



Teachers' Experiences in Piloting the Integrated Curriculum in Lesotho: Constraints and Prospects

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DOI: 10.53103/cjess.v2i6.80

Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the challenges and opportunities experienced by teachers in piloting the integrated curriculum in Lesotho. Moreover, this research was underpinned by a Constructivist paradigm which concedes that peoples' views of the world are influenced by their experiences. The qualitative case study research design was employed and data were generated through the semi-structured interviews. In particular, purposive sampling technique was deployed to obtain sufficient and useful data. For this reason, three teachers with ten years teaching experience were selected from three departments in a chosen school. The departments included; Commercial studies, Science and Mathematics as well as Languages respectively. Overall, findings from this study affirm that constraints experienced while piloting the integrated curriculum outweigh the prospects. The opportunities raised included the following; development of creative skills and nurturing of the students' talent while the challenges highlighted were; content overload, lack of CPD, absence of monitoring and supervision among others. Therefore, the implications of these findings are that a successful implementation of the reformed curriculum is under threat. In order to reprimand this threat, provision of regular workshops, monitoring and evaluation of the CPD programmes, reliable internet coverage, free data bundles for both teachers and students, as well as frequent follow ups by curriculum developers may address the issues of concern hence improve the quality of education as intended by the Lesotho Curriculum and Assessment Policy of 2009.

Keywords: Integrated Curriculum, Piloting Schools, Constraints, Prospects

Introduction

The history of education in Lesotho is a very long one. Primarily, traditional education had been prevalent before the introduction of the Western education by the missionaries which was introduced in Africa, including Lesotho. What we know about the initial aim of this Western education is largely based upon the study of Mokotso (2015) which conveys that Western education was predominantly on evangelization. Nevertheless, the misalignment between the Western curriculum and the country's needs provoked some concerns regarding the relevance of such curriculum. Therefore, the idea of curriculum

reform became the foremost issue. As highlighted by Raselimo and Mahao (2015), a search for a quality curriculum could be traced back even prior to independence. Ultimately, researches establish that it was only after independence that there were a number of attempted curriculum reforms. Such attempts include the following: first, the curriculum diversification reform in 1974. Second, a core curriculum reform in 1982. Finally, there was a localisation of the 'O' Level curriculum and examinations in 1995 (Selepe, 2016; Ansell, 2002).

In regard to the localized curriculum, many scholars hold the view that there were discrepancies inherent in that curriculum. One most obvious view about the Cambridge Overseas Schools Certificate (COSC) curriculum was that it was irrelevant (Raselimo & Mahao, 2015). In fact, it failed to address the socio-economic issues of the country such as unemployment, poverty, environmental degradation and HIV/AIDS, to mention but a few. Furthermore, Nhlapo et al. (2019) argued that the COSC curriculum was exam-oriented. This assertion is based on the fact that teaching and learning process primarily focused on the mastery of content to fulfil examinations requirements. Undeniably, these above highlighted limitations were convincing enough for the curriculum to be reformed.

Finally, it was only in 2009 when the government of Lesotho through the Ministry of Education and Training developed and published the Curriculum and Assessment Policy (CAP 2009) which was meant to salvage the negative impact of the COSC curriculum. Notably, there is more literature acknowledging that CAP 2009 signifies a paradigm shift (Mokotso, 2020; Raselimo & Mahao, 2015). In other words, it marks a departure from the subject-oriented curriculum to a more learner-centred curriculum. For explication, unlike COSC curriculum which rendered students as passive recipients of knowledge, CAP 2009 encourages the empowerment of students with skills and knowledge to solve practical problems in life (Ministry of Education and Training (MOET), 2009). Another important aspect of CAP 2009 is that it is organised into learning areas. One paramount benefit of this organisation is that these learning areas are chunks from which different subjects contribute to respond to contemporary issues such as unemployment, poverty, environmental degradation, HIV/AIDS (MOET, 2009). In summary, the above merits of the integrated curriculum give hope that the country will attain its socio-economic goals.

In contrast to the above optimism on the outcome of the new curriculum, there is more growing literature revealing the challenges linked to the new curriculum especially in secondary schools (Ralebese, 2018; Makumane & Ngcobo, 2021; Kolobe & Matsoso, 2020; Tafai, 2017; Khechane, 2016; Phosisi, 2019; Kaphe, 2017). Even though it is commonly believed that there are more challenges associated with the new integrated curriculum, Ibraimova (2017) and Lowe (2017) contested this belief based on the fact that opportunities and challenges of implementing any curriculum are inevitable. In alignment with Ibraimova and Lowe's assertion, Moea's (2022) study on piloting secondary schools in Lesotho revealed that teachers in such schools face challenges. Such challenges include

the following; syllabus misalignment, limited time, calibre of learners' inspectorate frustrations and language instruction barriers. Similarly, the findings from the study conducted by Matee (2019) seems to concur with Moea's assertion that there is lack of training for teachers, limited resources, lack cooperation amongst teachers, inadequate facilities and supervision.

Contrary to the above challenges faced by teachers in the implementation of CAP 2009, there are also opportunities conveyed by the policy. Firstly, it offers provision for students to reflect on their everyday experiences to make teaching and learning more relevant. Secondly, the policy does not only advocates for learner-centred approaches to teaching and learning but it also advocates for interdisciplinary approach that allows a learner to use "overlapping skills to discover commonalities within the unit concept" (Phosisi, 2019). Along similar lines, Nhlapo et al. (2019) highlighted that the integrated curriculum is meant to revitalise the dormant self-reliance ideology in Lesotho. This was seen as an opportunity since the former curriculum was silent about self-reliance. In other words, the integrated curriculum is inclined to equip learners with necessary skills which are necessary for addressing life challenges. Apart from the provision of self-reliance, Matee (2019) outlined the following opportunities of the integrated curriculum as experienced by secondary school teachers in Lesotho: the curriculum encourages collaboration, motivation, learner-centeredness and teachers as facilitators.

Statement of The Problem

It is the foremost goal of countries to develop in various aspects. As a consequence, countries resort to curriculum reform these days in order to meet the high demands of the 21st century skills (Mokhets'engoane & Pallai, 2022). On the basis of such demands, Lesotho engaged in curriculum reform as a means to address some political and socio-economic issues. The curriculum and assessment policy which was finally published in 2009 was initially implemented in 2017. This pilot implementation was grounded on the basis that it is advisable to pilot any curriculum before full-swing implementation imposes problems. Practices such as this are meant to inform policy makers to make necessary adjustments before complete implementation (Mbatha, 2016; Ibraimova, 2017).

As indicated early, there has been a number of studies conducted on integrated curriculum in Lesotho. However, there is still more to be explored in relation to the teachers experiences especially those from the schools that piloted the curriculum as there is limited literature reviewed in those particular schools. For instance, a study by Matee (2019) focused only on the challenges and opportunities in the teaching and learning of English language. Moreover, a study by Moea (2022) focused only on the challenges faced by teachers at two piloting schools in Thaba-Tseka and Maseru respectively. Having identified the geographical and information gaps from these studies, this study sought to investigate

the experiences in implementing the integrated curriculum in piloting secondary schools in Leribe district. This study is benchmarked on the view that teachers being the stakeholders in determining the strategies of implementing the curriculum, their beliefs, concerns and views are of paramount significance.

Objectives of The Study

- a) To explore the opportunities brought by the integrated curriculum in Lesotho Secondary schools.
- b) To investigate the challenges faced by teachers in the implementation of the integrated curriculum in Lesotho secondary schools.

Materials and Methods

This study adopted a case study research design. In accordance with Leedy and Ormrod (2015), case study is a type of qualitative research in which there is an in-depth gathering of data to a single group, program or event with the purpose of learning more about them. The rationale behind the selection of this design is that this article seeks to make an in-depth investigation on the experiences of teachers in this secondary school from the rural parts of Leribe district which was among the few, selected schools piloting the curriculum since 2017.

This study was further influenced by constructivist paradigm. Concurrent with this paradigm, people's view of the world is influenced by their experiences (Creswell, 2014). They further posit that individuals provide meaning through these experiences and utilize the meanings they assigned to these experiences to interpret life or phenomenon. For instance, the teachers selected from the school had contrasting views on the opportunities and challenges encountered during the implementation of the integrated curriculum. Therefore, using the qualitative research approach has assisted in bringing out different views of the participants as they have been shaped by their experiences.

The researchers selected three (3) teachers to be representatives of the entire teacher's population of the school. The participants were taken from each of the three departments being; department of Languages, Science & Mathematics and Commercials. Furthermore, purposive sampling was employed as researchers knew where they could obtain sufficient and relevant data concerning the topic under investigation as such teachers have been teaching for more than 10 years and have been part of the implementation of the integrated curriculum. Semi-structured interviews were employed to collect data from the teachers. The questions were administered face-to-face which further permitted the researcher to probe open ended questions and responses. The interview per participant took between 15 – 20 minutes and was recorded using a mobile phone. The data collected were

transcribed, coded and analysed using a thematic analysis approach.

With regard to ethical considerations, in order to ensure confidentiality and anonymity of the individuals, pseudonyms were used. To ensure transparency, the researcher asked for permission from the principal of the school to conduct this research. Again, the identity of the school that participated was not revealed.

Results and Discussion

Opportunities Brought by the Integrated Curriculum

The findings of the study provide confirmatory evidence that one of the opportunities brought by this curriculum is that, it develops creative skills among the students. Current research appears to validate this view because the assertion seemed to be a trend in the three teachers who participated in the study. Teacher 1 propounds the view that, since the curriculum is organized into three streams being; the academic, vocational and technical, learners are able to acquire skills and knowledge which they can use if they cannot make it in academic stream. On these grounds, we can argue that, entrepreneurship skills are developed and therefore students become self-reliant, which is something that was not addressed by the old curriculum.

She explicitly stated,

“The curriculum assists learners to be job creators rather than job seekers because with vocational and technical skills acquired, they may be able to start their own businesses.”

Similarly, there is an ample support to the above claim by teacher 2 who further accentuates that, learners do not run after scarce white-collar jobs as the curriculum empowers them with skills on how to establish their own businesses. As confirmation to this point, through engaging in mini projects in the school, learners are able to equip themselves with transferrable skills of which they can implement even at home. Along similar lines, teacher 3 puts forward the view that, the creative skills are salient in addressing the societal issues of concern. For instance, poverty, crime and issues of discrimination can be addressed so that learners are able to adjust and live peacefully with others within a multicultural society.

According to Berk (2022) creative skills poised by the integrated curriculum play a key role in equipping individuals with the skills needed in social and labour market. Likewise, it is agreeable that, general secondary education is designed to prepare students directly for labour market and higher education by providing them with knowledge, skills and competences in a particular field or occupation. Additionally, Nhlapo et al. (2019) also abounds with an example that, vocational subjects such as tourism are intended to provide learners with practical and entrepreneurial skills. In the present study, the above issues are extrapolated by the emphasis drawn from MOET (2009) that, the integrated curriculum

plays a crucial role in emancipating students from poverty through strategies that encourage creativity, productivity and entrepreneurship.

Another opportunity raised by teachers is that integrated curriculum promotes independent learning which nurtures learners' talents. More specifically, through the learner centred pedagogy, there is provision of a conducive setting for students to learn independently. The implication of this conducive environment implies that the students interact freely with teachers to create knowledge and skills. This assertion draws from the research conducted by Siddiqui (2020) that, this ideology puts students at the centre of the learning process hence promoting students' talents. The description of this ideology resonates with the features of CAP, 2009 as it advocates for a teaching which recognises everyday experiences (MOET, 2009).

Furthermore, the teachers interviewed echoed the same sentiments as expressed by Siddique and CAP. They indicated that the curriculum gives the students an opportunity to learn on their own which further assists them to unleash their potential. As a result, the different intelligence or individual differences of the students are being recognised. To give a common example for the sake of clarity, the integrated curriculum gives talented students who can sing a platform to nurture that talent.

Teacher 3 puts it succinctly,

“Since the introduction of this curriculum, I have recognised students who can sing, draw beautiful portraits and dance marvellously although not gifted academically...therefore I see this curriculum appreciating the talents of such students.”

Additionally, teacher 2 further underscores the fact that with the application of the learner-centred activities, learners are able to boost their confidence which later translate into improved academic performance.

Challenges Faced by Teachers during the Implementation of the Integrated Curriculum

One of the challenges brought by the integrated curriculum is content overload. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2020) defines content overload as “the excessive amount of content to be taught and learned in relation to the time available for instruction” (p.11). In the context of the integrated curriculum in Lesotho, it implies that the curriculum seems to carry more content that teachers fail to teach within the prescribed academic calendar time. It had been indicated by Majoni (2017) that worrisome situations such as this one of content overload, often constrains teachers to provide too much information that may be overwhelming to the learners.

In view of all the findings that have been gathered about content overload so far, all the interviewed teachers seem to be adamant over the fact that the integrated curriculum is overloaded with content. In their view, they were in one accord that reducing academic

years from 5 to 3 years of secondary education is one of the factors which contributed to content overload. To explicate, subjects' syllabi have experienced addition of more topics and demands although time to complete the LGCSE had been minimised to three years. In substantiating the argument of three years, it is worthwhile to highlight that grade 8 is considered a transitional year to the LGCSE (MOET, 2009). When accentuating her perception in regard to content overload, teacher 2 vocalised,

“I have never been able to finish the syllabus since its inception in 2017 not because I'm slow but because the content is expanded with about four new topics; a number of practical activities which needs more time to finish.”

For her, the challenge with the geography syllabus does not only rest on the addition of content to this syllabus but there are additional demands to the syllabus. To be precise, contrary to the old geography syllabus which emphasized mastery of content, the new syllabus encourages students to be actively involved in solving societal issues of concern (MOET, 2020)

Another worrisome issue raised by teachers is lack of Continuous Professional Development (CPD). Admittedly, the inception of the curriculum in 2017 at post primary level implies that there was a paradigm shift which affected the way teaching, learning and assessment process. That being so, there is more literature supporting the fact that in-service trainings, workshops and peer meetings are fundamental in improving teachers' practices and beliefs (Selepe, 2016; Tafai, 2017). Similar views are raised by teachers who suggest that teachers need frequent trainings to update skills and knowledge needed for effective teaching and learning process.

The teacher from the Language department articulated,

“... I have only attended one workshop which was held in Morija in 2018 and ever since then I have not attended any”

This above utterance signifies that due to inadequate training through workshops, teachers were not able to implement the curriculum as anticipated. This idea is further supported by the findings of Thaanyane (2010) and Motšoane (2004) that unless teachers are adequately equipped through professional development to be efficient in a changed curriculum, any attempt to change that particular curriculum will be in vail.

Another important finding of the study was the absence of monitoring and supervision from the Ministry of Education and Training. Drawing from their grievances, teachers laid their discontent over limited inspections in their piloting schools by relevant inspection bodies. Given this situation, it is somewhat surprising to realize that while teachers need an unremitting support for the successful implementation of any curriculum, currently there is limited supervision by the ministry concerned. one potential outcome provoked by inadequate follow-up sessions is that teachers skew the curriculum demands by making their own interpretations (Khechane, 2016).

The findings of the study revealed that teachers were frustrated by the consistent failure rate amongst the learners. There is some evidence that poor transition from primary to secondary education aggravate the current alarming failure rate. To clearly illustrate this point, teachers complained that the grade 8 students lack basic skills. In addition, one disconcerting issue divulged in teachers' sentiments is that there are cases of grade 8 students who could not even write their names properly. These concerns of teachers provide a solid evidence base for one to concur with teacher 2 that students get into secondary school having not completed the syllabi. This is evidence in teacher 1's utterance,

"I believe there is something wrong at primary level. The teachers might be abandoning some of the topics they find complex to teach or perhaps lack understanding on how to impart this curriculum. as a result, we have to teach content which should have been treated at primary level."

This above observation of a teacher 2 strengthens Moea's (2022) idea that one of the apparent challenges faced by teachers at piloting schools is language barrier. In making this comment, Moea illuminates that grade 8 students fail to comprehend and express themselves in English language. A dramatic example articulated by teacher 3 is that when students report any issue concerning their class, while they are charged to express themselves in English, they prefer to renounce their case. It is undeniable based on the above illustration here that it becomes problematic for students to complete their secondary education since they lack foundation.

Another challenge teachers indicated is that of the inadequacy of resources in the teaching and learning process. When asked about the negative impact of inadequacy of books, the teachers that the unavailability of textbooks in some grades and in some subjects poses frustration to the efficient implementation of the curriculum. This above impediment is further exemplified in one of the teacher's distressing remarks that when a teacher seeks to give students an assignment; they are obliged to write the assignment on the chalkboard. Perhaps the most serious disadvantage of this practice is that it consumes time which could have been spent profitably for the teaching and learning process.

Teacher 1 had the following to say,

"I find it difficult to teach Sesotho literature since few students possess literature textbooks. I even hesitate to give them reading assignments since they have nowhere to refer. Therefore, this forces me to always read for them."

The above grievances from teacher 1 corroborate weber's (2007) assertion that the shortage of resources such as textbooks has detrimental effects on the successful implementation of curriculum in many schools. This above articulation of Weber is similar to Mokhele's (2012) findings that insufficient textbooks force teachers to download worksheets from the internet, and the reliability of these worksheets can be a problem.

Another limitation indicated by teachers is the unserviceability of the information communication technology (ICT) available in school. To exemplify this, school computers are outdated while others are malfunctioning. The most distressing issue teachers indicated about these computers is that the few usable computers do not have internet connection. In situations such as this where there is a limited access to the digital technologies such as televisions and projectors, how would students possess the 21st century skills which are advocated by the present curriculum? Indeed, this raises questions of despondency and uncertainties about the successful implementation of this new curriculum since there is relatively a minimal interposition by the ministry to curb the experienced implementation issues before total roll out across the country.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The conclusions drawn from the findings of the study indicates that the challenges concerning the implementation of the integrated curriculum outweigh the opportunities. As a consequence, this manifests that it possesses a threat to the successful implementation of this curriculum. Subsequently, teachers have to always improvise on the teaching and learning resources as findings revealed that there is scarcity. In addition, the available evidence seems to suggest that the content overload puts more pressure on teachers to cover the content within the shortest possible time. As a result, they opt for teacher dominated strategies which do not fully engage students hence neglecting the core philosophy of the integrated Curriculum.

On the basis of the evidence currently attested by teachers that there is limited training, teachers become frustrated to the extent that they cover only content they are familiar and competent with. This in turn impedes the quality of education since the teachers are not supported and empowered with different skills needed for the proper implementation of the integrated curriculum. On logical grounds, the present research concludes that the government implemented the integrated curriculum oblivious of the challenges teachers experienced during the piloting stage.

In order to address the aforementioned challenges, the researchers recommend that the government must provide frequent trainings to the teachers at piloting schools. That is, the workshops or seminars conducted will guide, motivate, empower and keep teachers informed on the effective implementation of the curriculum. Given the centrality of the matter, researchers believe that this will be beneficial since the teachers from the piloting schools will in return be resource persons in schools that were not piloting.

The current research also advocates for frequent monitoring and evaluation of the CPD programmes provided. By all means, this will assist in identifying the existing strengths and weaknesses so that there could be modifications by the policy makers.

Since the integrated curriculum is also envisaged in producing learners with skills that will help them to thrive in the digital world of the 21st century, the government is

recommended to create academic websites. Researchers maintain that it would help both the teachers and students across the country to efficiently implement the curriculum especially if they can access them without any charges. For instance, when such academic websites are zero-rated any student who cannot even afford to buy data bundles can download materials and books. Furthermore, e-Libraries can also be created as they have been shown to be much cheaper and flexible. As a consequence, students can access information anytime and anywhere. In addition, the government should collaborate with the telecommunications companies in the country to support education by providing monthly data to students and teachers at secondary level. After all, this is something that is already carried out in some of the institutions of higher learning in the country. The researchers have an unwavering believe that this will address the issue of limited resources being textbooks and other materials that might be needed for effective teaching and learning.

In conclusion, based on the findings, the study recommends that the government through MOET should have an evaluation of the effectiveness of the curriculum in the piloting schools so that they can be informed of the constraints and prospects of the integrated curriculum. It is important to highlight that, this will inform the curriculum developers to make necessary adjustments that will definitely address issues of failure, content overload, and poor transition from primary to secondary level among others. Nonetheless, there was full swing implementation of the new curriculum without doing a comprehensive evaluation from the piloting schools. To this end, a number of indispensable elements have been left behind which could definitely improve the quality of education in Lesotho.

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