

Selected primary school teachers' perceptions of implementing the Competence-Based Curriculum in Zimbabwe: Heartaches and opportunities

Mufanechiya Albert & Mufanechiya Tafara
Great Zimbabwe University

Abstract

The study examines conversations among Zimbabwean primary school teachers about their experiences with the new Competence-Based Curriculum (CBC) (2015-22) being implemented by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education. The new curriculum prescription has been met with mixed feelings from primary school teachers. This small-scale qualitative study reports the views of three Harare urban primary school teacher volunteers who were interviewed. The interviews produced live stories which reflect the teachers' level of understanding and experiences with the new curriculum. The study was informed by Hall and Loucks' 1987 Concern Based Adoption Model. The results of the study show that it has been difficult to transform primary school teachers' professional behaviour and alter teachers' deep-seated traditional practices to adopt new systems and styles. One of the major findings from the teachers' stories was that the significant aspects of motivation, resources and teacher sensitisation and preparation on the new demands of implementing the new curriculum were not seriously considered. Accordingly, the study concludes that the practical implementation of the CBC has not been fully achieved. The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education did not psychologically and professionally prepare primary school teachers to implement the new curriculum initiative. The study therefore recommends that Curriculum Development and Technical Services (CDTS) unit should transcend being a producer of curriculum documents to engaging in professional dialogue with primary school teachers, given the magnitude of the curriculum reform. This sets the stage for successful implementation of the curriculum and its institutionalisation, especially if teacher concerns are met.

Keywords: *Competence-Based Curriculum; Curriculum implementation; Curriculum reform; Primary school; Live stories*

Introduction and background

The post-independence curriculum reform process in Zimbabwe has been a long and arduous one. The post independent Zimbabwean government inherited an academic curriculum which only prepared students for wages and employability in a country that had diminishing employment opportunities. The Nziramasanga Commission of Inquiry into Education and Training (1999) proposed a curriculum that directed focus on skills development. However, it has been difficult to shake off the imbalances created by the colonial education which the new government inherited. That inherited curriculum, which was being transformed through piecemeal and cosmetic changes, hardly addressed the challenges that were affecting society. Carroll and McCulloch (2014) say that the defining characteristics of a good curriculum are

that it reflects knowledge valued and accepted by society. While there had been muted disapproval of the primary and secondary school curriculum by stakeholders concerning the quality of the product from the school system, the Zimbabwean government has been slow in coming up with a curriculum that addresses those concerns.

Educational reform is top on the agenda of almost every country in the world. Yet, with the ambitious attempts, the performance of many school systems has barely improved (Barber & Mourshed, 2007). This is despite having well thought out and far-reaching reform objectives. According to Fullan (2006) the way to change education systems is to foster the development of teachers who are the system thinkers in action. In this regard, the quality and capacity development of teachers are the main drivers of change. The quality of any education system cannot exceed that quality of its teachers (Barber & Mourshed, 2007). Teachers' knowledge, skills and mindset matter in all educational change contexts.

One of the most significant moves to reform the Zimbabwean education system and the curriculum came in 1998 with the commissioning of the Presidential Commission of Inquiry into Education and Training. The Commission was tasked with the responsibility to unpack and revisit the education and training systems in Zimbabwe. The Commission was mandated to make recommendations that would address educational and curriculum challenges. The idea was to have an education curriculum that prepared learners for tomorrow's responsibilities in an environment that allowed learners to explore real-life situations (Halasz & Michel, 2011). The Zimbabwean government was cognisant of the fact that the education system should meet the expanding knowledge, skills, professional and instructional needs in a changing education context (McGuinness, 2011) which the old curriculum had failed to address. The Commission made far-reaching recommendations that might have improved the Zimbabwean education, social and economic society had they been implemented. However, the recommendations were only implemented in earnest in 2015 under CBC

In 2015, the Zimbabwean government, through the Education Ministry and assisted by the United Nations Children' Education Fund (UNICEF), revisited the Nziramasanga document to lay the foundation for the New Curriculum Framework (2015-2022). It is called the Competence-Based Curriculum (CBC). Initially, the implementation adopted a phased approach. Early efforts and focus were on Early Childhood and Development (ECD A) and infant levels, that is, grades one and three. The implementation is now across the whole primary and secondary education school systems. The CBC is meant to raise the Zimbabwean educational profile by modelling learners (Machin, Hindmarch, Murray & Richardson, 2015)

towards skills for personal and economic imperatives. The CBC is about the transmission of knowledge and ideas that work in real life practical contexts.

The New Curriculum Framework (2015-2022) document has been met with mixed feelings, especially by primary school teachers who are the principal drivers of its implementation. Chinangure and Chindanya (2019) note that teachers have experienced many challenges in implementing the new curriculum. They cited lack of resources, inadequate consultation, lack of skills among teachers, college lecturers, education officials and unavailability of ICT, as factors that have compromised the implementation of this curriculum reform initiative. The authors recommended the in-servicing of teachers before its implementation.

Curriculum implementation begins with multiple decision-making points. This is when the individual teacher decides to put a curriculum into use through practical processes (Burgess, Robertson & Patterson, 2010). Visvanathan and PannerSelvam (2014) say that the implementation of any curriculum reform depends on the quality of the teachers, how they conceptualise and construct their understanding of the curriculum.

Ornstein and Hunkins (2013) say that to implement change, curriculum initiators must get teachers to change some of their habits and views. In many situations, teachers are ignored and initiators spend time and money modifying only the curriculum document or processes. This study explores the teachers' capacity to implement the provisions of the CBC.

Statement of the problem

The new Competence-Based Curriculum has put into question the competencies of primary school teachers, given that it has created new learning areas and instructional approaches. The Zimbabwean primary school teachers have struggled to understand and implement this new curriculum reform. The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education is pushing for its implementation when primary school teachers, who are the implementers, are not clear about its provisions and are facing a lot of challenges.

Research questions

- What level of understanding do primary school teachers have of the Competence-Based Curriculum?
- What are the primary school teachers' concerns about the implementation of the Competence-Based Curriculum?

Conceptual framework: Concern-Based Adoption Model (CBAM)

The discourse that underpins this study is the Concern-Based Adoption Model (CBAM). The model was propounded by Hall, Wallace and Dossett and developed by Hall and Loucks in 1987 at the University of Texas at Austin (Wang, 2014; Gundy & Berger, 2016). The framework is considered primarily as a descriptive and predictive model. The model can aid primary school teachers in implementing innovations by helping them develop effective strategies for their classroom (Gundy & Berger, 2016). The model focuses on how primary school teachers can conceptualise curriculum reform and how their mind-set could be changed, prepared and assisted to implement it in a practical way.

The Concern-Based Adoption Model framework is benchmarked on six assumptions summarised by Gudyanga and Jita (2018) as follows:

- Change should be a process;
- Change is accomplished by individuals;
- Change is a personal experience;
- Individuals go through different stages in how they feel about reforms and in their capacity and ability to align their practice with those reforms;
- Change should be comprehended in operational terms; and,
- Policymakers and those enforcing innovations must focus on individuals, the innovation and the context in which this interaction takes place.

The interpretation strength of these assumptions is in its identification of teachers as central figures in curriculum change. Teachers' concerns are of importance and should be taken into account for a successful curriculum reform implementation. CBAM addresses teachers' concerns regarding content, materials, pedagogies, technologies and educational experiences (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2013). As a framework adopted in this study, it offers a set of devices that enable an understanding of change in teachers. The CBAM philosophy postulates that any new curriculum is implemented only when teachers' anxieties have been satisfactorily addressed. From the framework, if the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education in Zimbabwe and other educational stakeholders are to assist teachers implement the new curriculum, they must be aware of and address their concerns.

In light of this view, teacher professional development has always been a subject of intense discussion and focus, especially when curriculum reform is at stake. Good teaching skills are the bedrock of good performance. Hence, educators should be given support through timeous training and mentorship, resources and motivation. Research studies carried out in South

Africa(Pournara, Hodgen, Adler & Pillay, 2015) established that inability to independently handle new subject matter does not only affect teacher performance, but their confidence and morale as well.

Teaching is about teachers making subjective professional decisions that are informed by their critical knowledge and understanding of what they are implementing. Teaching suggests an investment by teachers in decision-making on topics and concepts/content, on methods, monitoring and evaluation. Thus, successful implementation of a curriculum reform requires that teachers increase their knowledge base of the new curriculum content, develop new expertise in pedagogical approaches, and improve their knowledge of instructional design and how students learn (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2013). The child, the curriculum document and the teacher form part of the teaching-learning matrix. It is conceptually unsound and socially unacceptable to solve any curriculum reform problem by forcing teachers to implement what they do not really understand (Halasz & Michel, 2011). The knowledge they dispense to learners is based on professional reasoning premised on clear understanding of curriculum documents (McKernan, 2008). They need implementation capacities in order to identify new skills and integrate them with traditional ones. Without those new skills, the net effect is curriculum implementation stagnation. Most failures in planned change implementation are linked to little or no preparation of teachers (Dalziel, 1988).

Primary school teachers need support in terms of resources, competence development, updating assessment methods and introducing new ways of organising learning (Halasz & Michel, 2011) in view of the demands of the CBC. The support invites teachers to apply their best human imagination, be conversant with the new curriculum and for learners to get maximum educational experiences. Zimbabwean primary school teachers need to be fully grounded in sound understanding of the CBC document for effective discharge of their duty.

Methodology

The study used a qualitative multiple case study of three Harare urban primary school teachers from different school locations. The study was grounded on teachers' narrated stories. The reason for using the live stories in this study was mainly to focus on real teachers' teaching experiences and their perceptions of the new curriculum currently being implemented in Zimbabwean primary schools. The stimulated-recall (Nilsson & Driel, 2010) stories whose meaning is situationally rooted in the classroom contexts (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011) helped the researchers to unpack the teachers' perceptions of the new curriculum. Teachers told their own stories by giving accounts and critical incidents of their

lived experiences. The practice is in line with De Vos, Strydom, Fouche & Delport's (2012) recommendations about the implementation of any new curriculum. This narrative approach of reporting verbatim from one's lived experiences is seen as an opportunity for creating rich and authentic live data (Cohen et al., 2011:455). The story technique enabled the researchers to gain meaningful insights into the teachers' subjective views (Czarniawska, 2014:50) about the implementation of the said curriculum.

To generate insights on the implementation of the new curriculum, primary school teachers were, separately, and in their individual capacities, asked two questions, namely:

1. What is your level of understanding and use of the Competence-Based Curriculum?
2. What challenges do you face in the implementation of the new curriculum initiative?

The primary school teacher participants were allowed to tell their stories and other issues related to the implementation of the new curriculum without interruptions.

The selection of the three primary school teachers was done using the non-probability volunteer sampling strategy. These teachers volunteered to discuss their own experiences with the new curriculum. The interviewed primary school teachers taught at three different schools in Harare District. While appreciating that the sample could be too small to generalise the findings, the study's intention was to provide in-depth insights of primary school teachers' perceptions towards the implementation of the new curriculum reform.

Permission to audio-record the conversations from the participants was sought and granted. The participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity to protect their identities. This was in line with ethics of the research process.

Data collection

The data were collected while the researchers were supervising students who were on practicum in Harare District. The study, however, involved full-time qualified primary school teachers who had a better understanding of curriculum implementation issues. Most primary school teachers were uncooperative and unwilling to participate in the discussion, fearing victimisation, even after assuring them that their identities would be kept anonymous and confidential. This explains why the researchers had to interview the three willing primary school teachers. The curriculum implementation recall sessions invited teachers to say out, impromptu, their personal reflections on how they had understood and implemented the new

curriculum. The researchers acted as non-participant listeners as the teachers narrated their implementation stories uninterrupted. English language was used to communicate their ideas.

Data analysis

The audio-recorded excerpts were subjected to a thematic analysis in order to identify patterns of meaning and emerging themes across the dataset and provide answers to the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Braun and Clarke's (2012) six steps approach to thematic analysis were used. The six steps include: familiarising with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and producing the write-up. These steps guided the researchers to come up with the themes for this study.

Ethical considerations

The ethical principle of confidentiality was important in this study. The participants were assured that what had been discussed would not be repeated or 'offloaded' (Cohen et al., 2011) to other people. In the study, pseudonyms such as Primary School Teacher 1: PST 1 were used to hide and protect the teacher identities. Anonymising them was an important professional and ethical responsibility to protect the teachers from possible harm, given the sensitive nature of the phenomenon under discussion.

Data presentation: Primary school teachers' live stories

The researchers' assumption was premised on the belief that primary school teachers' perceptions were influenced by their level of understanding of the new curriculum. Their stories and comments were an indicator of their level of preparedness and the implementation challenges they faced. Through thematic analysis, the data from the three participants were organised and presented according to emerging themes as shown below.

Primary School Teacher 1 (PST 1)

Confusion

It is confusion all over. There are teachers who have gone for workshops on the new curriculum so that they can cascade the information to us, but have come back more confused. Each person from this CBC workshop has a different story. We now spend more time discussing this new curriculum animal at the expense of actual teaching.

Lack of adequate training

The Ministry has unleashed Schools Inspectors to enforce the implementation of the new curriculum yet we have not been trained enough to understand it. There are new and too

demanding learning areas that require re-skilling. The bottom line is that there was need to in – service us first before implementing the new curriculum.

Lack of motivation

Its common knowledge that teachers are lowly paid in Zimbabwe. Instead of concentrating on the new curriculum demands we are worried about how to put food on our tables as the salaries cannot sustain us and our families. Generally, teachers are not motivated.

Lack of content knowledge

There are new learning areas demanding new content knowledge and skills which the majority of us do not have. For example, mass displays. Family and Religious Studies, Agriculture, Heritage Studies are some of the areas we don't really understand.

Integration with technology

Schools do not have computers, other related software and specialist rooms. We need to update our skills in computer education so that we can integrate this in our teaching which the new curriculum advocates.

Lack of involvement

Overall, this new curriculum has stressed us because we were not involved during the design stages.

Primary School Teacher 2 (PST 2)

Lack of clarity

Generally primary school teachers including myself have problems with the new curriculum. No one seems to be very clear of what should be done. It has remained guess work with those to spearhead it also having a hazy idea.

Early intervention and detection of challenges among learners

The document has so many good things for our learners, for example, early identification of talent, detection of learner disorders and timely intervention can be done. Our children need skills for survival not book knowledge which is not useful.

Encouraging learner-centred approaches

The new curriculum motivates learners because it is a curriculum around their interests. It is all about individualised learning which requires good record keeping and these records move with the learner from one level to another. By the time they reach grade seven we will have the full knowledge of the learner's potential and interests.

Addressing unemployment

With the CBC learners can showcase their potential and skills and these can be nurtured at an early age. The new curriculum is trying to infuse in children the spirit of self – reliance at an early age paying dividends both to self and country.

Confusion and teacher preparedness

The education sector has different teacher age groups: young, middle and old and some have problems in adapting to the new curriculum expectations. Teachers now have negative attitudes towards the curriculum because the Ministry is pushing for its implementation when teachers are confused and not prepared.

Economic environment and timing

The timing is also wrong given the poor economic situation in the country. We cannot reject policy but given a choice the implementation of this curriculum was supposed to wait and be implemented when the economic environment is conducive and ripe.

Primary School Teacher 3 (PST 3)

Confusion on the demands of the new curriculum

No one claims to know what the CBC is about. Most teachers pretend in public to implement the curriculum to please those in offices but the truth of the matter is no one knows. The question is about the new learning areas demanding new content.

Need for in-service training and capacity development

Some of us graduated from colleges of education way back. The new curriculum has come as an emergency and before we understand we are supposed to implement it. We need to be professionally capacitated first before implementation.

Lack of resources

Schools are struggling to get basic teaching and learning resources. The new curriculum and the new learning areas are demanding new resources. Learners are not paying school fees yet schools are not allowed to send them back home. Primary schools need computers, books and other resources to implement the new curriculum.

Authentic assessment and class sizes

Tracking and assessing individual learners as required by the CBC is difficult with more than 50 learners in a class. I think there was need to first have the material resources and be oriented on this type of assessment before implementing the curriculum.

A burden to parents who are poor and facing economic challenges

Parents were not conscientised about the new curriculum. The new curriculum is being implemented at ECD A, Grade 1 and 3. These learners need eleven (11) while those doing the

old curriculum require six (6) exercise books, respectively. Some parents, because of economic hardships want their children to do the old curriculum insisting that CBC is expensive. Parents do not know that they do not have that choice.

Findings and discussion

The study explored the Zimbabwean primary school teachers' perceptions and the level of use of the Competence Based Curriculum. The excerpts from individual primary school teachers were synthesised and condensed into five conceptions: teacher sensitisation and preparedness, professional development, teacher motivation, financial and material resources and opportunities for teachers and learners.

Teacher sensitisation and preparedness

During the interview with primary school teachers the researchers found out that there were several stakeholders who were linked to, interested in, and owned the new curriculum. However, the teachers' stories suggest that they did not have ownership of the new curriculum document, hence they referred it as the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education document. This finding supports the ideas by Dalziel (1988), and Ornstein and Hunkins (2013) which say that lack of ownership and clarity are some of the reasons why teachers resist curriculum change. It was a document that was being pushed down their throats, pointing to the kind of decision-making by educational fathers to exclude them from the curriculum preparation stages, hence failing to understand it. In our Zimbabwean primary school context, where one teacher is assigned to teach all subjects in a class, it is critical that the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education adequately prepares individual teachers to implement the new curriculum with confidence. This finding is consistent with one of the tenets of CBAM that educational policymakers and those enforcing reforms must focus on individuals; the reform and the context in which this interaction takes place (Gudyanga & Jita, 2018).

Teachers make important professional classroom decisions about teaching and learning which are based on correct information (Burgess et al., 2010). From the stories, the primary school teachers did not really understand the demands of the new curriculum to enable them to meet their professional and instructional responsibilities in the changed educational environment. This points to lack of conceptual clarity and correct imaging of the curriculum document. Teachers had very genuine concerns which the government should take seriously. Government should decide and use correct means to diffuse and disseminate information

the new curriculum to all classroom teachers. Teachers should be able to define and interpret key processes in the curriculum document. Failure to do so poses a threat to, and impoverishes the implementation process.

A functional primary education system is based on the kind of investment that the Ministry puts on teachers who implement the curriculum. Improving teacher competencies and performance in view of the CBC, it appeared, was one neglected area hence teachers became restricted professionals in their classrooms. From the qualified teachers' stories, they had been trapped in a system that had created fear and panic resulting in failure to influence professional behavioural change among them. It appeared primary school teachers were yearning for space to develop their beliefs, ideas and attend to their feelings about the CBC, a prospect denied. Their concerns had gone unnoticed. Ornstein and Hunkins (2013) observed that teacher insecurity is an obstacle to successful curriculum change implementation. Teachers appeared detached from the document creating cracks in the implementation walls of the Competence-Based Curriculum. The teachers had a negative attitude towards the CBC as the educational fathers failed to address their concerns. A new curriculum should be implemented when teachers are ready. The diversity of interpretation of the document was not healthy for both teachers and learners.

Without a clear definition and understanding of the CBC, teachers would leave a lot of important concepts unexplored. The curriculum reform process of this magnitude required more time with awareness campaigns on a large scale and involving as many teachers as possible. It appeared very few teachers have been involved albeit with very little conviction. The few had failed to properly cascade the right information and messaging about the new curriculum. The success story of any curriculum reform depends on the clarity and full information disclosure to teachers who implement the curriculum. This would reduce confusion by having shared meanings.

Professional development

Any new curriculum should come with a complete package of reskilling teachers to create competence and confidence in implementing new ideas. This is to ensure that the proverbial truism 'new wine in old wine skin' does not derail all efforts at the implementation stage. With the CBC, teachers revealed that they had some skill deficiencies in a number of learning areas, particularly in Technology, Heritage Studies Agriculture and Family, Religious and Moral Education. Their knowledge base in these areas was still inadequate. There was a need to turn attention towards these immediate challenges that teachers were facing.

Government should listen to the cry by teachers to update and re-skill them in those areas they showed discomfort in terms of content and pedagogical practices. The CBC seemed to have deskilled a lot of teachers who had been basking in the glory of old practices. Ornstein and Hunkins (2013) understand that the status quo would be supported by teachers when the mission for the new curriculum is not clearly stated. The primary school teachers knew their professional responsibilities as they seemed to have done a lot of self-evaluation and had noted some skills gaps which should be closed. Teachers were not equipped with knowledge and skills that helped them make subjective professional decisions resulting in the implementation capacity of the CBC becoming blurred.

The transition from the old to the new curriculum should have been carefully managed, given that change is not always received with open hands. At the heart of curriculum reform implementation are skills that are an important ingredient in a situation where teachers are under scrutiny. There was a need for knowledge and pedagogical support for the teachers through staff development in all aspects of teaching especially those new areas introduced by the CBC. Teachers' skills upgrade should be an iterative process until the Ministry is satisfied that teachers have internalised the content knowledge and practices as espoused in the CBC.

Teacher motivation

The situation showed that teacher motivation in implementing the CBC was at its lowest ebb. This may have negative effects on their classroom outputs as teachers learn to apply new processes. The quality of any curriculum is as good as the quality of its teachers (Barber & Mourshed, 2007) and motivation is a critical factor in teaching - learning discourses. In short, there were no efforts for productive change among primary school teachers as their low remuneration levels kept them disengaged from the curriculum reform process. We interpret the teachers' constant reminder that their salaries were too low to be a confirmation that motivation to understand and implement the curriculum reform could not occur if the teachers' remuneration concerns were not addressed.

Financial and material resources

The issue of resources was one major sticking point in the teacher stories. Primary school teachers lamented the lack of material and financial resources in primary schools to enable them to effectively implement the CBC. From their experiences of implementing the new curriculum, primary school teachers did not have necessary resources that made their work

easy. The low economic performance of the country had negatively affected both the primary schools and parents in terms of providing the necessary teaching and learning resources.

Teachers and learners needed books as references during teaching and learning. The implementation had been done without adequate books, especially in those new learning areas introduced, such as Technology and Family, Religious and Moral Education. Literature (Chinangure & Chindanya, 2019; Ornstein & Hunkins, 2013) suggests that in any educational reform agenda, teachers need support in the form of resources, competence development, upgrading assessment methods and introducing new ways of organising teaching and learning. With most parents failing to pay fees, which were the only source of educational funding, the resource situation in primary schools was dire. A new curriculum is mostly built around resources that contribute to the overall development of teacher understanding of that curriculum. What this meant was that teachers continued to use the old textbooks to teach the new content, a situation that did not help the implementation of the Competence-Based Curriculum. Further, the curriculum reform required schools to have well-furnished play centres, uniforms and equipment for mass displays and all these required funding, overstretching already stretched financial resources. Our overarching conclusion was that the Ministry rushed the implementation without taking into account schools and teacher resource needs and capacity.

Opportunities for teachers and learners

The Competence-Based Curriculum has offered a refreshingly new thinking in primary school teachers. The new philosophy among the primary school teachers was that teaching is a career-cycle development and adopting new practices from the new learning areas becomes a professional survival strategy. The CBC had the impact of introducing new instructional suggestions, integrating ICT in teaching and generation of new ideas, thus taking teachers to another level of professional growth.

The new curriculum also had the potential of uncovering learners' hidden talents early, by focusing on learner potential given that the curriculum was devised around learner interest. The emphasis was on skills development on the part of the learner, rather than accumulation and remembering knowledge for reproduction in examinations. Learners were monitored and mentored in their skills areas, making schooling more relevant, enjoyable and addressing unemployment challenges in the economy. The implementation of the CBC enabled the teachers and learners to continuously learn new skills ensuring that they remained updated with educational trends.

The emerging concept from the teachers' narratives was that the CBC seemed framed in productive skills. There were positives from the stories of the three primary school teachers that, if properly handled, the CBC had the potential to transform learning from the current 'one size fits all' to providing equitable learning opportunities to all learners. It appeared teaching and assessment in the CBC transcended routine knowledge-intensive subject matter to chatting different promising pathways for learners. The assessment criteria now pay more attention to preparing learners for contextualised knowledge and skills that are relevant for work and life. With the CBC, the country was likely to see a crop of knowledgeable primary school teachers who are research-oriented, creative and innovative enough to reshape teaching and learning in Zimbabwe.

Conclusion

The study has found that, generally, the CBC being implemented in Zimbabwean primary schools had not been well understood by the teachers. It was therefore not being implemented effectively. The implementation was different from each primary school and its implementation was fraught with inherent challenges. Difficulties that arose were as a result of the schools and the Ministry not providing teachers with the necessary financial, material and psychological support. The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education should have addressed these important imperatives that would ensure smooth curriculum implementation take-off as suggested by the Concern-Based Adoption Model. The evidence from the study suggests that for primary school teachers to effectively and responsibly manage and achieve desired goals in the teaching-learning context, they need knowledge and skills of the curriculum they would be implementing. Confronted with these challenges, meaningful teaching and learning may not occur and old practices may remain entrenched. The teachers needed to have been fully engaged in discourses related to the curriculum reform in order to enhance their theoretical and practical understanding so as to avoid contrasting perspectives from teachers implementing the same curriculum.

However, taken together, the idea by the Zimbabwean government to come up with a new Competence-Based Curriculum was a noble one. Learners now learn and experience what is relevant to their lives. It appeared the old curriculum denied teachers and learners the opportunity to construct, participate and interact with curriculum content in a more practical and meaningful way, thereby contributing to disappointing educational outcomes.

Recommendations

Given the observations from the primary school teachers' stories, the study makes four recommendations:

- There is need for a bigger national survey to ascertain the level of understanding and use of the Competence-Based Curriculum by Zimbabwean primary school teachers.
- The Curriculum Development and Technical Services unit has a responsibility not just to produce curriculum documents but to interface with teachers who interpret and implement those documents by engaging them in professional dialogue.
- Government needs to institute primary school teacher capacity building initiatives to help them understand the Competence-Based Curriculum after listening to their concerns.
- There is need to increase resources and support to under-resourced primary schools.

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