategic direction serves as a blueprint that I follow in school development journey"*. Consequently, after the training head teachers set a shared strategic direction for their respective schools. Interviewed teachers and SEIs also confirmed the existence of plans of school direction including school vision, missions, and values. The researchers also witnessed the presence of signposts in all schools visited which display the school vision, mission, and core values. It was proved that what was being done in schools by headteachers who benefited from CPD modalities was also recognized by their teachers, direct supervisors SEIs and any other external observant.

New learning Initiatives in Schools

Thanks to the CPD diploma programme, headteachers understood that they must be actively involved in students' learning. One of them revealed this: *"Before benefiting from the CPD, I was only dealing with school management responsibilities to the expense of learning activities. After the training, I am now aware that the core business of the school is teaching and learning, therefore being headteacher, I ought to closely follow up students' learning as my primary responsibility."* Respondents affirmed that there is a positive improvement in the dimension of leading learning. This is further confirmed by new initiatives undertaken by headteachers with a view to improving students' learning. These initiatives include special interventions to students in need, use of students' performance data to track individual student performance and ensuring a creative learning environment. Indeed, this calls for special interventions for inclusiveness purpose. To this end, a headteacher reported: *"School environment ought to be conducive and inclusive*

to accommodate and facilitate all students equally and fairly. As a headteacher therefore, I must ensure that I know each individual student context to be able to cater for his/her learning”.

Inclusive and Gender Sensitive Learning Environment

Headteachers highlighted their understanding of the need to make learning environment more inclusive and gender sensitive. Indeed, majority of headteachers informed that special intervention activities have been initiated after the training. They include but are not limited to the provision of instructional aids/ kit to the needy students, use of production from school garden (where they exist) to feed students from deprived families, children visit in their family in case of social distress, and girls’ room in some schools. Likewise, as another headteacher reiterated it, *“students ought to feel in a caring family when they are at school, that what attract, retain and encourage them to learn.”*

Close follow-up of Individual Student Learning through Regular Assessments and Coaching Session

Regarding the use of assessment results, headteachers revealed that they put emphasis on close follow-up of individual student learning with a view to identifying those with difficulties and devising suitable strategies to help them. One emphasized that: *“students’ learning is the core business of my school, as a headteacher therefore, I need to invest much time and efforts in following students’ learning. It is not easy to make a regular analysis of students’ results, but we must do it to identify aspects of learning that need special consideration and inform teaching and learning strategies to apply.”* Teachers and SEIs also affirmed that, regular assessments of students and use of their results is a tool that headteachers are using to track the progress of each individual student and improve teaching and learning methods and strategies. It was revealed that slow or poorly performing learners are accorded special time for coaching, in most cases, morning hours before the start of normal teaching/learning programmes.

Improvement of Social-Cultural Activities and Students’ Creativity in Schools

As a result of the CPD programme, respondents confirmed that headteachers improved activities of socio-cultural clubs within their schools with a view to making students team-players, socially competent while contributing to the school community well-being. One headteacher highlighted that, *“students’ learning is not only limited to theoretical knowledge in classroom sessions, but rather encompasses other socio-cultural creativities aimed at making them future stewards and good citizens of the country. Therefore, head-teachers put more emphasis on social values for students to improve their social creativity. It came out that each classroom forms a club with specific values that underpin its socio-cultural activities. They include, among others, unity clubs, clubs against genocide, environment clubs, and “Itorero” (National civic education training). However, it was found that these socio-cultural activities were not given time in the academic calendar. Headteachers arrange themselves to find extra time for the clubs’ activities.*

Headteachers also ensure a creative learning environment as one headteacher expressed it, *“I did not put an emphasis on students’ creativity, if they were required for instance to make an art craft of their choice, students would*

go and buy a basket, provided he/she came with some kind of art craft, but now I ensure that each student does it under supervision within the school”.

Knowing and Understanding Headteachers’ Responsibilities in relation to Leading Teaching

Respondents revealed that they follow closely teaching practices and ensure that they are relevant and effective to students’ learning. Particularly, Headteachers informed that they have put a particular emphasis on teaching dimension of school leadership and undertook various leadership activities aimed at improving teaching practices. These activities include instructional supervision, organization of CPD activities for teachers and introduction of community of practices (CoPs).

About instructional supervision, a headteacher declared the following: *“I learnt from the training that one of my responsibilities is to follow up classroom teaching practices with a view to devising the best teaching strategies. It is in this context that I always have a weekly programme for classroom visits. After classroom visits, I sit together with the concerned teacher to identify what went well and areas of improvement.”*

Understanding the Purpose of Instructional Supervision and How to Effectively Do It

Headteachers revealed to have known the difference between instructional supervision (classroom visits) and inspection. They indicated that before the CPD programme, the focus was on supervising teachers with a view to catch them red-handed, but after the CPD programme, they are now aware of the importance of instructional supervision and have initiated it on their weekly schedule. They are now aware that the purpose of this instructional supervision is to improve classroom teaching practices through positive, shared, and constructive feedback. Consequently, headteachers reported that they are now working with teachers to schedule a convenient time for supervision, in some cases the headteacher is assisted by other teachers in the same department. Headteachers indicated that this kind of instructional supervision provided an opportunity not only for teachers to receive constructive feedback but also an opportunity to improve students’ learning and achievements.

Organization of CPD Activities for Teachers

Headteachers revealed that they have realized that teachers need to regularly update their teaching practices with a view to coping with the changing teaching environment. One headteacher said: *“I learnt that in contemporary environment, knowledge is no longer for teachers only. Students access knowledge everywhere, from radio, television, social media, internet, etc. Teachers, therefore, need to be regularly updated to avoid classroom embarrassment and be able to effectively deliver their respective courses”.* In this respect, after the training programme, CPD activities for teachers were initiated, organized, and reinforced on a weekly basis in schools, including induction of new teachers, CoPs, training, coaching, peer lesson observation, etc. where an experienced teacher helps his/her colleagues to upgrade their levels of understanding on a given subject. One headteacher opined that *“teachers do not necessarily need experts from outside the school, rather a forum or platform within the school.”*

Better Understanding of and Development of School Plans

Respondents revealed that different school plans are developed and improved with a view to streamlining the management of their schools and school resources management procedures. Even though school improvement plan (SIP), school operational plan, action plan and budgeting existed even before the training in all visited schools, headteachers revealed that they neither know the difference between these plans nor the rationale behind them; they were there as formality for external inspectors. They indicated that after the training, these plans were improved to reflect the school vision, mission, and core values. As one headteacher reiterated it, *“success starts with a school improvement plan to guide all school improvement efforts”*. These participants finally revealed that SIP now serves as a blueprint that guides all school activities with a view to achieving the school vision.

Efficient Use of School Resources

Headteachers reported that the programme made them aware of the need to identify various resources and put them to the best use. One headteacher confirmed: *“This starts from not only identifying individual capabilities among teachers and developing them accordingly, but also managing timetable for proper allocation of workload”*. Similarly, headteachers revealed that most of them were not doing an inventory of school assets. However, they started inventorying them for proper use. In addition, financial resources were being managed and used as per the headteachers' schedule. After the training, financial resources are distributed according to the school priorities identified by the school management committee and per the approved procedures. Financial management procedures have been rationalized after the training to ensure that they are aligned to school priorities. SEIs also revealed to have witnessed such improvement in the management of school resources as one SEI put it, *“headteachers have established clear internal procedures for effective management of school resources. They even request authorization from the sector to withdraw the money from the school account.”*

Being Aware of the Role of School Stakeholders and Involving them in School Activities

Respondents asserted that the CPD programme took headteachers to a higher level of involving stakeholders in the school activities. Indeed, headteachers indicated that the CPD programme raised their awareness of the role of parents, and the wider community in the teaching and learning process. Consequently, headteachers said to have strengthened the school-community partnership to ensure the maximum participation of parents/community in managing the school. They reported that they are engaging parents as school active partners in all school development endeavour. One of the respondents said that *“Schools now collaborate and use parents' representatives, opinion leaders among parents in most cases to change the parents' mindset with regard to educational issues by raising their awareness on their role in the education of their children but also triggering their participation in school activities.”*

Improvement of Collaboration with School Stakeholders

Headteachers confirmed to have improved and reinforced their ties with the school community through regular participation in weekly village general assemblies. These meetings, scheduled in most cases on Tuesday every week, were found to be an opportunity for the headteacher to not only discuss with the community on educational issues but also to participate in community activities. Headteachers revealed an improvement in collaboration with local leaders at the lower levels (cell and village) in dealing with educational issues. Headteachers reported to engage local leaders in finding solutions to some issues like the case of dropout, apart from discussing it in weekly village assemblies in general. One headteacher said that *“local leaders help to identify students who dropped out, reach to every individual parent with a view of bringing back the child to school.”*

Parents’ Commitment to Students’ Learning

The cooperation between the school and the community has been noticed by the researchers at one school where a parent in own business saw a student lingering during studying hours and immediately brought her back to school. In a conversational interview with this parent to know more about that commitment; the parent claimed that the management of the school in general and children in particular cannot be left to headteacher and teachers alone. This parent’s commitment is a simple sign of the level of cooperation and sense of responsibility entrusted to the school community. Most SEIs also appreciated the collaboration between headteachers and school community after the CPD programme. They confirmed to have attended various school general assembly meetings with parents. As one SEI put it, *“headteachers made an aggressive sensitization campaign through opinion leaders among parents, before they invited the meeting and only few parents attended. In some cases, the meeting was postponed due to the insufficient number of attendances. But today, they are using other parents who already understand the need for parents to participate in the school management activities and we can see the difference”.*

Participation of Headteachers in Created Learning Network of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)

As a result of the CPD diploma programme, headteachers meet a sector level in PLCs to discuss their challenges, share best practices and find solutions to their problems. One headteacher explained its importance in the following words: *“PLCs are of critical importance to us because what we learnt in theory, we tried it in our respective schools, and challenges encountered during the implementation are discussed in PLCs, individual headteachers’ experiences are shared, and remedial strategies are taken. It is directly linked to the school leadership training programme as it helps us to smoothly concretize classroom theories”.* Headteachers argue that PLC sessions serve as a continuation of the diploma programme. In terms of professional performance, they highlighted that PLCs lead to professional and social experience sharing, peer learning, mutual assistance, and professional collaboration.

Challenges Hindering Effective Use of Acquired Competencies from the CPD Programme

Overloaded Agenda of Headteachers

As one headteacher claimed it: *“Headteachers, particularly in primary schools, do not have administrative supporting staff, we are at the same time, leader, secretary, bursar, head of studies, in charge of discipline, Information Technology officer, liaison officer with the community and local administration offices”*. This challenge becomes heightened in case of semi-public schools, where a headteacher has to attend not only to local administration calls but also to owners of the school (in most cases churches) wishes. The critical aspect of this challenge is that headteachers do not have time to be in their respective schools on a regular basis as most of the aforementioned tasks are performed outside the school. It was revealed that a big part of headteachers' time is spent in administrative meetings, councils, etc. at the sector or district levels. All these activities increase their already overloaded agenda.

Overcrowded Classrooms

Respondents indicated that some teaching and learning activities are not performed effectively due to the number of students in one class. Thus, the close follow-up of individual student performance through the analysis of their regular achievement is quite difficult in the case of many students in different lessons. It was also observed that many classes have more than 50 students each one.

School Specific Context (geographical location)

Respondents demonstrated that some schools are located in remote areas with no access to road, internet, mobile phone network and it becomes a challenge for their headteachers to perform up to the standards. One headteacher clarified it in the following lines: *“In this era of technological advance, most of instructional aids from REB are downloaded from the website, it is difficult for those schools to directly access online resources. They walk long distances on foot to reach the area where they can access the internet facility. In the same vein, rotational PLC sessions becomes a problem as headteachers are reluctant to join these remote schools”*.

Challenges Related to the Facilitation and Conduct of PLCs

During live observation of PLCs sessions, the SEI being in the higher administrative offices and the facilitator of the session seemed to dominate the discussions and subsequently, relationship, collaboration and shared leadership among PLC members were not effectively applied. This challenge has been described by one headteacher as follows: *“when we meet under the lead of the SEI, it is as if we are receiving instructions but when we meet under the lead of our colleague headteacher, we discuss as friends”*.

Another challenge resulted from various stakeholders having PLCs in their projects' implementation like VVOB, BLF, and SOMA UMENYE with the same intent but using different approaches. It came that different types of PLCs exist within the sector but all of them use different approaches. In some cases, the SEI is the facilitator and there

is a fixed venue, most probably sector office; in other cases, there is a headteacher who is in charge of organizing and inviting his/her colleagues and the venue is a school selected on a rotational basis while in other cases there is an expert who was invited to deliver a kind of lecture. As a matter of fact, the PLC sessions of BLF are organized monthly by one of the headteachers to a selected school while VVOB ones are organized quarterly by the SEIs at sector office.

In addition, it was observed that PLC sessions bring together headteachers who benefited from the CPD programme and headteachers who did not attend it. This mixture created a discrepancy in terms of understanding. For instance, when a trained headteacher is talking about the SIP, not all headteachers are able to follow or understand, especially those who did not benefit from the training. This mixture is further worsened when primary and secondary school headteachers meet in a PLC session. Secondary school headteachers dominated the discussion while those of primary schools demonstrate low level of esteem and consequently behave as learners in a PLC session.

It was also observed that in PLCs headteachers identify a prevailing or collective issue in their sector and devise strategies that will be implemented in their respective schools. However, the adopted strategy may be successful in one school and fail in another school because every school has its own specific context. Therefore, it is subject to critics to apply the same strategy in different school contexts.

Strategies to Make the CPD Diploma Programme more Effective

(1) Considering the relevance of the CPD programme, respondents suggested a need to train all headteachers, teachers and representative of parents in school leadership so that the school community have a common understanding of what they are expected to do; (2) considering also the ever-changing work environment, headteachers proposed a refresher training to regularly update their competencies, particularly on the module of managing the school as an organization; (3) headteachers also recommended field visits after learning each module to evaluate the implementation process of the acquired competencies in that particular module. This will allow them to work on each school dimension as the modules coincide with the school dimensions; (4) headteachers recommended study tours to the best performing schools to have hands-on experience while they are still undertaking the programme; (5) As the CPD programme was more heterogeneous, combining participants from different academic background, levels of education as well as professional experience. Headteachers therefore recommended to either categorize trainees as per their levels of education and academic background or use differentiated facilitation approaches; (6) headteachers recommended a review of the schedule of training sessions. They complained that the time between the training sessions was too long and therefore suggested to plan training sessions either during holidays or in consecutive weekends; (7) to reorganize PLC sessions so that they can be led by one of the headteachers on a rotational basis among headteachers; and (8) to harmonize the PLC framework by all education partners having PLCs in their projects so that they can be facilitated and conducted in the same way.

Discussion

This study aimed at exploring the outcomes of the CPD diploma programme in Effective School Leadership on headteachers' professional performance. Specifically, the study sought to determine its relevance, outcomes, challenges, and the way forward. The findings indicated the relevance of the CPD programme to the headteachers daily work. The programme covers all dimensions of school leadership, informs their current practices, and helps to change their mindset in relation to the way they used to lead schools. This finding corroborates with UNESCO (2015) and Gungor and Yaldirimi (2016) who stressed the importance of CPD to school leaders. It also agrees with Lewin's individual change management theory (Taloo, 2007) in that the acquired competencies from the CPD programme became the driving force for headteachers to change the way they were used to doing their daily professional activities.

Besides, the study revealed positive outcomes of the CPD programme in relation to the five standards of effective school leadership. School vision, mission and core values were set and posted in schools, new initiatives were introduced in schools, learning environment was made inclusive and gender sensitive, individual student learning is closely monitored, social cultural activities were improved, and students' creative activities were developed and reinforced in schools. Headteachers knew and undertook their responsibilities in relation to leading teaching and are effectively doing instructional supervision. CPD for teachers are taking place in schools including induction of new teachers, in-service trainings, peer lesson observation, coaching and CoPs. Head teachers improved and/or developed different school plans including SIP, operational or action plans and CPD plans. Headteachers are using efficiently school resources, involving stakeholders in school activities, their collaboration improved, and parents are committed to students' learning. Finally, headteachers created their learning network (PLCs) and are actively participating in it every month.

These findings concur with a number of studies. Indeed, Lynch (2018) notes that key to an effective school vision is that it is academically focused, clearly displayed, and present in classrooms. Similarly, Nouwen, et al. (2018) recognized that school-based prevention and intervention measures include academic support, socio-emotional and behavioural support, and career guidance support. Likewise, the National Association of Elementary School Principals (2011) recommended headteachers to use student achievement data to support instructional decision making and to make data part of the ongoing cycle of instructional improvement. In the same vein, OECD (2013) emphasized that student assessment ought to be an essential practice to measure the progress and performance of individual students, plan further steps for the improvement of teaching and learning and share information with relevant stakeholders. Allida, et al. (2018) shared also an effective instructional supervision ought to be a process of helping, guiding, and mentoring a teacher with the sole purpose of improving their delivery of classroom instruction and consequently student learning. Having headteachers in Nyabihu doing proper instructional supervision raises hope that students' performance will consequently improve. Furthermore, as the School Improvement Network (2015) put it, when a school has a clear sense of its current status; it can then plan for the desired future.

In line with these outcomes, it is clear that this CPD programme fulfills the qualities of an effective CPD programme as described by Hunzicker (2010) and the Australian Institute for Teaching and School leadership (2018) that the most effective CPD programme for headteachers ought to (1) deepen pedagogical expertise; (2) increase capacity to lead teaching and learning to have a positive impact on student outcomes; (3) strengthen interpersonal skills; and (4) develop management and leadership skills.

Despite the positive outcomes of the programme on headteacher professional performance, some challenges were highlighted. They include, among others, the overloaded agenda of headteacher, overcrowded classrooms, school specific context (geographical location), insufficient resources, and challenges related to the facilitation and conduct of PLCs. Related challenges were also highlighted in Louis *et al.*, (2010) who found that headteachers perform multiple and complex roles as a school manager, community mobilizer, liaison officers, resource mobilizer and instructional leader. Other studies (Bush, 2022; Dea & Basha, 2014; Tirri *et al.*, 2021) also affirmed that headteachers continue to face challenges in their daily duties and responsibilities. For the leadership hierarchical gap between SEIs and headteachers, which hampers the freedom of headteachers during PLC sessions led by the SEI, Wenger *et al.* (2011) indicate that one of the key enablers of PLC session remains the open relationship, collaboration, and shared leadership.

Although challenges exist, to make the CPD programme more effective, headteachers proposed training all headteachers, teachers and representatives of parents in school leadership, having refresher training, field visits after each module, tours to the best performing schools during the training, review of the training schedule and using an integrated training approach that fit different categories of school leaders.

Conclusion

In light of the findings, the study achieved its aim and answered its research questions. The CPD programme was found to be relevant to the headteachers' professional career and development. It led to positive outcomes in relation to the five standards of effective school leadership although some challenges hinder their professional performance. In line with the identified challenges and provided suggestions, the study recommends an integrated and comprehensive approach to making the CPD diploma programme more effective.

Given that this study was only conducted in Nyabihu district, generalizing the findings to other districts should be done with great caution and further studies can focus on other districts of the programme intervention to get a common picture of the programme outcomes. Despite these limitations, the study was of vital importance and greatly contributed to the existing literature on CPD programmes in education. It was found out that the CPD is relevant and led to positive outcomes even though obstacles are still on the way.

Informed Consent

All study participants were given the opportunity to give their informed consent.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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