

# Participation in Professional Programmes and Curriculum Implementation: Perspectives of Senior High School French Teachers in Ghana

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## Abstract

Professional development is a sine-qua-non to increasing teachers' skills and abilities in curriculum implementation. Yet, in recent times, policy makers, school heads and teachers have given it little attention. This study therefore focuses on investigating the impact of teachers' participation in professional programmes on curriculum implementation at the SHS. The research adopted the concurrent mixed approach in documenting facts about teachers' professional development and implementation. Evidence was gathered through surveys and interviews on seventy two (72) and eight (8) teachers respectively, drawn using multiple sampling procedures. It was found that teachers of French at the SHS participate in professional programmes such as the ones organised by CREF, GAFT and the GES. However, teachers had negative perceptions about the content of these programmes since they did not in enhance teacher knowledge, skills of teaching and students' achievement. It was also found that a positive significant relationship [ $r(72) = .804, p < .05$  given  $\alpha = .05$  and  $p$ -value = .008] exists between participation in professional programmes and curriculum implementation. Based on these outcomes, the study recommends that for maximum impact, content of professional development programmes be aligned with the curriculum so teachers' implementation challenges could be addressed for enhanced student learning.

**Keywords:** SHS, curriculum implementation, French teachers, CREF, GES

## 1.0 Introduction

Staff development for teachers has emerged from fragmented, one shot, large group awareness sessions, delivered to passive recipients into the primary driving force in school reform enabling students to achieve at high levels (Burke, 2000). The old model of staff development, often referred to as professional development, was focused on fixing what is wrong through generic instruction to large groups, resulting in limited if any long-term transfer into instructional practice. Often the training provided lacked the support of research to prove its value, was determined by the school principal, and lacked continued support for implementation and evaluation (Burke, 2000). Each professional development programme was a result of federal policies intended to stimulate change and improve schools. The Rand report found that the federal government policies played a major role in promoting the implementation of programmes, however even successful implementation of these programmes did not ensure continuation of the programmes. The premise behind the federal programme was that more money and better ideas would improve school practice. The Rand report examined the local factors on the implementation of the projects. School districts utilised local discretion and adapted different strategies for implementation. Implementation strategies that relied on outside consultants, pre-packaged programmes, one shot training, pay for training, formal and summative assessments were seen as ineffective. Their ineffectiveness resulted from the incompatibilities with the districts' priorities and the needs and interests of teachers involved in the projects. In general, these strategies were not effective because they failed to provide on-going and sometimes unpredictable support teachers needed, excluded teachers from project development and (intentionally or not) signaled a mechanistic role for teachers (McLaughlin, 1989). Additionally, the study found that resources alone did not ensure successful implementation or continuation of the projects. Effective strategies included concrete and ongoing training, classroom support, the ability of teachers to observe similar projects, regular project meetings providing timely feedback, locally developed materials, administrative participation in the training, and broad-based project commitment. McLaughlin (1989) contends, ten years later, that it is difficult for policy to change educational practice. The Rand study shows that the change in education is highly dependent on local factors beyond the control of our federal policy makers. Each local district varies even though they may share some common feature. An English class in a wealthy suburban classroom will be uniquely different from an urban, lower socioeconomic school's English classroom.

Teachers' efforts are crucial for implementing new practices. They need regular feedback, supportive leadership and multiple opportunities for professional development. Desimone, Porter, Birman, Garet, and Suk Yoon

(2002), in a study identified three characteristics of best practices in the design and structure of professional development. These characteristics were; activity type, time devoted to the activity, and the collective participation of groups of teachers. Activity types included study groups, teacher networks, mentoring committees, internships, and individual research projects. Time for staff development included the length of the individual training activity, total hours of involvement and the entire length of the programme. Collective participation included groups of teachers from the same school, department, and grade level. In addition, they identified three characteristics at the core of effective staff development. They were content focus, opportunities for active learning, and a cohesive staff development programme. Each contributed to the success of the professional development to improve teachers' skills and changes in instructional practices. Interviews were conducted during the period of July 1997 through December 1998 with the districts' professional development coordinators (Desimone, 2002). Data, gathered through telephone interviews, were based solely on the response of one individual from each district. The interview questions focused on the districts' professional development's alignment with standards, coordination, continuous improvement efforts, levels of planning, teacher involvement, and teacher evaluations of their professional development. The research results indicated that most districts have standards aligned to assessments for professional development but larger districts were more likely to be aligned than smaller districts.

In order that curriculum policy is translated into practice and to ensure that successful implementation and continuity of any curriculum innovation exists in the classroom, it is paramount that teachers receive in-service training and provision of ongoing support and professional development (De Lano et al., 1994; White, 1993). As Stenhouse (1975) put it, without teacher professional development there can be no curriculum implementation. Brindley and Hood (1990) claimed that ongoing in-service training and professional development constitute an important component of any projected implementation. In-service training focuses on teachers' responsibilities and is aimed toward short-term and immediate goals, whereas professional development seeks to facilitate growth of teachers' understanding of teaching and of themselves as teachers (Richards & Farrell, 2005). A teacher may be doing him/herself a disservice if s/he therefore fails to take active part in professional developmental activities. A considerable number of conceptual and empirical studies have been carried out to illustrate the importance of teachers' in-service training and professional development in assisting teachers with their curriculum implementation skills. Analysing 15 empirical studies conducted in the 1970s, Fullan and Pomfret (1977) concluded that in-service training was a factor in seven studies. These studies indicated that teachers who received intensive in-service training had a higher degree of implementation than those who did not.

### *1.1 Statement of the Problem*

Staff development is meant not only to expand the repertoire of teachers' instructional skills and ensure successful implementation of complex school reforms but it also offers meaningful intellectual engagement for teachers. The complexity of teaching, the inconsistent educational policies and the lack of opportunities for teachers to upgrade their professional skills hinder the successful implementation of curriculum in Ghana. Lack of governmental, non-governmental (NGOs) and institutional structures to provide short-term workshops/seminars with a view to changing observable teacher classroom behaviour leaves much to be desired especially in the area of French education at the SHS level. The fact remains that it may be impossible to improve school performances without improving the skills and abilities of the teachers. However, this subject has not received the needed attention in research cycles especially in Ghana. This motivated me to conduct this study to find the impact that teachers' participation in professional programmes has on curriculum implementation in French.

### *1.2 Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this study was to examine the teachers' participation in professional programmes and curriculum implementation, focusing on the perspectives of SHS French Teachers in Ghana. The nexus between participation and implementation were the main variables examined. The specific objective of this study was to:

1. Ascertain the kind of professional programmes in which French teachers participate.
2. Find out the perceptions of French teachers about the content of the professional programmes they participate in terms of programme potency to enhance teacher knowledge, skill and motivation; teachers' classroom teaching and enhancing student achievement.
3. Lastly, the study sought to investigate if a relationship exists between teachers' participation in French professional programmes and curriculum implementation.

### *1.3 Research Questions*

The study sought answers to the following pertinent questions:

1. What professional programme(s) do SHS teachers of French participate in?
2. How do French teachers perceive the content of the professional programmes in which they participate in terms of their capacity to:
  - a. Enhance teacher knowledge, skill and motivation to teach effectively?
  - b. Enhance teacher's classroom teaching?
  - c. Enhance student achievement in French?

#### *1.3.1 Hypothesis*

1.  $H_0$ : There is no correlation between teachers' participation in French professional programmes and curriculum implementation.  
 $H_1$ : There is a correlation between teachers' participation in French professional programmes and curriculum implementation.

### *1.4 Significance of the Study*

The current is important in the following ways:

The report would help play a critical role in transforming schools if students are going to achieve at high levels in French. In other words, it is envisaged that the study would help improve learning of French at the SHS. Moving forward and using this information, the study would help improve student learning and provide opportunities for teacher collaboration for the purposes of learning and applying new knowledge and practices.

1. Also, the study would alter the attitudes, practices, and extend the knowledge of French teachers in transacting the French curriculum. The net result of this would be the acquisition of new skills and knowledge by teachers and which would engender organisational change.
2. It would provide the platform for government, NGOs, Subject Associations such as GAFT and other stakeholder in education to meet and deliberate on better ways of putting in place professional developmental programmes that meet the instructional needs of French language teachers.
3. Literature reviewed in this study would serve as a source of rich literature for future research especially in the area of foreign language acquisition.

## **2.0 Theoretical Framework**

### *2.1 Overview*

Staff development is in the process of changing from fragmented, one shot, large group awareness sessions into cohesive collaborative programmes designed to increase student achievement. In the literature, it was found that the National Staff Development Council (NSDC) adopted new standards in 2001 which forced educators to rethink their staff development programmes (NSDC, 2001). Staff development can no longer be generic in nature but rather must be seen as the major instrument in school reform. The focus of staff development has shifted to increasing the achievement of all students through the improvement of the skills and abilities of teachers as implementers of education reform programmes. The NSDC standards for staff development revolve around context, process, and content. Context calls for the development of learning communities supported by administrative leadership and resources. Process involves identifying a problem based upon multiple sources of data, analysing the research in the problem area or areas, designing a cohesive ongoing programme to provide teachers with instructional strategies to address these areas, and assessing the impact of the staff development on student achievement (Little, 1993). Included in the process component is the shift from top down management to a collaborative model in which both teachers and administrators collectively work together. Content addresses quality, equity, and family involvement. The new standards call for focusing on staff development, supported by research that provides teachers with new instructional strategies by specific content areas. In addition teachers are to be prepared to understand and appreciate all students, develop high expectations for student achievement, and obtain knowledge and skills to involve all stakeholders in the education of children. The complexity of teaching and the lack of proven staff development models were noted as problems in designing of successful staff development programmes (Little, 1993). Authors still contend that staff development is the key to transforming schools if students are going to achieve at high levels. Staff development programmes for language teaching, especially French should be carefully planned and based upon the intended objectives for learning French, taking into consideration the needs and learning styles of the learners. French teachers should possess excellent teaching skills and knowledge of their content areas prior to being considered as a French teacher.

Teachers should be able to establish and maintain relationships with students and be able to motivate and monitor students' learning.

In fact, showing that professional development translates into gains in student achievement poses tremendous challenges, despite an intuitive and logical connection between them (Borko, 2004; Loucks-Horsley & Matsumoto, 1999; Supovitz, 2001). To substantiate the empirical link between professional development and student achievement, studies should ideally establish two points. One is that there are links among professional development, teacher learning and practice, and student learning. The other is that the empirical evidence is of high quality - which the study proves what it claims to prove. This paper focuses on the second point, treating the first only briefly as a heuristic or logic model.

## 2.2 Teacher as a Professional and teacher Professionalism

There is a body of evidence of increasing advocacy for teachers to engage in continuous professional development as a measure to maintain the level of their professionalism. Cardno (2005) for example states that professional development for teachers is important to ensure the sustainability and growth of teaching profession. This claim reinforces Boyle, While and Boyle (2004) assertion that "the continual deepening of knowledge and skills is an integral part of the professional development of any professional working in any profession" (p. 46). The relationship that is established between teachers' professional development and teacher professionalism has shaped this literature review to the discussion of teaching as a profession. Dean (1991) defines the term 'profession' as "an occupation which requires long training involving theory as background to practice, has its own code of behaviour and has high degree of autonomy" (p. 5). Paramount to this definition is the emphasis on the significance of learning the theories of teaching to inform teachers' teaching practice. Dean (1991) as cited in Nurul (2012) explained that for teaching to be considered as a 'profession', it is mandatory that teachers are offered continuous learning opportunities that expose them to the theories of education to develop their practice. As emphasised earlier by Dean (1991), professional development for teachers needs to be strongly grounded in theory. Goodson (1997) (as cited in Nurul, 2012) supports this statement by explaining that "at its best, theory works back to informed and improved practice" (p.30). He also cautions that separation of the theoretical knowledge from practice will affect the idea of teaching as a profession, which "is based on a set of research expertise and theoretical bodies of knowledge" (Goodson, 1997, p. 32). The strength of teachers' professional development that embodied the theories of teaching and learning is evident in the Best Evidence Synthesis (BES). Timperley, Wilson, Barrar and Fung (2007) report that from the six studies on teachers' professional learning examined in the Best Evidence Synthesis (BES), the three studies of teacher professional learning that recorded the lower outcomes for its learners are the ones identified as having the least emphasis on theories. This finding further supports the argument that theory oriented approach is essential to teachers' professional development for it to have some impact on teaching practice.

In addition to having a strong focus on the theory aspect of professional development, the definition of the term 'profession' as offered by Dean (1991) also implies that for teaching to be considered as a profession and teachers as professional, it is fundamental for the teachers to continuously experience professional development throughout their career. This is further explained by Kwakman (2003) who says:

*Keeping up is a core responsibility of professionals, as the professional knowledge base underlying professional work does rely on the input of new information since it is subject to continuous improvement. The main aim of reading is keeping up to date with new insights and developments influencing the professional field such as new subject matter, new teaching methods and manuals, new pedagogical approaches, but also new societal developments which have an impact on education and teaching in general (p. 153).*

Bredeson (2002) however points out that continuous learning opportunities for teachers to enrich and refine their professional knowledge and practice is often undermined by the lack of time, money, and appropriate structures. In addition to understanding the relationship between professional development and the notion of teachers as professionals, the literature review also reveals that some authors choose to shape their discussion of teaching as a profession by first looking at the term 'professionalism'. Defining the term professionalism in the manner that best describes the work that teachers do prove to be a challenging task as the literature appears to be divided in the approaches used. Hargreaves (2000) for example has established the link between professional development and teacher professionalism by looking at the different phases of teachers' professionalism. He asserts that the idea of 'professionalism' refers to the quality of teaching and the conduct, demeanour and the standards that guide it. In addition, Hargreaves (2000) argues that the idea of teacher professionalism has evolved in the past years due to the changes that are constantly taking place in the world's education system. He further elaborates that there has been four historical phases of teacher professionalism identified over the years; the pre-

professional age, the age of autonomous professional, the age of collegial professional and finally, the post-professional or post modern.

Consequently, the force of change affecting teacher professionalism is also identified to be affecting the nature of teachers' professional development. Hargreaves (2000) notes that during the phase of the 'professional autonomy', the nature of teaching is often described as working in isolation. It is common during that phase of time for teachers to work alone in their classroom with minimal interaction with their colleagues (Hargreaves, 2000). Hence, their professional development experiences come in the form of workshops and courses that are delivered away from the classroom and school by outside experts, and received by teachers as individuals. However, these teachers were not able to integrate what they had learned into their practice when they returned to workplaces as they did not understand or received support to apply the new knowledge and skills in their classrooms (Little, 1993 as cited in Hargreaves, 2000).

In their quest to improve the nations' economic competitiveness, the governments become preoccupied with the effort to increase the standard of education received by the students. This increased expectation in the quality of education sees more teachers facing the prospect of having to teach in ways they had not been taught themselves (McLaughlin, 1997). Hargreaves (2000) explains that for this reason, "many teachers are starting to turn more to each other for professional learning, for a sense of direction, and for mutual support" (p.162). Consequently, this has caused the shift in the nature of teaching from working alone in the isolation of their classroom to working in collaboration with their colleagues. This collegial relationship also changed the form of teachers' professional development. Instead of having off-site workshop for individual teachers, recent professional development programmes are designed to be more collaborative in nature.

To sum up, the literature base reviewed has established that teaching is a profession and as professionals, teachers need to be provided with sufficient amount of professional development so that there are able to maintain their level of professionalism. Hence this suggestion has raised some very important questions such as: Do the teachers agree with the statement that professional development helps to improve their teaching practice? If so, what are the impacts? Do the forms and activities of professional development experienced by the participants enable them to be more effective in their practice? This research study will attempt to seek the answers to these questions.

### *2.3 Teachers' Professional Development Models*

In general, teachers' professional development falls under two categories of models: the traditional and the 'reform-type' professional development models (Birman, Desimone, Porter, & Garet, 2000). The traditional model often assumes that there is a deficit or a gap in teachers' knowledge and skills which can easily be developed in "one-shot" workshops (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002). In addition to the workshop approach, traditional form of teachers' professional development also comes in the forms of within district workshop or training, out of district workshop or training and also formal postgraduate courses (Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon, & Birman, 2002). Although the traditional approach helps to foster teachers' awareness or interest in deepening their knowledge and skills, is believed that this model alone is insufficient to foster learning which fundamentally alters teaching practice (Boyle et al., 2004).

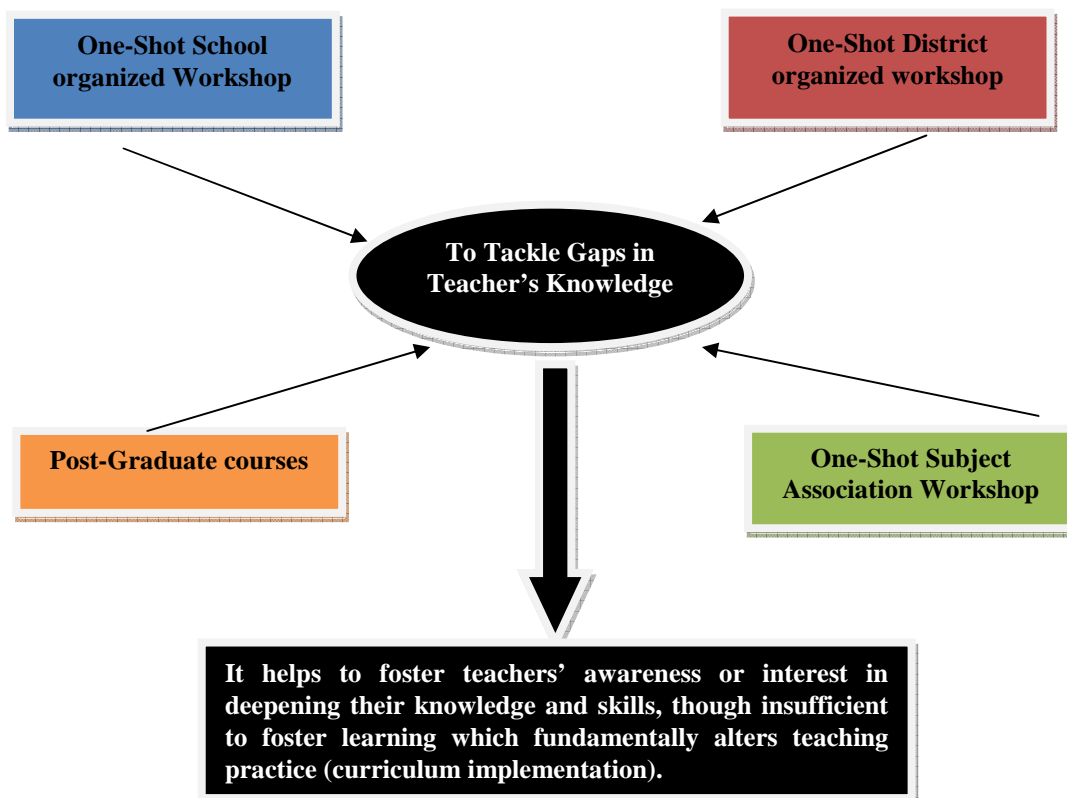
Moreover, the traditional form of teachers' professional development is also criticised as being shallow and fragmented (Hawley & Valli, 1999). This is echoed by Ball and Cohen (1999) who describe the in-service workshops as "intellectually superficial, disconnected from deep issues of curriculum and learning, fragmented, and noncumulative" (p.4). The authors further explain teachers' professional learning is often shallow and fragmented because teaching is perceived as mostly common sense and has little need for professional learning. In addition, it is also perceived that teachers do not required sustained learning to perform their work (Ball & Cohen, 1999).

The alternative to the traditional model of teachers' professional development is the 'reform-type' or else known as the 'growth' model of professional development (Huberman & Guskey, 1995). The authors describe this model as "a variety of professional development activities that accompany continuous inquiry into one's instructional practice" (p. 270). This paradigm shift from the traditional model to reform-type sees that professional development for teachers is changing "from replication to reflection, from learning separately to learning together, and from centralization to decentralization" (Smylie & Conyers, 1991 as cited in Hawley & Valli, 1999).

Advocates of the reform-type model also believe that professional development for teachers is most effective when it is done within their working context. Sparks and Hirsh (1997) for example argue that it is imperative for teachers' professional development to be treated as multiple forms of job-embedded learning for meaningful changes to occur in teaching practice. Wilson and Berne (1999) suggest that some learning, no doubt, goes on in

the interstices of the workday, in conversations with colleagues, passing glimpses of another teacher's classroom on the way to the photocopying machine, tips swapped in the coffee lounge, not to mention the daily experience of the classroom.

The school is said to be the most suitable place for teachers to develop professionally as new teaching competencies can only be acquired in practice (Kwakman, 2003). However, despite the advocacy for teachers' professional development to be centred in practice, Ball and Cohen (1999) argue that it “does not necessarily imply situations in classrooms in real time” (p. 14). Instead, they suggest that better learning opportunities for teachers can be created through strategic documentation of practice. The authors recommend among others the collection of “concrete records and artifacts of teaching and learning that teachers could use as the curriculum for professional inquiries” (p. 20). Figure 1 represents the traditional model of teacher professional development according to Desimone et al. 2002.



**Figure 1.** Traditional model [Modified] of teacher professional development couched from Desimone et al. (2002).

#### 2.4 Impact of Professional Development Programmes on Curriculum Implementation

Based on their research on teachers' perceptions of the impact of continuous professional development, Powell, Terrell, Furey and Scott-Evans (2003) choose to define the word ‘impact’ as “changes in professional knowledge, practices and affective response as perceived by the individual practitioner” (p. 399). They argue that to measure impact, it does not necessarily have to rely only on quantifiable data. Instead, they propose that the impact of professional development on teaching practice can also be assessed from the teachers' insight and reflection of “what constitute significance and value in relation to their own personal, academic and professional needs and development” (p. 399). Other researchers have also documented that teachers in general believe certain professional development programmes they attended have significant impact on their development as teachers and for that matter on their effectiveness in transacting the curriculum. Several authors (Dean, 1991; Guskey, 2000) for example, describe teachers' professional development as a process which is aimed primarily at promoting learning and development of teachers' professional knowledge, skills and attitudes.

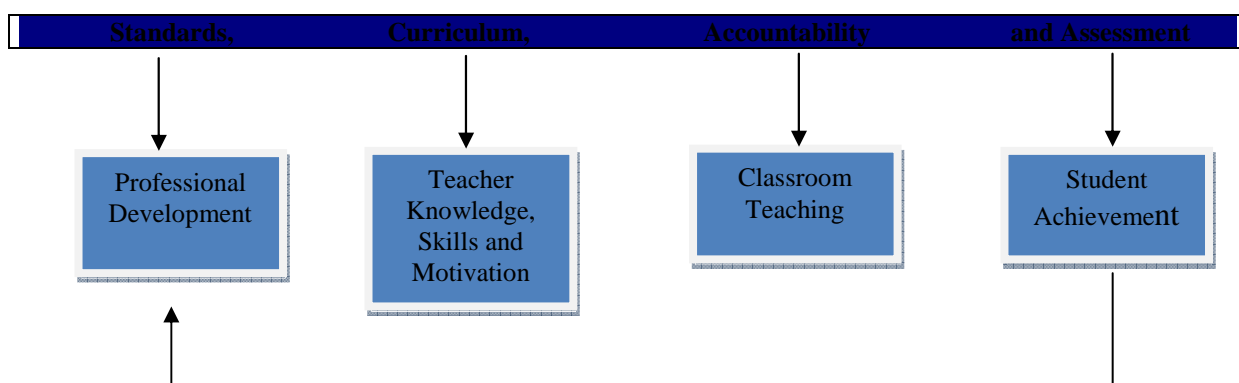
For these reasons, teachers' participation in professional development is believed to have some impact on the teachers' ability to acquire and critically develop the knowledge, skills and emotional intelligence essential to good professional thinking, planning and practice with their students and colleagues through every phase of their

teaching lives (Gabriel et al., 2011; Buczynski & Hansen, 2010; Poskitt, 2005; Borko, 2004). In addition, Desimone (2009) asserts that professional development also impacts on the teachers' ability to decide on and implement valued changes in teaching and leadership behaviour so that they can educate their students more effectively, thus achieving an agreed balance between individual, school and national needs.

A wide review of literature reveals a plethora of research that focus on the examination of the features of some of the best practices in relation to teachers' professional development (Garet et al., 2001). Desimone (2009) for example points out the fact that there is a growing consensus on the features of professional development that are believed to result in the changes in teacher knowledge and practice and possibly students' achievement. She later proposes that these common features of effective professional development are measured to assess the effectiveness of any professional development programmes, no matter what types of activity they include, (Desimone, 2009).

### 2.5 Effective Professional Development Model (EPDM)

Effective professional development models have posited that there exists a nexus among professional development (PD), teacher learning and practice, and student learning. Consistent with several existing models of effective PD (Cohen & Hill, 2000; Fishman, Marx, Best, & Tal, 2003; Garet et al., 2001; Guskey & Sparks, 2004), it was assumed that the effects of PD on student achievement are mediated by teacher knowledge and teaching in the classroom. As our logic model (shown in Figure 1) indicates, we also assume that teacher's PD and instruction as well as student learning take place in the context of high standards, challenging curriculum, system-wide accountability, and high stakes assessment. Figure 2 depicts the connections among standards, curriculum accountability and assessment in the logic model.



**Figure 2.** Logic model of the impact of professional development on student achievement.

Professional development affects student achievement through three steps. First, professional development enhances teacher knowledge, skills, and motivation. Second, better knowledge, skills, and motivation improve classroom teaching. Third, improved teaching raises student achievement. If one link is weak or missing, better student learning cannot be expected. If a teacher fails to apply new ideas from professional development to classroom instruction, for example, students will not benefit from the teacher's professional development. In other words, the effect of PD on student learning is possible through two mediating outcomes: teachers' learning, and instruction in the classroom. In the first step, for professional development to improve teachers' knowledge, skills, and motivation, it must be of high quality in its theory of action, planning, design, and implementation. More specifically: it should be based on a carefully constructed and empirically validated theory of teacher learning and change (Richardson & Placier, 2001); it should promote and extend effective curricula and instructional models - or materials based on a well defined and valid theory of action (Hiebert & Grouws, 2007; Rossi, Lipsey, & Freeman, 2004) and it should be intensive, sustained, content-focused, coherent, well defined, and strongly implemented (Garet et al., 2001; Guskey, 2003; Supovitz, 2001). In the second step, teachers apply their enhanced knowledge, skills, and motivation to classroom teaching (Borko, 2004), supported by ongoing school collaboration and follow-up consultations with experts. Doing so could require overcoming such barriers to new practices as lack of time for preparation and instruction, limited materials and human resources, and lack of follow-up support from professional development providers. In the third step, teaching - improved by professional development - raises student achievement. The challenge is measuring and validating the gains.

## *2.6 Features of effective professional development*

### *2.6.1 Content focus*

There is a widespread agreement among scholars for teachers' professional development to be largely viewed as knowledge and skills development (Desimone et al., 2002; Garet et al., 2001; Timperley et al. 2007). The literature reviewed exhibits a strong advocacy for teachers' professional development to be understood as opportunities for learning (Fishman et al. 2003 as cited in Nurul, 2012). Professional development for teachers needs to give them the opportunities to learn from their own practice by way of self-reflection in addition to preparing them for their new roles and responsibility (Garrett and Bowles, 1997). They further add that teachers' professional development needs to focus on the enhancement of their professional knowledge, beliefs and attitudes so that they will be able to improve their student learning. This reinforces other earlier statements and views that professional learning for teachers will enrich their knowledge base, improve their teaching practice, and enhance their self-efficacy and commitment to quality service.

In general, the content focus of any teachers' professional development falls into two categories: Fishman et al. (2003 as cited in Nurul, (2012) in their work explained that the first category of content focus refers to the knowledge related to general teaching work such as assessments, classrooms organisation and management and teaching strategies while the second category refers to the subject content itself. Assessment is a major component of all the core studies covered in BES as through their assessment skills teachers are able to judge the impact of their changed practice on student learning (Timperley et al., 2007). The authors explain teachers' sound assessment skills make it possible for them to make ongoing adjustment to their teaching practice so that it can be more effective.

Consequently, knowledge content has become the most significant component of any form of teachers' professional development programme. Borko (2004) argues that having a strong emphasis on knowledge content is critical to the success of any professional development experienced by teachers. This is because participation in professional development programmes is believed to allow teachers the opportunities to renew their knowledge base while at the same time introducing new knowledge and skills into their repertoire to continuously improve their conceptual and teaching practice (Borko, 2004; Grundy & Robison, 2004). Furthermore, Borko (2004) argue that it is important for teachers to have "rich and flexible knowledge for the subject" (p.5) to foster students' conceptual understanding.

### *2.6.2 Active learning*

Numerous researches conducted to study the forms of high quality teachers' professional development conclude that reform-type professional development is more effective in changing teaching practice (Helmer et al., 2011). The traditional form of teachers' professional development is criticised for not being conducive enough to foster meaningful changes to their teaching practice (Birman et al., 2000; Desimone, 2009). This happens as the activities designed do not provide teachers with ample opportunities to engage in active learning which is believed to be a crucial factor in sustaining the changes made to their teaching practice (Fullan & Mascal, 2000). Birman et al. (2000) explain that professional development that incorporates active learning for teachers also: includes opportunities to observe and be observed teaching; to plan classroom implementation, such as practicing in simulated conditions, and developing lesson plans; to review student works; and to present, lead and write – for example, present a demonstration, lead a discussion or write a report (p. 31).

These forms of strategies linked to active learning are said to be most effective in changing teaching effectiveness. Southworth (2004) who researched on primary school leadership in the context of small, medium and large sized schools asserts that modelling, monitoring and professional dialogue and discussion as the strategies identified to have the most effect in changing teaching practice. In addition, Guskey (2000) as cited in Nurul, (2012) argues that professional development for teachers needs to provide them the opportunity to get regular feedbacks on the changes made to their teaching practice. This approach is believed to be able to change teaching practice compared to professional development programmes conducted in the forms of large group presentations, training programmes, workshops and seminars.

### *2.6.3 Collective participation*

Reform-type professional development for teachers is comparatively believed to be more effective than the traditional model as it focuses on collective participation which is participation of teachers from the same department, subject or grade in the same professional development programme. Birman et al. (2000) assert that collective participation in professional development is more likely to afford opportunities for active learning and are more likely to be coherent with the teachers' other experiences. Moreover, teachers' professional development that involves collective participation, especially for teachers in the same school is believed to be



able to sustain the changes made to their teaching practice. This is because they are more likely to have more opportunity to discuss the concepts, skills and problems arise during their professional development experiences (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Kwang Suk, 2001).

In other words, collective participation in teachers' professional development programmes also engendered collaboration among the teachers. Hargreaves (1995) for example discusses the use of collaboration as one of the ways for teachers to improve their teaching practice. One of the advantages of collaboration is that it increases the capacity for reflection (Hargreaves, 1995) which is argued to be a critical point to teachers' professional learning experience. Collective participation in professional development also gives teachers more opportunities to learn from each other's practice. Kwakman (2003) says that feedback, new information or ideas do not only spring from individual learning, but to a large extent also from dialogue and interaction with other people. This reinforces Hargreaves (1995) earlier assertion that collaboration can be "a powerful source of professional learning: a means of getting better at the job" (p.154).

In addition, collaboration in school also increases efficiency as it eliminates duplication and removes redundancy between teachers and subjects as activities are co-ordinated and responsibilities are shared in complementary ways (Hargreaves, 1999). As this happens, teachers can allocate more of their time and effort on the preparation of their lesson which will improve the quality of teachers' teaching (Hargreaves, 1995). Consequently, collaboration that exists in school provides teacher with moral support as it allows teachers the opportunities to work with their colleagues instead of having to handle the frustration and failure alone.

#### *2.6.4 Duration*

Professional development activities designed based on the reform type are believed to be more effective compared to the activities of the more traditional approaches because of its longer duration. Duration refers to the contact hour spent in a particular professional development activity and also the time span or period of time over which the activity was spread (Garet et al., 2001). Similarly, Birman et al. (2000) argued that "the activities of longer duration have more subject-area content focus, more opportunities for active learning, and more coherence with teachers' other experiences than do shorter activities" (p. 29). This is further reinforced by Garet et al. (2001) assertion that longer professional development activities also more likely to provide opportunities for in-depth discussion of the content, student conception and misconception and also pedagogical strategies to take place among its participants. The authors also suggest that activities that extend over time are more likely to allow teachers more time to try out new practices in the classroom and obtain feedback on their teaching (Garet et al., 2001).

#### *2.6.5 Coherence*

Finally, reform type professional development is believed to incorporate the element of 'coherence' in its design. The literature highlighted three dimensions of coherence in teachers' professional development: 1) the alignment between the professional development activity and teacher's goals for professional development, 2) the alignment between the professional development activity with the state or district standards and curriculum frameworks and with state and district assessments, 3) the ongoing professional communication with other teachers who are also trying to change their practice (Desimone et al., 2002; Garet et al., 2001). This reinforces Day's (1999) earlier assertion for the personal and institutional professional development approaches to be synchronised to maximise the opportunities for change and development in schools. In addition, it has been asserted that teachers need to construct their own knowledge by anchoring new information obtained to pre-existing knowledge. This assertion supports earlier statement that the active learning process as emphasised by the constructivist approach is "heavily influenced by an individual's existing knowledge and beliefs and is situated in particular contexts" (p. 674). Similarly, Kwakman (2003) believes that professional development for teachers needs to allow teachers the opportunities not only to construct their own knowledge but also to direct their own learning.

The issue about cost to provide teachers with more professional development as opposed to having the 'one shot' workshop may need to be further interrogated. It has been argued that it is more expensive to provide teachers with professional development that is catered to their personal needs. In addition, the suggestion for teachers' professional development to extent over a longer period of time is believed to result to teachers leaving their classroom more often and hence causing more disruption to the students' learning. The researchers therefore think that the common features of effective teachers' professional development as highlighted in the literature and discussed earlier go to support any conclusions and recommendations that should be derived for policy makers, French teachers in particular and teachers in general in Ghana.

### **3.0 Methodology**

#### *3.1 Design*

The researcher used the concurrent mixed method design, employing both quantitative and qualitative sources of data. A questionnaire was administered to French teachers and eight (11.1%) of them were interviewed using an interview schedule.

#### *3.2 Population*

The participants comprised seventy two (72) SHS French teachers in ten (10) districts of the Western Region of Ghana. The districts comprised: Jomoro; Mporhor Wassa East; Prestea Huni Valley; Sekondi Takoradi Metro; Sefwi Wiawso; Shama, Suaman; Tarkwa Nsuaem Municipal; Bia; and Ahanta West districts. The teachers in these schools are implementers of the French programme whose responses were deemed relevant in interrogating the research questions and the hypothesis for the study.

#### *3.3 Sample and Sampling Procedure*

The sample for the study consisted of 72 SHS French teachers drawn from ten districts of the Western Region of Ghana. The districts were selected using simple random sampling and the SHSs in the selected districts which offer French were considered using purposive sampling procedure. Eventually, all the SHS French teachers were included using the census technique. A total of eight (8) teachers (representing 11.1% of the total teacher population) were sampled using simple random technique after a sampling frame was constructed to cover all the participating teachers.

#### *3.4 Instrumentation*

A self report instrument (a questionnaire) in addition with an interview schedule was used to gather data from the teachers in all the schools. The questionnaire and the interview schedule were used to gather data on the Research Question (RQ) One and RQ Two. The choice of the two methods was to help the researcher triangulate data sources of the procedures. The fourteen-item (14) questionnaire touched on the professional programmes that teachers participate in and their perceptions about the content of these programmes in terms of how they enhance teacher pedagogical content knowledge, skill and motivation among others. The perceptive items on the questionnaire were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree (5), Agree (4), Neutral (3), Disagree (2) to Strongly Disagree (1).

##### *3.4.1 Pilot-Testing*

Before administration of the questionnaire, it was pilot-tested in eight schools in the Cape Coast metropolis of the Central Region to ascertain the reliability of the individual items. The analysis yielded a reliability coefficient of .78 indicating the cohesiveness of the items in defining the constructs of the study. The interview schedule was not pilot-tested since the result of the pilot-testing of the questionnaire served as the basis for determining the worth of the interview instrument.

##### *3.5 Data Analysis*

Descriptive statistics of means, percentages and frequencies were used to help answer the research questions whereas the Pearson Moment Correlation was also used to test for statistical significance with the help of SPSS. In the case of the qualitative data, content analysis would be used to analyse it through vivid descriptions of the relevant themes that may emerge in the study.

### **4.0 Results and Analysis**

#### *4.1 Research Question 1*

Respondents were asked to provide the professional programmes in which they participate. They mentioned programmes such as GAFT seminars and conferences, Centres Régionaux pour l'Enseignement du Français (CREF) Workshops, GES Seminars, School-Based Workshops among others. During the interview, the majority of teachers 7(87.5%) indicated that most of these programmes had little effect on their classroom teaching. As one of them put it, "*These seminars and workshops often have little to do with the teaching of French except for the CREF Workshops and so I do not personally think I benefit from the other ones by the GES and GAFT in terms of how they contribute to my teaching.*" The said mostly, the CREF Workshops focus on lesson note preparation and the integration of technology to improve the teaching of French. All of the teachers submitted that they thought the content of the professional programmes were not relevant in promoting professional competence. One said, "*The programmes do not on, the whole, enhance teaching in any way.* Some further

stated that this situation does not worry since them. They explained that since schools go after good results, teachers also flirt with all the impossibilities to produce these results without giving any attention to the syllabus. Asked why they participated in the programmes some said they attended because they were made compulsory for teachers. Others said they attended especially the CREF Workshops because of the monetary incentive that the French Government provides for participants. Some were frank to state that, “*But for these incentives, I would not worry myself to attend them.*” They however confessed that they believed appropriate professional programmes when put in place for teachers, would enhance their professional competence.

#### 4.2 Research Question 2

Views of French teachers were sought concerning their perception about the content of the professional programmes in terms of their capacity to: enhance teacher content knowledge, skill and motivation to teach effectively; teacher’s classroom teaching and enhance students’ achievement in French. Table 1 portrays the outcome of the survey exercise conducted on 72 French teachers.

**Table 1: French Teachers’ Perceptions about the Content of the Professional Development Programmes in Which They Participate**

Item	S A No. (%)	A No. (%)	N No. (%)	D No. (%)	S D No. (%)	Total No. (%)
They enhance knowledge, skills and motivation to teach	0(0)	3(4.2)	7(9.7)	23(31.9)	39(54.2)	72(100)
They enhance classroom teaching which is effective implementation	2(2.8)	1(1.4)	9(12.5)	33(45.8)	27(37.5)	72(100)
They invariably enhance students’ achievement in French	0(0)	0(0)	27(37.5)	25(34.7)	20(27.8)	72(100)

From Table 1, one can see that the majority of teachers that is 62(86.1%) perceived professional programmes to have contents which do not enhance teachers’ knowledge, skill and motivation to teach. Seven (9.7%) of them were indifferent whereas only three (4.2%) agreed that they perceived the content to enhance knowledge, skill and motivation. On the question of whether the content enhanced classroom teaching, only three (4.2%) agreed. However, 60(83.3%) disagreed that the content of the development programmes they participate in enhance their classroom teaching. Nine (12.5%) of them however did not express any view on the issue. Lastly, 45(62.5%) intimated that they perceived the content of the professional programmes to enhance students’ achievement in French. However, 27(37.5%) did not express their views on the matter. On the whole, it can be deduced that French teachers generally have negative perceptions about the appropriateness of the content of the professional development programmes since these programmes, according to them do not impact positively on teaching of French.

#### 4.3 Hypothesis

There was a need to find the relationship (inferential statistics) between teachers’ participation in French professional programmes and curriculum implementation (effective teaching). The summary of the obtained data has been presented in Table 2.

**Table 2: Correlation between Teachers’ Participation in Professional Programmes and Curriculum Implementation**

Variable	N	Mean	SD	R	p-value
Participation in Professional Programmes	72	1.98	.317	.804	.008*

\*  $p < .05$ ; N= Sample size; SD= Standard Deviation;  $r$ = Correlation coefficient

It can be gleaned from Table 2 that there is a strong positive correlation ( $r = .804$ ) between participation and curriculum implementation and the small value of the standard deviation ( $SD = .317$ ) indicates that there were no dissenting views expressed by teachers. In other words, the teachers’ views did not vary much on most of the items. Again, the mathematical function of the information showing relationship between teachers’ participation in professional programmes and curriculum is:  $r(72) = .804, p < .05$  given  $\alpha = .05$  and  $p$ -value = .008. Since  $p$  –

value is less than  $\alpha$ , the result is statistically significant. The null hypothesis is thus rejected and a conclusion made on the alternative that a significant correlation exist between teachers' participation in professional programmes and curriculum implementation. By implication, if teachers participate in professional programmes, they would be equipped to implement curriculum effectively.

## 5.0 Discussions and Conclusions

In sum, this study has discovered that teachers need to continuously work on improving their practice and to ensure that they are able to effectively transact/implement the curriculum and facilitate effective students learning. Having too many professional development programmes that are arranged at close interval period of time and tailored along the prescriptions of the syllabus has tended out to be the surest way to improve teachers' ability to implement curriculum planned. Teachers' participating in the professional programmes is even more crucial in the success of the teaching enterprise. Providing teachers and especially French teachers with adequate time to consolidate their new knowledge into practice and to apply it into the classroom is said to be more effective and helps to boost teachers' confidence with their own practice. New practices can further be reinforced through professional learning communities where the teachers are encouraged to share their knowledge and experiences with each other and to support their professional learning experience. The point must be made that professional development for teachers need to address teachers' specific needs so that the experience of participating in professional activities becomes more meaningful, rewarding and not seen as a burden afterall.

Effective professional development programme requires tailoring programme content in enhancing teachers' classroom performance and continuous improvement (Tulsa Public Schools, 2000). A number of studies have revealed that staff development improves students' learning. These studies have explained that effective staff development prepares teachers to understand and appreciate students, create safe, orderly and supportive learning environments, and hold high expectations for their academic achievement (NSDC, 2001). The main findings of this paper is that participation in professional development has no discernible effect on student achievement. This supports the findings of Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon, and Birman (2002). In the context of Ghana, it is important for stakeholders in education to give priority to teacher development programmes to teach well. Research has shown that many teachers are resistant to change and therefore are resistant to professional development activities though the outcome of this study proved otherwise (Richards, 2002). It came to the fore from the current study that French teachers admitted generally that such programmes are necessary in shaping their classroom teaching skills except to say that the contents of the ones they participated in were flawed or irrelevant. Richards (2002) suggested that in order for professional development to be effective, it must come from within the school and be implemented by teachers in the school and yet the finding of this study is contrary. Murphy (2002) concluded that it has been the common practice for professional development to be planned by the principal and to have intentions of achieving dramatic improvements in classroom teaching and student performance. Professional development has traditionally been short-term, disjointed, and held outside of the school day, in physical locations and contexts that are far removed from the classroom.

The study by Murphy concurs with the finding of this study since most of the professional programmes such as the ones by GAFT, CREF and GES are held outside the purview of the school environment. It is perhaps the reason why in this study, French teachers have negative perceptions about the quality of the professional programmes they participate in. it came to the fore that a significant positive relationship exist between participation and curriculum implementation. This finding goes to show that once teachers accept to participate fully in professional development programmes, they would be able to effectively implement the French written curriculum. And so professional development must be designed well to achieve this objective and teachers must be encouraged to fully participate so as to derive the benefits. (Zmunda, Kuklis, & Kline, 2004; Owusu, 2012). In this respect, Ghana must adopt some standards in the design of best professional development programmes for French teachers in line with the standards already established by the United States Department of Education (1996). The programmes should: focus on French teachers as central to student learning and reflect the best available practices in the teaching and learning of French as a foreign language so as to enable French teachers to develop further expertise in pedagogical content knowledge. When these are done curriculum implementation in French at the SHS level would be enhanced.

### 5.1 Recommendations

The following recommendations have been made based on the findings in this study.

1. Professional Development programmes, for them to have the maximum impact, should be aligned well with the content of the written curriculum where teachers are presented with facts about dealing with potentially

- confounding issues bothering on instructionally relevant variables such as curriculum, methodology and instructional materials for enhanced student learning.
2. The GES should redouble their efforts to initiate policies that would encourage teachers to participate actively in professional development programmes. One way of achieving this would be to put in place incentive packages to reward teachers who commit themselves to the course of professional development. The same body (GES) should also initiate and institute regulatory framework to deal ruthlessly with teachers who fail to avail themselves for professional development. The framework should also empower school authorities to sanction teachers even at the grassroots to deter others from the practice where teachers stay away and the GES should also encourage individual schools to conduct subject-related seminars for teachers with part of the funding coming from the GES.
  3. The French government, which has over the years been an ardent sponsor of CREF's programmes for French teachers should sacrifice the more and give financial aid to boost the activities of these centres throughout the country. In the same vein, a call would go to the managers to judiciously use these funds for their intended purposes so as to be able to source more to sustain the programme.
  4. The government of Ghana should consider sending French teachers outside Ghana to neighbouring countries to learn about French language teaching. The exercise should be coordinated in such a way that the teachers are sent out during every long vacation period on the academic calendar. Though the cost of this would be enormous, its benefits would far outweigh the cost. This, in the end would encourage students to study French and it would also encourage others to train and join the profession as French teachers.
  5. Lastly, there should be a feedback mechanism to evaluate and determine the relative worth (overtime) of development programmes for French teachers. In line with this thought, it is recommended that regular inspection be conducted to SHSs to ascertain the outcomes or the impact of the professional development programmes on teaching. This should take the form of primarily conducting post-programme assessment of French teacher competences and doing cost-benefit analysis in order to improve future endeavours. This could be made by the regional coordinators of CREF and some personnel from the French Embassy in Accra.
  6. Finally, professional development activities should incorporate in them, active learning ingredients that fosters for teachers, opportunities to observe and be observed teaching; to plan classroom implementation, such as practicing in simulated conditions, and developing lesson plans; to review student works; and to present, lead and write. These have positive impact on teaching practice. Again, professional development for teachers should provide them the opportunity to get regular feedbacks on the changes made to their teaching practice. This approach when adopted would be able to change the phase of teaching compared to professional development programmes organised in the forms of large group presentations, training programmes, workshops and seminars.

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