# The Perceptions and Experiences of School Management Teams and Teachers regarding Continuing Professional Development of Teachers in Digital Literacy amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic

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## Abstract

Since the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic gripped the world in 2020, the South African government, through the National Coronavirus Command Council (NCCC), introduced rigid regulations to curb the deadly novel coronavirus from spreading. The forced closure of schools was a bold step to take in order to manage the surge of the pandemic and save lives. While many schools resorted to online teaching, it became evident that many teachers lacked the necessary digital skills to manage online teaching programmes. Also, the lack of technological resources impacted negatively on teaching and learning in primary schools. This study aimed to determine the perceptions and experiences of School Management Teams (SMTs) and teachers regarding the provision of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) for teachers in digital literacy. Using a phenomenological approach, data was collected by means of interviews at four primary schools in the Nelson Mandela Bay Metropolitan area of the Eastern Cape Province. The study found that most SMT members did not make digital literacy a priority because they lacked the necessary knowledge and skills. It is recommended that teachers and SMTs should be trained in using digital platforms so that teaching and learning can be enhanced.

**Keywords**: continuous professional development, school management teams, digital literacy, online learning, digital skills development, teacher empowerment, technological resources, COVID-19 pandemic

# Introduction

As a society, South Africa is standing on the cusp of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and with this, comes an array of advanced technologies that impact directly on all spheres of society and industry (Lamprini & Brochler 2018). Globally, most progressive organisations have replaced manual systems and processes with advanced digital devices. The problem, however, is when measured against other formal organisations, education comes up lacking in the application of enhanced technology (Bozurt & Sharma 2020). It is one of the least innovative formal organisations when compared, for example, to healthcare or financial sectors (Lamprini & Brochler 2018). According to studies undertaken by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2013), it is established that only one in three adults worldwide have skills needed to succeed in a digital-literate world.

Mhlanga and Moloi (2020) state that the global pandemic came as a much-needed revelation for the education sector in South Africa; specifically, at primary, secondary and tertiary education level. Daniel (2020) avers that COVID-19 has indeed been the greatest difficulty that education systems around the world have ever faced. He further states that many governments around the world required various educational establishments to halt face-to-face instruction and with extraordinarily little warning, placed pressurised educational institutions to continue instruction through online platforms. Advanced technology and more especially, digital literacy are indispensable in the 21st century; even more so, considering the current state of education and the COVID-19 pandemic that has gripped nations globally (Allen *et al.* 2020). It became imperative for teachers to effectively turn to social media as a way of keeping in touch with learners, and online teaching and learning. It is thus crucial that teachers not only have the necessary digital literacy knowledge and skills to accomplish online teaching but also effectively use these acquired skills effectively in their day-to-day classroom interactions, in order to make learning more relevant and meaningful to learners (Paudel 2021).

To curb the spread of COVID-19, most of the governments globally enforced a lockdown for their countries by closing, among others, the economy and the educational sector (Allen *et al.* 2020; Paudel 2021). The National Coronavirus Command Council (NCCC), a temporary legislative body, enforced similar conditions in South Africa. Thus, schools were compelled to close under lockdown alert levels 3 – 5, partially opened under level 2, and became operational under level 1. However, in fear of children contracting the virus, many parents kept their children at home. During the COVID-19 pandemic, some schools have resorted to online teaching and learning. According to Le Grange (2020), parents are placed in a dilemma regarding sending their children to school. One of their main concerns is about teachers and learners experiencing serious challenges with online teaching. Apart from internet data problems, a main concern cited by parents, is teachers' lack of appropriate digital skills and knowledge to effectively teach online. It is thus vital for teachers to make paradigm shifts to become digitally savvy, especially in light of the current circumstances, brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic (Mahaye 2020).

In a South African context, the release of the White Paper on e-Education (Republic of South Africa (RSA) 2004), priority was given to the integration of Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) in the education sector, with an emphasis on equipping schools with necessary ICT materials (Wilson-Strydom *et al.* 2005). The White Paper on e-Education outlines a plan for teachers, school leaders and administrators, and Department of Education (DoE) officials to attain the necessary knowledge and skills needed in order to integrate ICTs in schools (RSA 2004). Data received from the DoE's Management Information System showed that in 2002 only 8.8% of schools in the Eastern Cape Province were equipped with computers; compared to the 88.5% of schools in Gauteng Province (RSA 2004). The White Paper on e-Learning further states that, 'every South African learner in the general and further education and training (FET) bands will be Information and Communication Technology capable … by 2013*'* (RSA 2004: 38). This goal has, unfortunately, not yet been achieved.

Looking at digital literacy through a South African lens, it is no secret that the education system is lacking, and more specifically the quality of education in the Eastern Cape Province is alarming. Studies by Taylor (2007) and Lawrence and Moyo (2006) highlight the need for improvement in the Eastern Cape's education sector. Hendricks (2008) further outlines the

problems faced by Eastern Cape schools and the lack of resources available to teachers. It is apparent that learner outcomes depend greatly on teacher quality. According to Statistics South Africa (2016), there has been a noted increase in the nationwide results, but this was not the case in the Eastern Cape, where annually there has been a notably slow increase in the percentage of learners who have passed in Grade 12. Although the Senior Certificate Examination (SCE) pass rate in the Eastern Cape in 2019 was 76.5%, it was significantly lower than the national average of 81.3% (Department of Basic Education (DBE) 2020). The 2020 results reflected an 8.4% percent (Pretorius 2020). Studies by Taylor (2007) and Lawrence and Moyo (2006) have shown that the quality of education in the Eastern Cape is of great concern. Some of the reasons for this dismal situation include: the lack of infrastructure and resources in schools; poor school leadership; insufficient teacher development and guidance from School Management Teams (SMTs); and teachers who do not possess appropriate knowledge and skills to prepare learners for a digital society (Sayed *et al.* 2013). It is unlikely that learners' academic results will improve considerably due to the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Using technology, teachers should learn to adopt new teaching strategies and instil in learners the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in a digital society. In order to keep abreast of the ever-changing circumstances, teachers should be motivated to use advanced technologies to teach current learners. The SMTs play a pertinent role in providing continuing professional teacher development (CPTD) in technology and digital literacy. They are responsible for creating opportunities for teachers to acquire the much-needed digital literacy skills in order to teach learners, so that these learners can become capable citizens of the global community (Buzzetto-More 2015; Florian & Zimmerman 2015). For SMTs to be successful, part of their portfolio is to aid in the development and production of essential teaching and learning materials, and to ensure that educational instruction is sound and well presented to learners (Mathipa *et al.* 2014). An SMT is responsible for guiding and leading their staff.

The research problem is therefore encapsulated as follows:

*What are the perceptions and experiences of SMTs and teachers in the Nel-son Mandela Bay area of the Eastern Cape Province regarding CPD for teachers in digital literacy?*

To address this research problem, the following questions were posed:

- In what ways can SMTs support their staff through CPD in enhanceing their digital literacy skills?

- What CPD programmes in digital literacy are provided to teachers by SMTs?

- How can SMTs strengthen CPD for teachers and better equip them with digital literacy knowledge and skills?

## Aim and Objectives of the Study

This paper aims to determine the perceptions and experiences of SMTs and teachers in the Nelson Mandela Bay area regarding CPD of teachers in digital literacy.

The following objectives contributed to realising the aim of the study:

- To explore ways that SMTs can support their staff through CPD in enhancing their digital literacy skills;

- To establish what CPD programmes in digital literacy are provided to teachers by SMTs; and

- To investigate how SMTs can strengthen CPD for teachers and better equip them with digital literacy knowledge and skills.

## Literature Review: CPD in Digital Literacy

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers across the world have turned to various digital platforms to deliver much needed educational instruction that will ensure learners stay on track during the academic year (Hodges *et al.* 2020; Paudel 2021). As the novel coronavirus continues to spread, more and more countries have opted to shut down schools as part of efforts to curb the process. It is estimated that that 138 countries closed their schools at some

point as a result of the pandemic and that 80% of children worldwide had been affected (Van Lancker & Parolin 2020). Hodges *et al.* (2020) and Dhawan (2020) observed that many educational institutions chose an online teaching platform to cater for the majority of learners who were apprehensive about physically attending schools. They posit that teachers who provide instruction online afford learners the opportunity to access teaching and learning from any location. The rate at which the change to online teaching has taken place, has been capricious.

The global COVID-19 pandemic thus created the perfect set of circumstances for teachers to enhance their skillset and improve their digital literacy knowledge, to deliver quality lessons during these unprecedented times (Dhawan 2020). Unfortunately, CPD in digital literacy seems to be lacking. Marsh *et al.* (2017) assert that teachers do not receive the necessary training to incorporate digital technologies in their classrooms. Plumb and Kautz (2015, as cited in Marsh *et al*. 2017), reported that many teachers showed a deficit in digital literacy skills and this resulted in many of them exhibiting reluctance in using digital literacy in their teaching.

The DBE's vision embraces all South African citizens to receive exceptional learning opportunities (RSA 2018). There is no doubt that CPD for teachers is of paramount importance, especially with the shift into the Fourth Industrial Revolution, and the constant evolution of technology. Continued research in the field of teacher quality and the achievement of learners has led to an understanding that a significant relationship exists between the two (Caena 2011). To ensure that teachers deliver high quality teaching so that learners can excel academically, it is essential for SMTs to provide CPD for teachers, more especially CPD in digital literacy.

Craft (2002: 9) defines CPD as, '… all types of professional learning undertaken by teachers beyond the point of initial training'. O'Sullivan and Deglau (2006) infer that CPD can be defined as organised experiences that are created to enhance teachers' understanding, with the ultimate goal of enhancing the standard of education learners receive. Meanwhile, Collin *et al.* (2012) aver that CPD consists of both formal and informal activities which develop staff beyond their initial training. Continued Professional Development is essential for teachers and is born from the fact that teachers' needs in digital literacy are identified, and strategies developed to assist teachers in improving their practice. It can be argued that a 'one size fits all' approach to CPD as practised by the Eastern Cape Department of Education

(ECDE) is not a solution to improve the quality of education. The needs of teachers are unique to specific schools, as teachers are lifelong learners who should be cognisant of new and ever-changing teaching strategies and pedagogies (Moseley *et al.* 2016). A need therefore exists for high quality CPD opportunities for teachers.

Guzey and Roehrig (2009) outline that the incorporation of technology is, for the most part, linked to opportunities for CPD. They highlight the need for CPD programmes which are participant focused, in order to improve personal learning about technology. In this regard, Pedder *et al.* (2008) outline that CPD needs to be adapted to individual needs and should not be viewed as an all-inclusive process. Birman *et al.* (2000) argue that the most effective way to improve learners' academic results is to upskill teachers in their ability to reflect on learning of a high standard. Problems, however, can arise as Hague and Payton (2010) highlight, when some teachers feel that their digital literacy skills are not as advanced as those of their learners', and this leads to them doubting their ability to teach or use digital literacy in the classroom. It is important for teachers to realise that functional skills are merely one part of the bigger digital literacy puzzle. The biggest part of the puzzle is, in fact, one's ability to think critically and to use digital knowledge to create meaning (Hague & Payton 2010). Another area which can be examined, is that of the attitudes of teachers towards digital literacy. Oftentimes, there is such 'mystery' surrounding new technology that teachers are hesitant to try new digital platforms, as they fear they might not understand how to use them correctly (McQuiggan 2012). Here, the correct approach to CPD for digital literacy will go a long way in guiding, supporting and encouraging teachers to try new platforms and not feel intimidated by the possible daunting task of grasping new teaching methods through digital platforms (McQuiggan 2012).

Korteweg (2005) states that the ever-changing digital technologies that are accessible to teachers, play an important role in the way people view CPD for digital literacy. Moreover, technology should not be viewed as the all-encompassing and all-empowering aspect of teaching, but rather as a vehicle for delivering sound educational material to learners. It is essential, therefore, that the changes in technology and the need for CPD for digital literacy merge, for CPD to be meaningful.

The next section sheds light on the importance of SMTs in providing CPD for teachers.

## The Role of SMTs in CPD

The SMTs are ultimately responsible for the CPD of their staff. The role of SMTs is a crucial one in South African schools. When Outcomes-based Education (OBE) was introduced in South Africa in 1998, SMTs were introduced as a way in which to lead schools to ensure better teaching and learning could be achieved. For SMTs to be successful, part of their portfolio is to aid in the development and production of essential teaching and learning materials, and to ensure that educational instruction is both sound and well presented to learners (Mathipa *et al.* 2014). An SMT is thus responsible for guiding and leading their staff. Leithwood *et al.* (2010) define a SMT as one that consists of the principal, deputy principal and Heads of Department (HoDs); this team is solely responsible for the professional leadership within a school. Various policies have been put in place as a legal framework, outlining what is expected of teachers and SMTs regarding CPD.

Msila and Mtshali (2011) assert that the key ingredient to better performance in schools is the empowerment of school leaders. They argue that the reason some schools are not performing as they should, can be attributed to a lack of foresight by management, as well as a lack of morale among staff. The aim of both the education district as well as the circuit officers in South Africa is to ensure quality teaching and learning in all schools. If this is the case, then why are so many schools still performing poorly? A study by Somo (2007) illustrated that SMT members were guilty of offering insufficient support or leadership regarding teachers' professional development. Other studies in the field of CPD found that SMTs lack clear understanding of how CPD activities should be orchestrated (Mizell 2010).

The quality of South African education was studied by Spaull (2013) and his findings were alarming. He reported that South African learners were well below grade level expectations, in terms of their reading, writing and numeracy skills. He also alluded to the fact that South Africa's education system was one of the worse, when compared to other education systems around the world. Van der Voort (2016) shares similar sentiments with Spaull and argues that poor learner results could be an outcome of the state of disarray in which schools find themselves, and this is directly related to poor leadership. It is important that school leaders become leaders of learning and encourage their staff to see the value of meaningful CPD opportunities. Principals are also expected to be knowledgeable on curricula matters as well

as having a clear understanding of current classroom practices (Triegaardt 2013). The position of school principal is one which carries many responsibilities, one of the most important, in our opinion, is that of mentor, leader and facilitator. In this regard, principals are required to be instructional leaders, which is essential for creating a positive school climate. Continued Professional Development aids in creating such a school climate (Mestry *et al.* 2013).

The principal's role in instructional leadership, as outlined by Mestry *et al.* (2013: S53) is to 'communicate high expectations for teachers and learners, supervise instruction, monitor assessments, coordinate the school curriculum and promote a climate for learning'. Kruger (2003: 206) argues that in the current educational climate, there has been a strong emphasis on enhancing the 'culture of teaching and learning'. He further states there is a direct link between the instructional role of a principal and the efficiency of a school. The instructional leadership role of the principal is therefore crucial to the performance of a school. However, in the South African context, principals spend a great deal of time pursuing other matters (e.g. school finances) thus neglecting to undertake their instructional leadership duties. It thus becomes imperative for principals to make use of distributive leadership. Principals have the authority to delegate certain responsibilities to other staff members, thus empowering them in their relative positions. Curriculum matters can be delegated to the deputy principal and HODs, thus easing the workload of the principal. Distributive leadership has a strong emphasis on, 'collaboration, shared purpose, responsibility and recognition of leadership, irrespective of role or position within an organisation' (Keppell *et al.* 2010: 166).

It has, however, been found that some SMTs are not fulfilling their duties regarding CPD for teachers, as outlined in various policy documents (Monametsi 2015). Goslin (2009) purports that members of SMTs should view themselves as mentors and role models and that they should lead by example. The Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS) policy (RSA 2013) outlines various ways in which SMTs should provide guidance and support regarding CPD. The SMTs should align themselves with the teachers' aims to improve themselves; to deliver high quality lessons; as well as to improve their own teaching practices. The SMTs must thus identify the needs of teachers and this can be done in a variety of ways. Class observations, written work, diagnostic analysis of assessment results as well as

minutes of phase meetings, can all be used as tools to identify the CPD needs of teachers.

The IQMS policy (RSA 2013) further outlines how SMTs can address the CPD of teachers in their schools. Once needs have been identified, the SMT should create an action plan, to ensure staff receive the necessary CPD training. SMTs can organise school-wide workshops addressing the various needs of teachers. The SMT may engage the services of experts to address teacher CPD needs. It is important, too, that SMTs assess whether the CPD programmes that have been designed and executed have been successful. This can be done through pre- and post-training staff evaluations. After a CPD programme is delivered, teachers could complete a feedback questionnaire which would allow them to comment on the perceived quality of the CPD programme and whether it was beneficial.

# Research Methodology
## *Research Approach and Design*
A generic qualitative research design situated within a constructivist interpretivist paradigm was selected to understand the perceptions and experiences of SMTs and teachers regarding CPD for teachers in digital literacy. Qualitative research, according to Henning *et al.* (2004), is concerned with the way in which researchers interpret, analyse and find meaning in data. Guba and Lincoln (1989) assert that the aim of an interpretivist paradigm is to gain a deeper appreciation of the individualised world of human events. They further argue that researchers need to interpret the data received from participants and make every effort to ensure that the perspectives of participants are expressed, rather than the perspectives of researchers. Since we were interested in the real, lived experiences of participants, our research design used a phenomenological approach, as phenomenology forms part of qualitative research and is concerned particularly with the lived experiences of a particular group of people (Creswell 2012).

## *Sample*
This study was conducted at four primary schools in the Nelson Mandela Bay Metropolitan area of the Eastern Cape Province. The sampling strategy

undertaken in this study was purposeful, and schools were selected by considering the quintile rankings. Purposeful sampling aims to elicit and extrapolate the most data from a certain sample (Merriam 1998). Since we sought different perspectives on how technology is applied in schools, along with the level of teachers' knowledge and skills in digital literacy, we interviewed one Head of Department (HoD) and two teachers from each of the four primary schools. We selected two affluent schools (quintiles 4 and 5) and two schools from poorer socio-economic areas (quintiles 1 and 2). The selected HoDs and teachers were required to have more than three years' teaching experience. In total, there were 12 participants in this study.

## Research Methods

Initially, open-ended interviews were planned in order to allow participants the opportunity to engage with the researchers about their real, lived experiences, and to gain a deeper understanding of their personal experiences. Semi-structured interviews were the main method of data collection. The questions in the interview schedule were open-ended and opportunities were provided for participants to add their own anecdotes, thoughts and ideas on the questions asked. However, due to COVID-19 protocols and standard operating procedures that were put in place at schools, this was unfortunately not possible. Part of our data collection method was thus altered, and the use of different technological platforms were sought. Participants were thus sent an interview schedule and were required to audio record their answers to the questions, then send the voice recordings back. The recorded answers were transcribed verbatim. The interviews yielded thick data; however, it was necessary to follow up with participants to get clarity or to gain a deeper understanding of participant responses.

## Data Analysis

The transcriptions of the voice recordings were analysed using Tesch's method of data analysis (Creswell 2009). Merriam (1998) states that data analysis is concerned with finding meaning in data. This process involves looking at data from all angles and ultimately finding answers in the data. The transcriptions were read through thoroughly and notes were made of interesting or recurring topics or problems. Once the list was completed, and

themes and sub-themes began to emerge, and similar ideas and themes were grouped together. Data was then coded into pockets of information and various categories were identified.

## *Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations*

To ensure trustworthiness of the study, triangulation of data was applied to merge data extracted from interviews with HoDs and teachers. Olsen (2004) argues that triangulation in the social sciences refers to the amalgamation of data in such a way that various points of view come to light. A personal reflective journal was kept after transcribing every interview, in order to keep track of personal notes and reflections, and to ensure personal bias was kept in check.

To establish the trustworthiness of the study and reduce researcher bias (Singh 2014), we applied Guba and Lincoln's (1989) mode: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Participants were provided with a copy of the transcribed notes so that they could establish reliability of the data in the notes (Simon & Goes 2016). In this study, credibility was sought by finding the truth; asking the correct questions to gain an understanding of the phenomenon being studied. Transferability was achieved through cross-referenced data to see if it was applicable in other contexts. For dependability, it was shown that the findings were consistent, and confirmability reflected bias or prejudice from the researchers. Throughout the research process, the researchers collaborated with peers, in order to keep bias and subjectivity in check and to elicit essential advice, related to the study. Self-refection was used throughout the data collection process to ensure that personal views did not bias the data coding process.

This research upheld all ethical requirements. Approval was granted by the Ethics Committee of the University of Johannesburg and permission was sought from the Eastern Cape Department of Education. Permission was also obtained from the principals and participants of the four participating schools. For anonymity, we used numbers to identify participants (e.g. Participant 5).

## Findings

Participants in this study ranged from 29 to 63 years of age. Twenty-five

percent of the participants were males, and 75% were females. Teaching experience ranged from five to 35 years. For the HoDs, years served on the SMT ranged from six to 15 years.

The data emanating from the interviews yielded the following themes:

- The unavailability of CPD programmes
- SMTs' role in CPD programmes

Theme 1 and the sub-themes are discussed:

## Theme One: The Unavailability of CPD Programmes

| Theme One | Sub-themes |
|---|---|
| The unavailability CPD programmes | 1. Budgetary limitations and the lack of technological resources |
| | 2. Time constraints of teachers |
| | 3. Relevance of CPD programmes offered by ECDE |

### *Budgetary Limitations and the Lack of Technological Resources*

Budgetary constraints, especially in the poorer schools, were one of the most pressing issues that affected the promotion of CPD. Participant 6 asserted that money played a crucial role in the use of technology at their school:

> *So, definitely, money is an issue. The use of technology is a problem with ... with some of the teachers who don't know how to use computers and then we have to kind of teach them and also finance is a huge problem, because we might want the latest technology, for example, we might want a smart board in our classroom, but unfortunately there isn't money to allow for all of us to have it ....*

Participant 5, a teacher who is employed at an affluent school also expressed similar sentiments to Participant 6, and elaborated that the impact of CPD on

teachers depended on the budget of a school:

> ... other programmes that would fall into that category would be, guest speakers at the school that would come in and give the staff a talk on team building, on leadership … for staff development.

Desta *et al.* (2013) in their research, found the unavailability of funds related to CPD programmes to be a major drawback in integrating quality CPD programmes in schools. If teachers feel there is a need for training in a certain field, for example, digital literacy, then unfortunately the budget of a school will ultimately be the deciding factor as to whether teachers receive such training. If the ECDE does not offer training in digital literacy, then a school would need to outsource the CPD and costs play a pivotal role. Also, teachers would need the necessary digital equipment in order to integrate digital literacy into their classes, and this comes with a hefty price tag attached.

In order for schools to adequately integrate digital literacy into their lesson plans and pedagogy, it is of utmost importance that schools are equipped with the necessary digital tools in order to deliver high quality lessons using various digital platforms. Participant 9 felt defeated at the fact that they had been pushing for technology to be integrated into their school, yet their efforts were in vain. They added:

> I am pro-technological teaching since its inception. I am sure that it will be mutually beneficial in teaching and learning. For years I have been raising the plea to go the technological route at school level, even through fundraising efforts, but to no avail.

Chigona *et al.* (2010) in their research, found that even in cases where adequate technology was made available to schools, it was found that teachers were unfortunately not integrating technology into their teaching. If we are to move forward and become more digitally literate in our schools, it is imperative that teachers are provided training on how to integrate digital tools in their teaching to enhance learner achievement (Hague & Payton 2010).

## Time Constraints of Teachers

The workloads of teachers and the timing of delivering CPD programmes

were factors that inhibited teachers to fully participate in CPD programmes. Participant 2, a teacher, questioned the timing of CPD programmes presented. She asserted:

> When CPD programmes are offered, facilitators need to be mindful of the timing when CPD programmes are delivered. The biggest problem is the time of day or the time of the term or the time of the month when these things are presented, because the nature of teaching is always so incredibly busy, your plate is always so full, your day is always so long, if these things are … are presented to you on a… on a weekday afternoon, or a Friday afternoon, that … that seems to be quite a famous [popular] time to do meetings and get together and training and PD, it's not optimal. We are tired.

Participant 6, also a teacher, echoed the views of Participant 2 and remarked:

> Uhm, I would love to do more, but unfortunately, these things are very expensive and to find the time, as a teacher, uhm, because often you have to leave your class, or leave school early, so for us, it's not really feasible.

Nerantzi and Gossman (2015) highlight the importance of offering CPD programmes which can be delivered on a variety of platforms. They noted that teachers are busy and often find it challenging to engage in CPD programmes due to time constraints. The nature of teaching makes for an almost oversubscribed day (Hosseini 2018). It was clear that teachers would be more receptive to CPD programmes if these took place at a suitable time and were, in fact, relevant to enhancing their teaching.

## *Relevance of CPD Programmes offered by ECDE*

The participants unanimously agreed that they did not participate in any CPD programmes related to digital literacy because the ECDE or external agencies did not provide such programmes. In most cases, workshops arranged by ECDE were administrative or relating to disseminating policy matters. Participant 5 stated:

> Professional development programmes that I have attended in the last two years have been predominantly about sport, … attending sport meetings regarding athletics, rugby and even soccer. This had no relevance to improving my teaching.

This is worrying, as CPD for sports coaching seems to have taken priority over academic development. The South African Council for Educators (SACE) (Republic of South Africa 2000: 6) emphasises that an educator must 'keep abreast of educational trends and developments'. It is therefore the responsibility of teachers to take ownership for their own learning, and ensure they attend necessary CPD programmes, not necessarily arranged by the ECDE. However, this is made difficult if there are no programmes offered by other agencies. The Transformational Learning Theory undergirds the importance of CPD which ultimately enables teachers to keep abreast of current teaching trends that can transform their behaviour, attitudes and beliefs.

The responsibility for teacher training through CPD programmes remains the duty of the ECDE. Although the ECDE is ultimately responsible for delivering quality CPD programmes, the SMTs are responsible for alerting their staff to programmes offered by other external agencies. It can be argued that SMTs should take the initiative to provide CPD programmes in digital literacy rather than being entirely dependent on the ECDE. However, participant 10 concurred that CPD is the responsibility of the DBE, and added:

> CPD is largely done by the ECDE. They offer various courses (obviously not now during the pandemic) ranging from development in the teaching of all subjects, computer literacy, discipline, leadership. Schools are notified of the courses and educators are asked to attend. They are expected to report back to the rest of the staff once they have completed the course.

Another issue that was raised by participants was that CPD programmes offered by ECDE tend to have a 'one size fits all' approach. Teachers should be given a choice when it comes to their own personal growth and development as a professional and cannot be expected to attend CPD programmes which are of little interest to them (Mestry *et al.* 2009).

Participant 5, a teacher, emphasised the importance of CPD being relevant to their everyday teaching and stated:

> The workshops arranged by ECDE are oftentimes a waste, because, you get there and then they (the officials) read off statistics for the past five years and … and I don't know how that is supposed to benefit the staff, or any teachers attending the meeting [as] there's not much in [on] curriculum development …

An HoD, participant 4, agreed and affirmed:

> We're not required to do any Professional Development, besides the things we have to go to for the Department, so every year we'll have to go in [at] the beginning of the year to the Department meeting where they discuss how the subject's doing, what they expect of you. I'll be honest with you, you really don't learn all that much there, you just go to sign your name.

Participant 7, also an HoD, elaborated that the feedback from staff who had attended CPD programmes of late, showed they were not satisfied with their overall experiences. They stated:

> The teachers are often not happy with the quality of the courses presented by the Department of Education. Some of the responses include the following: very basic training, content not presented well, time not managed well by presenters, no follow up.

Most of the participants concurred that CPD programmes offered by the ECDE, were of no value and most times, were repetitive in nature, leaving the participant feeling as though they had wasted their time. It is our opinion that the ECDE needs to seriously reassess at what skills teachers need to learn, and then arrange CPD programmes around upskilling teachers in these specific areas. Perhaps, the ECDE should send out questionnaires to various schools for the purpose of determining the needs of teachers and then develop CPD training which is tailor-made for teachers rather than relying on a general programme.

Of interest, was that some teachers felt that even though they lacked

the opportunity to gain digital literacy skills through formal CPD programmes, many of them collaborated, of their own accord and helped one another gain valuable digital skills. As an HOD, Participant 3 was genuinely in awe of how well the staff working in her Phase came together as a team and helped one another. They added:

> … this has very much been a learning curve, learning from and with each other. It was wonderful to watch all the different grades. They sent their planning through email to me during lockdown and I was able to go on and watch their videos and watch their interaction and I learned so, so much from the teachers.

## Theme Two: SMTs Role in CPD Programmes

| Theme Two | Sub-themes |
|---|---|
| SMTs role in CPD for teachers | 1. Digital literacy not a priority due to SMTs lack of knowledge and skills |
|  | 2. Lack of opportunities to gain digital literacy skills |

### *Digital Literacy Not Made a Priority Due to SMTs Lack of Knowledge and Skills*

There exists an absolute need for CPD in digital literacy among teachers, however, these needs in the Eastern Cape Province have not been realised. The CPD for teachers in digital literacy has not been prioritised and this is probably due to the SMTs own lack of knowledge and skills in digital literacy. SMTs have not realised the urgent need for teachers to be provided with CPD training, resulting in teachers becoming helpless and frustrated. Participant 4, an HOD, expressed that the SMT at their school did not provide any CPD programmes for digital literacy:

> No, we do not provide teachers with professional development programmes, specifically in digital learning. I don't think the Depart-

> ment does either, they will make some things available, if there's something interesting available, they just put it on the board and you can decide if you wanna [want to] go, but there's nothing compulsory, there's nothing that we've created ourselves. We don't even have a staff meeting where we give out that kind of information.

If neither SMTs nor the ECDE are offering any formal training for digital literacy, how are teachers meant to upskill themselves and evolve with the current technological times? It is important that these needs be addressed. It is incumbent on the principal to provide training and development to SMT members so that they can be competent in digital literacy (Hosseini 2018).

However, SMTs argue that they are overworked and lack the necessary time to put CPD programmes in place. Mestry *et al.* (2013: S55) found that '[an] overload of administrative and management tasks' was an issue impacting SMTs ability to teach as well as to lead'. As an HoD, Participant 9 felt strongly that they tried encouraging a better learning environment for their staff, however, this was very frustrating because of the lack of support from principals:

> I tried to encourage co-operative learning amongst those staying close by [to one another] to work together, but with social distancing and other lockdown regulations, this proved to be difficult. I think the biggest challenge is when you have a principal who places money above effective learning and teaching.

Phorabatho (2013) asserts that there exist varying views amongst members of SMTs, regarding the management of CPD programmes for teachers, and these diverse views have a major effect on the overall efficiency of CPD delivery. He states that it is important for SMTs to have common goals regarding the development of their organisations, as a lack of foresight for the future can lead to unwanted separation among SMT members. Undertaking CPD programmes for personal growth as well as to enhance the culture of teaching and learning in South African schools is part and parcel of being a teacher. Christie and Potterton (1999, as cited in Sayed *et al*. 2013), indicated that the overall success of schools is, to a great extent, directly determined by the leadership within a school. As SMTs are

ultimately liable for CPD delivery in schools, it is up to the SMTs to ensure that every measure is in place for teachers to continue to upskill themselves.

## *Lack of Opportunities to Gain Digital Literacy Skills*

Many participants felt that opportunities to gain digital literacy skills were simply not made available to them. This can be highly frustrating, especially as the world is moving towards the use of increasing numbers of technological platforms to deliver content. Leonard *et al.* (2016) highlight the fact that all over the world, education is constantly transforming and there has been a massive increase in the use of ICTs in education. Participant 6, a teacher, provided valuable insight into the lack of CPD training, stating:

> Our school doesn't really give us much opportunity to go on courses and things like this, because they are very expensive. We also don't have all our children that have a tablet, or something like that, so only recently, I think in the last two or three years, did we actually get a projector in our classroom, so I find that possibly, our school could maybe give us the opportunity to … to go on more courses like this…

Participant 12 felt very strongly that the lack of CPD training for digital literacy was a core factor affecting the unavailability of online learning in their school. She added:

> The lack of such programmes has been detrimental to our school. I feel that if we were given the opportunity to participate in these programmes, it would have equipped us better when doing online teaching. We also do not have the necessary technological equipment to ensure fully effective online teaching.

With the world becoming more digitised daily, it is critical that teachers be given the opportunity to embrace digital technology, receive training on necessary digital platforms and ultimately incorporate technology into their every-day lessons (Ksenija 2019). Teachers are unable to keep abreast of the latest technological advancements if they are unable to receive training in these areas.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings the following are recommended:

- If the ECDE is to stay up to date with current international trends, the need to procure resources and train teachers and SMTs should become top priority. The ECDE should, from their education budget, allocate substantial funding for the procurement of data and technological resources such as laptops or notebooks for every teacher and learner.

- Provision should be made for teachers and SMTs to be trained in using digital platforms so that teaching and learning can be enhanced. The ECDE should solicit the services of reputable service providers (e.g. universities) to train these teachers and SMTs.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions and experiences of SMTs and teachers regarding the CPD of teachers for digital literacy. As teachers are life-long learners, it is imperative that all stakeholders in schools understand the importance of CPD, in order to engage in new and improved ways to instruct, specifically in the current ever-advancing digital age. More and more content is being made available on digital platforms and the longer schools take to get up to speed, the more our students will continue to lose out on these skills.

This qualitative study has highlighted that certain schools in the Eastern Cape are not equipped with the digital knowledge and skills needed, in order to keep abreast of current technological advancements. There is thus an urgent need for teachers to be provided with an in-depth CPD in digital literacy. Since CPD training ultimately lies in the hands of the SMTs of schools, this study has shown that the roles and responsibilities of SMTs might be misunderstood, or that SMT members are ultimately too busy with various teaching and managerial tasks, to be able to afford the time and energy needed to put together various CPD programmes. SMTs were not supporting their staff, through CPD, in enhancing their digital literacy skills, as digital literacy is not currently a priority in the schools. It was further

ascertained that due to the general lack of CPD programmes offered by SMTs, no digital literacy CPD had been provided to the schools in this study. Finally, it was discovered that SMTs need to strengthen their provisions for CPD for teachers, specifically in digital literacy.

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