



THE PREPAREDNESS OF PRIMARY SCHOOLS TO IMPLEMENT THE GRADE 3 NEW CURRICULUM IN ZIMBABWE: CASE STUDY OF BULAWAYO METROPOLITAN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract:

World over, a national curriculum that is contextually relevant to the evolving needs of a nation is highly regarded as one of the essential drivers of a country's socio-economic development. Every nation therefore strives to ensure that its educational curriculum is in tandem with its developmental needs. The goal behind the commissioning of the Nziramasanga Presidential Commission of Inquiry into Education and Training (CIET) in 1998 was to come up with an educational curriculum that is relevant to the socio-economic challenges obtaining in Zimbabwe. The CIET Report of 1999 recommended a shift from a predominately theoretical curriculum to a hands-on curriculum that emphasizes the development of vocational technical skills. The CIET Report of 1999 got political approval and adoption 13 years later at a ZANU PF party conference in Chinhoyi (The Standard, 13/12/2013). The period 2014 to 2016 saw bureaucrats in the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE) translating the CIET Report: 1999 into policy by designing the new curriculum and preparing the relevant teaching-learning inputs (Curriculum Framework for Primary and Secondary Education: 2015-2022 / CFPSE, 2015-2022). According to the MoPSE, all the relevant preparations were done and schools were in a position to implement the new curriculum with effect from January 2017. On the contrary, some sectors of the Zimbabwean society like, the Progressive Teachers' Union of Zimbabwe (PTUZ) were insinuating that schools were ill prepared for the implementation (News Day Zimbabwe: 09/01/17). The Dadaya High School (SDC) challenged the introduction of the new curriculum in the High Court alleging parents were not consulted and schools were not prepared (The Herald:

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15/02/17). This background and the managerial principle that curriculum implementation should be closely monitored to ensure it remains on course (Ahmadi and Lukman, 2015) gave birth to this study.

Keywords: primary schools, curriculum, Zimbabwe

1. Major Research Question

To what extent are primary schools in Zimbabwe prepared to implement the new curriculum at grade 3 level?

1.1 Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

- To what extent do primary schools in Zimbabwe have the teaching-learning media relevant to the new curriculum at grade 3 level?
- How adequate is the primary school infrastructure for the implementation of the new curriculum at grade 3 level?
- To what extent do grade 3 teachers possess the requisite craft competence needed to implement the new curriculum?

2. The Concept Curriculum

The concept curriculum is a heavily contested one. Ahmadi and Lukman (2015) defined it as the taught or learnt content, courses or subjects. Kelly (2008) conceptualized a curriculum as the planned and guided activities within and outside a school that are intended to achieve some set learning outcomes, goals or objectives. According to Gwarinda (2002:24) the recommended teaching-learning methods, assessment and evaluation procedures are components of a curriculum. In Zimbabwe the planning and distribution of the education service at primary and secondary school, levels are highly centralized. In such a context, the word curriculum can be defined as, an officially planned and selected teaching-learning program for schools spelling out the; intended learning outcomes, learning areas, teaching-learning methods, infrastructural requirements, assessment and evaluation procedures.

2.1 The New Curriculum of Zimbabwe

Bureaucrats in the MoPSE dubbed the 2014 to 2016 period the phase one of the new curriculum. This was the preparatory stage during which the curriculum was designed

(CFPSE: 2015-2022). The broad goal of the curriculum is to develop learners with a Zimbabwean identity, morally upright, with vocational technical skills to sustain their livelihoods whilst contributing effectively to national development (CFPSE, 2015-2022). The curriculum recommends discovery and hands on oriented teaching-learning methods like; field work, demonstration, simulation, role play, group work, drama, debate and research (CFPSE, 2015-2022). The new curriculum saw the introduction of new learning areas or subjects across all developmental levels from ECD through to Advanced level. The learning areas at grade 3 level are as follows; Visual and Performing arts, Physical Education, Mass Displays, Indigenous Languages, Mathematics and Science, Family and Heritage Studies and Information Communication Technology (ICT), English, Heritage and Life Skills Orientation Program (LOP) – Social Studies and Family, Religion and Moral Education (FAREME) and Agriculture (CFPSE. 2015-2022). Continuous assessment is the recommended assessment model. This study was undertaken to establish if grade 3 teachers at primary school level had the requisite media, skills and infrastructure to teach the learning areas listed above.

2.2 Curriculum Implementation

Curriculum implementation is the putting into practice of the prescribed curriculum design (Chikumbi & Makamure, 2005). Okello and Kagoire (1996) defined curriculum implementation as the sum total of the “...*varying activities involved in translating curriculum designs into classroom activities*”. The implementation of the new curriculum in Zimbabwe is herein conceptualized as the putting into practice or actualization of the curriculum teaching-learning methods, learning areas, and assessment procedures within the recommended infrastructure within or outside a school to achieve the intended learning outcomes. Currently the implementation of the new curriculum is in its phase two. The study was carried out to establish if the implementation of the new curriculum was on course at grade3 in Zimbabwe primary schools.

2.3 Factors Affecting Curriculum Implementation

A curriculum as an educational programme may suffer a still birth if the resources that are needed to implement it are not sufficiently supplied (Babalola, 2004) and (Mkpa, 2005). Primary schools that are prepared to implement the new curriculum at grade 3 level should have the teachers with the requisite content knowledge and skills. Prepared primary schools should also have the relevant media, infrastructure, and funds required to successfully implement the new curriculum.

2.4 Human Resources

One of the key variables in the implementation of a curriculum is the human side of the education ministry. These are the technocrats (educational managers and teachers) implementing the new curriculum. The human resources should be provided in sufficient quantities and qualities. They should have the craft competence needed to successfully implement the curriculum. They should have the relevant knowledge and skills in the learning areas (subjects) they teach. According to Chivore (1994) and Hawes (1979), there is a positive co-relationship between a teacher's mastery of the subject content and learners' learning gains. Houston (2005) says a teacher who lacks subject content mastery can do much harm to the learners and the institution's image. Up and above these, curriculum implementers should be able to; correctly interpret the curriculum, use the learner-centred teaching-learning methods and correctly use the assessment and evaluation models advocated for by the curriculum policy documents (Makunja, 2016). They should also be fluent with the teaching-learning technology commensurate to the curriculum. In cases where there are knowledge and skills gaps, implementers should be staff developed to bridge the gaps (Mlahleki, 1995) and (Makunja, 2016). This study was undertaken to establish if grade 3 teachers had the requisite content mastery and the skills required to successfully implement the new curriculum in Zimbabwe.

2.5 The Relevant Non Projected Media

For grade teachers to effectively implement the new curriculum, primary schools need the relevant non projected media. Non projected media are two dimensional aids which tell their implications with words or pictorially or both (Shumbayaonda and Maringe, 2000). These are teaching-learning inputs like: syllabi, textbooks, charts, posters and maps. These by and large constitute the subject matter content that should be taught in schools. Subject content is a central component of what primary schools need to effectively implement a curriculum (Houston, 2005). According to Kapfunde (2012) the production of the subject matter materials should be sufficient and distribution should get to the remotest of stations in the country on time (Kapfunde, 2012). The need for these materials in primary schools is higher now than it was ever before. The curriculum innovation and change made most of the reading materials that were in place obsolete or partially obsolete.

2.6 Teaching-Learning Technology

The new curriculum in Zimbabwe emphasizes the incorporation of modern technology like ICT into the school syllabi. The curriculum also emphasizes vocational technical

subjects. This thrust in the new curriculum saw the need in teaching-learning technology rising sharply. Schools need projected media like computers, video tapes, slides, projectors, tablets, flashes, memory cards etc. (Shumbayaonda and Maringe, 2000). Teaching-learning technology according to Dewey (1979), Rousseau (1974), Taruvinga and Moyo (2000), make learning multi-sensory, participative and interesting to the learners. The availability of such equipment makes the migration from theoretical to hands on education possible. The technology also improves the teaching-learning quality (Taruvinga and Moyo, 2000) and (Olorok, 2006). Primary schools implementing the new curriculum at grade 3 level also need the new assessment and evaluation technology. Grade 3 teachers should have the continuous assessment know how.

2.7 Physical Infrastructure

According to Dewey (1959), Rousseau (1974) and Paulo Freire (1972), knowledge is never passively received but is developed as learners interact with their social and physical environment. The new curriculum at grade 3 level requires schools to provide infrastructure like, classrooms, ICT labs, resource centers, agricultural fields, sporting fields and electricity. The relevant infrastructure should be provided sufficiently (Ivowi, 2004) because it maximizes the quality of the teaching-learning interactions as well learner's gains (Nwagu, 2004). The study sought to establish if schools able to provide the requisite infrastructural requirements for grade 3 teachers.

2.8 Funding

The curriculum implementation process should be sufficiently funded to secure the relevant resources on time (Onyeachu, 2006). Limited funding often waters down the quality of an otherwise good curriculum (Adebanjo, 2008). The (CIET: 1999) qualified its recommendations as demanding because they needed more resources and funding to implement them.

3. Research Methodologies

To answer the research question both quantitative and qualitative data were needed. As a result, the quantitative and the qualitative paradigms were made use of. The case study research design was the major design for the study. The design enabled the researchers to single out a province (Bulawayo Metropolitan) and a grade level (grade 3) a thorough, intense, detailed an in-depth study in their real life contexts (Merriam, 1988). The case study design had the other advantage of being cost effective because it restricted the study to a single geographical area Bulawayo metropolitan (Chikoto et al,

1995). The case study design was augmented by the survey design. The survey design enabled the researchers to work with a sample and generalize the findings to the sparsely distributed population of interest (Chikoto et al, 1995). The other advantage found in the use of a survey design was its compatibility with the use of instruments like observation and questionnaires to collect and generate data (Chikoto et al, 1995).

3.1 Target Population and the Sample

The population of interest was made up of 150 grade 3 teachers in the primary schools spread across the five districts of Bulawayo metropolitan province. Cluster sampling was used to ensure that the five districts that fall under Bulawayo metropolitan were fairly represented in the sample. At district level, primary schools were drawn into the sample using simple random sampling. Having identified the schools, purposive sampling was used to draw the grade 3 teachers into the sample because they were the data-rich sources (Creswell, 1994). A total of 40 grade 3 teachers were drawn into the sample.

3.2 Data Collection Procedure

The permission to conduct the study was secured from the Bulawayo metropolitan provincial education offices. The researcher visited the grade 3 teachers who made it into the sample to gather data.

3.3 Data Analysis

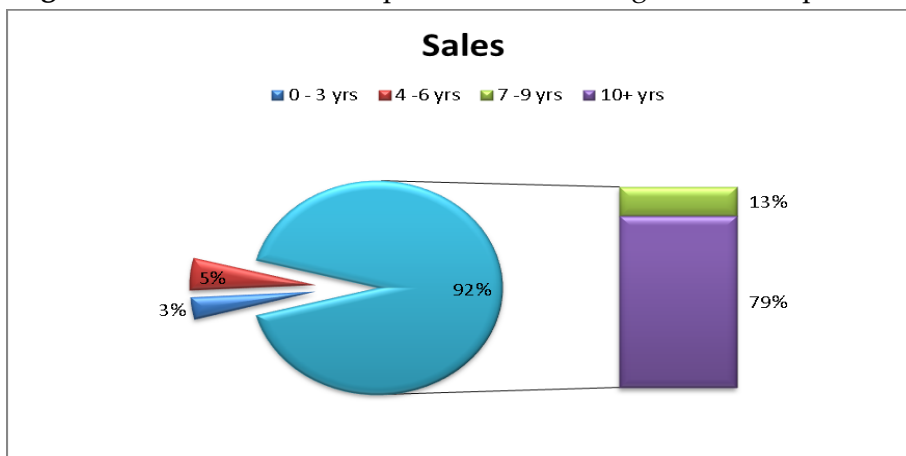
Quantitative data was analyzed in frequency tables and then visualized on graphs or pie charts. Respondents' qualitative responses to the questionnaire open ended questions were coded into categories and results were listed according to the responses given.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

The researchers had a moral and a professional obligation to be ethical even in contexts where respondents were unaware or unconcerned about research ethical norms and standards (Neuman, 2003). The respondents' right to an explanation of aims, procedures, purposes, and consequences of the research was respected by explicitly telling them these aspects of the study. The safety and security of the respondents were ensured by observing their rights to privacy, anonymity, confidentiality, non-participation and participation withdrawal at any time without any penalty to them.

4. Findings and Discussion

Figure 1: Distribution of Respondents According to Work Experience



Years of Experience	Grade 3 teachers	%
0 – 3	2	5%
4 – 6	3	7.5%
7 – 9	8	20%
10+	27	65.5%
Total	40	100

N = 40

92% of the sample had at least 7 years of working experience as teachers. 92% of the grade 3 teachers had good exposure to curriculum implementation and the challenges encountered in the process.

Table 1: Distribution of Grade 3 Teachers According To Subject Content Mastery (Summary)
 (N = 40 per subject)

Acceptable (good to very good)	Unacceptable (weak to not sure)
1. Indigenous Languages 92% 2. Science & Technology 92% 3. English 90% 4. Mathematics 88% 5. Physical Education 75% 6. Family Religion & Moral Education (FAREME) 65%	1. ICT 73% 2. Mass Displays 68% 3. Heritage & LOP Social Studies 65% 4. Visual and Performing Arts 62% 5. Agriculture 55%

Teacher content mastery was acceptable in 7 out of 11 subjects. Teacher content mastery across the curriculum subjects was acceptable 63.6%. Grade 3 teachers' subject content mastery was generally good and acceptable in subjects that were inherited from the

predecessor curriculum. Teacher content mastery was unacceptable in 5 out of 11 subjects which constituted 45.4% of the learning areas. Grade 3 teachers' subject content mastery was generally weak in the new subjects that were not inherited from the predecessor curriculum.

4.1 Qualitative Explanations of the Unacceptable Content Mastery

- Content not covered at school and tertiary levels;
- The staff development teachers received was not equal to their needs;
- Some of the facilitators were not fluent with the demands of the new curriculum;
- There are no textbooks and the internet to research from despite the fact that the new curriculum requires teachers to research a lot;
- The researching is made difficult by the high teacher to pupils ratios.

Table 2: Distribution of Grade 3 Teachers according to Abilities to Implement the New Curriculum (N = 40 (per each ability))

Acceptable (very good and good)	Unacceptable (weak and not sure)
1. Teacher ability to interpret the syllabi 83% 2. Teacher ability to use the continuous assessment model 89%	1. Teacher ability to use child centred methods 62%

Teachers were able to interpret the syllabi and to use the continuous assessment model. Teachers could not make full use of learner centred methods due to resource limitations.

4.3 Qualitative Explanations of the Weak

- Teachers are weakened in their curriculum interpretation of the Indigenous Languages by the fact that the syllabi are written in English. Translations and interpretations may vary from teacher to teacher;
- The scarcity of resources makes the use of child centered methods difficulty thus resorting to the chalk and talk methods of the predecessor curriculum;
- Weak staff development;
- High teacher to pupil ratios;
- Poor working conditions;
- Some content aspects of the new curriculum are out of sync with teachers' Christian values (for example the National Pledge);
- Some aspects of the content are inconsistent with the broad Curriculum Framework objective of developing learners into critical thinkers. History and

Heritage Studies were cited as subjects that are biased towards some political party or can be qualified as propaganda.

4.4 Provision of Textbooks across the Curriculum Subjects at Grade 3

N = 40 (per subject), Textbook to pupil ratio 1: 2

Subjects	Acceptable %	Unacceptable %
English	35%	65%
Indigenous Languages	25%	75%
Mathematics	25%	75%
Science& Technology	24%	76%
Visual and Performing Arts	5%	95%
Physical Education	0%	100%
Mass Displays	5%	95%
Family Religion & Moral Education (FAREME)	5%	95%
ICT	5%	95%
Agriculture	0%	100%
Heritage and LOP Social Studies	5%	95%

The provision of textbooks across all curriculum subjects is unacceptable.

4.5 Provision of Infrastructural Requirements

N = 20 Schools

Infrastructure	Schools in possession	%	Schools without	%
Ict Equip	16	80%	4	20%
Computer Lab	2	10%	18	90%
Lab Electrified (N = 2)	1	50%	1	50%
Standby Generator	1	5%	19	95%
A Garden	20	100%	0	0%
Sporting Fields	20	100%	0	%

100% of the schools had good sporting fields and gardens. 80% of the schools had a good supply of computers. However, 90% of the schools did not have a computer lab. 95% of the schools did not have standby generators, implying ITC lessons were interrupted in cases of load shedding.

5. Funding

Save for the syllabi, government did not provide the essentials needed to implement the new curriculum. Donors are not aiding schools. Teachers argued that schools were actually aiding the government by providing money to staff develop staff members. Schools were given a directive to submit their levy monies to some central bank account called an SSF Account (School Services Account).

5.1 Should The Implementation Continue?

N = 40

	Continue	Discontinue	Total
Frequency	24	16	40
%	60%	40%	100%

Arguments for:

- Predecessor curriculum not in tandem with the social economic needs of the nation;
- The nation should not discontinue the implementation of a relevant curriculum; just because schools do not have sufficient resources;
- Economic recovery will never be soon for the schools to have adequate resources;
- Other nations like Namibia are implementing the *CIET 1999* recommendations.

Arguments against continuation:

- Teachers are not familiar with some of the content and the technicalities of the new curriculum;
- Teachers are most likely to ignore the content they are not familiar with;
- Scarcity of resources;
- The content of the new curriculum is being taught using the methods of the predecessor curriculum;
- If the new curriculum is taught using the bookish methods of the predecessor curriculum, the objectives and goals of the new curriculum will not be achieved.

6. Conclusions

The study came out with the following conclusions:

- Teacher content mastery is relatively good in the learning areas continued from the predecessor curriculum.

- Teacher content mastery is weak in new learning areas that were not a component of the predecessor curriculum.
- The staff development given to teachers as a way of preparing them to effectively teach the new curriculum was not sufficient.
- Textbooks for use by pupils are not enough.
- The physical infrastructure required to effectively teach the new curriculum at grade 3 is generally not enough.
- The funding of the new curriculum implementation is far too inadequate.
- Most pioneer learners of the new curriculum at grade 3 are disadvantaged.

7. Recommendations

The study put forward the following recommendations:

- The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education should promote stakeholder awareness, moral and financial support of the new curriculum implementation.
- The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education in conjunction with teachers' colleges and universities should introduce short courses to bridge teachers' performance gaps.
- Teachers' colleges and universities should realign their curriculum to the demands of the new primary curriculum.

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