

Original Research Article

Problems Faced by Lesotho Piloting High School Teachers in Implementing the 2009 Curriculum and Assessment Policy

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Abstract

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Lesotho, like all countries in quest for development in all phases, has need of an education system which prepares its citizens to play a part and flourish in an all- the- time more globalised world, simultaneously safeguarding its idiosyncratic morals, ethics and culture, and transferring these to the subsequent generation. This study examines the problems faced by teachers at piloting high schools in implementing the 2009 curriculum and assessment policy. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data from the four teachers from the piloting schools in Lesotho; two from piloting high schools in Thaba- tseka district, in the central and rural region of Lesotho and two from piloting high schools in Maseru district, the urban and metropolis of Lesotho. The findings reveal that teachers faced the following challenges; syllabus misalignment, limited time, calibre of learners, inspectorate frustrations and language instruction barriers. Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) requires to go back to the drawing board and re-evaluate the curriculum from the planning process to implementation and make sure that it suits the context of Lesotho economically and otherwise. Teachers should be incorporated in various curriculum processes and be equipped with workshops to enhance their teaching practice.

Keywords: Curriculum and Assessment Policy, High schools, Implementing, Lesotho, Piloting, Problems

INTRODUCTION

Lesotho, like all countries in quest for development in all phases, has need of an education system which prepares its citizens to play a part and flourish in an all- the- time more globalised world, simultaneously safeguarding its idiosyncratic morals, ethics and culture, and transferring these to the subsequent generation. Lesotho, as a signatory member of the United Nations (UN), is in pursuits for obedience with transcontinental accords and treaties through its scholastic policies (Ralebese, 2018). This slots in the educational objectives of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Education for All (EFA) and

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), to mention but a few. For illustration, numerous of Lesotho's educational policies are steered, to a significant degree, by the EFA goals and policy actions in the field of education and training (MoET, 2005; UNESCO, 2014a).

The Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) has introduced a new integrated secondary school curriculum, designed to respond to the changing needs of education in Lesotho. This curriculum is aimed at maintaining the core values and identity of Basotho culture and society. In order to achieve its national

educational development goals, the government of Lesotho, through its ministry of education and training replaced Cambridge Overseas School Certificate (COSC) with the Lesotho General Certificate of Secondary Education (LGCSE). This is a local qualification that "is being developed over a period of years in four main stages with the aim of aligning this qualification with the new curriculum (Examination Council of Lesotho, 2012, p.1)".

According to Raselimo and Mahao (2015) the new education system, under the new Curriculum and assessment policy (CAP), is rearranged such that basic education covers the first 10 years of formal education, from Grades 1 to 10 and the final two years of secondary education, Grades 11 and 12. Basic education is intended to form basic foundation for secondary, technical, vocational education and lifelong learning. This move comes in place to remove the (COSC) examinations which comprised of General Certificate of Education (GCE) O Levels, marked and graded by Examinations Council of Lesotho (ECOL) in Lesotho since 1989. As part of the national educational development in Lesotho, in 2013 the COSC was substituted by the LGCSE (Moea, 2021). Moea further adds that LGCSE was believed to be more to the point than COSC in that LGCSE is a qualification that appreciates subject performance in distinct acknowledgment unlike COSC which was based on a group award system and that all the subjects in the curriculum will have the same status and English Language ceased to be a passing or failing subject.

With the new system, the government of Lesotho through MOET has replaced Primary School Leaving Examinations (PSLE) with National Examinations (NE), and replaced the COSC with the LGCSE. The PSLE and COSC were set and marked locally but endorsed in the United Kingdom while NE and LGCSE are local qualifications locally endorsed. The new system also dictates that learners cannot be prevented from advancing to the next grade due to poor performance unless the situation is extremely bad and beyond redemption (Kabi, 2015).

According to Kabi, the changes came as a result of a World Bank study which unveiled that the old syllabus no longer responded to Lesotho's needs and discriminated against particular learners. Again, the previous syllabi were expensive and that through their ousting, the Ministry is saving the money. Further, according to Kabi's article, the fundamental objective of this curriculum localisation was to contextualise it and make it responsive to the needs of Basotho and that under the new syllabus, learners do neither pass nor fail, there are no positions because teachers are more concerned about each learner's abilities.

Lesotho has undergone a number of straits in its effort to put into place educational reforms. According to MOET (2012) these include the following: the high cost of

curriculum implementation, teacher professional development programmes, resistance to change by teachers and parents and alignment of curriculum in tertiary institutions to socioeconomic needs. Nevertheless, despite all the challenges faced since independence in 1966 the Government of Lesotho has continued to implement curriculum and assessment reforms, although with little success (Raselimo et al., 2015). In 2013, Lesotho introduced the basic and integrated curriculum and also localised the senior secondary examinations by introducing the LGCSE. This New Integrated Curriculum (NIC), which is said to be relevant in the context of Lesotho, was developed (MoET, 2009). The 2013 Form E cohort was the first to sit for examinations under the novel curriculum (Kabi, 2017).

Many parents criticised this move in many ways. Many parents saw this as a move that takes the country backwards. When one would communicate with them, they argued that for the fact that no learner is to fail and repeat a class, learners are going to be lazy to work hard in order to pass to the next class. Others found the syllabus embarrassing them in front of their learners when they are given assignments and they fail to help them. On top of that, they alleged that it is lowering the quality of education.

Implementing a new curriculum impacts in so many ways on the schools, especially directly on teachers who implement the curriculum and learners who are to be shaped by such a curriculum. According to Oibile et al. (2015) cited in Nnabuike et al. (2016), some challenges of curriculum implementations include, but are not limited to, non-involvement of the teachers in curriculum planning and development processes, unconducive school environment, heavy academic load, teacher, parent and student factors and working conditions. Because teachers are the ones taking the final decision in relation to the actual learning process, it is imperative that it becomes problematic not to involve them in planning of the curriculum. Also, an environment where ingredients of a conducive learning environment are found wanting, will be a hindrance to effective execution of duties by teachers. Government's failure to treat teachers and neglecting them renders teachers dissatisfied by such working conditions therefore, it becomes a major challenge.

Although the implementation of curriculum reform is often contentious and complex, it is necessary to attain educational targets. As such, implementation cannot simply be regarded as a mere execution of policy prescriptions, but should engage the sense-making processes of teachers as the core implementers. Teachers are expected to change pedagogy and shift from traditional approaches of instruction and assessment to the alternative ones (MoET, 2009). When a reform is as radical and ambitious as the one espoused by Lesotho's Curriculum and Assessment Policy (CAP), it becomes essential to establish teachers' interpretations

and actual practices with respect to the new curriculum.

In as much as The Ministry of Education and Training has gone on board on the review of the entire primary and secondary education curricula with the purpose of making education at these levels accessible, relevant, efficient and of the best quality (MOET, 2009), there are some glaring issues with regard to CAP implementation at high school level. The Education Sector Plan of 2016-2026 provides a spur to the operationalisation of Curriculum and Assessment Policy of 2009 in order to produce learners and systems that are unbendable and vigorous during challenging times and also to salvage and reposition the Ministry of Education and Training as a training hub to produce school leavers and graduates who can fend for themselves in the face of myriad challenges besetting us in the current times (MOET, 2016). Even so, after the first piloting group of Grade 11 learners sat for its examinations earlier this year, 2021, their results proved rather disturbing. Their performance was below par as evidenced by an unpublished Literature in English report that, 'the performance... was below par... and was observed allegedly as a result of advent of grade 11 candidates' (Moea, 2021, p. 20).

This is further problematised by many teachers who complain about low level of competence from the piloting groups of learners; Grade 10 and Grade 11. Also, this problem is of current interest since most schools are still uncomfortable with the way CAPS has been implemented, especially now that the roll-out stage has begun countrywide. Since the first piloting group sat for its examinations (LGCSE), failure rate has aggrandised and various examiners' reports alludes such to the advent of the Grade 11s. Furthermore, educators still have a dearth of hands-on experience and have a need of solutions vis-à-vis applicable techniques of effecting CAPS in a more contextualised means in order to yield educated learners. Therefore, this study sets to investigate the lived challenges of piloting high schools' teachers with regard to implementing CAP.

METHODOLOGY

This study was done qualitatively. The instrument that was used is the semi-structured interview. Conducted conversationally and interactively, as Adams (2015) states, with one respondent at a time, the semi-structured interview instrumentalises an amalgam of closed and open-ended questions, often accompanied by follow-up why or how questions. Face-to-face semi-structured interview meeting was used, permitting me to probe open-ended questions and probe participants' responses. The semi-structured interview was used as a reliable method used across the teachers because of its large spectrum of individualism and secrecy. The participating teachers were four piloting high schools' teachers; two from piloting high schools in Thaba-tseka district, in the

central and rural region of Lesotho and two from piloting high schools in Maseru district, the urban and metropolis of Lesotho. Of the four teachers that I interviewed, three were females and one was male.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Based on the results of this study, it appeared that teachers encountered a problem of lack of resources. All the teachers revealed that in the piloting phase, there were no books both for the learners and the teachers. Those that arrived were very late because they arrived around August at schools. According to the teachers, this became a major strait because they could not teach without resources and learners had nothing to refer to. From one school, one respondent revealed that even with the syllabuses, there was a delay whereas in Religious Studies, a syllabus was changed in the middle of the year. Resultant from this was a lot of confusion for both teachers and learners. Even to date, since 2017, only four 'main' subjects have the books, being Sesotho, English, Mathematics and Science. This, according to the teachers, is frustrating because they have to struggle to find some ways in which they can improvise. This is evidenced by Mupa et al. (2015) that children with dearth of provision of reading materials perform below par in schools. It also appeared that it even went as far as being economically demanding for the teachers because they had to use their money which is already little to access the internet trying to find materials suitable for teaching. Obviously, this was a strain to the teachers with a new syllabus that is without resources.

Another issue raised is that of syllabus misalignment. According to the teachers, Grade 8 and Grade 9 content syllabi do not match. Teachers declare that content taught in Grade 8 does not match and is different from that of Grade 9. It appears Grade 8 deals with Primary content while Grade 9 begins the LGCSE journey. That is, the content between the two grades is not linked. Worse still, it appears from the teachers that unqualified teachers were 'propelled' to teach content unfamiliar to them. An Accounting teacher had to teach music without necessary equipment to teach music, acting content taught by someone who has studied nutrition. This posed challenges to teachers and obviously content could not be delivered as correctly as possible and some did not even bother to teach it. The result is obvious; low quality of learners and education standard. The issue of resources does not only end within the walls of schools' campuses. It goes beyond where a learner has to be taught music yet the content is only limited to Grade 8 and the following year, they study something completely new. At the same time, the country has no further plans for music knowledge and there are no drama schools in the country yet the learners study it. That year becomes a useless year because whatever content learned is not

going to benefit them anywhere else except in their Grade 8 year. The misalignment again existed, according to the teachers, due to a missing link between NCDC and Examinations Council of Lesotho, where it seemed there was no communication between the two powers and this caused confusion. The misalignment between the curriculum designers and the examiners brings confusion in the way teachers interpret the curriculum (Phaeton et al., 2017).

Another challenge faced by teachers was that of limited time. The teachers stated that the content that was taught in the period of five years has been reduced to be taught in three years. This is because Grade 8 deals with content that is not serving the purpose anywhere else, then Grades 9 to 11, which is three years, it is only then that the LGCSE content is taught. This says, the teachers were just forcing through the content in the heads of learners to pass time and finish the syllabus in time. The implication of this was, content was not fully covered; if covered, there is a lot of frustration and assessment in not well done and comprehension could not be measured. This had an adverse repercussion on the status of education because learners were not well taught, hence the high failure rate at the end of the year. It should be noted that this deviates from what CAP states that there will be five years from Grade 8 to Grade 12.

Another glaring issue is that of the calibre of learners. The teachers share the experience of learners from primary level who do not know how to read and write. The worst scenario cited is that of a Grade 8 learner who could not even write their own names and copy what was on the board. For the high school teacher who was not indoctrinated into ways of teaching such elementary information, it got them frustrated and they even declared and acknowledged that they now hate their profession. This becomes the case because there is a lot of content to cover within a short span of time and at the same time they cannot teach because the learners cannot read and write. Teachers on the other side were swamped with a lot of work to find ways to deliver the content without resources and the high expectations from the government and the society to 'make the learners pass.' Obviously, the level and quality of education was affected. It gets worse because, due to the fact that they know they are not going to fail, learners do not pay attention and apply effort in their work. This may be because they knew that, failed or not, they were going to move from one class to the next, hence the glaring issue of learners who lack the fundamental basic skills; reading and writing. Such skills are taught at primary level and it seems this issue began after the PSLE was faced out. One can then say, teachers at lower level need a serious visitation with regard to this.

Again, teachers revealed that another frustration was brought about by inspectors who do not help them understand the syllabus better, instead they threatened

them that they were going to expel them because they were incompetent. According to one interviewee, this is one cause of hatred towards her job which she once loved. This causes teachers to neglect their duties because they feel neglected by the government which does not deliver on its part but puts the blame on the teachers who were never given proper training by the members of the National Curriculum Development Commission (NCDC). Instead, NCDC demanded information from the unknowing teachers. In addition, the same NCDC never came to inspect if the process of piloting had been smooth or not. This, together with the lack of confidence brought by having no knowledge of the content, challenged and demotivated, and still does, the teachers. When teachers are frustrated, their level of productivity is lowered by that lack of motivation as evidenced by Obilo et al.(2015).

In addition, another challenge faced by teachers is that of the language of instruction; English Language. Teachers asserted that learners did not understand English as used as a language of instruction in their classes. They reveal that learners never respond or participate in class. When they ask them, the learners respond that they do not understand the English Language because they were never taught it at primary level. Everything they did was in Sesotho. This poses yet another challenge because now teachers have to find ways to make them understand and that is time consuming to the already limited time with a lot of content to cover. Some teachers have even opted to cut out some content in Grade 8 because they say it does not serve them any purpose. The problem is still continuing according to the respondents because the problem at the stream has not been attended to and the curriculum has now been rolled out across the country yet these challenges were never addressed.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

By the look of things, teachers are faced with many challenges that cut across from instruction, through to the government. It seems that the government has imposed the curriculum on the teachers and it offers no support to them in return. In turn, teachers are frustrated and this breeds their hatred for the teaching profession. It has to be borne in mind that teachers should always be competent, effective, always available and should have job satisfaction (Obilo et al., 2015). Therefore, anything that threatens such makes a teacher to feel incompetent and unable to disseminate content in an appropriate manner. This then becomes a problem in the quality of education. The government through MOET is required to go back to the drawing board and re-evaluate the curriculum from the planning process to implementation and make sure that it suits the context of Lesotho economically and otherwise. Curriculum reform in

Lesotho mandates a radical change at school level (MOET, 2009). This places the teacher at the helm of implementation (Ralebese, 2018). Their knowledge and the technical know-how should be encapsulated during the curriculum reform. However, this is not the case and it compromises the delivery of the content because they are only remembered when they are to implement. This makes the understanding of the curriculum by teachers to be vague. It is therefore important to incorporate teachers and equip them with workshops to enhance their teaching practice.

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