

Collaborative Strategies for Teacher-Led Professional Development among Teachers of English



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ABSTRACT: This article reports on an action research study that involved teachers of English leading their own professional development, while establishing the collaborative strategies that they can use to do this. Teachers collaborating in professional development is a departure from the traditional modes where teachers are taken through presentations that are meant to equip them with what facilitators feel they need to know about classroom practices. In this study, the teachers identified their individual challenges with practice and then worked in collaboration with a colleague to overcome them. This was done through the use of a number of collaborative strategies that find support in research studies on teacher learning. The findings bring out practical collaborative strategies that can improve the classroom practices of teachers as well as their collegial relationships.

KEY WORDS: Teacher professional development; Classroom practices; Teachers of English; Collaborative strategies

I. INTRODUCTION

Teacher professional development and teacher learning are concepts that have gained considerable attention worldwide. This is especially because there is concern the world over about the falling standards of education and the resultant questioning about the quality of the facilitators of learning: the teachers. In the recent past, studies have emerged that have established that an effective teacher plays a great role in determining student learning outcomes (Putnam & Borko, 2000; Johnson, 2006). Indeed, literature on teacher professional development concur on the view that if the teacher's classroom practice is to be effective, then teachers regardless of their length of service must engage in professional development (Mizell, 2010; Fullan, 2007; Harwel, 2003). This has resulted in significant efforts by governments and Ministry of education officials worldwide, to avail development opportunities for their teaching workforce.

Research and literature also consistently show that professional development (PD) is likely to transform teaching and increase student learning only if it is applied in the teacher's classroom (Wong, Britton & Ganser, 2005; Mizell, 2010). What this means is that while teachers must learn, the learning should find application in the practice of the teacher with the result being improvement in classroom practice and learner outcomes. Arguably, the common practice of teachers learning for certification and promotion cannot be considered effective PD as the intention misses the mark of improving practice and learner outcomes. Recent research studies connect teacher learning to effectiveness in practice and therefore suggest that teachers implementing their learning has far reaching effects on what their students learn and how they learn it (Marzano, 2013, Putnam & Borko, 2000).

While the need for effective PD is a critical one, how to structure the PD for effectiveness has been an issue for governments and a subject of studies for some time now. Villegas-Reimer (2003) notes that the only forms of PD that have been available to teachers for a long time are those situated away from the teacher's workplace and offering new information as identified by education officials. This scenario is true form any developing contexts and countries including Kenya and Bungoma South sub-county and the practice is even more evident in the PD offered to teachers of English. While the setting of PD experiences away from the classroom context may enable teachers to think in new ways, Broad & Evans (2006) contend that the process of integrating new ideas and practices in one's classroom may not be simple or straight forward. Yet organizers of traditional PD do not seem to be cognizant of this shortcoming.

In the past decade, a considerable body of knowledge has emerged aimed at establishing what needs to be changed about teacher PD in order to make it more effective. These studies have revealed what we now know are the challenges with traditional PD, which include the fact that it does not take into account how teachers learn; its organization lacks the input of the teacher who is the target of the learning experiences; its focus and duration do not allow for learning to emerge and its failure to address teachers' individual challenges with practice (Putnam & Borko, 2000; Gathumbi, Mungai & Hintze, 2013). Yet despite these shortcomings of traditional PD, literature suggests that it... "is not useless, but it can never be powerful enough, specific enough or sustained

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enough to alter the culture of the classroom or school” (Fullan, 2007; 1). Perhaps what needs to happen is a critical analysis of the above challenges with a view to come up with strategies that support on-going teacher learning that is guided by the professional needs of the teacher.

On the other hand, literature suggests that in schools there are teachers who have found ways to help their students learn and these strategies and practices can be shared with colleagues in an environment that allows for support in the implementation process (Westbrook, Durrain, Brown, Orr, Pryor, Boddy and Salvin, 2013; Mizell, 2010). What this implies is that teachers can learn from their own classroom and school context in ways that enhance the integration of learning in their everyday work; allows them to engage in solving context specific problems, while affording them opportunities to try out new ideas, make mistakes, get feedback and adjust accordingly. However, school-based teacher learning will require strategies that can make it effective in order to avoid random learning that is unpredictable and unplanned (Wilson & Berne, 1999). A review of literature on teacher professional development reveals a number of collaborative strategies that are informed by research (Zaare, 2012; Garber, 2014; Degan, 2018). This study sought to try them out in the developing world context of Bungoma, Kenya.

From a theoretical perspective, a number of studies have proposed adoption of social learning theories like that of Wenger in order to make PD more collaborative, interactive, long term, offering supportive feedback and involving school based action research. Kafyulilo (2013) proposes teacher collaboration that can happen in communities of practice, lesson study groups, professional learning communities and teacher design team, as a link that would enable teachers to share their difficulties and successes and thus improve their practice. Additionally, there are calls for the institutionalization of PD to position it in the daily activities of teachers and to meet their individual challenges with practice. It is against the background of these views that this article examines collaborative learning for improved practice among teachers of English and the strategies that can enhance this.

This paper has emerged from a study where twelve teachers of English in Bungoma South sub-county, Kenya were involved in teacher-led professional development. The aim of the study was to explore the process of teacher-led professional development and the effect of this on the classroom practices of the teachers of English. The research questions underpinning this paper are:

- (i) What strategies can teachers of English use to lead their professional development?
- (ii) How does teacher-led professional development enhance the classroom practices of teachers of English?

The article begins by outlining the theories of adult learning, which form the theoretical foundation for the action research study on which the article is based. Then the methodology of the study and the action research process used are outlined to enable the reader to get an idea of the strategies that were applied and how they worked. The article also brings out the effect of using the collaborative strategies on the classroom practices of the teachers who were involved in the study.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The overall aim of the study was an exploration of how teachers can lead their own professional growth with the support of a colleague and to establish the effect of this on the classroom practices of the teachers. The implication here is that in working collaboratively with a colleague, teachers gain practical knowledge and thus the need to take into consideration how adults learn. The theories used in this study guided the choice of the research design that aimed to leverage on the experiences of the teachers as they assist each other with the identified challenges in their classroom practices.

Mezirow's (1991) theory of Transformative Learning informed the study by its focus on the unique way in which adults learn as opposed to how children learn. Its key themes emphasize the centrality of adult learners' experiences as the beginning point of any learning, in order to anchor new ideas. In this, Mezirow agrees with Kolb's (1984) theory of Experiential Learning where experience is central in the learning process unlike other theories that emphasize acquisition, manipulation and recall of abstract symbols. It is a truism that the teaching profession is one that involves sharing information and since every practicing teacher has some experience of what has worked in their classroom, then collaborative learning is a possibility among teachers. This study examined the collaborative strategies used by the teachers and established their use and ability to support teacher learning in meaningful ways. Indeed, scholars have established that the challenge for teachers is not the uptake of new knowledge, but the implementation of new skills and application of knowledge in their classrooms (GulamHussein, 2013) and thus the need for strategies of doing this.

According to Kolb (1984), learning can be viewed as a continuous process of human adaptation to situations without being limited to settings or life stages. This clearly describes the situation that teachers find themselves in where their profession is continually evolving and therefore demanding that they learn new practices. Indeed, the notion that a teacher is someone who needs to learn, unlearn and re-learn holds true and thus the need for them to be equipped to learn anytime and with whoever they want to learn with. Arguably, teacher learning cannot be confined to those workshops that are organized once in a while in a 'one-size-fits-all' manner, instead it should be a lifelong process where ideas are formed and re-formed over time resulting in invaluable experiences that can then be shared with others. Furthermore, teacher learning should not be the preserve of veteran teachers who have been in the practice for some time or novice teachers who are entering the profession, instead it should encompass all levels of the teaching career.

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In Greeno's (1997), *Situated Perspective on Cognition*, learning is best situated in a context that plays an important role on what is learnt and how it is learnt. What this means is that learning experiences for teachers that are likely to transform teaching should happen in their workplace, specifically in their classrooms. Indeed, it is in the school and classroom contexts that the teacher can identify their unique challenge and experiment with solutions alongside a colleague(s) who can observe the teacher and if need be offer peer coaching. The emphasis here is that learning is social and the role of others cannot be ignored as they determine what is learnt and how learning takes place. According to Greeno (1997), cognition for adult learners is distributed and can be 'spread out' to others through organized or random fora, in a way that adults share information without any sense of competition.

These two theories and the perspective on cognition agree on the view that all learning is a social activity done in collaboration and for adult learners, past experiences form the basis for sharing. This implies that any learning experience for teachers needs to be structured to allow them to share what has worked and to support each other in implementing the skills. These aspects of adult learning were taken into consideration in this study through the choice of the action research design and introduction of collaborative strategies. By participating actively in seeking solutions to their challenges with classroom practice, the teachers emerged as autonomous thinkers who acknowledged their challenges and worked towards change.

III. METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

This was an action research study that explored the process of teacher-led professional development by involving teachers of English in Bungoma South sub-county in active learning and collaboration. The choice of action research was informed by the fact that it would allow collaborative efforts, making the participants contributing partners to their own learning. By using action research, the study participants were able to examine their own practice and apply interventions emerging from research and guided by the researcher, in what is termed 'insider research' (Mills, 2007; Wilson, 2009).

The study was conducted in Bungoma County of Western Kenya, one of the fourty-seven counties created under the new constitution of Kenya 2010. Due to the rigors of action research, the study delimited itself to Bungoma South sub-county, one of the nine sub-counties in Bungoma county. Secondary school students in this sub-county have consistently performed poorly in English, leading to persistent recommendations by researchers for in-service training of the teachers, yet the results have not shown any improvement.

The study lasted for four months and involved two teachers of English in each of the identified six secondary schools representing extra county, county and sub-county schools. The participants were 5 females and 7 males, of varying ages, levels of professional training and years of teaching experiences. The twelve teachers were identified by their school Principals from the total number of teachers of English in a research site. The researcher also identified and worked with two critical friends who engaged in objective discussions of the findings and the report.

The study made use of three research instruments during data collection to ensure that as much information about the phenomenon was collected with a view to increase the accuracy of the study (Hendricks, 2006). The research instruments used were questionnaires, interview schedules and observation guides since the study acknowledged that no one single instrument would be sufficient to gather data (Kumar, 2018). The study yielded both qualitative and quantitative data which were analyzed to reveal themes that were used to make claims about the study.

IV. THE ACTION RESEARCH PROCESS

The action research happened in 3 Phases. The pre-intervention phase was a situational analysis to establish the experiences of the teachers with available professional development opportunities, while allowing them to identify and write down their challenges with classroom practice. To get access into the teachers' experiences, a self-administered questionnaire was given to each of the participants. The findings were used to plan the intervention phase.

The first action in the intervention phase was to introduce teachers to strategies of collaboration through a training facilitated by the researcher, based on research supported strategies. The intervention followed the finding that although all participants cited occasional challenges, they did not have any channels of mitigating them. The training introduced the teachers to four strategies namely: lesson observation, peer coaching, lesson study and team teaching. To create interaction spaces for the teachers as they navigated through teacher collaboration, a WhatsApp platform titled Teacher Collaboration was set up. After the training, the teachers worked in pairs to assist each other in the areas of instruction and content where they had identified challenges. This phase happened in 5 cycles of planning, acting, observation, reflection and re-planning that were mainly done by the teachers with the support of the researcher. Each cycle was planned to implement a single collaborative strategy.

Cycle one was a lesson where action research lesson observation was applied without assigning a grade to the performance of the teachers. The process involved three stages: First was the pre-observation stage where the two teachers had a discussion and description of what they each considered as challenges in their teaching of English language content. This stage also involved agreeing on who would be first to observe the other in class, planning when this would happen and what aspect of practice to focus on. The second stage was the classroom observation where one teacher taught while the other observed the colleague's practice with a focus on the agreed aspects. Observation also involved making notes on a schedule developed for this purpose. The

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third stage involved dialogue on what was observed, what went well and what needs improvement and how the improvement is to be done. It is at this point that the participants would decide on whether to engage in peer coaching, team teaching or lesson study. Cycle two was a lesson aimed at addressing the challenges identified in the lesson observation undertaken in cycle one. The participants agreed on what strategy to apply to mitigate the challenges. The most preferred strategy was peer coaching, where the observing teacher would demonstrate ways of overcoming the challenge. The process began with a planning session to establish convenient time and identifying the content to be taught. The coach was mandated to develop a lesson plan and teach the lesson while the teacher with the challenge observes and makes notes. The teachers then had a discussion to establish what was observed. Each teacher then captured the process of the peer coaching in their reflective journals. This process was then repeated in the class of the other teacher (who was the coach).

Cycle Three was a lesson where the teachers combining their expertise in lesson delivery. This process involved planning for a lesson, identifying convenient time and implementing it. Due to the technicalities of having two teachers in a classroom and executing a single lesson, most participants allocated more time to this strategy by using 80 minutes or double lessons. The teachers then discussed their observations of the process and captured this in their reflective journals. A lesson taught using the team teaching strategy was undertaken in each teachers' classroom.

Cycle four was a lesson that enabled the teachers to engage in lesson study. The lesson study process involved planning for the lesson, identifying aspects of the lesson to observe, agreeing on the convenient time for the lesson and who was to implement it with the other teacher observing. The teachers then discussed their observations of the process and what can be done better next time to enhance learning and understanding for the students. The teachers also wrote their observations in their reflective journals.

Cycle Five was one lesson planned in each of the research sites to enable the researcher observe the teachers using any of the collaborative strategies in their classroom. This process involved the participants planning for the lesson, selecting a strategy to use, identifying convenient time and implementing it in the presence of the researcher. The researcher captured the observations by use of an observation schedule and wrote details as field notes. After the lesson, the participants and the researcher held a discussion session about the process.

The Post-intervention phasesought to establish the experiences of the teachers as they endeavored to improve their classroom practice with the assistance of a colleague. Data was collected through a self-administered questionnaire, audio-recorded face-to-face interviews for the pair of teachers and recorded reflections by teachers as captured in their reflective journals. Below are the findings for each strategy that the teachers applied in their classrooms.

V. FINDINGS

The first objective of the study was to establish the strategies that teachers of English can use to lead their own professional development given that in the past they were passive in their own PD. The teachers were introduced to collaborative strategies during their training mentioned in the action research process above. The data presented here is from the experiences of the participants who are identified using pseudonyms.

Data analysis shows that all the six study teams easily embraced lesson observation and used it to clearly establish their challenges with practice and to learn from each other. To describe her experience Ms. Celine said:

...Working with Madam Celestine has been a pleasure... it has enabled me to learn a lot from her, being my elder sister. I learnt a lot from the way she was handling students, her closeness to her students and the way she ensured they got the concepts, was very admirable. (Post-intervention interview, 19/6/2019).

For Ms. Sophie, lesson observation was an eye-opening experience that enabled her to be aware of her abilities and those of her colleague. Her observations then informed her future actions in class and her continuous efforts to improve. This is captured in her words:

...I am a better teacher by far. This whole thing has really helped me especially when it comes to observation. I have observed him 3 or 4 times and I realize the mistakes he makes normally do not come from the students. When I get back to my class I have this at the back of my mind and so I am always trying to involve them and make them more attentive and it has worked wonders for me (Post-intervention interview, 21/6/2019).

In a journal entry made on 14/3/2019, Mr. Antonne wrote the following:

I observed Mr. Ariel teach intransitive verbs in Form 3 Red, after I had taught the same class Transitive verbs. His technique of asking the learners questions was captivating and learners seemed to enjoy the lesson. Most of them participated actively in the discussion, unlike in my case where I used examples from various books, revision materials and even my lesson notes. He tended to use examples from students and his own examples without referring anywhere

Peer Coaching was another strategy that was applied by all the six teams in modelling practices that work in the classroom. The successful application of peer coaching is captured in the following excerpt by a teacher from Tumaini secondary school (a pseudonym):

Mr. Prolific: To sit down and listen to a teacher who is professionally younger than me explaining concepts in class, to me I can say it was such a refreshing experience and I enjoyed it and I learnt that indeed many years of service does not

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indicate that you know everything. There is a lot to learn from those who are new and energetic in the field. (Post-intervention interview, 19/6/2019).

This view was also held by other teams in the study who realized that every teacher has some strategy that has worked in their classroom practice which they can share. Ms. Raquel observed:

I have learnt a lot from this experience, it has made me a better teacher and I think it is something I would like to embrace because I have learnt from the other teacher and if I had weaknesses, right now I have worked on my weaknesses and indeed if I have strengths, then the other teacher has gained from me (Post-intervention interview, 20/6/2019).

Another popular strategy employed by all the six teams to support each other and student learning was Team Teaching. This is evident in Ms. Sophie's journal entry:

I must say the whole experience was very eye opening...Observing my colleague teaching I notice even my mistakes in him and I have been able to make a lot of corrections in the way I teach. Even for the students, the lessons have been more interactive and when they see the two of us going in and teaching together they pay more attention and the lessons become more exciting (Post-intervention interview 21/6/2019).

Interview data further reveals that teachers preferred team teaching for a number of reasons including the ability to enhance content coverage and to make learning fun. Mr. Ariel said:

I really was at home with team teaching...the learners responded positively and as a teacher, you realize that when sharing a class, you cover a lot such that what you have not explained, your colleague covers for you (Post-intervention interview, 1/7/2109)

Another reason for the popularity of team teaching was its ability to 'diffuse ownership' of teachers. To explain this phenomenon, Mr. Prolific stated that:

...we have this situation where students imagine that Ms. Belinda is our teacher or Mr. Prolific is our teacher of English, period. In a situation where I am incapacitated by a flu or something and they do not see me, it becomes a lesson for her to teach. By team teaching, we have diffused ownership of teachers by students. (Post-intervention interview 19/6/2019).

Despite the above benefits, written reflections by the teachers reveal their challenges with collaborative strategies. In a journal entry, Ms. Raquel noted this about a team teaching session she had with her colleague:

Time was another challenge, because the lesson was so interactive, the students tended to derail the lesson out of excitement. This was kept in control by ensuring learners did not take too much time discussing one issue (Journal entry, 20/3/2019).

While team teaching had an effect on the learners who became more attentive and active, it also presented the teachers with the challenge of classroom and time management. This points out an important consideration for teachers who set out to apply team teaching in their lessons, that of classroom control.

Data from the journal entries of the teachers, post-intervention interviews, lesson study reports and the researcher's notes indicated that lesson study was used by three out of six teams to understand student learning, especially how they learnt or did not learn. For Mr. Adrian and his colleague, lesson study lead to a change in the way they taught and how their students understood the literature set book. This is captured in his journal entry:

...I have learnt something by thinking about how my students understand what I teach them. We realized that our students were poor in understanding the setting of "Blossoms of the Savannah" because they struggle to answer questions in class, but after lesson study, we changed how we explained setting and involved learners, then there was some change. I think we will do more (Journal entry, 1/4/2019)

While lesson study seems to hold great promise in informing the teaching and learning process, data from the researcher's notes show that lesson study was one strategy that received less attention compared to the other three strategies. Only three out of six teams implemented it in their classrooms. The following excerpt tries to explain why this happened:

Mr. Ariel: The most difficult to implement was the bit of lesson study.

Researcher: What was difficult about it?

Mr. Ariel: The process. What you have to capture according to the form provided. I think it makes it difficult from the word go... (Post-intervention interview, 1/7/2019).

Agreeing, Ms. Belinda said:

...Basically, it wasn't easy for us to get the time to sit down and discuss, identify the issue and then go to class to study it, then again meet to discuss and repeat the process. Time was not there. When I have the time, my colleague is busy and vice versa, therefore striking a balance was a challenge. But we tried those strategies that required less planning and meeting. (Post-intervention interview 19/2/2019)

The views of Mr. Ariel and Ms. Belinda offer some explanation why lesson study was not given a lot of attention. Data from interviews further reveal that teachers found the preparation for an experiment lesson long and demanding requiring a lot of time in the planning, enacting the lesson, writing the report and undertaking a follow-up lesson to try out the recommendations and

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watch the effect. Indeed, data from the researcher's reflective journal showed that even the teams which implemented the first cycle of lesson study made minimal efforts to carry out a follow-up lesson to try out the recommendations from the first experiment lesson (Researcher's diary, 2019).

Data from the post-intervention interviews and the WhatsApp Teacher Collaboration platform showed that 8 out of 12 of the teachers found useful ideas on social media for classroom practice and were motivated through social media interaction.

Commenting on her experience, Ms. Sophie said:

It was very useful, getting experiences from other teachers from other schools and reading about their challenges encourages you and you want to learn (Post-intervention interview, 21/6/2019)

However, Ms. Celestine had a different experience with social media interaction as aptly captured in this extract:

Researcher: Now, in the process of collaboration, we had a forum, Teacher Collaboration on WhatsApp, was it useful?

Ms. Celestine: In fact, I was not very active.

Researcher: Why perhaps?

Ms. Celestine: I have phobia for social media because I feel that people may never really understand you...it is just a phobia, especially in groups, unless I know you, I am more of an introvert...you know I am more of old school, it would have helped me if I saw whom I am communicating with. (Post-intervention interview, 19/6/2019)

While Ms. Celestine's excuse for not interacting on social media could be associated with her age (45 years and above), she was not alone in this situation. Most of the teachers in the current study were in the age bracket of 25-29 years, yet their interaction on the wall was not consistent with the expected engagement of young people with social media. They read what was posted on the wall but only a few made any comments. To explain this disconnect Ms. Belinda, who is a younger teacher, commented:

On my part, the best thing that could be done was for us to meet, you know the WhatsApp was created but we never met, the 12 of us never met. The communication is done, you don't know who this person is... (Post-intervention interview, 19/6/2019).

This was corroborated by Mr. Antonne, who said:

I am young and I am always on WhatsApp but you know I could ask a question or two but those are people whom you don't know or are not sure if the question you are asking is relevant to them. I could instead ask my colleague rather than posting because you don't know who is there, how he/she will take the question...it could have been useful if we met and knew each other (Post-intervention interview 21/6/2019).

From the findings above, it appears that while the teachers in the study were introduced to a number of collaborative strategies, their engagement and implementation of each had a unique impact on their understanding, their practice and their relationship with each other and their learners. Below is a discussion of the findings.

VII. DISCUSSION

The study set out to establish the collaborative strategies that teachers of English can use to chart the path to their professional development and the effect of this on their classroom practices. This was important given that the teachers in the study had only been exposed to traditional PD where they were passive learners receiving new knowledge from facilitators. This is a common scenario in most developing world contexts, thus the study intervened by equipping the teachers with collaborative strategies in order to lead their own PD. Available research evidence on teacher-led professional development is from the West and Asia, where a number of collaborative strategies have been used by teachers with significant success and improvement in their practice.

Data analysis found that the collaborative strategies introduced to the teachers in this study received some significant support and use by the teachers. The analysis showed that lesson observation, peer coaching and team teaching were clearly popular, as exemplified in some of the excerpts above. That is, these three strategies offered the teachers an opportunity to enter into each other's 'world of teaching and classroom' where they learnt new techniques and ways of teaching differently; were able to clearly identify their weaknesses and gaps in practice even as they observed a colleague and, they ended up developing professional relationships of trust and sharing. While the teachers in the study were already engaged in evaluative lesson observation as a requirement by their employer, the description they gave of their experiences with these strategies showed that they found them both useful and exciting. These results may be due to the fact that the strategies used here were non-evaluative and so the teachers felt free to expose their challenges to one another without fear of judgement. These findings are consistent with what Noguera (2018) and Shing (n.d) found in their studies, that non-evaluative lesson observation enhanced the teachers' ability to observe each other with more openness and willingness than the evaluative lesson observation. The implication for education officials and school administrators is that PD opportunities should be structured for enabling teachers to improve their practice and not for evaluation purposes.

The study findings also suggest that teachers can engage in collaborative teaching and learning if they are equipped with the means to do this. Collaborative strategies like lesson observation, peer coaching and team teaching used in the study were embraced by the teachers as means of sharing and modelling practices that have worked in one's classroom. This is not an obvious practice given that in most pre-service training, teachers are socialized to work alone in their classroom with their learners as only

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the audience and will often resist intrusion into this domain. This was evident in a study by Hismanoglu (2010) that aimed to explain what professional development strategies language teachers preferred. According to Hismanoglu, 84% of teachers of English in his study considered professional development an important part of their profession but generally neglected collaborative activities. While teachers in the current study described their experiences as 'eye-opening' 'refreshing' and 'the best experience' those in Hismanoglu's study felt that collaborative activities were too demanding and they risked exposing their weaknesses. This view can be attributed to lack of a clear understanding of the benefits of collaboration and thus the need to sensitize practicing teachers on the advantages of collaborating.

The use of collaborative strategies as exemplified by the extracts above also showed that teachers can be both learners and teachers as hypothesized by Greeno's (1997) Situated Perspective on Cognition which contends that cognition is distributed and can be spread out to others. The teachers were involved in modelling practices for a colleague and also identifying and implementing new teaching strategies. The excerpts showed that the effects of collaborative teaching spread even to the students who became active and enjoyed the lessons. The increased participation by learners may have been encouraged by what they observed in their teachers that included team work, variety in teaching styles and improved teaching practices that resulted in enjoyable lessons. According to Degan (2018), teaching as a team is a powerful way for teachers to model collaboration to their learners in ways that will enable them observe sharing of ideas, resources, teachers and learners. However, even with collaborative strategies, findings from this study and others reveal that time was a challenge in implementing a joint lesson while at the same time there was fear that students may compare the teachers' knowledge and skills. This suggests the need for planning when using the strategies to ensure that while the teachers and students benefit through improved practice other critical aspects of schooling like time management and a teacher's self-esteem, do not suffer.

The successful uptake of lesson observation, peer coaching and team teaching seems to point to a silent need by the teachers to find ways of working on challenges with classroom practice, that are practical and are easily available when need arises. The excitement expressed in some of the excerpts as the teachers realized that they could trust a colleague in their school context with their challenges and get support in filling the gaps is evidence that they had discovered a way out. These results may be due to the fact that while teachers had years of experience with practices they have used, the only way they would share this is verbally in casual conversations or in departmental meetings. The introduction and implementation of collaborative strategies provided a link between experience and improving practice that agrees with the contention of Mezirow (1991) that adult learning is grounded on problem solving through practical ideas. Additionally, the application of what has been learnt in one's classroom and the support provided by the colleague in the event of any challenges with implementation of new practices, is arguably a factor that counts for what literature on teacher learning has called effective PD (Harwel, 2003; Borko, 2004).

While the above discussion shows significant effect from implementing lesson observation, peer coaching and team teaching, analysis of data on lesson study revealed reluctance and minimal attention in applying this strategy. The excerpts reveal a number of reasons put forward by the teachers to explain this phenomenon, especially that it is demanding in terms of paper work and planning time. While this explanation is reasonable, it also points to the need for pre-service training to take into consideration emerging trends that enable teachers to learn about their practice alone or with others. The minimal attention paid to lesson study may also be due to the fact that the teachers have heavy teaching loads in a decade where classrooms are big, while at the same time holding other school responsibilities that do not leave them a lot of time and energy. Such findings concur with what Rock & Wilson (2005) found, that the lesson study process requires substantial time and commitment and thus the need to ensure separate school time for the teachers to plan and implement it. Despite this finding, Rock and Wilson established that Japanese teachers still follow eight steps in their collaborative lesson study, guided by a strong belief emanating from their pre-service training, that studying their lessons will improve their teaching and lead to school-wide improvement. While lesson study as a strategy to enhance teacher learning was not well implemented in this current study, it however remains one strategy that provides an opportunity to study learners and their learning with a view to improve how the teacher can exploit pedagogical practices to improve learning outcomes.

The other strategy that was not well implemented according to data analysis was the use of the WhatsApp platform to share ideas among the teams in this study. Only 8 out of 12 of the teachers found useful ideas for classroom practice and were motivated through social media interaction in what is termed informal professional development. The remaining 4 teachers expressed fear about engaging on WhatsApp, especially given the way WhatsApp groups are formed and how information can be shared without due regard to the interests of an individual. According to pre-service teachers in a study by Alenazi (2018) WhatsApp is a communication tool for staying up to date with peers and sharing information with no obligation. This could explain the detached manner in which the teachers in this study engaged on the platform, coupled with the idea that they were unfamiliar with each other, that is apart from their collaborating partners. The solution to this could be found in the findings of a study by Alberth et al (2018) that proposed blending of face-to-face sessions with the on-line component to reduce the feeling of sharing 'delicate' information with a stranger.

Arguably, the lack of face-to-face interaction in a common forum for the teachers denied this study full realization of the benefits of using social media in informal professional development. This is contrary to what Suardika, Alberth, Mursalim, Salim,

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Suhartini&Pasassung (2020) established in a study involving students of education, where the group that used WhatsApp reported a stronger sense of community and more benefits of the platform. For one of the teachers in the current study, her excuses for not interacting on social media could be associated with her age (45 years and above) and her teaching experience (19 years) which some studies have identified as important delimiting factors for why teachers do not take up changes easily (Rock & Wilson, 2005). What this means is that there is need to encourage teachers to embrace social media platforms as spaces where informal professional development can happen, especially if ethical use of the platform is adhered to. This is important given the fact that the future of communication and learning is in digital spaces and so the facilitators of knowledge in this century should be well equipped and comfortable with technology, if they have to assist their learners fit in this digital dispensation. The lesson learnt here is that before engaging in informal PD on social media, it is important that the teachers meet to create some bonding that will allow them to exercise some level of trust while interacting on social networks.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to demonstrate the fact that teachers can learn whenever they wish to and with however they want to, as long as they are equipped with collaborative strategies. This is important given that teachers especially in developing world contexts have always been passive recipients of PD, which often does not address their individual challenges with practice. Available literature reveals significant shifts in the West and parts of Asia towards teachers charting their own path to professional development, although very little has been documented in developing world contexts like Kenya and Bungoma South Sub-county. This study made significant conclusions regarding the phenomenon of teacher lead professional development and the collaborative strategies that can be used to enhance this. First, that despite the fact that teachers in the study have always been passive recipients of knowledge, when introduced to collaborative strategies they were able to teach and learn collaboratively. Secondly, that there are a number of collaborative strategies that teachers can use, although non-evaluative ones seem to be embraced easily for their ability to minimize the fear that comes with judgement and grading. Even where teachers have challenges with using certain strategies, this can be surmounted through training at both pre-service and in-service levels. Thirdly, that teachers at all levels of their career are significant resources that can be exploited and guided to provide practical ideas for classroom practice that can result in enjoyable lessons and hopefully, improved learning outcomes. Teachers are their own best models.

This article contributes to knowledge on teacher-led professional development, especially in a developing world context where it is a novel idea that can benefit from more research especially with a bigger study population and over an extended period. The findings have implications for pre-service teacher training and education officials even as they seek to support teacher learning in practical ways. The guiding principle for such efforts is best captured by Mizel's (2010) argument that, "Good teaching is not an accident...it is a result of study, reflection, practice and hard work"p. 10. This view points to active teacher involvement in their own professional development, if there is to be any hope for quality teaching and improved learner outcomes.

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