

“Underprepared” Principals Leading Curriculum Reform in Lesotho

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Abstract

This qualitative study explored the views of six Lesotho primary school principals regarding the in-service training they received to implement the integrated curriculum. Purposive sampling was used to select participants who met the inclusion criteria in Maseru, the capital city of Lesotho. A document analysis of the integrated curriculum was conducted, and open-ended interviews were conducted with participants and audio-taped, coded, and analysed using the thematic interpretive approach. Findings showed that the participants were partially trained to lead the implementation of the new integrated curriculum. The participants reported that their training was shorter compared to that of the teachers. Furthermore, teachers were trained before the principals, compelling the principals to rely on the teachers for implementation information and strategies. The unique finding emerging from the study is that principals in Lesotho had to learn the dynamics of implementing the new integrated curriculum from the teachers they were supervising. We

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conclude that having insufficient knowledge about curriculum reform disempowers school principals and holds potential threats to the implementation of new curriculum initiatives, not only in Lesotho but in many other centralised education systems. We recommend that policy reformers and curriculum supervisory authorities should adopt a renewed approach to empower principals with appropriate curriculum reform leadership skills.

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Introduction

Globally, many countries implement curriculum reforms as a way of reinvigorating their education systems. Concepts such as learner-centredness and integration are regarded as policy imperatives that necessitate reforms (McPhail, 2017). However, the management of change by the stakeholders does not always yield the envisaged changes at the school level (Schechter, Shaked, Ganon-Shilon & Goldratt, 2018). Some scholars have referred to this phenomenon as the "policy-practice gap" (Akkari, Lauwerier & Shafei, 2012; Apple, 2018). In other words, policy aims to influence practice, but in most cases, practice has an even greater effect on policy (Cohen, 1990). Or, in the worst-case scenario, there is no harmonisation between what reform policy says and what principals and teachers practise in schools – policy may face east, while practice faces west.

In the Maldives, Shafeeu (2019) established that after introducing a new 60 percent policy in the school system, the Ministry of Education (MOE) proclaimed that school principals in the Maldives had to act as instructional leaders. To ease implementation, the MOE devised an action plan to make instructional leadership a key role for principals. Principals were subsequently required to support the instructional activities in their schools, with the ministry setting targets for each school.

A study by Alsaleh (2018) showed that, after initiating curriculum reform, the MOE in Kuwait undertook the initiative to develop and prepare the school principals for their new instructional leadership role. Following this training, the MOE developed guidelines with clear expectations for the principals to engage in instructional leadership. Consequently, the job descriptions and responsibilities of the principals were updated.

Singapore boasts one of the best education systems in the world (Ng, Nguyen, Wong & Choy, 2015). This is attributable to two main factors. Firstly, there is close cooperation between policymakers, researchers and educators. Secondly, there is selection, training and development of a high-quality teaching force. As a result, there is a strong alignment between policies and their implementation. All major stakeholders (teachers, principals, the MOE) pay close attention to the details of implementation. This, according to Ng et al. (2015), reduces the implementation gap in the Singaporean education system.

The Abu Dhabi policymakers supported the desire for curriculum change by embarking on strong professional development for principals and teachers to build capacity within the schools (Hourani & Stringer, 2016). In this regard, the principals' professional

development was considered a crucial factor in improving their capacity to lead and implement the envisaged changes in the schools.

These mandated educational reforms come laden with new ideas that often challenge the status quo in schools (Ganon-Shilon & Schechter, 2018; Omar, 2014). The principal's position in the school puts them at the forefront of these changes, making them walk the tightrope to meet the internal and external demands exerted on schools (Ganon-Shilon, Tamir & Schechter, 2020).

In efforts to revitalise the implementers, education officials prescribe professional development for teachers and principals (Johns & Sosibo, 2019). These professional development activities come in the form of in-service training workshops. The workshops aim to impart new knowledge and re-skill the implementers to improve teaching and learning (Murphy, Smith, Mallon & Redman, 2020), which would ultimately improve the economic prospects of the country.

Lesotho's education system has been criticised for being irrelevant in addressing the needs of the citizens (Raselimo & Mahao, 2015). Several attempts have been made previously to address these shortcomings through curriculum reforms, although these initiatives have had little success (Raselimo & Mahao, 2015). In 2009, Lesotho developed the Curriculum and Assessment Policy (CAP), which culminated in the implementation of the new integrated curriculum in all primary schools in 2013 (Lesotho. Ministry of Education and Training [MoET], 2009). With the CAP, Lesotho has made an explicit proclamation that it seeks to address the socio-economic challenges that the country faces. Such challenges include poverty, unemployment, HIV/AIDS and an irrelevant curriculum (Lesotho. MoET, 2009). Therefore, the CAP aims to equip learners with skills, attitudes and competencies to meet daily life challenges both locally and globally. To achieve these



goals, the CAP advocates for the adoption of learner-centred and integrated methodologies in the classroom. Specifically, learners are supposed to construct their own knowledge, whereas teachers must facilitate learning. Apart from that, the teaching-learning process should incorporate the daily life experiences of the learner (Lesotho. MoET, 2009).

The radical changes envisaged by the CAP challenge the status quo by assigning new roles to teachers and principals in schools. For instance, education in Lesotho is said to be highly teacher-centred (Nketekete & Motebang, 2008). It was therefore necessary for the MoET to re-skill the core curriculum implementers to realise learner-centred teaching and learning. The MoET opted to phase in the integrated curriculum in schools, starting with Grades 1, 2 and 3 in 2013. The MoET then embarked on a country-wide in-service training of implementers in two phases. First, the teachers attended a week-long in-service training to prepare them for implementation. After this training, the teachers went back to schools to implement the integrated curriculum. After the teacher in-service training, principals later received in-service training on the implementation of the new integrated curriculum. This study therefore seeks to interrogate principals on their views on the in-service training they received and their roles as implementation leaders of the integrated curriculum in Lesotho primary schools.

Literature Review

A corpus of literature on reform implementation has provided empirical evidence that principals have a decisive impact on curriculum reforms (Coburn, Hill & Spillane, 2016; Gawlik, 2015; Shaked, 2019; Spillane & Kenney, 2012). As key role players in reform implementation, principals turn policymakers' visions into reality

(Levin & Datnow, 2012). This also means that the effectiveness of reform implementation to a large extent depends on principals' interpretation and understanding of that reform policy and envisaged implementation strategies (Coburn, 2016; Herold, 2020). Contemporary literature has also provided persuasive evidence that principals have an impact on school effectiveness (Shafeeu, 2019). However, many principals have confessed that they are not skilled enough to lead their schools, let alone curriculum reforms (Mestry, 2017).

In some countries, reform rollouts failed to achieve the desired outcomes because the principals and other stakeholders were inadequately prepared for the changes. For instance, in 1999, Thailand passed a reform law (Hallinger & Lee, 2013). This reform required more instructional leadership from the principals. However, the reform was rolled out without training or preparing the Thai principals to be effective instructional leaders (Hallinger & Lee, 2013, 2014). As a result, the expected changes were only superficial after almost a decade since the act was passed. Similarly, in Thailand, Malaysia, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore, reforms are generally "top-down", with little teacher input, and changes are frequently only cosmetic (Hallinger, 2010). The top-down approach to curriculum dissemination in Zimbabwe, which excluded teacher consultations and participation, resulted in poor implementation of the Social Studies Curriculum Reform (Chimbunde & Kgari-Masondo, 2020).

In the case of Lesotho, the rollout of the O level localisation reform was inhibited by the two implementing agents – the National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC) and the Examination Council of Lesotho (ECoL). These two bodies did not reach a consensus regarding the localisation of the curriculum and assessment (Raselimo & Mahao,



2015). The intention of this reform was to shift the curriculum and its assessment from the administration of Cambridge University in the United Kingdom to the local Lesotho context due to inefficiencies noted. Ultimately, implementation was left hanging until 12 years later when the two bodies established a common ground.

Schools can only be effective when professional development efforts for the principals and teachers are deliberate (Bush, 2020). During curriculum reforms, principals deal with changes on an unprecedented scale. As a result, the role of a principal is characterised by ambiguity and complexity (Shava & Tlou, 2018). However, as leaders, principals act as agents of change who facilitate reform in teaching and learning (Alsharija & Watters, 2020; Ganon-Shilon & Schechter, 2019). Therefore, they need to be equipped, through in-service training, with relevant leadership knowledge and skills to meet the needs of teachers and students (Gumus & Bellibas, 2020). For instance, several countries pair curriculum reforms with specific efforts to prepare and develop school leaders (Alsaleh, 2018; Shafeeu, 2019). However, school leadership has not been prioritised during reform implementation in other countries, especially in the developing world (Pont, 2020). For example, in countries such as Lesotho, there are no strategic policy initiatives to prepare and develop principals to lead their schools even when implementing curriculum reforms (Moorosi & Komiti, 2020).

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in Human Capital Theory (HCT) espoused by Schultz (1993). The theory assumes that knowledge and skills are a form of human capital and that investing in human capital would, ultimately, lead to economic growth. In broad terms, human capital



refers to the knowledge, skills, abilities, talents and experiences possessed by people individually and collectively in an organisation. These resources can be channelled to achieve organisational growth. Human capital is therefore important for organisational success. Schultz (1993) proposed that education or training represents an investment in human capital – which is an investment in human resources. The assumption, therefore, is that investment in the education of individuals yields economic returns in due course (Gillies, 2011).

Human capital investment is any activity that improves the quality and productivity of the worker. In this regard, training increases the productivity of employees by imparting knowledge and skills. HCT focuses on two main components – individuals and organizational performance (Gillies, 2011). Therefore, training is an important component of human capital investment, because it improves an individual's capabilities to perform activities of economic value.

HCT was deemed appropriate as the illuminating lens for this study because it offers a way to explain how education systems empower their principals through in-service training, hence improving their productivity and performance (Maran, Arokiasamy & Ismail, 2009). The theory also aligns or links in-service training of principals to economic development. In the context of Lesotho, HCT is directly linked to and underpins policies such as the CAP and Poverty Reduction Strategy of 2008 (Government of Lesotho, 2007). These policies seek to harness education to maximise return on investment and improve the livelihoods of the general populace.



Problem Statement

Since the introduction of the CAP, the role played by school principals has received limited attention from policymakers and researchers in Lesotho. Yet, it is no secret that the integrated curriculum places new external pressures and challenges on principals (Shaked, 2019). To implement these radical curricular changes, the knowledge and skills of principals need improvement through training (Rastogi, 2000). The principals are expected to spearhead and manage the implementation of the integrated curriculum at school level (Alsharija & Watters, 2020). Therefore, principals must possess requisite knowledge and skills on management and leadership of the new curriculum (Hourani & Stringer, 2015). However, recent literature has revealed that many principals still face challenges in providing leadership for the implementation of new reform policies (Ralebese, 2019). It appears that many serving principals lack curriculum knowledge and skills to lead the implementation of the integrated curriculum, despite attending in-service training to prepare them for implementation. For Lesotho, heavy spending in education seems not to be reciprocated with effectiveness during curriculum implementation. The objective of this paper, therefore, is to examine the perspectives of principals regarding the in-service training they received on the premise that the human capital development of the principals, as school leaders, would generate dividends from human resource investment. As such, the research question driving this study is: What are principals' views on the in-service training they received and their roles as implementation leaders of the CAP in Lesotho primary schools?

Method

This study used qualitative data obtained from a mixed-methods study that explored the perspectives of Lesotho primary school

principals regarding their roles as leaders of curriculum reform implementation. Specifically, this paper followed the interpretive qualitative approach (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018). This approach allows researchers to study a phenomenon in its natural setting and to make interpretations based on participants' points of view (Johnson & Christensen, 2014).

Sampling

Qualitative data obtained from a purposively selected sample of six primary school principals in the Maseru district formed the bedrock of this study. The inclusion criteria entailed voluntary consent to participate (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), a minimum of two years in the leadership of the integrated curriculum, and the potential to provide rich data. The participating principals were drawn from three dissemination centres within the Maseru district.

Data Collection

Data for this research were gathered through document analysis and open-ended interviews. Document analysis involved an examination of the CAP and other related policy documents that guide the implementation of the integrated curriculum in Lesotho. Open-ended interviews were conducted with the six participating principals to solicit their views on the training they received that was intended to empower them with knowledge and skills to supervise the implementation of the CAP in their schools. Probing questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018) were used as follow-ups to the responses to the main questions so that unclear points could be clarified.

Using probes (Creswell & Poth, 2018), the participants were asked to give their opinions regarding the in-service training they received in preparation for the implementation of the integrated curriculum. Each



interview lasted approximately one hour and was tape-recorded for eventual transcription and subsequent analysis. A total of six interviews were conducted.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was employed to glean insights and make sense of the data generated from the interviews. The steps provided by Braun and Clarke (2006) formed the analytic framework in this paper. The steps included generating initial codes, searching for themes and reviewing them, as well as defining the themes. According to Lester, Cho and Lochmiller (2020), researchers use thematic analysis mainly to produce descriptive statements that reflect their understanding of data in response to their research questions. Following Braun and Clarke (2006), interview data were transcribed and coded. The codes were then collated into themes that were refined in relation to extracts from raw data. Finally, the themes were reviewed in light of literature, theory, the research questions and the extracts to produce a vivid and compelling story about participants' perspectives regarding their in-service training in preparation for reform policy implementation.

Ethical Considerations and Trustworthiness

Relevant permission to conduct this research was sought from and granted by the University of Free State and the MoET in Lesotho. The purpose of the study was explained to the participants and their consent for voluntary participation sought before conducting the interviews. The interviews were conducted in line with the ethical considerations of confidentiality, voluntary participation and informed consent (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). To ensure trustworthiness of the study, prolonged engagement with the

participants, auditing of data interpretation, and member-checking were employed.

Findings and Discussion

This study set out to examine the perceptions of Lesotho primary school principals regarding the in-service training they received to lead the implementation of the integrated curriculum. The subsequent sections explain the findings using themes generated from CAP document analysis and the open-ended interviews with the six participating principals from Maseru in Lesotho.

Shallow Information Impedes Integration

An analysis of the CAP policy revealed two key policy prescriptions which seem to have direct implications for principals' leadership at school level. Firstly, integration seems to be the central premise of the current reform, hence the term *integrated curriculum*. The CAP seeks integration as the implementation approach to be adopted in schools. This is explained as follows in the policy document (Lesotho. MoET, 2009): "Integrated and learner-centred approaches to teaching and learning will be used in the implementation of curriculum in school" (p. 22).

According to the above policy excerpt, integration should feature predominantly during implementation. Therefore, this prescription calls for deeper understanding from the school leaders. However, the participants confessed that they have limited understanding of the envisaged integration. One participant, Peter, said: "I am not sure how teachers have to integrate." Similarly, Paul added: "Those who are supposed to give us the right information about this curriculum only give us shallow information." It becomes evident from the participants' statements that leading the implementation of the



envisaged integration is a challenge to principals due to limited information.

The integrated approach to teaching and learning has received considerable research attention in the 21st century (Barcelona, 2014). This approach is associated with increased learner achievement (Rodriguez, Diaz, Gonzalez & Gonzalez-Miquel, 2018). Despite the envisaged benefits, the adoption of the integrated approach at school level challenges the teachers, as well as the school leaders, who have to ensure that teaching and learning are geared towards this policy prescription. Literature on curriculum integration has shown that an integrated curriculum has potential to develop lifelong learners who have a holistic perspective on life (Sharma & Ahmad, 2020).

Furthermore, the CAP document (Lesotho. MoET, 2009) stressed that: "The framework advocates the establishment of a very strong link between curriculum and assessment so that the feedback on the learning progress should be used to formulate strategies that will improve the teaching and learning process" (p. vii). This expectation requires the principals to oversee the use of continuous assessment by teachers. However, participants did not appear conversant with the use of continuous assessment when implementing the integrated curriculum. For example, Dominic stated: "We still assess the learners every quarter and at the end of the year." In the same way, Prudence had only heard that the teachers are expected to use continuous assessment, but she, as a principal, did not have more details about this envisaged assessment. She said: "I only heard about it (continuous assessment), but the trainers never explained how we have to use it." The participants' narratives reveal that they experienced challenges when leading the implementation of continuous assessment. This is because they do not understand what continuous assessment entails.

The use of continuous assessment is regarded as a step towards improving teaching and learning (Faremi & Faremi, 2020). However, its implementation has been hampered by lack of capacity from the teachers due to inadequate training (Atsumbe & Raymond, 2012). Likewise, inadequate training of the principals regarding the continuous assessment in Lesotho primary schools seems to impede its implementation due to a lack of capacity not only from the teachers but the principals as well.

Furthermore, the MoET envisages a contextually relevant curriculum that links instruction with real-life problems. To achieve this, the policy (Lesotho. MoET, 2009) further prescribed that: "This (integrated) approach recognises that the learner is part of a community and that learning should consider everyday experiences of learners. School life should thus be integrated with community life and that of the individual learner" (p. 15). As reform-implementation leaders, the implication of the above statement for principals is that they have to monitor the teaching-learning processes in order to realise this policy prescription. However, it seemed that the participants in this study were not aware about this envisioned prescription. For instance, Takesure stated: "When integrating, the teachers have to identify related concepts from the syllabus and put them together in the scheme." Peter added: "When integrating, the teacher has to teach similar concepts in one lesson, as one thing" From these statements, it seems that the participants' conceptualisation of integration is inconsistent with the one envisaged in the CAP. Literature in this regard has shown that learning becomes more meaningful to learners when teachers make deliberate efforts to link learners' daily experiences with classroom teaching (Upadhyay, 2006).



On the other hand, some participants (Peter and Paul) reported that they received in-service training regarding the integrated curriculum, but as teachers and not in their capacity as principals. For example, Peter explained that he represented his principal in policy consultations that happened before the integrated curriculum had developed. He said: “No. I wasn’t trained [for the integrated curriculum]. I knew about this curriculum before it started. I was just asked by my former principal to go there (policy consultations workshop) on his behalf.”

Similarly, Paul did not receive any in-service training about the integrated curriculum as a principal. According to him, he was trained about the integrated curriculum while he was a teacher, before he had become a principal. He explained: “At the time of going there (teacher in-service training), I wasn’t a principal. I only went to the workshop once [as a teacher].” Having not been trained for the integrated curriculum as principals could mean that these two participants relied on their knowledge as teachers to lead the integrated curriculum.

Overall, the expressions of the participants indicated that they received shallow in-service training which they believed has negative consequences for implementation. The participants reported that they struggled with the implementation of the integrated curriculum because they were not specifically trained to lead the implementation of the integrated curriculum. Their narratives agree with literature, which has shown that the short nature of these in-service development workshops renders them ineffective (Mokoro, 2020). Apart from that, literature has shown that the workshop model of in-service training often fails to equip participants with relevant knowledge and skills that enable them to implement the envisaged changes (Johns & Sosibo, 2019; Matsepe & Maluleke, 2019). Bush (2018) also posited that

principals need specific training because their role differs from that of teachers. Therefore, without specific training, these principals are technically unqualified to lead their schools (Bush & Oduro, 2006). This finding resonates with current literature, which has shown that lack of training and the complex nature of reforms often render many serving principals ineffective (Bush, Kiggundu & Moorosi, 2011).

In a nutshell, integration is three-pronged, according to the CAP. It involves blurring subject lines, linking instruction with assessment, as well as linking school life with the daily life experiences of learners. However, the participants revealed that their understanding of integration is incongruent with integration as encapsulated in the CAP. This discrepancy holds threats for the implementation of this core prescription that is supposed to characterise the current reform. The achievement of the goals of the integrated curriculum depends on the ability of the stakeholders involved in curriculum development and implementation to interpret this policy in their specific contexts (Raselimo & Mahao, 2015).

Leading the Unexplained Pedagogy

The CAP policy further espouses a learner-centred pedagogy. This pedagogy aims to equip learners with skills to take responsibility of their own learning (Lesotho. MoET, 2009):

The focus in pedagogy has therefore shifted more to teaching and learning methods that can further develop creativity, independence and survival skills of learners. Learners are expected to become more responsible for their own learning processes and thus should be able to identify, formulate and solve problems by themselves and evaluate their work. (p. 22)



With this statement, the CAP prescribes a shift in teaching methodology. The new methods should therefore put the learners at the forefront as knowledge constructors. In this way, the CAP challenges the dominant teacher-centred methodologies found to be prevalent in Lesotho classrooms (Nketekete & Motebang, 2008). The current study revealed that the participants lacked knowledge and skills to supervise the enactment of learner-centred pedagogy. For example, Prudence said: “The trainers did not explain in detail ... they just told us that this curriculum is learner-centred ... and I still do not understand.” In the same way, Takesure said: “Most of the new things were not explained during the training ... even the new methods were not explained. Implementation of this new curriculum is not easy.” These statements show that the participants’ understanding of learner-centred pedagogy is limited and, as a result, they experience challenges in their leadership of this envisaged pedagogy. Recent research has shown that principals often struggle with the leadership of learner-centred pedagogies despite attending professional development programmes (Gumus & Bellibas, 2020).

This pedagogy is well-known for placing emphasis on learners’ construction of knowledge (Du Plessis, 2020), fostering participation and empowering them to become life-long learners (Bremner, 2021). In this way, the CAP is similarly aligned to this global trend in education. However, research has shown that teachers’ uptake of reform prescriptions is subject to their beliefs (Lou & Restall, 2020).

The policy also underscores a learner-centred approach by prescribing new roles for teachers and learners. In this regard, it states (Lesotho. MoET, 2009): “Therefore, the new trend should be a move from teaching to facilitating learning; from transfer of facts to student construction of knowledge” (p. viii). According to the CAP, the



teachers are viewed as facilitators and the learners are expected to be knowledge constructors – implying that learners will have greater control over instructional processes (Raselimo & Mahao, 2015). By assuming the role of a facilitator, teachers are expected to relinquish some power and control of the lesson. Despite this prescription, Dominic said: "I don't even know why we say you are a facilitator, not a teacher." This statement reveals that the participants in this study did not seem to understand what this new role entailed for teachers. In this regard, research has indicated that teachers tend to struggle with this role due to contextual and epistemological circumstances (Dash, 2020). It becomes evident that the in-service training attended by the principals did not empower them to influence the teachers to move in this new direction.

The principals are mandated to ensure that quality teaching and learning take place in their schools (Parliament of Lesotho, 2010). However, these radical changes present ambiguity and complexity to the role of school leaders (Ganon-Shilon & Schechter, 2017). These two policy prescriptions, integration and learner-centred approach, seem to anchor the implementation of the current reform in Lesotho primary schools. The onus is with the principals to lead these pedagogical changes in their respective schools.

"Half-Baked" Leaders

The participants revealed that they received insufficient training about the integrated curriculum. They described their training as "shallow". For instance, Dominic said: "The training was shallow. It wasn't enough, because the curriculum is broad." He seemed convinced that the information they received from the in-service training was not enough for them to lead the implementation of the integrated curriculum. In the same way, Takesure added: "First and foremost, the



trainings that were held were not adequate.” Based on these statements, the participants judged their training based on the breadth of the integrated curriculum. The policy prescribes two broad changes, namely integration and learner-centredness (Lesotho. MoET, 2009). These two prescriptions are not only broad but also challenge the status quo in Lesotho classrooms. This finding is consistent with literature, which has shown that implementers may not be attuned to prescriptions of curriculum reforms due to inadequate in-service training (Raselimo & Mahao, 2015).

The shallow training was also pointed out by Prudence, who metaphorically indicated that the principals were “half-baked” by the ministry. She stressed that: “Ministry half-baked us leaders. I felt that we were undercooked. We were not given enough workshops to ensure that we indeed know it.” According to her, the training did not give her enough knowledge to master the integrated curriculum. This finding is in line with literature, which has shown that professional development workshops are often not given adequate time to expedite implementation of reforms (Pak, Polikoff, Desimone & Saldivar-Garcia, 2020). Literature has further shown that principals and teachers failed to conceptualise the new curriculum due to inadequate in-service training (Dhlomo & Mawere, 2020).

Furthermore, Paul expressed his scepticism regarding the manner in which the integrated curriculum was disseminated to them. He stressed that: “Truly speaking, in Lesotho, the dissemination of the integrated curriculum wasn’t done well ... the developers of the curriculum did not do much in terms of dissemination of the curriculum, hence implementation is problematic.” According to him, the developers did not put much effort into the dissemination process. As a result, the problems in dissemination caused problems in the



implementation. In addition, Prudence revealed that the dissemination was done superficially. She said: "It was like the trainers believed that because we are principals we already know [about the integrated curriculum], hence there was no need to spend a lot of time at the workshops."

Her verbatim excerpt shows that the trainers did not deliver deep knowledge about the reform. According to her, they were trained as if they had already known about the new curriculum, hence no need to go deeper. To her, an apparent flaw of the in-service training was the attitude of the trainers, who did not put much effort into the workshop. In concurrence, previous research has shown that the dissemination of information about the new reform changes is a critical step that ensures that the key implementers understand the prescriptions (McBeath, 1997). Elsewhere, a lack of clarity before implementation caused challenges for secondary principals as they attempted to implement the new curriculum (Samson & Charles, 2018).

Short and Sketchy Workshops

The participants who attended the in-service training were unanimously concerned that the duration of the training was particularly short. According to the participants, their training ranged from a few days to one week. For instance, Prudence expressed her concern in this manner: "It was very short indeed, because it did not even last one week." Dominic reiterated this claim by indicating that a week's training is not enough to enable classroom implementation of a broad curriculum. He stressed his opinion in the following way: "You can't say you are trained well if you are taking a week's training for this broad thing that you have to implement in class."

The other participants voiced the same concern and compared their training duration with the duration of teachers' workshops. This claim was articulated by Takesure:

The principals, they have gone [for] just four days ... following the teachers that have gone for several trainings. You shall find that some of the teachers ... they were even trained more than the principals in regard to how to implement the integrated curriculum.

Victor also emphasised that: "I was taught all that in one day. That is, the Grade 7 teachers took one week being trained about the integrated curriculum, but I took one day." In this case, the participants claimed that the teachers attended the training several times, while their training was once-off. They believed that they were not well trained when compared to the teachers.

The participants also expressed disappointment regarding the depth of the information they received. Dominic said: "I expected that if teachers were taught about this ... I was going to be taught in more detail than the teachers." From his expression, he expected detailed information, but they received shallow information. The participants had high expectations regarding their in-service training. They expected in-depth information about the integrated curriculum, but their expectations were unmet mainly because of the short duration of the workshop.

Literature confirms that the in-service workshops are often short once-off activities (Matsepe & Maluleke, 2019); and the content of such workshops has been criticised as being sketchy (Murphy et al., 2020; Sunzuma & Maharaj, 2020). Johns and Sosibo (2019) advised that in-service training requires time and effort to be effective. Interestingly,

this study found that the teachers were more trained than the principals. These findings also prove that there is no strategic development for principals in Lesotho (Moorosi & Komiti, 2020).

"Reversed" Training

It is interesting to note the sequence of the workshops by the MoET. The participants reported that the teachers were the first to attend the in-service training. In the words of Takesure, "[t]hey (the teachers) have gone to a new land and familiarised themselves into a new land before a person who is supposed to monitor them familiarise them on that land. They left the leader behind." After the training, the teachers implemented the integrated curriculum at their schools before the principals could attend the training. With this kind of sequence, the principals felt that they were "left behind" as leaders. This finding confirms the notion that education systems put more effort into teachers' training, but principals' training is not prioritised (Nzarirwehi & Atuhumuze, 2019; Pont, 2020). This provides evidence that lack of training for principals has disempowering effects, especially during the implementation of curriculum reforms.

As a result of this "reversed" training sequence, the participants confessed that they tend to rely on teachers for the implementation of the integrated curriculum. For example, Dominic reported that:

I have to learn from the teachers ... learn the procedures of the curriculum from the teachers, more especially teachers who went to the training of the lower classes, Grades 1, 2, 3. We were not given a chance to be trained for this curriculum at that time. We only learned from the teachers who were workshopped.

As seen from the above statement, principals learned about the integrated curriculum from their teachers basically because the

teachers were trained first. This may explain why the principals struggle with the implementation of curriculum prescriptions such as integration and learner-centred pedagogy. Contrary to research (Coburn, 2005), this study shows that teachers influence the sense-making of the principals about the reform.

Furthermore, the participants claimed that the teachers received more training than they did. Takesure explained: "You shall find that some of the teachers were even trained more than the principals in regard to how to implement the integrated curriculum." Therefore, the participants believed that the teachers know more about the implementation of the integrated curriculum due to receiving more training. Consequently, by having superior knowledge, the teachers are better positioned to lead the implementation.

Peter further added:

It (lack of curriculum knowledge) is a challenge, because I must have knowledge which is a little bit more than that of the teachers, so that when they meet challenges in the syllabus, I should be able to guide them ... we cannot deliver it correctly, because we don't understand it.

The above excerpt provides evidence that it is challenging for the principals to fully monitor the teachers, especially when teachers encounter challenges. According to Peter, his limited understanding affects the implementation of the integrated curriculum. Victor echoed the same point in this way: "Whereas I am supposed to have more knowledge than them ... they have more knowledge than me ... that is, even where the teacher is cheating me, I am not able to see." Victor was aware of his limited knowledge and acknowledged that teachers know more than him. However, he was worried that his limited

knowledge would hinder him from identifying teachers who "cheat". Reiterating the same issue, Dominic showed that his knowledge about the integrated curriculum is inferior to that of the teachers. He noted: "Sometimes you think, this teacher knows more than I do, so how do I assist ... or what she tells me sometimes I get to believe that it is the right thing." According to him, his limited knowledge makes him doubt his ability to help the teachers. He confessed that he believes what the teachers tell him about the integrated curriculum because of their apparent superior knowledge.

Takesure metaphorically depicted his perception as the tail wagging the dog. According to him, the teachers attended training before the principals attended their initial training. For example, he explained that:

Even before principals went to the training, the teachers were already teaching the principals ... they were already teaching the principals what the principals were supposed to monitor. And now the dog is striving very hard to wave the tail.

This situation made it hard for Takesure to lead the integrated curriculum. The teachers were the ones who tell him how to supervise the implementation of the integrated curriculum. He therefore compared his situation to that of a dog that finds it hard to wag its tail.

The above statements indicate that the participants found themselves in unfamiliar territory. The teachers had superior knowledge, yet the principals were expected to supervise the teachers. This finding is also unique in that teachers had to "teach" the principals what to "monitor" as they implement the integrated curriculum. Literature has confirmed that principals often have less content knowledge than the teachers they supervise (Lowenhaupt & McNeill, 2019). This situation makes



supervision difficult for principals. This compromised situation of the principals is a direct consequence of the sequence that the MoET adopted when conducting the in-service training for the teachers and the principals in Lesotho.

Conclusion

This research examined the views of principals regarding the in-service training they received for leading the implementation of the integrated curriculum in Lesotho. The findings are of direct practical relevance to education systems in Africa and other parts of the developing world where school leadership is not prioritised especially when implementing curriculum reforms.

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the in-service training for the principals was inadequate to equip them with the necessary knowledge and skills to lead the implementation of the integrated curriculum. This paper offers an alternative explanation for the implementation gap that has puzzled policymakers and researchers for many decades. As a human capital development strategy, the in-service training for principals is vital for their professional development, to enhance their knowledge and skills to lead the curriculum reforms (Bush, 2018; Omar, 2014). This misplaced/improper investment in human capital may explain why curriculum reforms fail to penetrate classrooms (Hallinger & Lee, 2013; Liwa, 2018).

The unique finding emerging from the current study is that principals in Lesotho had to learn the modalities of implementing the integrated curriculum from the teachers under their supervision. This was mainly because the teachers were in-serviced on the new curriculum before the principals. Consequently, the principals' role to supervise the



implementation of the integrated curriculum was difficult, as the teachers under their supervision were more knowledgeable about the integrated curriculum than them.

The finding that teachers were more knowledgeable about the integrated curriculum than the school principals who supervise them raises the question whether principals should know more about the content of curriculum reform than the teachers who implement the changes. Why did policymakers seemingly put teachers in charge of this curriculum reform in Lesotho? The participating principals in this study felt that they should know more about the integrated curriculum than the teachers who were implementing it. It appears that society and policymakers (and the principals themselves) perceive and expect school administrators to be more knowledgeable than the teachers. However, teachers often possess more knowledge of the subject(s) they teach, because they are subject specialists, than school principals who (often) are technocrats possessing more administrative knowledge than subject-specific content knowledge. Could it thus be that curriculum reform, at least in part, is hampered by the fact that principals (and policymakers and society in general) feel that principals must know more than the teachers?

Future research can focus on why school leadership continues to receive scant attention from policymakers despite social expectations for principals to be more knowledgeable than the teachers they lead. More research incorporating the perspectives of policymakers may assist in generating plausible explanations to the apparent lack of strategic development of school leadership during the implementation of curriculum reform.

To improve the efficacy of reform policy implementation in schools, this study recommends in-depth leadership training for principals (not



once-off in-service training). Such training should equip the principals with the necessary knowledge and skills that would capacitate them to lead the envisaged curriculum changes. To avoid curricular stasis, the principals should be empowered to be agents of change in their schools, to avoid complaints of being “half-baked” in leading reform policy implementation. The principals and other leaders can reflect on how policy implementation affects their self-esteem and efficacy.

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