

## TEACHER INVOLVEMENT IN CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT: RATIONALE, CHALLENGES, AND STRATEGIES IN ZIMBABWEAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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### Abstract

The study focused on the rationale behind teacher involvement in curriculum development, the challenges that are associated with such a practice as well as the strategies which can make the process smooth and helpful. A case study design was used in Goromonzi District in Mashonaland East Province of Zimbabwe. Cluster, random and purposive sampling were used to select 45 teachers and five school heads from a population of 825 teachers and 35 school heads. The sample included teachers and school heads from different educational contexts: boarding, urban, rural, mine, farm and resettlement schools. NVivo Version 10 was used to analyse data generated from semi-structured questionnaires and in-depth interviews. The research found out that the rationale behind teacher participation in curriculum development lies in their closeness to the learners and the classroom in which the curriculum will be implemented. Other findings in support of teacher participation included development of a practical curriculum, increase of teacher professionalism, motivation. Challenges associated with teacher participation included time factor, lack and scarcity of resources, negative attitude among teachers as well as political interference. The study came out with three categories recommendations; first the government should include teachers from different educational contexts, provide adequate resources and time for curriculum development as well as remunerate the teachers decently for their responsibilities. Secondly, teachers should develop a positive attitude towards research and their work in general. Lastly teacher development institutions are encouraged to prioritise curriculum development in the training of teachers.

**Keywords:** Curriculum development, teacher involvement.

## 1. Introduction

The goal of a successful educational program and thus curriculum development should be to meet the needs of the current attitudes, values, skills, and relationships. The government of Zimbabwe perceives education as a basic right not a privilege for the few and should be designed to meet the needs of every citizen and the nation (Pedzisai, Tsvere & Nkhonde 2014; Munikwa 2011 and Zvobgo, 1986). Because of the ever-changing environment, the curriculum process continually undergoes review, revision, and change. Curriculum development can be challenging, therefore the need to involve the teachers who are directly involved in the implementation of the curriculum innovations, revisions, and changes in different educational contexts.

One of the themes in Zimbabwean education today is the efficacy of implementing the updated curricula introduced in 2015. Even though huge amounts of money have been spent on developing and implementing the new curriculum, several of the reforms have failed to take off effectively in the different schools in Zimbabwe. As supported by Alade (2011), the main reason for the failure is the system through which the curriculum is developed. More often than not there is a large gap between the planned curriculum and the transacted curriculum. This has resulted in tissue rejection of the innovations (Chinyani, 2013). Many critics blame lack of teacher involvement for the challenges being faced. It is not a

secret that over the past four decades educators are concerned with the over-arching question; why are a majority of the well-intended curriculum innovations end up with a flop? The following scholars respond to the question.

To Mavhunga and Phiri (2014) one major reason for the failure of educational innovations is the marginalization or limited involvement of the teacher in curriculum development, particularly at the planning stage. This observation is supported by Shane (2018) who points out that; many people, institutions organisations, and issues will contribute to the curriculum change demanded by changes in the world. Only the teacher can effect this change. Whatever the nature of political power and its impact on educational direction there is a 'constant' in the scene; the role of the teacher in curriculum change/ development.

Successful implementation of curriculum requires teachers to possess the skills and knowledge to implement the curriculum with commitment (Wiles & Bondi, 2014). Adopting a new curriculum requires teachers to feel confident in materials they use in order to ensure accurate implementation (American Institute for Research, 2016; Early, Roggi & Deci, 2014). Identification of reasons that support or prevent teachers' effective implementation of a new curriculum may provide direction for helping the ministry in administering curriculum changes. According to Lochner, Conrad, and Graham (2015), teachers are central to whether a curriculum is delivered consistently, effectively, and with efficacy to enable the support of student progress and growth.

Chinyani (2013) condemns centrally developed curriculum. She questions the effectiveness of a curriculum planned centrally in providing worthwhile knowledge. Decisions are made in some distant center elsewhere and cascaded down to the user system at the periphery. She indicates that there are chances that the users at the furthest end get a watered-down version of the originally documented curriculum. These arguments confirm Hoyle (1978)'s argument that more often than not there is a large gap between the planned curriculum and the implemented curriculum resulting failure to achieve the intended goals.

In support of teacher involvement in curriculum development, Amino, Bosire & Role (2014) found out that most countries have a centralized education system; and use a center-periphery approach in curriculum change implementation. This approach cuts off teachers and community members who are main sources of curriculum development. Citing Monter-sieburth (1992) they write "curriculum is viewed as too important to be left in the hands of teachers. By and large, teachers are rarely involved in the planning course, or are their views on why or how to change the curriculum genuinely sought after". They add that curricular changes are unlikely to succeed unless they are social and academic activities in which teachers and parents are encouraged to participate.

Vendayar (2017) confirms the importance of teacher participation, he argues that changing the ways in which teachers teach or students learn and changing the curriculum without also changing the teachers, classroom and schools might not achieve the desired results. He calls for thorough teacher preparation for curriculum change before the changes are instituted. Ramparsad (2001),

supports Vendayar (2017) on the issue of teacher training. He emphasises that teachers should be trained on policy formulation and be encouraged to participate in policy development. Their suggestions have to be taken into consideration.

Worthy research has been carried on this issue of teacher involvement with reference to previous curriculum innovations. Much of it has pointed on over-centralisation of the curriculum development process and lack of teacher involvement. These have failed to give a possible solution to the problem as the teachers are currently complaining of lack of involvement in the 2015-2023 updated curricula. The current study sought to focus on the teachers who are in the classrooms. The study was, therefore, designed to examine teachers' perception on the rationale behind their involvement in curriculum development, the challenge associated with such involvement, and the best strategies for their involvement.

### Statement of the problem

Many innovations have been introduced and failed in Zimbabwe, many critics have pointed at minimal/ lack of teacher participation as the major cause, and little change has been noticed in the past four decades. This research, therefore, seeks to find out the rationale, the challenges, and strategies for teacher involvement.

### Objectives

The research is guided by the following three objectives;

1. To establish the basis for teacher involvement in curriculum development.
2. To identify the challenges associated with teacher involvement in curriculum development
3. Suggest strategies for teacher involvement in curriculum development.

## 2. Review of related literature

The review of related literature is divided into four sections: (1) the concept of curriculum development, (2) the rationale behind teacher participation in curriculum development, (3) the challenges associated with teacher participation, and (4) the strategies which can be used to ensure meaningful participation of teachers in curriculum development.

### a. The concept of curriculum development

Curriculum is seen as ". . . the officially selected body of knowledge which government, through the Ministry of Education or anybody offering education wants students to learn" Urebvu, (1985: 3). Messick and Reynolds cited in Aydin, Unver, Alan and Saglan (2017)'s defines curriculum as "the planned school program that includes a set of goals for the students". This is in line with Kerr (in Shiundu & Omulando, 1992)'s definition which regards curriculum as all the learning planned and guided by the schools, whether it is carried out in groups or individually, inside or outside the schools. These definitions clearly show that the curriculum shapes the attitudes, skills, perceptions, and values of the learners. These in turn shape the nation's economy, culture, politics, and life in general. It is therefore crucial for every nation to take curriculum development seriously to ensure a better today and future.

On the other hand, Carl (2005) views curriculum development as “. . . an umbrella and continuous process in which structure and systematic planning methods figure strongly from design to evaluation.” Carl’s definition concurs with Marsh (1992) who defines the curriculum as a conscious and deliberate effort to improve the effectiveness and or efficiency of human systems through the utilization of valid knowledge. The two definitions reflect that curriculum development has to be well planned if it has to be successfully implemented. Successful planning requires involvement of all the stakeholders especially the teacher who is at the centre of curriculum implementation.

According to Amino et al (2014); Shiundu & Omulando, (1992); Otunga, Odero & Barasa (2011) curriculum development can occur at three levels namely minor, medium and major. Minor changes may comprise of arrangement of the subject content or learning activities or just the addition of one topic or method to the instructional program. Medium changes may include an innovation like integration of subjects, a new subject or a new approach to the existing subject. Major changes will affect many aspects of the curriculum, for example, content, methods approaches, materials; subtracting or adding to what already exists. There could also be changes in the conceptual design and organization calling for new planning. For the purpose of this research, curriculum development is a generic term that subsumes a whole family of concepts such as planning, innovation, change, and adoption.

Chinyani (2014) views teacher involvement as encouraging teachers, to take active participation in curriculum development. This echoes what Marsh (1990) refers to as ‘teacher initiated grassroots phenomenon’ which is in line with what Sternhouse (1976) calls ‘the teacher as a researcher.

### **a. The rationale of teacher involvement in curriculum development**

Without doubt the teacher is the key person in the implementation of any curriculum reform. With their knowledge in pedagogy and subject areas, the teachers are central to any curriculum development. Teachers’ opinions and suggestions have to be sought for and incorporated into the curriculum for development. Alsubaie (2016) justifies the teachers’ involvement in curriculum development saying, if another party has already developed the curriculum, the teachers have to make an effort to know and comprehend it before implementation. It is important that curriculum developers consider the teachers as part of the environment that affects the success of any curriculum reform (Carl, 2009).

Mcbeath (2018) stresses strong teacher participation in curriculum development since smooth and successful curriculum reform is enormously difficult and time-consuming. She further points out that because of the complexity of educational reforms it cannot be accomplished without potential implementers becoming personally involved and embracing the change on their own terms, according to their own perception of reality. Whilst many systems still opt for centrally developed curricula, there is need to find conciliations which enable end users of the curriculum to work hand in hand with the central initiators and bring in their own ideas into the

curriculum. Mcbeath (2018); Fullan, (1991); Ruddock, (1991) agree that teacher ownership can exist side by side with central initiative and direction and ownership will be achieved jointly by the both the teachers and the central administrators.

Alsubaie, (2016) states that the teacher has a lot of responsibilities and roles to play in the curriculum development process. Whilst their major task is to implement the curriculum, they need to scheme, plan and make the curriculum relevant to their individual environments. To effectively implement the curriculum innovations, teachers have to be involved in the decision-making process. Carl (2009) further argues that because of their role as the implementers the teachers have the responsibility to ensure that the curriculum reforms succeed. Because of this reason he strongly supports teacher empowerment through involvement in curriculum development. Teacher involvement in turn leads to success of the curriculum reform. Handler (2001) also supports the need for teacher involvement in curriculum development. Their involvement enables proper and effective alignment of curriculum content with the needs of the students in the classroom.

Chinyani (2013) argues that centrally developed curriculum deskills the teacher. To that end, teacher participation would enable the teacher to implement a curriculum whose rationale and philosophical underpinnings they understand. If involved in the development process the teachers will develop a sense of ownership and would be more willing to see the curriculum innovations succeed. Encouraging teachers to take part in curriculum development would allow the reforms to enhance the quality and sustainability of educational reforms. Fastier (2016) echoes that teacher involvement in curriculum reforms provides them with freedom to design coherent school-based reforms responsive to the needs of the students. Involvement of teachers also enables them to direct and accelerate changes beneficial to the learners (Martin 2012; Fastier, 2013).

Curriculum development in Zimbabwe is generally the responsibility of Curriculum Development Unit (CDU), a department in the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education head office. Young (1988) recommends that for CDU to function effectively it has to engage different stakeholders with a variety of expertise. Teachers, on their part, have ‘practical knowledge based on their daily work with students. This experience is important in curriculum development because the teachers can assess whether the ideas being developed will work in the classroom. Therefore, if curriculum reforms and content development is made in collaboration with the teachers’ other teachers will be encouraged to use the new materials.

In addition, Voogt, Peters, and Handelzalts (2016) found out that active involvement of teachers in collaborative curriculum design can improve the harmonisation of the formal and enacted curriculum, enhance teacher ownership of the curriculum, and promote teachers’ curricular collaboration. Such active participation can only happen when the teachers feel the need for change and are convinced that their effort will bring about the change and they are really able to implement the changes.

Voogt al (2016) concurs with Taylor (2004) and Young (1998) that teacher involvement in curriculum development enables teachers to grow professionally. Research on teacher involvement in decision-making has shown that participation results in greater job satisfaction, work achievement, and personal integration into the organization. Teachers involved in curriculum development have reported increased self-confidence and morale as well as new ideas and the rethinking of their own ideas.

The reviewed literature indicates that the top-down strategies can never succeed because it reduces the teachers to passive recipients and rational adopters of curriculum innovations. That is why it is important to include teachers in matters concerning curriculum development. It is important to note that the teacher carries out instructions by presenting lessons, assuming a facilitator role, maintaining an interactive and instructive physical environment, using feedback constructively, counseling on an individual and group basis, and modeling behavior and attitude- almost simultaneously. Because of all this, it is safe to maintain that teachers are the main actors in curriculum development.

The researcher cannot lose sight of the fact that even if teacher participation is necessary, there are, on the other side, disturbing problems that can be encountered in the process.

#### **b. Challenges associated with teacher involvement in curriculum development**

As shown in the previous section there are convincing arguments in favour of teacher participation in curriculum development, but various factors work together to keep teachers' attention focused on their classroom. Young (1988) as supported by Alsubaie (2010) states that teachers get primary satisfaction from their teaching duties, stressing instructional outcomes and relationships with their students. He states that 'teachers prefer classroom tasks over organization tasks and classroom claims over organizational initiations.'

Chinyani (2013) and Bishop (1986) agree that the teaching profession in Africa recruits people of mediocre ability and research on curriculum change has shown that teachers are conservative. **Teacher conservatism** also works against their participation in curriculum development (Alsubaie, 2010). He identifies many factors associated with teacher conservatism, such as the uncertainty underlying their work. The teacher's routine becomes their shelter and comfort zone. Clearly, if teachers have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo, they will have little incentive to participate in curriculum development which is synonymous with change and innovation. Chinyani (2013) concurs with Alsubaie that teachers view change as threatening as it tends to deskill them and force them to adopt new ways of going about their routine work. This was confirmed by teachers' sentiments that curriculum development is not their responsibility. They are strategically placed in the classroom to teach.

Taylor (2004) points out **costs** of involving teachers in curriculum development as one of the major challenges. Generally, curriculum development has been criticized for being more expensive than initially estimated. Costs include setting up the process and establishing key systems and structures, coordination of the

participating stakeholder/ teachers and bringing the people together, direct financial and logistical needs, and maintenance of the costs.

Teacher remuneration is one of the major challenges to teacher participation in curriculum development. As cited by Chinyani (2013), teacher remuneration in Zimbabwe is depressing. In her research on feasibility of school-based curriculum development, the teachers interviewed expressed sentiments that they would rather be involved in income-generating projects to supplement their meagre income than get involved in curriculum development. The teachers are suffering from carrier burn out hence they are not motivated enough to participate in curriculum development which they perceive as an extra duty. Confirming the findings, Bowers (in Abudu, 2015) noted that teachers in Canada are reluctant to participate in curriculum development processes because there is no remuneration and incentives.

Nyoni and Nyoni (2011) cite that no matter how much teacher in Zimbabwe wish to participate in curriculum development their working conditions weigh against it. The secondary teachers have to struggle with heavy teaching loads averaging 36 periods per week with classes averaging 50 students. Besides lesson delivery, they require a lot of time for lesson preparation, research, and marking of the huge piles of students' books. In addition to the classroom activities, the teachers must also train students in sports, clubs, and any other extra curricula activities. Bezzena in (Abudu, 2015) found out that time constrain is one of the major barriers: huge responsibilities that the teacher has to execute compete with teacher participation in curriculum.

Ramparsad (2001); Dziwa, Chindedza & Mpondi (2013) and Ulla and Winitkun (2018) cite lack of professional, experiential, and academic preparedness of the teachers. In his research on South African curriculum review, Ramparsad (2001) cites that because teachers have not been involved in curriculum development in the past their enthusiasm and quality of input did not have an impact on the curriculum development process. Confirming the above point, Chinyani,(2013) stated that the teachers' capacity to handle curriculum development is a real challenge. Teacher training in Zimbabwe focuses on syllabus interpretation and lesson delivery rather than construction of the curriculum and decision making. If they are getting involved in it, they would need reorientation.

It is further maintained that it is important to consider the nature of teachers and their capacity to handle curriculum development. Most countries, Zimbabwe in particular have a mixture of teacher academic and professional qualifications, Gatawa (in Chinyani 2013) describes it as 'a mixed-bag of qualifications. It is further pointed out that education colleges in Zimbabwe have not been putting any emphasis in curriculum development. Concentration has been placed on the subject areas, professional studies, teaching practice, and theory of education. To this end, teachers do not perceive curriculum development as their prime responsibility. The different qualifications can also show the difference in perception and ability to take part in curriculum development issues.

Alsubaie (2010) and Ramparsad (20011) cite lack of guiding policy as one of the challenges to teacher participation in



curriculum development. The role that teachers are supposed to play in curriculum development is not well defined and very difficult for the teachers, so they face many challenges in their involvement on curriculum development.

In terms of motivation for participation in curriculum development, Bowers (1991) postulates that teachers need to know that their involvement in curriculum development gives them an opportunity to improve the existing curriculum and increase their effectiveness as teachers. He maintains that teachers will be motivated by the feeling that their contributions and suggestions are helpful and satisfaction from participating in decision-making that affects one's own work. Further teachers need to be convinced that their involvement will make a significant and recognized contribution to the educational development of children. More so teachers involved in curriculum development must help in identifying their needs and coin solutions to address these felt needs (Maphosa & Mutopa, 2012).

Time factor also act against teacher participation. Long-term planning is needed for curriculum development. As a result, an immediate change is impossible. Enough time is needed for this long-term planning. Gatawa (1990) further retains that long-range curriculum planning habitually impedes change because circumstances are ever-changing. It is further pointed out that factors that make change necessary are not constant over a long time because they are dynamic.

In some cases, as posited by Chinyani (2013) even if the teachers are willing to take part in curriculum development the nature of their work is arduous. By the end of the long day, it is highly unlikely that they will have time and energy to spare for the business of curriculum development, an enterprise that they have always known is handled by experts elsewhere. On a different note, one can view this as a scapegoat when people do not want to change, they will always indicate that they really want to work on the curriculum change committees but they do not have enough time (Alsubaie, 2016).

It is important to note that there seems to be numerous problems, which when not taken care of, can place participation of teachers in curriculum development at a disadvantage. It appears that teachers should shift from their way of seeing and addressing curriculum issues as a duty for external forces so that they can be ready for change.

### **c. Strategies to enhance teacher participation in curriculum development.**

As indicated by Carl (2005) teacher participation and involvement in curriculum development is essential and necessary principle in the whole process of teacher empowerment. Many scholars have therefore discussed different strategies to ensure its effectiveness.

Since teachers have to take part in curriculum development they need to be provided with adequate skills that enable them to effectively contribute to the curriculum development process (Alsubaie 2016). Teachers need in-service training and workshops to prepare them for curriculum development Carl (2005) and

Chinyani (2013). On the other hand, teacher development institutions must emphasize the curriculum development studies.

Chinyani (2013) also suggests reduction of teacher workload so that they have time to familiarize themselves with curriculum development. This can be done through reduction of teaching periods and teacher-pupil ratio. This will reduce the time spent on marking and lesson preparation. Employment of extra staff to handle extra curricula activities such as sports and clubs can also create time for the teachers.

Teacher participation needs a lot of support (Voogt et.al, 2016) according to them specific tasks have to be allocated to the teachers and the team coaches need to regulate teams' interactions and its alignment to the goals of the curricula reform. Collegiality has to be created between the teachers themselves and the curriculum administrators from the central offices.

Apart from professional support, more resources must be provided for the process (Ulla & Winitkun, 2018; Chinyani, 2013). These can come in form of school libraries. Where school libraries are not available then teacher resource centers have to be set up at cluster, district, provincial or national levels. Those centers should be manned by specialist curriculum planners who will guide the teachers in their curriculum development roles.

There is also need to address teacher attitude towards their work (Chinyani, 2013). This can be done through provision of decent remuneration and acknowledgment of teacher qualifications. If teachers are paid according to their qualifications they will develop zeal to learn and upgrade themselves. Attitude towards curriculum development can also be changed through provision of monetary incentives for the work done.

The literature here looked at the rationale, challenges, and strategies for teacher involvement in curriculum development. This research aims at highlighting the perception of the secondary school teacher in Zimbabwe on the issue of curriculum development. This is because teachers are the principle role-players in education.

## **3. Methodology**

To navigate this study the research employed the qualitative case study research design. This design was chosen as it allowed in-depth study of the teachers' perception on their role in curriculum development and the barriers inhibiting effective implementation of the curriculum as well as reconstruct the 'what is' on the issue of teacher participation in curriculum development (Murphy, 2014). This in turn helped in describing and giving answers to the teaching experiences of the respondents.

### **Participants**

A total of 50 participants (45 teachers and 5 school heads) took part in the study. Using cluster sampling, the schools in Goromonzi District of Mashonaland East Province of Zimbabwe were divided into five categories: boarding, rural, urban, mining, farm, and resettlement schools. One school was taken from each cluster giving a total of five participating schools. This allowed the research to generate data from different educational contexts in

Zimbabwe. Using random sampling nine certified teachers were picked from each school. Convenience sampling was used for the selection of school heads. By virtue of being head at a selected school the head automatically became a participant. This was done to allow easy access into the schools and teachers.

#### Data collection

Semi-structured questionnaires were used to generate data from all respondents then the 5 heads were interviewed. Both the questionnaire and the interview guide had two sections: section A was designed to provide demographic data of the participants and section two where the participants expressed the challenges they have been facing in implementing the updated curriculum as well as possible solutions to the challenges. The questionnaire and interview protocol were validated through pilot studying the instruments with five teachers and one school head from the research sample. Data collection only commenced after ethical considerations were fulfilled: the researcher sought permission from the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education to enter the schools; participants took part by consent; confidentiality was assured and the heads were only recorded after verbal consent was sought. The administration and retrieval of questionnaires was done by the researcher within a space of 21 days. After retrieval of questionnaires, the interviews were then carried out. Data from the in-depth interviews was captured using a digital recorder and notes. The data generated were analysed using NVivo version 10.

## 4. Findings

The data analysis by the researcher and the independent decoder resulted in three categories. The three categories were rationale for teacher participation, challenges in involving teachers, and the strategies for effective teacher participation.

### a. Rationale behind teacher participation in curriculum development

Data discussed in this section were derived from both the questionnaires and the interviews. Participants responded to questions: **1. Why is curriculum development important to the professional development of the teacher?** **2. What is the significance of involving teachers in curriculum development?** Teachers showed awareness on the importance of participating in curriculum development and raised the following issues.

Teachers cited that any change in the curriculum affects their day-to-day work hence the need to be involved in the development process. One of the seasoned teachers from the boarding school stated, *"If we understand curriculum development then we understand our task in the schools and the classroom."* Another teacher from the urban school concurred that teacher participation in curriculum development is essential as it enables the teacher to understand the curriculum changes better, paving way for effective implementation. He confirmed, *"Curriculum development enables us to have a holistic approach to teaching. It would enable us understand the changes and implement them."* He went further and highlighted that participation in curriculum development is also crucial to teachers because *"once we participate in the process we will have a sense of ownership which is relevant to the successful implementation of the curriculum."* Another teacher

from the mine school supported the point saying, *"Involvement in curriculum development enables me to interpret the syllabi correctly. It also equips me with relevant teaching skills as each curriculum needs a different approach."*

Teachers also cited that they are closer to the situation in the schools so their involvement allows the curriculum innovations to be achievable in the different educational contexts in the schools. One participant from the rural schools responded saying, *"It enables us to correct some of the challenges noted when implementing the curriculum in the different schools that we teach and it also enables one to adapt the new requirements of the curriculum to our individual classes."*

The teachers cited that centrally made curriculum has a tendency of not carrying wide range needs assessment hence they fail to cater for the marginalized schools. Involvement of teachers from a cross-section of schools will enable them to come up with a curriculum which is practical in all schools. One rural school teacher said, *"The current curriculum has a bias towards digitalisation, it emphasises the use of computers but we do not have the electricity, infrastructure, and let alone the computers to implement the curriculum. If we were involved in the decision-making stage we would probably bring awareness to the situation in the schools."* The issue of digitalisation was not unique to the rural school only even the seemingly well-equipped boarding school cited inadequate computers as a challenge to implementation. If teachers are involved in the development of the curriculum there is much guarantee of a successful curriculum.

The teachers also maintained that when they find out that the central government/ head office respect their ideas in curriculum development and when they imbibe the notion that they can make a change, it boosts their job satisfaction. Their morale is boosted by knowing that they are part of the decisions that affect their daily lives in the classroom. This satisfaction arouses an excitement and empowerment and this motivates them to work beyond remuneration and contribute to the empowerment and success of the education system as a whole.

Responses from participants also indicated that once teachers are involved actively in curriculum development their understanding is enhanced. One teacher from the boarding school summarised the importance of teacher participation, *"Enhanced understanding will enable us to share ideas where need arises; we will also be able to make informed decisions where adjustments are needed to suit our unique environments and learner level of cognitive development."* Seminars, workshops can easily be organised at local level to assist each other on the best ways to ensure successful implementation.

Lastly, the teachers indicated that they represent the ministry in the schools, they are in constant communication with parents and learners hence they are aware of the needs of the society and the end users of the curriculum. When teachers are meaningfully involved in curriculum development they will develop a sense of ownership and assist in selling the curriculum reforms to the learners and the different communities in which they teach. This will in turn ensure curriculum success.

**b. Challenges faced in teacher participation in curriculum development**

Whilst literature has overwhelmed support for teacher involvement, collected data confirmed Ndawi & Maravanyika (2011)'s assertion that there are always challenges regardless of the system used in instituting curriculum change. These challenges include; lack of knowledge, negative attitude, lack of resources, and being forced to agree with the central government. The challenges mainly come as a result of lack of preparedness of the teachers for their role as curriculum developers. Participants were also made to respond to the question: **What are the challenges that you face when involved in curriculum development?** Various concerns were raised.

Responses from teachers showed that they have a negative attitude towards curriculum development. They have lost confidence in the government because their contributions in the past have never been taken seriously, the mine school head lamented, *"many researchers have asked us about our concerns pertaining curriculum development, nothing has changed so let them decide what they want."* The participants also showed scepticism on whether their contributions through the nationwide administered needs analysis questionnaire were ever read. Because of this suspicion, even those who attended the different workshops did that because duty called them to do so and failure to attend would be considered as insubordination.

Work load was a major concern such that the teachers felt curriculum development would be extra work. One teacher complained, *"It is time-consuming for the overloaded teacher. When you attend the workshop your classes will be waiting for you or you leave written work which needs to be marked after the workshops."* Another one had this to say, *"Time factor, after scheming, teaching and marking curriculum development is an unnecessary burden."*

Poor remuneration coupled with the economic challenges in the country worsens the teachers' attitude towards curriculum development. One of the teachers bluntly responded, *"The major challenge is career burnout, we are demotivated by our salaries and not interested in the new curriculum; we are the worst paid group of workers and this is the worst time for curriculum change."* Whilst this could be one of the factors affecting the teacher's motivation to participate in curriculum development, this factor on its own might not be a challenge directly linked to curriculum development because even during the times when teachers were paid relatively well, their participation was evidently minimal.

Fourthly, it was found out that teachers are affected by lack of knowledge for them to fully participate in CD. This could be lack of proper training or exposure after training. A teacher from the boarding school confessed her lack of training as well as experience on how to develop a curriculum, *"when I studied curriculum at college the main focus was on how to teach my subject area so most of the things discussed during the workshops I attended were new."* In such a case involvement of teachers will be a waste of resources as their presence will only save as a formality.

The fifth challenge was lack or scarcity of resources. As highlighted by Gatawa (1999), Ndawi, and Maravanyika (2011); Dziwa, Chindedza, and Mpondi (2013) curriculum innovation in Zimbabwean secondary schools or elsewhere has faced problems due to cost implications. Curriculum innovations tend to be more expensive than the programs they replace because of the cost of research, development of material, and re-education of personnel. Teachers highlighted that even if they participated and understood the thrust of the curriculum different schools had different resource bases hence implementation remained unstandardised as some schools resigned because of scarcity of resources, the head from the farm school confessed that, *"we do not have basic texts for the implementation of the new curriculum. This resulted in partial implementation as we focused on the subjects which the teachers are familiar with"*

The last challenge raised by the respondents was coercion to agree with government. Responses in questionnaires from the teachers reflected that they were reluctant to participate because the government involves them to endorse what it has already decided on. The other fear comes from the close relationship between government and politics, teachers end up agreeing with the government of the day to avoid victimization. Because of this close relationship between policy issues and politics the teachers were implementing the curriculum out of fear. One of the teachers narrated his experience at one of the workshops at district level, *"the ministry has a tendency of using force even when it is not necessary. Teachers cannot ask questions because they are afraid of victimisation. At one workshop at district level teachers were trying to question the logic behind some of the reforms, to cut the story short the District Schools Inspector described the new curriculum is a bullet which has already left the trigger, it was either you comply or you would get shot."*

As revealed by the responses the teachers did not find the curriculum development environment conducive for open discussions and free contributions hence they found themselves endorsing the government-made curriculum framework. These findings confirm that in as much as teacher participation is crucial in curriculum development, the teachers were not academically equipped for the process. It can therefore be concluded that teacher participation needs to be thoroughly prepared for.

**c. Strategies which can improve teacher participation in curriculum development**

The participants were asked to respond to the question: **What can be done to improve teacher participation in curriculum development?** Their responses were summarised into seven strategies which are discussed here.

The first suggestion was provision of adequate resources. The participants suggested that there is need for the central curriculum planners to provide resources to appraise the teachers on the changes and the role they should take. Teachers proposed provision of resource centers and printed literature to keep them abreast with the changes. The school head from the farm school lamented scarcity of resources at her school, *"Ministry should help the marginalised schools like ours with resources to allow proper*

*institutionalisation of the new curriculum. These resources include textbooks, computers and even the teachers to teach the new learning areas being introduced."*

The second suggestion was to incentivise teachers to participate. Teachers noted that according to the ministerial policy, curriculum development is not part of the key result areas of the teacher therefore they need to be motivated and convinced that their involvement will be significant to the educational development of children. One of the teachers went further and highlighted that *"Monetary incentives are also very important because we are poorly remunerated. If given incentives we will willingly and actively participate in curriculum development."*

The third strategy was allocation of adequate time for curriculum development. Teachers agreed that teacher participation in the 2014 to 2023 curriculum development was retarded by the limited time set for curriculum development. They further suggested that curriculum development need long-term planning. As a result, an immediate change is impossible. Enough time is needed for this long-term planning. Teachers need time to comprehend the curriculum needs for them to participate effectively. Two teachers indicated that *"Curriculum implementation caught us unprepared we were still trying to internalise the changes yet we had to prepare learners for examinations."* The school head from the urban school also complained about the rushed curriculum reforms, *"Full participation was hindered by limited time given for the reform. We were not given time to understand the reforms and source the required resources for our teachers and schools."* The teachers' responses show that whilst teachers can be blamed for negative attitude towards change it is important to note that if curriculum development is rushed teacher participation will be reduced. This, as revealed by reviewed literature can lead to curriculum failure.

The fourth strategy pointed at the method of selecting teachers who represent others in curriculum development. Teachers understood that they could not all participate in curriculum development but the selection process had to consider the teachers qualification in curriculum studies and their interest in the whole process. On teacher from the boarding school who had just acquired a Masters' degree in Curriculum Studies lamented not being picked at any stage of the curriculum development process, *"I have never participated in curriculum development. This time I thought I would be selected but it failed."* Another teacher from the mine school suggested that *"CDU must keep a database of those who are curriculum specialists among the teachers; they are knowledgeable enough to represent us."*

The fifth suggestion pointed at the way teachers are prepared for curriculum development. The teachers felt that they need to be taught curriculum studies during their teacher training programs undergo in-service training before engagement in curriculum development. One teacher from the rural school admitted, *"... when we learnt curriculum studies at college the main focus was on our subject areas."* This was confirmed by another teacher from the mine school confessed ignorance and need for proper training in curriculum development, *"I was part of pilot implementation but*

*I did not contribute much because most of the things were new to me, they should train us before engagement."* For teachers, understanding curriculum development is the first step to successful implementation. Teachers need to be engaged throughout the curriculum development process since they have first-hand information on what the schools afford, what the learners need and can handle.

The sixth contribution focused on needs analysis. The teachers emphasised that curriculum development is a continuous process; the continuity of the process comes from the arising needs. The teachers and heads emphasised that curriculum success comes from proper needs assessment. Because of their position the teachers are closer to the parents and learners hence they are the best stakeholders to engage in needs assessment. Engagement of teachers from different educational contexts will enable the central curriculum developers to come up with a curriculum which is applicable to all schools in the country.

The last contribution emphasised on the need for curriculum development to return to the hands of professionals rather than the politicians. The teachers and heads of schools suggested that curriculum Development Unit should avoid politicising the curriculum development process. In as much as politics is a determinant of curriculum development politicians must not take center stage in curriculum development because they lack pedagogical knowledge in education. On the other end, teachers must shift from their way of seeing and addressing curriculum as a duty of external forces so that they can make a difference when given a chance to participate in the process.

## 5. Recommendations

The research proposed four recommendations to Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE):

- (1) Policymakers should make conscious effort to equalise participation in all curriculum decision-making by teachers from different educational contexts. This will allow them to come up with a curriculum that meets the needs of the local society as well as prepare learners for the global village in which they will operate.
- (2) MoPSE should provide ample time for curriculum development. Long-term planning is needed for curriculum development. This enables them to involve as many teachers as possible as well as enable the teachers and schools to prepare adequately for implementation of the updated curriculum. It needs not be emphasised that change must be systematic and encompassing to all stakeholders.
- (3) There is need to look seriously into the requirements of the secondary school updated curriculum and provide funds for infrastructure, material, and human resources. There might be challenges of capacity to provide the resources, this can, however, be solved through liberalising involvement of private players in the funding of education at both national and school level. In cases, indicated in this research, where schools do not have



libraries then teacher resource centers at cluster, district, provincial or even national level should be set up.

- (4) Considering the huge responsibility the teachers have as curriculum implementers, the government must consider their remuneration with due seriousness. Non-monetary incentives are also very important to supplement the teachers' meagre salaries. If given incentives the teachers will commit their time and energy to conceptualization and proper implementation of the curriculum.

In addition to the recommendations given to MoPSE two recommendations are proposed to the teachers:

- (1) Teachers must work on their attitude towards work. Change is not always bad and it is through embracing it that they get to understand it.
- (2) Whilst the issues of low remuneration are being worked on, there is need for teachers to develop the zeal for research and embrace the concept of 'teacher as a researcher' propounded by Sternhouse (1975).

Lastly, the study also had a recommendation to teacher development institutions. One recommendation is put forward for teacher development institutions. Research findings revealed that teachers were not academically prepared for their task as curriculum developers. Teacher development institutions have focused on subject content and lesson delivery which limits the teacher to classroom practice only. The study, therefore, recommends that the institutions take curriculum development as a compulsory component in teacher development. The institutions must aim at producing a holistic teacher who can meaningfully participate in curriculum development. This move has already been embarked on by other teacher training institutions.

## Conclusion

The study concludes that even though teacher participation in curriculum development in Zimbabwe is so crucial, it is shrouded with a lot of challenges. There is need for thorough planning on the part of the government and attitudinal change on the teacher's part.

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