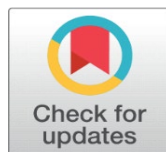
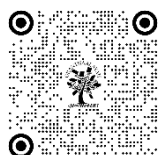


CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: A CASE STUDY OF POST-FUNDAMENTAL SCHOOLS IN BUJUMBURA PROVINCE, BURUNDI

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the challenges and opportunities in teacher professional development in post-fundamental schools in Bujumbura Province, Burundi. A sample of 92 teachers from 15 randomly selected post-fundamental schools participated in the study. Data were collected using a 32-item questionnaire, covering aspects such as the need for professional development, programme organisation, resource availability, and participation. The findings revealed significant challenges, including inadequate organisation of programmes, insufficient time allocation, a lack of infrastructure, and disparities in participation. Despite these challenges, there is a strong demand for professional development among teachers, with particular needs identified in areas such as ICT and pedagogy. The study highlights key opportunities to improve professional development by better organising programmes, increasing teacher involvement in decision-making, and providing adequate resources and incentives. Addressing these issues could significantly enhance the quality of education in post-fundamental schools in Bujumbura Province.

Keywords: Teacher Professional Development, Post-Fundamental Schools, Bujumbura, Burundi, ICT Training, Pedagogy, Educational Infrastructure

1. INTRODUCTION

Education is widely recognized as a critical factor in driving positive societal changes and fostering prosperous development within communities. At the heart of this educational process are teachers, who serve as the key drivers in helping nations achieve their developmental goals. To effectively fulfill this crucial role, teachers must continually engage in professional development to acquire new knowledge and update their existing skills.

The importance of teacher professional development cannot be overstated, particularly in developing countries like Burundi, where educational resources may be limited and teaching methodologies may lag behind global standards. In the context of Burundi's post-fundamental schools, which cater to students after their basic education, the need for well-

Through this case study, we aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of the professional development landscape for teachers in Bujumbura Province. The findings will not only highlight the existing challenges but also suggest actionable opportunities to enhance the professional development system, ultimately contributing to the betterment of the educational experience for both teachers and students.

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Burundi, a small landlocked country in East Africa, has faced numerous challenges in its education sector due to political instability, limited resources, and a growing population. The country's education system is structured into four levels: pre-school, fundamental (primary and lower secondary), post-fundamental (upper secondary), and higher education. Post-fundamental education, which is the focus of this study, typically spans three years and prepares students for university education or vocational training.

In recent years, the government of Burundi has made efforts to improve the quality of education, including initiatives to enhance teacher professional development. However, these efforts have been hampered by various factors, including limited financial resources, inadequate infrastructure, and a shortage of qualified trainers (UNESCO, 2018).

The Bujumbura Province, which includes the capital city, represents a significant portion of the country's educational infrastructure and student population. As such, understanding and addressing the professional development needs of teachers in this province can have a substantial impact on the overall quality of education in Burundi.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Despite the crucial role of teacher professional development, there is limited research on the specific challenges and opportunities for post-fundamental school teachers in Bujumbura Province, Burundi. This gap impedes the effective design of programs that could enhance teaching quality and improve student outcomes.

While some professional development activities exist, their relevance and impact on teachers' needs remain largely unexamined. Additionally, the challenges that hinder teachers' full participation and benefit from these programs have not been systematically explored in the context of post-fundamental schools in Burundi.

1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objectives of this study are:

1. To identify the professional development needs of post-fundamental school teachers in the Bujumbura Province of Burundi.
2. To examine the current professional development activities conducted for these teachers.
3. To investigate the problems and challenges faced in implementing effective professional development programs.
4. To suggest measures for improving the professional development of post-fundamental school teachers in the region.

1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study offers valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities in professional development for post-fundamental school teachers in Bujumbura Province, Burundi. It identifies key gaps in current programs, highlights obstacles to effective implementation, and proposes strategies for improvement. The findings will help inform policy decisions and contribute to more targeted and impactful professional development initiatives, ultimately enhancing teaching quality and student outcomes.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 OVERVIEW OF EXISTING STUDIES ON PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR TEACHERS IN SIMILAR CONTEXTS

Professional development in post-fundamental schools in Burundi focuses on enhancing teachers' skills to meet the evolving demands of education. Studies by Pannone (2023) and Osei-Owusu (2022) emphasize the importance of professional development in improving both teacher effectiveness and student performance. However, many teachers in Burundi face challenges, such as limited opportunities, insufficient resources, and programmes that are not tailored

to their specific needs (Acevedo, 2013). Despite these challenges, professional development is vital for maintaining teacher motivation and improving educational outcomes (Ross, 2023).

2.2 KEY THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS GUIDING TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Professional development is supported by adult learning theory, which highlights the need for practical, experience-based learning for teachers (Kennedy, 2016). Constructivist learning theory further stresses the importance of active participation and reflection in professional development (Watkins, 2019). Additionally, the networked learning framework emphasizes collaboration among teachers, which fosters shared learning and improves professional growth (Bayar, 2014).

2.3 THE ROLE OF ICT, PEDAGOGY, AND SUBJECT SPECIALISATION IN PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

The integration of ICT into education is crucial, though many teachers in Burundi face barriers due to limited resources and infrastructure (Witherspoon, 2022). Developing skills in pedagogy is equally important, as teachers need to adopt more student-centered teaching methods (Arakaza & Mugabo, 2022). Furthermore, subject specialisation remains critical for teachers to stay updated and deepen their expertise, though ongoing training in this area is often lacking (Steinert, 2014).

Teacher professional development in Burundi is essential for improving education, but challenges like resource constraints and insufficient ICT training persist. By focusing on targeted programmes that align with key learning theories, professional development can better address the needs of teachers in post-fundamental schools.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

This study employed a descriptive survey design to investigate the professional development needs, activities, and challenges faced by post-fundamental school teachers in the Bujumbura Province of Burundi. This design was chosen for its ability to provide a comprehensive overview of the current situation and to gather data from a relatively large sample of teachers.

3.2 POPULATION AND SAMPLING

A random sampling technique was used to select participants for the study. From the total of 59 public post-fundamental schools in Bujumbura Province, the researcher randomly selected 15 schools. From each of these schools, seven teachers were randomly chosen, resulting in a final sample size of 92 post-fundamental school teachers. This approach ensured that each school and teacher had an equal chance of being included in the study, promoting representativeness and reducing sampling bias.

3.3 DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

To gather the necessary information, the researcher developed a questionnaire aimed at exploring teachers' professional development needs, activities, challenges, and suggestions for improvement. The questionnaire consisted of both closed-ended and open-ended questions, covering the following areas. The closed-ended questions focused on:

- The availability, organisation, and participation in professional development activities.
- Teachers' perceptions of the importance, relevance, and effectiveness of these programmes.
- Specific areas where teachers felt they needed further training, such as ICT, pedagogy, classroom management, and evaluation.

The questionnaires were distributed to all 92 participants, and the data collection was conducted over a period of several weeks. The researcher ensured that all participants were provided with sufficient time to complete the questionnaires. At the end of the data collection process, all 92 questionnaires were successfully retrieved.

3.4 DATA ANALYSIS

The collected data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, were used to summarize and present the findings. For open-ended questions, responses were categorized and coded to identify common themes and patterns.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED IN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The study revealed several significant challenges hindering effective professional development for post-fundamental school teachers in Bujumbura Province, Burundi. These challenges are as follows:

4.1.1 LACK OF ORGANISATION AND INSUFFICIENT TIME

As indicated in Table 1, all teachers acknowledged the availability of professional development activities, but only 47.8% found these programmes to be well-organised. Furthermore, a majority (88%) of the teachers stated that the time allocated for these programmes was insufficient. This lack of adequate planning and time constraints reduces the impact of professional development efforts. Prior research supports this finding, as poorly organised programmes with insufficient duration have been shown to diminish their overall effectiveness (Ross, 2023). Effective professional development requires not only well-structured content but also ample time for teachers to engage meaningfully.

Table 1: Availability, Organisation and Time Duration of Professional Development Programmes

	Yes	No
Availability	93 (100%)	0 (0%)
Organisation	44 (47.8%)	48 (52.2%)
Time duration	11 (12%)	81 (88%)

4.1.2 INADEQUATE RESOURCES AND INFRASTRUCTURE

In Table 2, it was found that 72.2% of respondents believed their schools lacked the necessary infrastructure to support professional development. This lack of resources, coupled with limited financial incentives for participation (reported by 82.6% of respondents), contributes to low motivation among teachers to participate in these activities. In line with the literature, adequate resources such as technology and proper venues are crucial for successful professional development (Postholm, 2012). Without addressing these basic needs, professional development initiatives will continue to face barriers.

Table 2. Infrastructure Adequacy, Incentives Provision, Gender Consideration and Need for Improvement in Professional Development Programmes

	Yes	No
Adequacy of Infrastructure	21 (22.8%)	71 (72.2%)
Provision of Incentives	16 (17.4%)	76 (82.6%)
Gender Consideration	27 (29.3%)	60 (70.7%)
Need for Improvement	83 (90.2%)	9 (9.8%)

4.1.3 GAPS IN ICT AND OTHER TRAINING NEEDS

One of the most pressing gaps in professional development was in ICT training, with nearly half of the teachers (49.6%) identifying this as a key area where they require support (Table 3). In addition, teachers pointed to pedagogy (44.6%) and classroom management (14.5%) as other important areas for training. These gaps reflect a broader issue in education, where the rapid integration of technology and evolving pedagogical practices have outpaced the training provided to educators. Studies have highlighted the importance of continuous ICT training to help teachers meet the demands of modern classrooms (Almerich et al., 2011).

Table 3. Needed Areas and Training Required in Professional Development Programmes

Response	Frequency/ (%)
Classroom Practices Management	55 (14.5%)
Co-Curricular Activities	27 (7.1%)
Evaluation	34 (9%)
ICT	189 (49.6%)
Pedagogy	169 (44.6%)
Subject of Specialisation	37 (9.8%)
Teaching Subjects	46 (12.2%)
21 st -Century Skills Implementation	39 (10.3%)

4.1.4 ISSUES RELATED TO EQUITY AND PARTICIPATION

Another challenge identified in Table 4 was the inequitable participation in professional development programmes. Over 60.9% of teachers reported that they had never participated in such programmes, and 64.1% stated that there was no

parity in opportunities to participate. These findings suggest systemic issues in ensuring fair access to professional development. This aligns with existing research, which shows that unequal access to professional development can create disparities in teacher quality and negatively impact student outcomes (Bayar, 2014).

Table 4. Frequency and Parity to Participate in Professional Development Programmes

Participation Frequency				Parity in Participation	
Once	Twice	Thrice	Never	Yes	No
28 (30.4%)	4 (4.3%)	4 (4.3%)	56 (60.9%)	33 (35.9%)	59 (64.1%)

4.2 OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

Despite the challenges identified, the study also highlighted several opportunities to improve professional development for teachers in Bujumbura Province.

4.2.1 HIGH DEMAND AND INTEREST IN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

A positive finding was the strong interest in professional development among teachers. Table 5 shows that 100% of teachers affirmed the importance of professional development programmes, and 63% of respondents in Table 6 expressed a desire to participate in such activities. This high level of interest indicates a strong foundation upon which improvements can be made. Prior studies have shown that when teachers are motivated and engaged, professional development can have a transformative impact on teaching practices (Kennedy, 2016).

Table 5. Need, Importance and Relevance for Professional Development Programmes

	Yes	No
Need	93 (100%)	0 (0%)
Importance	93 (100%)	0 (0%)
Relevance	78 (84.8%)	14 (15.2%)

Table 6. Awareness and Interest in Organised Professional Development Activities

	Yes	No
Awareness	44 (47.8%)	48 (52.2%)
Interest	58 (63%)	34 (37%)
Teaching Skills Enhancement	52 (56.6%)	40 (43.4%)

4.2.2 KEY AREAS FOR ENHANCING TEACHER SKILLS

The data identified specific areas where professional development could significantly enhance teacher effectiveness. **ICT** and **pedagogy** emerged as critical needs, as shown in **Table 3**. Given the increasing importance of technology in education, providing targeted training in ICT would be a crucial step in modernizing education in Bujumbura's post-fundamental schools. Additionally, focusing on pedagogical skills, such as classroom management and the implementation of student-centred teaching, would help align teacher practices with global educational standards (Arakaza & Mugabo, 2022).

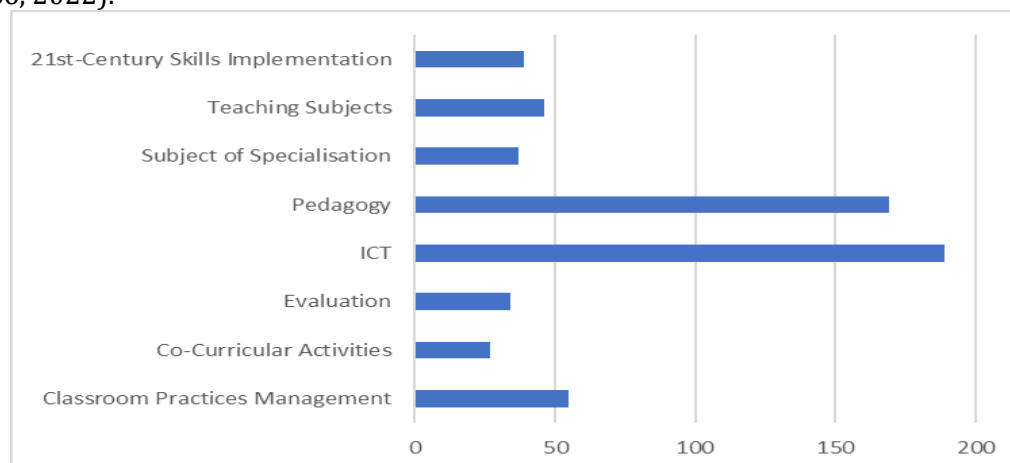


Figure 1: Needed Areas and Training Required in Professional Development Programmes

4.2.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Teachers provided several recommendations for improving professional development programmes. These included the need for better organisation, more structured and regular programmes, and greater involvement of teachers in decision-making processes. Teachers emphasised that their inclusion in planning would ensure that the programmes are more relevant and responsive to their specific needs. This is consistent with literature suggesting that professional development programmes are most effective when they are tailored to the needs of teachers and involve their input (Bayar, 2014). Furthermore, improvements in infrastructure, access to ICT tools, and financial incentives are necessary to create an environment conducive to professional growth.

4.3 IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

The results of this study have important implications for both policy and practice. The findings suggest that the Ministry of Education and other relevant stakeholders need to re-evaluate the current structure of professional development programmes. Adequate time and organisation, increased funding, and equitable access should be prioritised. In addition, targeted training in ICT and pedagogy should be developed to address the specific needs identified by teachers. The government must also focus on addressing resource shortages and infrastructure inadequacies, which have been major barriers to the success of professional development programmes.

Moreover, there is a need to ensure equal access to professional development opportunities for all teachers. This can be achieved through transparent selection processes and a commitment to inclusivity in professional development initiatives.

By addressing these challenges and leveraging the opportunities identified in this study, it is possible to create a more effective and impactful professional development system that enhances teacher skills and improves educational outcomes in Bujumbura Province.

5. CONCLUSION

This study explored the challenges and opportunities in professional development for post-fundamental school teachers in Bujumbura Province, Burundi. The findings revealed a complex interplay of factors that hinder effective professional development, including inadequate organisation, insufficient time, lack of infrastructure, and disparities in participation. The gaps in ICT training and the need for enhanced pedagogical skills further emphasize the pressing need for reform in teacher professional development programmes.

However, the study also uncovered significant opportunities for improvement. The high level of interest and demand for professional development among teachers, as well as the identification of key areas for skill enhancement, provides a solid foundation for future initiatives. Teachers are eager to engage in meaningful professional development if given the right support, structure, and resources.

To address the identified challenges, there is a need for better organisation, regular implementation of professional development activities, and equitable access for all teachers. Involving teachers in decision-making processes, improving infrastructure, and providing targeted ICT and pedagogy training are critical steps that could transform the current system. Furthermore, policy changes focusing on resource allocation, infrastructure development, and financial incentives for participation are essential for the long-term success of professional development programmes.

In conclusion, improving teacher professional development is key to enhancing the quality of education in Bujumbura's post-fundamental schools. By addressing both the challenges and opportunities identified in this study, stakeholders can create a more robust and effective system that empowers teachers and improves student outcomes. Future research should continue to explore strategies for implementing these recommendations and measuring their impact on teaching quality and student achievement.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None

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None

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