



CURRICULUM OVERLOAD AND ITS IMPACT ON TEACHER EFFECTIVENESS IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract:

The study investigated the curriculum overload in primary schools. The multiple case study approach was used and ten schools in Bindura urban participated in this study. The purposive sampling technique was used to select the participants. The participants were teachers teaching in the primary schools. Data were generated using interviews and open-ended questionnaires. Data were qualitatively analysed. The study also found out that the curriculum was broad yet the time to cover it was limited. The study concluded that there was prevalence of work overload in primary schools. The study recommends the review of the curriculum with the aim of reducing work overload.

Keywords: curriculum, curriculum overload, teacher effectiveness

1. Introduction

In Zimbabwe, eleven subjects constitute the subjects offered at primary school level. Primary school teachers are expected to teach all the subjects of the primary school curriculum assess children's work and prepare the prescribed children's records and ensure they are up to date. They also prepare remedial work for slow learners and ensure they teach them.

Before independence, the education system in Zimbabwe was modeled around the British system of education (Zvobgo 1990). The attainment of independence in 1980 government called for a review of the colonial education system which was organized and run on racial lines (Zvobgo 2004). This resulted in the emergence of a new national curriculum and the elimination of racial segregation in the school system. The various

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elements such as language, culture and decolonization of the curricula created a new challenge of overload in the primary school curriculum.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Definition of Curriculum Overload

According to the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (2010) overload is a mismatch between capacity and load. This has been explained as the imbalance between our capacities to activate a curriculum.

Prevalence of Curriculum overload been reported in many countries both developing and developed countries. Le Metais (2003) identified countries such as England, Netherlands, Wales, China, Philippines, Japan, New Zealand and Australia has having overloaded curriculum (INCA 2003). In Easter and Southern Africa countries such as Tanzania, Kenya, Zambia, Malawi, Angola and Zimbabwe were identified as experiencing curriculum overload (Ndjabili, 2004).

Overcrowded curriculum was identified in Asian countries by UNESCO (2003). Most countries in Asia had curricula that were overloaded. In China the content was considered was too difficult for pupils and in Vietnam there was a lot of content. Indonesia had a curriculum that had much detail that promoted memorization (UNESCO, 2003).

The English curriculum teachers teach for testing. The subjects that are not tested are crowded out by those tested (Cambridge Primary Review 2009). Curriculum overload has been considered as a catalyst for and a consequence of revision and reform of the primary school curriculum. Curriculum change has been necessitated by the need to meet a wide range of needs, meeting social and technological changes, raising standards of assessment and making the curriculum more manageable (Pepper 2008, INCA 2003).

The size of the curriculum is considered as the main cause of curriculum overload. There are claims that there are too many subjects or too many content and learning materials are considered too difficult for children. Overlap or duplication of content has been identifies as a major cause of overload. Time has also been considered as inadequate to allow for coverage of the targeted content (Pepper 2008).

Curriculum overload has been as a result of hierarchy in status of some subjects in the curriculum. Timetabling decisions determine the quantity of time allocated to the subject. Core subjects such as language and mathematics are the greatest beneficiaries. In Africa, curriculum overload has been as a result of decolonization efforts. Independent countries in their effort to ensure curriculum relevance, the massive educational expansion, and consideration of the official medium of instruction and

inclusion of minority languages in the curriculum resulted in overload (Ndjabili 2004, NCCA, 2010).

2.2 Causes of Curricula Overload

A number of factors have contributed to curriculum overload in the primary school sector. These include size and volume of the curriculum, lack of time, socioeconomic technological changes; and improvement on subject content in the curriculum. The major challenge related to curriculum overload is the size and volume of the curriculum. The sheer size of the curriculum is a key factor contributing to overload (NCCA 2010). The broadness of the curriculum has created challenges in implementation. Teachers complain that they cannot cover the curricula subjects in the time available (NCCA 2005). Broadness of the curricula is usually caused by government review of the curricula due to pressure from interest groups and the needs of the changing environment. The result has been an increase in the number of subjects without increase in time. Most countries have between 11 – 14 subjects in the primary school curriculum (APPA 2014). The volume of the content in the specified curricula is a factor contributing to overload. The size of the syllabus and the number of books used by teacher in the school is a measure of overload (APPA 2014). The pages covered by the curricula ranges between 100 – 1000 pages in countries like Australia.

The importance placed in subjects has led to overload. The quality of time allocated to the subject and the time of the day, it is taught impact on overload. Core-subject such as English and Mathematics are usually given more time and are taught in the morning (NCCA, 2010). Subjects competing for time and placed in the timetable has created challenges of overload. Teachers have been overwhelmed by both the volume and the content to cover and meet societal expectations. According to NCCA (2005), assessment is an integral part of the curricula. Overload is found in the time and difficulty in assessing individual pupils especially in Africa where the teacher pupil ratio is above 1:50 (Ndjabili 2004). Teachers have challenges in assessing oral language practical work and group work. Teacher face challenges in assessing the skills mustered by the pupils.

Curriculum overload has been caused by the need to comply with legislation and directives from government. Independent African countries had to come up with policies to eliminate racial segregation and the need to decolonize the curriculum. Most countries have also responded to information technological advancement and environmental changes by expanding the curriculum (NCCA 2010)

Teachers cited insufficient time to cover the syllabus and content as a factor of overload. The amount of time allocated to each subject and the amount of time required to teach each subject area has caused overload in the primary school curricula.

Overload has been caused by subject tested vis-a-vis subjects not tested (Cambridge Primary Review 2009). Governments have made various efforts to try and resolve curriculum overload such as integration and reviewing the structure of the curriculum and downsizing the curriculum. Hence, the review of the primary school curriculum has become an ongoing exercise in most countries.

3. Statement of the Problem

The current primary school curriculum has created problems during the implementation process for teachers. To what extent is curriculum overload prevalent in primary schools in Zimbabwe? What are the challenges being faced by teachers related to curriculum overload?

4. Research Question

- Is curriculum overload prevalent in primary schools in Bindura District?
- What challenges are being faced by teachers in relation to curriculum overload?
- How can curriculum overload be overcome to ensure effective teaching?

5. Materials and Methods

The study was qualitative in nature. Qualitative research involves the researcher studying the participant in their natural setting. A multiple case study design was used in this study to study overload in various primary schools. The purposive sampling techniques were used to select the participants to this study. The participants were teachers in primary schools. To generate data interviews and open-ended questionnaires were used. The interpretive case study analysis was used to analyse the data.

6. Findings and Discussions

Participants in this study indicated that they experienced work overload in the schools. Asked to indicate the effects of workload on one's work the teachers indicated that work overload affected the quality of work they produced and large amounts of time was spent in planning and updating record books to meet policy requirements. One teacher had this to say 'I get very tired to be able to prepare adequately for the next lesson e.g preparing media'. Teachers indicated that the goals they set for themselves are not achieved and slow learners will not get individual assistance even if they fail to

master difficult concepts since there is little time for individual attention. They revealed that there was a lot of paperwork at the expense of children's learning. The high teacher pupil ratio of an average of 1:50 students caused work overload. Ultimately, the quality of learning and teaching is negatively impacted on. One participant had this to say *'I am demotivated, I am straining myself so that I meet the policy requirements. And another said' I am strained and made to work overnight and work overtime during the weekends and holiday'*

The major causes of work overload were too many pupils in a class, too many subjects to cover on the curriculum and too many records which increase written work. The strategies to overcome work overload included working overtime daily, use of weekends and public holidays. Other teachers give pupils less written work or reduce the number of exercises and subjects against the ministry specified requirements. Some teachers assigned fast learners to assist in slow learners or gave pupils homework so that they are assisted at home. One participant actually said *'I do not have any strategies, I am struggling with overload'*. Some teachers stay at school after normal working hours to cover up or use break time and lunch time to work or marking early morning.

The teachers suggested several solutions to overcome the problems of work overload. These included reducing the teacher/pupil ratio, employing teachers for extra mural activities and practical subjects as well as and marking. Some teachers do on spot marking during lessons. They also suggested revisiting the curricula for subjects such as reading, music, physical education not on timetable yet they should be taught and there was suggestion of doing away with hot sitting. They felt the need to standardized schemes and scheming computers so that more time is dedicated to lesson preparation. Other teachers suggested reducing amount of written exercises and more use of oral assessment for subjects such as AIDS, Guidance and Counseling while other participants more resources should be availed to teachers to improve their effectiveness.

7. Recommendations

The study recommends the following:

- Review of the number of curriculum subjects offered at primary schools level.
- The teachers are compiling a number of records such that more time is spent on paper work at the expense of actual teaching.
- There is need to reduce the teacher pupil ratio in the context of quality and reduction of work overload.

8. Conclusion

There is prevalence of curriculum overload resulting in teachers failing to cope with the tasks required of them to accomplish and effectively execute their duties.

About the Author

Cuthbert Majoni is the Regional Director of Mashonaland Central Regional Campus of the Zimbabwe Open University since 2004. Cuthbert Majoni graduated with a PhD in Educational Management from the Zimbabwe Open University. He holds a Masters in Educational Administration from the University of Zimbabwe. Has experience of administration in Distance Education. The research interests are in teaching and learning, Administration and leadership as well as open and distance learning. He can be contacted on cmajoni2002@gmail.com

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