

CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT POLICY STATEMENT: TEACHERS' CHALLENGES IN SOUTH AFRICA

Kufakunesu Zano* (Corresponding author)

Department of Education, South Africa

Dr Erasmus Charamba

University of Witwatersrand

Kufakunesu Zano* is a PhD candidate with the University of South Africa. He has interest in Language and Literature issues which include vocabulary and vocabulary learning beliefs, translanguaging, English as a foreign language, second language acquisition and Afro-American, Caribbean, African and English literature

Abstract: *The study serves to explore teachers' enactment of the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) in selected Free State Province schools. The data was collected by means of semi-structured individual interviews. The respondents were grade 11 teachers whose schools were chosen by the researchers because all the respondents had undergone a week long CAPS training. The study adopted a qualitative approach therefore a purposive non-probability sampling strategy was used to select the sample. The collected data from the respondents was analysed qualitatively and recommendations based on the research findings were made. As the study has shown, curriculum changes have been beset by constraints and challenges. As such, the planning, formulation, and adoption of curriculum changes are not really a serious concern rather; implementation has become a huge challenge. The article thus recommends that appropriate resources should be made available in order to ensure efficient and effective implementation of curriculum.*

Key words: *Curriculum; Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement; Outcomes-Based Education; National Curriculum Statements; Revised National Curriculum Statement, Curriculum Implementation; Further Education and Training phase*

Introduction

We live in a time of rapid change time of moving forward. We tend to define ourselves in terms of where we are going, not where we come from. History, by its nature, does more than tell us about the past; it helps us understand why our present is as it is; it helps us understand the problems of the present and the way we try to resolve current problems in an attempt to secure a better future (Lemmer and van Wyk 2010).

South Africa has had a number of curriculum reforms since the advent of democracy in 1994 and they were apparently intended to level out inequalities and injustices caused by the apartheid regime policies which used education as its tool (Nkosi, 2014). Magano (2009) states that changes in curriculum policy may lead to the greater changes from the teachers the way they teach learners and the way learners learn in the classroom. This indicates that teachers have to deal with many changes regarding new curriculum.

The ANC-led government has made a raft of changes in education and the major ones being the Outcomes-Based Education (OBE), National Curriculum Statements (NCS) and Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (Jansen, 2008; Chisholm, 2005; Bantwini, 2010). Chisholm (2005a) identifies three main stages in the development of the post-apartheid curriculum and these include syllabus revision, implementation of the OBE through Curriculum 2005 and review and revision of Curriculum 2005.

On 24 March 1997, the new national Department of Education (DoE) launched Curriculum 2005, informed by the principles of OBE as the foundation of the post-apartheid school curriculum. Hoadley and Jansen (2009: 161) identify the following as some of the failings of Curriculum 2005: language and design features of Curriculum 2005 were too cumbersome and complex for teachers to interpret and manage, the curriculum was under-specified and teachers' own lack of content knowledge meant they struggled to select and sequence content appropriately, lack of resources for teacher-training and support and there was little attention to coherent programme of conceptual development within learning areas. Ongoing implementation challenges resulted in another review in 2009 and the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) was revised (2002) and the NCS Grades 10-12. From 2012 the two National Curriculum Statements for grades R-9 and Grades 10-12 respectively, were combined in a single document and is simply known as National Curriculum Statement Grades R-12. The above has already shown that curriculum 2005 and RNCS had their own fair share of problems therefore South Africa could not continue to follow a curriculum that had proven to be unsuccessful for more than decade of implementation. This gave 'birth' to the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement.

Literature Review

Hoadley and Jansen (2009) contend that new needs cause curriculum change. Curriculum change often occurs in response to changing needs in society. In many cases this happens independent of a change in government. New economic needs might cause curriculum change. Economic change has always had significant impact on the prescribed curriculum in South Africa (and elsewhere). When South Africa moved from being a mainly agricultural society to a society that was more dependent on a industrial commercial economy, the curriculum changed to reflect the kind of work opportunities available in the cities and in industry, for instance, by introducing commercial subjects. The economic development contributed to the introduction of Bantu Education. As South Africa now moves into an information age, in which roles in the workplace require different sorts of skills and different attitudes, the curriculum is changing again (Hoadley and Jansen, 2009).

From the start of democracy, South Africa has built its curriculum on the values that inspired its Constitution (South African Act 108 of 1996). The Preamble to the Constitution states that the aims of the Constitution are to heal the divisions of the past and establish a society based on

democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights. The constitution also aims to improve the quality of life of all citizens, free the potential of each person and lay the foundation for a democratic and open society in which government is based on the will of the people and every citizen is equally protected by law, and build a united and democratic South Africa that is able to take its rightful place as a sovereign state in the family of nations (National Protocol For Assessment, DoE 2011: 1).

The National Curriculum Statement Grades R-12 represents policy statement for learning and teaching in South African schools. It comprises the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement for all approved subjects listed in this document, National Policy Pertaining to the Programme and Promotion required of the National Curriculum Statement Grades R-12 and National Protocol for Assessment Grades R-12.

According to the DoE, CAPS is not a new curriculum but an amendment to the NCS. It therefore still follows the same process and procedure as the NCS Grades R-12 (2002) (Pinnock 2011). The CAPS is an adjustment to what we teach (curriculum) and not how we teach (teaching methods). There is much debate and discussion about OBE being removed; however, OBE is a method of teaching, not a curriculum. It is a curriculum that has changed (repackaged) and not the teaching method. This means that it is more prone to traditional teacher methods rather than OBE methods. There is one single comprehensive National Curriculum and Assessment Policy for each subject (Maskew Millar Longman, 2012).

One could ask why was there was another change to the curriculum with CAPS. The amendments were made to address four main concerns about the NCS as identified by a task team and reported to the Minister of Education in October 2009 (DoE 2009). The concerns were complaints about the implementation of the NCS and the teachers who were overburdened with administration. The other two reasons were that there were different interpretations of the curriculum requirements and a huge worry about the underperformance of the learners. Much of the debate about the CAPS is about whether it is an amendment, repackaging or even re-curriculum. It is accepted that the NCS has been repackaged; it is to make it more accessible to teachers and to give details for every subject in each grade of what content teachers ought to teach and assess. These details include clearly delineated topics for each subject and a recommended number and type of assessments per term (Pinnock, 2011).

The dates for the implementation of the CAPS were set as follows: January 2012: The Foundation Phase (Grades R-3) and Grade 10 (FET) in January 2013; the Intermediate Phase (Grades 4-6) and Grade 11 (FET) and January 2014 was for the Senior Phase (Grades 7-9) and Grade 12 (FET).

Methodology

The purpose of this paper is to give an account of a qualitative research design about challenges faced by teachers in implementing CAPS. The study conducted attempted to answer the following research question: Which challenges are faced by teachers in implementing CAPS?

Participants

The population in this study was made of 20 grade 11 teachers at the selected 5 high schools in Free State.

Data Collection Instrument

This study used the semi-structured individual interview approach where the researchers followed open and closed questions which were tailored to get clarifications from participants.

Data Collection Procedure

The researchers exposed the predetermined list of questions to which the participants responded. Each participant was faced with an identical set of questions for the purposes of standardisation. The researchers allowed each participant to read the interview schedule together with the researchers in order to allow participants to choose where he/she wanted to start. In each interview session, the researchers were careful enough to keep the interview focused and save time for both the researchers and the interviewees.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data for this study was analysed using the content analysis method. The volume of information was reduced and significant patterns were identified. The researchers analysed the participants' responses to interview questions closely, finding links and similarities in the responses and hand-coded them appropriately. Then, the researchers abridged and positioned the results into themes. The researchers read the sentence or paragraph and decided whether it contained relevant information, and if so, to which category the information belonged. From the relevant information, the researcher formulated short descriptive statements about the values in the dimensions. After gathering data, the researchers then processed it in order to further consolidate the research's information base.

Results

The idea of allowing learners to change subjects in Grade 11 was reported by the respondents to be detrimental to the concerned learners as they lacked the foundational content of that subject in Grade 10. Literally speaking, it is an apparent impossibility to build a roof in the air. They stated that Grade 10 content was the foundation for the Further Education and Training phase (FET). In this study, it meant that allowing learners to change subjects in Grade 11 should be sparingly done as these learners arguably struggled to cope with even the elementary concepts in Grade

11. This implied that Grade 11 level was in between the foundation (Grade 10) and the icing of the cake (Grade 12). Only the naturally academically –gifted could manage a new subject in Grade 11 whose content they never met in their earlier phases like the General Education and Training (GET). As such, respondent 007 noted that: “The tendency of allowing learners to change subjects in grade 11 does more harm than good to those learners as they lack grade 10 content but only the intelligent ones can manage”[Respondent 007].

All the respondents got assistance from the district office by means of emails, phone calls, workshops and even physical visits by Learning Facilitators (LF) or subject teacher to the district. However, the respondents found that assistance too inadequate and this could influence the quality of the teachers’ enactment of CAPS. They reported that it was unusual for these LFs to have either time or the inclination to provide all the needed assistance in other than a lecture method. Such expert delivery of knowledge by the LFs was seldom useful and meaningful to the participants and overshadowed more powerful learning opportunities. They also reported that some of the workshops that they attended were not comprehensive at all and did not cover most of the problematic areas in their subjects. They indicated that CAPS training should not be treated as an event but an on-going process until they reach what one could call “expert level”. They also reported that the time for CAPS training workshops was ridiculously inadequate and felt more training was needed in order to become more meaningful in the practices of Grade 11 teachers. Respondent 020 had this to say: “The help from the district isn’t enough for me because some of the workshops I attended a lot of difficult arrears were never exhausted and lecture method was overused. Also, training for 5 days was a mockery but say 2 weeks is fine” [Respondent 020].

Feedback played a major role in the implementation of CAPS. However, the respondents found it hard to devote so much time and effort to write detailed comments to each learner. In the interests of time, the respondents just indicated very short and sketchy feedback which had inadequate useful corrective information for the learners. In some cases, the respondents ended up writing disparaging remarks towards the learners which ended up discouraging them (learners). This problem was aptly presented by respondent 008: “It forces me to literally worship assessment and testing as if they are the alpha and omega in learning and teaching ignoring other fields like sport and some teachers write bad comments” [Respondent 008].

When the respondents used the discussion method, they had a mountain-climb shifting from an information-giving role to facilitator. They tended to dominate the discussions, turning them into mini-lectures. The respondents reported that they often tried to conduct discussions when learners’ background knowledge was insufficient. They also reported that in the same vein, when conducting group work activities, if the process was not well organized, a great deal of instructional time was lost in transitions to and fro the group work. To confirm the above, the following respondents had this to say: “In class discussions, teachers forget to just remain facilitators of learning and teaching and let it be learner centred. Plus discussions are never fine if learners lack background knowledge” [Respondent 015] and, “Sometimes, learners take time to settle in their groups thereby wasting learning and teaching time” [Respondent 012].

The respondents also reported the in negative nature of supervision in CAPS. The respondents reported that they had worked with teachers who were not comfortable with class visits because they always thought it was a fault-finding endeavour by the supervisors. In this study, it meant supervision in the enactment of CAPS must be conducted without ulterior motives as this demoralised the supervisee. Hence, respondent 004 had this to say, “Some supervisors when they come for lesson observation aren’t objective enough but just hunt for faults and settle previous quarrels” [Respondent 004].

They indicated that some of these supervisors had an obsession for uniformity which sometimes might have required that all subject teachers taught the same curricula at the same time in the same way. Attaining such uniformity was woefully impractical considering that each classroom had something unique about its environment. As a result, those superiors wrote very negative reports about what they would have observed in one’s lesson or subject file instead of being elastic enough to treat each setting differently. This was raised by respondent 010: “Some supervisors believe in uniformity without noting that each classroom is a unique environment” [Respondent 010].

The respondents indicated that in some cases like giving directions about how to teach a certain topic for example, testing for photosynthesis in Grade 11 Life Sciences, CAPS was prescriptive leaving little or no room for any change(s) by either the teacher or learner. The respondents treated this as a hard-line stance because it disempowered both the teacher and learner, almost as if it were a virtue to have amnesia about either the teacher or the learner’s backgrounds. They reported that CAPS treated them as passive recipients of the wisdom of the curriculum developers. CAPS seemed to constrain their autonomy where it required definite sequencing. Directions to teachers were clearly spelt out, naturally for both good and bad reasons, and such teacher-proof packages were viewed negatively by these respondents. Respondent 018 echoed: “Teachers are treated as passive recipients of the ideas of those who made this curriculum (curriculum designers)...” [Respondent 018]

The respondents also reported that the current emphasis on national standards by the government meant that in all schools, “assessment /testing” was now being used to control CAPS and teaching. The DoE has prescribed standardised assessment/testing and procedures for teaching a subject or for using a particular CAPS package. Although assessment is good for grading and promotion, the respondents reported that these national standards forced them not to give much attention to psycho-social activities like counselling and sport because they were not examinable. Respondent 013 concisely described it as follows; “I see CAPS as assessment-based only and it ignores other educational areas like sport and counselling” [Respondent 013].

Some respondents indicated that a negative attitude of teachers was a hindrance to the successful enactment of CAPS. It was important that the teacher as the implementer had a positive attitude towards it. Where the teachers were unsure or frustrated to comply with the varying informal and formal assessment requirements of CAPS, they naturally fell back into the traditional ways thereby compromising the successful enactment

of CAPS. In responding to teachers' negativity, respondent 003 explained: "Some teachers are demotivated and stressed hence they develop negative attitude towards CAPS implementation and others are naturally resistant to change - don't take change lightly" [Respondent 005].

Another critical issue reported by the respondents was learners' negative attitude towards school work which formed part of either informal or formal assessment. The learners generally had a feeling that written exercises, tests and written examinations were just acts of assessment which teachers did "to" learners and not "with" learners. The learners viewed assessment in CAPS as a sole domain for the teacher in which the learners had no voice, and in which they could be excluded. Lest they forgot, assessment was a summative product where the allocation of a mark determined the promotion decision. Respondent 017 summed it up expertly: "Some learners are demotivated by teacher dominance in lessons, they (learners) are voiceless hence they become negative towards formal and informal tasks" [Respondent 017].

Still on the same token, other issues reported by the respondents that had a direct negative influence on the assessment of individual grade 11 learners were late coming, absenteeism, transportation problems, a lack of discipline and respect for authority. Respondent 001 pointed out: "Other learners bunk lessons, and seek refuge in toilets and taverns, drinking and smoking. Such guys usually disrespect teachers and other learners" [Respondent 001].

Language was also reported by three respondents as a major hindrance to the successful enactment of CAPS. In this study, it meant that teachers' enactment of CAPS needed to take cognisance of language ability and proficiency of learners. Learners' level of language skills in listening, reading and speaking always influenced the assessment results gathered through the different assessment methods. If logic prevails, then it is rational that there is a crystal correlation between mother-tongue instruction and learner achievement. In contrast to this, respondent 003 revealed: "The majority of the learners are receiving instruction in a language that's not their first language" [Respondent 003].

The respondents reported that resources were inhibiting the successful enactment of CAPS. They further elucidated resources such as money and classrooms. On the issue of inadequate money as a hindering factor, the respondents noted that the funds from the DoE were never enough to cater for all the burning needs of the school. Learners needed to read extensively to broaden their knowledge. A well-resourced library could be their only oasis in the Kalahari Desert. Unfortunately, the schools always struggled financially and failed to equip the libraries adequately. In the end the learners who were supposed to read and do research work like in Grade 11 Business Studies and Physical Science in a well-resourced library would suffer. Other examples of inadequate facilities reported by the respondents included classrooms and laboratories. Schools must have enough classrooms to alleviate overcrowding of learners for the proper enactment of CAPS. This could not take place because of overcrowding and the classrooms needed adequate air ventilation for good learning and teaching. They indicated that usually, most of the disciplinary problems emanated from overcrowded classrooms. This meant that for teachers to enact some provisions of CAPS there was need for fewer learner disciplinary issues. Thus, it was paramount to have more classrooms so that the teacher-pupil ratio could be manageable. To confirm the above claims, the following excerpts from respondents 002 and 020 served the purpose: "We don't have well equipped labs and classrooms so we are having too many learners in a class causing disciplinary problems" [Respondent 002] and "The library at my school has very old books which are of little help in CAPS" [Respondent 020].

Discussion of the findings

One of the problems reported by respondents was that learners who changed subjects in Grade 11 would have missed the foundational content of that subject in Grade 10. To counter the problem, the teachers can come-up with learning teaching programmes to be followed to assist the learner in covering those aspects of CAPS for the previous grade that were not completed or never done by the respective learner. These measures can include highlighting in their (learner) textbooks topics these learners needed to master and giving them handouts to read on their own. If they encountered any problems, the learners were allowed to come to the respondents for clarity.

The teachers who teach the same subject can also gather and sort out some CAPS enactment problems they might be encountering. Even a chat over coffee about grade 11 Mathematical problem can save time by creating staff unity and providing a room for sharing and working out problems.

The teachers can also hold meetings with local resource persons like the principals and HoDs depending on the school and the frequency can vary from one school to another. In these meetings, ideas about CAPS can be shared, problems concerning CAPS enactment are discussed and support given. Also, as indicated earlier, the attitudes of teachers towards compliance with CAPS requirements were negative. The negativity of teachers could have been caused by a couple of factors which included inadequate training, poor salaries and psycho-social issues to mention but a few.

There should be coherence between individual Grade 11 teachers to ensure successful enactment of CAPS. Lack of coherence between Grade 11 learners can breed separation and individualism. In as much as Grade 11 classes are generally organised around separate subject departments, located in separate parts of the school, which compete with each other for resources like chairs, it is important to embrace co-operation and communication than individualism.

When planning and conducting group work activities, it is important to avail materials, make goals and directions clear and be time-specific. In the absence of the above, lessons can disintegrate into aimless "bull sessions". The teachers can also let group members seat together prior to the group work activity to make the transition from the whole-class activity to learner groups and back again with a minimum of disruption. Teachers should also specify the amount of time learners are allowed to finish the task.

It arguably works when the teachers engage the parents whenever they have concerns with their children. The teachers can ask the parents to visit their children at school like on parents' day where they have the opportunity to discuss their children's conduct with the teachers. The school can also avail a telephone facility where teachers can always phone the parents whenever they have academic or behavioural problems with their children at school. Some parents assist their children with homework and others send their children for extra lessons during school holidays and even weekends. Thus, it is important if teachers could value the role parents can play in the education of their children.

Although guidelines about curriculum and teaching are prescribed in detail in CAPS, teachers need to encourage each other to consider other countless ways in which teachers can responsibly and professionally get around both the spirit and substance of such prescription. For example a Grade 11 Life Science teacher could vary the content of a topic like Plant and Animal life or the sequence in which it will be taught. Instead of beginning with Plant life the teacher may teach Animal life first as the learners may be having more previous knowledge about Animal than Plant life. It is easier if the learners are taught from the simple to complex and from the known to the unknown.

Conclusion

During the investigation of teachers' challenges on CAPS implementation, several factors have been cited that curtail curriculum implementation. These factors included the idea of allowing learners to change subjects in Grade 11 as disadvantageous to the concerned learners as they lacked the initial content of that subject in Grade 10. They indicated that some of the supervisors had a mania for standardisation which occasionally might have required that all subject teachers taught the same curricula at the same time in the same way. Also, the schools always struggled financially and failed to stock the libraries sufficiently. The challenges reported in the study could bring about curriculum implementation to an eventual low level of success in some grade 11 classrooms. However, with the adequate co-operation of all the stakeholders involved in the implementation of CAPS, there are several ways to allay each of the reported curriculum implementation challenges.

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