Teachers'Views Regarding the Adoption of the New Curriculum in Zimbabwe: Fostering Quality in Education and/or National Developmental Needs

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Abstract: This study sought to find out teachers' views regarding the adoption of the New Schools Curriculum in Zimbabwe. The study adopted the qualitative research paradigm and the case study design. It focused on rural primary and secondary school teachers in Hwange District of Matabeleland North Province in Zimbabwe. The study population comprised rural primary and secondary school teachers in the area under study and a sample of 20 (N=20) teachers (10 from the primary and 10 from the secondary school sector) was considered for the study. The sample was obtained through Purposive sampling method and Interviews were used as the research technique. Consistent with qualitative inquiries, interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) of the generated data was done and the data was presented in point form. The key findings were that the teachers understood the New Schools Curriculum in Zimbabwe to mean the new syallabus, learning areas and content that was introduced in schools by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education to replace the traditional curriculum. However, they were concerned that they were generally ill-prepared to implement the New Curriculum, mainly because of the many challenges they faced including limited understanding of the New Curriculum as they felt that they were not well oriented by the relevant Ministry before its introduction. They also cited shortage of appropriate teaching and learning resources for some new learning areas. However, the teachers indicated that it was critical for all education stakeholders to welcome the New Curriculum in acknowledgement of the fact that it was largely a result of national stakeholder consultation conducted by the relevant Ministry. Accordingly, the researchers concluded that inspite of the challenges faced by the primary and secondary school teachers in the implementation of the New Schools Curriculum, they considered its adoption in the context of both fostering quality in education and national developmental needs. Recommendations were that, there is need for continual staff development for teachers in order to help them understand the New Curriculum in depth and that there is need to increase funding of rural schools in order to promote the holistic sussessful implementation of the New Curriculum countrwide.
Keywords: Teachers,Curriculum Adoption, Quality in Education, Education Stakeholders, National Developmntal Needs.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Since the attainment of independence in Zimbabwe, the country considered reviewing and introducing a New Schools Curriculum as a way of fostering educational reform. This idea 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 [1]. Through needs analysis, baseline research and stakeholder consulations, among other things; Zimbabwe, for a long time envisioned the provision of a New Schools Curriculum that was meant to enhance the development of the country and mainly meet its post-independent socio-economic and developmental needs [2]. For the bigger part of post-independent Zimbabwe, this rationality became part of the national discourse which was considered within the contextual framework where education is essentially viewed as the major driver of national sustainable development.

The term 'curriculum'generally refers to the lessons and academic content taught in an educational institution or in a specific course or programme. Depending on how broadly educators define or employ the term, curriculum characteristically refers to the knowledge and skills students are expected to learn, which includes the learning standards or learning objectives they are expected to meet; the content and lessons that teachers teach; the assignments and projects given to students; the books, materials, presentations and readings used in a course; and the tests, assessments, and other methods used to evaluate student learning [3]. As described by McBrien and Brandt [4] and the Indiana Department of Education [5], a 'curriculum' is a planned interaction of pupils with

instructional content, materials, resources and processes for evaluating the attainment of educational objectives. For Ellis [6], a curriculum is not described merely in terms of how things ought to be, but how things are real in the classroom as well as how they may be applied in real life situations. The focus of this paper was basically to explore primary and secondary school teachers' views regarding the adoption of the New Schools Curriculum in Hwange District of Matabeleland North Province in Zimbabwe.

In his official update on the proposed Zimbabwe New Curriculum Framework for Primary and Secondary Education 2015-2022, Dokora [7] explained 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 [47] 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.

The new curriculum has also incorporated the views and suggestions that were generated during a nationwide consultation process; where stakeholders urged the Ministry to spotlight Mathematics, Science, Technology, Vocational Studies, Heritage Studies and the Humanities. The expansion in the capabilities of information and communication technologies (ICT) and the emergence of an information-driven economy underpin the need for the development of new skill sets that enable citizens to live and work competitively in the global village, [7].

The President of the Republic of Zimbabwe, cited in the Parliament of Zimbabwe Handbook [8], in his national address in the 8th Session of the Parliament of Zimbabwe,had endorsed the idea of the New Curriculum Framework for Primary and Secondary Educationin Zimbabwe: 2015-2022 by saying 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. This stance by the country's President was taken as a national licence that heightened the development of the New Schools Curriculun in Zimbabwe; which saw the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education leading the way in reviewing the primary and secondary schools

curriculum. This 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.

As Dokora [7] presents, 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 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 two at the secondary school level. For the Primary School Infant Level (PSIL), these are;
1. Indigenous Language as medium of instruction;
2. Visual and Performing Arts (Expressive Arts);
3. Physical Education;
4. Mass Displays;
5. Mathematics and Science;
6. Social Studies (Family and Heritage Studies); and
7. Information and Communication Technology.

At the Primary School Junior Level (PSJL), these are;
1. Languages;
2. Mathematics;
3. Social Studies;
4. Science and Technology;
5. Agriculture;
6. Information and Communication Technology;
7. Visual and Performing Arts;
8. Family, Religion and Moral Education; and
9. Physical Education, Sport and Mass Displays.

At the Ordinary School Level (Forms 1 to 4), these are;
1. Heritage Studies (embracing Zim Constitution)
2. Mathematics
3. Sciences (Physics, Chemistry, Biology option General Science)
4. Humanities including History, Geography, Religious Studies, Sociology, Economic History
5. Literature in Indigenous Languages and in English
6. Indigenous Languages and English Language
7. Foreign Languages (French, Swahili, Chinese, Portuguese)

8. ICT: Programming Language and Packages
9. Agriculture
10. Commercials (Accounting, Commerce, Economics, Business and Enterprise Skills)
11. Practical subjects (Wood, Metal, Textile Technologies)
12. Physical Education, Sport and Mass Displays

There are five pathways at Advanced School Level (Form 5 to 6); and these have a bias towardsScience, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) while Humanities and Languages, Commercials, Visual and Performing Arts, Design and Technology are other learning areas.

This paper observes that there are more learning areas at the junior than infant school level, while there are more at the ordinary than advanced school level as outlined above. 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, a Life Skills Orientation Programme (LSOP) will cap a learner's studies up to Form 4 before they settle on a pathway that will define their professional, vocational and adult life. Notably, the New Curriculum technically differs from the traditional curriculum in scope, content, structure and orientation.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM
Without taking away the critical need to adopt a New Schools Curriculum in Zimbabwe, the pertinent question or problem at stake is 'as key stakeholders, do primary and secondary school teachers in Hwange District view the adoption of the New Schools Curriculum as a way of fostering quality in education or simply national developmental needs?

STUDY PURPOSE
The purpose of this study was to determine selected primary and secondary school teachers' views concerning the adoption of the New Schools Curriculum which is currently under implementation in Zimbabwe following the ministerial directive. The study was undertaken with special reference to Hwange District in Matabeleland North Province.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS
The following specific research questions guided the study:
1. What do primary and secondary school teachers understand by the New Curriculum?
2. Are primary and secondary school teachers prepared to implement the New Curriculum?
3. What are the views of the primary and secondary school teachers regarding the adoption of the New Curriculum currently under implementation in Zimbabwe?

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY
It is envisaged that the importance of this study has several dimensions. Firstly, it will simply highlight primary and secondary school teachers' understanding of the New Schools Curriculum currently under implementation in Zimbabwe. Secondly, it will bring to the fore whether or not these teachers are prepared to implement this New Curriculum. Thirdly, it will expose other views by the teachers regarding the adoption of the New Curriculum; which will give a hint of what is actually going on in the schools studied, and possibly in other schools in Zimbabwe. In addition, the findings are expected to highlight to the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education whether teachers in Zimbabwe generally view the adoption of the New Schools Curriculum in the context of fostering quality in education or national developmental needs or both.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE
The Government of Zimbabwe (GoZ), like most central governments across the globe, recognizes 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 [9]. In addition, education simply fosters the maintenance of the social structure [10]. 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 Shizha and Kariwo [9];

> *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.*

As noted in the Zimbabwe Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education New Curriculum Framework 2015-2022 Handbook [46], 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 [9]. In the same vein, Dokora [2] says that theNew Curriculum is meant to modernize the educational system in line with new

technologies thereby producing learners with entrepreneurial skills who are also capable of creating employment as opposed to educating learners to be employed. Thus, the New Curriculum attempts to transcend the previous curriculum in both its philosophical underpinnings and learner assessment criteria.

Education in post independent Zimbabwe, having been propagated by the 'mass education philosophy' (MEP), has however, been instrumental in the promotion of increased learning opportunities for the black majority, expanding knowledge and skills development. Remarkably, this saw the national literacy rate in independent Zimbabwe rising to as high as 91.4% by 2009, thereby registering one of the highest literacy rates in Africa [12, 13]. However, as argued by Verwimp [11], the challenge for independent African countries 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 noted by Bergmann [14] and resonated by Liston [15], contemporary quality in education is related more to the relevance and value of the institution's mission, purpose, goals and objectives, as well as the achievement of identified outcomes. Quality in education, according to Hoy *et al* [17] entails "an evaluation of the process of educating which enhances the need to achieve and develop the talents of the customers of the process, and at the same time, meets the accountability standards set by the clients who pay for the process or the outputs from the process of educating".

Gandhe [18] contends that quality in education is an amalgamation of different notions, including; exceptionally high standards, perfection and consistency, fitness for purpose, value for money, fulfilment of industrial needs and demands andransformational capabilities.

To further clarify, Grisay and Mahlck [19] are of the view that evaluating the quality of any education system typically involves examining the;
- extent to which the products or the results of the education provided (the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes attained by the learners) meet the standards stipulated in the system's educational objectives,
- extent to which the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes acquired in the learning process are relevant to human and environmental needs,

- extent to which the acquired education is generally utilised by individuals and groups to solve micro and macro problems in life.

Thus, this broad conceptualization of 'quality education' takes into account the global influences that propel the discourse oneducational quality while ensuring that national and local educational contexts contribute to quality education [20].

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 [21, 22]. Thus, our understanding of quality education must 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. For Coombs and Manzoo [23], school continuous assessment and improvement can focus on any or all dimensions of system quality: teachers, learners, learning environments, content, process and outcomes.

The International Working Group on Education [17] says that contemporary quality educationmust include, among other factors;
- Learners who are healthy, well-nourished and ready to participate and learn,and supported in learning by their families and communities;
- Environments that are healthy, safe, protective and gender-sensitive, andprovide adequate resources and facilities;
- Content that is reflected in relevant curricula and materials for the acquisitionof basic skills, especially in the areas of literacy, numeracy and skills for life,and knowledge in such areas as gender, health, nutrition, HIV/AIDSprevention and peace;
- Processes through which trained teachers use child-centred teachingapproaches in well-managed classrooms and schools and skilful assessmentto facilitate learning and reduce disparities;
- Student outcomes that encompass knowledge, skills and attitudes, and are linked tonational goals for education and positive participation in society.

This interpretation of quality education allows for an understanding of education as a complex system embedded in a social, political, cultural and economic context [17, 24]. It is important to keep in mind thatby education's systemic nature, however; these dimensions

are interdependent, influencing each other in ways that are sometimes unforeseeable.

Research in education generally reveals that there are often challenges in reaching large numbers of children with quality content, even in cases where a 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, ibid).However, educational reform and implementation of new curricular is most likely to succeed where communities are involved, central government as well as educational agencies provide adequate resources for its development and implementation; especially one that responds to emerging national needs [25].

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 [26] 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.To be most effective, quality education must be situated in a context of quality processes and collaboration between and among key stakeholders; in which case teachers should feature most as they are central to the implementation of new curricular [27, 28]. Until recently, much discussion of educational quality centred on system inputs, such as infrastructure and pupil-teacher ratios, and on curricular content. In recent years, however, more attention has been paid to educational processes, including how teachers and administrators use inputs to frame meaningful learning experiences for students. 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 [29].

The Global Partnership in Education [30] posit that several factors influence the successful implementation of a new school curriculum. These include;
- Teachers' professional knowledge;
- Consistence in children's backgrounds and school work;
- Ongoing professional development for teachers;
- Active, standards-based participation methods;
- Teacher-learner feedback mechanisms;
- Teacher beliefs that all students can learn and adapt to curricular changes:
- Teachers' general working conditions;
- Extent of Information and Communication use;
- Diversity of school processes and facilities;
- Administrative support and leadership;
- Political will and support for educational reform.

Thus, this review of related literature has been proffered in order to reflect on the literature that touches on the theory of national development needs, quality education, educational reform and theirimplications for the adoption of a new national schoolscurriculum.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted the qualitative research paradigm which is appropriate when a social problem needs to be explored, or because we need a detailed understanding of the problem at stake [31-33]. The case study design was utilised and focused on one rural primary school and one rural secondary school 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 speficic cases and that it can establish phenomenal cause and effect; with the researcher observing effects in real or natural contexts [34, 35].

The study population, which Kuhn [36]; Marshall and Gretchen [37] 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 and secondary school teachers in the area under study. A sample of 20 (N=20) teachers from two schools (10 from the selected primary and 10 from the selected secondary school) was considered for the study. The sample was obtained through Purposive sampling method which Best and Kahn [38] say that it essentially entails 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 [39, 40], whom in the current study were rural primary and secondary school teachers all of whom were engaged as participants during the school holiday inorder not to disturb school programmes.

The participants responded to Interviews which were the research techniques while Interview guides were used as the actual tools for data gathering. However, consistent with qualitative inquiries, the researchers were the main research instruments. Interviews were preferred because they enabled the researchers to probe further to get participants' views further clarified [41]. The administration of Interviews involved the researchers discussing with interviewees one by one in the schools in question and then documenting their responses. Before using the research

tools, the researchers subjected them to pre-testing them with one teacher from a rural primary school and one teacher from a rural secondary school both of which were not part of the study. This pre-testing helped in the consolidation of the instruments (i.e. Interview guides) by the researchers [42]. Consistent with qualitative inquiries, interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) of the generated data was done (Bailey,ibid) and the data was simply presented in point form picking on critical views raised by the different participants. The major limitation of the findings were that, though they apply to rural primary and secondary school teachers from the studied schools, their generilisation to the rest of Zimbabwean primary and secondary school teachers is somewhat limited,which is, however, consistent with case studies [43].

STUDY FINDINGS

This study revealed the following as the key findings;

- Teachers understood the New Schools Curriculum in Zimbabwe to generally mean the new syallabus, learning areas and content that was been introduced in schools by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education to replace the traditional curriculum adopted at Zimbabwe's independence in 1980 from the colonial regiom
- Teachers were generally ill-prepared to implement the New Schools Curriculum, mainly because of the many challenges they faced including;
  - ➤ Limited understanding of the New Curriculum as they felt that they were not well oriented by the relevant Ministry before its introduction
  - ➤ New Curriculum is too diverse and has too many areas bunched together as single learning areas
  - ➤ Shortage of appropriate teaching and learning resources for some learning areas of the New Curriculum
  - ➤ Textbooks and other resources available 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 Curriculum syllabi is too long and teachers are generally encountering some difficulties in interpreting it
  - ➤ Totally new content to be introduced by the New Curriculum which teachers themselves do not have background in
  - ➤ Large class loads particularly in the primary sector mostly due to the public service's recent stance to freeze teaching posts. For example, some primary school teachers are teaching composite classes as a consequence

- ➤ Lack of ICT skills by some of the teachers, compounded by lack of ICT resources and Internet connectivity in some schools, yet ICT use is generally advantageous as Mafa and Gasva's [45] study revealed that utilizing ICT in teaching and learning generally increases access to quality education
- ➤ Limited financial and resource support from the community, relevant ministry and central government; resulting in challenges such as securing appropriate teaching and leaning resources or building ICT laboratories
- ➤ Low teacher motivation and morale due to low salaries, poor working conditions; compounded by the country's poor economic performance.
- However, in spite of the challenges in implementing the New Schools Curriculum, the teachers were in consensus that it is critical for all education stakeholders including themselves as teachers, the learners and parents to welcome the adoption of the New Curriculum in acknowledgement of the fact that it evolved from the long-standing recommendations of the Presidential Commission of Inquiry on Education and Training [44] which was followed up by national stakeholder consultation by the relevant Ministry.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From the key findings of the study, the researchers concluded that in spite of the challenges faced by primary and secondary school teachers in the implementation of the New Schools Curriculum, its adoption need to be generally viewed by all education stakeholders in Zimbabwe as a way of both fostering quality in education and national developmental needs, hence, deserves to be embraced as a noble idea and move in the right direction in the educational history of the country.

Based on the findings and conclusions, the researchers recommended that:

- There is need for continual staff development for both primary and secondary school teachers at different levels (school, cluster, district, province, national) in order to help them understand the New Curriculum in depth
- The Government of Zimbabwe (GoZ) and other Non-Governmental organisations interested in education need to step up funding of rural schools in order to promote the holistic sussessful implementation of the New Curriculum countrwide.
- 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 posed by the New Schools Curriculum

- It would be necessary to conduct a similar study to find out views of primary or secondary school teachers or both at a larger scale considering that the current study only involved a small number of teachers from very few schools in Hwange District of Matabeleland North Province in Zimbabwe.

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