



The Aptitude of Heads of Schools in Fostering Professional Development Opportunities and Support towards Teachers' Effective Teaching in Public Secondary Schools in Meru District Council

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Abstract: *This study assessed the aptitude of heads of schools in fostering professional development opportunities and support towards teachers' effective teaching in public secondary schools. The study employed a mixed research approach with explanatory sequential design. Sample size of the study involved 130 including 120 teachers, 5 heads of schools and 5 heads of departments that were drawn from 435 targeted populations. Data collection tools were questionnaires and interviews. The data analysis methods involved descriptive statistics and thematic methods of data analysis. The study found that, the aptitude of heads of schools in promoting teachers' professional development in enhancing effective teaching activities is comprehensive and critical. By strategically implementing indoor training, securing financial support, fostering reflective practice, organizing seminars and workshops, facilitating collaborative learning, and providing frequent, constructive evaluations and instructional supervision, school leaders significantly enhance teachers' skills and knowledge. The study recommended that the government, community members, parents and teachers should provide mutual support e.g. financial to heads of schools to foster teachers' professional development and overall quality of education.*

Keywords: *Aptitude, Heads of Schools, Professional Development Opportunities and support, Public Secondary Schools*

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1. Introduction

Heads of schools referred to as principals or school leaders who are the chief executive officers of educational institutions, responsible for the overall management, leadership, and instructional direction of the school (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). The role of heads of schools in teachers' professional development is multifaceted and crucial for enhancing instructional quality and student outcomes (Wang & Li, 2018). They act as instructional leaders, mentors, and facilitators, directly influencing the growth and effectiveness of their teaching staff (Zhang & Liu, 2019). Situational

Leadership Theory (SLT), developed by Paul Hersey and Ken Blanchard in the late 1960s, posits that there is no single best way to lead; instead, effective leadership is contingent upon the context and the readiness level of the individuals being led. Situational leadership theory provides a robust framework for school heads aiming to enhance teachers' effectiveness in public secondary schools by recognizing the diverse needs of educators at various stages of their careers.

Globally, there is a widespread recognition that effective teaching is paramount for student success and that continuous professional development (PD) for teachers is crucial for maintaining and improving

teaching quality (Namuddu, 2017). Educational reforms worldwide emphasize the importance of school leadership in facilitating teachers' professional development. The evolving demands of education, including technological advancements and changing pedagogical approaches, necessitate ongoing learning for teachers, and school leaders are increasingly seen as key agents in creating environments that support this (Wang & Li, 2018). This process is directly relevant with Transformational leadership theory introduced in the 1970s by James MacGregor Burns, emphasizing the importance of leaders who inspire and motivate followers to achieve higher levels of performance and personal development (Sergiov, 2018).

In Europe, particularly in Britain, the emphasis on professional development for teachers has evolved significantly, driven by policy reforms aimed at improving educational standards and teacher accountability (Stronge, 2018). The role of heads of schools is central to this process. The head teacher's commitment to continuous professional development (CPD), directly correlates with improved teacher performance and student outcomes (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). Heads of schools are expected to create a culture of continuous learning, identify teachers' developmental needs, allocate resources for training, and monitor the impact of CPD on teaching practices (Stronge, 2018).

Similarly in Asia, specifically in China, the rapid economic development and educational reforms have placed a strong emphasis on teacher quality and professional development (Zhang & Liu, 2019). The role of school heads in fostering these opportunities is crucial, especially given the vast and diverse educational landscape. Chinese educational policy mandates continuous professional development for teachers, with school heads responsible for its implementation and effectiveness within their schools (Wang & Li, 2018).

In Africa, the context for professional development for teachers is also characterized by unique challenges, including resource constraints, large class sizes, diverse linguistic backgrounds, and varying levels of infrastructure (Mtebe & Mbvette, 2014). Despite these challenges, the role of heads of schools (principals or head teachers) in fostering professional development is increasingly recognized as vital for improving educational quality.

In South Africa, principals are seen as key agents of change, responsible for leading school improvement initiatives, which include teacher professional development (Ssentamu, 2019). In Kenya, the Teachers Service Commission (TSC) is the primary body responsible for teacher management and professional development. Heads of schools are tasked with implementing TSC policies related to teacher training and ensuring that teachers engage in continuous

professional development (CPD) programs (Republic of Kenya, 2020). Studies in Kenya highlight that principal' leadership styles, their ability to motivate teachers, and their capacity to provide necessary resources significantly influence the effectiveness of professional development initiatives (Republic of Kenya, 2020). There is a growing emphasis on school-based teacher development (SBTD) where principals play a direct role in organizing and facilitating training within their schools, often with support from external agencies or educational authorities (Wanzare, 2012).

In Uganda, the government, through the Ministry of Education and Sports, has prioritized teacher professional development to enhance teaching quality (Namuddu, 2017). Heads of schools are crucial in operationalizing these policies at the school level. Research in Uganda indicates that effective school leadership, including the head teacher's commitment to supporting teachers' professional growth, is a significant predictor of improved teaching practices and student learning outcomes (Namuddu, 2017; Ssentamu, 2019). However, challenges that are faced include limited funding for CPD and a lack of capacity among some head teachers to effectively lead professional development initiatives, underscoring the need for targeted training for school leaders themselves (Ssentamu, 2019).

In Tanzania, and specifically within the context of Meru District Council, the role of heads of schools in fostering professional development opportunities and support for teachers' effective teaching is particularly relevant given the focus of the study. Tanzania's education system has undergone various reforms aimed at improving teacher quality and student performance (Chaula, 2023). Heads of schools in Tanzania are expected to be instructional leaders who guide and support their teachers' professional growth (Kuluchumila, 2014). They are responsible for identifying teachers' professional development needs, often through performance appraisals and classroom observations, and then facilitating access to relevant training programs, whether school-based or externally organized (Mtebe & Mbvette, 2014). The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology provides policy frameworks, but the successful implementation largely depends on the proactive role of school heads in creating a supportive environment for continuous learning and improvement among their teaching staff (Matemba, 2024). The study by Chaula (2023) identified poor students' academic performance is a result of poor pedagogical knowledge and skills among teachers due to insufficient professional development opportunities in Meru district council secondary. Thus, this study assessed the aptitude of heads of schools in fostering professional development opportunities and support towards teachers' effective teaching in public secondary schools. This helped to know the ability of heads of schools' in fostering professional development opportunities towards

teachers' effective teaching in public secondary schools and establish appropriate measures to promote heads of schools' aptitude in fostering professional development opportunities towards teachers effective teaching.

2. Literature Reviews

Scholars worldwide had different perspectives on the strengths of heads of schools in fostering professional development opportunities and support towards teachers' effective teaching in public secondary schools. Joy, et al, (2021) studied on the managing educational institutions: school heads' leadership practices and teachers' performance in Philippines. The study found that there is a strong relationship between the public-school head's leadership with teachers performance. Similarly, United Kingdom Education Endowment Foundation Report (2019) show that, heads of public secondary schools in the UK employ a multifaceted mechanism to maintain effective teaching including professional development initiatives, curriculum design, visionary leadership, data-informed decision making, participatory approaches, and strategic resource allocation, as well as they create an environment conducive to high-quality education. Similarly, American Association of School Administrators (2020) also reported that, the effectiveness of teaching in USA institutions is greatly influenced by the leadership and management strategies employed by school heads including creating conducive environment, curriculum design and development as well as effective supervision.

Benson (2011) made a study titled assessment of leadership training of head teachers and secondary school performance in Mubende District, Uganda. Qualitative and descriptive correlational research design was adopted. Six schools out of 32 were chosen using purposive sampling techniques. Self-constructed questionnaire adapted to teachers, head teachers and students' leaders. The study revealed that heads of schools promote effective teaching among teachers through management of teachers discipline well, promoting teachers' professional development, and instructional leadership. In addition, it was found that there is relationship between head teachers and school performance.

Also, Okendo (2018) studied on the effectiveness of heads of school in supervising teachers' teaching activities in secondary schools in Kagera Region, Tanzania. The study was guided by transformational theory. Descriptive statistics employed to analyze quantitative data with the use of SPSS and thematic analysis. The study revealed that there is significant relationship between school headship and teachers teaching commitment in secondary schools. It was further revealed that, head of schools ensure that teaching documents are prepared for effective teaching

through inspection of lesson plan and scheme of works as well as provision of instructional supervision.

Similarly, Chaula (2023) made a study on the school heads' clinical supervision practices and emerging teacher emotions in Tanzania secondary schools. Questionnaire and interview method were adopted in gathering data from the informants. SPSS version 25 supported the analysis of quantitative data, while qualitative data, on the other hand, were analyzed through content analysis. The study revealed that effective communication and teachers' necessary supervision cooperation significantly strengthened school heads' clinical supervision practices. Positive teachers' emotions among teachers emerged as a result of the appropriate clinical undertaking which results to effective teaching. Negative teachers' emotions emerged from improper clinical supervision practices which may result in an ineffective teaching process.

3. Methodology

The study was conducted in Meru district council under a respective time and resources. This study employed a mixed research approach with explanatory sequential research design to gather both qualitative and quantitative data and ensure that both data are analyzed to give strong evidence over the researched problem (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). Purposive sampling techniques was employed because it allows for the deliberate selection of individuals or cases that possesses the characteristics relevant to the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). Purposive sampling technique was used to select teachers, heads of schools and heads of departments who directly influence educational practices to ensure that the data collected are pertinent and insightful. Sample size of the study involved 130 including 120 teachers, 5 heads of schools and 5 heads of departments that were drawn from 435 targeted populations in five public secondary schools. According to Mugenda (2018) 30% of the targeted population is an appropriate sample size to be drawn from targeted population for data collection.

Under this study questionnaires and interview methods of data collection were employed. Both open and close-end questionnaires were administered. Open ended and closed ended questions were prepared based on study's objectives. Using questionnaires each teacher received the same set of questions, which minimized variability and allows for easier comparison and analysis across different respondents (Bryman, 2016). Structured and semi-structured interviews were also employed to get valid data from heads of schools and heads of departments about the topic under investigation. Structured interview guides were prepared, while semi-structured interview were generated promptly during interviewing. Through interviews it was possible to get logical information from heads of schools and heads of departments

because they have extensive knowledge about educational practices, policies and challenges within their institutions. Hence, their insights provided a comprehensive understanding of how leadership influences teaching effectiveness.

Data was analysed by using descriptive statistics and thematic methods. Descriptive statistics were adapted to analyze the quantitative data in form of percentages (%), frequency and mean score by using a table. Thematic data analysis method was also employed to make analysis of the qualitative data by analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within qualitative data. Descriptive statistics and thematic analysis methods were adapted due to its effectiveness and flexibility for analyzing quantitative and qualitative data.

The validity of the study was ensured by conducting a pilot study, whereby 10 teachers were involved. The pilot study was helpful to identify potential issues with wording, clarity, or response options before the main

study. The reliability of research instruments was maintained by establishing clear and consistent procedures for data collection, scoring, and analysis. The researcher also adhered to key ethical principles including respect for persons, beneficence, and justice.

4. Results and Discussion

This study investigated the aptitude of heads of schools in fostering professional development opportunities and support towards teachers' effective teaching in secondary schools. Data from teachers were collected through questionnaires and are presented in table 1 in a likert scales namely, SA-Strongly Agree, A-Agree, SD-Strongly Disagree, and D-Disagree. The remark was made by using a mean value, whereby a mean value between 1.00 and 2.4 were considered Disagreed and from 2.5 to 5.00 was considered Agreed. Mean was used to determine the average score of participants' responses for each item.

Table 1: Strengths of Heads of Schools in Fostering Professional Development Opportunities and Support

Items	SD		D		A		SA		Mean
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	
We have indoor training for teachers	-	-	3	2.5	86	71.7	31	25.8	3.2333
We receive financial support from heads of schools for professional development programmes	-	-	2	1.7	88	73.3	30	25.0	3.2333
Head of schools attempt reflective practice	1	0.8	1	0.8	77	64.2	41	34.2	3.3167
Seminars and workshops emphasized by heads of schools in our school?	-	-	3	2.5	80	66.7	37	30.8	3.2833
Collaborative learning to teachers encouraged by heads of schools in our school	-	-	1	0.8	80	66.7	39	32.5	3.3167
We have mentorship programs based on experienced teachers and novice teachers in our school	1	0.8	2	1.7	97	80.8	20	16.7	3.1333
Heads of schools motivates staff members to pursue further growth opportunities in our school	-	-	2	1.7	88	73.3	30	25.0	3.2333
Frequent teachers evaluation made by heads of schools in our schools	-	-	1	0.8	83	69.2	36	30.0	3.2917
Heads of school provide instructional supervision to promote teachers' teaching skills and knowledge	1	0.8	1	0.8	80	66.7	38	31.7	3.2917

Teachers' responses in table 1 show that heads of schools use professional development opportunities and support to foster teachers' effective teaching in secondary schools. Data in table 4.2 show that 86(71.7) agreed, 31(26.8%) strongly agreed and 3(2.5%) disagreed which is proportional to 3.233 mean value of the respondents opted that there is indoor training for teachers in secondary schools. The responses reveal that

indoor training is emphasized by heads of schools to foster teachers' effective teaching in secondary schools. This was concurred by heads of school A explained that:

We often administer indoor training such as peer observation programs, subject-specific training sessions and assessment literacy training to promote

teachers' skills and knowledge in teaching area. Also, indoor training often involves collaborative activities where teachers share experiences, challenges and best practices to support one another in their professional journey. (Interview on 26th July 2024).

Heads of school's responses detailed that indoor training is an important aspect administered by heads of schools in secondary schools to promote teachers' effective teaching. Indoor training is done through classroom sessions, subject-specific training sessions, and provision of assessment training and emphasize on teachers' knowledge and skills sharing on teaching pedagogically.

Data in table 1 also suggests that 88(73.3%) agreed, 30(25%) strongly agreed and 2(1.7%) disagreed equivalent to 3.2333 mean score of the respondents opted that financial support provided by heads of schools for professional development opportunities. The response detailed that financial support is also provided by heads of school to support teachers' professional development opportunities in fostering effective teaching in secondary schools. To verify this, head of school B explained that:

Sometimes we use internal budget to allocate funds for teachers to attend professional development opportunities such as workshops, advanced degrees, internal training programs and mentorship initiatives which enable teachers to promote their teaching knowledge and skills" (Interview on 27th July 2024)

This gives evidence that financial support is provided by heads of schools as a way of supporting teachers' professional development initiatives towards teachers' effective teaching.

Data in table 1 also detail that, 77(64.2%) agreed, 41(34%) strongly agreed, 1(0.8) disagreed and 1(0.8%) strongly disagreed which is proportional to 3.233 mean score of the respondents opted that there are reflective practices established by heads of schools in secondary schools. Meaning that, heads of schools make reflective practices in public secondary schools. Data was evident by head of school A explained that:

We have reflective practices in our school including self-assessment, peer feedback, and collaborate discussions aimed at improving teachers' pedagogical approaches. Also, reflective practices allow teachers to learn from their experiences and adapt their teaching methods accordingly. (Interview on 27th July 2024)

The findings show that heads of school play an important role in supporting professional development

through adopting reflective practices which allow teachers to get feedback on their strengths and weaknesses and establish alternatives approaches in fostering their teaching pedagogical approaches.

Data from the field describes again that 80(66.7%) agreed, 37(30.8%) strongly agreed, and 3(2.5%) disagreed equivalent to 3.28.3 mean score of the respondents opted that, seminars and workshops emphasized by heads of schools in secondary schools. The data verify that there are seminars and workshops organized by head of schools to foster teachers' professional development in public secondary schools. This was concurred by head of school B explained that:

We often have seminars and workshops in our school. Also, there are seminars and workshop programs that are prepared by district educational officers, ward educational officers and other officers. We always allow and encourage teachers to participate in workshops and seminars with aims of fostering teachers' teaching effective." (Interview on 27th July 2024).

The findings describe that heads of school play a vital role in supporting professional development through well-organized seminars and workshops aimed at fostering effective teaching practices among educators.

Teachers' response further describes that 80(66.7%) agreed, 39(32.5%) strongly agreed, and 1(0.8%) disagreed which is proportional to 3.3167 mean score opted that, collaborative learning to teachers encouraged by heads of schools in our school. This details that heads of schools ensure that there is collaborative learning among teachers to foster professional development in public secondary schools. To support this head of department from school E who said:

Heads of schools in our school encourage teachers' collaboration within subject departments for example, teachers in science subject department they regular emphasizes to collaborate in learning with aims of sharing teaching skills and knowledge to each other (Interview on 29th July 2024).

The results show that heads of school play an important role in supporting professional development through adopting collaborative learning among teachers which allow teachers to share ideas, skills and knowledge.

Data also remarks that 97(80.8%) agreed, 20(16.7%) strongly agreed, 1(0.8%) strongly disagreed and 1(0.8%) disagreed which is equivalent to 3.1333 mean score opted that, we have mentorship programs based on experienced teachers and novice teachers in our school. Meaning that, heads of schools enforce mentorship programs to foster professional

development among teachers in public secondary schools. To verify this, the head of department from school D said:

Actually, our school principal is often working hard to ensure that, teachers attend mentorship programs through inviting experienced teachers and using indoor experienced teachers to give mentorship to inexperienced teachers. This step is assistive in promoting teachers' pedagogical skills and knowledge and enhancing effective teaching. (Interview on 28th July 2024).

The results imply that heads of school play an important role in supporting professional development through adopting mentorship programs by inviting outdoor experienced teachers and inexperienced teachers to impart teaching skills and knowledge to inexperienced teachers.

The results also show that 88(73.3%) agreed, 30(26%) strongly agreed, and 1(0.8%) disagreed, which is equivalent to 3.2333 mean score opted that heads of schools motivate staff members to pursue further growth opportunities in our school. Meaning that heads of schools have motivation programs to encourage teachers' effective teaching in public secondary schools. To support this, head of school D said;

We often have motivation programs to teachers who their subjects have good performance in Mock and national examinations. This motivation programs given through money rewards, and recognition certificates, by adopting these programs we have able to foster effective teaching and students' outcomes in our school (Interview on 28th July 2024).

The results imply that heads of school play an important role in supporting professional development through adopting mentorship programs by motivating teachers through rewards, and recognition certificates to foster effective teaching and students' outcomes in public secondary school.

Finally, 80(66.7%) agreed, 38(31.7%) strongly agreed, 1(0.8%) disagreed and 1(0.8%) strongly disagreed which is proportional to 3.2917 opted that heads of school provide instructional supervision to promote teachers' teaching skills and knowledge.

Generally, heads of schools have great aptitude in fostering teachers' professional development opportunities in enhancing effective teaching in public secondary schools. Heads of schools ensure that teachers have indoor training, receive any financial support, reflective practice, seminars and workshops, collaborative learning, frequent teachers' evaluation and provide instructional supervision to promote teachers' teaching skills and knowledge.

Discussion

Indoor Training

The study revealed that indoor training is emphasized by heads of schools to foster teachers' effective teaching in secondary schools. Indoor training is done through classroom sessions, subject-specific training sessions, and provision of assessment training and emphasize on teachers' knowledge and skills sharing on teaching pedagogically. This aligns with the principles of transformational leadership, where leaders inspire and motivate teachers to engage in continuous learning and improvement (Glickman., Gordon., & Ross-Gordon, 2018). By applying SLT, heads of schools can ensure that indoor training is not a one-size-fits-all approach but rather a dynamic process that maximizes individual and collective learning, leading to better skill development and improved educational practices (Kenton et al., 2024). This matched with the study by Benson (2011) revealed that, schools heads have a role to ensure that there is indoor training in their schools tailored to meet specific needs within educational setting while fostering collaboration among educators and ultimately results to teachers' effective teaching and good students achievement.

Financial Support for Professional Development

The study further revealed that heads of schools ensure that teachers have financial support to foster their professional development opportunities. Heads of schools are responsible for advocating for and securing budgets that cover the costs of training materials, external facilitators, conference attendance, and substitute teachers when staff are engaged in professional learning (Blanchard., Zigarmi., & Zigarmi, 2019). However, in Tanzania lack of financial resources is frequently cited as a barrier to effective teachers' professional development, making the head's role in resource allocation and fundraising paramount (Kuluchumila, 2014). This aspect is particularly relevant under the Situational Leadership Theory (SLT), where leaders adapt their approach based on the readiness level of their followers and the demands of the situation (Herry, 2024). Providing financial support demonstrates a supportive and enabling leadership style, especially for teachers who may require external training opportunities (Khattak et al., 2023). In line to the findings, Chaula (2023) revealed that heads of school should foster an environment that emphasizes continuous learning and reflection among teachers. Also establishing a structured framework that encourages peer observations as well as administrative evaluations is necessary.

Reflective Practice

The findings show that promoting reflective practice is another vital function of school heads in promoting teachers' professional development in public secondary schools. This involves encouraging teachers to critically analyze their teaching methods, student outcomes, and professional growth. The heads of schools use strategies including journaling, peer observation with constructive feedback, and structured reflection sessions. Reflective practice is essential for teachers to internalize new knowledge and skills, adapt them to their unique classroom contexts, and continuously improve (Darling-Hammond, et al, 2017). Transformational leaders foster an environment of trust and openness where teachers feel safe to reflect on their practice and seek improvement (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). In line to the findings, Chaula (2023) revealed that heads of school should foster an environment that emphasizes continuous learning and reflection among teachers. Also establishing a structured framework that encourages peer observations as well as administrative evaluations is necessary.

Seminars and Workshops

The study found that heads of schools organizing and facilitating seminars and workshops, both internal and external, provides teachers with opportunities to learn about new pedagogical approaches, curriculum changes, and educational technologies. Heads of schools are responsible for identifying high-quality professional development providers, scheduling these events, and ensuring that the content is relevant and engaging (Glickman., Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 2018). The effectiveness of these interventions is enhanced when they are part of a broader, coherent teachers' professional development opportunities plan rather than isolated events (Stronge, 2018). Joy et al. (2021) matched the findings that, school leaders have role to prepare seminars and workshops and encourage teachers to participate in outdoor seminars and workshops. Encouraging seminars and workshops for teachers is necessary in promoting effective teaching in secondary schools.

Collaborative Learning

The study further found that heads of schools ensure collaborative learning, through mechanisms like professional learning communities, peer coaching, and team teaching, in enhancing highly effective teachers' professional development. Heads of schools facilitate these structures by allocating time for collaboration, providing necessary resources, and fostering a culture of shared learning and mutual support (Chaula, 2023). This approach leverages collective expertise within the school and allows teachers to learn from each other's experiences and best practices. Transformational leadership emphasizes building a shared vision and

fostering a collaborative culture, which is crucial for successful collaborative learning initiatives (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). When teachers work together, they share best practices, troubleshoot challenges, and collectively develop innovative teaching strategies (Stronge, 2018). Empirical studies consistently demonstrate that professional learning communities (PLCs) and other forms of collaborative inquiry led to improved instructional practices and student outcomes (Matemba, 2024; Zhang & Liu, 2019).

Frequent Teachers' Evaluation and Instructional Supervision

Finally, the study found that heads of schools ensure frequent teacher evaluations, conducted constructively and formatively to foster teachers' professional development in public secondary schools. Instructional supervision, which involves direct observation of teaching, followed by coaching and mentoring, is particularly effective in improving teaching skills (Chaula, 2023). Heads of schools, or designated instructional leaders, provide this supervision, offering guidance and support for improvement (Huang & Li, 2020). This aligns with Situational Leadership Theory, where the leader adjusts their directive and supportive behaviors based on the teacher's competence and commitment. For less experienced teachers, a more directive and supportive approach (e.g., high instructional supervision) might be appropriate, while more experienced teachers might benefit from a more delegating or supportive style (Kouzes & Posner, 2017).

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

The aptitude of heads of schools in promoting teachers' professional development in enhancing effective teaching activities is comprehensive and critical. By strategically implementing indoor training, securing financial support, fostering reflective practice, organizing seminars and workshops, facilitating collaborative learning, and providing frequent, constructive evaluations and instructional supervision, school leaders significantly enhance teachers' skills and knowledge. The consistent application of these strategies by heads of schools directly contributes to an environment conducive to teacher growth and improved instructional delivery.

5.2 Recommendations

The study recommended that:

1. Heads of schools should adopt a leadership approach that actively promotes and supports teacher professional growth, recognizing its

direct impact on effective teaching for example, fostering a culture of continuous learning.

2. Policy makers should prioritize funding and policy frameworks that support diverse professional development opportunities for teachers in public secondary schools including indoor training, financial assistance, and the integration of reflective practices.

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