CROSSING THE BRIDGE: FROM PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TO EARLY CHILDHOOD CLASSROOM PRACTICE IN TANZANIA

by

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DEDICATION

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Table of Contents

LIST OF FIGURES ...................................................................................................................... 10

LIST OF TABLES ........................................................................................................................ 11

ABSTRACT .................................................................................................................................. 12

CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY ............................................................... 13

  Teacher Professional Development ....................................................................................... 15

  Overview of Tanzanian Context ......................................................................................... 19

  National Context of Pre-Primary Education in Tanzania ................................................... 19

  Early Childhood Education Policy Landscape in Tanzania .................................................. 21

  Early Childhood Teacher Professional Development in Tanzania .................................... 22

  Establishment of Private Pre-primary Schools in Tanzania ................................................. 25

  Theoretical Perspective ....................................................................................................... 26

  Statement of the Problem ................................................................................................... 28

  Research Questions ............................................................................................................ 29

  Question One ...................................................................................................................... 29

  Question Two ..................................................................................................................... 29

  Question Three .................................................................................................................. 30

  Summary ............................................................................................................................. 30

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE ......................................................................... 31

  Social Constructivism in Teacher Professional Development ............................................. 31
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION ........................................................................ 115

Research Background ........................................................................................................... 115

Discussion of Research Questions ........................................................................................ 116

Question One ...................................................................................................................... 117

Question Two ...................................................................................................................... 122

Question Three .................................................................................................................... 125

Additional Insights ............................................................................................................. 129

Practitioner Resilience ........................................................................................................ 129

Potential for Constructivism in Professional Development ............................................... 130

Western Literature and Concepts ....................................................................................... 132
Conclusion ............................................................................................................................ 133
Policy Implications ................................................................................................................ 134
Recommendations for Future Research .......................................................... 138
Integration of Funds of Knowledge in Professional Development ............... 138
Constructivism in Professional Development .................................................. 139
Supporting Practitioners to Implement Professional Development Learning .......... 139
APPENDIX A: ACHIEVEMENT SCHOOL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SCHEDULE 141
APPENDIX B: EMPOWERMENT SCHOOL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SCHEDULE 146
APPENDIX C: CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH 149
APPENDIX D: QUESTIONS FOR PRACTITIONERS ........................................................... 153
APPENDIX E: EXCERPTS FROM ANALYSIS CHART....................................................... 155
APPENDIX F: MEMBER CHECK RESPONSE FORM ......................................................... 156
REFERENCES ........................................................................................................................... 158
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Study design. .......................................................................................................................... 51

Figure 2. Achievement School practitioners’ responses to overall usefulness of professional development. ................................................................................................................................. 70

Figure 3. Elements making professional development useful for classroom practice. ............... 135
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 Description of Research Participants ............................................................................... 58
ABSTRACT

Professional development is key to helping teachers create engaging and relevant classroom experiences, especially in early childhood education where young children are beginning to build knowledge, skills, and attitudes for life. This qualitative study used a constructivist theoretical framework to understand early childhood practitioners’ perceptions of professional development for classroom practice in two Tanzanian preschools, pseudonyms Achievement School and Empowerment School. While multiple data collection strategies were used, only practitioners’ interview responses were analyzed for the purpose of this dissertation.

Findings indicated that practitioners at both schools had different perceptions of professional development. One set of practitioners viewed professional development as an engaging and useful learning experience while the other set viewed it as somewhat useful but not always relevant to their classroom practices. Findings are reflected through the themes: 1) Practitioners’ perceptions and use of professional development in classrooms, 2) Processes and content of professional development, and 3) Relevance of professional development to classroom practice.

The conclusion highlighted that practitioners’ perceptions of professional development guide their actions, emphasizing that in order to ensure practitioners’ commitment to professional development and to enable them to use it for classroom practice, it is crucial that a) professional development meets their needs, b) it is relevant to their classroom practices, c) practitioners are engaged in planning and implementing the content, d) administrators are supportive of practitioners’ initiatives, and e) it is held at locations convenient to the practitioners.

Key words: professional development, early childhood, preschool, preprimary.
CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Professional development is key to helping teachers create engaging and relevant classroom experiences, especially in early childhood education where young children are beginning to build knowledge, skills, and attitudes for life (Ball, 2010; Desimone, 2009; Darling-Hammond, 2016; Janssen, Westbroek, Doyle, & Van Driel, 2013). As teachers develop skills and competencies, professional development is reported to become more meaningful when teachers are able to use what they learn in their classroom practices (Ball, 2010; Girvan, Conneely, & Tangney, 2016; Taylor, 2014). The need for professional development has become even greater as educational settings reflect increasingly diverse populations (Hadley, Waniganayake, & Shepherd, 2015; Hedges, 2012). Nevertheless, Camburn and Han (2015) argued that there continues to be inadequate support for teachers to adapt their teaching practices to the changing contexts they often face.

The mobility of the world’s population has resulted in early childhood settings being sites of “super-diversity” (Vertovec, 2010). As a result, perspectives on early childhood education must shift from representing children as universal, to representing them increasingly as both unique constructors of and contributors to their own learning (Bloch, Swadener, & Cannella, 2014; MacNaughton, 2005; Rogoff, 2003; Taylor, 2014; Vygotsky, 1978). Changes within early childhood classroom populations call for shifts in how teachers are supported in enhancing their teaching practices to meet learners’ needs (Iddings, 2017). Ryan and Grieshaber (2005) noted that the changing times “have disrupted the taken-for-granted relationship between child development knowledge and the preparation of early childhood teachers,” establishing the need for teachers to understand the contexts of early childhood learners (p. 34). Mallory and New (2014) echoed these assertions by claiming that “the need to more fully conceptualize the role of
the sociocultural context as an integral contributor to children's development is paramount” (p. 325). This view situates children as individual learners and is especially relevant to the Tanzanian context, in which early childhood education policies and practices are evolving (Bakuza, 2014).

This shift to considering children as individuals whose learning is influenced by lived experiences emerged early in this century (Ball, 2010; Bloch, Swadener, & Cannella, 2014; Canella, 2008; MacNaughton, 2004; Rogoff, 2003). The sociocultural view of childhood contends that children learn through engaging in everyday activities (Vygotsky, 1978). This idea is also echoed by scholars who agree that childhood is influenced by many factors, especially the context in which childhood is experienced, resulting in varying ways of knowing and being (Cannella, 2008; Bloch, Swadener, & Cannella, 2014; MacNaughton, 2005). Childhood therefore should be understood in connection with surrounding communities, sociopolitical forces, and the expectations that are laid by these influences on children’s day-to-day experiences. Learning in early childhood hence needs to be understood as “inherently interdependent” to the learners’ experiences (Taylor, 2014, p. 122). Dahlberg et al. (2007) put forward a similar notion, stating that learning in early childhood is like “living in a web of multiple representations where meanings vary, and identities are constituted and reconstituted relationally” (p. 57). Therefore, as Vygotsky (1978) argued, engaging learners in their learning experiences enables them to create new knowledge, which they then own, and which then becomes the previous knowledge they rely on in their next learning experience.

Consequently, to remain effective, teacher education programs and ongoing professional development need to help teachers provide children with contextually relevant learning opportunities that allow these children to construct new knowledge from their lived experiences.
The question remains, however, whether pre-service teacher education prepares early childhood practitioners to provide such an environment, and if not, what kind of professional development can bridge that gap?

In Tanzania, the location of the two study sites, professional development is provided on an ad-hoc basis. No sole government institution is responsible for professional development, neither is there a single coordinated approach to professional development delivery (Bakuza, 2014; Mtahabwa, 2009). As a result, it is difficult to guarantee that professional development is providing early childhood practitioners with the tools to be responsive to children’s lived experiences, an issue that will be discussed further in the context overview. This study allowed me to understand practitioners’ perceptions of what they learned from professional development in order for them to make curricular decisions for classroom practice. This new learning will support the research sites’ enhancement of professional development practices to support classroom practices. The research will also contribute to professional development literature in the Tanzanian context, specifically for early childhood education practitioners.

**Teacher Professional Development**

In most contexts, teacher education includes pre-service education (i.e., initial teacher preparation) and in-service learning for practicing teachers (i.e., professional development). Both forms of teacher education enable education practitioners to learn about how, and in many cases what, to teach (Janssen, Westbroek, Doyle, & Van Driel, 2013). The fundamental purpose of teacher education is to ensure that teachers can teach in a manner that will encourage engaged learning. Borko, Jacobs, and Koellner (2010) wrote, “If we want schools to offer more powerful learning opportunities for students, we must offer more powerful learning opportunities for teachers” (p. 548). The authors further explained that these opportunities should include the
concept that learning to teach is a dynamic continuum characterized by shifting with the changing needs of learners. The concept of understanding and responding to learners’ varying needs was also emphasized by New (1994), who notes how social constructivist theory supports the changing role of teachers:

Social constructivist theory entails a new interpretation of the role of the teacher as one who is capable of and responsible for learning about the children within his or her care and utilizing this knowledge to construct practices that are developmentally appropriate for particular children in particular contexts. (p. 334)

While there are different models of pre-service education, and teachers are prepared to teach in various ways in different contexts, the need for continuous professional development has been consistently acknowledged globally (Blank 2010; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2007; Desimone, 2011; Hadley et al., 2015; Howard, 2003; Murphy, Bryant, & Ingram, 2014; Swim & Isik-Ercan, 2013; Wilson & Berne, 1999). In other words, as stated by Chen and McCray (2012), “The ultimate goal of teacher professional development is to improve classroom practice” (p. 10). Therefore, in order to address the needs of diverse learners, professional development needs first to reflect teachers’ needs.

Darling-Hammond et al. (2005) suggested that teachers have to transition from practicing an “apprenticeship of observation,” defined as teaching the way one was taught, to becoming “adaptive experts” who respond to particular contexts that arise in their practice (p. 359). Considering that teachers are at the core of classroom experiences, it is imperative that they are supported in these efforts. Howard (2003) explained, “We can’t teach what we don’t know” (p. 3). The concept of adaptive expertise allows teachers to work with the views of learning not being limited to a “process of habits and skill acquisition” but a process of socialization within
one’s environment (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 83). Vygotsky consistently argued the need for interaction among learners and their environments as “an integral part of mental functioning” (p. 101). Teachers’ learning experiences, therefore, must also provide opportunities to engage in environments like those of their classrooms.

Advocating for the social constructivist approach to teacher education, New (1994) stated, “the tenets of social constructivism entail more than a radical change in our work with young children. This theoretical paradigm describes the processes by which adults, too, come to more sophisticated conceptualizations of their world” (p. 334). New further emphasized that “early childhood settings can serve as crucibles in which adults work together to construct new understandings of learning and development leading to more effective programs” (p. 334).

Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2007) claimed that, while engaging teachers in acquiring new knowledge through professional development, it is important to also focus on attitude change. The focus on attitude change cannot be stressed enough if we are seeking to enhance teachers’ ownership of learning so they can better enhance their practice and build pedagogical skills that support interactive learning (Guskey, 2002). The importance of teachers’ building relationships with their environment and those around them influences continuous interrelated learning experiences (Rogoff, 2003). In order to enable children’s continuous learning, teachers need to embrace continuity in their own learning and hone the ability to develop relationships with their learners. Professional development provides a unique opportunity for this kind of continuous learning and relationship building.

In sum, the concept of professional development has been widely acknowledged as a valuable tool to support teacher learning. Therefore, it is important to ensure that the process is inclusive and allows teachers to take ownership of their learning, which Luneta (2012) advocated
as an important factor of professional development sustainability. Janssen et al. (2013) express a similar view when stating that “teachers are often confronted with innovations that are initiated and developed by others, and our purpose is to explicate the dynamics of this common situation and construct bridging methodologies for connecting such innovations with classroom practice” (p. 11). This perspective indicates that including teachers’ views is crucial for professional development to be successful.

Having teachers who are adaptive experts is ideal; however, Blank (2010) warned us that “envisioning an early childhood teacher education that can both address present issues and future aspirations may involve making painful choices” (p. 403). Blank explained that early childhood contexts require two kinds of teachers: those with specific expertise and those who can enhance learning within diversity. Therefore, transitioning apprentice observers into adaptive experts should be managed so that teachers’ individual expertise is retained while they are supported in adapting strategies that enhance their classroom practices.

In teacher education, involving the learner in teaching and learning interventions has been found to be of highest value (Hadley et al., 2015). Furthermore, taking account of the realities of teachers’ sociocultural contexts and building on those experiences creates opportunities to participate more fully in their own learning and then apply that learning successfully in their classrooms. Without teacher involvement, professional development becomes a codified set of interventions devoid of relevance.

In Tanzania, the concept of involving teachers in their learning is still considered far-fetched, especially for early childhood practitioners. Given that many teachers in early childhood classrooms have little to no background in the field and are therefore struggling in the day-to-day running of the classroom, their potential contributions to professional development activities are
seldom considered. In my study, I wanted to better understand the relationship between professional development and classroom practice. To do this, I focused on non-government schools, where continuous professional development was considered part of the school system.

Overview of Tanzanian Context

In this section the realities of professional development for early childhood practitioners in Tanzania is discussed. To do so first requires a look at the pre-primary education system and the policies that regulate it.

National Context of Pre-Primary Education in Tanzania

East Africa, and Tanzania in particular, is moving in the direction of prioritizing early childhood education (World Bank, 2012; UNICEF, 2011; Bakuza, 2014). In 1995, the Education Policy of The Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC) was updated to include two years of pre-primary education as a mandatory part of the formal national education system, which also includes seven years of primary education, four years of ordinary secondary education, and two years of advanced secondary education (respectively equivalent to grades 7–10 and grades 11–12 in the US public educational system).

In studying the relationship between early childhood education policy and practice in Tanzania, Mtahabwa (2009) explained that the policy affirmed pre-primary education as the “government’s responsibility” (p. 59). However, it is important to note that the policy did not state that pre-primary education was compulsory. Furthermore, the policy “fails to articulate regulations on the standards of programmes [sic] before registration,” nor does it provide guidance on important matters such as class size, physical environment, teacher-child ratio, or even strategies to implement the curriculum (Mtahabwa, 2009, p. 59).
According to the country report *Systems Approach for Better Education Results* (SABER) by the World Bank (2012), approximately 34% of children attend pre-primary schools in Tanzania. The ministry of Education and Culture (2014) reflected similar statistics. However, access to pre-primary education varies in different regions, ranging from 90% in Mwanza in the north to 19% in Dar es Salaam, the country’s largest city. The report also drew attention to resource constraints and lack of coordination among stakeholders; in addition, it emphasizes that “the quality of available education has serious challenges” (SABER, 2012, p. 2). The report further showed that, while the government appears committed to coordinating efforts to provide early childhood education, implementation is lacking. This lack of commitment to improving early childhood education has been confirmed in other studies (Muneja, 2013; Vavrus & Bartlett, 2013). To increase access and formalize the administration of early childhood education, the present policy in Tanzania requires every public primary school to include a pre-primary classroom for children aged five and six years. However, the teachers assigned to pre-primary classrooms do not necessarily have relevant training. This is a cause for immediate concern considering that structures for professional development for early childhood education teachers are also lacking (Bakuza, 2014).

The above situations confirm the claims of Vavrus and Bartlett (2013) who stated, “Tanzania, like many countries, appears to be strong on policy development and weaker on policy implementation” (p. 24). This minimal guidance and support also led to inconsistent pre-service teacher preparation (Mtahabwa, 2009). Although the 2014 Policy of Education is more detailed about stakeholder responsibilities in general, much is left unknown about how teachers will be supported through professional development. Issues left unaddressed include how to implement a competency-based curriculum in early childhood classrooms, how to support
teachers to respond to needs-based learning, how to use interactive teaching and learning, and how to support teaching in the languages used by different school systems.

**Early Childhood Education Policy Landscape in Tanzania**

Influenced by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and the World Bank declaration of Education for All (1990), a national task force in Tanzania developed and formalized the Child Development Policy in 1995. However, because of the above-mentioned scarcity of adequate information on program implementation (Mtahabwa, 2009), Tanzania has more than one institution that deals with policies on children: Ministry of Health and Social Welfare; Ministry of Education and Vocational Training; Ministry of Community Development, Gender, and Children; and the Prime Minister’s office (both Regional Administration and Local Government). This multiplicity has created an overlap of responsibilities, which prevents clear articulation of a common and consistent early childhood policy. Mtahabwa (2009) observed a “lack of proper definition of roles” for each of these stakeholders (p. 59). Similarly, both the SABER report (2012) and Bakuza (2014) agreed that none of the ministries responsible for early childhood have a department dealing specifically with young children. A steering committee exists to coordinate early childhood issues within the policy; however, according to Bakuza (2014), “it is loosely connected [and] without formal accountability” (p. 46). Examples of these accountability issues are included below (Mtahabwa, 2009):

- Basic Education Statistics in Tanzania were not documented until 2004.
- Although pre-primary education was made formal in 1995, the curriculum for teacher preparation was not developed until 2003.

Considering the above realities, early childhood education teachers in Tanzania do not have consistent or institutionalized support to mitigate the gap between theory and practice. Therefore, ongoing professional development is essential to provide current teachers the support necessary to create engaging and meaningful experiences in the early childhood education classroom.

**Early Childhood Teacher Professional Development in Tanzania**

There is a general commitment among relevant institutions to improve provision of early childhood education in Tanzania. However, many teachers in pre-primary classrooms have not received this training. Some of these teachers may have been trained to teach primary education, while others have no formal qualifications (Bakuza, 2014). To address this disparity, the government has identified seven colleges that provide specific courses for early childhood education teacher preparation and professional development. However, according to Muneja (2013) and Bakuza (2014), not all tutors (educators who teach teachers) in these colleges have received early childhood education training either. Therefore, the relevance of teacher education to the needs of young children in pre-primary classrooms is questionable.

Efforts have been made in Tanzania to create a national early childhood education curriculum for teacher preparation colleges. However, during their research in Tanzania, Vavrus and Bartlett (2013) confirmed the observation of Hardman, Abd-Kadir, and Tibuhinda (2012) that teachers in Tanzania are trained to transmit knowledge through lectures followed by exercises using the chalkboard. The researchers concluded that, in the Tanzanian education
system, although “policy and syllabi have changed, teacher education lags behind in preparing teachers to use learner-centered methods” (Vavrus & Bartlett, 2013, p. 24). They explained that the national curriculum mandates the principles of active learning, which were initially “popularized by the country’s first president, Julius Nyerere (1961-1985), even though these principles have yet to be fully realized” (p. 11).

In their research, Vavrus and Bartlett (2013) observed that pre-service teacher education in Tanzania tends to disconnect theory and practice by teaching content knowledge separately from pedagogical practices. In addition, Vavrus and Bartlett (2013) also documented pre-service colleges having reduced practicum (teacher training) lengths from three months to three weeks, further decreasing opportunities for practical learning. The researchers also observed insufficient staffing within public schools, which often required teachers to engage in administrative activities, robbing them of both course preparation time and contact time with children. Finally, Vavrus and Bartlett highlighted teachers’ uncertainty about applying what they were taught in their teacher preparation colleges, observing that tutors did not adapt their teaching pedagogies to curricular expectations of pre-service teachers. Following is a typical example of the perspective that dominates the pre-service programs Vavrus and Bartlett observed. A teacher educator says to a student teacher:

Please note—and you better write this down, because it is important in your examination—In the modern conception of education, so-called student-centered education, we do not lecture anymore to students, but students have to find out things for themselves. (2013, p. 24)

While there is general agreement among governing bodies regarding the importance and need for teacher professional development, its implementation is neither structured nor consistent
with the pedagogical needs of early childhood education teachers (Hardman, Abd-Kadir, & Tibuhinda, 2012; Mtahabwa, 2007). These pedagogical attitudes demonstrate the need for more relevant professional development.

In 2009, with a growing teaching force yet a lack of structured professional development in place, Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (MoEVT) sought collaboration from UNICEF to develop a national In-service Training and Education (INSET) initiative, which resulted in several baseline studies (UNICEF, 2009). In response to these studies, UNICEF and MoEVT created guidelines for developing INSET, and the Continuing Professional Development program was officially launched in February 2011 (Hardman et al., 2012). A school-based INSET program in combination with self-study modules was designed with support from UNICEF. Nonetheless, Hardman, Ackers, Abrishamian, and O’Sullivan (2011) claimed that the “provision of in-service education and training (INSET) is . . . judged to be of poor quality with little transferability to the classroom” (p. 670).

In research on early childhood policies and implementation in Tanzania, Bakuza (2014) also reported that lack of formal professional development, especially for early childhood practitioners, was a concern to almost all research participants. In addition, the few professional development opportunities that may exist for early childhood practitioners are not specific to early childhood education: “People may be assigned to work in ECE without prior training on early childhood education, but there should be early childhood education leadership training opportunities to equip them with the skills they need to perform their duties” (Bakuza, 2014, p. 114). In conclusion, Bakuza agreed with Hardman et al. (2012) as well as Komba and Nkumbi (2008) that the teachers’ professional development initiative in Tanzania has not been given enough attention and needs re-thinking.
It is also important to note that teachers who graduate from Tanzanian public pre-service colleges also acquire employment in private preschools, where learners come from an even wider variety of cultural and socio-economic backgrounds than in public schools (including public colleges). Here again, professional development is imperative to prepare teachers to both experience and create interactive teaching and learning experiences. In this context, employing a social constructivist approach to professional development has the potential to help teachers intentionally plan for professional development experiences that enhance classroom practice.

**Establishment of Private Pre-primary Schools in Tanzania**

Since MoEC’s 1995 national education requirement of two years of pre-primary education, Tanzania has experienced a rapid growth in private preschools ranging from community-based institutions to individually owned centers. Most of these schools have larger budgets than government schools, create cultures that encourage professional development, and use English-based instruction. Mrutu, Rea-Dickins, Bakuza, Walli, and Pence (2016) have reported that private preschools and those run by nonprofit organizations are perceived to have strong professional development cultures that encourage what they term “holistic education” (i.e., learning that impacts all aspects of children’s development; p. 61).

This study examines two private nonprofit schools providing early childhood education within the mandate of an international health and education development network. This network emphasizes improving living conditions and opportunities for people in specific regions of the majority world. The network mandate is to build institutions and programs that respond to the challenges of social, economic, and cultural change. In Tanzania, the network has numerous institutions contributing to educational development, including a range of pre-primary to higher secondary schools in various geographic locations. As a pioneer in establishing formal early
childhood education in Tanzania, the network has contributed actively to educational reforms. In higher learning institutions, the network also seeks to support the movement towards creating change agents for a better society.

The early childhood programs run by the network are aimed at providing holistic education that empowers learners to contribute to society at large (i.e., nationally) by acting as responsible citizens in their own communities (i.e., locally). Network-sponsored early childhood programs also have a well-established structure of professional development opportunities; however, how this structure supports enhanced classroom practice has not yet been substantiated.

**Theoretical Perspective**

This study was conceptualized using a social constructivist theoretical framework. Social constructivism refers to meaning-making through real-life engagement, including social and cultural encounters (Dewey, 1938; Piaget, 1952; Vygotsky, 1978). Constructivism is built on the precept that learning takes place as new knowledge is constructed by engaging with the cognitive conflict that arises from overlapping states of knowing and not knowing (Piaget 1952). In post-Piagetian research, the role of the social environment in learning and cognitive activities was established as crucial, especially in early childhood education (Corsaro, 1990; Rugoff 1992; Vygotsky, 1978). Social constructivists therefore argue that everyday social interactions contribute to make new knowledge useful and relevant (Brunner, 1986; Moll, 2014; Vygotsky, 1978). Considering that individuals come from different backgrounds, their understandings of the world vary. Hence, it becomes easier to create new knowledge when the learning environment includes social and intellectual aspects of the learners’ lived experiences. The role of social experiences includes instruction in learning and involvement of individuals in their own learning processes (Mallory & New, 1994). In a constructivist context, both children in
early childhood classrooms and their practitioners are learners and continue to learn through engaging with familiar, relevant experiences in day-to-day activities.

Pedagogies are influenced by several factors: pre-service education, experiences as learners, understanding of classroom expectations, the socio-cultural contexts in which one teaches, and ongoing learning experiences (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2007). Teachers regularly engage in the social contexts of teaching and learning by applying their lived experiences to enhance their practice (Desimone, 2011). Hence, experiencing a social constructivist approach to learning in professional development can enable teachers to implement similar experiences in their classrooms. A social constructivist approach to teaching encourages critical thinking and the application of relevant knowledge in early childhood classrooms (Mallory & New, 1994; New, Mardell, & Robinson, 2005). Mallory and New argued:

There is now, within the parent field of early childhood, a growing effort to incorporate understandings of sociocultural contributions to development into the profession's evolving definition of developmentally appropriate practice because children with varied interests and abilities benefit from learning experiences that are genuine and contextual. (p. 324)

They further argued that providing opportunities to solve problems from their sociocultural contexts enhances young children’s learning, resulting in relevant responses to problems encountered. In other words, existing knowledge is used to build new knowledge (Mallory & New, 1994). Being involved in using what they know to build new knowledge can contribute towards children’s learning becoming dynamic, continuous, and relevant. In these learning contexts, children from a very young age enrich their lived experiences as they use new knowledge in day-to-day activities.
The fundamental tenets of social constructivism are the importance of socially and contextually relevant experiences and the value of contributions made by learners to their own learning (Mallory & New, 2014). Social constructivism for in-service teacher education, in which practitioners bring with them lived experiences from their classrooms and beyond, would inspire practitioner involvement in decisions about what they learn and provide opportunities to contribute to their own learning by using lived experiences to build new knowledge. Furthermore, social constructivism enables practitioners to engage in contextual problem solving, which will be reflected in their day-to-day classroom practice.

**Statement of the Problem**

Scholars have argued that changes in early childhood classrooms may not be consistent with what teachers are prepared for during their pre-service experiences (Ball, 2010; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2007; Taylor, 2014). This incongruity brings about tension because teaching practices do not match learners’ needs. In the effort to provide access to and implement their visions of relevant early childhood education, the study schools have regular professional development programs to support teachers. However, as of yet, no study has been conducted to establish the relationship between existing professional development programs and early childhood practitioner classroom practices in Tanzania. Therefore, this study was designed to investigate current professional development processes and content to determine how they support early childhood teachers’ classroom practices at two nonprofit nursery schools in Tanzania. Guided by the principles of social constructivism, I wanted to clarify how professional development content and implementation relate to practitioners’ classroom practices and to what degree practitioners are involved in their own learning. Research participants included teachers, assistant teachers, and individuals who provide professional development. Using qualitative
methods, the study sought to reveal practitioners’ perceptions about professional development and to determine how practitioners apply what they have learned from professional development to enhance their classroom practices.

**Research Questions**

The study was guided by the following research questions, which remained consistent for both schools:

**Question One**

What are the existing processes for designing and implementing professional development for early childhood practitioners at the Empowerment (pseudonym) and Achievement (pseudonym) schools?

a. In what ways are different stakeholders (teachers, parents, administrators, professionals from the community) involved in the design of professional development for early childhood teachers at the two schools?

b. What processes are followed to identify and plan the content for professional development?

c. What resources inform the professional development?

**Question Two**

In what ways does the professional development content relate to the practitioners’ classroom practice?

a. How does the professional development content relate to the schools’ early childhood curriculum?

b. How do those providing professional development model or demonstrate the practice they are trying to encourage?
Question Three

What evidence, if any, do teachers provide regarding the use of professional development in their classroom practice?

a. How do teachers report making curricular and instructional decisions based on professional development they have received?

b. What are the early childhood teachers’ perceptions of the impact of professional development?

Summary

This chapter introduced the theoretical orientation to early childhood practitioner professional development that guided the study. The educational landscape in Tanzania (the study context) was discussed in relation to the lack of coordinated professional development for early childhood education practitioners. Chapter Two provides a review of the literature related to teacher professional development and social constructivism.
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Social Constructivism in Teacher Professional Development

Professional development is widely viewed as a vehicle for supporting in-service teachers’ learning and classroom practice. Some authors defined it as the process or act of undertaking some form of learning (Abdal-Haqq, 1998; Buysse, Winton, & Rous, 2009; Christ & Wang, 2013; Lazzari, 2012; Murphy, Bryant, & Ingram, 2014), while others highlighted the purpose or end-product of an activity as being professional development (Darling-Hammond, 2016; Janssen, Westbroek, Doyle, & Van Driel, 2013). Nevertheless, the common purpose of professional development in education is to provide continuous learning opportunities for practicing teachers.

Hardman, Abd-Kadir, and Tibuhinda (2012), who conducted research on teacher-education reforms in Tanzania, wrote that professional development enables “changing the narrow repertoire of pedagogic practices, for ultimate educational quality” (p. 827). Desimone (2011), in the primer on effective professional development, described professional development as a “complex array of interrelated learning opportunities” (p. 69). In addition, Chen and McCray (2012) in their research on building skillful practice and promoting skills for mathematics in early childhood teachers agreed, stating that “the ultimate goal of teacher professional development is to improve classroom practice” (p. 10). Although researchers from different parts of the world define professional development in varied ways, the common premise is its value for enhancing practice. Giving examples of professional development strategies Desimone (2009) wrote:

Professional development includes formal and informal activities, teaching experiences and social encounters by teachers that directly relate to their teaching practice including
workshops, conferences, seminars, engagement in communities of practice, which requires a holistic approach to professional development taking into account development of knowledge and skills, as opposed to the traditional approach of lecturing. (p. 182)

Professional development therefore can be implemented in different ways, keeping in mind the purpose and the relevance of the activity. However, innovations in professional development are most effective when collaboration and ownership from the learners are included.

Active learner involvement in constructing knowledge is also supported by Sigel (1978), who states that “the active organism does not passively assimilate information and construct a knowledge system. Rather, the active organism builds from experience and the process of building results in knowledge” (p. 334). Sigel further explained that the involvement of learners in their own learning enables them to be “determined in the sense that [their] constructions guide subsequent actions” (p. 335). Although the wording varies, all researchers above advocate for teacher involvement in their learning and for using professional development to support their teaching practices.

Due to the complicated nature of professional development as well as its lack of a common definition, Desimone (2011) suggested, “One solution is to focus on the features of professional development that lead to teacher learning” (p. 69). Therefore, it is not surprising that the need for organizational structures to guide effective professional development has been a focus of researchers in recent years (Buysse, Winton, & Rous, 2009; Chen & McCray, 2012; Desimone, 2009; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001; Perue et al., 2007). Features of these organizational structures and how they have been used will be discussed later in this chapter.
Professional Development Paradigms in Education

Professional development can be argued as meeting an ongoing need to support teachers in their practice and to encourage their personal and professional growth (Buysse et al., 2009; Christ & Wang, 2013; Lazzari, 2012; Murphy, Bryant, & Ingram, 2014; Winton & Rous, 2009). Professional development is an important aspect of incorporating change into classroom practice. According to Chen and MacCray (2012), “The key to increasing teachers’ proficiency is their learning through continuous professional development” (p. 8). Darling-Hammond et al. (2005) suggested that teachers need to transition from practicing an “apprenticeship of observation,” in other words, teaching the way one was taught, to developing “adaptive expertise” and responding to contexts that arise in their practice (p. 359). Hadley et al. (2015) discussed contemporary professional development practices in early childhood education and argued that this new paradigm for professional development “represents a clear departure from the use of workshops to teach ‘techniques’ toward the use of multiple professional development strategies that build teacher capacity to understand subject matter, pedagogy, and student thinking” (p. 263). Similarly, Blank (2010), in discussing historical themes and contemporary issues in early childhood education stated that traditional professional development is being replaced “by approaches that are more closely aligned with constructivist and situative theories and reform efforts” (p. 548).

In their research of teacher research as part of professional development for early childhood teachers, Murphy et al. (2014) concluded that if improved student learning is the goal, then professional development that supports that goal is the answer. Moll (2014) stated that professional development provides teachers with a “social cultural platform for their pedagogy” (p. 119), which allows them to use their socially constructed knowledge to enhance their
pedagogies. Hence, researchers seeking to conceptualize a relationship between professional development and enhanced classroom practice have argued that the new knowledge created through professional development can be crucial to making teaching and learning relevant in the classroom. For example, teachers from a given community or social background would be able to create relationships to the content for the learners, the need for which is reflected in response to changing classroom structures and populations (Kun, 2012; Swim & Isik-Ercan, 2013; Taylor, Pearson, Peterson, & Rodriguez, 2005; Yosso, 2005).

The change in classroom structure is most evident in the shift from a teacher-centered approach to a student-centered one. This transformation is seen best through the lens of social constructivism, which is built on the engagement of learners in their own learning. Engaging learners as partners in their learning allows for social interaction among teachers, learners, and their sociocultural contexts. Ismat (1998) stated that “schools are the sociocultural settings where teaching and learning take place,” explaining that social constructivism “assumes that theory and practice do not develop in a vacuum” but in connection with learners (n. p.). This articulation supports the idea that new knowledge is constructed using existing knowledge, which it could be argued is derived from the learners’ context. Therefore, ensuring that teachers are engaged in professional development that supports their practice becomes critical.

**Teacher Professional Development Considerations in Early Childhood**

The need for professional development in early childhood education is exemplified by emerging research, high teacher turnover, lack of resources, and varied initial teacher training experiences (Buysse et al., 2009; Christ & Wang, 2012; Darling-Hammond, 2016; Hedges, 2012; UNICEF, 2011; World Bank, 2012). In addition, as early childhood classrooms continue to increase in racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse children, the need to support
practitioners in contextualizing teaching and learning cannot be overemphasized (Amanti, 2005; Gonzalez, et al., 2005; Hedges, 2012; Nsamenang, 2009; Yosso, 2005). Professional development provides opportunities to respond to the needs of changing populations in a timely, meaningful manner.

Ryan and Grieshaber (2005) confirmed the need to enhance what teachers learn through pre-service education, stating, “Many future early childhood teachers are not necessarily learning about diversity and the limitations of a developmental lens for addressing the multiple ways of teaching” (p. 36). For teachers to be able to support young children’s continuous learning, they need to embrace continuity in their own learning as well as the ability to develop relationships with their learners. Professional development using the social constructivist framework provides unique opportunities to collaborate in a variety of ways.

The discussions above provide an overview on professional development as a useful tool for changing classroom practice. The value of continuous professional development in order to implement new knowledge in the classroom as opposed to a one-time event is strongly recommended by researchers in the field (Buysse et al., 2009; Chen & McCray, 2012; Panuel, Fishman, Yamaguchi, & Gallagher, 2007). Consequently, elements that make professional development effective need to be incorporated in the effort to bring desired change.

**Social Constructivist Approaches to Teacher Professional Development**

Due to differences in how professional development is defined, the need for a structure that gives insight to teacher learning through professional development was recommended by researchers (Buysse et al., 2009; Chen & McCray 2012; Desimone, 2009; Garet et al., 2001; Swim & Isik-Ercan, 2013; Wilson & Barne, 1999). In their literature review on contemporary professional development for practicing teachers, Wilson and Barne (1999) reported that few
studies “explicated their theories of how teachers learned and designed research to test those theories” (p. 178). The review concluded there was a need to “weave together ideas of teacher learning, professional development, teacher knowledge, and student learning-fields” in one professional development program (p. 204). The idea of integrating existing knowledge of teacher learners and their field experiences reflect the elements of social constructivism in professional development, which can enhance teacher learning for classroom practice (Mallory & New, 1994).

Teacher Involvement in Professional Development

Researchers have established the value of structures that guide professional development, some of which are similar and build on each other’s findings. While analyzing characteristics of effective professional development, Garet et al. (2001) recommended two important elements: the core issues and the structural issues. The structural issues included a) “The form of activity - whether it was an interactive approach or the traditional conference approach,” b) “The duration of activity, including number of hours and the span in which the activity was conducted,” and c) “The degree of collective participation from what they termed same school, department or grade level.” The core issues included a) “The degree to which there is a focus on content,” b) “The degree to which the activity offers active learning opportunity,” and c) “The degree to which the activity offers coherence to what happens in the classrooms” (pp. 919-920). These elements of real-life experiences and including learners in their own learning, represent the social constructivist approach.

Building on the work of Garet et al. (2001) and in response to the need for meeting standardized expectations of individual States in the US to improve the quality of early childhood programs, Buysse et al. (2009) embarked on the task of suggesting a definition for
professional development. The researchers instead proposed a structure that could be used “across the field of early childhood, including early childhood education” (p. 236). Having reviewed literature from a variety of sources, the researchers suggested a structure summarized as the “who,” the “what” and the “how” in an integrated manner, for “highly effective teaching and intervening” professional development (p. 238). They explained these aspects as a) “the characteristics and contexts of the learners and the children and families (the who),” b) “content, what professionals should know and be able to do, generally defined by professional competencies, standards, and credentials (the what),” and c) “the organization and facilitation of learning experiences (the how)” (p. 239).

Both Buysse et al. (2009) and Garet et al. (2001) acknowledged the importance of the process, which included duration and continuity as opposed to a one-event activity. In addition, both structures referred to the need to consider the participants’ context. In fact, in their elaboration of the “who,” Buysse et al. (2009) also recommend consideration of the context of the children and their families (p. 238). On the other hand, although both structures focused on the content, Buysse et al. (2009) recommended content should include “knowledge, skills and dispositions” and to determine foundational knowledge, “professional development providers can turn for guidance to professional competencies and standards, quality program standards, and expected outcomes for children and families” (p. 239). Garet et al. (2001) argued that not much attention is given to the content of professional development and suggested that, “focus on specific content and how students learn that content had larger positive effects on students’ achievement outcomes, especially achievement in conceptual understanding” (pp. 923-924).

The two structures discussed above differ in their conceptualization on the source of professional development content, however they concur with the concept of involving the
learners and their context in the processes of learning and the value of continuous and collaborative interactions relevant to teachers’ classroom practice. All these aspects echo characteristics of the social constructivist approach in learning, where teachers bring their daily life issues and experiences to build on so that they are able to conceptualize possible responses to the needs of their classroom practice.

To enhance teachers’ competency in the early childhood classroom practice, Chen and McCray (2012) emphasized the “promotion of all aspects of a teacher’s development, including attitude, knowledge, and practice,” suggesting a structure called the “whole teacher approach” to professional development (p. 14). Like Buysse et al. (2009), they argued for the need to look at the teacher from a holistic perspective to “provide maximum output and create conditions for better student outcomes through changed teaching practice” (p. 9). Chen and McCray (2012) acknowledged the major factors of professional development being a) “an ongoing process, b) emphasizing collaboration, c) tailoring training to meet the needs of the teachers, d) providing hands-on opportunities, and e) connecting the new knowledge to classroom practice” (p. 9). The researchers argued that there is a crucial need to incorporate all above aspects in professional development to allow for enhanced classroom practice.

It is important to note that the whole teacher approach advocated for changing attitudes, which has not been part of the other structures reviewed. However, in their literature review, Wilson and Berne (1999) argued that teachers attend professional development with the attitude of learning new things but not necessarily for changing their practice. Since professional development is aimed at changing practice, addressing the attitude could be considered an important element to support teachers in changing their practice. The authors stated,
Much as we would like to, we cannot mandate learning, only attendance. Even when teachers attend voluntarily, teachers arrive at professional development programs with clear ideas of what kind of “knowledge” is most helpful and relevant to their learning. Seldom do teachers come to professional development programs assuming that their views of knowledge, the subject matter, or students need to change. (pp. 198-199)

Besides the element of attitude, the structure for engaging the whole teacher resemble the two structures by Garet et al. (2001) and Buysse et al. (2009) discussed earlier, in which elements of collaboration, continuity and process, as well as relevance to classroom practice are included. As shared in chapter one and like the structures discussed above, Luneta (2012), in a literature review on how continuous professional development could be designed in South Africa, concluded that there is a need for teacher engagement throughout the process of the design, implementation, and evaluation of the program to allow ownership among the teachers.

In their experience of providing professional development to early childhood classroom teachers González et al. (2006) also acknowledged the support of school administrators. However, the structures discussed earlier do not include the involvement of the administrator.

**Administrator Involvement in Professional Development**

Researchers view administrators as an important part of a school system when it comes to understanding the needs of teachers and how to support them in implementing changes (Desimone, 2009; Luneta, 2012; Murphy et al. 2014; Swim and Isik-Ercan, 2013). As part of the early childhood faculty within a university partnership in the Midwestern US, Swim and Isik-Ercan (2013) conducted a study to understand how daily classroom practices and processes can be supported through professional development in early childhood education. From their case studies and interviews, the researchers reported, “It became clear after discussions with the
center administrators that the teachers needed to be more intentional and purposeful in their planning of curriculum” (p. 177).

In addition, to establish how early childhood teachers’ professional development learning is “intertwined with their daily practice,” Swim and Isik-Ercan (2013) reviewed literature and concluded that, “Centre administrators can be in a good position to provide daily support and supervision” (p. 181). Therefore, findings from their study concluded that administrator support was instrumental in better understanding teachers’ needs and supporting them in implementing what they learned. Desimone (2009) also supported the view of including administrators in the structure for studying professional development, where school leadership is included as part of the context.

Similarly, Murphy et al. (2014), in a study examining how classroom practice can be used as a learning platform for early childhood teachers’ professional development conducted at Cape Cod Community College in Massachusetts, reported that discussing outcomes of professional development with administrators and keeping them involved broke down the power relations. Interestingly, like Swim and Isik-Ercan (2013), the researchers also reported shared learning between teachers and administrators; “In some cases, the learning is between teachers, but it can also be between teachers and teaching assistants, teachers and administrators, teachers/administrators and those in higher education” (p. 34). This study was conducted with the conceptual view of knowledge being constructed socially, as well as through reflective practice, both elements also reflect characteristics of social constructivism.

This section has highlighted that researchers have attributed the success of early childhood teachers’ professional development to organizational structures that ensure a) teachers are involved in their learning, b) classroom experiences are included in professional
development, c) collaborative learning opportunities are used, and d) school administrators are part of professional development. Organizational structures allow for conceptualization and planning of professional development. Administrators in many ways are part of a school system, therefore their systematic action is often required to put professional development structures in practice. Therefore, in the following section, I review professional development approaches with a social constructivist view, used for early childhood education that reflect implementation of the structures mentioned above.

**Communities of Practice in Teacher Professional Development**

Professional development has been considered a supportive component of educational change, especially change in classroom practice. Early childhood education is no exception. Buysse et al. (2009) argued, “recent years have witnessed a renewed interest in professional development in early childhood” (p. 235). Challenging the modernist perspectives, postmodernism has brought with it the view that diversity, collaboration, and a sense of the dynamic realities in early childhood education are important (Dahlberg, et al. 2007). This view has been reflected in approaches to professional development reported to be successful. Common elements found in the structures of professional development discussed above include; teachers’ involvement in their learning, relevance to teachers’ context of classroom practice, facilitating collaborative learning, and engagement of the administrators. These elements, as discussed earlier reflect characteristics of the social constructivist theory, emphasizing constructing new knowledge by building on learners’ existing knowledge and interaction with their social cultural environments. In addition, conceptual discussions by Desimone (2009) and Buysse et al. (2009) have commonly argued for collaboration as an important element within professional development structures.
Furthermore, Garet et al. (2001) examined the relationship between structures of professional development through literature review and “self-reported change in teachers’ knowledge skills and classroom practice” (p. 918). The researchers drew data from a national probability sample of 1027 mathematics and science teachers, thus providing “first large-scale empirical comparison of effects of different characteristics of professional development on teachers’ learning” (p. 915). Empirically testing their findings, they advocated for collaboration, continuity, and practice-based components as important elements of professional development. The study concluded, “previous speculation about the importance of collective participation and encouraging of professional communication among teachers appears to support change in practice even after the effects of enhanced knowledge and skills are taken into account” (p. 936).

Similarly, Chen and McCray (2012) who created the whole teacher structure for professional development discussed above, applied the structure in their project and reported success through collaborative activities. The goal of their study was to enhance approximately 80 kindergarten and pre-kindergarten teachers in a Head Start program who participated voluntarily in the yearlong project aimed at enhancing teachers’ knowledge in mathematics and “development of skillful practice” (p. 12). The researchers strongly attributed their success to collaboration of teachers through communities of practice. Building on the work of Etienne Wenger (1998), Kuh, (2012) defines community of practice as “practice within which group members share their capacity to create and use knowledge in a collective process” (p. 22). The collaboration suggests sharing of knowledge and working within a familiar social structure.

While exploring how to address challenges in classroom practice, Christ and Wang (2013) found that the community of practice approach supported sustainable professional development. The study examined community of practice as an approach to professional
development to deal with classroom practice challenges in a northeastern U.S. city Head Start program. Findings from the study were analyzed using literature supporting professional development through communities of practice, which concluded, “Mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoires of practice” as key aspects for successful communities of practice (p. 353). The study added the importance of mutual engagement to collaboration and including teachers’ classroom practice needs in the success of communities of practice.

Supporting the use of community of practice for professional development, Kuh (2012) recommended, to be effective, these experiences should be “intentionally designed, and carefully orchestrated collaborative inquiry experiences” because mere meetings do not “directly translate to better teaching” (p. 34). Bearing in mind that meetings are a common culture in schools, it is crucial to establish a clear distinction between the purpose of meetings and communities of practice for professional development. Like Kun (2012), Riojaz-Cortez, Alanís, and Flores, (2013) recommended communities of practice for professional development to transform early childhood teachers’ practice. The researchers also acknowledged the need for intentional planning and suggested a model that “incorporates a balance between critical dialogue and theory within a community of practice” (p. 44). Therefore, although collaborative activities like communities of practice were found to be effective for professional development in early childhood education, careful planning becomes a crucial element.

Studies conducted by Garet et al. (2001) and Chen and McCray (2012) discussed earlier in this chapter, supported the importance of collaboration, continuity, and relationship to classroom practice for professional development in early childhood education. These elements were also part of the structures for professional development suggested by Buysse et al. (2009) and Desimaone (2009). Therefore, these researchers unanimously agree that, for communities of
practice to be successful, the elements of collaboration, continuity, and relationship to classroom practice are important.

Continuity in this context is the stability of the teaching faculty from year to year. “Early childhood programs are plagued by high teacher turnover rates, ranging from 30% teacher attrition per year to over 50% across four years (Christ & Wang, 2013, p. 352). These turnover and attrition rates have been consistently reported to affect efforts for professional development in early childhood education (Kuh, 2012; Lazzari, 2012; Bussye et al. 2009). On the other hand, community of practice models for professional development have been reported to sustain teachers continued learning and provide the desired collegial support despite the high attrition and turnover rate. Christ and Wang (2013) have noted, despite the turnover issues in early childhood education, using communities of practice for professional development, allowed them to continue working with teachers who remained in the system and integrate those who joined. These elements are consistent with elements suggested in professional development structures discussed in the previous section.

Considering the discussions above, it can be concluded that, well-planned communities of practice can be considered a potentially effective way of conducting professional development for early childhood education.

Teacher Research in Professional Development

Another collaborative approach claimed to be effective for professional development in education is teacher research. Zeichner (2003) referred to teacher research as a group or individual inquiry within teachers’ professional practice to enhance their practice: “Teacher research will produce knowledge about teaching and learning that will be useful to other P-12 educators, policy-makers, academic researchers, and teacher educators” (p. 302). Zeichner
analyzed the “nature and impact of teacher research conducted under different conditions from the few existing systematic programs” in the USA (p. 302). He provided a summary of professional development activities using the teacher research approach and reported data from two to three year-long professional development activities conducted in Brookline, Boston, Georgia, and Ames. The study involved 84 to 100 teachers and administrators. The findings were reported as individual case studies drawing outcomes together to give a conceptual map of teacher research by sharing its different dimensions. Improving personal classroom practice through gaining professional knowledge was one of the highlighted outcomes of teacher research. Zeichner also gave details on structural differences in conducting teacher research, which vary from teacher research in a group setting to ones conducted individually. All forms of teacher research were reported to contribute towards improved classroom practice. The assertion of teacher research improving classroom practice was also supported by researchers working in early childhood Amanti (2005), Hedges (2012), and Murphy et al. (2014).

Aiming to inform administrators and teachers that teacher research can be an effective way of solving day-to-day problems while contributing towards professional development, Murphy et al. (2014) conducted a group study, details of which were given in the previous section. The study documented that teacher research can promote meaningful and continuous professional development without making the teachers feel threatened or overwhelmed by their practice. A teacher participant said, “We have found a way to intentionally and systematically research and answer our own questions and to enrich our own professional development through teacher research” (p. 28). A participant and an author of the study gave her view of the experience stating, “Teacher research is a way to tackle something that you want to learn more about and break it down into steps. It is a great strategy for educators to share what they have
learned” (p. 29). In addition to learning, the participant included the sharing aspect which reflects collaboration, a common element within the structures of professional development as well as an important element for communities of practice.

Murphy et al. (2014) echoed the benefits of collaborative strategies for professional development. The authors reported, “Teacher-research groups are a great way for teachers to come together and share resources as well as their knowledge and experience” (p. 33). This view was parallel to Zeichner’s, (2003) findings, who, while reviewing numerous studies about teacher research found “there was a ‘multiplier effect’ in the group experience, teachers said they learned things about teaching not just from the research that they conducted themselves, but from the research conducted by all of the group members” (p. 308). Furthermore, Murphy et al. (2014) reported working with the group had been “extremely beneficial in numerous ways - being able to bounce ideas off each other and having the support from each other, not only from different viewpoints but from different experiences as well” (p. 33).

Adding to collaboration and new knowledge, analysis of professional development conducted by Zeichner (2003) reported extensive evidence that “teachers became more ‘learner-centered’ in their practice as a result of conducting research” (p. 308). Furthermore, Gonzaléz et al. (1993) conducted a study in Southern Arizona using an ethnographic approach of teacher research to better understand the funds of knowledge of working-class Latino students. In the study, the authors acknowledged the development of new knowledge and a collaborative attitude among teachers and the families of children, and reported that teachers, upon better understanding their roles as teacher researchers, were not only able to include relevant teaching resources in the classrooms but also create learning opportunities within the communities where
children were able to take the lead role. The findings were consistent with what Zeichner (2003) stated about the gains of teacher research:

[The] nature and impact of teacher research based on studies that have systematically examined teachers’ research experiences has revealed that under certain conditions, teacher research seems to promote particular kinds of teacher and student learning that many teachers find very valuable and transformative, qualities not often linked with most professional development experiences for teachers. (p. 317)

Therefore, Zeichner’s conclusion seems to represent the wider view of the effectiveness of teacher research as an approach to professional development.

Although many advantages were reported for using teacher research as a professional development approach, support for teachers was considered most important. It was documented earlier that, unlike other structures, Desimone (2011) in the summary of her conceptual discussions on studying professional development, discusses the importance of involvement of administrators to support teachers as researchers. The need for administrators’ support for teachers to implement changes in their classroom practice has also been verified by other studies (Amanti, 2006; Murphy, et al., 2014; Hedges, 2012; Zeichner, 2003; Gonzales, et al., 2005). Areas in which support for teachers was seen to be important included: time for teachers to conduct their research, time for teachers to meet as a group to discuss their findings, understanding teachers’ needs, and autonomy for teachers to put into practice their new knowledge. Therefore, teacher research like communities of practice can be considered a useful approach for professional development in early childhood education; nonetheless, support from the administrators and value for time allocated for the activity and collaborative discussions cannot be overstressed.
Although teachers in some projects worked on individual problems, collaboration, self-confidence, collegiality, and finding ways of making learning relevant through teacher research was reported as a common outcome by numerous researchers (Chen & McCray, 2012; Christ & Wang, 2013; Gonzalez et al., 2006; Gonzalez, Moll, Floyd-Tenery, Rivera, Rendon, Gonzales, & Amanti, 1993; Hedges, 2012; Kun, 2012; Lazzari, 2012; Rojas-Cortez et al. 2013). Discussions in this section have given evidence that communities of practice and teacher research can be useful for professional development in early childhood education, validating claims by Zechiner (2003) and Desimone (2001). However, these studies have also shown that there is need for systematic planning, involvement of administrators, and intentional organization of the environments in which such collaborative learning takes place.

Reflecting on the elements of collaboration, continuity, and practice-based professional development in early childhood education highlighted in the studies related to teacher research, it is unmistakable that these studies embrace characteristics of the social constructivist theory. The core characteristics of the social constructivist theory builds on the learners’ knowledge, using the social cultural context, i.e. teachers’ classroom experiences and the importance of ensuring relevance to the needs of the teachers are mirrored in the collaborative strategies for professional development advocated in the literature reviewed in this section.

**Summary**

It can be argued that there is strong evidence in support of social constructivist approaches to teacher professional development. Involving teachers’ and administrators’ lived experiences into formulating professional development was strongly advocated by Sigel (1978) stating, “Knowledge is built from actions, experiences, and the interactions with the world” (p. 334). Garet et al. (2001) and Zeichner (2003) have both argued for the elements of collaboration,
continuity, classroom-based support, and the need for professional development to be content-based in addition to skills development. Both studies not only reviewed the need for these elements but also studied long-term professional development activities. Buysse et al. (2009) and Chen and McCray (2012) echoed the value of these elements and in their study reported positive outcomes even after a five-year period. Furthermore, studies conducted by both the Garet et al. (2001) and Zeichner (2003) had large samples covering a variety of backgrounds representing diversity of participants and the possibility of generalizability because their data were cross-sectional and collected in more than one way to support triangulation of findings. Many advocates of professional development in early childhood education also support their approach (Murphy et al., 2013; Gonzalez et al., 1993; Christ & Wang, 2013; Lazzari, 2014).

Considering the contextual realities of Tanzania shared in Chapter One, the need for professional development was clearly established, especially for the early childhood education practitioners (Bakuza, 2014; Hardman, Abd-Kadir, & Tibuhinda, 2012; Mtahabwa, 2009; Muneja, 2013; Vavrus & Bartlett, 2013). Nevertheless, limited research is available on effective early childhood teacher professional development in Tanzania, and the existing literature has not completely answered my questions about how early childhood teacher professional development is conducted in Tanzania. Are teachers and administrators involved in bringing their experiences to learning opportunities? Are the learnings from professional development being effective in the classroom? One may argue that in the context of Tanzania, structured professional development cannot be considered a strength in the government system. However, it is not an unusual element of the non-governmental organizations and private institutions (Mrutu et al., 2016). Therefore, to better understand professional development in Tanzania and how it supports practitioners to
make curricular decisions, it became imperative that this study was conducted within schools that had well established professional development as part of their system.

From a social-constructivist perspective, teaching and learning experiences are socially constructed within the learner’s environment, and this approach could be invaluable to early childhood education teachers in Tanzania. These practitioners have culturally rich lived experiences and bring with them knowledge that can contribute enormously to their professional development. Because of these qualities and considering the present lack of relevant preparation during their pre-service education (Bakuza, 2014; Muneja, 2013; UNICEF, 2011), teachers in Tanzania might welcome support in implementing curricula interactively. This study was undertaken in the hope of contributing to building awareness and evidence in support of social constructivist approaches to early childhood teacher professional development in Tanzania.

**Summary**

This chapter provided the review of literature on the need for professional development and how social constructivism has been used in professional development for early childhood teachers. Examples of approaches for professional development that reflect social constructivism have been discussed highlighting how researchers found these approaches useful to support teachers’ classroom practice. Finally, a reflection on how the review has influenced the study has been shared, which includes the rational for the study in the specific context.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to understand how early childhood practitioners in two Tanzanian preschool settings use professional development to enhance their classroom practice. The study design and the worldview that influenced the choice of design is laid out in this chapter. The research setting, and the specific research procedures are then introduced. This chapter also gives an account of how the data was analyzed to find the emerging themes. The chapter concludes with an overview of my role as the researcher.

Research Design

Coming from a social constructivist worldview, I wanted to understand the context in which I conducted research (Creswell, 2009). I wanted to listen to what practitioners said about their experiences of professional development and how they used their learning to make curricular decisions for their classroom practice. Practitioners and professional development providers were the central part of the research. Since the goal of the research was to work in the participants’ natural settings and make meaning of their experiences, I found the qualitative approach to be the most suitable for this study (Cresswell, 2009, p. 175). The diagram below summarizes the relationship between my worldview and the choice of research design.

*Figure 1. Study design.*
**Research Setting**

Considering the unique research context explained in Chapter One, a brief description will put the study into perspective. Approximately 34% of children attend pre-primary schools in Tanzania according to the Systems Approach for Better Education Results (SABER)—a report on Tanzania by the World Bank (Systems, 2012). Access to pre-primary education varies from 90% in Mwanza, the second largest city, to 19% in Dar es Salaam, the largest city, as recorded by the *Wizara ya Elimu na Mafunzo ya Ufundizi* (2014), henceforth referred to as the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (MoEVT). While all primary schools in the country are required to have a pre-primary section, in practice only 40% of public schools have registered pre-primary classes (Bakuza, 2014). However, numerous private sectors have established preschool programs. These private programs are better resourced and have regular professional development activities that are lacking in the public-school system (Mrutu et al., 2016).

To understand how professional development supports classroom practice, it was important to conduct research where ongoing professional development was part of the program. The research sites therefore were two English-medium preschools run by a non-government, nonprofit, international, non-denominational network, working to improve living conditions and opportunities for people in specific regions of the majority world. Although different organizations within the network have different mandates, all have a common goal of building institutions and programs that respond to the challenges of social, economic, and cultural change. In Tanzania, the network runs health care and education related enterprises including a higher learning institution and a school system. The school system provides a range of pre-primary to higher secondary schools in different geographic locations. Most schools offer the country’s national curricula, while some also offer other programs such as the Cambridge curriculum and
the International Baccalaureate (IB) curriculum. Data was collected in two preschools given the pseudonyms Achievement School and Empowerment School.

**Specific Research Sites**

**Achievement School**

Achievement School is located in a large coastal city and is among the first private English-medium schools established in the post-free market Tanzanian economy in 1993. The school offers the Primary Years Program (PYP) from the International Baccalaureate (IB) system, which includes a pre-primary section. Both the pre-primary and primary sections are in separate compounds located within walking distance (approximately 10 minutes) of each other. Data was collected only from the pre-primary section, which accepts children aged two-and-a-half to five and is largely a feeder for the primary section because both sections are part of the same school system. A small number of children from the pre-primary section also transition to other English-medium schools for primary education.

The Achievement School compound has a concrete building hosting the administration office, computer room, library, multiple sets of washrooms, and nine classrooms with colorful walls and large windows. Each classroom leads to a huge playground used by approximately 180 children enrolled in the school. The compound is fenced by a short wall with intervals of metal blocks and is surrounded by trees and gardens. Children attend Achievement School Monday through Friday, from 8:00 a.m. to noon. The school has 18 practitioners (teachers and assistant teachers), 13 facility support staff, and an early years’ coordinator who supervises the pre-primary section and reports to the headteacher. The headteacher is based in the primary section.

At Achievement School, the headteacher leads the administration team, which supports both the pre-primary and primary sections. The current headteacher had joined the school
approximately one year before the data collection of this study began. In addition to children’s admissions, hiring and firing of staff, overseeing the maintenance, and the budget of the school, the headteacher also participated in professional development decisions. The headteacher was also a professional development provider and the coordinators responsible for overseeing professional development reported to the headteacher.

Practitioners at Achievement School came from a variety of backgrounds representing the learners’ communities. Practitioners included those of native Tanzanian background, immigrants from the Indian sub-continent who had made Tanzanian their home, as well as expatriates in the country on work permits. These practitioners had varied qualifications and training backgrounds ranging from certificates to bachelor’s degrees in education, with some teachers having acquired diplomas in early childhood education. At that time, some assistant teachers were working on their certificates (in Swahili) from community colleges. Several practitioners had no formal training in early childhood education; however, they had acquired years of work experience in the field.

Professional development was common at Achievement School. Both pre-primary and primary practitioners were required to attend calendarized pre-planned professional development activities conducted at the primary section. Practitioners from the pre-primary section commonly walked to attend professional development activities with practitioners from the primary section. Two- to three-hour sessions were scheduled weekly on Wednesdays, and extended sessions were scheduled before the semester began.

Professional development activities at Achievement School were planned, monitored, and evaluated by the IB coordinator, based in the primary section, who, like the early years’ coordinator, reported to the headteacher. Commonly, professional development providers at
Achievement School included the IB coordinator, assistant coordinator, and headteacher. Occasionally, external facilitators from the IB global team had conducted some professional development activities. However, during the preceding administration, which had changed about two years previously, some professional development activities had been conducted at the pre-primary section. Online courses had also been attended by some practitioners as part of their professional development. A sample professional development schedule shared by the coordinator can be found in Appendix A. All practitioners and professional development providers from Achievement School were invited to participate in this study. All fourteen practitioners and four professional development providers agreed to participate in the study.

Empowerment School

Empowerment School, also one of the first established non-government preschools, was located in a rapidly growing city in northern Tanzania. The school has a huge compound with a large playground and a two-story building accommodating a large classroom, a set of washrooms and a kitchen on the ground floor and five classrooms, the administration office, library, and two sets of washrooms on the floor above. The classrooms had colorful walls and large windows. Like Achievement School, children at Empowerment School were also between the ages of two and a half and about six years when they are accepted in primary schools. The school is in session Mondays through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to noon. Empowerment School follows an eclectic curriculum, which brings together elements from various programs, for example, High Scope, Montessori, Waldorf, etc. as opposed to being specifically based on the International Baccalaureate (IB) program used by Achievement School. All children from Empowerment School move on to other English-medium primary schools to continue their education. Because
Empowerment School does not have an established primary school, the compound only hosts the preschool.

The school had 12 practitioners (teachers and assistant teachers), three facility support staff, and one administrative staff who was the headteacher. All practitioners at Empowerment School came from different backgrounds. Again, like Achievement School, the diversity in practitioners reflected communities the learners came from. All practitioners at Empowerment School are native Tanzanians and the headteacher is of Indian origin who has lived in the country for two generations. Practitioners’ academic profiles ranged from a diploma in education to a certificate in early childhood education received from a variety of English and Swahili-medium institutions. There were also two practitioners who did not have any formal training in early childhood education.

The head teacher at Empowerment School was the only administrator for the school. In addition to the academic activities, the head teacher oversaw all office related responsibilities like children’s admissions, hiring and firing of staff, overseeing the maintenance and the budget of the school. The head teacher at Empowerment School also organized, conducted, and oversaw the professional development activities. However, unlike Achievement School, the head teacher at Empowerment School involved all practitioners to participate in planning and conducting professional development activities and supported them in their search for professional development content and implementation strategies. Practitioners were encouraged to suggest topics of choice for professional development and seek support from the headteacher. The headteacher has worked at Empowerment School for over 20 years.

Empowerment School had a unique professional development culture. Although they also had weekly professional development sessions, unlike Achievement School, all practitioners at
Empowerment School were also professional development providers. Teachers were invited, encouraged, and supported by the headteacher to conduct professional development on their choice of content on a regular basis. Assistant teachers at Empowerment School reported that they also contributed towards the professional development sessions; either through working with the teacher leading the session, or by contributing activity ideas that can be implemented in the sessions. Calendarized professional development schedule for Empowerment School shared by the headteacher reflecting topics initiated by the practitioners is attached in Appendix B.

According to the interview responses from the practitioners, professional development content at Empowerment School responded to practitioners’ needs and desires to learn. The practitioners used a variety of resources to plan professional development mentored by their headteacher. Although not in a structured manner, professional development activities at Empowerment School reflected a social constructivist nature where collaboration was evidently a key to learning. All practitioners and the headteacher at Empowerment School were invited to participate in this research. All eight practitioners and the head teacher accepted to join the study.

**Research Participants**

Purposeful sampling (Maxwell, 2013) was used to identify two sets of research participants, the practitioners and the professional development providers. The practitioners were all females of various age groups from different backgrounds with varied qualifications; there were no male practitioners. Data from the practitioners provided an understanding of their perceptions of professional development and how they made curricular decisions in relation to their professional development experiences. Professional development providers contributed additional data regarding professional development content, process, and planning. A summary of participants is described below.
Table 1

**Description of Research Participants**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Site</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practitioners</td>
<td>7 teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>1 school headteacher</td>
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<tr>
<td>Development</td>
<td>1 professional</td>
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<td>Providers</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
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**Ethical Considerations**

Ethical approval was obtained through the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Arizona Human Subjects Protection Program. All participants provided written consent to participate in the study, sample form in (Appendix C). Interviews were scheduled in collaboration with the participants and their supervisors to avoid interference in teaching obligations. Participants were assured that there were no consequences for those who might choose not to participate in the study or who might wish to withdraw from the study at any time.

After acquiring consent, I visited the schools twice for two hours each time to familiarize myself with the surroundings and to build further rapport with the stakeholders. During these visits I was aware that, in a social context like a preschool where children and adults share the environment, I may be caught in-between establishing a “passive presence” and an “active presence” (Schatzman & Strauss, 1973, p. 59). Therefore, when children approached me voluntarily and initiated a conversation, I respected their communication and responded as
briefly as possible. When on site, I tried to not interfere in any activities that may disrupt the day-to-day events of the school.

**Trustworthiness**

Maintaining a trustful relationship between the participants and myself was an important part of this project. I wanted to ensure that participants felt safe as they participated in the data collection process. Trustworthiness in this study is also reflected through employing aspects of validity in data collection. Maxwell (2013) stated that validity is a controversial concept in qualitative research if interpreted as the “objective truth” (p.122). To uphold the validity of a study, Creswell (2009) referred to the importance of reporting accuracy of findings. Therefore, it was of paramount importance that the participants trusted me as a researcher.

**Anonymity**

To protect participants’ and the institution’s right to privacy, all communication from the participants was treated with absolute confidentiality. All names and identities in this dissertation have been replaced by pseudonyms. Records linking participants to their pseudonyms were only available to myself and my advisor if required. These records will be destroyed upon the conclusion of this research. Transcribed data may be presented in a professional context; however, participants information will not be used.

**Data Collection Procedures**

Multiple data collection strategies were used to answer the research questions, however, the primary source of data for this dissertation is derived from practitioner interviews. Other sources include interviews with professional development providers and supporting documents shared by the stakeholders. Data collection processes followed the same sequence in both schools.
After being introduced to the participants, informal discussions were held to share the research objectives and to build a rapport (Hatch, 2002; Maxwell, 2013; Schatzman and Strauss, 1973). After the informal discussions, and a briefing from the headteacher at Empowerment School, it became apparent that all practitioners in that school were also professional development providers. Therefore, I worked on creating one set of guiding research questions relating to both practitioner and professional development providers, which was then used for both research sites (Appendix D) in order to maintain consistency. Consequently, practitioners’ interviews became the primary source of data in Empowerment School. Interviews were also the main source of data for Achievement School however, the practitioners were not professional development providers, therefore professional development providers were also interviewed.

**Interviews**

Interviews in both schools were scheduled in collaboration with the headteacher and the coordinator, to avoid inconveniences and interference in the day-to-day activities. Interviews at Empowerment School were conducted over a period of five days while interviews at Achievement School took a total of four months, considering that the school holidays fell during my data collection periods. At Achievement School I interviewed all practitioners before I began interviews with the professional development providers. My interview notes enabled me to analyze which interview questions elicited responses directly related to my research questions and which did not (i.e., required further revision). All interviews were recorded and transcribed as soon as possible.

Observation data and the analysis of documents related to professional development activities served to validate the interview data without offering any additional or new insights. As a result, only interview data from the practitioners was analyzed for this dissertation.
Data Analysis Procedure

The analysis process was iterative, simultaneously blending data collection, conceptualization, and reflection. Often, I thought through the larger concepts reflected by practitioners in their interviews and how they contributed towards answering my questions. However, there were times when I worked on specific questions from a specific set of data. I analyzed data from one school at a time beginning with Empowerment School following the detailed process outlined below.

My formal analysis began as I started transcribing the interviews. While transcribing, I referred to the research questions and recorded my thoughts and initial findings in a journal for future reference. Once both of the school transcriptions were completed, I re-visited the data to color-code the responses according to the specific research questions. For example, all responses related to Research Question One were highlighted in the same color in each interview transcript from both Empowerment and Achievement Schools. As I proceeded in this task, I realized there were instances where answers to certain research questions were imbedded throughout the interview responses as opposed to being within a specific section. Therefore, it became important that I kept a printed copy of my research questions to refer to as I continued through the process of color coding the responses from the transcribed interviews.

After color coding the responses, I went through the process of data reduction by grouping responses to specific questions together using detailed Excel sheets (Maxwell, 2013). I first grouped responses from individual schools on separate sheets beginning with Empowerment School. Once I began grouping the data, I realized that some questions needed further classification because the responses indicated more than one finding for the question. For example, responses to the subsidiary question 1b) *What are the early childhood practitioners ’
perceptions of professional development? Needed to be classified into useful and not useful. As I continued to sift through the responses, I realized I needed yet another category, both useful and not useful. This process was also done for question 3a) How does the professional development content relate to the schools’ early childhood curriculum?

Once responses from both schools were grouped in separate Excel sheets, I created a third document to combine responses from both schools on one Excel Chart so that I could view all responses to a particular question in one place. These charts led me to better organize and reflect on similarities within responses, which led to creating themes that the data reflected. Excerpts of the chart can be found in Appendix E. The themes reflected in the data charts are used to report findings from each school and will be discussed in the following chapter.

Member Checks

Interview transcripts were shared with practitioners for initial member checking. In addition, I held a follow-up session with the practitioners after data analysis in order for them to verify my understanding of their interview responses. The process included a thematic presentation summary from the school’s findings to discuss what I had understood from the data. A printed copy of the findings’ summary was also shared with each practitioner. After the presentation, practitioners were given time to go through the printed summary and provide their individual anonymous input in writing and ask any clarification questions. As part of this member check process, practitioners from both schools had an opportunity to give individual input on the data after analysis so that the analysis would represent the true meaning of the data collected.

At Achievement School, the member check activity was conducted on August 16, 2018, through a face-to-face meeting. The activity for Empowerment School was conducted virtually
on September 14, 2018, with the practitioners’ and the administrator’s consent, because they were not available earlier due to their school vacations and I had to return to the US to continue with my studies. A sample of the input form can be found in Appendix F. Practitioners at each school were involved in organizing the member check activity as per their convenience and the administrators’ consent was sought accordingly.

**Reciprocity**

In this study, participants invested their time and trust in me. In return I felt it was my obligation to ensure I give back to the participants and the institution what may be useful to them. Hatch (2002) suggested that researchers find a way to give back “something of substance” (p. 66). I considered that sharing preliminary findings would be of value to the participants and the institution in order to review their professional development programs. Therefore, preliminary findings were shared with the relevant stakeholders before being made public through this dissertation. Since the two schools are governed by the same institution and a common board of governance, preliminary findings, research insights, and recommendations from the study were shared with the administrators as well as the board of governance through a presentation on October 10, 2018. In addition, upon completing my PhD, I will be supporting the network to collaboratively work with the practitioners and the professional development providers to create a sample action plan on how some of the recommendations from this study may be implemented.

**My Role as the Researcher**

Having previous knowledge and familiarity with the context, I anticipated a few challenges as a researcher. However, I foresaw these challenges as opportunities for growth. Being familiar with the context allowed me to respect the cultural boundaries and the
sensitivities of scheduling my research activities. Being fluent both, in English and the national language, Swahili, allowed me to build a rapport with the participants. This allowed them to share information in either of the two languages if they chose to do so. However, the challenge that concerned me the most was a possible perception of power. Fourteen years previously, I had worked in one of the two study schools within the network as the headteacher and had been the curriculum coordinator for the institution. While the school structure and human resources were quite different, I did not want those I had worked with to feel obligated to participate in the study. I addressed this situation from the beginning of the study by assuring the participants that I was there to learn from the activities and not to judge anyone. In addition, I made it clear to all participants that their identity would not be disclosed to anyone in the system. I allowed participants a choice to participate in or withdraw from the study on their own accord. Although I had previous knowledge of the research site, I worked toward being open to new knowledge, and not making assumptions based on my previous knowledge.

The agency administration has changed over time and I was able to conduct this study fully aware that the professional development processes as well as practitioners’ classroom practice had evolved in the past 14 years. I also made it clear to the participants that, although I was doing my PhD is a western country, I was not working on comparisons; instead, my research was focused on learning. I acknowledged and was aware that being a PhD student in the United States may also give an impression of privilege and power. However, as a co-learner, I wanted to remain open to what I found in the field to learn how practitioners made curricular decisions based on their professional development experiences. I felt that I began the study aware of my positionality and ready for the professional challenge.
Chapter Summary

This chapter has outlined the research design used for this study, described the settings where data was collected, and explained ethical principles upheld during the research process. Further, the chapter has given an account of the data collection process as well as the steps used in analyzing the data to derive themes from the findings that the data represented. My role as the researcher has also been shared in this chapter. The next chapter will include a summary of the findings and a discussion of the themes drawn during the analysis process.
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

In this chapter I provide a brief overview of the two study sites and present my findings, addressing three main areas: 1) practitioners’ perceptions and use of professional development in classrooms, 2) processes and content of professional development, and 3) relevance of professional development to classroom practice. Common themes in these three broad areas, which I identified during my analysis of the interviews with classroom practitioners (teachers and assistant teachers), are described and summarized. The interview questions for the practitioners are included in Appendix D. Since data was collected from two different schools, the findings and summary for each school will be discussed separately, beginning with Achievement School followed by Empowerment School. Practitioners’ interview excerpts are shared without being edited and quoted according to the line numbers from their transcripts.

Achievement School

Achievement School is referred to as the early years section of the Primary Years Program (PYP) by the institution within the larger International Baccalaureate (IB) program. Practitioners at Achievement School arrive around 7:30 in the morning for a nine-hour day, Monday through Friday. Every Wednesday, the practitioners join primary section practitioners for professional development. In this section, findings related to this theme of practitioner perceptions will be shared. The three subsections expand on Achievement School practitioners’ perceptions of professional development and how they used professional development for their classroom practice.

Use of Professional Development in the Classroom

In their interviews, almost all practitioners indicated they used skills and ideas from professional development in their classroom practice. These skills included a) elements directly
related to teaching strategies such as games, activities, and use of manipulatives; b) indirect elements such as building relationships with children; and c) structural components such as setting up the classroom environment according to Primary Years Program (PYP) guidelines.

**Use of Elements Related Directly to Teaching Practice**

Practitioners at Achievement School indicated that professional development had contributed to their engagement of children through hands-on experiences. For example, when asked to recall whether material learned in professional development were implemented in the classroom, Tumaini stated:

> Before we have not putting them into groups, like they have to make their own groups after making their own group maybe we give them activity and they have to participate I mean present in front of other children but I can see that we have groups now and it work out. (78–81)

Salama described including activities for her three- to four-year-olds as one of her teaching strategies:

> I used the idea of activities I used in the class there like math games, so the children really like it, and you know at this age three- to four-year-olds they like to have something like where they are running, and you know from here to there, so we give them the activity of recognizing the numbers. (222–224)

The above two excerpts are echoed in Rukia’s response, in which she suggests using professional development to make curricular decisions about the use of manipulatives in her classroom. This assistant teacher states that in her previous role as a classroom helper, she didn’t know how and when to use manipulatives:
You know before, ... yes we were using manipulatives, but when we go for the professional development we know how to use, when to use the manipulative. As I said before I was just a dada [means sister, term used for a class helper in this school] cleaning them, I didn’t even know how to use it, but after professional development ... I am using [manipulatives]. (166)

Similar to the responses shared above, Jesica reported using both small groups and manipulatives to provide her students with opportunities for creative expression:

The task was using the shape that you are given to come up with any creative object that you would like to make from them. So then, I grouped them and worked as a group and different groups came with up with different things. So I gave them shapes to make use of manipulatives, before I did not know and I used to give them paper only. (139–142)

The responses shared above indicate that professional development has influenced these practitioners to use a variety of engagement strategies in their classrooms.

**Use of Elements Not Directly Related to Teaching Practices**

In excerpts shared below, practitioners reported using the knowledge gained from professional development about building better relationships with their children. Mariamu said:

I learn how to listen … first how to listen a child and to teach because many teachers when they find a child is like that we are not helping them at all, we use to use the …the language which is not polite for them, like sit down, rudi ndani [come back inside] by using big voice, but since I join that online course it was about child behavior then I try to use it the things from that course. (114–120)

Similarly, Mwajuma stated:
I have put that in practices that I have to create a relationship between me and child first so that should be the basic of me be a teacher I should create some kind of a relationship between me and the child. (143–146)

Susan also referred to using elements, though not directly related to teaching, that are important to creating a conducive environment and encouraging taking responsibility. She stated, “In the class management course which I took online, I learn and I use how to make the children to be quiet, settling down, make them to pick up things, arrangement, and time to listen to the teacher” (249–250). These excerpts indicate that practitioners are using what they learned in professional development to make curricular decisions that create positive learning environments.

**Use of Professional Development for Structural Elements of Classroom Practice**

Classroom layout and allocation of learning spaces contribute to a positive learning environment. One of the PYP requirements is to provide learning centers for children in their early years. Practitioners at Achievement School shared that, in professional development, they learn about creating learning centers in their classrooms. Mwajuma described the process of implementing these spaces: “Okay so aaah … PYP makes us to have center-based learning aaah we have reading center and count center in our class you know (115–116). This attitude is mirrored by Hetal, who also uses professional development for making curricular decisions: “Yes I use it, we have large group in the morning then small groups for centers” (163). When asked to describe their classroom practice, practitioners consistently reported the use of learning centers and small-group activities. This is particularly relevant because it reflects how professional development influences practitioners’ decisions in classroom practice.
Practitioners’ Perceptions of Overall Usefulness of Professional Development

Unlike the more consistently positive opinions in the previous section, practitioners’ views varied on the overall usefulness of professional development content. Therefore, I initially grouped the responses to this part of the question into two categories, one for responses indicating that professional development was useful and the other for responses indicating that it was not. However, as I continued to read and re-read the interviews, I realized there were numerous responses indicating that some professional development was useful and some was not. Consequently, I created a third category to ensure that all response types were reflected in the results. See Figure 3 for a comparison chart summarizing these findings. Of the 14 practitioners, eight reported professional development as not useful, four reported its being useful, and four reported some parts being useful and others not. The responses reflected in Figure 3 will be discussed in the following section.

![Response Categories](image)

*Figure 2. Achievement School practitioners’ responses to overall usefulness of professional development.*

**Professional Development as Useful**

At Achievement School, few practitioners reported professional development as being useful to their classroom practice. The practitioners did, however, share that they gained
confident, acquired knowledge from each other, and learned about differentiation during professional development sessions. According to Asha, “Professional development helps also, to me, first thing confidence, they help, they make me grow. In my classroom as well” (118–119). Her statement indicates that she felt she had grown professionally and personally, although, apart from her statement about confidence, she is not specific about how. Susan reported that sharing knowledge and getting answers to her questions was useful, as is reflected in the following response: “Maybe someone has knowledge and you have another knowledge when we put together we get correct answer when we work in group we can learn” (217–218). Susan elaborated on the nature of this knowledge sharing, stating, “When you put with my idea it’s help me, maybe I didn’t know how you use manipulative of math. We have manipulative like we can use LEGO®” (222–223). Susan’s statement about manipulatives indicates that professional development at Achievement School also enabled Robista to better understand how to use the material that was available in her classroom:

Learning about how to teach in relation to individual students needs was also conveyed as being useful to an assistant teacher, “Yeah, it’s useful, I was learning about differentiation how to differentiate children in the class. (Robista, 182)

In summary, the overall usefulness of professional development reported by practitioners at Achievement School was attributed mainly to general things like building confidence, collaborative learning, and differentiation. Although many practitioners mentioned applying some professional development content directly to classroom practices, only one teacher mentioned the use of manipulatives as something useful they learned from professional development.
**Professional Development as Not Useful**

Responses referring to professional development not being useful clearly outnumbered the responses that describe professional development as being useful. Numerous responses stated that professional development has not been useful because it has not been directly relevant to their classroom practices. The context for these teachers’ responses is that professional development at Achievement School is almost always conducted together with the primary school practitioners in the school system, and the study (nursery-level teachers) practitioners’ responses indicate that the content of the professional development is geared to primary school teachers.

For instance, Eliza said, “Here now I don’t have many strategies from workshop because I am talking about when I was in primary, we did planning for everything in workshop” (172–173) A statement from Mwajuma reflects comparable experiences and explains why she found professional development not useful: “[The] focus is on primary and very hard things for nursery children–sometimes it’s useless to go there but we must go, maybe we will learn something” (90–92). Other practitioners reporting related experiences include Salama, who said, “Yea, it was not geared towards my age range. Aaaa most of the times you know, that was the only reason the workshop was not really working for me” (103–104).

Again, another practitioner, Susan, was clear about the content not being relevant, stating, “Because the things we learn in workshop is difficult for those children to make connection, there are lots of things, which are not familiar with our babies” (196–197). As in previous responses, Tumaini explains, “It was about teaching strategies but for us I think it was based more in primary school, but not at all for early years so they wasted our time” (111–112). A number of other practitioners reflected similar sentiments, as shared below. Hetal reported:
Because you know the … the children of there are different than us, you know we have the small baby ones with us here. They are big and ours small. So, there are things in workshop it depend on them and we can’t use it for us. (197–199)

In addition, Salama said:

I faced those kinds of things because during the mathematics workshop I used to be in preschool class, so the children were two to three years old, and the activities which were there, were not really like, I could not take back to the children. (98–100)

Similar to both of the previous responses, Mariamu said:

Yah they mostly talk about older children … you know in our school, they need us to give a lot of techniques about the children how to handle them, lot of methods, techniques which will help us also as teacher, some teacher they are new they don’t know how to manage the class, they need it so that become get from primary, because primary they are big, when you tell them to keep quite they will understand but we need to learn more especially about nursery. (207–212)

The findings therefore indicate that most of the content in professional development conducted by the Achievement School system has been focused on primary school practitioners, which makes the content less relevant for nursery school practitioners.

Some Aspects of Professional Development Useful and Some Not

This category was created to accommodate responses that did not directly fit under either of the other two categories. Therefore, in this section I will share findings that reflect professional development being useful in some ways but not in others. Findings indicate that professional development sessions held either at the nursery school or by facilitators from outside the system were more useful for the nursery teachers compared to professional
development sessions held collectively with the primary school practitioners by facilitators from within the system. Nevertheless, there are responses that acknowledge that some professional development sessions are useful; however, no specific examples are mentioned. The following excerpts reflect the nursery teachers’ responses.

Mariamu stated, “When we go to the workshop some areas we are fit and some areas we are not fit, you know for nursery school” (146–149). Similarly, Hetal said, “So that it was difficult to me to cope but I try my best but sometimes we are going to sessions in primary and it is also not everything for nursery teachers” (139–140). The following statement by Hetal once again indicates that the practitioner feels she is advancing in her learning but finds some of the material unclear: “But in session of workshop it helps me to move one place one point to another but it’s difficult slowly slowly, but not everything is clear for me” (146–147).

The following excerpts clarify what specific professional development has been useful and explain specific content and processes that has not been of specific use for their classroom practice.

This was from our school not the one we go to primary. Only very very few times we do professional development here but I like it when we do our own school thing you know. It is like we are in our own school and learning about our school things, when we go to primary we don’t learn many things for our school…. (Salama, 86–89)

She continued:

Yeah, this was from our school here, here we just actually brainstorm different things we can do in the classroom, how to do it, and yea not in primary school those are not so nice and don’t have many things about nursery…. (92–94)

She also stated:
Aaaaa this year we had some workshops, where our coordinator had a separate like, a separate list of workshops, which were like age appropriate like the age of children, but it was not still too useful. We complained last time a lot. (106–108)

Asha echoed Salama’s sentiments, saying:

It is useful in a way, because it help us teachers to learn like, if you are lacking of something, so we learn but if you don’t have knowledge like from other courses, it I will confuse you. I was not liking it before … I told you I volunteered here before, so then it was not clear to me, the things we were doing in workshops. (149–152)

Hetal’s statement sent the same message:

We need to do workshops as early years people here we can go there but they can arrange for nursery teachers alone then we can join if it’s necessary to join with them and we can do things with primary (183–185)…. Not all, but many things related to primary (206).

Finally, Eliza described one of the workshops as not being relevant to her. “It happened to that workshop of education first, for me that was not productive, I was real interested in early years thing, which we are struggling with and they did not include it.” (145–146)

Summary: Practitioners’ Perceptions and Use of Professional Development

Reflecting on Achievement School practitioners’ perceptions of professional development, it is important to consider that while twice the number of practitioners reported professional development not being useful compared to those who reported professional development being useful, several participants shared responses that reflect using professional development to make curricular decisions. Therefore, it can be concluded that professional development was reported by the practitioners to be both useful and not useful.
Practitioners at Achievement School used professional development to make curricular decisions such as arranging their classrooms to allow for small-group learning opportunities, making decisions to use activity-based learning for young children such as integrating physical play like running while the practitioners teach how to count, and using games and manipulatives to keep learners involved. In some instances, practitioners also described being new to these strategies and activity ideas and seeing their use make a positive difference in the classroom.

Evidently, practitioners have also used professional development to improve their relationships with learners by sitting close to them, using a polite tone of voice, and listening to what they may have to say. Furthermore, the resulting positive behavior in children, when practitioners applied these communication strategies, was attributed to an online course on classroom management. This attribution suggests that some Achievement School practitioners perceived professional development through online courses as supporting classroom practice. Most likely because Achievement School is part of the primary years program (PYP), practitioners also applied what they learned in professional development to meeting PYP expectations by implementing structures like learning centers to enable a variety of learning experiences and inquiry in their classrooms.

The above section represents how Achievement School practitioners described using professional development for making curricular decisions. However, their perceptions of the overall usefulness of professional development sends a mixed message. From 14 respondents, four practitioners reported professional development to be useful, eight practitioners reported professional development not to be useful, and four reported professional development to be both useful in some areas and not in others. These findings indicate that, although practitioners are finding the generic strategies (e.g., making groups and using hands-on activities) about teaching
and learning useful, the majority do not find professional development useful in relation to the specific teaching and learning processes in pre-primary (early childhood) classrooms. In addition, professional development conducted by external facilitators and through online courses was reported to be more useful to the specific needs of these pre-primary practitioners. Practitioners distinctly reported that most professional development content is geared to primary level teaching and learning, particularly when conducted by facilitators from within the school.

**Processes and Content of Professional Development**

Responses in this section are grouped into three parts. The first part discusses findings on stakeholders’ involvement in conducting professional development. The responses are grouped into three categories: no involvement from any stakeholders, involvement of teachers, and involvement of others. The second part discusses the process involved in identifying content and planning professional development. Finally, the third part focuses on the resources that inform professional development.

**Involvement of Stakeholders in Professional Development**

Twelve out of thirteen responses by the practitioners at Achievement School indicated that they were not being involved in planning professional development. In fact, Mariamu actually stated, “In planning they involve just them the primary people … yeah, No … we are not involved, only the PYP coordinators and headteacher from primary” (159–160). The only different answer was from Jesica when relating professional development to parental involvement activities; she stated, “When we have the curriculum afternoon whereby we have to give the parents the insights about the curriculum. Yeah, and with that give tips of how parents will go about teaching their children at home” (89–91). The findings also indicated that the
teachers were expressing a desire to be included in planning and conducting professional development. For example, at the end of the interview, Asha stated:

I don’t have any questions. But I would really like that, if possible to suggest if teachers could get an opportunity to conduct a professional development session to grow as well, or even other people, not just those from primary IB coordinator and those with position. Even from those who are nursery specialist, maybe some doctors or any new people.

(279–282)

The responses clearly showed that teachers and assistant teachers were not involved in planning or facilitating professional development. It was reported that, almost always, the PYP coordinators and the headteacher provided professional development. However, a desire to participate in conducting professional development was expressed by the practitioners at Achievement School. This is clearly articulated by Tumaini who said, “Maybe sometime, we will have the position because I want to also do workshops and then allow other nursery teachers to also do some. We have nice leaders in this school you know” (117–118).

**Process for Identifying and Planning Professional Development**

Considering that practitioners responded as not being involved in the planning or provision of professional development, it was not surprising that only Tausi responded positively to being involved and said, “Yes yes, sometimes it depends on their teaching what they want to teach, but everything is inside the book, they just take some few topics to discuss every time we have PD we never know what will be there” (119–120). Although the response begins with a positive assertion, her explanation reinforced the claim by other Achievement School practitioners that they were not involved in identifying and planning professional development.
Resources that Inform Professional Development

Only two direct responses related to this area. Both responses indicate that the source of professional development content was the Primary Years Module, which is a booklet that is universally used by the International Baccalaureate Program to guide teaching and learning in primary years classrooms. Susan said, “You see everybody who is working, maybe they find the objectives in the PYP book, they read useful of PYP book and scope and sequence” (158–159). And Rukia stated, “It’s from the module of PYP. I didn’t even know what was the PYP before, and I was just a dada [means sister, term used for a class helper in this school]” (143). Both responses reflect the numerous statements of Achievement School practitioners that the PYP module is the primary source of their professional development content.

Summary: Processes and Content of Professional Development

This area focused on responses related to stakeholder involvement, the processes modeled, and the source(s) of professional development content. Practitioner responses in this area were brief, which could be attributed to their lack of involvement in planning and conducting professional development. All but one response stated that they were not involved in the process of planning or facilitating professional development. Therefore, according to the findings, professional development at Achievement School was planned and conducted by either coordinators or the headteacher who were based in primary school. One practitioner who responded differently referred to her involvement in conducting a curriculum information session for parents of her students.

It was apparent that nursery practitioners preferred professional development conducted by facilitators outside the school and were also interested in involving early childhood experts and other professionals in facilitating professional development. Another important aspect to
note was that practitioners expressed interest in conducting professional development sessions in areas of their strength so they could grow professionally. In fact, a teacher with a background in Montessori education suggested that, although Achievement School is an International Baccalaureate (IB) school, it would be valuable to have a Montessori professional conduct professional development to give teachers exposure to different ideas. Since the Montessori approach is based on an individual child’s progress, it could be that the teacher is echoing other practitioners’ sentiments that the content should be more relevant to pre-primary children.

From the findings, it is clear that all professional development sessions were based on content from the PYP modules and mainly related to primary classrooms. In fact, as reported by the practitioners, most of the content was derived from the modules titled “Scope and Sequence for IB Learning,” which relate almost exclusively to primary years teaching. While some PYP approaches and structures could be valuable to the practitioners, the interviewees were evidently seeking content that was more directly relevant to pre-primary levels of teaching and learning. It is therefore not surprising that practitioners were more appreciative of and found the external facilitators’ workshops relevant, useful, and enjoyable.

**Relevance of Content and Processes of Professional Development to Classroom Practice**

In order to understand how practitioners responded to the aspect of relevance, I had to group responses into two sets. One set reflects professional development as being relevant to what happens in day-to-day early childhood classrooms; the other set reflects the content as not being relevant. Nine of fourteen practitioners reported that at least one topic was relevant to early childhood classrooms. However, the rest of the responses indicated that all content was not relevant to their classroom practices.
A variety of topics relevant to classroom practice were mentioned by the practitioners. For example, Salama shared, “So apart from PYP workshops we had classroom management workshop as well which was for our class” (84). Professional development on classroom management was also mentioned by Sussan, Asha, Fatuma, and Tausi. Furthermore, Tausi’s responses provided additional details about what was relevant from the classroom management professional development content stating, “Yes, the other one different methods of making the child take the ownership of doing the activities so they don’t make noise” (140-141).

Another relevant topic mentioned was assessment. Rukia said, “it’s all about learning, assessing…. eeh, I was, I was learning also about learning … assessing … what is PYP and all the stuff but a lot of it about assessment” (137–140). Similarly, Robista echoed, “In professional development mmmh I was learning about assessment (203)…. Yeah how to do assessment and why we do assessment in the class” (205). Practitioners did not mention learning about specific early childhood-related assessment strategies; however, when asked to explain their classroom practices, they did mention conducting pre-assessment.

Three more responses reflected professional development as being relevant, but each also shares a concern. For example, Asha said (144–145), “Like how to plan, like if you have a new unit coming. How do you engage with children in that unit, how do you introduce the unit to them?” She then shared more details indicating that, although professional development is relevant to her classroom practice, it’s difficult for her to implement:

Yeah, there in the professional development. They share a lot of things with us, but then how to introduce them, how to tell them that we are going to do this, this, we are going to actually find out what animals they have to explain more. We can tell children what they
eat, like that, it was like, how are your children getting to know what they are doing, why are they going there or what reason, I want to know how to do that you know. So that was the reason, like, that was the way how they were teaching us, they were telling us like; if you were talking to a children introducing to children the new unit, the process, that’s the main thing I can say, they tell us the process but we have to then do things ourselves, sometimes it’s very hard.” (166–173)

The following two excerpts also share perceptions of the relevance of the professional development content. However, both participants stated that the professional development held by individuals other than the current headteacher and the coordinators was more relevant to their classroom practice:

Learning engagement, we are learning how to arrange their class corners…. How to walk how to do something at work to be best in for how our school to be best…. It is one lady came from I don’t remember from where. She teach how to work with a young children. she was telling us about nursery not about primary. It was so nice. (Jenny, 143–189)

Jesica, another teacher, echod Jenny’s sentiments:

When we had the in-house workshop only in nursery last year by Nancy [previous coordinator] about inquiry based related to Maths, we have that session of getting children involved in the inquiry process, to use manipulative and how they could use the creativity to come up with different things. (Jesica, 120–123)

Content Not Relevant

In this section, I will share responses that reflect why the practitioners did not find professional development content relevant to their classroom practice. Tausi, for instance, infers
that the professional development would be more relevant if the content and the processes were more connected to the teaching and learning of early childhood.

Some things are not very not useful. I think according to the number of our children in the class, we cannot do some of the practice that they tell us to do like finishing the work on time and working with new things. Yea, even if you do it, it will be just for a few groups of children. They are not relevant, age wise and expectations sometimes are irrelevant. (182–187)

Tausi’s response reflects her feeling that professional development content did not relate to the younger children in her classroom. This feeling is again embedded in Tausi’s following statement:

And I wish we could get somebody, especially those who come for the professional development, somebody for the early years, because whenever we ask them, for example I remember us we were planning, they take us to plan for English, it was really hard for us to plan. We told them how can we plan English we are not teaching them English? (227–230)

Asha’s sentiments confirm the views of other practitioners: “But I would suggest that more professional development to be done here in nursery and also maybe with specialist of Nursery children, like someone who knows more and is more familiar with the nursery teaching” (180–183). Salama provided another example about how the content and the process was not relevant: “So, during the professional development session, we are 70 something and above and we don’t do things exactly according to nursery needs” (236–237). The expressed need for professional development content to be more relevant to the pre-primary school was a consistent part of numerous responses, each of which suggested that the practitioners would like
professional development content and processes to focus specifically on their classroom practices. Eliza explained why she found professional development not relevant to their classroom practice:

   Somehow because in all professional development we really focus in our teaching and in how to teach but when we talk about teaching and learning there, we can have a point of how to integrate with kids, we are not learning so much about nursery in there at primary. I want to learn how to integrate with them is when you are, when you make them comfortable, when you are caring to them. (237–241)

Mariamu stated:

   About teaching especially in a preschool what I can say that I like their professional development session workshop you can’t compare with other schools but here a lot of workshop which is developing as a teacher, we develop to know many strategies about handling primary classroom… handling the many children for the primary school also–maybe one day I can use those things even in primary school if I go there…. (92–96)

   Responses in both areas suggested that, while practitioners reported at least some professional development to be relevant, the focus on primary school surpassed that of nursery education, and attending practitioners came from two very different sections of the school: the early years, which includes children aged two-and-a-half to six years, and the primary school, which includes children aged six to twelve. Data also indicates that nursery school practitioners preferred and requested that professional development be held on site at their school by professionals engaged in early childhood education, including the practitioners themselves.
Processes of Professional Development

One aspect of this research included understanding how professional development providers modeled practices they encouraged in the classrooms. Considering the theoretical framework of the study, both social interactions and learner engagement were sought. Practitioner responses indicate that small-group activities were used in professional development, as stated by Jesica: “So normally we work in groups, we have coordinator that demonstrate what needs to be done and she talks about primary things but we get ideas” (44–45). Use of small groups within the larger team was also reported by other practitioners. For instance, Jenny said, “This workshop you are going there all sitting and only speak in small group activity because only there maybe we do things for nursery things” (154–155). Tausi considered small groups to be a supportive strategy for acclimatizing newcomers in the system and allowing individuals the confidence to share their views in small groups instead of an overwhelming large group situation.

They, I mean the coordinators keep on repeating because there is a lot of teachers so the new teachers who have come, they are also doing small group with us (105-106). Yea as we take our children, also us this one cannot open up there so many people, this one cannot open up may be. (245–246)

Practitioners also mentioned finding that small groups helped them better understand the facilitators and learn from each other’s ideas. Susan states, “It’s nice when you go to group. Otherwise we cannot learn what they say. In the group there are different idea we shared, everybody has different perspectives” (213–214). She further clarifies, recalling about one facilitator that she
gives us work and we come to present in front in our area in nursery about … she gives us work about unit like it was aaah … may be manipulative group and everybody come with different idea of how you use manipulative and other group they use may be ICT computer, others about reading skills when we come together and everybody present I get the new ideas. (Susan, 236–239)

Hetal added, “It help me to sit with the group and to share ideas yeah, I get ideas from others and nobody can laugh at you” (155–156). A similar response by Tumaini noted that “I was the chairperson, so at the end of the day I was supposed to stand and say what my group did” (136–137), which in addition to collaboration reflected gaining confidence in leadership skills.

These responses correlate to the responses of practitioners when explaining their classroom practices. Almost all teachers mentioned using small groups. However, yet again, there were comments about how an external facilitator used processes that were more familiar and relevant to the nursery school setting. The following excerpt exemplifies these findings:

There were others like mathematics and language and reading English we did here in school, but it was not from PYP book. We had someone come and the person did lots of activities with us, of those subjects. And it was like engaging, it was … everyone was supposed to get in a group, and do an activity, and there were centers so every 15 to 20 minutes we were in a center, we were doing those activities like children doing in the class. This one was the best, it was by outside people I think. So, when they ring the bell we used to circulate going the next group just the way it is in the class. (Salama, 70–78)

**Summary: Relevance of Professional Development to Classroom Practice**

In this final section, I was looking to establish what relationship existed between the professional development content and the processes modeled for the early childhood
practitioners’ classroom practice. Although there was resemblance between the professional
development content and what practitioners reported their classroom practice to reflect, it was
evident that the resemblance was reported as limited to generic aspects like planning processes,
assessment, classroom managements, and active learning, with a major focus on primary school.

Practitioners nevertheless appreciated the strategy of using small group discussion during
professional development. They reported using the small group time as providing a sense of
safety and trust where practitioners felt they were not embarrassed to ask questions or express
difficulty in understanding the generic content of the professional development. The small
groups were also related to acknowledge the need to support new staff and the need to gain
confidence.

Practitioners also reported that this school system had more of an emphasis on
professional development as compared to other schools in which they had worked. However, the
practitioners associated the venue with a lack of content relevance. For instance, they reported
previous experiences of professional development being held in the early years section of
Achievement School as more useful and meaningful to their classroom practices because those
experiences were oriented specifically for their learners’ age group, classroom activities, and
classroom dynamics.

Having a large group of about 70 practitioners, which included teachers and assistant
teachers from both the primary and the early years, seemed to be an overwhelming experience
especially for the early childhood assistant teachers. The discomfort could be related to the
concepts and vocabulary used in the professional development being unfamiliar to the assistant
teachers, the majority of whom have become practitioners through learning on the job before
they went for any formal teacher training.
Once again, like the previous questions, findings in this section reflect that practitioners prefer external facilitators who conduct professional development that focuses on early childhood classrooms. Often, facilitators brought in from outside rotated the workshop settings from one center to another—a practice also common in practitioners’ own classrooms. Because this strategy directly reflected what practitioners reported their classroom practice looked like, the high participant number did not interfere with the effectiveness of the workshops. Instead, practitioners were comfortable and able to concentrate on presentations, discussions, and activities. Therefore, the need for a change in approach to facilitating professional development and the inclusion of specific content related to early childhood education was emphasized by the practitioners.

**Summary of Findings for Achievement School**

Professional development at Achievement School reflected the use of workshops as a major strategy, which Hadley et al. (2015) suggest should be replaced with collaborative strategies that allow ownership and critical thinking. Teacher research was one of the collaborative strategies reflected in the constructivist approach to professional development, advocated by numerous researchers (Blank, 2010; Moll, 2014; Murphy et al., 2014; Zeichner 2003). However, practitioners at Achievement School did not mention engaging in any kind of research activities, collaborative or otherwise, which does not reflect Moll’s (2014) recommendation of using teacher research as a social learning tool to develop new knowledge. Zeichner (2003) specified the importance of teacher research for educators, policymakers, researchers, and practitioners alike. Zeichner’s findings were also supported by other researchers in their study within the area of early childhood education (Amanti 2005; Hedges, 2012; Murphy et al., 2014).
Referring to the analysis of characteristics for effective professional development conducted by Garet et al. (2001), collective participation of practitioners from the same context was highly recommended. Achievement School reflected this characteristic by including all practitioners (teachers and assistant teachers) in professional development. On the other hand, combining practitioners from the primary and early years sections contradicts the concept of collaboration within the same context because the contexts of these practitioners were different; they were located in different buildings, they catered to different age groups, and their teaching-learning content was different. This dissonance was also reflected in the data reported by early years practitioners.

Collaborative practices in professional development at Achievement School were reported to be limited to group work during the workshops. While practitioners reported working in groups as being useful to clarify workshop content, gaining moral support and confidence, there was no mention of how the group work supported further learning related to the early years practitioners’ classroom practice. This perception of group work does not reflect Kuh’s (2012) and Riojaz-Cortez, Alanis, and Flores’s (2013) advocation of collaborative activities like communities of practice, in which practitioners work together to address their needs and support each other in day-to-day activities. Use of communities of practice has been reported to strongly support professional development that enhances classroom practice in both small and large-scale studies (Buysse, 2009; Chen and McCray, 2012; Garet et al., 2001; Kuh, 2012; Wenger, 1998).

A clear connection to classroom practice was also recommended as characteristic of effective professional development. However, numerous responses reported that the activities and concepts shared in the professional development sessions at Achievement School did not reflect the teaching and learning environments of early childhood education. In addition, a
dissonance from the whole teacher approach of professional development advocated by Chen and McCray (2012) was evident. Practitioners at Achievement School clearly resented going to the primary section for professional development activities. This aspect contradicted the whole teacher approach because the approach recommended considering practitioners’ willingness to attend professional development as well as their engagement in the activities. Furthermore, the whole teacher approach also recommended meeting practitioners needs, while at Achievement School, the majority of practitioners reported that the professional development did not meet the needs for their classroom practice.

Another noticeable difference between what the literature suggested and the data I collected was the way in which administrators were involved in professional development. Studies have reported that involving administrators in professional development permits the practitioners to implement their learning from professional development and allows them time to engage in activities to enhance their practice (Desimone, 2009; Luneta, 2012; Murphy et al. 2014; Swim & Isik-Ercan, 2013). Conversely, at Achievement School, administrators’ involvement was reported to making decisions of content and processes of professional development as reported repeatedly by practitioners at Achievement School.

Nevertheless, continuous professional development was noticeable at Achievement School. Continuity as opposed to ad-hoc episodes of professional development is recommended by both Bussey et al. (2009) and Garet et al. (2001). Recommendations based on the findings from Achievement School will be discussed in the next chapter.

**Empowerment School**

In this section I will share findings from the second school (pseudonym Empowerment School). Empowerment School is located in the second largest city of Tanzania, and children at
this school are the same age as at Achievement School: two-and-a-half to six years.

Empowerment School is not part of the IB system and therefore does not follow the PYP. Instead, the school uses an eclectic curriculum put together by a team of headteachers from within that school system. At the time of the interviews professional development was part of the Empowerment School culture; all practitioners participated in planning and conducting workshops. Findings from Empowerment School will be presented in a similar manner as Achievement School using three main areas: 1) practitioners’ perceptions and use of professional development in classrooms, 2) processes and content of professional development, and 3) relevance of professional development to classroom practice. However, the elements of focus within these three areas will be shown to be different in the two schools.

A summary will be shared after discussion of findings in each area and a collective summary will conclude the findings section. Interview questions used for the practitioners in both schools were the same and can be found in Appendix D. In the first section, findings related to this theme of practitioner perceptions will be shared. The three subsections expand on Empowerment School practitioners’ perceptions of professional development and how they used professional development for their classroom practice.

**Use of Professional Development in the Classroom**

At Empowerment School all practitioner responses to questions about curricular decision-making indicated that professional development supported teachers in making curricular decisions. Practitioners consistently reported specific things that they learned from workshops and then mentioned using them in their classroom practice. Excerpts from the participants’ responses exemplify the consistency of this message, beginning with Sofia, who stated that she used strategies from the workshops to prepare children for literacy by involving them in singing:
So, in those workshops I get experience how to prepare children before reading how to prepare children before writing how to make children enjoyable while writing how to make children enjoyable while reading so those, things maybe I just have few, so I get more and more in workshops (232–235). How to make those children who maybe you can get those challenges in class when children are singing others just looking, so how to make those children who don’t like to sing how to make them to enjoy sing. (239–241)

Sofia also described learning new songs, stating “Yeah I have learned many, many songs I had just few few songs for example the school that I was teaching there and now I’m using more songs here” (296–297). Learning new strategies was also reported by Tubia, who acknowledged that professional development had taught her the use of resources she hadn’t been aware of. For example, she candidly admitted, “Yeah I didn’t know you can use a toilet [paper] roll for many things in the classroom” (265). She also said, “Okay, so I take the ideas of activities from the workshop, so I train my kids in my class and we have much fun” (250–251). She continued, “The meaning of puppets I didn’t know that there is puppet exist in this world, now I use them in my class for many things” (403–404).

It was interesting how the terminology “puppets” made concepts seem new. For example, a common African cultural childhood experience is making dolls and other figures from used corn cobs and other naturally available materials like plastic bags and old clothes and rags. Yet puppets seemed to be a new concept for this practitioner. Tubia also expressed that workshops allowed her to ask about curricular resources she had access to, so that she could use those resources effectively:
Yes, and sometimes the things that we have in the class, but we are not using we say 
aaaha this we can’t use but if you go to the workshop you can ask or even they will say 
how to use the things we have in our class. (277–279)

Learning new concepts and teaching/learning strategies in the workshops seemed to be a 
common perception among the Empowerment School practitioners. Salama acknowledged new 
learning by saying, “Yes we have workshop here it is nice for me myself, because there is 
something new. New things you can’t think always that you know, then when you go to 
workshop you know much more” (166–168). She gave another example in the following 
statement: “Also how to pour water or how to use their shoes different shoes we keep their shoes 
from here to there, then we play games for learning and physical development and language and 
many new things we learn” (273–275). In addition to learning new practices that help with 
curricular decisions, Salama explained how professional development helped her put her college 
learning in perspective and how she put her new learning into practice:

My side, I did not understand how to use it but in professional development we are 
learning everything then I know what the research in the book was saying. The book we 
used in college so now I use the music material and cards for happy activities and games 
for mathematics and many things after I go to workshop here (206–209)…. There are 
many games when we read from the workshop it was new for me but now for example 
how to play the drama and chair-drum-chair game you know I can do many things to 
make children enjoy in my class and they also learn. (261–263)

Mirroring Salama, Rebeca shared how she made curricular decisions to include games 
and sports in her classroom as a result of professional development: “For sure it’s about when we 
learned about physical activities. Here always we have sports and games I have got, I have
learned so many games about small children” (199-200). Again, she indicated how she puts in practice the use of songs being taught in professional development for teaching numbers. “For these young children I teach them first by songs of maybe if it is counting. Then I teach them songs. So that they can recognize even if we start counting or we start writing the numbers” (215–217). Rebeca further explained how she builds number concepts reflecting the activities used in the workshops:

Then if it is the blocks, then I tell children go and bring for me two blocks or go and bring for me two stones that they get used to that. They learn two has how many values when you see two stones means that like same as number two like we did in the workshop. (228–230)

Echoing the use of games and manipulatives for building number concepts and literacy skills as a result of professional development, Shella said:

That you have to maybe use games in addition maybe say 3+4, the ways of you count. You can use beads to count. You can use your fingers, you can use beads, stones to count, mmh and another thing you know maybe reading skills, so I do that in my class now. Reading skills, I learn a child can able to read by using different things, we can use songs. We can help them to read and I do that also in my class. (195–201)

All practitioners mentioned using what they learned in profession development to make day-to-day classroom teaching and learning-related decisions. In addition, Jamila claimed that she was better able to support children who needed more attention in her class through her learning from professional development:

Okay in a classroom I have an example of like when I have told you about the slow learners, if you know a child cannot catch up very easily in writing so you help with more
activities like the dotted lines and I know that from workshop of my headteacher. (244–246)

The above findings reflect practitioners’ making curricular decisions as a result of attending professional development. Another prominent element repeatedly reported by practitioners at Empowerment School was the usefulness of professional development. Unlike Achievement School where three categories are used to share the final responses to professional development being useful, not useful, and partially useful were used, Empowerment School only reflected one category: professional development being useful. The responses reflect this perception of usefulness in two major areas: 1) day-to-day classroom practice with specific reference to teaching and learning experiences and 2) personal growth as professionals. I will separately share interview-response excerpts that exemplify each area.

**Professional Development Useful for Classroom Practice**

Workshops held at Empowerment School were reported to be helpful in a variety of curriculum areas. According to Sofia, the workshops “help with different … curriculum areas” (221). Sofia also stated, “I like that too much” (304). She continued to say how professional development added to her knowledge around teaching literacy skills:

So, in those workshops maybe I get experience how to prepare children before reading how to prepare children before writing how to make children enjoyable while writing how to make children enjoyable while reading so those, things maybe I just have few, so I get more and more in workshops. (232–235)

In addition to literacy skills, the responses from Jamila stated that professional development helped them teach about science more effectively: “Yeah it was helpful you can make simple arrangements for science experiments in class and show the kids like heavy and
light” (216–217). In relation to experiments, Mwanaidi advocated for using practical tools and activities in her classroom after learning about them in the workshop. She insisted, “I will make sure that I use practical things” (161), and “Yeah, since we are teaching those small children, we need to use practical things I learned” (366). Mwanaidi stated something similar: “If somebody is doing music she will come out with new songs and new things to show you that you weren’t aware of them, so you find you use those skills to improve in your class” (246–248). Mwanaidi also noted that professional development supported her in improving how she taught mathematics: “And you gain some skills that you can use to improve in maths” (266), and “Yeah most of our workshop they are very helpful” (232). Similarly to the responses discussed above, Jamila provided a specific example of how professional development supported her in meeting the specific needs of individual children in her classroom.

Okay, in a classroom I have an example of like when I told you about the slow learners, if you know a child cannot catch up very easily in writing so you help with more activities like the dotted lines that I know that from workshop of my headteacher. (244–246)

To put Jamila’s statement in perspective, it is important to note that, in response to being asked what was challenging about being an early childhood practitioner, she had mentioned dealing with what she called slow learners in her classroom. Therefore, according to her response, the headteacher, who coordinates and supports professional development in Empowerment School, addresses teachers’ needs through professional development.

The above section reflected how professional development was perceived by practitioners as being useful in their daily classroom practices. The second part of this section will reflect responses that reflect their perceptions of how professional development helped them grow professionally.
Professional Development Useful beyond Teaching and Learning

It was encouraging to note that Empowerment School practitioners related professional development to becoming better teachers. The excerpts shared below provide examples of ways in which professional development was perceived as contributing to their teaching. Rebeca stated, “Yeah, it’s nice for sure in workshops all of this things I learn it’s from there. When we learn about professional things, we get many things. I have been getting so many ideas about teaching” (176–179). In addition to learning to become a better teacher, Rebecca described learning about qualities such as being a role model: “When you teach children be like them it is singing, dancing is when they will learn because a nursery teacher is a role model of those children. They do what you teach them” (279–280).

The following excerpts reflect professional development as being useful for sharing ideas and building confidence. For example, Yasinta shared, “Since I joined here ah I was some little bit low in knowing many things, but the workshop has made me to improve in many areas, we learn ideas from one another” (340–341). She also specifically explained how her confidence had helped her communicate with parents by stating, “Yeah, I have gain something in fact confidence yeah in language am very confident now to speak in English with parents” (347–348). Tubia also talked about the usefulness of sharing ideas with her colleagues, stating, “I find very helpful in workshop I have gain a lot of things, because we share ideas in workshops” (212–213). She also described how, through professional development, the headteacher allowed her to try what she wanted to do:

Because I wanted to try it, and know more about it, I did maths and we had a lot of fun with songs and games and teachers liked it and the headteacher gave me confidence mmh, and to get new ideas from other teachers. (358–360)
Tubia shared that she was also learning how to deal with very young children from her headteacher: “Our headteacher teaches us how to be with all children even very small” (371–372). Becoming a better teacher through professional development was also reflected in the response from Jamila, who said, “it helps me to learn more, so if I have some more ideas from other teachers then I will have to teach them to my kids in the class then I can be better teacher you know” (227–229). She also shared that professional development helped her to connect with children, which could mean building relationships with them: “Okay the workshops helps you to get a more connected to the kids the more they understand you” (293–294). As illustrated by Tubia’s response below, these practitioners all shared that professional development was making them better teachers:

Okay it helps me to help the kids to learn more so if I have some more ideas from other teachers then I will have to teach them, to my kids in the class then I can be better teacher you know. (227–229)

Only one response mentioned that not everything was perfect, which could mean there may be elements that are not useful, but the practitioner attributed her perception to being tired. Nevertheless, she also acknowledged the usefulness of the workshops: “mmh everything is not perfect, because sometimes you are tired, but I see every workshop is helpful you know sometimes, something can come like you don’t know that thing, so I learn something new at-least” (Tubia, 260–262). This section has highlighted practitioners’ responses on how they find professional development useful both for classroom practice as well as developing professionally as better teachers.
Summary: Practitioners’ Perceptions and Use of Professional Development

Findings in the area of usefulness of professional development have consistently indicated that practitioners in Empowerment School used their knowledge and experiences from professional development to make curricular decisions for their day-to-day classroom practice. From the data presented it is evident that teachers and assistant teachers plan their classroom experiences in relation to what they learned in their workshops. Clearly, practitioners connected professional development with making decisions about what to teach; how to teach; what types of resources to use; when to begin transitioning from pre-reading to reading activities; and even more specifically, when and how to use songs and games to engage children in learning. Practitioners reported that they made decisions about the content as well as the processes involved in their classrooms as a result of professional development.

There was a resemblance in practitioners’ responses regarding their perceptions of professional development. All practitioners reported professional development as being extremely useful for their teaching and learning. In addition to learning about content in various curriculum areas, practitioners explained that their class management skills had improved and they had learned about being more connected to and building relationships with the learners in their classrooms. Practitioners also reported learning more about how to work with very young children. Considering that Empowerment School enrolls children as young as two-and-a-half years old, professional development on working with them in the classroom becomes very useful. Personal growth was also reported to be a result of professional development. Practitioners described gaining better language skills and developing self-confidence through professional development. These skills and attributes are arguably important for teachers.
Processes and Content of Professional Development

Responses relating to this area were grouped into three parts. The first part discusses involvement of stakeholders, the second discusses processes involved in identifying or planning professional development, and the third discusses resources that inform professional development.

Involvement of Stakeholders in Professional Development

Interview responses made it clear that, in addition to the headteacher, all practitioners were involved in planning and conducting professional development at Empowerment School. In fact, it was also reported that the learning assistants were being involved in working with the teachers to prepare them to become future facilitators. The excerpts below reflect what practitioners report about their involvement in professional development.

Mwanaidi said, “We are doing, yeah and I have been conducting since I came” (187); she explained, “Mmmh I have done so many workshops now I know a lot” (431). Clearly, Mwanaidi does not seem a novice at conducting workshops at her school and felt she had learned from the process. From Sofia’s response, a system seemed to be in place for all teachers to facilitate workshops: “Yeah every teacher presents a workshop, usually its once a week” (200)…. “So also I have been involved in workshop I have done one workshop here” (204). New teachers at Empowerment School were also encouraged and given opportunities to present workshops. According to Sofia, “I have been here eight months but have already given a workshop” (477–478). She also reported that all practitioners participated in the workshops: “We go there all teachers and learning assistants then one presents the workshop and everything” (222–223). This practice was echoed by Yasinta, who said, “Yeah and every teacher is performing the workshop” (242) and explained that “every teacher has her own topic” (282). She also described an
upcoming workshop that she would be facilitating: “Yeah and now I have submitted another workshop which I will perform this term is about physical education” (319–320).

Another element of professional development reported consistently was the planning process. Tubia explained that teachers were encouraged to plan workshops independently however, support from the headteacher is available. She said, “when I present my workshops, I will be independent and free because I know more things and we are all learning, so others also present and we share. The headteacher helps us to learn more for the workshop when we are planning” (226–227). Support from the headteacher when teachers are involved in preparing workshops is reported again by Shella. In addition, she reiterated what has been reported about different workshops being conducted by different teachers. “I have been going to the different workshop it’s about science, mathematics, can be reading skills, and our teachers work on many things in the workshop. Our headteacher also helps us all” (180–182). The above excerpts have clearly reflected the teachers’ involvement in professional development.

Although learning assistants mentioned not facilitating workshops, they reported that they were involved in planning professional development different ways including being prepared for becoming facilitators. Salima explained, “Am assistant teacher, many times a teacher is planning for workshops, but we work with them and then, when we are ready, we can do workshops” (524–525). Rebeca also reported, that she was being prepared to become a facilitator:

Aaaha we are as learning supporter’s assistant. We just attend, teachers they are preparing the workshop and the headteacher. Yeah but us we are going in during the workshop time. We are just cooperating each other and get help to be prepared for giving workshops in the future (332–334)
Rebeca also reported, “Eeehe we, sometimes, even teachers can ask us to bring some ideas also, in some days we were filling those evaluation forms then they get feedback” (337–338). While some practitioners, who were learning assistants were not directly engaged in facilitating workshops, both Salima and Rebeca reported being involved in professional development.

Unmistakably responses in this area indicated that all practitioners were involved in planning and facilitating professional development supported by their headteacher.

**Processes for Identifying and Planning Professional Development**

Practitioners at Empowerment School gave a detailed account of the processes they followed to plan and prepare for workshops they were going to conduct. Tubia explained the entire process of how she prepares her workshop and what kind of support system is in place:

First I Google maybe if I want to do Maths, or read from books we have in teachers corner in library (302–303).… Yeah I choose the topic myself if I want to do art and craft if you want to do language, but they have language and listening only or drawing or making puppets (313–314).… I Google myself I find my notes myself (316).… Sometimes maybe I didn’t write the aaaha other points yes with other teacher and the headteacher helps me (324–325).… When we identify topics for workshop, our headteacher tells us to think and see what we want to learn and what will help the children when we are in the classroom. How they can help me and the kids in the class. (364–366)

Other practitioners also reported similar processes, for example, Tubia stated, “first I Google maybe if I want to do Maths or read from books we have in teachers’ corner in library” (302–303). Notably, a desire to learn, the need for sharing, and personal interest are also being
reflected in these statements. Tubia’s perceptions were echoed by her colleagues. For example; Jamila said, “Mmh okay I choose music and drama because I wanted the teachers to understand more about how we can use music when maybe starting a class it’s very important” (511–512). She added, “Yeah I wanted to share knowledge and learn more you know” (518).

Similarly, Yasinta responded that “it depends on what the teacher has prepared for that and what she wants to learn and share with others” (292–293). She also stated, “We choose [professional development topics] according to my understanding yeah and my interest” (326). Responses from practitioners indicated that their interests, desires to learn more about specific topics, and intentions to share knowledge were all part of their planning for professional development.

Resources That Inform Professional Development

Surfing the Internet, literature available in the teachers’ library, and input from the headteacher were regularly reported by practitioners as resources that informed professional development. In the following excerpts Jamila said, she used the books in the library “I read about it in a book,” (528) and also indicated, “I did my research, it in the library” (532) “even from the Google it helps” (538). In addition to library books, Sofia also reported using her college notes to prepare for professional development, “from books in library or my notes from college, some I Google” (503–504) “I got more and more there in the Internet” (520). Support and input from the headteacher were also reported by practitioners, Mwanaidi explains that the headteacher’s input for improvement was given after the teacher had independently planned what she wanted to do. “I prepared that workshop myself then got input from my headteacher then I improved it and then I was doing it” (459–460).
Moreover, one of the practitioners also mentioned the use of evaluation forms as a possible source of planning for professional development content. Rebeca said, “So I don’t think so maybe they are using but what I think that those evaluation forms they have been using maybe to see what is good and what they have to teach in workshops” (341–342). Some practitioners in the previous section had mentioned their involvement in professional development through the use of evaluation form. The response of Rebeca indicates that while she is not certain, there is a possibility that information from evaluation forms contributed to decisions of professional development content.

**Summary: Processes and Content of Professional Development**

In this section I intended to highlight which stakeholders were involved in planning and conducting professional development at Empowerment School, what were the processes followed to plan the professional development, and what sources informed professional development. The findings reflected that the school had a culture of encouraging and supporting all teachers to plan and facilitate workshops. This included teachers who had been in the school for under a year. Practitioners also had the liberty of choosing the content related to curriculum areas they wished to present a workshop about.

In addition, learning assistants were involved in giving ideas and evaluating workshops that contribute to future workshops. Learning assistants were also given the opportunity to learn about planning in preparation for them to facilitate workshops in the future. The headteacher involved and supported the practitioners through providing them the opportunity to facilitate workshops, the time and freedom to prepare for them, and finally by providing input before practitioners presented the workshops to their colleagues. The headteacher, who coordinated all
professional development related activities, was also involved in planning and conducting professional development, reflecting elements of mentoring the practitioners.

The planning processes reported by practitioners demonstrated the practitioners being involved in researching the content they wanted to present in the workshops and then receiving input from the head teacher. The head teacher encouraged practitioners to reflect on their practice and share what they knew with others, she allowed practitioners to experiment with new topics, she supported practitioners’ desire to learn new content through research, and then enabled them to practice the pedagogy that could be used to implement their learning in the classrooms during professional development. This process enabled the teachers to develop pedagogical content knowledge for becoming better practitioners.

For the practitioners, planning and facilitating professional development was an interrelated learning process. A process that provided a continuum resulting in desire for further learning. Planning the workshops was no different from conducting the workshop, as both provided opportunities to explore ways of knowing, being, and working with young children in a collaborative environment. This followed authentic implementation of the new knowledge in the classroom, where teachers realized the benefits of what they had learned. As teachers continued to put their new learning into practice, they developed expertise and their desire to learn and share grew into motivation for conducting yet another workshop and to learn more. This continuum created a web of interdependent and motivated learning.

It was apparent that the motivation for professional development was nurturing the desire of practitioners to learn so that they could become better professionals. Sources like the Internet, literature from the library, their college notes, and the headteacher became contributing factors to how best the learning can be maximized. Evidently, at Empowerment School, all practitioners
were actively involved in planning and conducting professional development, which follows a natural desire to learn and meets the needs of practitioners’ classroom practice.

**Relevance of Professional Development to Classroom Practice**

In this section, I will discuss findings related to relevance of the content and the process of the professional development to Empowerment School practitioners’ classroom practice, so as to better understand how professional development supports classroom practice. At Empowerment School all responses reflected professional development being relevant to the practitioners’ day-to-day teaching practice. Responses from the practitioners also suggested that the processes of professional development also reflected teachers’ classroom practice. Often, responses from the practitioners were interrelated as revealed in the excerpts shared below.

Therefore, I will share the findings of both parts together.

Responses from the practitioners gave specific details on how the content and the processes of professional development reflect what happens in the classrooms. Mwanaidi shared detailed processes of a mathematics workshop.

Oooho yeah, there you find that she elaborates her workshop for example if she is doing math’s (201) She will first identify what is maths, how is that maths effectively to the nursery school and young children. After that she will engage us as a questioning in groups and do fun things (204–205) And how can we improve Maths during teaching, so you find that we contribute inside there and everyone gives ideas in small group and large group (210–211) And we make the workshop more elaborative (213).… Aaaha, again you find she has materials and she will show us examples and ask us to think more then she will ask you how you can use this things in your class and we all think and start to share ideas and make plans sometimes (217–219)
Similar to mathematics, other curriculum areas were reported to be part of professional development. Sofia explained, “so we usually have workshops with different curriculum things for our classrooms” (202). The variety of curriculum areas or activities are reported to have a direct impact on classroom practice. Sofia described how a workshop on songs supported her classroom practice by saying, “…to help those children who maybe, you can get those challenges in class when children are singing others just looking, so how to make those children who don’t like to sing how to make them to enjoy to sing” (239–241). She further clarifies that,

There were not many songs there, so I have learned in this workshop yeah many, many songs, many teaching aids yeah we have many, teaching aids here, we have many, many songs here. So, I have learned more songs, how to use more teaching aids more ways to make children enjoyable in different, different activities yeah (299–304)

Sofia continued to explain how the workshop on songs was relevant to the teacher’s classroom practice in more than one way. “They don’t like running if you keep them there just they cry so how to make those children participate in different games with songs” (519–520).

Supporting that content was related to classroom practice, Sofia said, “for example, every teacher has a workshop with different different curriculum areas, yeah, so maybe other teachers maybe someone did one workshop today, another one next time about things in classroom” (221–222).

Jamila’s response is a typical example of how the content and process of professional development was reported in an interrelated manner. She talks about what they did in the workshop, which included the topics or curriculum areas as well as the activities like tracing, drawing, and playing games that reflect activities that one would observe in an early childhood classroom. In some ways the response illustrates classroom experiences. Jamila said:
Learning about puppets, with how do you tell a story with puppets (188) different activities like making, different teaching materials, how to help the children learn a certain things (194–195) okay it helps me to help the kids to learn more so if I have some more ideas from other teachers then I will have to teach them, to my kids in the class then I can be better teacher you know (227–229) yeah tracing, simple drawing so that the child can improve in writing skills or drawing skills you know things they have to do when they go to primary school (249–250). Yeah we are learning many things from the workshops like in reading and writing (311) many children cannot read there and then and write so you have to take them slow and do other activity with them till they are ready. (313–314)

Another example of the interrelationship between content and process, and how both are relevant to classroom practice was from Yasinta. She stated:

Mhh, for example you can find todays workshop is about language pre writing and pre reading (284–285) the next workshop will be music (287) or science experiments (289) the workshop I gave was about science experience… experiments in the Preschool (317) how to teach preschool the language (345) for example ah I didn’t know how to use puppet in story and the teacher has bought that topic in the workshop is giving us some ideas those ideas I can bring them in class (398-399) experiment like the eggs in vinegar, the skin and float (411) and the techniques which we can handle the children. (417) We go to different centres like we take them in different corner and different centers so that they can be settled and play. (423)

In addition to reporting relevant content, the response from Mwanaidi explains the process of the workshop being like a *mockup* for new activities that she wanted to implement in her classroom. She explained:
Mmmh every day you can’t give them write numbers do this. And we give them new varieties so that they can know. Learning and know more (413–414)…. This time am going to do I am going to take a topic from language. Yeah so I took a subtopic pre writing and pre reading (470–471)…. Because I have those kids who need to listen and to be paid attention for language and I wanted to do new things for them so I did the games in workshop first. (477–478)

In addition to content related to different curriculum areas, Rebeca explained that the workshops provided opportunities about holistic teaching and learning, which was relevant to the ages of children she taught. She described that the workshop brought together what she learned and how children could learn the same content.

We really learn about the life of the children, life of our profession. And how to be creative with teaching children. Yeah there we get I have been getting so many things from the workshops and others (185–187). And so many things even in maths. How to make children to like learning mathematics (207)…. Aaaha this it has been helping me that in the age from zero or we can say from two to eight years (236–237). That children they have to learn about their whole life that. In this world we have animals, we have birds. So they have to know their environment or their life before becoming very big because it will be (240–242)…. So this is helpful that children they have to learn according to their age if they are three to four what they have to learn. (246–247)…. Yeah we, since I have started learning about nursery learning. And also, in workshops they are join me together that this is the real thing which we have to do in the classroom. To understand that kids they have to do when according to their age and know and learn about everything. (254–256)
Shella also gave a similar response to Rebeca and Yasinta, where the content and the process of professional development were mentioned to be directly relevant to classroom practice. She said, “I learn on how to teach the children on mathematics the ways of teaching children” (193). Further, she gave another example of what she learned in the workshop, which could also be done in the classroom; “You can put a tape then you can record something, then after that you switch off. Then you can ask the child what they heard. We learn these things in our workshops” (219–220).

Emulating other responses, Salima reported the types of activities and the content of the workshop, reflecting what happens in the classroom and said,

We also learn how to help share with children so you see the way they are playing if it is a game in the class and how they are learning all the time even when they play (181–182). ehe then again how to use cards and equipment and games for sharing with a children there (199–200) eye hand coordination it is the part of enjoying for the children, yeah to identify this is mine and this is not mine so they also sort things you know. (296–297)

The content and processes of professional development, according to Salima, also bridged the gap between what she learned in the college and what she was expected to do in her classroom. She said, “mhh, we learn about how to teach the children, that’s something we are not taking into our course there from the college so here in workshop we learn from other teachers and also headteacher” (172–173).

**Summary: Relevance of Professional Development to Classroom Practice**

This section sought to establish relevance of the content and the processes of professional development to classroom practice. In the case of Empowerment School, the findings exhibit that
the content of professional development included content related to a variety of curriculum areas from the school program. These curriculum areas were reported to be directly related to what the practitioners teach in their classrooms. Therefore, the workshop content correlates with what practitioners explained their classroom practice to be, which supported them to make curricular decisions. It was also clear that the processes of the workshop reflected classroom-based teaching and learning experiences. In addition to discussing use of different resources, practitioners participated in simple science experiments, drawing, playing games, and singing songs. The content of the workshops was also presented in the manner that reflected what happens in the practitioners’ classrooms.

In addition to learning about the content of what practitioners have to teach in their classroom, the content of the workshops included how to build relationships with children, help young children settle in class, and how to teach very young children. Conclusively, the content and the processes of professional development at Empowerment School had direct relevance to classroom practices.

**Summary of Findings for Empowerment School**

Professional development at Empowerment School reflects a collaborative effort that favors learning and sharing new knowledge. In fact, practitioners reported identifying professional development content reflecting their interests and desire to learn. Recent works such as Hadley et al. (2015) suggested that workshops should be replaced with more collaborative strategies. The main practice for professional development at Empowerment School was workshops. However, the workshops were collaborative in nature, finding a middle-ground between traditional workshops and Hadley et al.’s recommended approach. Practitioners were involved in planning, implementing, and evaluating the workshops, reflecting the whole teacher
approach (Chen and McCray, 2012). They further reported working in groups to develop workshop content and being supported by the headteacher while planning and delivering content.

In addition, practitioners reported engaging in activities that reflected elements of teacher research while preparing workshop content. For instance, practitioners reported researching for content using different sources including their peers, the Internet, and their headteacher. Teacher research has been reported as a social tool for learning and a successful constructivist strategy for professional development that supports classroom practice (Blank, 2010; Moll, 2014; Murphy et al., 2014; Zeichner, 2003). Teacher research has also been recommended as a tool for educators, policy makers, and administrators for evidence-based classroom change, specifically in early childhood education (Amanti 2005; Hedges, 2012; Murphy et al., 2014; Zeichner, 2003).

Empowerment School also exemplified collective participation of practitioners within the same context, which Garet et al. (2001) recommended as a useful strategy encouraging support among colleagues in implementing new learning from professional development. With such support practitioners can enhance the relevance of the content to their classroom practice. Similarly, collective participation was also a highly recommended characteristic of effective professional development practice (Garet et al., 2001; Kun, 2012).

Another distinctly collaborative feature at Empowerment School was how practitioners worked together to enhance their teaching collectively through professional development. Practitioners supported each other’s needs and created workshop content to solve issues related to their classroom practice as recommended by Kun (2012) and Riojaz-Cortez, Alanís, and Flores (2013). Although not in a structural manner, practitioners at Empowerment School implemented collaborative problem solving through the use of communities of practice (Wenger, 1998). For example, practitioners supported each other in finding ways to solving their
classroom issues. They also shared experiences from their own classroom to enhance the practice of others as well as inspire each other to conduct professional development in order to share their new knowledge. These communities augmented professional development that inspired classroom practice (Buysse et al., 2009; Chen & McCray, 2012; Garet et al., 2001; Kuh, 2012).

Administrative involvement in professional development at Empowerment School was prominent. Practitioners reported that their administrator mentored them during the process of conducting workshops and supported them in researching content of their choice. This kind of administrative involvement has been advocated as contributing to efficiency (Luneta, 2012; Murphy et al., 2014; Swim & Isik-Ercan, 2013). Similarly, recommendations by Buysse et al. (2009) regarding incorporating knowledge, skills, and dispositions in professional development were also evident at Empowerment School. Practitioners reported participating in workshops directly related to classroom content, employing ways of creating and maintaining relationships with young learners, and building self-confidence. However, unlike the argument by Wilson and Berne (1999), at Empowerment School practitioners actually attended professional development to improve their classroom practice.

The professional development culture at Empowerment School clearly reflected factors identified by Chen and McCray (2012) as essential: a) “an ongoing process, b) emphasizing collaboration, c) tailoring training to meet the needs of the teachers, d) providing hands on opportunities, and e) connecting the new knowledge to classroom practice” (p. 9). The researchers further argued that these factors lead to enhanced classroom practice.

**Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, summary of the individual schools was presented through three major themes, 1) Practitioners’ perceptions and use of professional development in classrooms, 2)
Processes and content of professional development, and 3) Relevance of professional development to classroom practice. Each theme is summarized, and a collective summary of Empowerment and Achievement School has been provided. The findings will be discussed in the next chapter following the same themes used in this chapter.
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION

In this chapter I provide a brief background of the study followed by answers to the three main research questions according to themes that arose in the data analysis. The discussion also provides suggestions on possible ways in which Achievement School and Empowerment School can draw from each other’s strengths. The chapter ends with conclusions drawn from research insights and recommendations for both the local research context, and early childhood professional development globally, including suggested research for the future.

Research Background

Scholars have contended that teacher preparation or pre-service teacher education does not fully prepare teachers to meet the challenges associated with changes reflected in the day-to-day classroom experiences of early childhood education, which creates the need for professional development or in-service teacher education (Ball, 2010; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2007; Taylor, 2014). The above reality led me to investigate practitioners’ perceptions of professional development in order to better understand how the content and the processes of professional development related to their classroom practice at two non-profit early childhood settings in Tanzania. I used a social constructivist lens to make meaning of the data I collected to answer the following three research questions:

1) What are the existing processes for designing and implementing professional development for early childhood teachers at the Empowerment (pseudonym) and Achievement (pseudonym) Schools?

a) In what ways are different stakeholders (teachers, parents, administrators, professionals from the community) involved in the design of professional development for early childhood teachers at the two schools?
b) What processes are followed to identify and plan the content for professional development?

c) What resources inform the professional development?

2) In what ways does the professional development content relate to the practitioners’ classroom practice?

   a) How does the professional development content relate to the schools’ early childhood curriculum?

   b) How do those providing professional development model or demonstrate the practice they are trying to encourage?

3) What evidence, if any, do teachers provide regarding the use of professional development in their classroom practice?

   a) How do teachers report making curricular and instructional decisions based on professional development they have received?

   b) What are the early childhood teachers’ perceptions of the impact of professional development?

**Discussion of Research Questions**

In this section I will answer the research questions, including major differences in professional development practices between Achievement School and Empowerment School. My discussion will also include opportunities for learning between the two schools. The discussion will follow a thematic presentation similar to that used for sharing the findings in the previous chapter. These themes reflect the essence of the answers provided to the questions exploring practitioners’ perceptions of professional development and how they use professional development to enhance their classroom practices.
**Question One**

“What are the existing processes for designing and implementing professional development for early childhood practitioners at the Empowerment (pseudonym) and Achievement (pseudonym) schools?”

Question one was addressed through the theme ‘professional development content and processes’ that included stakeholder involvement, processes of identifying and planning content, and resources that inform professional development. From a social constructivist perspective, practitioners should be considered partners in constructing the content of professional development (Jassen et al., 2013), therefore the process would reflect engagement of stakeholders in these processes. I found that practitioners from the two schools reflected very different experiences about their involvement in the planning processes. In fact, the experiences were opposite. All practitioners from Empowerment School reported to be involved in identifying, planning, and facilitating professional development content while none of the practitioners at Achievement School reported such involvement.

Practitioners at Empowerment School were encouraged to identify and create professional development content of their choice. Practitioners chose the content depending on; what they wanted to share with their colleagues, what they needed to meet their classroom needs, and content on concepts they wanted to learn more about. Such practice reflects ownership of learning and the use of professional development for classroom practice. Involving practitioners in their learning as reported at Empowerment School not only motivated them to attend professional development, but it also acknowledged the value of their knowledge and experiences (Chris & Wang, 2013).
Including practitioners in their learning can result in co-construction of knowledge. This co-construction was reported as common practice at Empowerment School where practitioners created content for professional development and received input from colleagues, and together practitioners were able to engage in discussions and activities that would enable them to implement the content in their classrooms. Professional development modeling co-construction of learning can equip practitioners with skills to implement similar practice in their classrooms. Jordan (2004) advocates for early childhood classroom practices where co-construction of knowledge happens as “teachers and children engage in higher order thinking” (p. 41). Therefore, in my view, the practice of co-constructing professional development content present at Empowerment School could support practitioners to utilize the constructivist approach.

It was evident that engaging practitioners in planning the content at Empowerment School resulted in the content being tailored to their classroom needs. Practitioners reported learning through collaborative discussions and participating in activities like simple science experiments, pre-writing and pre-reading activities like drawing patterns, learning new songs that help introduce math skills to young children, and also participating in physical education games appropriate for the children they teach. Gupta and Daniels (2012) as well as Tallez (2008) strongly recommended professional development designed to respond to practitioners’ classroom practice to achieve better learning outcomes and motivation of practitioners.

Furthermore, Brown and Inglis (2013) found that collaborative discussions resulting from practitioners’ engagement during professional development encouraged practitioners to reflect on their practices, resulting in self-learning. At Empowerment School, collaborative discussions were reported to be held during planning, implementation, and review of professional development, encouraging similar reflective learning. Encouraging reflective practice in teacher
education for early childhood teachers has been highlighted as a growing need globally (Khales & Meier, 2013). Empowerment School integrates reflective components in its professional development practices. In fact, it can also be inferred that practitioners at Empowerment School are becoming “senior semioticians” through reflecting on their practice and making meaning of their learning (Jordan, 2004, p. 41).

At Achievement School, practitioners could not speak to the processes used for planning professional development content because they were not involved. Planning was carried out by professional development providers who were not early childhood practitioners at the school. In his literature review on teacher education in early childhood, Luneta (2012) forewarned that not involving practitioners in the planning or implementing professional development could be detrimental to the learning of practitioners as well as the sustainability of programs. He explained, “Professional development will mostly succeed and be sustained if teachers play a central role from its inception to implementation to the evaluation” (p. 373). Achievement School practitioners’ reported discontent could therefore be attributed to their lack of involvement in professional development planning and implementation. Practitioners at Achievement School wanted to participate in the planning of their professional development and make it relevant to their classroom practice. Practitioners wanted to engage in experiences that they could then replicate in early childhood settings.

On the other hand, all practitioners at Empowerment School were involved in planning professional development content. Such involvement clearly reflected the social constructivist perspective of acknowledging the learner as a partner in creating new knowledge (Avalos, 2011; Gupta et al., 2012; Moll, 2014). Involving practitioners in the planning process of their own professional development could prevent a situation in which practitioners face professional
development innovations that they may not find useful to their practice. Jassen et al. (2013) advised that when professional development innovations do not involve practitioners, these innovations tend to become less practical and may be difficult to sustain. For practitioners at Empowerment School, professional development was what they planned it to be. It involved content they had participated in creating with support from their colleagues. While for Achievement School it was content that was created by professional development providers and geared towards primary school.

It is likely that active engagement of practitioners in creating professional development content at Empowerment School was the reason for their desire to contribute to new learning. This involvement could also be why they continued learning from their professional development experiences and used what they learned to make curricular decisions to enhance their practice. Using professional development to enhance classroom experiences is a desirable outcome and according to some scholars reflects the sole purpose of professional development (Borko et al., 2010; Desimone, 2011; Gupta & Daniels 2012).

Considering the above findings, Achievement School has much to learn from Empowerment School regarding practitioner involvement. Therefore, at Achievement School, working collaboratively with early childhood practitioners to address their needs through professional development and allowing them the opportunity to initiate the content can be specific examples of practitioner engagement. Practitioner engagement was highlighted as an encouraging, motivating, and augmenting aspect at Empowerment School. In other words, creating the collaborative nature of their experience allowed the practitioners to learn how best to support their classroom practice without being overwhelmed by content dictated via modules or prepared by individuals not directly involved in similar classroom practices.
In addition to their involvement in creating the content, practitioners at Empowerment School were fully engaged in the planning process and were able to explain this process in detail. They researched content of their choice from libraries, the Internet, and colleagues. Thereafter, practitioners developed a plan and received input from their headteacher in order to further develop the content and prepare presentations. Practitioners also reported engaging in collaborative discussions on how to use the content in their classrooms. After facilitating the presentation, practitioners also received constructive suggestions for improvement from their colleagues, such as giving more time for discussions in the future, including different language songs, etc. This type of involvement was lacking at Achievement School. At Achievement School, it was reported that practitioners participated in the workshops according to what was designed for them. While there were evaluation sheets to be completed after the sessions, practitioners did not report opportunities for dialogue or evidence of follow-up on the evaluation sheets. Therefore, practitioners at Achievement School continued to feel that they had no say in how the content could become more relevant to their early childhood classrooms.

Furthermore, the headteacher’s involvement at Empowerment School reflected support for practitioners’ learning needs. Researchers strongly advocate involving administrators in practitioners’ professional development because it avails the practitioners of the support they need to gain new knowledge to implement in their classroom (Christ & Wang, 2013; Desimone, 2009; González et al., 2005; Sheridan et al., 2009). This support was not reported at Achievement School. Furthermore, at Empowerment School the headteacher was also one of the professional development providers, which modeled continuous learning.

Although the head of school at Achievement School was also a professional development provider and involved in making decisions about the content, according to the practitioners, her
involvement did not reflect consideration on making the content relevant to early childhood. Therefore, Achievement School would highly benefit from involving the early childhood practitioners in planning and implementing professional development, ensuring content applicability to classroom curricula and practice. Lack of relevance was consistently signposted at Achievement School and will be further discussed in the following section. Involving the practitioners in professional development opportunities at Achievement School would also be supportive of their stated desire to facilitate their own professional development with content relevant to their classrooms.

**Question Two**

*What evidence, if any, do teachers provide regarding the use of professional development in their classroom practice?*

The second question was addressed using the theme ‘*relevance of professional development to classroom practice*’. Relevance was attributed by content that could be used in early childhood classrooms as well as content applicable to young learners, like pre-reading and pre-writing activities, games, songs, and ways of engaging young learners in learning experiences.

Practitioners at Achievement School reported professional development content as not relevant to their classrooms as it was geared towards primary school. Experiences that are not relevant to practitioners’ practices can also be detached from their sociocultural context, which can prevent them from engaging in constructivists learning that builds on prior knowledge (Moll, 2014; Vygotsky, 1978). Practitioners repeatedly reported desiring to engage with content that reflected early childhood classrooms. Making professional development content relevant to practitioners’ classroom was highly recommended by several scholars (Christ & Wang, 2013;
Garet et al., 2001; Gupta & Daniels, 2012; Jassen et al., 2013; Kuh, 2012). This was certainly not the case for Achievement School. For example, practitioners reported that content like teaching Mathematics, Science, and English was emphasized in professional development while in the early childhood setting they used activities that developed pre-reading and pre-writing skills, fostered positive social relationships, provided hands on activities to develop skills for scientific experiments, etc. Practitioners wanted their professional development to become more hands on and include activities that were similar to what they planned for their young learners.

Chen and McCray (2012) advocated for hands on opportunities for practitioners to connect new knowledge to classroom practice as a major factor for effective professional development that supports classroom practice. However, practitioners at Achievement School did not report being actively engaged in early childhood classroom related activities, which prevented them from being involved in hands on experiences that were similar to what they used for their learners. Therefore, it was not surprising that practitioners at Achievement School did not find professional development relevant to their classroom practice.

Furthermore, professional development at Achievement School was conducted for primary and pre-primary practitioners together, however, their classroom experiences were different. This difference can contribute towards lack of collaborative dialogue between the two sets of practitioners during professional development. Collaborative dialogue among practitioners from similar contexts allows for knowledge sharing and support for implementation of the content (Buysse et al., 2009; Garet et al., 2001; Ryan & Grieshaber, 2005; Sheridan et al., 2009; Swim & Isik-Ercan, 2013).

In contrast, professional development content at Empowerment School reflected the practitioners’ classroom experiences, which allowed them to directly connect their learning to
their classroom practice. Practitioners reported professional development to include ways of presenting learning experiences for early childhood classrooms. For example, they mentioned activities such as learning songs to introduce mathematics concepts, playing games that can be included in physical education time, making puppets for storytelling, and engaging in simple science experiments were all part of their professional development experiences. In fact, practitioners reported that professional development content was further made relevant for the different age groups within early childhood through discussions with peers as they engaged in these activities. In my view, these collaborative discussions made the content more accessible for individual practitioners’ classroom related needs. Considering that all practitioners (teachers and assistant teachers) were involved in the same experiences, there was greater potential for them to work together and support each other in their classroom implementation. Christ and Wang (2013) also encouraged use of collaborative discussions in professional development among practitioners from similar context as a support mechanism.

While there was collaboration of practitioners reflected in both schools’ professional development processes, Empowerment School enjoyed the company of their colleagues to work with while Achievement School practitioners felt they were forced to work with practitioners from the primary school. I therefore believe that professional development can be made more relevant by opportunities that allow collaborative discussions among practitioners who work within early childhood classrooms as opposed to discussions with practitioners from another level of schooling.

The format in which professional development was conducted at Achievement School also contributed towards lack of relevance for early childhood practitioners. Professional development was reported to be conducted through a large group discussion with both primary
and early childhood practitioners, followed by small group activities, after which, small group discussions were presented to the larger group. According to the practitioners, this format was not reflective of their early childhood classroom structure. In their classrooms, practitioners reported to use a variety of learning centers where learners and practitioners engaged in hands-on activities such as making puzzles, playing memory games, threading beads on strings, using manipulatives to develop concepts skills related to various areas, and participating in physical education activities. The difference in practitioners’ experiences of professional development to what happened in their classrooms was highlighted as the second main reason for lack of relevance at Achievement School. The first reason was the content not being directly relevant.

On the other hand, at Empowerment School, after a brief large group discussion, professional development format emulated practitioners’ classroom set-up, practitioners engaged in experiences that could later be presented to their learners. Practitioners reported that this structure allowed critical dialogue about how their learning can be transferred into classroom practice. These critical discussions were held with early childhood colleagues within the same school and more importantly among practitioners who work together in the same classroom.

Research findings by both Gonzalés et al. (2005) and Kuh (2012) also advocated for collaborative dialogue among practitioners from the same context as key to enhanced classroom practice. Consequently, it would be prudent for Achievement School to emulate the collaborative professional development structure employed by Empowerment School, which has also been concluded by researchers to support learning.

Question Three

*What evidence, if any, do teachers provide regarding the use of professional development in their classroom practice?*
This final question was addressed through the theme *practitioners’ perceptions and use of professional development in classrooms.* This included what practitioners regarded to be useful to them and how they used professional development content.

I found a significant difference between the two schools regarding practitioners’ perceptions concerning the usefulness of their professional development experiences. All practitioners from Empowerment School reported that professional development was useful to them because it included elements that they could use in their classroom. Sheridan et al. (2009) recognized this as *classroom based* professional development because it is helpful in areas of making day-to-day classroom decisions such as what content to teach, what strategies could be used to teach that content, how the content could be presented to different learners, and how to best structure the classroom for learning to take place. Borko et al. (2010) also encouraged a paradigm for professional development that denotes “departure from the use of ‘techniques’ toward the use of multiple professional development strategies to build teacher capacity to understand subject matter, pedagogy, and student thinking” (p. 263). Therefore, practitioners’ experiences at Empowerment School can be attributed to the new paradigm because their experiences were not limited to teaching skills and include what Darling-Hammond (2007) called pedagogical content knowledge. In addition, according to Blank (2010), experiences that enable practitioners to relate professional development to their individual classroom contexts allows them to make “immediate relevance and enhance the way teachers make meaning of classroom life” (p. 402). Therefore, it was not surprising that practitioners at Empowerment School found their experiences useful, expressed appreciation for, and desire to engage in continuous professional development.
Practitioners at Empowerment School also described professional development as being useful beyond teaching and learning. For example, they reported developing personal confidence, learning about the importance of being a role model for learners, and expanding personal growth in areas like acquiring better English language skills. Evidently, professional development at Empowerment School mirrored the whole teacher approach that nurtures practitioners’ holistic needs (Chen and McCray, 2012). According to the authors, this approach creates maximum output in terms of practitioners’ learning and their willingness to participate in professional development, both outputs were also reported at Empowerment school.

In contrast to Empowerment School, more than half the practitioners at Achievement School reported that professional development was not useful for their classroom practice. The main reason for this was; they were not able to use what they learned during professional development in their classrooms. As discussed in the previous two questions, practitioners reported the content and the processes of implementing professional development did not reflect practitioners’ classroom processes. They mentioned professional development being useful only when it included practical activities like building relationships with learners, creating learning centers, and implementing hands-on experiences, for example, using manipulatives in the classroom. Such relationship was also advocated by Ryan and Grieshaber (2005).

Therefore, practitioners at Achievement School would benefit from opportunities that allow practitioners to engage in occurrences that directly reflect their classroom experiences. For example, content that would include ways of presenting creative writing opportunities, how to extend dialogue with young learners when they engage in making puzzles, what type of science experiments can be conducted for your learners to develop relevant skills, how to integrate stories to introduce mathematical concepts, etc. Such content was reported by practitioners of
Empowerment School as the most useful aspect of their professional development. Considering that “activity is the basic element of children’s life and learning” (Chen et al., p. 1140) and the professional development activities mentioned above related to different learning needs, it is not surprising that practitioners at Empowerment School found professional development very useful to their practice, which was clearly missing at Achievement School.

Moreover, practice-based professional development, which allows practitioners to experience what their classroom practice could look like was also highly recommended through research evidence by Swim and Isik-Ercan (2013) and Murphy et al. (2014). In my view, professional development opportunities for engaging with content in a manner that could be implemented in practitioners’ classrooms allow for building pedagogical content knowledge (Darling Hammond, 2007). Including content as well as pedagogy in professional development was also concluded as “highly effective teaching and intervening” (Buysse et al., 2009, p. 238). Therefore, to make professional development useful for practitioners at Achievement School it would be of value to incorporate both early childhood-related content and pedagogy, which Buysse et al. (2009) called the “what” and “how” of professional development.

One useful aspect highlighted by practitioners at Achievement School was having external facilitators as professional development providers. Practitioners alluded that external facilitators often related professional development content to early childhood classrooms. Including external facilitators as professional development providers would be a valuable addition to Empowerment School where this was not happening.

External facilitators may introduce concepts new to enhance variety and critical thinking regarding learning in early childhood classrooms. Opportunities for discussions on classroom related activities facilitated to meet individual needs within a similar context allows for
“integration of individual capabilities” and promotes confidence in each other (Hadley et al., 2015, p. 187). Although practitioners at Empowerment School reported professional development as useful to their classroom practice and provided them confidence in their work, in my view, an outsider’s perspective would further practitioners’ learning and allow them to explore different ideas.

Additional Insights

In addition to answering the research questions, I have gained further insights about professional development. While they are beyond the scope of this project, I find it valuable to document them as additional learning points. These include a) practitioner resilience, b) potential for constructivism in professional development, and c) use of western literature and concepts. I share details of this learning below.

Practitioner Resilience

Practitioners at Achievement School displayed resistance to changing their practice to match that of primary school in spite of their professional development experiences. It was evident that practitioners at Achievement School found professional development content and processes of implementation not directly relevant to early childhood learners. However, their interviews indicated that these practitioners continued structuring their classrooms with a variety of activities that engaged early childhood learners. They described their practice of creating learning stations with opportunities for young learners to engage in activities like creating drawings about their weekends, using their shoes to learn about heights, having story time, and outdoor games. Clearly, practitioners did not change their practice to reflect the primary school classrooms where the structure was similar to their professional development processes. Instead, they continued to nurture learning contexts that enabled young children to construct knowledge
through active engagement that allow opportunity for critical thinking, dialogue, and exploration which is an example of a social constructivist perspective in learning (Blotch et al., 2014; Cannella, 2008; Dahlberge et al., 2007; Mac Naughton, 2005; Vygotsky, 1978).

Practitioner resistance at Achievement School can also be explained through the fact that their practices contradicted the findings of Hardman et al. (2012). These authors reported that early childhood practitioners in Tanzania followed the “three-part-structure” in their classrooms because their training was focused on becoming primary-school educators (p. 828). Evidently, however, although their professional development experiences were based on primary classrooms, practitioners at Achievement School continued to provide creative learning experiences for their students and did not employ the three-part-structure comprising of “giving explanations through questions and answers, followed by individual work by learners, then marking of that work by teachers” (p. 828). Therefore, I learned that early childhood practitioners can exhibit resilience through their resistance to professional development processes that would necessitate changing their classroom practices in ways not suitable for their learners.

**Potential for Constructivism in Professional Development**

Teachers at both Empowerment and Achievement Schools exhibited potential for employing constructivism in professional development. The existing professional development processes at Empowerment School can be leveraged to structure a variety of constructivists approach to learning. Although a collaborative climate was not present at Achievement School, practitioners reported to have similar views regarding increased collaboration, hence the environment can be created. Although Empowerment School reported more collaborative engagement in planning and implementing processes, the desire to be fully engaged in
professional development was also expressed by practitioners at Achievement School. Therefore, it can be inferred that practitioners at both schools have the potential to take responsibilities for their learning and co-constructing new knowledge, which is a key element of constructivism (Bruner, 1986; Corsaro, 1990; Etienne Wenger, 1998; Kuh, 2012; Mallory & New, 2014; Moll, 2014; New, 1994; Rogoff, 1992; Vygotsky, 1978).

One example of constructivism in professional development that can be employed at both schools is creating communities of practice that are intentionally structured to support individual practitioner’s classroom practice through collaborative efforts. Through communities of practice, practitioners can contribute their lived experiences to solve real life classroom issues, especially when there is opportunity for dialogue among practitioners who work in a similar context. Practitioners from similar contexts can support each other with an array of ideas and relevant perspectives as well as learn from each other in a non-threatening environment.

Communities of practice can also encourage a mindset of co-constructing learning as opposed to the notion of teachers or professional development providers being the most knowledgeable. Khales and Meier (2013) explained, “teachers teach young children best when teachers do not see themselves as the sole source of knowledge and information” (p. 290). Therefore, in my view, including communities of practice as part of professional development would allow practitioners the opportunity to participate in co-constructing knowledge for individual as well as collective learning, which they could then replicate in their classrooms.

Another example of a constructivist approach to professional development that can be employed by both schools is teacher research, which according to Zeichner (2003), includes simple inquiries to support classroom practice. Considering that practitioners at both schools bring with them a variety of training and experiences, they can be supported to engage in teacher
research. Practitioners at both schools reported the need and desire to learn more about early childhood classroom practice. This desire can be nurtured through mentoring the practitioners to work on small scale inquiries collaboratively. Practitioners can work with their school-based colleagues to create new knowledge for their classroom practice. Teacher research, according to Zeichner, can be instrumental in creating new knowledge that responds to classroom practice situations, enhancing teacher learning, and developing confidence in early childhood practitioners. Use of teacher research was also highly recommended for collaborative learning, integration of funds of knowledge, and supporting practitioners to mitigate gaps between teacher preparation and real-life practice within their classrooms (Amanti, 2005; Hedges, 2012; Murphy et al., 2014).

Numerous researchers have concluded that both teacher research and communities of practice, if structured well, can be very effective professional development options (Christ & Wang, 2013; Gonzaléz et al., 2006; Hadley et al., 2015; Kun, 2012; Riojaz-Cortez et al., 2013). I am of the view that practitioners at Empowerment and Achievement School would be in a good position to integrate constructivism in their current professional development practices using these alternatives.

**Western Literature and Concepts**

Practitioners from both schools gave numerous examples of professional development content reflecting experiences from the western world—or what Dahlberg et al. (2007) refer to as the “minority world” (p. 20). While it could be argued that there is limited literature on early childhood from the African continent, practitioners did not even mention trying to look for contextual resources. At Empowerment School, the use of the internet was mentioned as a major source of content and at Achievement School it was the IB modules again, from Switzerland. To
me, this is a matter of concern especially because it has been widely advocated that including children’s funds of knowledge and their cultural contexts in their learning is crucial (Anning, Cullen, & Fleer, 2008; Cole 2010; González, Moll, & Amanti, 2006; Mac Naughton, 2005; Moll, 2014).

Sources of professional development content at both Achievement and Empowerment Schools reflected the need to problematize the practice of using western or colonial resources. If the practice is not problematized there is potential for professional development to remain within the “notions of linear teacher development” (Gaches & Walli, 2018, p. 2). This notion of remaining within the traditional way that only includes one perspective in early childhood professional development was also disputed by Blank (2010). Therefore, casting a wider net for sources of professional development content would allow for a broader approach to learning for the practitioners.

According to Borko et al. (2010), if the professional development content does not include culturally relevant knowledge and allow for individual funds of knowledge, these aspects may also not be included in practitioners’ classrooms. Furthermore, Viruru (2005) draws attention to the value of considering post-colonial knowledge stating, “postcolonial scholarship can serve as a vital resource for those engaged in educating educators” (p. 139). Therefore, including indigenous knowledge in professional development would add value for both schools. Borko et al. (2010) explained, adopting an expanded view of teacher learning and professional practice allows for educational reforms in all disciplines and across all grade levels.

Conclusion

The focus of my study was practitioners’ perceptions of professional development in two non-profit early childhood centres in Tanzania. Through the study, I conclude that early
childhood practitioners’ perceptions of professional development guide their actions in the classroom. I therefore consider the following elements essential for professional development in early childhood education: a) In order to ascertain practitioners’ commitment to professional development and to enable them to use it for classroom practice, it is crucial to ensure that professional development meets their needs, b) For professional development to be relevant, it should reflect practitioners’ classroom practices, c) Professional development content that correlates classroom practice is a strong way to support practitioners’ curricular implementation, d) Engaging practitioners in planning and implementing professional development content enhances their perception of professional development, e) Administrators and professional development providers can play a crucial mentoring role in the development of practitioners learning, f) When administrators model and support learning through PD professional development, practitioners are empowered to implement new learning (crossing the bridge) and g) Early childhood practitioners prefer professional development activities to be conducted within their school context, which enhance their desire to attend the program.

**Policy Implications**

Conclusive findings from this research project have implications for potential policy change at various levels to enhance professional development outcomes for classroom practice. This change can be reflected at the individual school level, at the organization level, and at the national level in Tanzania.

Considering that a national policy for early childhood practitioners’ professional development does not exist in the country (Bakuza, 2014; Hardman et al., 2012; Mtahabwa, 2009), this study provides a baseline for the systematic and relevant planning as well as the implementation of a professional development system. The concluding elements summarized in
Figure 3 can be incorporated in the policy document as a framework that embraces constructivism in professional development for early childhood practitioners. As the research demonstrates, this project emphasizes engagement of classroom practitioners’ lived experiences, making professional development meaningful to their day-to-day classroom practice.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Usefulness</th>
<th>Meet practitioners’ needs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relevance</td>
<td>Correlate professional development to classroom curricula</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Context</td>
<td>Include practitioners’ lived experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ownership</td>
<td>Engage practitioners in planning and implementation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>Ensure administrators model and mentor learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convenience</td>
<td>Consider using the school context as a venue</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 3. Elements making professional development useful for classroom practice.*

Elements in Figure 3 were derived from analyzing practitioners’ interviews reflecting their perceptions of what can make professional development enhance their classroom practice.

**Usefulness.** Professional development was reflected as useful when it met practitioners’ needs. For example, practitioners did not find repetition of content useful because they already know it. While some professional development content may be of value to the early childhood practitioners, if they did not feel the need for that knowledge, it was termed not useful.

**Relevance.** When professional development content correlated early childhood curricula and classroom practice it was termed as relevant by practitioners. For example, practitioners stated they found professional development relevant when they were able to engage in content that was identical to what can be included in their classrooms. In addition, they specified that when content was presented in a form that could be directly replicated in the early childhood settings, professional development became relevant. Hence presenting professional development content for practitioners to emulate in their classrooms created the relevance for them.
**Context.** Including practitioners’ lived experiences in professional development enables practitioners to relate to the content better and use it to enhance their classroom practice. These lived experiences serve as practitioners’ contribution to their new learning as well as their reflective dialogue. When real life experiences are part of professional development, practitioners can extend their learning from the classroom to professional development and vice versa. When the lived experiences and professional development content do not match, practitioners struggle to improvise their learning.

**Ownership.** Imposing professional development content for practitioners to learn does not allow for use of that content. For example, when content is not planned in collaboration with the practitioners, the content may not meet their needs or their desire for new learning. When practitioners are commissioned to create the content, they take ownership of the process and the content. Similarly, empowering practitioners to lead professional development sessions, allows them the liberty to present the content in a manner most useful to their practice. Therefore, practitioners’ involvement in planning and implementing professional development allows for ownership of learning.

**Support.** Encouragement from administrators for practitioners to take professional development initiatives and modeling similar practice is considered as a supportive act. For example, when administrators provide feedback on practitioners’ efforts and avail opportunities for presenting a variety of content in professional development practitioners feel supported.

**Convenience.** Conducting professional development at venues where practitioners can participate without having to commute allows for their full engagement. When early childhood practitioners have to change their environment for professional development after a full school
day is not only challenging, but also takes away the relevance. This is specifically valid for professional development venues that are not similar to those of practitioners’ context.

Although the categories can be considered individually, for this project they collectively stood out as what can influence use of professional development for classroom practice.

At the institution level, the findings of this study imply the need to revise current professional development practices. This revision can begin by incorporating ways of involving all stakeholders in the planning and implementation of professional development. While this process may require re-structuring administrative roles, it can also enable shared responsibility. Another implication at the institution level is to provide the space and opportunity for early childhood practitioners to engage in professional development as a team within their own learning environment. Since the institution also oversees schools in other regions of East Africa, the enhanced policy can be of value across all schools, given that the research data highlights generic guiding principles that support use of professional development knowledge for classroom practice. In addition, the institution can include in their policy sharing literature and experiences from other early childhood centers within the region to enrich specifically relevant knowledge sharing and creation.

For individual schools, the metaphor of crossing the bridge can be considered an invitation for practitioners to bring content they find relevant to classroom practice into professional development settings. By including classroom experiences in the professional development content, practitioners can further explore and build new learning and take that learning back to their classrooms. As a matter of policy, individual schools can incorporate practitioners’ professional and personal lived experiences into professional development and thereby enhance contextual knowledge about teaching and learning in early childhood.
Furthermore, schools can support all practitioners in becoming professional development providers by sharing individual expertise.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

I make research recommendations first for the two research sites, followed by a potential research agenda within the Tanzanian context and Africa at large. Further research in the African continent will add to the limited literature available in the field of professional development generally and within the early childhood context specifically.

**Integration of Funds of Knowledge in Professional Development**

I recommend further research to understand why professional development content was dominated by western literature and concepts, and how practitioners’ funds of knowledge can be integrated in professional development content at both Empowerment as well as Achievement School. This research could emulate the work of González et al. (2005) where a team of researchers collaboratively worked with classroom teachers to find ways in which funds of knowledge can be integrated into classroom practice. The research also served as professional development for the teachers where collaborative dialogue was the focus of learning new knowledge. An action research project that considers funds of knowledge not as a bridge, but a pathway – how all ways of thinking and being can come together to enhance professional development and classroom practice. Such a research project can be an excellent way to include existing experiences as well as making learning applicable for both schools.

Since the practitioners at both schools reflect diverse communities their learners come from integrating practitioners’ funds of knowledge into their professional development would encourage practitioners to implement their ways of knowing and being into their classroom practice, creating a contextually relevant learning environment. Documenting these research
experiences would also add to the contextual literature in the area of early childhood education, which is currently lacking in the context of Tanzania and East Africa generally.

**Constructivism in Professional Development**

I also recommend further research on how constructivism can be used for professional development processes in both schools. The research can build on existing practices at Empowerment School and initiate ways of engaging practitioners in their own learning at Achievement School. The project can explore how constructivist approaches can be included in professional development that embraces content from the IB modules and yet be implemented with involvement from the grassroots level including content that is relevant to early childhood. Practitioners can be empowered to use the IB modules to create professional development content that meets their classroom needs. It would be of interest and value to the early childhood community at large to learn about how to balance the requirement of organizations like the International Baccalaureate (IB) in a contextually relevant environment.

**Supporting Practitioners to Implement Professional Development Learning**

While there is considerable literature on the value of professional development to classroom practice, research on what exactly can be done to transfer learning from professional development into early childhood classroom practice is lacking. I also want to acknowledge that the need for support to implement new learning into classroom practice has been made clear in literature. I therefore recommend further research on ways in which practitioners can be encouraged to implement their new knowledge from professional development into their classrooms. In particular, it would be of value to understand mechanisms that practitioners find helpful in using their new knowledge for making curricular decisions. Understanding what the support may look like, for example, what type of mentoring would they prefer, would peer
coaching be more helpful, or would collaboration with a higher learning institution add value to practitioners feeling supported.
# APPENDIX A:

## ACHIEVEMENT SCHOOL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SCHEDULE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Session/Time</th>
<th>Workshop Theme</th>
<th>Workshop Leader</th>
<th>Audience</th>
<th>Venue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5th Aug 2016</td>
<td></td>
<td>New Teachers Induction</td>
<td>Head of School, IB Coordinators, HR</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>10th-11th Aug 2016</td>
<td></td>
<td>Making the PYP Happen</td>
<td>IB Workshop Leaders</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>29 Sept 2016</td>
<td>8h00 - 9h15</td>
<td>Inquiry-based learning 1</td>
<td>Head of School</td>
<td>All teachers</td>
<td>Staff room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29th Sept 2016</td>
<td>8h15 - 9h45</td>
<td>Break</td>
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<tr>
<td>9h45 - 11h00</td>
<td></td>
<td>Exploring the use of Everyday Maths Resources</td>
<td>IB Coordinator</td>
<td>All teachers</td>
<td>Staff room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11h00 - 11h15</td>
<td></td>
<td>Mini Break</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>11h15 - 12h30</td>
<td></td>
<td>PYP Assessment 1</td>
<td>Deputy Head</td>
<td>All teachers</td>
<td>Staff room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Activity</td>
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<tr>
<td>12h30 -</td>
<td><strong>ICT Google Apps (Refresher)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>13h00 -</td>
<td><strong>Google calendar</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>15h00</td>
<td>1. How to create event and reminder</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>2. How to set day and time</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3. Mobile setup</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Google Drive</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. How to create file(s)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. How to create folder(s)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. How to share folder(s)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Google Hangout</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Video call</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Phone call</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Message</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Student emails</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. How to create students group</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Google Classroom</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. How to create classes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Adding of students to the Google classroom</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At the end "Questions or suggestions".

---

**Emergent Literacy:**

Supporting children's development.

Before learning to read and write, children need to develop a variety of important foundational skills. These emergent literacy skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preschool Coordinator</th>
<th>Pre-school and KG1 (Lower School)</th>
<th>Nursery</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

142
Develop over time and are important in a child's journey to becoming a successful reader and writer. Learn developmentally appropriate ways to promote and enhance the development of children's emergent literacy skills.

We will be looking into hands-on activities and resources available to support early literacy skills in the classroom.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>8:00 – 9:15</th>
<th>Essential Agreements for Weekly Updates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In this session we will look at the full range of weekly updates we send to parents across all grade levels. Where are we being consistent or inconsistent? Can we come up with some essential agreements about what to include and how we present our weekly updates at all grade levels?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>NOTE:</strong> Please ensure that Brandi has a copy of your most recent weekly update before this session.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>9:15 - 9:45</th>
<th>Fountas &amp; Pinnell Reading Assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- An Introduction to the reading assessment kit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Explaining the components of conducting reading assessments (Oral Reading, Comprehension, and Writing about reading)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Hands-on practice on both fiction and non-fiction books</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1B Coordinator
KOZ/3 and Primary Teachers
Staff room
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Person Conducting</th>
<th>Audience</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9h45 – 11h00</td>
<td>PYP Assessment 2</td>
<td>Deputy Head</td>
<td>All Teachers</td>
<td>Staff room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In this session, Bernard will take us deeper into PYP assessment. We will take what we learned from the previous session and consider how we build PYP assessment into our classroom practice.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>11h00-11h15</td>
<td>Inquiry-based learning 2</td>
<td>Head of School</td>
<td>All Teachers</td>
<td>Multi-purpose hall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In this session we will explore our creativity in an inquiry-based music session. Be prepared to have fun and finish the week on a high!</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>11h15 – 12h30</td>
<td>Personal 'take away' and reflection</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>23/24 Sept 2016</td>
<td>Assessment in PYP</td>
<td>IB Workshop Leaders</td>
<td>Face to Face</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23/24 Oct 2016</td>
<td>Pedagogical Leadership</td>
<td>IB Workshop Leaders</td>
<td>Face to Face (Head of School &amp; IB Coordinator)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29th Jan 2017 – 26th April 2017</td>
<td>Professional Learning Communities:</td>
<td>IB &amp; Early years Coordinator</td>
<td>All Teachers</td>
<td>Face to Face</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* Inquiry based teaching and learning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* Differentiated teaching and learning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* Developing differentiated assessment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* Integrating ICT in teaching and learning</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* The use of Library to support inquiry</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* The use of manipulative to</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Event Description</td>
<td>Facilitators</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st February 2017</td>
<td>Online course: Making The PYP Happen</td>
<td>IB Online</td>
<td>New Teachers Online</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st February 2017</td>
<td>Literature Circles</td>
<td>IB &amp; Early years Coordinator</td>
<td>Homeroom Teachers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 3rd Feb 2017          | - Resource Based Learning  
- Differentiation  
- Classroom Strategies | IB & Early years Coordinator    | All Teachers          |
|                       | Early March                                                                      | Promoting positive         | Multipurpose       |
|                       |                                      | behaviour in the Classroom   | Hall               |
| 31st - 24th March     | - Educational Leadership that makes a difference in the 21st Century          | Attending a conference      | AKU                |
|                       | March 2017                                                                         | 2 only                       | Deputy Head Early  |
|                       |                                                                                   |                               | Years Coordinator  |
|                       |                                                                                   |                               |                   |
|                       | March 2017 to date                                                                | ICDL                         |                   |
|                       |                                                                                   |                               |                   |
| April 2017 to date    | - Classroom visits and Learning conversations with teachers  
- In house activities on Exhibition, POI Review, Reports | Head of School, Deputy Head,  | All Teachers       |
|                       |                                                                                   | IB & Early years Coordinator |                   |
APPENDIX B:

EMPOWERMENT SCHOOL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SCHEDULE

P.D. Schedule for 2015-2017

Teachers Planning Meetings - weekly 10 to 12 in a Term.

3 Terms - 36 meetings in a year @ 1 1/2 hr - 2 hrs.

Library Research Day for Teaching Staff - 1 hour in a week.

12 hours in a term.

36 hours in a year.

Library Stocks -Research -20 hours in a year.

(Books, Resources, Teaching aids)

Teachers/Staff Meetings - 15-18 hours including support staff.

Sharing Sessions - 15 hours in a year.

Objectives & Curriculum Planning every term - Individual meeting with Teachers - 10 hours in a year.

(3 hrs in a team).

Review plans on a weekly basis.

56 hrs in a week (39 wks).

Parents Meetings - 15 hrs in a Term.
Workshops & In-house Training for all Teaching Staff
- 6 workshops in each Term
- 3½ hour each a year
Topics covered such as
- Pre-reading
- Number games
- Classroom arrangement
- Dev - Creativity
- Learn through play
etc
with teacher participation and active role in conducting.
Research - Internet, Cds, books library, and head teacher's input.
Planning - Lesson weekly plans.
- Teachers - own time
- Preparation of activities
- Continuous guidance in planning and upgrade teachers in thematic teaching/classroom management computer skills.

Need of dev teaching skills in Early years to upgrade in special needs & psychology.
* Parents Meetings - Themes discussions
  - progress
  - areas of development:
  - stages/years
  - core objectives every term
  - reports given termly (checklists)

* Teachers Appraisal - Forms yearly
  - Feedback termly
  - Daily classroom observation
  - Discussions and sharing ideas

  - Personal meeting with teachers as needed
  - Regular feedbacks
APPENDIX C:
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

The University of Arizona Consent to Participate in Research

This is a consent form for participation in research. It contains important information about this study and what to expect if you decide to participate. Please consider the information carefully. Feel free to discuss the study with your friends and family and to ask questions before making your decision whether or not to participate.

Name of Researcher: Shelina Nawaz Walli Organization: University of Arizona
E-mail: snwalli@email.arizona.edu Phone: 520-448-7199 / +1 255 689 103 674

Name of Advisor: Prof. Reneé Clift Organization: University of Arizona
E-mail: rtclift@email.arizona.edu

Study Title: Crossing the Bridge: Early Childhood Professional Development to Classroom Practice in Tanzania.

Purpose:

The purpose of this study is to understand how professional development is being conducted, what is the content of the professional development and how it supports teachers’ classroom practice. Findings from the study will support the institution I conduct the study at and contribute towards literature regarding the professional development from within the context of Tanzania to enhance professional development interventions in the effort of making professional development more relevant to classroom practice. Additionally, the findings may be of learning to the University of Arizona for the future endeavors.
Processes involved:

The study includes individual interviews which will not last more than 45 minutes. Each participant will be interviewed once. Interview schedules will be discussed with participants in advance. Individual interviews will be tape-recorded, and the transcriptions will be shared with the interviewee for member checks before data analysis. The recordings will be discarded after participants have verified the transcribed content of the interview. The analysis of the transcript may be presented in a professional context in an anonymous manner. In addition, one observation of classroom for each practitioner will be conducted, where no identifiable data will be collected. The observation will be no longer than 30 minutes. There will also be observations of the professional development session, conducted with the purpose of identifying the content and the implementation processes followed. No identifying information will be obtained. Any data shared by the participants as examples of their practice or process of professional development including children’s work must be made anonymous before it is shared with the researcher. Real names of any observed or interviewed participants will not be used in presentations of the research and responses will be treated with confidentiality to anyone outside of this research. Tapes will be destroyed upon verification of transcriptions.

Duration:

Once I have completed my study procedures, the study will conclude.

Intended Participants:

All practitioners and staff related to professional development for the Aga Khan Nursery Schools in Tanzania will be invited to participate in the study. My study relates to two sets of participants. One set consists of the practitioners who work with children and make day-to-day curricular decisions and the second set includes administration and management staff and those who provide professional development if different from the ones I have mentioned. The choice of participants is in relation to my study questions stated below. Participants will be interviewed and those who conduct professional development will also be observed.

I intend to have no more than 45 participants in the study.
**Your participation is voluntary:**

You may refuse to participate in this study. If you decide to take part in the study, you may leave the study at any time. No matter what decision you make, there will be no consequences to you and you will not lose any of your usual benefits. Your decision will not affect your future relationship with your employer.

**Withdrawal:**

The subject may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which the subject is otherwise entitled. Participants will have the option to withdraw from the study at any time. All unidentifiable data collected from participants who withdraw will remain in consideration.

**Risks and Benefits:**

This study is based on the day-to-day activities at your work place. There are no physical demands besides participating in interviews. The benefit of participating in the study is to be able to contribute towards the learning experiences of the research and provide honest contextual information. There are no risks envisioned in the project. At the minimal, you will be required to spend 45 minutes for an interview. The classroom observation will be conducted for no more than 30 minutes during your usual class activity time.

**Confidentiality and Anonymity:**

There will be no actual names mentioned, anonymity will be maintained throughout the study as well as the writing of the reports through pseudonyms. No identifying information will be included in any shared communications. All information that links participants to their pseudonyms will be destroyed with a paper shredder upon the conclusion of this research.
Similarly, recorded data, will only be used for the purpose of transcription. Once the participant has verified the content of the transcribed data, all recorded data in any form will be destroyed.

**Contact & Questions:**

You can reach me for any further questions and clarification at any time on snwalli@emai.arizona.edu. If you have further questions regarding the study or the researcher please contact my supervisor Pro. Reneé Clift on rtclift@email.arizona.edu.

For questions about your rights as a participant in this study or to discuss other study-related concerns or complaints with someone who is not part of the research team, you may contact the Human Subjects Protection Program at 520- 626-6721 or online at http://rgw.arizona.edu/compliance/human-subjects-protection-program.

*You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.*

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read this form, and I am aware that I am being asked to participate in a research study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

______________________________  ___________________________  ________________
Printed name of Participant      Signature of the participant    Date
APPENDIX D:

QUESTIONS FOR PRACTITIONERS

1. Tell me about your teaching
   a. How long in this school?
   b. What age group do you teach?
   c. Describe your classroom and your students
2. What do you like most about your teaching?
3. What are some of your biggest challenges?
4. How would you describe your classroom practice? Feel free to give examples
5. How have you been involved in any PD provided by the school?
   a. Tell me about it
      i. Probe for activities
      ii. Probe for content
   b. What was helpful? How
   c. What was not helpful? How could it have been improved?
6. Are there any times when you remember using PD content or activities in your teaching? If so, tell me about them
7. In your opinion, what is the view of childhood and early childhood education reflected in the PD content?
   a. Please explain what has made you form this opinion.
8. Can you tell me a little bit about what you think of the nature of early childhood education?
   a. How does that fit with your vision of who young children are and what they are capable of?
   b. What is your view on how children learn?
   c. What do you think early childhood teachers need to know and be able to do to be successful?
   d. How are your views and the view conveyed by the PD similar? Different?
9. Have you been involved in planning any PD for early childhood education?
   a. If so, what was your role?
b. How did you identify content for PD? Was this informed by anything you read or conferences you attend or anything else?

c. Please explain

d. If you had to review the current PD program, what would your advice be? Please explain it using this diagram.

e. Is there anything that you would like to ask me?
APPENDIX E:

EXCERPTS FROM ANALYSIS CHART

### Processes and content of PD

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Achievement</th>
<th>School Empowerment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Practitioners state that only people from the primary section conduct PD</td>
<td>Teachers state they conduct PD through workshops with the support of their head teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>There seems to be a desire from the nursery practitioners to be included in the PD</em></td>
<td>There seems to be a system in place to support Assistant teachers to eventually present workshops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitators from the IT team</td>
<td>Q2b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decisions made by providers, in the past there was consultation</td>
<td>Use of internet and books about Early Childhood are referred, then the content is shared with head teacher for input</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practitioners report content was from IEB - PEP modules or their online</td>
<td>Practitioners report that the content of PD depends on the practitioners interest and needs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Practitioners' perceptions and use of PD in classroom

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Achievement</th>
<th>School Empowerment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The participants seem to indicate they use some ideas and skills from PD</td>
<td>The participants seem to use everything from PD as the content of PD originates from the teachers’ needs, interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q1a</td>
<td>New?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Useful to understand but not directly applicable to the classroom</td>
<td>Very useful - reflects the classroom practice and set-up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q1b</td>
<td>Q1bii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content related to Primary school not useful</td>
<td>Everything was reported as useful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q1bii</td>
<td>Q1biii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursery related content - useful</td>
<td>Nursery related content - not appreciated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q1biii</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX F:

MEMBER CHECK RESPONSE FORM

As a practitioner who participated in this research, you are invited to make comments and give further input if any as part of the member check process on any misinterpretation or misrepresentation of your articulation during the interview. In the event you do not have any further input, the data will be considered authentic. Thank you once again for participating in this research, which has allowed me to learn more about professional development.

1. Practitioners’ Perceptions and use of Professional Development in Classroom Practice

   Use of professional development in the classroom.

   Use of elements related directly to teaching practice.

   Use of elements not directly related to teaching practice.

   Use of professional development for structural elements of the classroom practice.

Practitioners’ Perception of Professional Development

2. Processes and Content of Professional Development

   Involvement of Stakeholders in Professional Development

Process for Identifying and Planning Professional Development
Resources that Inform Professional Development

3. Relevance of Content and Processes of Professional Development to Classroom Practice

Relevant Content / Not Relevant Content

Processes of Professional Development

For any further questions do not hesitate to contact me on the following:

Shelina.walli@aku.edu

+255 698 103 674

Best Regards,

Shelina Walli

August 16th 2018
REFERENCES


Mtahabwa, L. (2007). Pre-primary educational policy and practice in Tanzania: Observations from urban and rural pre-primary schools. *HKU Theses Online (HKUTO).*


Systems Approach for Better Education Results (SABER) a country report by the World Bank (2012), Retrieved from:


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