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Teachers Professional Development in schools: Reflection on the Move to Create a Culture of Continuous Improvement

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Abstract
Professional development of teacher is acknowledged to be centrally important in maintaining and enhancing the quality of teaching and learning in schools. Cognizant of this, nationwide professional development has been designed and enacted since 2003 in Ethiopia. This paper aims to reflect on the practices of teachers' professional development in schools. In so doing, it relied on the narratives of three informants, current literature and the experiences of the researcher as an insider and teacher educator. Methodologically, the study employed narrative research, which is the process of studying and understanding experience through story telling. The findings indicated that the participants found the current teacher professional development problematic and unhelpful to bring the desired change in teachers classroom practice and student learning. The available teacher professional development was narrowly understood, poorly practiced, and orchestrated tightly from the top.

Key words: Teacher, professional development, school, narrative research, learning, Ethiopia

Introduction

Globally, education has faced multiple pressures from multiple directions to prepare learners not only in a changing world but also for a changing world. Given this, efforts are being made by countries to transform their education systems to meet the demand and realities of the twenty-first century. Consequently, governments are restructuring and reculturing schools and schooling to be a competent system. According to Zmuda, Kuklis, and Kline (2004), a competent system requires several significant shifts: from unconnected thinking to systems thinking, from an environment of isolation to one of collegiality, from perceived reality to information-driven reality, and from individual autonomy to collective autonomy and collective accountability.

In the process of building a competent system, as Zmuda, Kuklis, and Kline further explained, the staff members need to emerge as a professional learning community, embracing collective accountability as the only way to achieve the shared mission for all students, which is ensuring learning for all. In this respect, teachers' professional learning is considered a vital and effective strategy to bring about change in education (Gemeda & Tynjälä, 2015; Guskey, 2000, Heikkinenet al., 2012). As Feiman-Nemser (2001) further noted, what students learn is directly related to what and how teachers teach; and what and how teachers teach depends on the knowledge, skills, and commitments they bring to their teaching and the opportunities they have to continue learning

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in and from their practice. Cognizant of this fact, the Ethiopian ministry of education launched nationally designed professional development activities for school teachers, intending to change and improve students' learning. Hence, this article is based on the narratives of three teachers participating in professional development in a secondary school in Ethiopia. The question posed is: What personal stories do participants share about their experience of professional development?

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of teachers about teachers' professional development and reflect on their experiences by analyzing the narratives of three teachers. My intention is to make timely contribution to the current professional development activities underway in schools. With this in mind, I grounded on the three vignettes, my own experience and current literature to shed light on the practice, problems, and possibilities of teachers' professional learning for the reason that such activities often considered as the means of improving learning for all.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework for this study is grounded in theories and research that characterize high quality or effective professional development for teachers that seem essential to improve schools. A professional consensus is emerging about particular characteristics of "high quality" professional development. These characteristics include: teacher involvement, continuous and job embedded development, collaborative development, reflective practice, strong leadership, adult learning, and constructivist theory.

Teacher Involvement

Teachers need to be actively involved in initiating, preparing and implementing professional development experiences (Jehlen, 2007; Lauer & Matthews, 2007; McCarthy, 2006; Timperley, 2011). Giving teachers a choice in attending professional development plays a key role in earning teachers' commitment and motivation to learn and ensure high implementation of school reform by the teachers (Allen, 2006; Supovitz & Turner, 2000). Otherwise, as Brooks (2006) puts it, teachers feel they are being coerced to attend, and feel little autonomy, and as a result, these experiences are often unsuccessful in changing teachers' behaviors. Professional development cannot be forced; rather the teacher needs to develop actively (Bubb & Earley, 2007). Teachers are learners and their learning needs should be approached individually (Kelleher, 2003). Each individual teacher is different and a 'one size fits all' approach to meeting development needs is unlikely to be successful (Bubb & Earley, 2007). Student learning and achievement increase when teachers actively engage in effective professional development focused on the skills and knowledge they need in order to address the

needs of the diverse learners.

Continuous and job embedded development

The traditional model of professional development that exists as one-shot workshops and staff meetings with guest speakers seeking to transmit information, and providing a series of disjointed and fragmented experiences has been deemed antiquated and ineffective since they produce minimal change (Guskey, 2000; Kelleher, 2003). Professional development can no longer be viewed as an event that occurs on a particular day of the school year; rather, it must become part of the daily work of educators and become an integral part of school culture. Professional development requires schools to embed into the school day ongoing professional development that involve follow up and support (Bubb & Earley, 2007; Callahan & Spalding, 2006; Kelleher, 2003; Pittinsky, 2005; Sparks & Hirsh, 2000; Tomlinson, 2005; Zepeda, 2008).

Collaborative development

Collaborative approaches have been found to be effective in promoting school change that extends beyond individual classrooms (Borko, 2004; Taylor et al., 2000; Wei et al., 2009). In the same vein, Carroll (2009) states that in order for quality teaching to occur, administrators must provide a collaborative culture that empowers teachers to team up to improve student learning beyond what any of them can achieve alone. To this effect, there is a need to rethink, restructure, and reculture the schools to create professional learning communities that expand the horizons for professional learning beyond models and activities (Bredeson, 2003). The professional learning community, according to Dufour (2004), seeks to establish a culture of collaboration that drives the school improvement process. In this respect, Zepeda (2008) states that when a school works toward becoming a learning community, all stakeholders are valued, collaboration is the norm, learning occurs naturally, and reflection is fostered through collegial conversations.

Professional learning communities are created, managed and sustained by optimizing resources and structures; promoting individual and collective learning; explicitly promoting, monitoring and sustaining the learning community; and leading and managing professional development well (Bubb & Earley, 2007). Learning communities in a collaborative work climate, as Mitchell (1999) puts it, is characterized by open and honest communication, shared decision-making, respectful treatment, professional sharing, and common understandings. Teachers need more collaborative time to work with colleagues in addressing reform issues to inform teaching and learning practices (Borko, 2004; Colantonio, 2005). A school wishing to become a learning-centered community would therefore take its CPD responsibilities most seriously and strive to secure effective learning for staff (Bubb & Earley, 2007).

Reflective practice

Professional development needs to take a reflective approach to professional growth and advocated that teachers become scholars and innovators in research (Mitchell, 1999; Nuebert & Binko, 1998; Timperley, 2011). It must provide occasions for teachers to reflect critically on their practices and to fashion new knowledge and beliefs about content, pedagogy, and learners (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). Schools and their staff need to be supported as reflective practitioners and equipped to access and conduct research investigations that will help to transform their practice (Bubb & Earley, 2007). School leaders need to encourage their teachers to conduct action research in their own classrooms so that they can see their students and instructional practice through fresh eyes, giving them a real voice in their own professional development (Danaher, et al., 2009; O'Hara & Pritchard, 2008; Phillips, 2003).

Strong leadership

Lambert (1998) argued that leadership is about learning together and constructing meaning and knowledge collectively and collaboratively. Lambert further states that it involves opportunities to surface and mediate perceptions, values, beliefs, information, and assumptions through continuing conversations, to inquire about and generate ideas together. Professional development, as Fink and Resnick (2001) asserted, is not separated from administrative duties and responsibilities; rather, it should be considered the centerpiece of exercising effective leadership that is committed to improving student learning. As Sparks (2002) puts it, if quality teaching is to occur in every classroom, all teachers must be supported in turn by skillful principals who work in systems that support their sustained development.

The leadership of the school must make changes to support effective professional development in their schools. They need to develop a collective leadership capacity of the schools, which as Stoll (2009) describes, refers to focusing on helping leadership teams collectively see, think and do things differently to improve all students' life chances, and find ways they can provide the conditions, environment and opportunities for their colleagues to be creative. Likewise, Kleinhenz & Fleming (2007), explain principals and school leaders need to understand the teacher as the most important influence on students' learning and create opportunities for developing ideas, and allocate resources and manage time and space in ways that support teachers' work. Research has also identified that to ensure sustainable improvement leadership has to be distributed within the school and embedded within its culture (Beachum & Dentith, 2004; Edwards, 2011; Kleinhenz & Fleming, 2007; Stoll, 2009).

Leaders need to create communities where teachers view themselves as learners (Fullan & Hargreaves 1996). They have to build more collaborative and democratic arrangements with teachers and others to promote a culture of learning. As Mitchell (1999) explains principals can support teachers' collective learning and organizational

learning in a number of ways: by actively participating in all reflection meetings; by modeling collaborative practice; by opening time and space for research activities; by discussing organizational learning in the staff room and in staff meetings; and by inviting on-participating teachers into collective activities. Opfer and Pedder (2011) further assert school principals enhance teachers' knowledge, skills, and dispositions and other aspects of school capacity by connecting teachers to external expertise, by creating internal structures, and by establishing trusting relations with school staff.

Adult learning

Professional development should take in to account how adults learn (Bubb & Earley, 2007; Zepeda, 2008). Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (2005), pioneers in adult-learning theory attempted to inform researchers about why adults learn differently from other types of learners. What the authors found was that there are several adult-learning principles that need to be addressed before an adult will attempt to learn. These include the following six principles. First, adults want to know why they need to learn something before undertaking learning. They learn what they want to learn and what is meaningful for them to learn (Illeris, 2006). Second, adults believe they are responsible for their lives. They need to be seen and treated as capable and self-directed. Third, adults come into an educational activity with different experiences than do adolescents. The richest resource for learning resides in adults themselves; therefore, tapping into their experiences through experiential techniques (discussions, simulations, problem-solving activities, or case methods) is beneficial. Fourth, adults become ready to learn things they need to know and do in order to cope effectively with real-life situations. They want to learn what they can apply in the present, making training focused on the future or that does not relate to their current situations less effective. Fifth, adults are life-centered (task-centered, problem-centered) in their orientation to learning. They want to learn what will help them perform tasks or deal with problems they confront in everyday situations and those presented in the context of application to real-life. Sixth, adults are responsive to some external motivators (e.g., better job, higher salaries), but the most potent motivators are internal (e.g., desire for increased job satisfaction, self-esteem). Their motivation can be blocked by training and education that ignores adult learning principles. Therefore, using effective adult learning theories would create effective forms of professional development.

Constructivist theory

Professional development models need to take the constructivist stance/approach. Constructivist theory sees learners as active participants in the process of learning, seeking to interpret and make meaning from multiple sources of information by linking them with what is already known (Westwood, 2004). Professional development is a sense-making process where the individual builds new knowledge and understand-

ing from the base of their existing knowledge and perceptions (Chalmers & Keown, 2006). Chalmers and Keown further state that professional development involves interplay between existing knowledge, ideas and beliefs and new ones imbedded in the concepts, content and philosophy of new material and approaches advocated by professional developers.

Professional development from constructivist perspective is an active learning through practical everyday experiences (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2005), a process of construction and confrontation of meaning rather than exploration and memorization of facts (Prawat & Floden, 1994), emphasizes shared inquiry and leadership, participation and reflection (Lambert et al.,2002), increases teacher collaboration, deepens content understanding, and supports classroom teaching and learning (Shroyer et al., 2007), and meaning making is a process of negotiation among the participants through dialogues or conversations (Liu et al., 2009). Constructivist approaches recognize the situated nature of cognition which is the key elements in effective professional learning (Chalmers & Keown, 2006; Kwakman 2003; Putham & Borko, 2000; Schlager & Fusco 2003). Hence, learning involves active construction, deconstruction and co-construction of knowledge by the actors.

Methodology

Education is the construction and reconstruction of personal and social stories; teachers and learners are storytellers and characters in their own and other's stories (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Given this, I adopt narrative inquiry methodology to investigate the experiences of three teachers (one from social sciences, one from natural sciences and the other is a professional development coordinator at the school) about their professional development in the Ethiopian context. Teachers' live stories, tell stories of those lives, retell stories with changed possibilities, and relived the changed stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994). Hence, I found narrative inquiry as one of the best ways to reflect upon the lived in experiences and stories of teachers about their professional development (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Data were obtained through interviews using the question "How teachers experienced their professional development activities carried out in their school?" The emphasis for me as an interviewer was not to have preconceived notions of what I planned to hear from the participants; rather, to examine what I could learn from their stories about their professional development. During the course of the interview, a concerted effort was made to attend to my participants' perspectives and stories. As with other forms of qualitative research, narrative research makes use of various methodological approaches to analyzing stories (Riessman, 2007). In my study, I used narrative analysis, which Merriam (2009) explained, uses the stories people tell, analyzing them in various ways, to understand the meaning of the experiences as revealed in the story. First, I transcribed the audio recorded information in to text and gave it to my participants to give them an oppor-

tunity to read and confirm their stories before the final version was produced. Then, I repeatedly read their stories and detect important points in their stories for discussion and reflection. As Mishler (1995) states:

> We retell our respondents' accounts through our analytic redescriptions. We, too, are storytellers and through our concepts and methods — our research strategies, data samples, transcription procedures, specifications of narrative units and structures, and interpretive perspectives — we construct the story and its meaning. In this sense the story is always coauthored, either directly in the process of an interviewer eliciting an account or indirectly through our representing and thus transforming others ' texts and discourses (pp. 117 – 118).

Finally, I detected interesting points in my respondents' stories and interpreted them. The stories and the reflections on these stories make visible the most important aspect of an ongoing teacher's professional development.

The existing professional learning of teacher in national context

Talk of educational reform has been a recurrent theme in Ethiopian education system, stimulated by internal demands with in the country and global change outside the country. The adoption of the current Education and Training Policy (ETP) in 1994 was accompanied with 20 years educational sector development programs to improve the education sector. Consequently, a tremendous achievement was made in terms of expansion. However, ensuring quality and equity of education remain a challenge for the government (Fekede & Fiorucci, 2012; Lemlem, 2010; Oulai et al., 2011). Recognizing the existence of entrenched problems within the education sector, the government has placed substantial emphasis on the professional development of teachers as strategy to improve the sectors. Hence, a Continuous Professional Development [CPD] guideline was centrally prepared by reform planners in 2003 and enacted prescriptively across a country in a top down approaches. It is mandatory for all teachers to undergo CPD program conducted at the national level (MoE, 2003; 2009). The overall aim of CPD is to raise the achievement of students in Ethiopian schools by changing teachers practice (MoE, 2009). As indicated in the document, the government vowed to make lesson student centered and engaging. According to MoE (2009), all teachers must be actively engaged: 1) in understanding what is meant by good teaching; 2) in their own learning process; 3) in identifying their own needs; 4) in sharing good practice with their colleagues; and 5) in a wide range of activities, formal and informal, that will bring about improvement of their own practice and the practice of others. In this section, I present the stories of three teachers participating in professional development.

Narratives of professional development experiences

Teacher One (T1)

T1 was a secondary school teacher with BEd in Biology and teaching grade 9 and 10. T1 offered the following account:

> *The issue of professional development is active only on the paper. Continuous professional development (CPD) program was initiated by Ministry of Education nationwide and imposed on schools for implementation. Teachers were not involved in the planning of CPD. Regardless of our experience, subject matter, school context we are exposed to the same kind of professional development activities. It is boring, confusing and not attractive. Practically, there was no CPD at schools. We do not have any say in the direction and content of the programme. We don't have a clear idea about the CPD. The educational officers sometimes organize training regarding the implementation of CPD. However, the training ends up in confusion, as there is no one to explain things for us. We are simply told, 'do it because it is useful. We do not have any option except accepting and doing it. We were forced to do it so we accept it half-heartedly. Therefore, the professional development program seemed ineffective.*
>
> *The ultimate goal of CPD is to raise students' achievement. I personally didn't see any change as a result of professional development program. If you start from the objective stated, it says to raise student achievement by improving the knowledge and skills of the teachers. However, the reality is that the student achievement is declining. The professional development program was centrally planned and imposed on us for implementation. It didn't address the knowledge and skill gaps we have to teach students in a better way and finally improve the result. In order for professional development program to bring improvement in student achievement and learning it needs to address the needs of the teachers and reality of the school. Within the current practice this didn't happen. We are told to make the lesson student centered, conduct action research and implement continuous assessment but not told how to do these activities. The overcrowded classroom, the knowledge and skills teachers have, classroom setup, teachers load and content driven curriculum make it difficult for implementation. It didn't consider the number of student in classroom, the knowledge and skills of teachers, classroom setup, teachers load and to broad curriculum the planning of professional development has to consider the actual condition of school and the need of the teachers.*
>
> *If we want to improve professional development activity: First, the presence of interference from local authority should be abandoned. The mission*

of school is highly politicized and used as a tool to achieve other political agenda by sideling pedagogical aspect. Furthermore, let the professionals lead their profession instead of mixing up things and messed the education sector. The right people with the right profession should play active role in their own profession; second, there should be adequate training opportunities on CPD matters so that everyone understand and actively participate on it; third, supporting teachers morally and materially by reconsidering the salary structure of teachers and introducing different incentive mechanism. Finally, the ministry of education should give due attention the teacher preparation programs. The teacher education programs needs to improve their quality and relevance they also need to improve the entry and exit criteria for the candidates.

Teacher two (T2)

T2 has a BA degree in Geography and teaching grade 9 and 10. T2 gave the following account:

Well, professional development is a planned activity, training or workshops carried out by knowledgeable experts to improve the teachers' knowledge so that we can improve student learning. It includes sharing of experience, (good practices) on different issues to learn from others, workshops department meeting to discuss on matters of learning. There is no upgrading. Once you gain BSC/BA/BED qualification, there is no way to upgrade to the next qualification. The other is if we looked at continuous professional development with the exception of few things, it has no significant change on student achievement or teaching learning. Because if we look at the modules of continuous professional development (CPD) it didn't match with our practice, neither it addresses our need. The goal of professional development is stated and communicated to us but we don't have any say. It is totally top-down approach. We are given an order to implement it. It is all about report report-report. We don't believe that it brings change. It is waste of time and resource, full of routine work which took much of time from classroom practices.

If you look at educational officers at woreda and zone, they didn't know in detail about the professional development program of teachers. They organized training in the school but they lack expertise knowledge to explain things, to make things clear. Professional development is more of papers work. It is about filing forms. We filled it out and returned the form. No one checked weather it is real or not. The other is professional development didn't go with the actual teaching learning activity. We are supposed to spend 60hrs per year. Let alone spending 60hr on professional development,

we don't have time to cover the course we are teaching. We are over loaded with various activities so no time to be engaged in professional development activities. The professional development is planned by considering national demands. There is no room to accommodate needs of the teachers adequately. You are only allowed add one of your need on the area identified.

The existing CPD program emphasized what we already know and practice. It is redundant. We easily get bored of it. They are always telling us that we need to increase student achievement. No one question this. We are here to serve our students. The problem is how? Raising student achievement and helping students to learn is our duty, the reason why we are in the school. What we need is how to realize this. We need to have a say on this regard rather than forced to implement professional development activities designed somewhere and brought to us for implementation. We need to participate in professional development activity that fit our real situation, meets our developmental needs address our practical problems and help us to make a change in classroom practice. The current professional development activity is a waste time. If we use the time that we wasted on routine activities of professional development for the actual teaching learning definitely we will change our classroom practices. If we see the content, it failed to fit the actual situation of our school. The implementation is by force. If you don't do this you will get this [bad consequence added]. So, it is not attractive. We do not have a clear idea about the continuous professional development initiative. Everything was in a mess and I did not think CPD would be fruitful as long as there is no clear idea about it, no experts to guide, support and follow up. The other challenges we faced to participate in a CPD program included: work load, low salary, inadequate training and lack of support. Everything was in a mess and I did not think CPD would be fruitful as long as there is no clear idea about it, no experts to guide, support and follow up. In order to improve teachers' professional development the government needs to reconsider the salary structure of teacher, reduce teachers work load, expand training and development opportunity and recognize teachers and the teaching profession.

Teacher three (T3)

T3 is a professional development coordinator of the school.T3 was a graduate of mathematics and 23 years of teaching experience. T3 offered the following account:

As one of the professional development coordinator at this school, I found professional learning of teachers is not up to its promise, not as expected. The current nature of professional learning of teachers didn't bring the intended results. Continuous professional development, induction and little training are the available professional learning opportunities. All these are initiated by the central government and brought to school for implementation. We didn't have the necessary awareness about the initiative. We were simply forced to implement the program. No one has had a clear idea about the reform. There was no supportive environment. Everything is mess regarding the professional learning of teachers. Teachers don't have any say on the matter. The practice is forcing the teachers to participate in professional development activity they don't want and need it. The current professional development program ignored the needs and realities of the school. Instead it follows are size-fit-all approach.

The content of professional development was decided and prescribed from the center-ministry of education. It is the same for all teachers across the country regardless of your subject, experience and context. It didn't address the existing gaps in our school and needs of the teacher. For example, mathematics teacher want to deepen his/her knowledge and skills in mathematics and how to teach mathematics in a way it best addresses the needs and reality of the diverse learners. The same is true for other subject teachers. The current professional development program was perceived as irrelevant and unhelpful. We don't have well qualified and experienced experts to organize, guide, support professional development activities. I didn't see any improvement as a result of the existing professional development opportunities. However, the induction component of professional learning program is relatively good. Because it was designed for newly qualified teachers. It helped them to get acquainted with the whole school system, how to approach teaching and students. It was good for new teachers.

As a coordinator, I am supposed to have a clear idea of professional development, detailed knowledge and skills of the initiative, but, I don't have all this. Rather, I was assigned to coordinate professional development without my interest. We were forced to accept it since it was from the central authority. There was no room to oppose, reject or modify any reform from the center. The professional development was more of paper work. Teachers prepare ideal plan on the basis of the national and regional priority and then prepared a report that go with the plan as if they implemented it successfully. The report was submitted to the department and then to professional development coordinator. So, continuous professional development was paper work as the report was not checked. This was how it works.

The continuous professional development was perceived as the government deliberate intention to intensity teachers' work and diverts their attention rattler than improving teaching learning process.

If you look what was repeatedly said and written in various documents, professional development was linked to student achievement. However, the reality didn't mirror what was echoed by the documents. At the moment, I can't say professional development raised student achievement. Because the student achievement was not improved. The professional development program was not accepted by teachers. If it was not accepted by teachers and didn't influence their practice, how can it impact student learning and achievement? I personally recommend the central planners to leave room for teachers in planning professional development so that they can actively engage in professional development. It was also better to build the capacity of teacher before forcing them to do what they want them to do. For example, how can a teacher forced to conduct action research before having the knowledge and skill of action research. Even though the professional development program dictate the teachers to conduct action research, the practice was nonexistent because of lack of knowledge and skills about what and how of action research.

The available forms of professional development in our school are the experience sharing and cascade model. As to me, these approaches are inadequate to improve teachers' knowledge and skills. In the case of cascade mode, people working in managerial position like principal and educational officer were invited at regional or central level and took training with the assumption that they will arrange similar training when they returned. This approach was not successful as we saw it. Because they are mangers assigned on the bases of their political affiliation and do not have expertise knowledge to deliver the training. That is why I said CPD didn't meet its objective. The goal of professional development is to raise student achievement by improving teachers' knowledge and skills. However, if you look at student achievement data it was declining. So, where is the change? From the onset the professional development program was centrally planned and imposed on schools for implementation. It was enacted forcefully without considering the context and relevance. The current professional development reform made the teacher to prepare a lot of plan, which took too much of our time that otherwise we use to help our students. We wasted too much of our time in preparing plan, on unnecessary meeting, on committee work, on organizing clubs. So, we don't have time for actual classroom practices. Generally speaking everything was getting worse and worse.

There are various challenges that hinder the development and learning of teachers as a profession. These include: a) forceful implementation of

nationwide initiative that don't address the needs of the teachers the context and realities of the school, b) lack of research based practices, c) too much time for activities not related to the actual classroom practices that emphasize paper work, preparation of plan, and meeting, d) economic problem-the low salaries teachers earn don't help them to cope up with the current living expense. The money teachers earned end up before the month end. Teachers lost hope about the teaching profession which in turn affects their attitude and commitment. Owing to this, being in the teaching profession is perceived as punishment, e) centralization of educational decision. Every decision affecting us was made at the center and passed to schools and the teachers for implementation. We cannot question the legitimacy of the decisions. No room for participation but accepting and implementing any decision from the center. We don't want to disagree with any decision from the top because of fear and insecurity.

Findings and discussion

Major issues surrounding the existing professional learning

There is a growing recognition that the professional learning of teachers plays decisive role not only in enabling education to be responsive to demands of the changing world but also in enhancing students learning and achievement (Hargreaves, 2003; Zeichner, 2013; Gemeda et al., 2013). It is, therefore, essential to provide teachers with quality, relevant and ongoing professional learning. Likewise, as Elmore (2002) succinctly puts it, you cannot improve a school's performance, or the performance of any teacher or student in it, without increasing the investment in teachers' knowledge, pedagogical skills, and understanding of students. At the back of this rationale, the Ethiopian government enacted a professional development program for teachers in all schools across the country. However, the existing professional learning is inadequate and antiquated to many. In this section, the voices of participants who participated in the existing professional development were interpreted. Furthermore, chaos, contradiction and issues surfacing teacher professional learning were identified and discussed.

The voices of all three participants signified the existence of paradoxical practices in the available professional learning initiatives. The policy documents and professional development guideline prepared by ministry of education stated that the focus of continuous professional development (CPD) program is to promote effective and reflective teaching, active learning, student centered approaches and continuous assessment (MoE, 2003). The ultimate goal of the program is to raise student achievement by changing education and educators in the schools. My experience as teacher educator, the participants and the documents anonymously indicated that the CPD program was enacted prescriptively through hierarchical channel. This practice is against the rhetoric of policy which claimed to emphasize the construction of knowledge through

active engagement of the learner (Heikkinen et al., 2012; Kleinhenz& Fleming, 2007). Furthermore, this epistemological practice contradicts with the constructivist theory, which underpinned this study and the Ethiopian education system.

Constructivism as a philosophy of learning is based on the belief that the learner, as an active and autonomous agent, is responsible for his or her own learning through reflection on experiences (Elias & Merriam, 2005). Rejecting the notion of knowledge transmission, constructivism emphasized knowledge construction, meaningful interaction, reflection and negotiation (Vavrus et al., 2011; Hassad, 2011; Beamer et al., 2008). Hierarchical authoritative imposition of CPD program on teachers, which the teachers described as "…we don't have any say…" resonates with behaviorism that favors unidirectional knowledge transmission from teachers to the learner (passive student and a top-down or teacher-centered approach) despite the government intention to promote student centered and learning centered environment.

The stories indicated that the decision making power is concentrated at center, which as scholars state, is contradictory to the paradigm shift to learner-centered and learning-centered environment (Hargreaves, 2003). The power relationships that inform and control the behavior of everyone in education setting influences the culture and every practice in the school as it mirrors and helps to sustain the structures at different levels in the education settings. For instance, teachers regard students the way the system and their superiors regard them. Hence, the whole activity and practices should gear toward the change that is wanted to happen in the school. To this end, teachers' involvement in their own professional development planning and other reform effort is a crucial step in avoiding what teachers complained as authoritative imposition and too much top-down command. The evidence from research continues to mount that teachers learn more effectively when they are allowed to voice their needs and preferences regarding the content and design of professional development (McCarthy, 2006; Carroll, 2009).

The practice of central authority to effect change without involving teachers at the planning phases of the professional development initiative not only contributes to teacher resistance against innovation and failure of continuous professional development, but also shapes the culture of educational practices against learning centered environment. Simply put, it erodes and/or discourages participation, engagement, collaboration, dialogue and professional autonomy of teachers. Conversely, it promotes authoritative imposition, the transmission view and unidirectional flow of knowledge/information. Within this context, dependence on external source for knowledge gain momentum by positioning teachers on the margin of knowledge generation. As several researchers state (Glanz, 2002; Kincheloe, 2008) top-down, unidirectional and institutional hierarchies are antithetical to democracy in action and justify teaching and learning as a power-over activity.

Rhetorically, it was echoed that there is a need to make lessons active and truly

engaging by subverting the traditional teacher-centered approach. To this end, the process of initiating a professional development program needs to align itself with the change that the government wants to instigate into schools. The effort to promote the constructivist assumption on learning should not be accompanied by top-down and authoritative imposition, one-way and hierarchical flow of information. Within the current practices, all teachers, regardless of their individual and school needs, are made to participate in the same professional development activities. As evidenced by the stories, the involvement of teachers in the process of developing professional development policy and program is hardly seen and there was no teachers' sense of ownership and agency within their own professional learning. The findings contradict with what researchers' sated as professional development cannot be forced rather developed actively from within (McCarthy, 2006; Bubb & Earley, 2007; Kleinhenz, & Fleming, 2007).

From what the teachers narrated, continuing professional development seems to have focused mostly on teaching as techniques to be learned, and teachers as technicians. Such a view was labeled as the traditional model (see, Harpaz, 2005), and criticized as it undermines the agency of the student for their own self-formation (Kemmis et al., 2014). Teachers who are preoccupied by the traditional model think that learning is listening, teaching is telling, knowledge is an object, and being educated means knowing the knowledge learned in school (Harpaz, 2005; Zeichner, 2013). Teachers as learners are expected to be actively engaged in their learning, rather than being passive recipients of transmitted information by experts (Harpaz, 2005). Conversely, the available professional learning focuses on helping teachers to deliver predetermined content designed by distant experts, emphasizes the prescriptive nature of knowledge and skill based. Such technical orientations, as Kincheloe (2004) noted, imply a hierarchical impulse that is incompatible with an inclusive, democratic worldview. Within the current practice, teachers' professionalism becomes eroded and downgraded. The emphasis is placed on greater centralized control and accountability where standards of practice are achieved in technical and scientific ways as standards of skill and knowledge. Heavy control on the teaching profession and the undermining of teachers' practice lead to deskilling and deprofessionalization (Gemeda et al., 2013). In deprofessionalization within such situation, teachers' professional expertise is rendered obsolete, the curriculum to be enacted is 'handed down', the state has pre-determined the desired outcomes, compliance and regulation become the norm. Teachers are engaged in form-filling and busy work, which was characterized as deskilling (Gemeda et al., 2013).

The central reform planners either hardly understood or ignored the school realities. The majority of teachers were trained by the traditional old curriculum that did not go with the current reform demands. Consequently, teachers did not have the theoretical and practical experience of action research, continuous assessment and student

centered teaching approaches. Therefore, it seemed meaningless to tell the teachers who were not prepared adequately in their pre-service teacher education program to enact these changes. For example, ordering teachers, who have neither theoretical nor practical knowledge of action research, to conduct action research is challenging. It is, therefore, crucial to ensure that the teachers have adequate knowledge and skills of the demands of the reform before embarking in to the reform.

The agenda of improving school is not an easy task. It requires the transformation of teachers' learning, which as Feiman-Nemser, (2001) described, a radical idea at the center of school reform. Several researchers (see, Guskey, 2000; Elmore, 2002; Gemeda & Tynjala, 2015) have documented professional development of teachers as a key strategy for continuous improvement of schools. Conversely to what the findings of the study reveals, research studies criticized one-shot workshop, fragmented, prescriptive, hierarchical, deficit based, and one size fits all model of professional learning (Bubb & Earley, 2007; Wei et al., 2009; Gemeda & Tynjala, 2015). Unlike the traditional approaches, studies characterize effective professional learning as collaborative, reflective, job embedded, ongoing and learning focused (Wei et al., 2009; Gemeda and Tynjala, 2015). Rather than viewing teachers as technicians who implement program change designed by distant experts, effective professional learning empowers teachers and enables them to become agent of and for change.

Concluding Remarks

The findings revealed an important understanding about the nature of professional learning in Ethiopian secondary schools. Accordingly, the current professional development practice was overwhelmed with centrality and uniformity of reform across a country, paradoxical and self- defeating goals and aims, limiting professional development to paper game, treatment of teachers as technician, routinization of teachers and teaching activity. It was clear from participant descriptions that the existing professional development program was not up to its premise, rather filled with problems, chaos, contradictions. The government's effort to initiate nationwide professional development might not be a problem per se but the process matters. A top-down hierarchical arrangement in effecting professional development program not only position teachers out of the knowledge generation and passive recipients of new innovation but also antithetical to the governments rhetoric of the reform intention. The policy documents and professional development guideline stated that the focus of the reform is to promote effective and reflective teaching, active learning, student- centered approaches and continuous assessment (MoE, 2003).

A fundamental shift in thinking is required in approach to teaching and learning. The process of initiating professional development program needs to align itself with the change that the government want to instigate into schools. The effort to promote constructivists assumption on learning should not be accompanied by top-down and

authoritative imposition, one-way and hierarchical flow of information. The power relationships that inform and control the behavior of everyone in educational settings influences the culture and every practice in the school as it mirrors and helps to sustain the structures at different levels in the education settings. For instance, teachers regard students the way the system and their superiors regard them. Hence, the whole activity and practices should gear toward the change wanted to happen in the school. To this end, teachers' involvement in their own professional development planning and other reform effort is a crucial step in avoiding what teachers complained as authoritative imposition and too much top-down command. This further promotes joint construction of knowledge and learner-centered environment.

Educating students is the collective effort of many stakeholders. Owing to this, all stakeholders need to contribute their fair share and render the required support to ensure students learn and achieve. Evaluating the success of the current professional development program on the bases of test scores and making teachers accountable to what students achieve, limits the conception of student achievement. It narrowly defines student learning and achievement to easily measureable knowledge and skills. This encourages a culture of teaching to the test instead of preparing students for the demand and realities of the changing and challenging world. Hence, as McLaughlin and Mitra (2001) suggest, those who are impacted by the change are able to better understand the big picture.

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