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Staff Development and the Implementation of Competency-Based Education in Kenya

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ABSTRACT: Curriculum implementation sometimes faces challenges, especially when supporting resources are insufficient, and staff lack relevant competencies and skills. There are acknowledged deficiencies in teacher training. This raises the question of whether staff development is sufficient for effective competency-based education (CBE) implementation. In view of the foregoing, this article interrogated the extent of staff development and CBE implementation in Kenya, borrowing insights from related studies globally, regionally and locally. The objective was to determine the nexus between staff development and CBE implementation. The curriculum implementation theory anchored the article. A historical research design was adopted. A total of 11 articles published between 2010 and 2023 were examined, from which pertinent data or information were derived using desk-based research. A qualitative textual approach was specifically employed to analyse data and present the resultant findings. The study findings revealed a lack of sufficient staff training and development necessary for curriculum implementation. Locally, teachers who have developed a positive attitude towards CBE are better placed to implement it. Yet, proper implementation of the curriculum is hindered by unprepared teachers. Moreover, it was established that there was a significant relationship between teachers' training and CBE implementation. The article concluded that, although teachers' training in CBE significantly impacts its implementation, there remain gaps in pertinent staff training and development. It is recommended that all teachers be sufficiently trained in CBE. Advisably, universities and teachers' training colleges should ensure that programmes are designed and planned in a manner that integrates CBE requirements.

KEYWORDS: Competency-based education, curriculum, curriculum implementation, staff development

INTRODUCTION

Staff development is crucial in every organisation. It is defined as training and educational initiatives aimed at enhancing the capabilities and practices of educators (De Rijdt et al., 2013). According to Kudaktin and Nazarenko (2023), the importance of staff development is underpinned by the rapid changes taking place not only in the structure but also in the functionality of implementing most organisational processes. It involves improving staff knowledge and skills through continuing education, and training and development through workshops, conferences, seminars and mainstream educational advancement. Contextually, there is great emphasis on continuing development of teachers, mostly due to the acknowledgement of their important role within the school, and the recognition of the importance of their professional learning (Harris, 2010). Essentially, staff development influences curriculum implementation.

Curriculum implementation involves executing the curriculum in a manner that enables the realisation of the goals for which it was designed. It encompasses translating the curriculum objectives from paper to practice. According to Nevenglosky et al. (2019), curriculum implementation refers to how instructors, teachers, tutors, lecturers or trainers use specific resources provided in a particular curriculum to deliver instruction (teachings or lectures) and assessments. It is imperative to understand what a curriculum entails. Wiles and Bondi (2014) postulate that a curriculum provides instructions, lesson plans, scripts, and assessment options aligned with a given objective or set of objectives. There is a great emphasis on curriculum implementation consistency. This can be achieved by ensuring that there is curriculum alignment, for instance, by aligning the curriculum for the preceding, current and the next grade levels (Tweedie & Kim, 2015).

Curriculum implementation in European countries is largely focused on digital literacy (Tolboom & Van Rooyen, 2021). Evidently, from a global perspective, all countries in Europe face similar curriculum implementation challenges. According to the authors, teachers' professional competence is the most important issue when addressing curriculum implementation. In this respect, schools' administrators, teachers, as well as teacher training institutes collaboratively anticipate the new demands occasioned by changes or improvements in the curriculum (Frey & Osborne, 2017). In Dubai, Haque and David (2022) point out the need to effectively implement the curriculum to achieve an optimal teaching and learning experience.

In Nigeria, inadequate funding is one of the major impediments to effective curriculum implementation. Curriculum implementation challenges can be addressed by educational research centres. These centres are aligned with curriculum support and educational support services, offering opportunities for professional staff development and ensuring teachers are involved in curriculum planning (Kabiru, 2024). The nexus between staff development and curriculum implementation is aptly captured in the context of South African schools. For instance, according to Sepadi and Molapo (2024), the implementation of the curriculum and assessment policy statement in schools could be fast-tracked through internal and external workshops for teachers (Sepadi & Molapo, 2024).

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In Kenya, the curriculum has witnessed an unprecedented transformation over a span of approximately four decades. In 1984, the 8-4-4 curriculum replaced the 7-4-2-3 curriculum, which had been in place since independence. The latter curriculum, which lasted for 20 years, had been adopted by the three East African countries of Uganda, Tanzania, and Kenya. However, its being too academic, elitist and unresponsive to the changing aspirations of individual Kenyans contributed to its abolishment (Owino, 1997; Simiyu, 2001). Consequently, the 8-4-4 curriculum was introduced to potentially address the stated problem and gaps, and enhance the employability of the learners (King & McGrath, 2002). The 8-4-4 system was replaced in 2017 by the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC), which recently transitioned to Competency-Based Education (CBE).

The CBE was established with the view of realising seven competencies. These include communication and collaboration, critical thinking and problem solving, creativity and imagination, citizenship, learning to learn, self-efficacy, and digital literacy. This curriculum constitutes three levels: Early years education, middle school education, and senior school (Inyenga et al., 2021). Presently, the curriculum is aligned with the more comprehensive Curriculum-Based Education (CBE). It is acknowledged that teachers' training colleges and universities are yet to fully align their academic programmes with the new curriculum; thus, there still exist gaps in pertinent staff development (Ministry of Education, 2024).

Statement of the Problem

Despite the highly regarded benefits (whether real, perceived, or projected) of the CBE, its implementation faces several challenges. Since the CBE is still in its early stages, there is limited empirical evidence on its benefits for learners (Muchira et al., 2023). However, the challenges in implementing the CBC are so evident that they cannot be ignored. Teacher training for this curriculum's implementation remains inadequate. The Ministry of Education (2024) acknowledged these inadequacies in the training programmes in universities and teachers' training colleges. Mule (2025) highlighted deficiencies in teacher training as a consequence of the curriculum implementation. This raises questions about whether staff development is sufficient for effective curriculum implementation. Nonetheless, existing empirical literature has not clearly established the connection between staff development and the implementation of CBE in Kenya. Therefore, a notable research gap exists that the current article aims to address.

Research Objective

To determine the nexus between staff development and CBE implementation in Kenya

Research Question

What is the nexus between staff development and CBE implementation in Kenya?

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section outlines a review of the anchoring theory and a review of past empirical studies on staff development and curriculum implementation.

Curriculum Implementation Theory

The article is grounded in curriculum implementation theory, propounded in 1971 by Neal Gross, Joseph Giacquinta, and Marilyn Berstein. This theory posits that the implementation of a new curriculum necessitates specific aspects to be addressed. These issues include ensuring the awareness and competence of teachers, teacher support and resources, the relevancy and adequacy of instructional materials, and administrative support (Gross et al., 1971). According to this theory, the curriculum is like an innovation whose implementation faces similar challenges to those encountered when an innovation attempts to introduce changes.

According to the curriculum implementation theory, the implementation challenges may include underdeveloped or undefined innovations and a lack of management commitment to the innovation's implementation. Another limitation is the lack of full control over the implementation process. The foregoing is in line with the postulation that an innovation's implementation process is contingent on the extent to which the innovation is defined and developed, management is committed to the implementation process, and the level of control of the management over the aforementioned process (Tom, 1981).

The curriculum implementation theory is applied in this article to demonstrate the implementation of CBE and its impact on staff development. As Tom (1981) quips, CBE is an educational innovation whose implementation is subject to overcoming imminent challenges. Contextually, the theory can be applied to explain the importance of the management's commitment to the CBE implementation. The management can be substituted with the government. Therefore, the extent to which the government, through the Ministry of Education, is committed to the implementation process is very crucial to the success or failure of CBE.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

As shown in Figure 1 below, the conceptual framework depicts the independent and dependent variables, which are represented by staff development and CBE implementation, respectively. Both variables are operationalised through measurable indicators. Staff development is assessed based on teachers' and learners' needs, the level of staff involvement in designing or planning development activities, opportunities for participation, quality of instructors, and mentorship programmes. The indicators for CBE implementation include resource adequacy, learners' engagement level, self-efficacy, creativity, digital literacy, critical thinking, and communication and collaboration. It was assumed that a relationship exists between staff development and CBE implementation.

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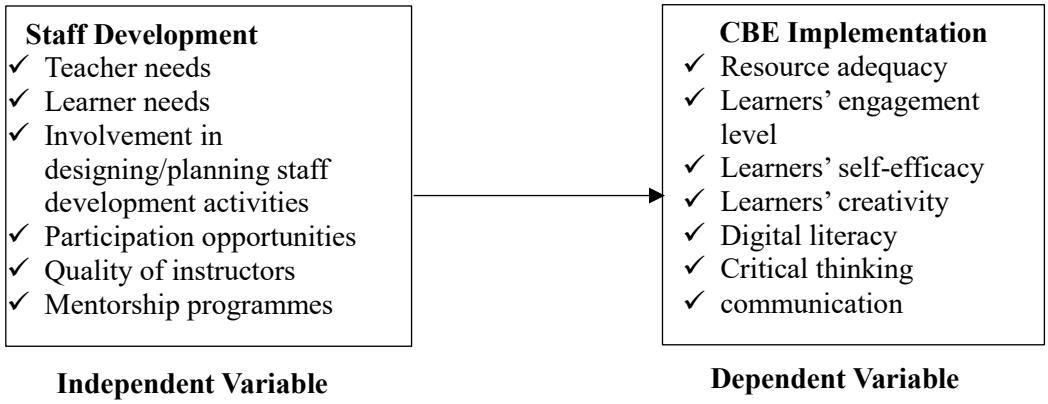

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

METHODOLOGY

The study discussed in this article adopted a historical research design. This is based on the fact that the CBE has been under implementation in Kenya for a relatively short period. According to Lune and Berg (2012), a historical research design involves a systematic process where past events are used to inform the current situation. It includes problem identification, collecting and critically analysing data from primary and secondary sources, objectively contextualising findings, and synthesising them into a coherent narrative where historical events influence current trends.

Population-wise, and in respect of inclusion and exclusion criteria, the examined articles centred on staff development and curriculum implementation and were published between 2010 and 2023. A sample of 11 articles was interrogated. The articles were global, regional and local in a ratio of 3 to 5 to 3. Pertinent data were collected using desk-based research. This method involves collecting data from documented secondary sources such as reports, journal articles, conference papers, and previous surveys, among others (Bassot, 2022).

The collected data were analysed using content analysis. This analysis involves a careful, comprehensive, and systematic examination and interpretation of specific materials (data/information) in respect of a particular issue, to establish patterns, themes, assumptions, and meanings (Berg & Latin, 2008). In the case of this article, content analysis encompassed permutations of written documents (journal articles, official reports, surveys, and conference papers). In line with Miles and Huberman's (1994) postulation, an interpretive approach was employed in data analysis. This approach involved organising the collected qualitative data to uncover patterns and meanings regarding staff development and curriculum implementation. Importantly, a qualitative textual approach dominated the analysis and presentation of the findings (Silverman, 2006).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings are organised chronologically and contextually. Chronological classification illustrates the presentation of findings and pertinent discussion in terms of their years of publication. Contextual classification presentation follows a funnel approach from global to regional and local perspectives, respectively. In presenting and interpreting findings, contextual classification takes precedence.

Global Findings

A study by Konokman et al. (2017) ascertained teachers' opinions of curriculum development competencies in Turkey. According to the study's findings, it was affirmed that teachers' perceptions can impact curriculum implementation. The findings showed that instructors believed they lacked the skills necessary to manage crucial facets of the curriculum, such as lesson planning, and that their judgment was unaffected by their gender and educational attainment.

The results of a study by Tolboom and Van Rooyen (2021) indicated that European countries continuously conduct teacher training and development to instil in them specific digital competences in tandem with curriculum implementation. This is against a backdrop of the understanding that staff development is crucial to effective curriculum implementation.

In India, Vashisth et al. (2021) studied perceived challenges faced by teachers during curriculum implementation in preschools. According to the study results, curriculum implementation challenges included, among others, inadequate teachers' preparedness, inadequate resources, and lack of in-service training. However, the study did not explicitly demonstrate the effect of staff development on curriculum implementation.

Regional Findings

This section puts into perspective the empirical results in the African context. Using primary school teachers as the primary implementers of the curriculum in South Africa, Mokua (2010) carried out a study to assess the impact of teacher preparation on this process. His study findings indicated that instructors are essential to the curriculum's implementation. It was revealed that, for South Africa to meet its educational objectives, teachers should first receive training on how to create successful lesson plans for the new curriculum. This suggests that before introducing a new curriculum, teacher training should take precedence.

A study conducted in Tanzania examined the adoption of a competency-based curriculum in secondary schools in Tanzania (Komba & Mwandaji, 2015). The study established that 86% of teachers lacked prior understanding of the competency-based curriculum. It was also found that 78% of the lesson plans submitted by teachers did not accurately follow the standards for competency-based curriculum compliance (Komba & Mwandaji, 2015).

In a related study conducted in Zimbabwe, effective curriculum implementation in rural schools was hindered by the lack of pedagogical expertise among the teachers (Zhuwau & Shumba, 2018). It follows that teachers were unable to integrate curricular components into instruction. Ambei and Kum (2018) conducted a study in Cameroon to determine how much CBC was being used by primary school instructors. The results showed

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that most teachers were unaware of what CBC entailed. It was also revealed that even for teachers who had received training and had some familiarity with the curriculum, successful implementation remained a significant challenge in the majority of cases due to a lack of resources and a lack of expertise on how to improvise resources. This study offered proof that instructors' lack of expertise on the curriculum can hinder the implementation of CBC.

The results of a study conducted in Tanzania by Makunja (2021) indicated that teachers' knowledge is essential to a successful implementation of CBC. Additionally, the CBC implementation was destined to fail to produce the anticipated results without providing instructors with proper in-service training. Since teachers are the primary curriculum implementers, the findings indicate that more opportunities for their involvement in the development and/or review of the curriculum are required. By doing this, teachers might be able to fulfill their responsibilities for developing and finally implementing the curriculum efficiently.

Bimenyimana and Cissy (2023) conducted a study on staff development and curriculum implementation in secondary schools in Rwanda. Their study revealed that at least 90% of the teachers had been trained on the new curriculum (CBC). However, about a third of the schools lacked well-equipped laboratories required for the curriculum implementation. Allusively, there was a close link between staff development and curriculum implementation.

Local Findings

Local findings refer to the results of staff development and curriculum implementation in the Kenyan context. According to Ondimu (2018), a few instructors have acquired a positive view toward the implementation of the competency-based curriculum after they received the training. They also have the desire and willpower to execute the new curriculum. Because teachers who have formed a good attitude are better able to apply the curriculum than those who have a negative attitude, this indicates that the curriculum has been successfully implemented.

The curriculum's implementation in Kenya has prompted numerous studies on the preparation of curriculum implementers. The degree to which teachers are prepared to implement a new curriculum affects that curriculum's implementation skills. According to Momanyi and Rop's (2019) investigation into teachers' readiness for Kenya's revised curriculum, teachers' levels of readiness had an impact on the course's outcomes. The proper implementation of a curriculum is hindered by unprepared teachers.

Another local study examined the link between teacher preparedness and CBC implementation in public pre-primary schools (Isaboke, 2021). The study revealed that the extent of the teachers' training in CBC (currently, CBE) had a statistically significant relationship with their ability to implement the curriculum. Yet, about a third of the teachers disputed having received any training on CBC.

CONCLUSIONS

Past studies conducted, particularly globally and regionally, provide crucial and informative insights regarding staff development and curriculum implementation. The analysed articles indicate how training and developing teachers have led to effective curriculum implementation. It is concluded that staff training and development instil in teachers digital competencies which are crucial to curriculum implementation. Yet, inadequate resources, teachers' preparedness, and a lack of in-service training are some of the factors that inhibit effective curriculum implementation. Teacher training is inferred to be important, especially before introducing a new curriculum such as the CBE. In Kenya, training of teachers has led to a change in the staff's attitude towards the CBE. Moreover, it is inferred that unprepared teachers (partly due to inadequate training and development) hinder curriculum implementation. Despite the acknowledgement that teachers' training in CBE significantly impacts its implementation, there remain gaps in pertinent staff training and development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the drawn conclusions, the article recommends that the relevant stakeholders, led by both the national and county governments, should ensure all teachers are sufficiently trained in CBE. There should be regular (at least annual) seminars, workshops or conferences organised for teachers/lecturers at respective levels (pre-primary, lower primary, junior secondary, senior secondary, and university) aimed at updating them on the intricacies of CBE, particularly its implementation. The foregoing should largely target teaching staff who were in service before the introduction of CBE. It is recommended that universities and teachers' training colleges should ensure that programmes are designed and planned in a manner that integrates CBE requirements.

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