

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This study qualifies as action research aimed at exploring an intervention for improving the practice of primary school teachers. Having presented the empirical study in Chapter 4, the purpose of this chapter is to report the conclusions with respect to my learning driven by the research questions indicated in Chapter 1. Following the conclusion I present the recommendations derived from the activities performed by me and the PRs in this participatory action research (PAR) with a view to conducting further research and in practices, quality and assessment of teachers' continuing professional development (TCPD). In order to explore the intervention referred to above, this PAR was guided by one central research question, *How can teachers in Grades 1 and 2 be supported in terms of improving their practices by taking responsibility for their own professional development?* In an attempt to answer to this question, I carried out a literature review and a baseline analysis by means of a questionnaire with open-ended questions. Then to understand PD in depth, led by the teachers themselves, I explored different models of TCPD and SDPD from the literature. In this journey of my learning, I also explored theoretical assumptions related to the concept of professional and development, TCPD and adult learning.

Evolving from the understanding emerged from the literature, from the results and finding of the questionnaires and the overall process at this stage of the Cycle A, including the background of study, I chose to explore a self-directed professional development (SDPD) model. The assumption was that in researching in a context where academic and professional qualifications of the learning facilitators are fewer than those required for an individual design of a plan for professional learning, the model to be adopted should encourage them to take responsibility for their own CPD. I assumed that a top-down approach of TCPD does not help teaching facilitators to develop themselves since it presupposes that they are the group to be trained. Therefore the intervention was based on the individual learning needs of the mentees.

Accordingly, a number of classroom practices were observed, reflected upon and improved by means of a simultaneous approach of innovative methods of facilitating learning and the appropriate remedial tasks supported by innovative learning material.

Having developed TCPD on an individual basis, the feedback provided by the practitioner-researchers (PRs) suggests the adequacy of SDPD. However, according to my observation and the current situation in the majority of Mozambican primary school regarding expertise in methods of facilitating and monitoring learning, the model should initially be supported by outsider expertise. This does not mean that the facilitator will be out of the school/zone of Pedagogical Influence. My understanding is that owing to the limitations concerning learning in Grades 1 and 2 among the learning facilitators in primary school, someone experienced in primary education could support the process towards ownership of individual practice. For this reason the pedagogical deputies could in the future be responsible for CPD at school level.

Following the process of answering the central question the sub-questions were generated and answered throughout the empirical study. The first sub-question that arose in this study, *How do Grade 1 and 2 teachers take responsibility for monitoring their own professional development?* was answered through analysing the results and findings of the questionnaire administered as part of the baseline analysis and during the practices with my PRs. The PRs and I experienced transformation of our assumptions regarding TCPD, individual learner learning, monitoring and assessment towards the improvement of our practice. In this respect we came from a deficit model of CPD to a SDPD which has more to do with a personal instead of homogeneous experiences and PD needs.

The second sub-question intended to explore the suitable intervention for TCPD asking, *What kind of intervention could be developed to support teachers to take responsibility for monitoring their own professional development?* Throughout the five case studies, in searching answers to this sub-question I took into consideration the Mozambican learning environment, with the emphasis on teachers' academic and professional qualifications, the predominance of large classes, the lack of learning materials and the primary school routines throughout the academic year. The second

sub-question was answered at the end of the intervention when the PRs participated in the discussion of quality assurance procedures by means of questionnaires for PR's feedback and research-mentor evaluation. In the questionnaires they demonstrate a clear recognition of the appropriateness of SDPD as a model for TCPD. In addition they state their willingness to continue paying attention to monitoring their learners' learning.

From the overall situation that seems to characterise the school where I carried out this study, I permanently asked myself, *How can self-directed learning help teachers with limited pedagogical skills to develop strategies to improve their learning facilitation?* In so doing I paid attention to what they already knew and what they needed to know at a specific point in time of this PAR either when planning **or** reflecting on learning opportunities, facilitating learning, finding complementary learning material, monitoring and assessing their learners.

Although I had explored models of TCPD and theories on adult learning, the results from the Cycle A of this PAR, which comprised the baseline analysis, classroom observation, encouraged me to progress with the third and last sub-question, *How can elementary principles of action research, instructional design and learner assessment support teachers in monitoring their own professional development?* In an attempt to answer this sub-question the PRs participated in learningshops on those topics and wrote a report. The PRs report, my own report and the activities performed with each PR provide positive indications of the use of AR, procedures of instructional design and learner assessment. However, is worth mentioning that assessment of individual learner has always been a matter of concern, mostly due to the large classes PRs had. Sixty learners in Grade 1 or 2 were a complex situation to deal with due to the insufficient knowledge on large class management among the PRs. To minimise the problem, the PRs very often introduce the learning content on the blackboard instead of asking each learner to follow in her/his exercise book. In doing so, the PRs ensure that all learners are following the learning opportunity. Another strategy is to follow and monitor what learners are doing. Mentoring learners' achievement was also a challenge to face since they were bound to lose the exercise books provided for free by the Ministry of Education. The families could not afford the replacement of those

materials. Most of the learners did not have a conventional school bag for carrying the learning materials. The main reason is the high degree of poverty in the country.

5.2 RESEARCH FINDINGS

The findings of this study to some extent show that teachers are aware of the need for more academic and pedagogical qualifications to improve learners' learning and their professional growth by means of improvement like promotion in the career and obtaining incentives. For the purpose of this conclusion, two basic findings are described, namely findings of the questionnaires and findings of the classroom observation.

5.2.1 Findings of the Questionnaire

The findings of the questionnaires allowed me to conclude that the respondents are concerned about their professional growth, mainly with respect to academic and pedagogical qualifications obtained through the attendance of teacher education programmes or progressing in to secondary education or university. The motivation for TCPD varied among others from financial to pedagogical concerns. The respondents had positive comments on CPD models or programmes which consider the systematic provision of CPD and are supported by follow-up of post-CPD events. Another conclusion indicates that the respondents require formal recognition from the Ministry of Education by means of credit points in order to advance in their teacher careers.

The study involved respondents with different levels of qualification. However, the teachers' perception concerning their roles as educators and the way in which they assess learning do not indicate significant differences.

5.2.2 Findings of the Classroom Observation

Regarding the findings of classroom observation, I am convinced that the PRs will improve the usual learning opportunities and create specific time for remedial tasks. The PRs plan and facilitate learning, taking into consideration the diversity of the level of knowledge and skills among the learners. Having been engaged in self-directed professional development, they looked at the learners' learning needs and the appropriate remedial tasks.

All PRs use the same exercise book and assign to the learners the same learning tasks. However, with pedagogical support, this PAR concluded that the PRs can identify innovative ways of presenting the learning tasks indicated in the exercise books or design similar learning tasks.

5.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS: WHAT DOES THE EMPIRICAL FINDINGS SHOWS?

In this section I summarise the main findings of this study in relation to the central research question and the derived sub-questions. Firstly the summary provides findings of the sub-questions followed by the findings of the central one.

5.3.1 Research Sub-question 1

How do Grade 1 and 2 teachers take responsibility for monitoring their own professional development? The related response shows that Grade 1 and 2 teachers do monitor their professional development using different ways, namely:

- moving from CFPP to IMAP/ADPP or from IMAP/ADPP to in order to progress in the teacher career

- taking responsibility for their own continuing professional development through individual initiatives to continue in the following academic level in Secondary or Higher Education
- participating in the meetings provided at Zone of Pedagogical Influence (ZIP) for pedagogical support, which shows the importance given to the ZIP.

5.3.2 Research Sub-question 2

What kind of intervention could be developed to support teachers to take responsibility for monitoring their own professional development?

From my observation as a researcher in this study, I concluded that the closer the facilitator of CPD, the greater the teacher's engagement will be. Due to the weakness presented in the introductory section of this chapter, the teachers need permanent support and follow-up in order to increase their motivation and performance. Another conclusion is that providers of TCPD need to promote and sustain self-directed professional development (SDPD), since each teacher is one single case to be dealt with. In addition, the findings of sub-question 2 lead to the conclusion that the TCPD programmes should follow a *whole school professional development* approach. This approach assures that all teachers at school are involved in SDPD.

5.3.3 Research Sub-question 3

How can elementary principles of action research, instructional design and learner assessment support teachers in monitoring their own professional development?

The study provided basic knowledge and skills concerning action research (AR), instructional design and learner assessment to PRs. The PRs raised their awareness with respect to reflection on their practice and the need to support individual learners systematically. The promotion of short cycles of AR can encourage teachers to reflect on what they do and can do better instead of blaming the curriculum, the learners and the shortage of learning materials. Reflecting on their practice, the teachers determine the appropriate remedial tasks to be assigned to each learner or to groups of learners. Once the change has been implemented, teachers need to be encouraged to proceed in order to improve their learning and the learners' achievement.

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

This PAR was an exploratory process. Therefore this study is not an end in itself; it is part of the challenge to find ways to support those who facilitate learning in Grades 1 and 2. It is therefore of value to state that the recommendations following from this PAR research are two-fold, namely recommendations for the implementation of the research findings and recommendations for further research.

5.4.1 Recommendations for the Implementation of the Research Findings

The following recommendations can be made with respect to the reflection on and implementation of the findings:

- The provider of TCPD should apply an all-school professional development approach in order to include all teachers.
- The introduction or initiation of innovative models of TCPD or innovative approaches regarding the facilitating learning should be introduced taking into consideration factors associated with initiation, with particular emphasis to those related to the learning facilitators, such as teacher motivation, teacher advocacy and pedagogical knowledge basis.
- The provider of TCPD should promote self-directed professional development and the implementation of short action research cycles and/or projects.
- At school level the teacher should be encouraged to produce learning materials for all subjects, with particular attention to Portuguese language in Grades 1 and 2 to support the acquisition of reading and writing skills.
- In order to put into practice self-directed professional (SDPD) at school level, significant changes should be introduced concerning human resources management with reference to the learning facilitating profession at provincial level. This involves a formal recognition of TCPD attended by means of in-service education programmes, such as seminar, short courses and SDPD at school level.
- Taking into consideration the number of teachers in lower primary education, the focus should be the pedagogical deputy from each primary school. This

person, being the one who is in charge and primarily deals with pedagogical matters at school level could be the facilitator, mentor and monitor of AR and TCPD. The approach should be a “whole school approach” in the sense that all learning facilitators should be involved. The programme could begin small, with those who are appointed for Grades 1 and 2; however, the aim should be to involve all learning facilitators. The procedure could be as follows:

- A pedagogical team, at provincial level of education, comprising experienced teacher educators, pedagogical technicians from the Provincial Directorate of Education, supported by researcher on PD and/or teacher education, expertise in primary education, concerning areas such as reading, writing and individual learner monitoring and assessment in Grades 1 and 2, could design and develop programmes to improve knowledge and pedagogical skills among teachers from these grades.
- The programmes designed should include the indication and production of learning material for the learning content in Grades 1 and 2.
- The pedagogical deputies participating in the programmes should produce their own kit comprising the basic learning material.
- The provincial team defines the minimal number of in-service education programmes each learning facilitator should attend and the certificate of participation to be provided.
- The provincial team develops a work schedule to involve pedagogical deputies of primary schools, according to the better practises used for a large and workable working group before the beginning of the academic year.
- Each pedagogical deputy, before the beginning of the academic year, promotes and facilitates TCPD on reading writing and monitoring and assessment of individual learning. At school level the pedagogical deputy could be supported by experienced colleagues and individuals with recognised experience.

- The TCPD programmes on reading writing and monitoring and assessment should provide participants the opportunities to produce their own learning material.
 - The PD programmes should focus on whole school, involving all learning facilitators in order to provide similar experience of CPD and opportunities to acquire or develop pedagogical skills. This approach is crucial for Mozambican schools since the practice in primary school is that a teacher does not often has the same class from Grade 1 up to Grade 5 or at least at Grade 2 when the learners, in theory, complete literacy acquisition.
 - The pedagogical deputies should follow-up and monitor how at classroom level the activities recommended for the initiation of reading and writing are being performed in order to ensure an effective reading and writing process.
 - The pedagogical team should follow-up the practises running at school level.
 - At the end of a set of in-service education programmes a certain number of learning facilitators should be appointed as Grade (1 or 2) or Cycle (Grades 1-2) specialists.
- The provider of TCPD should work towards an emerging expertise on acquisition of reading and writing skills among the learning facilitators at school level. This is likely
- to improve the quality of TCPD programmes
 - to contribute to the professional growth in the learning facilitator profession
 - to increase the acknowledgement of TCPD programmes
 - to discard and reduce expenses on the frequent and repeated revitalisation of revitalised Zones of Pedagogical Influence.

5.4.2 Recommendations for Further Research

As an exploratory research, this PAR has not been exhaustive; it has its limitations and raises a number of questions and creates ample opportunities for further research. The following issues are recommended:

- A number of TCPD have been provided by the Ministry of Education and by either governmental or non-governmental organisations; however, no research has been developed to find out the impact of the model of the CPD on the classroom practice. Therefore it is important to carry out research to establish the relationship between the learning provided throughout the TCPD and what learning facilitators actually do in class.
- The TCPD programmes provided have had little follow-up and monitoring. Therefore there is no clear feedback available. It is crucial to develop research on the impact of TCPD provided and the learners' achievement obtained.
- In Mozambique there are learning facilitators with different academic and professional qualifications. However, all of them are exposed to the same TCPD and the impact of TCPD on each group of learning facilitators is not clear. In order to establish the impact on those groups research could be performed.
- Owing to the different levels of professional qualifications there is no formal profile of a learning facilitator in primary education. Therefore, based in general on the aims of the national education system and in particular on objectives of primary education and curriculum planning for this level, research on the profile of learning facilitators should be carried out.
- This PAR has identified that methods of facilitating learning are the most valuable topic in the TCPD programmes attended. Accordingly research on the learning contents and the level and extent of the learning facilitators' participation in those programmes should be conducted.
- This PAR did not accurately identify the practice of individual learner assessment in terms of frequency, achievement attained and the provision of instruction to support low achieving learners. It is therefore important that research on the TCPD offered with respect to the aims and learning objectives, participation, follow-up and monitoring be performed.

- The study revealed that PAR is suitable for TCPD due to the importance given to the PRs participation in all stages of the study, with particular emphasis on the search for appropriate solutions. Therefore research should be conducted to find out how PAR could be used in primary schools.
- This PAR did not aim at designing or proposing a framework for self-directed professional development (SDPD) in primary schools. This is a topic for further research.

5.5 CONCLUSION

The findings from this PAR show *a priori* insufficient capacity of conducting authentic AR among the PRs. I as a research-mentor and beginner-researcher had to manage doing research and supporting a group of five PRs within the constraints at school and PR's availability as previously mentioned. I conclude that there is a need to create a minimal capacity in order to promote investigation in schools towards a SDPD.

As a facilitator of CPD of the PRs I should have promoted the fulfilment of the set of principles of SDPD described by Clarck (1992). However, I could not. This limitation was due to insufficient pedagogical knowledge and skills provided by the 10+2 teacher education programme. As mentioned in previous chapters, the PRs held 10+2 certification. To some extent they had limitations in identifying their learning needs and in planning their journey of learning. Therefore SDPD had to be supported by previous learning of methods of facilitating reading and writing in Grades 1 and 2. However, taking into consideration the overall process of this PAR and the involvement of the PRs, I conclude that this study contributes to improving my knowledge as research promoter and facilitator of TCPD. In addition I am convinced that the PRs increased their awareness and skills in relation to SDPD and elementary issues related to reflection and follow-up of individual learner achievement. Moreover, each PR can systematically design and develop remedial tasks. The PRs and I believe that the study provides a meaningful contribution to a SDPD in primary schools.