

Research Article

Challenges Faced by Teachers in the Implementation of the New Curriculum in Selected Rural Primary Schools in Zimbabwe: A Quest for Quality in Education

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Abstract: This study focused on interrogating challenges faced by teachers in the implementation of the Zimbabwe Schools New Curriculum in selected rural primary schools in Hwange District of Matabeleland North Province; in quest for quality in education. Qualitative methodology and case study design was adopted for the study. The study focused on three selected primary schools where teachers constituted the study population. A sample of 30 (N=30) primary school teachers was considered for the study and purposeful sampling was used to select participants; which ensured the identification of data-rich sources. Questerviews were used as the research instruments to gather data and interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) of generated data was done. Data were presented in point form picking on the various challenges raised by the different participants. The study revealed among other things, that there was limited consultation before introduction of the New Curriculum particularly between the relevant Ministry and primary school teachers, the New Curriculum is too diverse and somewhat controversial, there was shortage of appropriate teaching and learning resources for the implementation of the New Curriculum as well as negative attitudes by some stakeholders towards certain learning areas of the New Curriculum and so on. Accordingly, the study concluded that teachers generally faced several challenges in the implementation of the New Curriculum in the rural primary schools studied. In view of this, the study recommends, among other things, that there is need for continual staff development for all rural primary school teachers and consultation with other stakeholders in order to help them understand and appreciate the New Curriculum in depth. In addition, there should be concerted efforts by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education to engage all education stakeholders in the provision of appropriate teaching and learning resources including textbooks and ICT resources in order to address the needs and the demands of the New Curriculum.

Keywords: Curriculum, Curriculum Implementation, Quality Education, Education Stakeholders, Sustainable Development.

1.0 BACKGROUND AND ITS SETTING

1.1 Background to the Study

Zimbabwe is a land-locked country in the southern part of Africa and its immediate neighbours are Mozambique (to the east), South Africa (to the south), Botswana (to the west) and Zambia (to the north). It is a former British colony that was known as Rhodesia and gained its political independence from colonial rule on 18 April 1980; which ushered a new political dispensation (Raftopoulos & Mlambo, 2009). With reference to education, the country's background at independence was that the majority of the black people had not been exposed to opportunities and facilities for equal access to formal education during the

colonial period. This was largely because the colonial education system was very restrictive and bottle-necked for the Black population and most black students only finished six or seven years of primary schooling.

However, over the first two decades of independence, Zimbabwe witnessed incredible strides in school expansion, teacher training, and resource improvement, with the government following a socialist path, where the main driving principle was 'Growth with Equity', a principle that was adopted so that the government could redress the inherited inequities and imbalances in access to basic needs and social services including education (Shizha & Kariwo, 2011). For a

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long time since the attainment of independence, the review and implementation of a new curricular in Zimbabwe were considered as critical innovations for the country's educational reform. This rationality was in line with the assertion that the radical reconstruction of education is essential for the socio-economic, cultural and political development of any nation (Chavhunduka & Moyo, 2003).

In his official update on the proposed Zimbabwe New Curriculum Framework for Primary and Secondary Education 2015-2022, Dokora (2015) articulated that;

In line with the Recommendations of the Presidential Commission of Inquiry on Education and Training (CIET) in 1999, the Zimbabwe Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education undertook an updating curriculum review exercise beginning October 2014. The Ministry has now developed the Zero Draft Curriculum Framework for Primary and Secondary Education to guide learning and teaching during the next seven years: 2015-2022. The new curriculum framework gives expression to national efforts as reflected in the Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable Socio-economic Transformation (ZIMASSET), Zimbabwe's home-grown Constitution, regional and international treaties to which the country is a signatory.

Thus, in his professional capacity as the then Zimbabwe Minister of Primary and Secondary Education, Dokora (ibid) took it upon himself to clarify to the nation of Zimbabwe the background to the review and introduction of the New Schools Curriculum Framework.

The former President of the Republic of Zimbabwe, Robert Gabriel Mugabe, in his 2013 national address in the 8th Session of the Parliament of Zimbabwe, had in principle endorsed the idea of the New Curriculum Framework for Primary and Secondary Education in Zimbabwe: 2015-2022 by emphasizing that there is critical need to transform the structure and curriculum of the country's education system in order to adequately meet the evolving developmental aspirations of the nation; which should see greater focus being placed on the teaching and learning of science, technology, engineering, mathematics and entrepreneurship (Parliament of Zimbabwe Handbook, 2013). This open department by the then country's President was taken as a ticket that heightened the New Schools Curriculum dialogue and development in Zimbabwe; which saw the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education leading the way in the designing of the New Curriculum. The New Curriculum was a culmination of several phases of key stakeholder consultations and approval which literally marked the adoption of the New Curriculum in 2015 at the expense of the traditional curriculum which had

been adopted since 1980 from the colonial Rhodesian regime (Dokora, 2015).

As Dokora (ibid) presented, the New Schools Curriculum Framework mainly promotes the following core principles:

- Inclusivity;
- Relevance;
- Respect; and
- Diversity.

It is envisaged that this New Schools Curriculum Framework prepares graduates of the education system to have the following exit and competence skills:

- Critical thinking;
- Problem solving;
- Leadership;
- Communication and team building; and
- Technological.

The Framework outlines different learning areas for two levels at the primary school level and one at the secondary school level. For the Primary School Infant Level (PSIL), these are;

- i. Indigenous Language as medium of instruction;
- ii. Visual and Performing Arts (Expressive Arts);
- iii. Physical Education;
- iv. Mass Displays;
- v. Mathematics and Science;
- vi. Social Studies (Family and Heritage Studies); and
- vii. Information and Communication Technology.

At the Primary School Junior Level (PSJL), these are;

- i. Languages;
- ii. Mathematics;
- iii. Social Studies;
- iv. Science and Technology;
- v. Agriculture;
- vi. Information and Communication Technology;
- vii. Visual and Performing Arts;
- viii. Family, Religion and Moral Education; and
- ix. Physical Education, Sport and Mass Displays.

This paper observes that there are more learning areas at the junior than infant school level as outlined above. Notably, the Framework also emphasizes continuous assessment at all levels, that is, from Primary School Junior Level (PSJL) to Secondary School Advanced Level (SSAL) so that all learners' competences are continually assessed. In addition, the New Curriculum technically differs from the traditional curriculum in scope, content, structure and socio-economic orientation.

As noted in the Zimbabwe Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education New Curriculum Framework 2015-2022 Handbook, curriculum change and innovation brings about improved access to quality education whose thrust is on assisting learners in their diverse areas of development and skill during and after their school life. It is in part within this phenomenal context that the traditional curriculum in Zimbabwe has since been replaced by a home-grown new curriculum largely rooted in the country's self styled philosophy of Unhu/Ubuntu (or '*Unhuism/Ubuntuism*'), which is essentially hinged on social values, patriotism, hard work and entrepreneurship (Shizha and Kariwo, *ibid*). Thus, from an educational philosophy perspective, the researchers note that the New Curriculum attempts to transcend the previous curriculum in both its philosophical underpinnings and learner assessment criteria.

However, budgetary constraints on the part of central government and the relevant Ministry may create limitations in the implementation of various projects in schools including the introduction of the New Curriculum. On the other hand, Alonsabe (2015) contend that school and teacher-based challenges are viewed as the most crucial factors in determining the success or failure of the implementation of a new curriculum or any educational project. It is against this backdrop that the current study sought to explore the challenges faced by rural primary school teachers in the implementation of the New Curriculum in selected rural schools in Hwange District of Matabeleland North Province in Zimbabwe.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Notwithstanding the critical need to adopt a New Schools Curriculum in Zimbabwe which is based on the country's apt philosophy of Unhu/Ubuntu, the critical question or problem at stake is 'are rural primary school teachers well prepared to implement the New Curriculum in line with the ministerial directive and consistent with the country's thrust and global trends on educational reform for socio-economic transformation? As earlier alluded to, the implementation of any educational project requires the injection of mammoth human, capital and material resources. Where such resources are not available, curriculum implementation becomes a mirage. It is not clear whether such investment has already been availed to schools for bankrolling the implementation of the new curriculum. In view of this uncertainty, the study sought to find out what challenges rural primary school teachers are facing in responding to the demands of the new curriculum in selected schools in Hwange District of Matabeleland Province.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to find out the challenges faced by rural primary school teachers in implementing the Zimbabwe Schools New Curriculum in selected rural schools in Hwange District of

Matabeleland North Province; in quest for quality in education.

1.4 Research Questions

In pursuit of this purpose, the following research questions guided the study:

- i. Do rural primary school teachers in Zimbabwe understand the New Curriculum?
- ii. Are rural primary school teachers in Zimbabwe prepared to implement the New Curriculum?
- iii. What challenges are being faced by Zimbabwean rural primary school teachers in implementing the New Curriculum?
- iv. How can the successful implementation of the New Curriculum in Zimbabwe's Primary Schools be attained?

1.5 Significance of the Study

The primary significance of this study is that it highlights pertinent challenges faced by typical rural primary school teachers in Zimbabwe in the implementation of the New Schools Curriculum which was recently introduced by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education. It is accordingly envisaged that appropriate Ministry authorities may have the opportunity to read the findings in order to reflect on how some of the challenges may be overcome for the holistic successful implementation of the New Curriculum in the primary school sector.

In addition, since this is a topical issue in the education fraternity in Zimbabwe, it is critical for this study to sincerely urge all education stakeholders to embrace the New Schools Curriculum as a noble idea and move in the right direction in acknowledgement of the fact that it evolved from the long-standing recommendations of the Presidential Commission of Inquiry on Education and Training (Nziramasanga Report, 1999), national stakeholder consultation by the relevant Ministry, the country's developmental blueprint ZIM-ASSET, Zimbabwe's home-grown Constitution as well global inclinations in educational reform.

2.0 REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

As noted by Shizha and Kariwo (*ibid*), Zimbabwe's education system has a long and complex history; starting off with a colonial system that divided education along racial lines. Notably, the most crucial aspect of pre-colonial African education was its relevance to Africans in sharp contrast with that which was later introduced under colonialism. As described by Zvobgo (2009) cited in Shizha and Kariwo (*ibid*), at independence in 1980, Zimbabwe inherited a two-tier racially structured education system which sought to protect the interests and domination of a White-ruling class of the pre-independent era; while African education was designed to perpetuate and reinforce the

subjectivity and subjugation of indigenous Zimbabweans by a small White kleptocracy.

Writing on 'Education and Development in Zimbabwe: A Social, Political and Economic Analysis', Shizha and Kariwo (ibid) contend that education and development are very much integrated themes for any nation's social and economic development. The same source note that through needs analysis, baseline research and stakeholder consultations, among other things; the independent Zimbabwe for years envisioned to provide a New Schools Curriculum meant to enhance the development of the country and mainly meet its post-independent socio-economic and developmental needs. This was considered within the contextual framework where education is essentially viewed as the major driver of national sustainable development and sovereignty. A curriculum is basically a philosophical concept that entails a planned interaction of pupils with instructional content, materials, resources and processes for evaluating the attainment of educational goals. It is not described merely in terms of how things ought to be, but how things are real in the classroom and how they ought to be applied in real life situations (McBrien & Brandt, 1997; Ellis, 2004; Indiana Department of Education, 2010). Why, how and for whom the curriculum is offered in the school system generally constitute some of the more fundamental questions of school curriculum implementation.

Notably, at Zimbabwe's independence in 1980, new educational policies were introduced to redress the past inequities and disparities. The most significant outcome was the unprecedented increase in student enrollments in the first two decades of independence which, however, produced other consequences and side-effects such as reduced levels of resources at educational institutions and overcrowding. There have been shortages of text books and other necessary educational materials in most new schools that sprouted after independence. Nonetheless, efforts to protect the integrity of the Zimbabwean education system were done with notable support from central government and organisations such as UNICEF yielding positive fruits (UNESCO, 2011). The quantitative result is that Zimbabwe has gradually fostered a rapid rise in its numeracy and literacy rates as noted by the United Nations Development Programme's latest statistical digest; which remarkably saw the national literacy rate rising to as high as 91.4% by 2009, thereby registering one of the highest literacy rates in Africa (UNDP, 2009).

Primary schooling was made tuition free (concept of free primary education), and this resulted in gross admission rates that exceeded 100% and by the end of the first decade of independence, Zimbabwe had literally achieved universal primary education. More importantly, however, the Government of Zimbabwe (GoZ), like most central governments across the globe,

is on record for recognizing that education is a basic human right and that it is an investment in human capital, which sustains and accelerates the rate of economic growth and socio-economic development (Shizha & Kariwo, ibid). In addition, education simply fosters the maintenance of the social structure (Haralambos & Holborn, 2011); which has arguably been the case in independent Zimbabwe where its educational standard has been the basis for its general preservation of peace and a shared national culture.

Education in post independent Zimbabwe, having been propagated by the 'mass education philosophy' (MEP), has also been instrumental in the promotion of increased learning opportunities for the black majority, expanding knowledge and skills development. However, as argued by Verwimp (2009), the challenge for independent African countries including Zimbabwe has not been only one of redressing the educational qualitative and quantitative imbalances in the inherited colonial education system, but also that of meeting the exceedingly high need for a re-orientation of Africans to an African-grown education system characterised by a high regard for African values and practices. As in most African countries, the tendency to shun the Africanisation of education in Zimbabwe has been evident (Shizha & Kariwo, ibid). For them, the legacy of the traditional education systems adopted from the colonial regime did not prepare indigenous Africans to take control of their social, cultural and economic lives, but did more than corrupt their thinking and sensibilities as Africans; filling their minds with abnormal complexes, which consequently dehumanised and de-Africanised them leading to an alienated mindset.

For Adams (2003), a broad conceptualization of 'quality education' takes into account the global influences that propel the discourse on educational quality while ensuring that national and local educational contexts and needs contribute to quality education. Thus, establishing a contextualized understanding of quality education means including relevant stakeholders as different stakeholders often hold different views and meanings. Indeed, each of us judges the school system in terms of the final goals we set for our children, our community, our country and ourselves (Beeby, 2006; Julien 2013). Our understanding of quality education must, therefore, be open to change and evolution based on information, changing contexts, and new understandings of the nature of education's challenges. New research ranging from multinational research to action research at the classroom level all contribute to this redefinition. Systems that embrace change through data generation, use and self-assessment are more likely to offer quality education to students (Bergmann, 2006). For Coombs and Manzoo (2012), school continuous assessment and improvement can focus on any or all dimensions of

system quality: teachers, learners, learning environments, content, process and outcomes.

Research in education generally reveals that there are often challenges in offering quality education, even in cases where a redesigned, home-grown, inclusive and robust curriculum is thought of as the solution. In addition, some evidence suggests that educational reform beyond pilot programmes often falters even when the pilot programmes were successful (Verwimp, 2009). However, educational reform and implementation of new curricular is most likely to succeed where communities are involved and take ownership, central government as well as educational agencies provide adequate appropriate resources for its development and implementation. In addition, educational reforms are often considered most useful if they respond to emerging national goals and needs (Belamy, 2010).

However, in most cases, this is a challenge largely because;

- Teachers often find change ‘a personal and professional problem’, and curricular integration as well as interdisciplinarity difficult;
- Teachers often encounter challenges in implementing a curricular which was designed or changed with their limited involvement;
- Learning areas or subjects that do not appear on important examinations are not always taken seriously;
- Social attitudes of stakeholders towards new subjects or learning areas may not be favourable, and cultural patterns are difficult to change;
- Ideas conceived in other regions of the world may not be adequately adapted to the local context;
- National political and economic instability can lead to discontinuity in policies and programmes, as well as teacher and administrator discontent and turnover.

These and other obstacles pose serious but not insurmountable challenges to educational programming and reform, particularly to curriculum change. However, teachers’ roles and efficiency are often affected by different factors, one of which is the level of their knowledge and acceptance of a new operational curriculum. Challenges in the implementation of such educational reform for most countries becomes more apparent in cases where stakeholders particularly teachers largely have mixed views, with some simply resisting the change for the sake of it (Carron & Chau, 2008).

3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted the qualitative research methodology which is appropriate when a social problem needs to be explored, or because we need a detailed understanding of the problem or issue at stake

(Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007; Creswell, 2009; Denzin & Lincoln, 2012). The case study design was utilised and focused on three selected rural primary schools in Hwange District of Matabeleland North Province in Zimbabwe. The case study was preferred mainly because of its several advantages including, that it is concerned with a rich and vivid description of events relevant to specific cases and that it can establish phenomenal cause and effect; with the researcher observing effects in real contexts (Crotty, 2008; Nisbet and Watt, 2009).

The study population, which Kuhn (2006) cited by Marshall and Gretchen (2010) view as the totality of all elements or subjects that conform to a set of specifications, comprising of the entire group of persons that are of interest to the researcher and to whom the research results can be generalized, comprised rural primary school teachers in Zimbabwe. A sample of 30 (N=30) teachers in equal proportion from the three schools was considered for the study. The sample was obtained through purposive sampling method, which Best and Kahn (2003) cited by Godwin (2010) say that it essentially involves choosing the most qualifying individuals to serve as participants; ensuring that the entire sample’s elements have similar or related characteristics. Using the technique, the researchers were able to identify data rich sources (Bailey, 2004; Steinke, 2014)). In the current study, rural primary school teachers were the rich data sources as they are implementers of the New Curriculum.

The participants responded to Questerviews, which were used as the research instruments. Consistent with qualitative inquiries, the researchers were the main research instruments, who, however, used Questerviews to gather research data. The anonymity associated with the use of Questerviews resulted in the generation of honest and reliable responses ((Patton, 2002; Frankel & Wallen, 2006). The administration of Questerviews involved the researchers distributing them to teachers in the schools in question and collecting them the next day, which gave the participants ample time to think over their responses. Before using the instruments, the researchers pre-tested them with five teachers from a nearby primary school which was not one of the research sites which helped in their consolidation.

Consistent with qualitative studies, interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) of generated data was done (Bailey, *ibid*) and the data was presented in point form picking on the various challenges raised by the different participants. The major limitation of the findings were that, though they apply to the research sites in question, their generalisability to the rest of Zimbabwean primary schools is somewhat limited (Somekh & Lewin, 2010).

4.0 STUDY FINDINGS

This study revealed the following as the key challenges faced by primary school teachers in the implementation of the New Curriculum;

- Limited consultation before introduction of the New Curriculum particularly between the relevant Ministry and primary school teachers.
- New Curriculum is too diverse and somewhat controversial from the view of some of the stakeholders.
- Limited understanding of the New Curriculum by most rural primary school teachers.
- Shortage of appropriate instructional media (teaching resources) for some new learning areas.
- Available textbooks do not address some issues in the New Curriculum.
- Too many learning areas availed by the New Curriculum on the mainstream school's limited time table.
- New syllabuses are too long and teachers are encountering some difficulty in interpreting it and using it.
- Totally new content was introduced which teachers themselves do not have background in from either school or training college.
- Large class loads mostly due to the public service's stance to freeze teaching posts; some teachers are teaching composite classes as a consequence.
- Lack of ICT resources and no Internet connectivity in the rural schools.
- Limited ICT skills particularly for the 'old generation of teachers' who did not have opportunity to learn how to use Computers during Teacher Training.
- Supervisory challenges for primary school heads and teachers in charge (TICs) who themselves lack in-depth understanding of the New Curriculum.
- Limited financial and resource support from the community, relevant ministry and central government; resulting in challenges such as securing appropriate teaching and leaning resources, building the necessary infrastructure to meet the needs of the New Curriculum (e.g. ICT laboratory).
- Mixed attitudes by some teachers, students and parents towards certain learning areas of the New Curriculum, suspicion that they were shoplifted wholesome from other countries whose contexts differ immensely from ours.
- Low teacher motivation and morale due to low salaries, poor working conditions; compounded by a deteriorating national economy.

5.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Even though rural primary school teachers in the schools studied were generally positive about the introduction of the New Primary Schools Curriculum, they indicated that they faced several challenges in its implementation mostly because they were not well oriented to understand the New Curriculum in depth. Both the less and more experienced teachers faced challenges, though 'young generation teachers' seemed to be in a better position as they were mostly capable of using Computers and other E-learning resources to access teaching and learning information not available in traditional textbooks; yet is supposed to be taught in the New Curriculum.

Accordingly, the researchers recommend that:

- There is need for continual staff development for all teachers including school heads in order to help them understand the New Curriculum in depth which would ensure its successful and effective implementation.
- All rural schools in the country should be provided with electricity and Internet facilities as well as teaching resources that address the needs of the New Curriculum
- The relevant Ministry should engage all teachers who are not ICT literate in ICT training so that they can access new and current teaching and learning information from diverse E-learning resources
- Qualified education academics in the country and outside may be engaged in order to assist in the writing of new textbooks and other teaching resources that address the demands of the New Curriculum
- The relevant Ministry may consider implementing a robust 'change management' programme which would essentially be focused on developing positive attitudes by the different education stakeholders including teachers, learners and parents towards the New Curriculum
- Teachers as the major curriculum implementers should lead the way in showing clear and positive understanding of the New Curriculum in order to enhance its effective successful implementation
- In view of the declining national economy, the Zimbabwe Public Service Commission should continually review teachers' salaries up as well as strive to improve their working conditions in order to motivate them in the face of increasing workloads and demands
- The Government of Zimbabwe (GoZ) and interested Non-Governmental organisations may need to step up their funding of rural schools in order to promote the holistic successful implementation of the New Curriculum countrywide

- There should be strategic campaigns by the relevant Ministry for increased rural community and stakeholder involvement in order to foster increased ownership and sustainability of the New Primary Schools Curriculum.

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