

CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR IMPROVING LITERACY INSTRUCTION IN RWANDA

This position paper argues that:



- Rwanda needs a **permanent system of continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers**, in order to achieve improvements in areas such as literacy instruction.
- The CPD system should be flexible—**allowing teachers to gain credits for participation in NGO trainings** approved by REB—and should be linked to salary increases.
- In order to benefit from CPD, **teachers need enough time in their schedule** for learning & lesson planning.
- CPD should also **link to effective systems for mentoring and inspection**, to ensure improvements in practice.
- **The overall feedback system should be improved** between pre-service training, inspection results, and CPD training.

Earning a degree from a Teacher Training College, or from the University of Rwanda-College of Education, is just the beginning of the learning process needed to develop effective teachers. When teachers—even those with the correct formal qualifications—enter the classroom for the first time, there is a great deal that they still need to learn about effective instruction. Though they will gain some of these skills simply through experience, they would hone their knowledge and abilities to a much greater degree through formal continuing professional development opportunities that link the study of theory to systematic changes in practice.¹

Top-performing countries on international testing regimes such as PISA achieve their results in part by having strong systems of continuing professional development (CPD). In Singapore, Sweden, and the Netherlands—for example—teachers are required to log at least 100 hours of structured professional development experiences each year.² Continuing professional development systems can include formal courses offered in-person or online, teacher-practitioner research, reading and reporting on recent research articles, developing portfolios of new methods and activities, and peer-to-peer collaborations such as presentations and analysis of model lessons—among many other possibilities.³

Earning a degree is just the beginning of the process of developing effective teachers.

¹ Hilda Borko, "Professional Development and Teacher Learning: Mapping the Terrain," *American Educational Research Association* 33, no. 8 (2004).

² SCOPE, "How High-Achieving Countries Develop Great Teachers," (Stanford, CA: Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education, 2010).

³ Amol Padwad and Krishna Dixit, "Continuing Professional Development: An Annotated Bibliography," (Kolkata: British Council India, 2011).

Rwandan primary school students perform far below expected proficiency levels in reading fluency and comprehension. Yet how can this situation change, unless teachers are given additional training?

Rwanda's need for in-service teacher training in literacy instruction is a case in point. In recent studies,⁴ many Rwandan primary school students have performed far below expected levels of proficiency in both reading fluency and reading comprehension. Of course, early literacy development is a holistic issue that relates to the home environment and the broader reading culture, in addition to formal schooling. Yet how can this situation change, unless teachers are given additional training in order to become more effective at helping all Rwandan children learn to read? It is not enough for this training to be offered in an ad-hoc way by organizations operating in different regions of the country—as is currently the case for most subjects except English. **Rwanda needs a permanent national system of continuing professional development for teachers,** in order to achieve improvements in literacy instruction. The same applies for every other area of the pre-primary, primary, and secondary school curricula.

An effective CPD system for Rwanda should be flexible enough to **allow teachers to gain credits for participation in any training or experience whose quality has been approved by REB.** Non-governmental organizations around Rwanda provide significant support to the education system by offering a variety of types of in-service trainings. MINEDUC should take advantage of these contributions by setting up a system for rapid review of NGO teacher training content and assignment to a flexible CPD credit system. Trainings offered directly by REB could be classified under the same credit system. In this way, teachers can accumulate post-diploma credits in their field through participation in a variety of in-service training experiences.

CPD credits should be linked to a more subtle system of teacher salary grading in order to reward professional development efforts. Rwanda's current teacher salary grades are linked only to formal qualifications earned in universities—Associate's (A1), Bachelor's (A0), and Master's degrees. Yet once a teacher has obtained one of these more advanced university degrees, he or she is unlikely to remain within the day-to-day teaching corps; rather, salary advancement usually comes through promotion to managerial levels or exiting the teaching profession altogether. An effective CPD system could better motivate teacher retention and improvements in teaching quality by linking CPD credits to a sliding scale of incremental salary raises, which teachers could earn through their professional development efforts from year to year even while remaining at their same teaching post.

Teachers should be able to gain credits for participating in CPD opportunities offered by REB or by NGOs. These credits, in turn, should be linked to graded salary increases.

⁴ Joseph DeStefano et al., "Early Grade Reading and Mathematics in Rwanda: Final Report," (Research Triangle Park, NC: RTI International, 2012); REB, "Learning Achievement in Rwandan Schools (Lars)," (Kigali: Rwanda Education Board, 2012).

Teachers also need to have enough scheduled non-teaching time in order to be able to participate in CPD opportunities, and to put what they have learned into practice through the development of new lesson plans and approaches.⁵ Teachers in Rwanda currently have very heavy teaching loads—particularly in primary schools under the double-shifting system—leaving them little if any time to learn, reflect on their teaching, and make improvements. This situation is understandable in light of Rwanda’s budget constraints. Yet in order to attain the nation’s development goal of educating a highly capable and regionally-competitive population, there needs to be a clear strategy for gradually increasing the staffing levels in schools until every teacher has adequate time for professional development and lesson planning.

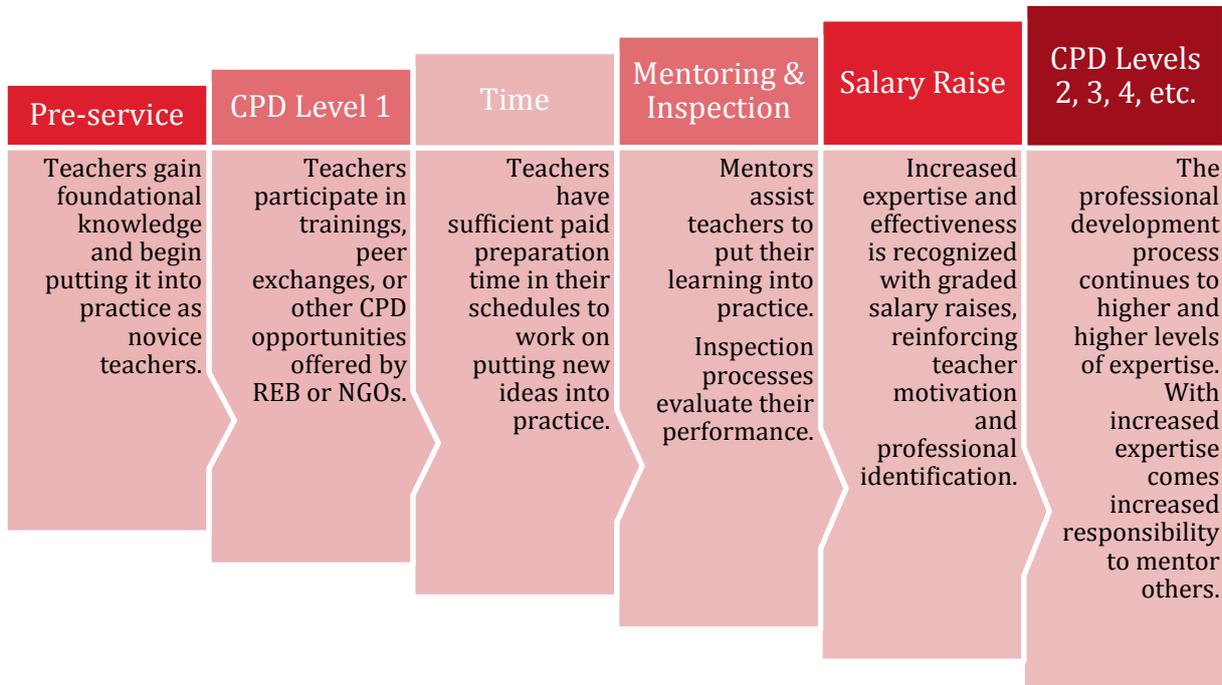
Teachers need enough non-teaching time to participate in CPD opportunities and to put their learning into practice by developing new lesson plans.

In order to ensure improvements in teacher practice, **Rwanda’s new CPD system should also link to effective systems of mentoring and inspection.** Rwanda’s current system of School-Based Mentors focuses primarily on English-language teaching, with some attention to reinforcing learner-centered pedagogy. Yet all new teachers could benefit from mentoring in their own subject areas during their first year or two on the job. Similarly, CPD opportunities need to be matched by some sort of mentorship or peer-to-peer learning structures in order to help teachers put into practice what they have learned. With some foundational training and adequate time formally scheduled into their timetables, directors of studies and selected teachers with advanced experience in a particular field could provide such mentoring to teachers in their school or Sector.

Sector Education Officers should become formal collaborators accountable to REB-EQS, should participate in CPD opportunities, and should be given small budgets to accomplish regular school inspections.

Simultaneously, **the school inspection system needs to be expanded and aligned** with the most recent understanding of best practices, in order to more effectively evaluate and provide feedback on teachers’ instructional approaches. The REB Education Quality and Standards (EQS) department currently inspects a sample of schools in every District each year. However, they do not have enough staff to reach each school, nor to engage in extensive observations of teacher practices. With some restructuring of their role and responsibilities, Sector Education Officers could become a valuable extension to Rwanda’s inspection system. To accomplish this, Sector Education Officers should (1) be formally integrated as collaborators accountable to the REB Education Quality and Standards department, (2) should participate in CPD opportunities as observers in order to stay up-to-date on best practices, and (3) should be given small transport budgets to accomplish regular school and classroom inspections in their Sectors. If such a system is put into place, the awarding of teachers’ salary raises based on CPD credits can be made contingent upon positive inspection reviews.

⁵ SCOPE, "How High-Achieving Countries Develop Great Teachers."

Figure 1: Increases in Teacher Effectiveness through Holistic Continuing Professional Development


Finally, the overall feedback system should be improved between inspection results, pre-service training, and CPD training. Together, the University of Rwanda-College of Education (URCE), the REB Education Quality and Standards (EQS), and the Teacher Development and Management (TDM) departments could become the vanguard of education quality improvement in Rwanda. Yet there is currently little communication and formalized responsiveness among these systems. To rectify this situation, REB-EQS needs to have a system for analysing and communicating to URCE and TDM any systemic weaknesses observed during school inspections. URCE should then have formal responsibility for responding to these weaknesses by proposing changes to pre-service training in the TTCs and the College of Education itself. REB-TDM should also have formal responsibility for offering—either directly, or through collaboration with development partners—in-service continuing professional development opportunities to remedy the issue on the ground. The formalization of these feedback loops will help ensure that the quality of the Rwandan education system improves by leaps and bounds over the coming years.

