

Monitoring and Support Mechanisms in Implementing Life Orientation Curriculum in the General Education and Training (GET) Band: Perceptions of South Africa Teachers

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ABSTRACT When the curriculum was reviewed in 1994, Life Orientation (LO) was introduced. Teachers had concerns as expected outcomes of LO were an unfamiliar ground to them; hence they (teachers) didn't perceive them as LO specialists. When implementing new curriculum, preparation trainings are to be conducted for teachers to effectively implement curriculum. Having observed the challenges of teaching LO in schools, this paper therefore examined the monitoring and support mechanisms put in place to support teachers in implementing LO curriculum. Curriculum implementation theory was used to explain data collected. Qualitative interpretive case study focusing on 3 schools was adopted. The data collected revealed that the support given to LO teachers was inadequate and monitoring strategies were very minimal and this contributed to their preparedness in implementing LO curriculum. The paper recommended that support be strengthened and monitoring mechanisms be more focused in empowering teachers to effectively implement LO curriculum.

INTRODUCTION

Widespread educational reforms and changes which were aimed at improving the quality of education affected almost the entire world (Tale 2013). Among other countries, Hong Kong had such changes in school curriculum aimed at aligning education system which is informed by knowledge-based economy (Chan 2010). Even with South Africa, after 1994 there were educational transformations that were introduced in order to reflect democratic values and principles as enshrined in the country's Constitution (DoE 2008). As a result of these educational transformations, new subjects were introduced while other subjects were removed. Life Orientation (LO) in the General Education and Training (GET) Band (Grades R-9) and Further Education and Training (FET) Band (Grades 10-12) was the new, compulsory and non-examinable subject that was introduced. The aim of LO is to equip learners with the essential skills, knowledge, attitudes and values (SKAV's) that would enable learners be-

come answerable residents (Department of Education (DoE) 2011).

Curriculum Implementation

Curriculum implementation is not an ad-hoc process; there are various aspects that need to be considered in preventing problems that might hinder its effective implementation. Furthermore, during the curriculum implementation process problems encountered that might contribute to the implementers having to revert back to their old ways of teaching should always be prevented at all times. Hence, Van der Nest (2012) conceded that teachers are the important resources of any curriculum that is to be implemented. Therefore, when the curriculum is introduced, the needs of the teachers need to be taken into considerations as they are key people for curriculum implementation (Thaanyane 2010). This is because teachers as curriculum implementers don't have to concentrate on the altered subject content; however, pedagogical knowledge is also imperative for any curriculum to be implemented. That is why Chisholm (2005) believed that teachers have to be experienced, enthused, and be more supported by the DoE in order to effectively implement the curriculum. Teachers can be supported in many ways, for example, support can be in terms of Learner Support

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Teacher Materials (LTSM's) and professional development teacher programmes (Badugela 2012; DoE 2011; Van der Nest 2012).

Teacher Involvement in Curriculum Implementation

With all the changes that take place in curriculum the main important stakeholders are the teachers. This is because teachers have an important role to play in any curriculum that is to be implemented (Nunalall 2012). Without trying to overemphasize the teachers' role in the curriculum implementation, it is evident that the implementation can never be effective if teachers are not integrated in the process (Taole 2013). Therefore, it has to be acknowledged that teachers are the basis of inquiry and data for any curriculum that has to be introduced. Hence, their views on improvement and application are always vital in certifying the success of a curriculum to be introduced. This therefore means that involvement of teachers in the curriculum implementation is very important. Hence, Handler (2010) believed that teachers and curriculum specialists should be working together in organizing all content and materials needed. Moreover, once teachers are involved in the curriculum development they would then be able to align content with learner needs. In addition to this, the teacher involvement can also encourage them to use alternative strategies or improvise when having to implement the curriculum as they understand their context based on the learners they teach and the schools where they teach such learners.

Teacher Support in Curriculum Implementation

Changes in the curriculum could not be put in practice without the support services targeting teachers. Therefore, successful transformation of education and training depends on the professional development of teachers as key people in implementing the curriculum (Badugela 2012). Curriculum change can be effectively implemented only if teachers as curriculum implementers are being prepared for that change through professional development initiatives (Hameed 2013). For example, teachers have to be trained and supported to develop LTSM's that are age appropriate, planning their lessons

effectively in order to incorporate various classroom techniques that cater for diverse learners in their classes and managing their classrooms well (Kirkgoz 2008). If teachers are inadequately trained on how to implement the new curriculum, it becomes very difficult for them (teachers) to adapt the new curriculum and end up reverting to the previous methods that they are more familiar and comfortable with (Nkosi 2014).

Monitoring Mechanisms in Curriculum Implementation

Regular monitoring is seen as an important feature in curriculum transformation. Departmental support strategies and levels of support rendered to schools are clearly outlined (Provincial Curriculum Guidelines (PCG) 2007). This implies that a provision has been made for officials in terms of supporting teachers and schools during the curriculum development processes. This therefore serves as a guideline of what needs to be done in ensuring the effective implementation of any curriculum. However, monitoring and support cannot only be solely dependent on the district officials. Hence, the School Management Team (SMT) under the leadership of the principal who is an instructional leader have a responsibility too (Badugela 2012). Monitoring and support mechanisms are none other than class visits where the teachers' problems with regards to teaching LO might be identified as they manifest in the classroom. For example, use of LTSM's, enhancing conducive classroom atmosphere through participatory approaches, classroom management, planning lessons etc. This might also assist the teachers to share their problems that they encounter during the discussion (PCG 2007).

Challenges with Curriculum Implementation

Curriculum implementation process has been faced with enormous challenges that made it impossible for teachers at times to effectively implement the curriculum according to the set standards. There has been evidence that in countries like Indonesia for example, the challenges experienced were inadequate monitoring, inadequate LTSM's to support curriculum implementation and absence of teacher trainings. These challenges as stated by Tadesse and Meaza (2007) have contributed to the teachers' nega-

tive attitudes in implementing new curriculum. South Africa for example has faced the same challenges as experienced in Indonesia when it comes to curriculum implementation. That is why Subban (2005) was of the view that the success of the curriculum implementation might be at risk due to the negativity of the teachers. Inadequate support services rendered might even become obstacles as teachers attempt to implement the curriculum.

Guiding Theoretical Framework

Theory of curriculum implementation by Rogan and Grayson's (2003) guided this paper. The theory acknowledged the importance of teachers, learners and the school environment in the implementation of curriculum. It has three major constructs which are (i) profile of implementation, (ii) capacity to support innovation and (iii) support from outside agencies. The theory was very important for this paper more especially the third construct that is about support by outside agencies. This is because construct focuses on the monitoring mechanisms, professional development provided to LO teachers and the provision of LTSM's to enhance the curriculum implementation. This construct also puts an emphasis on how other stakeholders are involved in the curriculum implementation. Therefore, this theory has been found to be relevant for this paper as it addressed its objectives.

Objectives of the Paper

This paper is aimed at examining the support and monitoring mechanisms put in place for South African teachers to implement Life Orientation curriculum.

METHODS

A qualitative interpretive case study design was found to be relevant for this paper because it encourages research participants to be studied in their natural settings (Frey 2011). Denzin and Lincoln (2011) argued that from an ontological stance, reality is socially constructed hence there is no single observable reality. In essence this means that a single event can have multiple realities and interpretations. From a qualitative research approach, the findings of the research cannot be generalized (Anderson 2010;

Johnson and Christensen 2011). The case study design was adopted because as stated by Yin (2009) case study design is an in-depth, intensive enquiry reflecting a rich lively reality and exploration of a bounded system. For sampling purposes three (3) schools were selected and from the selected schools 2 teachers teaching LO were purposively selected. The schools selected were a representation of the schools from each cluster. The researcher wanted to ensure that when studying a particular district, having an in-depth knowledge of how teachers from the same district have experienced the support and monitoring mechanisms received to effectively implement LO would be very useful for the purpose of this paper. This is in line with what is said by Creswell (2009) that in purposive sampling the individuals selected help in understanding the research problem and the research questions.

The data from the selected six (6) participants was collected through semi-structured interviews. Semi structured interviews are commonly used tools that assess people's experiences, inner opinions, attitudes and feelings of reality (Maree 2007). Trustworthiness and neutrality of the research findings are keys in making sure that validity and reliability of results are accomplished (Rule and John 2011). Smith and Cilliers (2006) asserted that credibility is the assessment of authenticity of the research findings from the perspective of the study respondents, as respondents are the only ones who can justifiably judge the credibility of the results. Hence, Simons (2009) stressed that fairness, justice and democratic process become important criteria in establishing credibility of the case. This was done in this paper through direct quotations that were indexed so that they can be traced back to an identifiable participant. The approach to data analysis for the qualitative data involves a search for themes that emerge. Therefore the researcher used the qualitative method by coding the data systematically.

Ethical Issues

All the ethical considerations were observed and adhered to by the researcher in this study. The researcher explained the ethical obligations to the participants and these acted as guiding principles to keep the researcher in check. Anonymity and confidentiality was assured to the participants as well as respecting the time of

each participant (Du Plooy-Cilliers et al. 2014). The researcher also sought permission to enter the targeted schools where data was collected from.

RESULTS

Support and monitoring are crucial aspects when it comes to effective implementation of any proposed curriculum. This is still the case even despite the responses received from the teachers who were participants of the study. For example, when LO teachers were asked about the support provided by the DoE and even by the SMT's in implementing LO curriculum in their schools they have given varying responses. Moreover, the participants were even asked about the monitoring strategies that were in place to ensure that their implementation meets the required standards. Even in this regard the respondents gave different responses. The responses of the teachers regarding the support received were an indication that support rendered was minimal and there was no regular monitoring in place to ensure that they are implementing according to the set standards. Teacher 1 revealed that,

"DoE and SMT's do not support us as LO teachers at all as a result, we are frustrated because we feel that we are not capacitated and this makes some of us to be always negative."

The teacher's frustration is further echoed by the Teacher 2 when having to say that,

"Being the LO teacher makes people think you have got all the necessary equipment to get along with the subject and learners you are teaching. No one really understands and even acknowledges that LO requires more support due to the learning outcomes it contains."

Another teacher also shared her frustration about not being supported to teach LO considering that this is a new subject. Teacher 3 therefore conceded that,

"The lack of support from the DoE is very discouraging and it becomes difficult for one to think innovatively even about the strategies to use when teaching as you are not even familiar with the outcomes to be achieved and the content to be covered in this subject."

The teachers were frustrated because they never received support from the DoE in implementing LO and this contributed to some implementation difficulties. These teachers also al-

luded to the fact that when teachers are ignorant that makes the implementation of LO in schools ineffective. This is due to the fact that teachers lack support especially those who are unqualified to teach LO. The other teachers further explained that there is not enough time given for teaching LO even on /the school timetable. However, there were some teachers who acknowledged the support they received from their schools and cluster leaders in implementing LO curriculum. From the data collected, among the teachers who have received the support Teacher 5 revealed that,

"We were once called in a cluster meeting with other teachers teaching LO from other schools and were workshopped on the strategies to be used when teaching LO. Even from the school, STM members are trying to support us with curriculum related matters even though some of them are not specialist in the field. The support I have received does not mean that I don't experience challenges when implementing LO curriculum."

Another teacher (Teacher 6) also supported the fact that they did receive support in preparing them for LO implementing, and he conceded that,

"I have received the training although the problem is when it comes to implementation as I'm alone in class when having to teach. The training I have received was not explicit enough in terms of strengthening my understanding of the subject as the person who never did LO before. The section on physical education is also a problem as learners get too excited once they are out in the field."

Another teacher has shown confidence in implementing LO curriculum. This was not because he received training and support from the designated people, but simple because during the teacher preparation years he specialised in LO and what he does in school when teaching LO is basically an implementation of what he has learned during his university years.

Another challenge raised by the teachers regarding the implementation of LO is the absence of people who monitor whether their trial and error initiatives made when implementing LO curriculum are indeed meeting the required standards. When it comes to monitoring strategies, all the participants unanimously agreed that

they have never been monitored to ensure that they are doing the right thing when implementing the curriculum. Out of frustration, Teacher 2 revealed that,

“It is very discouraging for having to do something with no external eye either to approve or disapprove your efforts. Due to the absence of monitoring, we just do according to our understanding and we are not even sure if our own understating is doing justice or injustice to the learners that we teach.”

It is very clear that the concerns raised by LO teachers during the discussion show that some teachers did not receive support from the DoE while others received it, although it was not enough. Moreover, LO subject advisors never visited the schools and this has made teachers to feel neglected. Physical education is also seen as a problematic aspect of LO where teachers have to take learners to the ground while they don't even understand what needs to be done once in the field. It is because of the challenges mentioned earlier that teachers just award marks to learners without competency.

DISCUSSION

Although there have been various different views with regards to the support received in implementing LO curriculum, Adewumi (2012) conceded that there is still a need for the DoE to enhance support and monitoring mechanisms to ensure that teachers are really coping with implementing LO curriculum. Support for teachers comes from the supervision of the school principals, certified teachers and from the DoE officials (Hammed 2013). Despite the policy that was developed by DoE that outlining some roles and responsibilities in terms of supporting curriculum implementation initiative, teachers in schools are still experiencing challenges when it comes to LO implementation (Mosia 2011). O’Gorman (2011) suggested that there is a need for strategies which will move away from the traditional instructional model towards a more active, experiential learning that will benefit all learners. In addition, teacher participation in professional development must be given access to information on current, evidence-based resources and the opportunity to implement them when teaching (Panday 2007). Such information will improve teacher competency in implementing the curriculum at the same time enhancing the ed-

ucational experience for all learners. Teacher unpreparedness, inadequate support and cumbersome monitoring strategies should be strengthened during the curriculum development process.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it is very essential that during curriculum developed phase, curriculum developers need to acknowledge that teachers have to be prepared and be informed of what to teach as they are the ones to implement the curriculum. For example, teachers need to be aware of appropriate teaching strategies that can amplify learner engagement in their lessons as well as the suitable LTSM's that can improve learners' learning of the subject. In addition to that teachers also need to know how to deal with learners' behaviour in the classroom. Moreover teachers have to be enthused in order to be able to implement curriculum with confidence and diligence, hence teachers need to be involved in the process. Teacher involvement might be very helpful in equipping teachers with useful skills necessary for the effective implementation of the curriculum. Inadequate support and cumbersome monitoring strategies would not do justice for teachers in implementing the curriculum.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper recommended that the involvement of teachers as the key implementers needs to be strengthened to inculcate the sense of ownership and responsibility in the implementation of the curriculum. Another aspect to be taken more seriously in implementing the curriculum is the training and support that is rendered to teachers in ensuring that they (teachers) have a deeper understanding of what is expected from them in the process of implementing the curriculum. However, proper training and support rendered is not adequate for teachers to become effective implementers of the curriculum. Hence, a more structured monitoring plan is necessary to ensure that teachers do not experience problems when implementing the curriculum. This implies that, support and monitoring processes should always be in place as at times the support to be rendered should be informed by what was found as a challenge during monitoring phase.

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