

Challenges Facing the Implementation of the New School Curriculum in Namibian Secondary Schools



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ABSTRACT: The purpose of this study was to investigate the challenges that are faced by secondary schools in implementing the revised curriculum in Outapi Circuit of Omusati Region. The study used a qualitative research methodology, which employed a case study design. Semi structured interview and open-ended questionnaire were used to obtain data from the participants and respondents. The sample was made up of teachers and schools principals who were purposively sampled because of their typicality to the subject of research. The collected data was analysed using thematic analysis method.

Key findings reveal that the implementation of the revised curriculum was faced by challenges related to shortages of instructional material and limited funding provisions, teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards the revised curriculum, as well as the lack of training and continuous support provisions to both teachers and school principals as they were not involved in curriculum development. The study concluded that the implementation of the revised curriculum was characterised by flaws which had negative implications on the process of teaching and learning. Stakeholders in charge of curriculum implementation should be cognisant of the challenges facing the implementation of the curriculum, and devise mechanisms to minimise the negative implications of the challenges for successful teaching and learning.

KEYWORDS: School Curriculum, Curriculum Review, Curriculum Implementation, New curriculum, Secondary schools

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Every country should streamline its curriculum to be in line with its ideology and values. Curriculum is designed and redesigned to address societal needs. Namibia has periodically revised its curriculum to remain relevant in addressing the needs and aspirations of the country. Curriculum review has become a standard procedure in educational institutions in both developed and developing nations. Curriculum is designed in such a way that once learners have completed a course of instruction, they should be employable or create their own employment. Mulenga (2018) views curriculum as a plan of all activities designed and provided to learners under the guidance of the school authority in order to achieve the designated learning outcomes which are achieved as a result of growth, progress and skills obtained for use in life and change society.

Mohanasundaram (2018), posits that curriculum development is considered as a planned, a purposeful, progressive, and systematic process to create positive improvements in the educational system. Despite curriculum being developed and reviewed, the preparedness of teachers in implementing intended curriculum efficiently and effectively, has often been neglected, thus prompting studies such as the current study to explore the hardships teachers are facing in implementing the curriculum. Such a deficiency might have been informed by historical accounts of education management and administration.

Before Namibia's independence in 1990, the country's education system was designed to reinforce the Apartheid system in what was termed the Bantu Education system whereby Afrikaans was a medium of instruction. This type of education was segregating in nature and intended to perpetuate the white's supremacy over the black majority. After independence, the Government of the Republic of Namibia (GRN) reformed the old curriculum by introducing the International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE) and the High International General Certificate of Secondary Education (HIGCSE) in 1994, in collaboration with the University of Cambridge.

The education curriculum post-independence was inclusive in nature and embraced everyone in Namibia regardless of race, religion or creed. The second curriculum reform was done in 2006 in which IGCSE and HIGCSE were replaced with the Namibia Senior Secondary Certificate Ordinary and Namibia Senior Secondary Certificate High Level (NSSCO/H).

The third curriculum review in 2019 has resulted in the Namibia Senior Secondary Certificate Ordinary (NSSCO) Level, a two-year course for Grade 10 and Grade 11, and the Namibia Senior Secondary Certificate Ordinary Advanced Subsidiary (NSSCAS), a one-year course for Grade 12 which replaces Namibia Senior Secondary Certificate High Level (NSSCH). Every time there are reforms

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or developments happening around the world, the school curricula are affected. Hence, there is a need to update curriculum through reviews to address the society's needs and aspirations (Mohanasundaram, 2018). Global changes have also a bearing on the curriculum since curriculum is the drive way of solving societal problems as well as addressing societal challenges.

According to Alsubaie (2016), the rationale behind a successful educational program and effective curriculum development has to do with meeting the needs and current market demands in the industry. Mandukwini (2016) states that change in curriculum is made to improve the intended quality of education for the benefit of both learners and teachers. Therefore, people in the leadership of schools are expected to play a pivotal role to ensure effective implementation of curriculum reviews. Hussain, Dogar, Azeem and Shakoor (2011) made it clear that the goals of education can be attained only through valid and reliable curriculum, and proper evaluation of the process for updating and fulfilling required social needs. All these ideas are valuable on paper, with little evidence of their implementation and effectiveness. Therefore, this research intended to acquire a practical understanding of the implementation of the new curriculum in secondary schools, with emphasis on the challenges that faced the implementation process. Mandukwini (2016) posits that, inadequate training regarding curriculum implementation, lack of guidelines for the implementation of curriculum changes and the complexity of managing the new and the old curriculum rapidly created challenges to most high school teachers in a process of implementing new or revised curriculum. Lotty (2020) purports that the problem on implementation of a new curriculum can be attributed to teachers who were not involved in curriculum development process, and were rarely consulted. Lombard (2014) is of the view that teachers normally find it very difficult to implement new curriculum, as they do not have a clear understanding of it. Though the new curriculum was revised to meet today's global market demand, its implementation at the secondary school level by teachers remains unimpressive. This study sought to explore the challenges that secondary school teachers faced in the implementation of the new curriculum.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The introduction of new curriculum requires proper implementation to be able to yield anticipated outcomes. The new program designed must be understood by all stakeholders so that they have a clear understanding of the new curriculum requirements for proper implementations. The Namibian government has implemented a curriculum reform to ensure that teaching and learning in Namibian schools, addresses the country's emerging trends and supports the country's development needs and aspirations.

Despite the significance of implementing the new curriculum to achieve desired goals, little evidence is available on the understanding of the new curriculum by teachers, and the challenges teachers were facing in implementing the new curriculum. Current observation in the case study schools suggests that the implementation of a new curriculum is not on track as anticipated, thus negatively affecting its effectiveness. It is against this background that this study intended to explore the challenges facing the implementation of the new curriculum in Namibian secondary schools.

METHODOLOGY

The study used a qualitative research methodology allows the sample to express themselves freely without being limited to confined answers to questions. Qualitative allows for more autonomy of expression during the data collection process. Kumar (2011) states that in a case where a researcher tries to solicit information from the direct source, qualitative approach is most appropriate approach to use. McCombes (2020) purports that qualitative research is multifaceted in comparison to quantitative research, as it deals with the real situation at hand. The qualitative methodology was carried out through a case study investigation in order to acquire an in-depth comprehension of the implementation of the new curriculum from the perspective of the members in the case study schools. The population was made up of teachers and principals drawn from the case study schools. The study used a purposive sampling method to select the sample of eight teachers and two school principals. McCombes (2020) states purposive sampling involves the researcher using own judgment to select a sample that is most useful to the purposes of the research. Open-ended questionnaires were administered to teachers while face-to-face interview was conducted with school principals. The interviewer pursued in-depth discussion with school principals on the challenges facing the implementation of the new curriculum, while open-ended questionnaires gave teachers the freedom to express their views freely in answering the given questions. The collected data was analysed by reviewing the data and establish common patterns which informed the development of the themes for interpretation and discussion.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The study found out that teachers of various subject areas had numerous challenges in implementing the new curriculum. The challenges included, lack of instructional resources in schools to operationalise the new curriculum, Teachers' limited knowledge of the curriculum, exclusion of teachers in curriculum development, as well as limited funding provision for the new curriculum implementation. These challenges are discussed below.

Lack of instructional resources

Most schools do not have required facilities, instructional and human resources. There is shortage of resources ranging from text books, classrooms and qualified teachers. The shortage of resources has animated the difficulties that complicate effective

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implementation of the new curriculum by teachers at secondary schools. Teachers find themselves having to teach a class of fifty learners, yet with only one textbook which then makes illustrations very difficult and time consuming. The schools lacked essential resources to help teachers implement the new curriculum effectively.

The above findings are in total agreement with Chaudhary (2016) who states that resource materials and facilities, school environment, culture and ideology, instructional supervision and assessment, are challenges facing teachers on the implementation of a revised curriculum. Shortages of resources related to the lack of physical infrastructure and resources, textbooks lacking in content, teacher workload and high learner-teacher ratio, severely hampered the implementation of the curriculum (ibid). Teachers are often required to implement the curriculum without the authority availing the required resources prior to curriculum implementation.

No meaningful learning can take place without adequate teaching and learning resources. This study intended to establish the availability of resources or lack thereof, for teaching and learning as the new curriculum is already implemented. Patius (2014) states that inadequate time allocation, and insufficient teaching and learning materials poses detrimental consequences of the efficiency and effectiveness of curriculum implementation. Apsari (2013) supports the above argument that teachers face challenges of limited school facilities and resources with which to implement the curriculum. Conclusively, without required resources, operationalising the new curriculum continues to be a daunting task to teachers.

Teachers' limited understanding of the curriculum

Lack of knowledge about the new curriculum was another barrier to the effective implementation of the new curriculum. Teachers were not adequately skilled and knowledgeable to be able to implement the new curriculum efficiently and effectively. As a result of lack of understanding curriculum content, teachers only taught topics that they already knew and omitted topics which they considered hard to teach, as they do not know much about the new topics. Teachers had insufficient knowledge about the implementation of the new curriculum, with most participants arguing that, "how can the authorities direct us to implement the new curriculum with limited knowledge about it. This is like putting a new swimmer at the deep end of the pool." Teachers did not possess the required skills to implement the new curriculum whose topics were difficult to facilitate, a situation which left some of these topics to remain not taught, which then affected learners negatively once confronted with the same topics during examinations. The above findings concur with Molapo (2016) who asserts that implementation of curriculum is hampered by lack of knowledge and also lack of training for teachers to help them understand the curriculum operational requirements. The lack of knowledge among teachers of the new curriculum has caused difficulties to most teachers when attempting to implement the new curriculum. Hellen (2019) purports that if teachers do not understand new curriculum, such deficiency has a negative bearing on effective implementation of the new curriculum. Knowledge is the cornerstone and centre pit for everything. Knowledge of the new curriculum is expected of every teacher. The understanding of the new curriculum is also a requirement during its implementation so teachers are aware of the expectations and what they should do to realise the expectations.

Cheung and Wong (2012) indicate that teachers' inadequate understanding of the curriculum reform is one of challenges experienced by teachers during the process of curriculum implementation. Elder-Hurst (2012) stipulated that the implementation of the curriculum is a challenge to teachers most particularly when professional development is not clear, yet it does not provide opportunities for teachers to learn, practice, and collaborate together. Patius (2014) revealed that lack of teacher training on curriculum is considered to be a huge challenge to teachers as they would fail to understand the curriculum in general terms and its expectations.

Nghihalwa (2018) stressed that no matter how well the curriculum is developed, if teachers do not extensively understand and accept it, it causes variation in interpretation in classrooms and variations in learner performance. Apsari (2013) asserts that the success of the curriculum depends on the ability of teachers to understand the curriculum changes they face on a daily basis. The interpretation of the curriculum policy into practice depends essentially on the teachers who have the influence to change meaning by means of numerous different teaching methods. This requires that they have thorough knowledge, skills, positive approach and passion for teaching the new curriculum.

Exclusion of teachers in curriculum development

Curriculum development is a process whereby teachers need to be involved in curriculum design and development stages so that they assume ownership of the new curriculum. This study revealed that teachers were not consulted during the initial stages of curriculum design and development of the new curriculum. This exclusion has compromised the execution of the new curriculum in schools. Teachers were only given the new curriculum to implement without having been involved in its development, despite them being knowledgeable about what happens in schools that might need to be catered for by the outcome of any curriculum review process. "It's a challenge if curriculum developers do not include teachers in designing and developing a curriculum. But it becomes an honour to implement something which you designed and developed." Teachers were being excluded in curriculum planning and development, and they were only seen as end-users of the curriculum during the implementation phase.

Chaudhary (2016) stressed that if teachers are not involved in curriculum design and development, this exclusion has a detrimental impact on how the new curriculum is implemented in the classroom. Teachers ought to be involved in the design and creation of

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curricula for its efficient and effective implementation (ibid). Since teachers are crucial to curriculum implementation, this should also be true for curriculum design and development. Excluding teachers in curriculum design and development helps to increase the effectiveness of lesson preparations and resource use.

This study established that teachers were given instructions to implement curriculum without being involved in the development or creation of the curriculum, which has left many teachers not committed to curriculum implementation. Apsari (2013) asserts that the success of the curriculum depends on the ability of teachers to understand the curriculum changes they face on a daily basis. The interpretation of the curriculum policy into practice depends essentially on the teachers who have the influence to change meaning by means of numerous different teaching methods. This requires that teachers have the knowledge, skills, positive approach and passion for teaching the new curriculum.

Neeta (2018) argues that in light of limited training for teachers on new curriculum and its implementation, teachers should be encouraged to form clusters to share ideas and experiences regarding the implementation of the curriculum by reviewing their teaching styles, teaching resources and school functioning. Such a strategy can help them in identifying their collective areas of strengths and weakness, and how they can improve the implementation of the new curriculum. Mulenga (2018) states that initial teacher education training alone cannot provide teachers with the knowledge and skills necessary for a lifetime of teaching, curriculum review and development. Effective curriculum implementation requires that each teacher is well versed with up-to-date skills, expertise and knowledge of the curriculum. Even though training sessions use to be presented to teachers on curriculum, Patius (2014), argues that sessions that were presented are usually not frequent, but conducted once and no follow-ups are made to ensure a sustainable retention of knowledge essential for curriculum implementation.

Limited funding provisions

Another important component for curriculum implementation is material. During implementation, ensuring all necessary materials for curriculum implementation are available, will be helpful (Guha & Sudha, 2016). Materials that are not available due to financial limitation results in the curriculum not being fully implemented. For example, as a result of the lack of necessary material for experiments in science classes, teachers often omit experimental topics without being taught due to lack of the required resources. Similarly, the lack of reading material in a language lesson, makes teachers to fall short on teaching some language skills or having to teach some lessons at a later stage which can be against curriculum completion time frames (Chaudhary, 2016). There is a shortage of funds required for the acquisition of the materials that are essential for implementing the new curriculum. Therefore, governments should provide schools with grants to purchase materials required for implementing the new curriculum (Mulenga, 2018).

Elder-Hurst (2012) opined that school facilities are the operational inputs of every instructional programme. The school is like a manufacturing organisation where plants and equipment must be in a top operational shape to produce result. Similarly, Yaya (2014) emphasise that curriculum is effectively implemented when infrastructural facilities, equipment, tools and materials are provided in adequate quantities. Every project requires money for its efficient and effective implementation. The availability of resources, funds and an environment conducive to teaching and learning also play an essential part in ensuring the effective implementation of a new curriculum. Lotty (2020) also supports the view that classrooms instructions and learners' performance are the points at which one can measure the effectiveness of a curriculum. The implementation of the new curriculum was hampered by the lack of funds required to improve facilities and acquire instructional resources as means of implementing the new curriculum. Sufficient budgetary provisions should be made available to ensure effectiveness in classroom instruction and improved learner performance.

SUMMARY

Teachers are the implementers of curriculum in schools, but they meet a lot of challenges as revealed by this study. Teachers are faced by many challenges mostly lack of diverse resources. Without the required resources, operationalising the new curriculum continues to be a daunting task for teachers to implement. Teachers in rural schools teach large classes which put pressure on their work, yet without enough resources to teach effectively. The lack of knowledge of the new curriculum also hampered the effective implementation of the new curriculum as teachers were not involved in the curriculum review and development. The involvement would have enabled teachers to acquire an understanding of the new curriculum, thus making it easy for them to implement. As funding is a determinant for the success of most operations. The the lack of fund to secure the resources in their multiplicity as required for the effective implementation of the new curriculum, has posed threat to teachers to implement the new curriculum as required. Consequently, classroom instructions were not effective and learner performance was not impressive as the new curriculum was faced by numerous operational challenges.

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