

## The Role of Curriculum Coordinators in Managing Teachers' Continuing Professional Development

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**ABSTRACT** This paper reports selected findings from a larger qualitative case study of purposively sampled Area Offices and secondary schools in the North West Province, South Africa. The study examined the role of curriculum coordinators and school management teams in managing teachers' continuing professional development for curriculum change implementation. The paper is restricted to findings regarding the role of curriculum coordinators. Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured individual interviews. Data analysis followed Teschs' open coding steps. Findings point to curriculum coordinators being central to the ineffective management of professional development initiatives that relate to curriculum reforms. The paper identifies a myriad of systemic limitations and barriers that account for management ineffectiveness and makes some recommendations.

### INTRODUCTION

Studies consistently confirm that teachers, among other factors, play a decisive role in the practical realisation of a curriculum (Fullan 2013; Priestely 2013). Teachers should know policies that drive curriculum change, adapt to the change, and be able to implement the change effectively. Possession of these attributes is, however, not a given among teachers. Rather, they require to be kept up to date with developments in this regard through continuing professional development (Penuel et al. 2007; Mizell 2010). Consistent with international trends (Bubb and Earley 2007; Robinson 2008), teachers in South Africa are provided with some training and development opportunities to facilitate the implementation of curricula reforms. It, however, remains debatable whether such training and development initiatives consistently and effectively serve the intended purpose. Research findings suggest the poor preparation of teachers as a major barrier to successful curriculum change implementation (Department of Basic Education 2009; Ono and Ferreira 2010; Mafora and Phorabatho 2011). It appears, in the main, continuing professional development initiatives

for curriculum change implementation are pursued without taking into account teachers' training needs and priorities or their classroom realities. They are also often provided without follow-up support (Adler 2002; Lessing and de Witt 2007; Fullan 2013). Against this backdrop, the broader study from which this paper is drawn focused on the effectiveness of those entrusted with the management of teachers' continuing professional development. This paper is restricted to examining the management role of curriculum coordinators at local office, or sub-district level. The specific research questions which the paper seeks to address are:

- What role do curriculum coordinators play in managing teachers' Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for curriculum change implementation?
- What constitutes the barriers to the effective management of teachers' CPD for curriculum change implementation?
- How can the role of curriculum coordinators as CPD managers be enhanced?

These questions were conceived of in the context of the view shared by the authors that without effective management practices CPD initiatives are not likely to fulfil their mandate (Ornstein and Hunkins 1998).

### Literature Review

The Employment of Educators Act (Brunton and Associates 2003) underlines the following

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as some of the tasks assigned to the role of curriculum coordinators in relation to managing teachers' CPD for curriculum change implementation:

- to assess professional development needs of teachers through questionnaires, developmental appraisal and other acceptable methods;
- to plan and support CPD activities based on teachers and or schools' needs, which are consistent with curriculum policy framework;
- to contribute, to implement and to participate in CPD activities;
- to assist in capacity building programmes for School Management Teams (SMTs) that concern managing the implementation of school curriculum;
- to participate in the IQMS in order to review teachers' professional performance on a regular basis; and,
- to provide support for professional growth of teachers within and outside the IQMS scope.

Noting the above tasks, this paper examines and discusses the role of curriculum coordinators within the multimodal conception of management. Our contention is that while scholars tend to frame their work within one management theory or the other, multiple theories can be used as none is mutually exclusive. Even the practice of educational management is rooted in a myriad of theories, albeit to different extents and without explicit acknowledgement. The multi-modal conception of management in this paper is restricted to Total Quality Management, Systems Theory and Contingency Theory. Each of these theories is discussed briefly below and subsequently used to ground the discussion of findings.

### ***Total Quality Management (TQM)***

It aims at improving organisational performance by emphasising quality values in every aspect of the organisation (Agarwal et al. 2011). Its fundamental principles include *customer-focus*, *teamwork* and *continuous improvement* (Prinsloo 2001; Irani et al. 2002). In the context of this study, customer-focus requires schools to prioritise teacher satisfaction by addressing their training needs in every organisational process. Schools should have plausible needs assess-

ment systems which take account of teachers' real CPD needs (Prinsloo 2001). Currently, the Department of Basic Education requires schools to adopt the Developmental Appraisal System (DAS) as a standard tool for assessing teachers' needs (Education Labour Relations Council 2003). This means, it is the outcomes of the developmental assessment process which should form the basis for determining the content and scope of teachers' CPD programmes.

The principle of teamwork, on the other hand, requires CPD managers to facilitate efficient work flow as it embraces collaborative interaction between them and stakeholders (Bubb and Earley 2007). Teamwork benefits CPD managers by motivation for change (Msila and Mtshali 2011), improving decision-making (Nkabinde 2006; Smit et al. 2011), and minimising possible negative reactions to change by inspiring a sense of collective ownership (Mafora and Phorabatho 2011). The essence of teamwork can be put into practice through delegation of certain tasks, responsibilities and authority (Swane-poel 2009), and through the formation of democratically-elected structures which are tasked with the responsibility over teachers' CPD (Bubb and Earley 2007; Blandford 2000). Smit et al. (2011) stress the importance of continuous monitoring and provision of sufficient resources to enhance the effectiveness of delegated subordinates and structures. As a TQM principle, continuous improvement suggests that managers should ensure the on-going implementation of small, incremental improvements in all areas of the school and CPD processes to achieve teacher satisfaction (Daft and Marcic 2004). Literature suggests three main ways to continuous improvement. First, managers should transform the organisational culture to embrace the concept of continuous improvement as its basic feature (Irani et al. 2002). Second, all employees (including CPD managers) should continuously undergo training to renew their skills, knowledge, values and attitude (Oakland and Oakland 2001). As a third strategy, organisations should continuously measure the achievement of its goals (Goldberg and Cole 2002). This suggests the determination of the success of CPD plans through the management task of controlling. Execution of this task, however, poses a challenge to most education managers (Church et al. 2010). Often managers either do it poorly or abandon it altogether (Rebore 2001; Conco 2004).

### *Systems Theory*

Systems theory emphasises the notion that all parts of the system interrelate, with everything having a link with everything else. It focuses on the arrangement of and relations between the parts of the organisation and how they work together as a whole (Ansari 2004). In terms of this theory, CPD managers should devote attention to promoting and reinforcing co-operative relationships between or among different components of their organisation to enhance quality attainment of CPD goals. Their practices should be grounded in the following tenets of systems theory: open to environment, teleological or purposeful, interrelated subsystems, input-transformation-output and feedback (Evans 2011).

The open to environment tenet implies that managing teachers' CPD should commence with thorough consideration of the context and environment that has influence on its existence. In their study Penuel et al. (2007) emphasise that CPD programmes should consider the local contexts of schools in which teachers work. This means, as CPD managers, curriculum coordinators should play a facilitating role in creating a climate that promotes rather than militate against the objectives of CPD. The teleological or purposeful principle requires CPD managers to regard behaviour in the organisation as purposeful. In this regard, they should pursue outcomes-based management practices as a means to eliminate inverse or rather unintended results. The interrelatedness of subsystems is recognised as lifeblood tenet of systems theory (Ansari 2004). It succinctly captures the notion that the behaviour of the whole (organisation) is more significant than the sum of its components (Ansari 2004). CPD managers are likely to achieve synergy if the different units in a system, either 'human or non-human', are organised and focused on the same goal, thereby creating a whole rather than a disjointed approach to quality management (Kerzner 2001). Evans (2011) posits that to create synergy, CPD managers need to do two main things: to provide requisite systems and resources, and to lead by example. The input-transformation-output principle stresses the view that a system should gather inputs from the environment and that it should send the relevant outputs back into the environment in a continuous interchange. In keeping with this

principle, CPD managers are expected to ensure that pertinent CPD programmes are based on the teachers' actual needs. Ansari (2004) suggests that the feedback principle calls for CPD managers to continuously control the quality of the CPD programmes to accomplish its desired condition. Effective CPD management necessitates proper control measures that inform the system whether the CPD programmes provided to teachers are worthwhile, need some improvements or should be discarded altogether.

### *Contingency Theory*

This theory takes into account the fact that change in most organisations is not a fully predictable process. Based on this, it emphasises that there is no one best way or universal set of principles which serve as a panacea for all organisational situations (Cohen and Sims 2007). This of course means CPD managers need to understand that the ideal course of action to improve organisational issues is contingent, that is, under different circumstances different solutions may show to be effective (Matyusz 2012). Implicitly, CPD managers should continually be aware that emerging issues need to be conceptualised and addressed according to ways that depend on the context and environment in which they unfold. Simply phrased, managing teachers' CPD should be context-based. This may help CPD managers to ensure that the anticipated activities aim to address the unique circumstances of the individual organisation (Mafora and Phorabatho 2013).

## **RESEARCH DESIGN**

This paper draws on a qualitative multi-case study conducted in two districts of the North West Provincial Department of Education. Twelve secondary schools were purposively sampled on the basis of learner performance, from each district. Six schools were drawn from two Area Offices in each district. Individual Area Offices (AO's) ranking of schools in terms of their average learner pass percentage in the 2010 grade 12 final examination was used as a tool to identify: two top achieving, two median, and two low achieving schools for inclusion in the study. In each of the selected AOs, a curriculum coordinator, and two subject advisors were included. From the schools, the study involved a prin-

principal, a head of department, and a teacher. This paper is restricted to findings regarding curriculum coordinators. Data were collected through semi-structured individual interviews and document analysis. Permission for the study was obtained from the North West Department of Education and the University of South Africa through the established ethical clearance system. Respondents gave informed consent to participate in the study. They also granted the researcher permission to record the interviews, and to take down field notes (Patton 2002).

Data analysis followed Tesch's steps for open coding (Creswell 2009). This involved the inductive process of organising data into categories and identifying patterns among them, then interpreting the data to provide answers to the research question (Cohen et al. 2011; McMillan and Schumacher 2010). Trustworthiness of the study was ensured by comparing transcribed interview data to the field-notes and to the themes from literature study to establish corroboration and convergence (Merriam 2009), doing member checking, and by limiting researchers' temptation to contaminate the data or its analysis with imposition of their personal views (Yin 2009). Tape-recording and verbatim transcription of interviews further safeguarded trustworthiness since these means provided an accurate reflection of the respondents' views (McMillan and Schumacher 2010).

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The empirical findings suggest that curriculum coordinators are central to the ineffective management of teachers' CPD for curriculum change implementation. A detailed discussion of the findings is outlined under the following two themes which are discussed in turn next:

- ♦ Limited understanding and inappropriate execution of management functions; and
- ♦ Systemic barriers to effective management of teachers' CPD for curriculum change implementation.

### Limited Understanding and Inappropriate Execution of Management Functions

Interview data suggests that the majority of curriculum coordinators have a narrow conception of what constitutes their management role in teachers' CPD for curriculum change imple-

mentation. This is consistent with earlier findings (Mabitsela 2004; Department of Basic Education 2009). The majority of respondents conceded their ignorance of the expectation that they should follow a set of formal management processes to improve the quality of teachers' CPD initiatives. Their responses suggest that, in the main, they view their role more as facilitators of the training than managers with oversight of all aspects of the training, from its conception to evaluation. Their general view is that management functions are an add-on to their core function of training facilitation. This is a plausible reason for the majority of respondents conceding to adopting and applying inappropriate management practices when discharging their responsibilities in their respective AOs. Emergent subcategories in this regard were: 1) inadequate adaptation of the organisational climate, 2) overlooking teachers' developmental appraisal outcomes and 3) poor controlling measures. These sub-categories are discussed sequentially in the next section.

### (i) *Inadequate Adaptation of the Organisational Climate*

Findings suggest that in the majority, curriculum coordinators do not create a climate that supports teacher learning as advocated by Penuel et al. (2007) and Smit et al. (2011). Instead, and consistent with other findings (Nkabinde 2006; Munonde 2007), they marginalise and subdue the voice of teachers when making decisions on teachers' CPD matters. As further evidence of misunderstanding their role, all respondents conceded that they centralise and monopolise decision-making and rarely delegate some of their management functions. No broad-based democratic committees with oversight on teachers' CPD, as advocated by Blandford (2000) and Bubb and Earley (2007), exist in Area Offices. An informative comment from one respondent was:

*Oh no... we do not have such committees at our AO. I don't know about other AOs. I haven't heard any of my colleagues talking about it.*

Considering current directives on building relationships with stakeholders as a critical variable to cause smooth implementation of policies (Department of Education 2000; Department of Basic Education 2011), deliberate exclusion of CPD primary stakeholders from decision-mak-

ing processes is inexcusable. It militates against a sense of collective ownership of CPD and renders management practices ineffective. Some of the negative outcomes of such marginalisation which were reportedly manifest in sampled AOs include: increased workload, stakeholder alienation, lack of cooperation and resistance, and blemished professional relationships.

### ***(ii) Overlooking Teachers' Developmental Appraisal Outcomes***

Consistent with earlier findings (Harwell 2003; Ono and Ferreira 2010) findings suggest that the majority of respondents promote the provision of CPD activities that are based on perceived rather than actual needs of teachers. Contrary to the findings of Kubeka and White (2014), teachers' developmental appraisal outcomes are not considered as training needs that should inform subsequent training. Instead, interview data suggests that CPD planners rely heavily on unreliable aspects like grade 12 learner performances to determine areas for which teachers need training. This suggests that teachers CPD needs outlined in each individual school's improvement plan are ignored. The practice contradicts the spirit of the applicable policy which prescribes that curriculum coordinators should liaise with their counterparts who oversee teachers' development appraisal when determining teachers' training needs (Education Labour Relations Council 2003). It can therefore be argued that CPD activities based on presumed needs are inconsequential as they do not culminate in improved teachers' classroom practice. One comment in this regard was:

*You know the different departments or units are working in silos. It's supposed to be [like] that. But it's not working like that. The needs analysis is the responsibility of IQMS coordinators. They work like conveyor belts.*

The existing gulf between the units that deal with facilitation of teacher professional development and that which handles developmental appraisal affairs in the same AO should be bridged. Synergised operations between the two components may bring about phenomenal improvement in managing CPD activities (Kerzner 2001; Evans 2011).

### ***(iii) Poor Controlling Measures***

Contrary to expectations that CPD managers should oversee the continuous evaluation

of related activities (Smit et al. 2011) to improve the quality of CPD activities, data analysis reveals that in discharging their responsibilities, not all respondents included the control function. This neglect of the control function is consistent with the observations that many education managers find the controlling function to be a rather complicated task while others neglect it entirely (Rebore 2001; Conco 2004). Interview data evinces that sampled curriculum coordinators facilitated this task intermittently, seldom, or neglected it completely. The respondents unanimously declared that they did not have a proper evaluation system in place for teachers CPD initiatives. They, however, apportioned blame for this administrative anomaly to the limitations of the training they receive to prepare them for their role. An illustrative remark in this regard was:

*We deal with training for different subjects at Area Offices. So, I would imagine people who train [subject] specialists to give them relevant post-training evaluation forms. In the past this used to happen, but nowadays it's different.*

Without proper evaluation systems, future CPD activities are prone to have the same degree of inadequacy or failure as their predecessors (Steyn 2011; Adler 2002). In the final analysis, proper evaluation systems are necessary to provide both internal and external CPD planners with feedback as regards the success or otherwise of the provided training.

## **Systemic Barriers to Effective Management of Teachers' Curriculum Change Implementation-related CPD**

Data analysis suggests that curriculum coordinators in the surveyed AOs experience the following system-related barriers to manage teachers' CPD for curriculum change implementation effectively: 1) limited training, 2) shortage of relevant resources and, 3) time constraints. Discussions of these challenges and their respective implications for managing teacher' CPD follows in the next sections:

### ***(i) Limited Training***

As found in other studies (Mestry and Grobler 2002; Mizell 2010; Kubeka and White 2014; Bjöklund 2015), this study discovered that the sampled curriculum coordinators were not pro-

vided with relevant training pertaining to managing teachers' CPD for curriculum change implementation. Their condition was made even worse by common testimony that they assumed duty without relevant induction or guidance on the subject of managing teachers' CPD for curriculum change implementation. Without proper training, and left to their own intuitions, the inevitable were bound to happen. They unanimously associated their lack of relevant training with the following: role ambiguity and lack of role ownership, ignorance about the policies that guide teachers' CPD, inadequate management of the implementation of the teachers' developmental appraisal, and their inability to guide schools concerning school-based teacher development activities related to curriculum change implementation. When responding to the question about the type of training they receive, one respondent remarked:

*Often we are called to a meeting with district officials to discuss teacher training issues. I won't call it training per se. Ja... We share best practices, and of course that helps to some extent.*

#### **(ii) Shortage of Relevant Resources**

Findings point to the majority of respondents experiencing shortages of resources that are required for implementing teachers' CPD programmes. In agreement with other findings (Conco 2004; Department of Education 2007; Kubeka and White 2014; Bjöklund 2015), all respondents indicated that the physical condition under which CPD activities are being provided militates against effective learning. In this regard, data analysis suggests that most CPD venues are experienced by the majority of respondents as typically difficult to access - especially when using public transport; lacking basic facilities such as water, power and sanitation; congested and, susceptible to external distraction factors. One respondent's response in this regard was:

*We do not have enough facilities for training teachers in the AO [Area Office]. So, we use schools. But still you get reports that teachers are complaining about location of the school-distance-wise, space, and yes, water and toilets are common problems.*

Reportedly, lack of relevant and adequate instructional aids and official means of transport also pose a common barrier to the effective-

ness of the majority of the respondents. Consistent with earlier studies (Mulkeen et al. 2005; Mafora and Phorabatho 2011), findings point to shortages being experienced by the majority of respondents with regard to laptops, data projectors and screens in all of the sampled AOs. This suggests that curriculum coordinators can only provide a sub-standard service as they go about their business without the requisite tools. These shortages are likely to impact negatively on the morale of training facilitators and participating teachers alike. As a standard interim means to address the shortages, curriculum coordinators reportedly borrow materials and equipment from schools. They, however, fail to provide school-based follow-up support and monitoring related to the initial resources-challenged CPD activities they provided. An informative comment from one respondent was:

*We are always struggling with resources. For example transport is always the issue. Um, data projectors, we don't have [enough] data projectors. We have in this AO one data projector, the laptops.... Currently we don't have [duplicating] paper, most parts of the year we don't have a photocopier. We always request schools to borrow [us].*

Limited resources means subject advisors are stuck in the old order as they cannot devise other means to improve facilitation of and follow-up support to teacher training. The respondents consistently and unanimously apportion blame for the persistent shortage of the above resources to the stifling bureaucratic processes of the Department of Basic Education. This sentiment coheres with the view that the continuing professional development of teachers is not always prioritised and adequately supported with resources in most education systems (Bubb and Earley 2007).

#### **(iii) Time Constraints**

The majority of respondents revealed that they experience difficulties with identifying suitable time for training teachers about curriculum change implementation. They expressed uncertainty regarding whether it was appropriate to organise such activities during regular working hours, in the afternoon of regular working days, over weekends, or during the holidays. Consistent with earlier findings (Chisholm et al. 2005) their experience was that teachers were not readi-

ly available for training sessions due to excessive professional and personal commitments. Faced with this challenge, the majority of the respondents revealed that they resorted to piecemeal arrangements of convening CPD activities that lasted for three to five days during normal working days once in a year. Some sessions are scheduled for 14h00 to 16h00 after the regular teaching hours. This, however, reportedly engenders teacher resistance, and the short training was found to be ineffective (Modipane and Themane 2014). One respondent echoing these challenges remarked:

*I can't really say what the best time to organise the workshops is. If it is during the week, we are being criticised for stealing the learners protected time... In the afternoons, the teachers are complaining that they are tired. Some are genuine in this. You will find a teacher literally sleeping during the PSFs. During the holidays, the teachers are untouchable. The unions fight viciously saying [that] the teachers are on leave during that period.*

### CONCLUSION

This paper has examined the views held by curriculum coordinators concerning their role as Area Office-based managers of teachers' CPD for curriculum change implementation. Consistent with other findings, the study has established that curriculum coordinators are not only central to the role of managing teachers' CPD for curriculum change implementation, but are also the weakest link in the CPD-related management chain. Data analysis illuminates critical systemic barriers that impede the effectiveness of curriculum coordinators in discharging their role as managers of teachers' CPD. One of the significant challenges curriculum coordinators face is limited understanding of what their role entails. The respondents held a unanimous view that this problem takes root from yet another major obstacle, inadequate training related to management of teachers' CPD for curriculum change implementation. Adding to the above confluence, the study discovered other debilitating factors in the form of lack of relevant resources to facilitate teacher training, and time constraints.

It is the view of the study that managing teachers' CPD for curriculum change implementation at AO level can be improved. To this end,

the study posits the recommendations outlined below.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

In addition to providing relevant training resources, the department through its Human Resource Development should ensure provision of relevant training to curriculum coordinators. To incentivise targeted teachers and sustain their motivation, such training should include credit-bearing short-course offered in association with reputable universities. Issues around poor physical conditions of CPD venues and the limited knowledge of coordinators can be addressed through the establishment of Institutes for Continuing Professional Development of Teachers in each district. Formal training and experience in human resource development, as well as, extensive knowledge of curriculum reform should be an employment requirement for personnel attached to these institutes. A longitudinal study which focuses on the role of the Human Resource Development unit in managing teachers' CPD for curriculum change implementation from a wider scope of the Province is recommended. It can help give a holistic and comprehensive picture of systemic constraints and, help overcome associated shortcomings.

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