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School financial management development programme for Eswatini principals: Lessons, challenges and implications

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Efficient and equitable use of financial resources has been one of the education policy objectives to achieve quality in education. Subsequently, the achievement of efficient and equitable use of financial resources in schools depends on the principals' understanding of their role in managing financial resources. However, evidence spanning developing countries suggests the existence of principals' various inadequacies and inefficiencies in this regard. To respond to this, the Kingdom of Eswatini's Ministry of Education and Training has developed a training programme to build financial management capacity of school principals. Through qualitative, semi-structured interviews with 4 principals, we explored how principals in that country who had undergone professional development (PD) in financial resource management experienced different aspects of the training they had received. Principals' experiences suggest the existence of various limitations of the programme. From these experiences, we draw lessons about the effectiveness and challenges of the programme and illuminate implications for how PD programmes can be offered to build principals' capacities in school financial management.

Keywords: continuous professional development; development programme; equity; financial management; training

Introduction

The value of providing education of high quality is acknowledged locally and globally (Bantwini, 2019; Van der Berg, Taylor, Gustafsson, Spaul & Armstrong, 2011). In Africa, high quality education has been listed in *Agenda 2063* as one of the key goals towards transforming Africa from a developing economy into a competitive, global powerhouse. For instance, Goal #2 indicates that Africa should produce well-educated citizens and a skills revolution underpinned by science, technology and innovation (African Union, 2015). Schools in any country play a critical role in producing highly educated citizens; hence, we have seen an increase in the number of African countries that have rolled out free primary education (Naicker & Ncokwana, 2016). Consequently, as a way to increase access to education, many governments have increased their spending in primary and secondary education (Mkhize, 2018). However, increased funding may not lead to access to high quality education unless there is efficient acquisition and equitable deployment of financial resources (Khuzwayo, 2018; Mkhize, 2018) in schools.

In the Kingdom of Eswatini¹ and in many parts of the world, school principals have been identified as playing pivotal roles in ensuring efficiency and equity in the acquisition and use of resources in general, and financial resources in particular (Ministry of Education and Training, 2015; Pang, 2007; Wagithunu, Muthee & Thinguri, 2014; World Bank, 2008). However, financial accountability has posed numerous challenges in many developing Africa countries such as Lesotho, Uganda, South Africa, Malawi, Kenya, and Zimbabwe (Magak, 2013; Mestry, Moonsammy-Koopasammy & Schmidt, 2013; Myende, Samuel & Pillay, 2018; Rangongo, Mohlakwana & Beckmann, 2016), and the Kingdom of Eswatini is no exception (Dlamini, BA 2011; Dlamini, EM 2018; Marope, 2010). Current research suggests that there is a capacity deficit among principals in relation to financial management skills (Bua & Adzongo, 2014; Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe & Meyerson, 2005; Dlamini, BA 2011; Dlamini, EM 2018; Mapolisa, Ncube, Tshabalala & Khosa, 2014). In the Kingdom of Eswatini, for example, a number of principals have been subjected to forensic audits stemming from the misappropriation and mismanagement of school funds (Tshabalala, 2017). On this, the Ministry of Education and Training reports that in the Kingdom of Eswatini, at least five principals are dismissed annually after charges of misappropriation of school funds have been laid (Kunene, 2018). As in many countries, there is no professional qualification for principalship in the Kingdom of Eswatini. Hence, principals are hired, usually with no prior knowledge or exposure to organisational financial management (Dlamini, BA 2011; Dlamini, EM 2018; Kunene, 2018). Research conducted in South Africa, and other countries in similar contexts, has consistently pointed to the need for PD of school principals in financial resource management (Mestry & Singh, 2007; Pang, 2007). For instance, in a study about continuous professional development (CPD) for principals, Mestry and Singh (2007:478) emphasise the need for principals to "take time and reflect on their personal growth as leaders and managers."

Recognising the need for efficient and equitable application of school financial resources, the critical role that principals play in this endeavour (Pang, 2007), and in line with the research recommendations by Mestry and Singh (2007) and Pang (2007), the Kingdom of Eswatini became one of the few countries that has provided a formal training programme for principals, called Personnel, Organisational, Money and Instructional management (POMI) (Ministry of Education and Training, 2007). Within this programme, principals undergo financial management training. However, challenges around the management of school finances in the Kingdom of Eswatini, as indicated in the previous paragraph, persist (Kunene, 2018; Tshabalala, 2017).

Given this ongoing challenge, in this paper we explore how principals in the Kingdom of Eswatini who had undergone PD in financial resource management experienced different aspects of training they had received. We argue that there is a need to understand these principals' perceptions of the training programme (POMI). Insights obtained may be used to understand why challenges persists despite the training provided. Through these encounters, we intend to draw lessons about the effectiveness, or lack thereof, of the programme.

There is a wide body of knowledge in evaluating continuous development programmes (CDP) internationally. The large corpus of research has tended to focus on numerous elements of teacher PD, and principals are largely ignored. In this study we contribute to debates and knowledge about CPD that focuses on financial management. This is crucial given the importance of the connection between equitable and efficient management of financial resources and the achievement of education policy objectives. Furthermore, the POMI has not been evaluated, thus, its effectiveness and challenges remain unknown. Therefore, while the findings are relevant internationally, they are even more relevant for African countries where CPD for principals or head teachers has been identified as a problem. These findings are likely to inform the planning of PD for principals in the Kingdom of Eswatini in particular, and in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) in general.

The paper is divided into five sections, excluding the introduction. In the first section we draw from literature on PD programmes elsewhere in the world, including two studies – a Norwegian and a South African perspective, to explore how principals have experienced PD. In the second, we discuss a conceptual framework underpinning the focus of this paper on effective PD for principals on school financial management. In the third section, we provide a short description of the programme under study and this is followed by the

methodology employed. In the fourth section, we present findings, followed by the discussion. We then conclude the paper in the fifth section.

We use the term “CPD” to refer to all those activities aimed at building principals' capacities. Such activities may take various forms such as conferences, seminars or workshops or courses done at colleges or university (The Glossary of Education Reform, 2013). We note that some scholars do not make a distinction between PD programmes and CPD programmes. We also acknowledge that such conceptual distinctions are difficult to make, particularly because many scholars seem to combine both when talking about PD (see, Moswela, 2006; Steyn, 2012). Nevertheless, we use the term “CPD programmes” to emphasise the long-term focus of development activities. These are consistent with demands for leader learners and/or life-long learning of professionals (Boyle, Lamprianou & Boyle, 2005). Any PD programme of an ad hoc nature falls outside this definition. Using our conception of CPD, we move on to briefly discuss two programmes that were introduced in Norway and South Africa respectively, to build leadership capacities of principals, and these were offered at higher education institutions.

Principals' Professional Development – Perspectives from Norway

The Norwegian School Leadership and Student learning programme is called the National Programme for the Preparation and Development of School Leaders (Møller & Ottesen, 2011). Newly appointed school principals must undergo such a programme which is offered by only four accredited universities: the University of Bergen, the University of Norway, The Norwegian School of Management and The Norwegian School of Economic and Business Administration. For the Norwegians, the underlying objective is that principals' leadership should be concerned with learning (Møller & Ottesen, 2011). We must also mention that such a PD programme was introduced despite stiff opposition from teacher unions who were unhappy about principals receiving special leadership and management training. Among the modules offered is “Leadership and Resources management.” In the Norwegian context, the government recognised that principals face multiple challenges and are accountable to many stakeholders. They also face pressures about students' academic outcomes. Principals are expected to handle all these issues, and stakeholders are people with power who are independent from the schools. Therefore, it is important that principals are able to handle issues of power relations and also manage resources and finances of the schools.

Principals' Professional Development – Perspectives from South Africa

Prior to the principals' PD programme in Eswatini, South Africa piloted a two-year training programme for principals. Originally, it was offered by five universities between 2007 and 2009, and it was commissioned by the then Department of Education. This programme, called the Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE): School Leadership, was designed to serve as preparatory training for aspiring principals. However, during the implementation of the pilot, it was offered to practising principals, with the addition of a few institutions that also included Departmental Heads. The second PD programme was the Principals Management Development Programme (PMDP) – a programme of six months. Whereas, the ACE: School Leadership was a national diploma, the PMDP was offered at provincial level in the KwaZulu-Natal province and involved 50 schools in six education circuits.

What is noteworthy in the two PD programmes is that the content of both programmes included financial management skills for principals as part of their module packages. In the ACE: School Leadership, issues of finances formed part of a module called Managing Organisational Systems, Physical and Financial resources (Naicker, 2011). In the PMDP programme, financial management appeared in their module packages as a stand-alone module (Financial management) and is separate from a closely related module called Resources Acquisition and Management. The ACE: School Leadership has since been reconfigured in the National Qualification Framework as an Advanced Diploma in Education, while the PMDP has been reconfigured and offered in another province.

We recognise the contextual differences between Norway and South Africa – the former is an economically developed country while the latter is a developing economy. Nevertheless, our analysis indicates the existence of some commonalities, including the fact that the PDs were offered by universities, these PD programmes constituted a PD diploma, and their contents highlighted, among others, leadership skills to manage multiple stakeholders in the context of multiple points of accountability.

Principals' Professional Development – Perspectives from Eswatini

The Ministry of Education in Eswatini offers an in-service training programme to principals known as POMI (Ministry of Education and Training, 2007). The programme is offered by the Department of In-service Education and Training, a wing of the Teaching Service Commission, which is responsible for the hiring of teachers. The Ministry of Education and Training (2007) describes the four components of the programme in

this manner: Personnel management pertains to providing guidance to all the various stakeholders responsible for the smooth running of the school, such as the teachers, support staff, parents, and learners. Organisational Management deals with the upkeep of the school property such as buildings, classrooms, equipment and supplies. Instructional leadership is about ensuring that principals are able to coordinate effective teaching and learning in the schools.

The money management components, which are analysed in this paper, deal with issues of budgeting, recording and the disbursement of school financial resources. According to the Ministry of Education and Training (2015), record keeping focuses on the various financial record books kept within a school. These include the analysis book, main file expenditure book, petty cash file, bank reconciliation statements and others. Similarly, the aspect of financial reporting is meant to equip principals with the skills needed to account for all the finances received by the school, and includes monthly, quarterly and annual reports (Ministry of Education and Training, 2015). Furthermore, the section on resource mobilisation empowers the principals with the skills required for harnessing sponsorships and strategies for maintaining positive relationship with sponsors (Ministry of Education and Training, 2015). While we do not have literature on how recipients of the training feel about it, we elicit some ideas from similar training programmes.

A study conducted in the Mpumalanga province, South Africa, regarding principals' views about their development programme showed that participants were excited (Van der Westhuizen, Mosoge & Van Vuuren, 2004). Participants expressed satisfaction with facilitators whom they described as highly qualified academics with a high command of the content knowledge. Similarly, a study by Chikoko, Naicker and Mthiyane (2014) regarding principals' experiences of mentorship in the ACE: School Leadership, elicited satisfaction and excitement for having been selected for the programme. Although they raised issues of a lack of practical experience among some facilitators, they admired facilitators for high levels of preparation, pedagogy and knowledge (Chikoko et al., 2014).

Effective Continuous Professional Development

We note that the effectiveness of PD has largely been studied by drawing from teachers' programmes. We use research from this angle to highlight features of effective CPD which we use as the conceptual lens of this paper. We draw from the work of Peterson (2001) who shares some features of effective PD programmes for principals. To extend the discussion of these features, we further use the work of Bayar (2014); Darling-

Hammond, Hyler and Gardner (2017); Desimone (2011); Duncombe and Armour (2004) and Hunzicker (2011) to suggest a conceptual lens for understanding what the experiences of the principals teach us about the effectiveness of the financial management development programme for Eswatini principals.

Peterson (2001) argues that the quality of a PD programme can be assessed through, among other things, the programme's focus and purpose, length and time of the programme and curriculum coherence. Bayar (2014) and Desimone (2011) share similar features but Desimone adds the notion of collective participation of professionals while Bayar adds high quality instructors as another feature. Duncombe and Armour (2004) add that high-quality PD programmes must be ongoing. Hunzicker (2011) further suggests that PD programmes must be supportive and job embedded, while Darling-Hammond (2017) believes that the programme must have opportunities for feedback and reflection. We now look at what these features mean for principals' PD on school financial management.

A PD programme with clear focus and purpose must focus on financial managerial skills that are required in the process of school financial management (Peterson, 2001). Writing about teachers' PD, Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) and Desimone (2011) argue that programmes should focus on what teachers do in the classroom. Likewise, principals' financial management programmes should focus on what principals are required to do in their financial management responsibilities. In line with this focus, the curriculum offered must be coherent with the expectations that the Ministry has for principals and their professional developmental needs (Bayar, 2014; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Peterson, 2001). Aligned to this, Hunzicker (2011) argues that PD must be job-embedded, which means that it considers what participants are required to do in their jobs as they are capacitated to achieve efficiency in their work.

Another important aspect of high-quality PD programmes, is their duration or length and the timing of delivery. There is a view among different scholars that PD on a particular skill must not be a once-off event (Bayar, 2014; Duncombe & Armour, 2004; Hunzicker, 2011). Bayar (2014) opines that prolonged engagement has a long-term effect on staff members and Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) concur that sustained duration allows participants enough time to learn and reflect on the implementation of what they learn. It is during this prolonged engagement that the element of collective participation (Bayar, 2014) is likely to happen. Through sustained engagement, principals will not only learn from the facilitators but they will have space to engage with their peers, thus

promoting reflexivity and learning from others. This is likely to ensure that participants are supported continuously as this constitutes a key feature of quality PD (Darling-Hammond, 2017; Hunzicker, 2011).

The aspects discussed above cannot be achieved if there is no special consideration of who the trainers are. Hence, the quality of trainers is raised as one of the key features high quality PD must have (Bayar, 2014). In line with this, Peterson (2001) argues that PD should be offered by experts who guide and support the participants. Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) recommend that education ministries should consider developing their own experts to use as trainers.

In line with these features, we want to understand what the experiences of principals suggest about the overall quality of the development programme on financial management as offered by the Teaching Service Commission (TSC) on behalf of the Eswatini Ministry of Education and Training.

Methods

In order to understand and interpret the meaning that principals attached to the PD programme, we adopted an interpretive, qualitative approach to enable us to interpret and understand principals' experiences and meanings (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). Through this approach, we also understood that an authentic study of this programme can only be constructed through those who have been part of it (Phothongsunan, 2010); hence, our selection of principals who had completed the programme.

Our interest in gaining in-depth views of principals engaged in a real-life phenomenon (the CPD programme) compelled us to adopt a case study design as it allows researchers to understand complex, real issues as they occur in context (Rule & John, 2011; Yin, 2009). The case in this study is the Eswatini principals' experiences of the CPD programme, particularly, in relation to its effectiveness. The challenges of the above programmes can be understood from the principals' experiences. Case studies have spatial and time frame boundaries and this study is spatially bound to four principals from four schools who attended the CPD programme. The study was conducted in 2017, although the principals had attended the programme earlier, between its inception and 2016.

We used both purposive and convenience sampling to select the four schools and four principals. These principals were information-rich given that they had attended the programme (Etikan, Musa & Alakassim, 2015; Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan & Hoagwood, 2015). In line with convenient sampling, principals were further selected on the basis of their willingness and geographical proximity, which

facilitated accessibility for data generation (Etikan et al., 2015; Suen, Huang & Lee, 2014). All four principals and their schools were from the Manzini region. Table 1 below provides the brief profiles of

the principals (the participants' and schools' identities, were anonymised through the use of fictitious names).

Table 1 Profile of the participants

PN	SN	EAP	HQ	G	A
Nsika Dlamini	Lusito	7 years	MEd	M	30–35
Kidwell Nkuza	Shining Star	21 years	PTC	M	50–55
Timi Mamba	Themba	9 years	MEd	F	45–50
Joacky Zwane	Tiny Tots	8 years	BEd	F	40–45

Note. PN = Principal name, SN = School name, EAP = Experience as principal, HQ = Highest qualification, G = Gender, A = Age, MEd = Master of Education, PTC = Primary Teachers Certificate, BEd = Bachelor of Education.

In order to generate in-depth descriptions of the principals' experiences, we used semi-structured interviews (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). The interviews lasted for about 50 minutes and were conducted in the principals' offices. We used predetermined themes in beginning the process of analysing data. These themes were drawn from our conceptual framework which considered features of high-quality CPD.

Since we sought to understand the challenges and effectiveness of the programme we were guided by this conceptual framework during the interviews. We then categorised data into these themes. The process of analysis happened at two levels. At the first level, each researcher read the transcripts and identified categories and themes. We then compared and discussed our notes and, in this process, we identified common and differing views, after which we engaged in the process of reducing the themes to arrive at those used to report the findings.

In order to ensure rigour and quality, we had to ensure that we applied the principle of trustworthiness. To ensure this, we used multiple data sources (four principals). Furthermore, once the data had been transcribed, it was shared with the participating principals for them to check that the data generated accurately reflected their actual words. The principals confirmed the accuracy of the content. In addition, the analysis process was thorough in that each researcher read the transcripts and engaged in individual analysis before we all compared our notes and themes. This did not only strengthen the analysis process but also trustworthiness. The research process was guided by the ethics requirements of the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Permission to conduct this research was granted by the Ministry of Education in the Kingdom of Eswatini, and as mentioned before, the participants' and schools' identities were anonymised through the use of fictitious names.

Findings

In this section, we share the findings of the study. The findings are presented under four themes: enrolment into the programme; duration and timing

of the training; content of the programme and quality of the trainers.

Principals' Enrolment into the Programme

We asked participants about when they enrolled into the programme. The experiences of the four principals suggest that there was no specific career stage at which principals are required to enrol in the programme. Some principals may be enrolled into the programme very early in their formal management careers, while others may be enrolled even after five years of being principals. For example, Nsika Dlamini's response shows that he had two years of management experience before enrolling into the programme. This is what he said: *"I was appointed into the position in January 2010, but I only got the chance to undergo the training late in 2012."*

While Nsika was enrolled two years after his appointment, Kidwell Nkuza and Timi Mamba were enrolled at the end of their first year of appointment. Kidwell and Timi had this to say respectively:

I was appointed in January 1996 and got the chance to be trained in December of the same year (Kidwell Nkuza).

I was appointed in January 2008 and I attended the training in August of the same year (Timi Mamba).

One participant principal, Joacky Zwane, expressed dissatisfaction with the timing and process of enrolment. From her comment it seems as though enrolment in the programme can happen very late in one's career. She said:

I am very unhappy with how the training programme is run. One cannot tell when she or he is going to be enrolled in the programme. I have just attended the programme in 2014, yet I was appointed in January 2009.

Her words above indicate that she was enrolled after five years of her appointment as principal. Noting the differences in enrolment in the programme, we probed about the service provider. We learnt that In-service Education and Training (INSET), which is an affiliate of the TSC, was responsible for the in-service training of principals once they were appointed. It was INSET's responsibility to communicate with newly appointed principals and inform them when they

were scheduled for training. This tells us that the time to enrol in the programme was beyond the principals' control, and thus they had no choice in this regard.

We were also interested to know how this uncertainty about enrolment into the training programme affected principals. Across the four participant principals, it surfaced that the waiting period was marred with multiple challenges. Below are the voices of principals:

It was tough such that when I went for training, it was then that I realised a lot of the mistakes that I had committed. I just used my common sense to complete the financial records (Nsika Dlamini).

It was such a nightmare to account for the funds. I depended on those principals who were more experienced (Kidwell Nkuza).

I could not touch any of the financial books, because I had no clue, I did not know where to start. I was fortunate though, that I found a secretary who is well versed about these books (Timi Mamba).

It was very strenuous because I had to go asking here and there, from other experienced principals or other people in a financial position (Joacky Zwane).

Emerging from the extracts above is the sense that prior to principals attending the programme, they would have resorted to adopting a trial-and-error approach in completing their financial records or seeking support from their peers and other colleagues. From the time they were enrolled, we also wanted to know how long they would be part of programme, and in the subsequent section we present experiences around this aspect of the programme.

The Duration and Timing of the Training

Scholars have accentuated the need for prolonged engagement in PD programmes because it is assumed that learning a new skill and internalising it could be lengthy and hectic (Sparks, 2002; Zepeda, Jimenez & Lanoue, 2015). We also wanted to understand whether POMI considered the duration and length of the programme to be important. From how the enrolment in the programme was managed, we further questioned the principals about the time they spent in the programme. The four participant principals' voices suggest that the programme was not prolonged. In the excerpts below, we share the comments of principals on the duration of the training.

I was exposed to the workshop for a week. The programme is packed, really packed, you get there day one you are still fresh, but in day two you feel the fatigue because all the work that has been prepared is too much. (Joacky Zwane)

The programme was very short and it was offered for a week when the schools were closed. You cannot train someone for only a week and expect that person to be a perfect in accounting (Kidwell Nkuza).

It was a week, just imagine you have to learn such a broad programme in a week and for us newcomers it was just theory, we could not link the theory to the practical that we had to do at our schools. (Timi Mamba)

The five days allocated to the programme are not enough, you see the first two or three days you can see that principal so and so, has absolutely no understanding of what so ever and then the next three days or so the training if over. (Nsika Dlamini)

The voices above suggest clearly that the duration of the programme was very short. It has also emerged that due to the condensed nature of the programme, participants did not have sufficient time to implement what they had learned, and they also suffered from fatigue.

The Content of the Programme

One of the critical aspects of any training or development programme is ensuring that it meets the participants' training or development needs. Participants also shared their experiences about the content of the programme and how it helped them manage the daily demands of their work. Below, we share their voices which contribute to an understanding of their experiences in relation to this aspect.

There is a huge gap between what is taught by the INSET officers and what the auditors want. For instance, you find that the auditors would say that you are not supposed to attach receipts like this or you are not supposed to have separate files, yet this is what we have been taught by the INSET officers. (Timi Mamba)

Timi Mamba's experience shows that the training prepared them for something different from what the auditors wanted during school visits. The same sentiments were echoed by Kidwell Nkuza as he stated the following: "*The INSET officers are saying things that the auditors do not agree with. There is a big difference in what is taught by the INSET officers and the expectations of the auditors.*"

Nsika Dlamini and Joacky Zwane shared the same views suggesting that the programme content did not equip principals with what was expected from them by auditors. The two participant principals respectively said:

There is a big contradiction between what you are taught by the INSET officers and the auditors. The INSET officers will tell you that this is the way you enter a petty cash voucher and the auditors would dispute that and say that is wrong. (Nsika Dlamini)
The entire programme is outdated; the INSET officers teach concepts that have been long revised by the auditors. Even some of the regulations used by the INSET officers are sometimes outdated, yet some things have long been amended. While one is trained, this difference sometimes causes confusion. (Joacky Zwane)

Besides the content not being aligned with official expectations, Joacky's elucidation shows that the

accounting terms used in the programme were old and different from those used by auditors. While this view about outdated concepts emerged from one participant, it appears that it caused confusion, which can be detected in the views of the other three participants.

The Quality of Trainers

In addition to the content of the programme, participants also shared their views on the quality of trainers. There were multiple views expressed but all suggested that trainers were not suitable for training principals on financial management. Nsika suggested that trainers did not have sufficient knowledge of the real context within which school financial management occurred.

They [the trainers] fail to apply their knowledge in real-life situations. They only rely on the training manual and cannot provide practical guidance on the problems raised by the principals. You find that you ask a question on a particular challenge and cannot assist you because they only have textbook knowledge.

Echoing similar views, Kidwell suggested that trainers from INSET lacked accounting knowledge, thus were not suitable for training principals. He said:

The INSET officers are not qualified in accounting, so they cannot train someone. These people just read the manual and then come and teach us. They do not have the experience in the field, so let the auditors train us on the finances and the INSET officers concentrate on the other administrative issues.

Kidwell further suggested another dynamic regarding the trainers. In his utterances it surfaced that INSET hired trainers directly from the classroom most of the time and these incumbents had limited or no experience of school leadership issues. He said: “*Experience counts on these things, the INSET officers are promoted straight from the classroom and then you expect that person to train a principal, yet that person does not know anything about being a principal.*”

Presenting similar arguments, Timi and Joacky also argued that people with relevant qualifications were the most appropriate to undertake the training task and this is what they said:

It is only the auditors who are relevant to teach, because they possess the relevant qualifications, and INSET officers should concentrate on the other administrative issues (Timi Mamba).

The INSET officers are okay, but they are not qualified to teach finances, because they are ordinary educators. In my opinion the INSET officers can only expose us to the record books, but the actual record keeping should be taught by the auditors (Joacky Zwane).

The consistency of data from all four participants suggests that the quality and the relevance of trainers appeared to be incompatible with the

magnitude of school financial management training that principals required. The voices of the participants point to the need for different trainers and preferably, people who are qualified in accounting matters. In the next section, we engage critically with these findings with the aim of understanding what these experiences suggest about the quality and effectiveness of the specific PD under study.

Discussion of Findings

One of the important considerations when a PD programme is offered, is that it should be responsive to the needs of newly appointed principals. As suggested in the literature, any high quality or effective CPD programme should ensure that the needs of participants are considered and that the programme is job-embedded (Hunzicker, 2011; Uysal, 2012). The experiences of the participating principals suggest that POMI’s approach to enrolling principals into the programme was not clearly focused on considering principals’ needs at different levels of their careers. We argued earlier that in many countries, Eswatini included, principals begin their management careers from the classroom, with limited or no experience of principalship (Bua & Adzongo, 2014; Davis et al., 2005; Mopolisa et al., 2014), and financial management is one area where a skills deficit has been identified. While there is no agreement among scholars about the most appropriate timing of a CPD programme, given the professional status of principals and effective CPD programme success, identification of a suitable time is, nonetheless, critical. This means that as they begin their management careers, principals need to understand the key areas of their job, and financial management is a critical area. Therefore, for a programme to be effective, a needs assessment is required as soon as an incumbent is appointed into the position (Hou, Jia & Jiao, 2019). Where possible, incumbents should be involved in the process of conducting the needs assessment and in identifying possible development areas (Karagiorgi & Symeou, 2007). The findings above suggest that the participating principals enrolled in the programme late in their careers and had no idea when they would be enrolled. By the time they were trained, they realised that they had already committed numerous financial management errors.

Active involvement of principals at different levels of a programme has been associated with high quality PD programmes (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Desimone, 2011). In this study principals, as demonstrated above, seemed not to be involved in the selection decisions, neither did they even know when they were supposed to be trained. In this regard, Peterson (2001) cautions that unclear selection procedures may cause programmes to fail, and as demonstrated in the

principals' responses, their late selection to the programme was not well received.

Literature suggests that effective PD programmes should be prolonged as this allows for reflection and development of networks, which allow deep and lasting influences on principals' work (Armour & Makopoulou, 2012; Bayar, 2014; Fratt, 2007; Peterson, 2001). In addition, Bayar (2014) opines that long-term and continuous PD programmes are more effective than shorter ones. Therefore, it is important that these programmes are based on the individual needs of potential trainees. Contrary to this understanding of PD, the experiences of the participating principals tell us that POMI was of short duration (one week) and training ran from the morning till the afternoon. It emerged from one principal's comment that effective learning did not occur as participants were overloaded with important information and were expected to master that information in one week. The principals' views coincide with those of Sparks (2002) and Zepeda et al. (2015) who accentuate the need for the prolonged duration of PD programmes because it is assumed that learning a new skill and internalising it could be a lengthy process. Also noticeable in the programme is that subsequent to one week of training principals were then expected to go back to their schools to implement what they had been trained on. Principals highlighted that frequently what was taught seemed to be in contradiction with what was expected from them during audits. We argue that the only way trainers could acknowledge and remedy this is through prolonged engagement with participants, which would allow follow-ups and critical reflections (Bayar, 2014; Duncombe & Armour, 2004). This would not only allow principals to learn but it would also allow the trainers to adapt and improve their programmes before new groups were enrolled.

Another important aspect that emerged from the principals' experiences was the relevance of the content offered in the programme. In the first part of this discussion we highlighted that job embeddedness and the timing of selection are critical. In addition to this, the focus and purpose of a programme is equally important. Literature highlights that the focus of a programme should be aligned with what is expected from principals and should empower principals to understand and perform their tasks better (Bayar, 2014; Desimone, 2011). Contrary to this quality requirement, principals experienced POMI as not being fully aligned to what was expected from them in relation to financial management responsibilities. All four principals indicated that there was a huge gap between the content of the training programme and what the auditors required when they came to check their school books. This observation may also be linked to the experiences of principals in relation the perceived quality of trainers.

Principals suggested that training should be done by experts in the field of financial management, for example auditors, contrary to INSETS' reported employment of former classroom teachers. Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) and Smith (2003) share the same sentiments, arguing that for PD to work, it must be offered by experts. We have shared earlier that principals are not trained in financial management and therefore, it is understandable if principals suggest that INSET should carefully consider by whom the training on financial management would be done. Experts are not only relevant in delivering the content, but they will also be able to guide and support participants (Peterson, 2001). There is a widely held belief that teachers must be trained by people who understand what is happening in the classroom; likewise, auditors understand the field of financial management and the policies governing public financial management in the Kingdom of Eswatini. They are thus better placed to guide and support principals in the process of financial management.

Conclusion

We conclude by revisiting the aim of this paper and drawing lessons in relation to the aim. To this end, we intended to explore how principals in Eswatini who had undergone PD in financial resource management experienced the different aspects of the training they had received. Through these experiences, we wanted to draw lessons about the challenges and effectiveness of the programme and illuminate implications for how PD programmes can be offered to build principals' capacity in general and on school financial management in particular. The findings suggest that the Eswatini programme does not offer principals effective help in developing their capacity in financial management. This is due to numerous factors including the timing of enrolment and duration of the training, the content of the programme, and the poor quality of trainers. From these findings we draw some critical lessons relevant to the Eswatini programme, but that might inform other programmes in similar contexts.

The first lesson is that training or development offered long after the incumbent principals have assumed their positions is bound to be a reactive rather than proactive. Because of their professional infancy in financial management, principals are bound to commit errors early in their careers unless they are developed in advance. Implied here is the need for early exposure of principals to PD in financial management. This is strongly linked to the importance of financial resources in the process of achieving equity in education.

Another critical lesson drawn from the findings relates to the duration of the programme.

Literature has taught us that development needs to be accompanied by reflections about what happens in practice after principals have been trained on financial management. Likewise, we learn here that the once-off development assumes that principals will master the skills during the brief training and this has been proved not to be the case. In this regard, we regard the programme as mere compliance with an intention to tick boxes and send principals back to schools. Therefore, we argue that there is a need for this process to be continuous so that principals are given space to reflect on how they experience financial management after training. This will help both the incumbent principals and those who design programmes for future purposes.

Furthermore, we learn that principals as professionals and leader learners need to be trained by expert facilitators who engender confidence among them as potential trainees. Empirical evidence suggests that the level of satisfaction of participants is closely associated with this factor. This requires careful consideration by CPD service providers regarding who should train principals. Based on the findings we argue that financial management is specialised knowledge and no matter how basic school financial management is, trainers should be well versed in the precepts of public finance management processes and hence the recommendation is that those who do auditing for schools, rather than former teachers, should be involved in training.

Authors' Contributions

Phumlani Erasmus Myende conceptualised the paper and developed the structure and the focus of each section. He then wrote the introduction and the discussion section and co-wrote the findings section with all authors. Thamsanqa Thulani Bhengu wrote the literature section and co-wrote the findings section with all the authors. He was also responsible for checking the final version of the manuscript including making sure that all references were included. Isiah Sizwe Kunene generated data. All the authors were involved in the analysis process and the development of themes.

Notes

- i. The Kingdom of Eswatini, formerly called Swaziland, is a small landlocked country in the Southern Africa region. It is almost surrounded by the Republic of South Africa. Its neighbour on the eastern border is Mozambique and in its northern, western and southern borders, it is surrounded by the Republic of South Africa.
- ii. Published under a Creative Commons Attribution Licence.

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