

# **BARRIERS TO THE EFFECTIVE CURRICULUM IMPLEMENTATION: SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS SPEAK OUT**

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## ***ABSTRACT***

The study focused on the barriers to the implementation of the updated curriculum in Zimbabwean secondary schools. A case study design was used in Goromonzi District in Mashonaland East Province of Zimbabwe. Cluster, random and purposive sampling were used to select 45 teachers and five school heads from a population of 825 teachers and 35 school heads. The sample included teachers and school heads from different educational contexts: boarding, urban, rural, mine, farm, and resettlement schools. NVivo Version 10 was used to analyse data generated from semi-structured questionnaires and in-depth interviews. The key barriers to curriculum implementation included scarcity of human and non-human resources, inadequate remuneration, unacceptable working conditions, lack of knowledge in curriculum issues, and lack of standardization in the management of curriculum change, and political interference. The study recommended that the government must recruit enough teachers to implement the curriculum in the schools; there is also need for provision of resources such as adequate buildings, information, and communication technology (ICT) gadgets, and electricity. Teachers must be paid meaningful salaries and their working conditions improved to reflect their status in society. Teachers must be adequately prepared to handle curriculum issues. Political interference in schools should be minimised.

## ***Key words***

Curriculum, curriculum implementation, barriers, secondary schools

## **I. Introduction**

Education curricula can never remain relevant and perfect for all ages as society changes (Munikwa, 2011; Zvobgo, 1996; Omulando, 1992). The education system, as a vehicle of social transformation, is undergoing a period of transformation globally to suit the prevailing societal interests, development, needs and aspirations by enhancing learners' achievement (Pedzisai, Tsvere&Nkonde, 2014). Thus, Zimbabwe has not been spared in these changes, the most recent educational reform being the updated curriculum of 2015.

One of the themes in Zimbabwean education since 2015 is the effectiveness of implementing the updated curricula. Curriculum development and innovation is generally more expensive than the programs they replace (Ndawi&Maravanyika, 2011). Even though huge sums of money are spent on developing and implementing new curriculum, several of these investments in Zimbabwe have failed. According to Alade (2011) and Dziwa, Chindedza and Mpondi(2013), the main reason for the failure is the system. Often there is a large gap between the planned curriculum and the transacted one. This has resulted in tissue rejection of the innovations (Chinyani, 2013).

Competent teachers are needed for successful implementation of anycurriculum (Wiles & Bondi, 2014). A new curriculum requires teachers to feel confident in materials they use to ensure accurate implementation (American Institute for Research, 2016; Early, Roggi& Deci, 2014). Identification of reasons that support or prevent teachers' effective implementation of a new curriculum may provide direction for helping the ministry in administering curriculum changes. According to Lochner, Conrad & Graham (2015), teachers are key to ensure that curriculum is delivered consistently, effectively and with efficacy to enable the support of student progress and growth.

Chinyani (2013); Dziwa et al. (2013); Mawere (2013) Pedzisai et al. (2014) and Dzimiri&Marimo (2015) provide empirical evidence on specific curriculum issues in Zimbabwe. The mentioned studies, which are explored further in the review of literature section, have shown that the effectiveness of any curriculum is measured by how it is implemented. The studieshave also shown the need to identify the factors that contribute to partial or ineffective implementation. Understanding the barriers to the implementation of new curriculum could provide vital intelligence for successful implementation of future curriculum reforms.

### ***A. Statement of the problem***

Our discussions with teachers and parents revealed that the problem in Zimbabwe is that the updated curriculum was not being implemented successfully. The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education in Zimbabwe has not acted to identify or understand the practices, concerns and barriers to curriculumchange and development. The underlying gap is that

schools are not implementing the curriculum successfully. The concerns of teachers remained unknown. The research was undertaken to identify the reasons for ineffective implementation from the teachers' perspectives.

### ***B. Research objectives***

The key research objectives of this study were:

1. To establish teachers' perceived barriers to curriculum implementation.
2. To explore strategies to minimize the perceived barriers.

## ***II. Review of related literature***

The literature examined here focuses on the factors which hinder implementation of curriculum innovations. The main focus is on highlighting the voice of the teacher on the obstacles of curriculum implementation. These include teacher preparedness, scarcity of resources, over centralisation of decision making, teacher working conditions, assessment through external examinations, time factor and learner ability.

The objectives of any level of education cannot be achieved if the planned programme is not effectively and efficiently implemented. Onyeachu (2008, p.1) comments, "No matter how well a curriculum of any subject is planned, designed and documented, implementation is important." In curriculum development most of the problems arise during the implementation stage. Much of the discussion in the research on curriculum implementation is that curriculum success is only achieved if the implementers (the teachers) understand the curriculum requirements. If they don't, they might modify the curriculum to suit what they understand. Table 1 summarizes the barriers as they are expressed by different scholars. The barriers are classified into two main categories - Micro and Macro.

### ***A. Micro factors inhibiting curriculum implementation***

These factors are considered internal (found within schools), and therefore vary from school to school. These have been raised by several scholars over the years. The factors are summarised in Table 1.

**Table 1: Micro barriers to curriculum implementation**

Barrier	Fullan 2007	Chinyani (2013)	Dzimiri&Marimo (2015)	Dziwaet al.(2015)	Alsubaie (2016)	Times mentioned across the 5 authors
Insufficient resources	X	X	X	X	X	5
Adverse classroom conditions	X			X	X	3
Inappropriate school environment	X	X			X	3
Incompatible assessment	X	X		X		3

As shown in Table 1 the factors include that inhibit curriculum reform at classroom level include: inappropriate school environment, insufficient resources, and incompatible assessment. In this study we grouped into five categories namely: urban, boarding, rural, mine, farm, and resettlement schools. This classification can be further sub-divided on the basis of resource availability in each school. Implementation of the curriculum in these schools differs due to the resource base at each of the schools. Dzimiri and Marimo (2015); Dziwa et al. (2013) concur with Fullan (2005) that in addition to resources and classroom conditions other internal factors in schools including large classes, lack of cooperation from parents, learner capacity and resistance from the administration also inhibit curriculum implementation.

***B. Macro factors inhibiting curriculum implementation***

Another category of barriers which prohibit curriculum implementation is external factors. These are factors which affect the nation regardless of the capacity of individual schools. Table 2 shows some of the main factor in this grouping.

**Table 2: Macro barriers to curriculum implementation**

Barrier	Fullan 2007	Chinyani (2013)	Dzimiri&M arimo (2015)	Dziwaet al.(2015)	Alsubai e (2016)	Times mentioned across the 5 authors
Absence of training on the part of the implementer	X	X	X	X	X	5
Insufficient resources at national level	X	X	X	X	X	5
Lack of teacher participation in curriculum decision making		X	X	X	X	4
Incompatible assessment	X	X		X		3
Curriculum dissemination practices		X		X	X	3
Insufficient curriculum time			X		X	2
Expenses of training teachers	X		X			2

Absence of resources at national level can impact seriously on the success of any curriculum reform. Every project needs funding to be fully implemented (Ogar&Awhen, 2015). Similarly, Dziwa et al. (2013), note that for any educational innovation to function well it must be sufficiently funded at national level. Pedzisai, Tsvere&Nkhonde (2014) investigated the barriers which weighed down implementation of the two pathways education (division of education into theory and practical biased curricula) curriculum in Zimbabwe. The research findings identified recurring factors like inadequate financial and material resources, lack of skilled teachers, congested timetables, lack of information, lack of proper infrastructure and lack of uniform policy for enrolling students into secondary school. Issues of human resources are also classified under macro forces since recruitment as well as teacher welfare is controlled by the government. These factors are issues of policy rather than school-based challenges. Other barriers which do not fit neatly into the two broad categories already discussed follow.

**1) Teacher understanding of curriculum development**

It is important to consider the nature of teachers in the school system and their capacity to handle curriculum innovation. A study by Buchanan &Engebretson (2009) reveals that clear understanding of the information and theoretical underpinnings of curriculum innovation is paramount to its proper implementation. According to Okoth (2016) in the absence of such understanding the teachers responsible for the implementation of the curriculum change make some adjustments which are not in line with the theoretical underpinnings of the change. It is

therefore crucial to ensure that they have adequate knowledge to ascertain correct conceptualization of all aspects of curriculum innovation.

### ***2) Lack of teacher involvement in decision making***

Studies by Ongong'a (2010) and Indoshi (2009) indicate lack of teacher involvement in decision making as one of the hindrances to curriculum implementation. This is supported by Alsubaie (2016); Chinyani (2013) and Dziwa et al. (2013) who note that the teacher's influence on the classroom curriculum is far more direct and usually far greater than that of any other single change agent. Involvement of the teacher in the decision-making process creates a sense of ownership and commitment which are crucial for effective curriculum implementation.

Emphasising the importance of engaging teachers in curriculum decision making and planning, Obinna (2007) asserts that no government policy on education can succeed if it does not first identify the problems and concerns before initiating any change. The teacher is in the best position and is the most qualified resource person to consult. Handler (2010) and Alsubaie (2016) are of the same sentiments and argue that as the most important personnel in curriculum implementation, the teacher must be involved in all stages of curriculum process. Obinna (2007) observes that teachers are deliberately neglected when major decisions on education and matters concerning their welfare. Sidelining teachers has negative consequences on curriculum implementation.

### ***3) Effects of assessment on curriculum implementation***

Assessment in form of examinations greatly influences implementation. Due to the great value placed on examinations in most countries, teachers may tend to concentrate their implementation on the aspects usually tested in the terminal examinations. This, according to Fullan (2007) can affect the broad goals of the curriculum.

### ***4) In sensitivity to gender***

A study by Mawere (2013) indicates that on the issue of gender equity, implementation is hindered by a gender insensitive curriculum. Few female models within textbooks and among authors and other resources demoralize both the teachers and the learners hence creating a negative attitude towards subjects. As fittingly advised by Chirimuuta (2006), it is the duty of the curriculum developers to ensure that, where female thinkers have made any contributions to scholarship, their works be added to the list of sources for instructional material.

### ***5) Learner capability***

Another important factor which can hinder curriculum implementation are the characteristics of the learners. According to Okoth (2016) the learners hold the key to what is transmitted in the classroom. The learners influence the teacher in the selection of learning experiences,

teaching methodology, and pace of content coverage. As such, the teacher needs to consider learner diversity and uniqueness in curriculum implementation.

As indicated in the foregoing review of literature, the above-mentioned micro, macro factors, as well as the other factors, work in varied ways to influence curriculum implementation. The current case study sought to identify the factors that were acting against successful curriculum implementation in Zimbabwe.

### **III. Methodology**

This study was exploratory focusing on the reasons behind unsuccessful implementation of curriculum innovations from the perspective of the secondary school teachers. The study employed the mixed method case study research design. The design was chosen in order to make a comprehensive and in depth understanding of the secondary school teachers' perceptions of the barriers to successful curriculum implementation. This methodology allowed the study to obtain the truth from the experiences, opinions and views of the teachers who are directly involved in the teaching and learning process. Mixed methods were used during data collection. A semi structured questionnaire was used to collect and generate data on teacher perceptions on the barriers to curriculum implementation. In-depth interviews were also used to generate data from the five school heads.

#### ***A. Participants***

Fifty participants (45 teachers and 5 school heads) took part in the study. The sample was obtained through cluster sampling. The schools in Goromonzi District of Mashonaland East Province of Zimbabwe were divided into five categories: boarding, rural, urban, mine, farm and resettlement. Firstly, five schools (one from each cluster) were picked using convenience sampling. We selected schools which were accessible to the researchers to cut on costs and travelling time. Within the schools, the heads were conveniently sampled as they direct and manage curriculum implementation in the schools. As the instructional leaders in schools, the heads also provided curriculum material necessary for the implementation of school curriculum. Besides the advantages mentioned above, the inclusion of school heads made it easier for the researcher to gain entry into the schools and subsequently to access official information. Lastly, the key sources of data for this research were the classroom practitioners/teachers. The subject teachers in the schools are the key implementers of the curriculum and were most likely aware of the barriers that inhibit successful curriculum implementation. Criterion sampling was used to select those teachers with a teaching qualification from the research population of 153 teachers. This was done under the assumption that certified teachers had done studies in curriculum development and had an interest in how it is done in Zimbabwe. As discussed by Cohen and Manion (1990), sampling in qualitative research is based more on quality rather than size of the sample. The size of the

sample of teachers (45) was made large enough to allow for identification of consistent patterns.

### ***B. Data collection and generation***

Semi structured questionnaires were used to collect data from respondents and additional data were generated from five school heads through in-depth interviews. The questionnaire and interview protocol were validated through a pilot study. After this, permission to enter the schools was sought from the ministry of Primary and Secondary Education. It was after permission was granted that data collection and generation commenced.

The first researcher visited all sample school sites and discussed with the heads of schools and teachers separately. The discussions were focused on issues relating to the nature and purpose of the study, explaining why these schools were chosen for the study, negotiating entry and access to the participants, as well as seeking permission to carry out interviews with heads. Participants took part by consent; the interviews were only recorded after verbal consent was granted. The participants were also assured that all information obtained during the study would be used for the purposes of the research only (Babbie, 2010). In addition, the researchers made sure all data that were used in this study did not carry names of participants or detail that could link back to the participants.

The administration and collection of questionnaires was done by the researchers within 21 days. After collecting the questionnaires, the interviews were then carried out. Data from the in-depth interviews were captured using a digital mobile phone. The data from both instruments were analysed using Nvivo Version 10.

### ***C. Findings***

The study revealed eight barriers in Zimbabwean curriculum implementation. These are: scarcity of human and non-human resources; low remuneration and huge workload; unacceptable working conditions; lack of knowledge in curriculum; lack of teacher preparedness in curriculum development; political interference; learner ability; and lack of standardised preparation in schools.

#### ***1) Scarcity of resources***

As introduction to the in-depth interviews, the School Heads were asked to provide a summary of resource availability in their respective schools. The contextual data shows that although the schools which participated in this study were from the same district, taught the same curriculum and sat for the same terminal examination, they had different resource bases. The updated curriculum was biased towards digitalisation and child centred approach hence

the importance of electricity, libraries, computers and internet connections. The findings concerning the four key resources are summarised in Table 2.

**Table 2: Resource availability in participating schools**

SCHOOL TYPE	RESOURCES				
	Electricity	Generator/solar	Library	Computer laboratory	Internet connections
<b>Boarding</b>	Fully	Available	Available	Available	Connected
<b>Rural</b>	Partially	None	Small	None	None
<b>Urban</b>	Fully	None	Small	Small	Limited to teachers
<b>Farm</b>	Partially	None	None	None	None
<b>Mine</b>	Fully	None	None	None	None

**KEY**

- Fully-** the whole school is connected to electricity
- Partially-** electricity is found in the administration block and staff quarters
- None-** the resource in question is nonexistent
- Small-** size of library is small for the school population
- Connected-** school connected to internet

Upon being asked the challenges they were facing implementing the curriculum with minimum resources the boarding school head expressed lack of resources as the major barrier:

*The curriculum has an emphasis on digitalisation. We have an enrolment of 900 students, one computer laboratory with 40 computers and two computer teachers . . . The school also needs many books in order to implement the new curriculum; we cannot buy the resources specially textbooks because we do not have the financial capacity.*(School Head,Boarding School, Interviewee)

Responding to the same question, themine school head had this to say, *“We do not have new curriculum textbooks. At first the market did not have the text books but now it is a matter of not affording the books. The curriculum also emphasises. . . digitalisation but we do not have computers.”* [At this point the Head showed me 5 new curriculum textbooks written NOT FOR SALE which were given to her by a publishing house]. *“The subject teachers actually sign for these when they want to use them with learners”*. (Female School Head, Interviewee)

The main outcry was on resources. The main resource base was the fees from learners which are controlled by the ministry such that they never get what they would have budgeted for. Non-payment of fees was another challenge. With a policy which prevents schools to send

non-paying students out of school, heads felt handicapped. The other issue was with hyperinflation, prices were rising daily, and schools fail to plan systematically. During an interview, a school head lamented:

*Most of our parents do not pay fees on time. We are not allowed to send the children home for not paying. With hyperinflation in the country when the fees finally come, they will have lost value.* (Male School Head, Rural School)

The other commonly mentioned class of resources was human. All the five heads of schools mentioned that implementation of the updated curriculum was being hindered by shortage of teachers. Of special mention were the computer teachers. The updated curriculum emphasized on digitalization, yet schools did not have enough skilled staff to implement computer teaching. Computer teachers are even needed to train fellow teachers. The boarding school head, whose school the research considered the best resourced school amongst the participating schools, revealed that the school only had two teachers for 940 learners and 37 teachers. The mine, farm, rural schools did not even have one computer teacher.

Other areas which need teachers were the newly introduced subjects: Heritage Studies, Mass Display, and Physical Education. Without provision of the necessary human resources, schools inevitably resort to selective implementation of the curriculum. The school head at the mine school remarked:

*Human resources are also a challenge. New learning areas were introduced without the necessary number of teachers needed. As a school we have not introduced these subjects because we do not have both the teachers and the textbooks.* (Female School Head, Mine School, Interviewee)

The findings confirm observations by Fullan (2007), Chinyani (2013); Dziwa et al. (2013); (2013) Pedzisai et al. (2014) and Dzimiri & Marimo (2015) that the major challenge with curriculum implementation is lack of - as well as scarcity of resources in schools. Clearly, lack of sufficient human, financial, material and infrastructural resources are barriers to the implementation of the curriculum in Zimbabwe.

## **2) Inadequate teacher development**

The other commonly mentioned factor was inadequate training of teachers. As mentioned by Ndawi and Maravanyika (2011), before institutionalization of any curriculum reform it is important to consider teacher competences and attributes. The five heads of schools mentioned that implementation of the updated curriculum was being challenged by inadequate preparation of teachers. The updated curriculum puts a lot of emphasis on digitalization, yet the teachers were not prepared for the use of computers and other information and communication (ICTs) gadgets. The other areas in which training and development are needed were the newly introduced subjects: Heritage Studies, Mass Display,

and Physical Education. Family and Religious Education is one other subject which underwent huge transformation. The teachers concerned lamented that major changes were made in their subjects without proper appraisal of the old syllabus and training of the teachers in the new syllabus. One of the teachers wrote, *“Sometimes as teachers we fail to interpret the syllabus and the prescribed methodology. We actually need to read before going for each lesson”* (Teacher 3, Urban School, Female Respondent). Heritage studies and Mass Display were also mentioned as new and challenging subjects. One of the teachers confessed, *“I am trained to teach History, Heritage Studies is a new learning area with unfamiliar content”* (Teacher 6, Boarding school, Female Respondent)

Teachers also had challenges in methodological changes; the updated curriculum has a thrust towards child-centred education. Teachers are required to be facilitators and not lecturers, yet the teachers were used to the lecture method. The conditions at the schools are also prohibitive. A teacher from the urban school had this to say, *“New methods are difficult because we do not have enough resources especially time and technology. Our classes are also too big for such methods and on the other hand we are not trained . . . how to use the computer in the classroom”* (Female Teacher 4, Respondent).

The issue of technology was also highlighted by another teacher who taught Geography. He complained about the scarcity of computers in the schools. He also lamented that teachers are inadequately trained for the changes, *“I teach Geography and the syllabus has undergone serious [massive] changes. There is a section where learners need to use computers, the school does not have a computer laboratory. I also need training in using the computer”* (Male Teacher 5, Urban school, Respondent).

The teachers’ voices confirm that teacher preparation is a barrier because the key stakeholders in curriculum implementation were not well trained and prepared for their [new] task. These findings confirm Ndawi and Maravanyika (2011) and Dziwa et al. (2013)’s assertion that curriculum innovation of any scale is always more complicated than anticipated. This is so because changing any one component of interrelated systems precipitates a chain of other changes. This often incapacitates teacher leading to frustration and feelings of hopelessness.

### **3) Low remuneration and huge workload**

All 45 teachers cited poor remuneration as one of the major challenges in curriculum implementation. Zimbabwean teachers have been reduced to one of the worst paid group of workers. One of the teachers from the mine school lamented, *“We are one of the worst paid group of workers - this is the worst time to bring the so-called changes. (Teacher 2, Male Respondent). This teacher was skeptical about the changes and his commitment to implement them is questionable.*

The school head at the urban school talked about the impact of poor remuneration to the urban teachers who must commute to work daily:

*We are also very much disgruntled with our salaries which have led to incapacitation. Teachers are not coming to work every day because they cannot afford the bus fare; [curriculum] implementation is heavily affected by teacher absenteeism.* (Male School Head, Interviewee)

Teacher absenteeism coupled with inadequate time impact negatively on curriculum implementation. These findings concur with Chinyani (2013)'s assertion that "teacher remuneration in Zimbabwe is dismal . . . the net effect is that a teacher becomes 'burnt out', such conditions leave very little time for the teacher to get fully involved in curriculum implementation."

Teachers also complained that their employer does not appreciate advancement of their education [qualifications] through [reviewing] remuneration. Teachers' salary grades are bunched together and there is little difference between highly qualified teachers and their colleagues with lower qualifications. This has discouraged teachers from advancing themselves academically. Instead of studying and upgrading themselves to remain abreast with the curriculum changes the teachers, ". . . would rather engage in other activities to supplement their meagre salaries" (Male teacher 9, Urban School, respondent).

Inadvertently, the demotivation from the poor remuneration coupled with heavy workload is likely to lead to infidelity in curriculum implementation. Participants talked of 35-40 teaching periods per week: large classes of 45 to 60 learners and co-curricular activities: "*Workload was also increased by the breath of content in some subjects*" (Male teacher 7, Rural School, Respondent). Much of the time is spent on lesson delivery and marking the large piles of students' work hence compromising lesson preparation which is a fundamental component of curriculum implementation. This finding is similar to that of earlier studies by Chinyani (2013) and Nyoni&Nyoni(2011). Chinyani(p.68) highlighted, ". . . teachers have to grapple with heavy teaching loads averaging 36 periods at secondary school. . ." Furthermore, Zimbabwean [primary school]teachers handle very large classes averaging 40-50 pupils and composite classes which can have up to three grades.

#### **4)Learner ability**

This issue was pointed out by the teachers from the mine, rural, and farm schools. These schools enroll learners regardless of their ability since the ministry policy states that every child has a right to education. One teacher from a rural school sadly remarked:

*At our school we enroll every learner who seeks for a place to learn including those who are very weak academically, they cannot even express themselves in correct English yet it is the medium of teaching and learning.*(Female Teacher 3, Respondent)

The teacher claimed that some of the weak learners do not understand the concepts easily. As a result, syllabus coverage is retarded by the failure of learners to conceptualise the content

easily. Besides level of understanding, other learner characteristics such as low motivation and indiscipline equally affect the teachers' attitude to work. Teachers end up teaching effectively in the better performing classes and neglecting weak classes. Ideally, the weak learners would require remediation, but the demotivated teachers do not have the level of commitment needed to engage in remediation. During an in-depth interview, the rural school head commented, *"In our school most of the learners are below average hence it is difficult to cover the expected content before commencement of examinations."*

One teacher from the farm school specifically mentioned Integrated Science as one of the challenging subjects:

*Implementation of the new Integrated Science syllabus is very difficult for our learners who are below average, I am failing to successfully teach the Chemistry and Physics components because my learners cannot conceptualise the technical language involved.*  
(Female Science teacher, Respondent)

The scenarios outlined in the preceding paragraphs are summarised by Okoth (2016) ". . . the learners hold the key to what is actually transmitted in the classroom. The learner also influences the teacher in the selection of learning experiences, as such the teacher needs to consider the diverse learner characteristics in curriculum implementation" (p.176). Considering findings from literature and the present study, the impact of learner capability and needs in curriculum implementation should not be taken lightly.

### **5) Political interference**

The participating teachers indicated political interference as a barrier to curriculum implementation. The educational innovations which are supposed to be professional in nature are meddled with politics. As government employees, the teachers are coerced to implement curriculum changes with little understanding. One teacher expressed his shock during a focus group discussion in these words:

*Some of these things are political so we fear victimisation. . . . The government has this tendency of using force even when it is not necessary. At one workshop at district level, teachers were trying to question the logic behind some of the curriculum reforms . . . to cut the [long] story short the DSI [District Schools Inspector] said 'the new curriculum is a bullet which has already left the trigger, it is either you comply or you get shot.'*  
(Male Teacher 7, Rural School, Participant)

Verbs like, 'forced', 'dictated', 'imposed', and 'dropped' were commonly used to describe the practices witnessed and experienced in curriculum dissemination and implementation. One teacher from the urban school showed resentment as he said, *"The curriculum was dropped on us"* (Male teacher 4, Respondent). Another teacher expressed resignation, *"We*

*had our reservations, but the curriculum was imposed on us hence the problems we are facing in implementing the curriculum” (Female Teacher 6, Mine School, Respondent).*

The sentiments raised in the preceding paragraphs show that failure of effective the curriculum implementation and resistance to change could be a result of how the curriculum was designed and/or developed and disseminated to teachers. The issue of over politicizing the curriculum was raised clearly during the in-depth interviews, *“In as much as politics is a major determinant of curriculum development it must not override the [central] role of teachers.”* (Male School Head, Boarding School)

A fellow head from the mine school concurred:

*Once the curriculum is politicized as teachers, we become afraid of engaging in honest discussions on the challenges we face as this might be considered as resistance to change and lead to victimization.*(Female School Head, Interviewee)

Teachers strongly felt that the curriculum is being used to make the citizens accept the status quo. Just like in the colonial era it is meant to maintain the capitalistic class system in the society. Admittedly, the ideology of the current government can never be left out from curriculum issues since it is one of the pillars in curriculum development. However, political interference can create problems when it takes the centre stage and overrides the voice of the professionals [teachers and school administrators] in the education sector. If these professionals are convinced and not forced to implement the curriculum, then political interference ceases to be a barrier.

#### **6) Non-involvement of teachers in curriculum development**

Teachers also cited lack of involvement in decision making concerning curriculum development. They pointed out that the curriculum in Zimbabwe is centrally developed by the Curriculum Development Unit. The teachers are minimally involved in the curriculum development process. They are represented by randomly selected individuals and a few dominant teachers' unions. One of the teachers with speaking with clear resignation remarked:

*I have been teaching for 24 years and have never been part of any curriculum reform. This time around, after acquiring a Masters' degree in Curriculum Studies, I thought I would be included but haazvakaramba [it has failed again].*(Male Teacher 1, Boarding School)

The respondent sounded dejected - his response implied that very few teachers are curriculum specialists like him. He strongly felt that by virtue of his qualifications he deserved to participate in the curriculum development process. The response raises questions: Why are teachers randomly selected for participation in curriculum development? How qualified are

those who participate in curriculum development? Does CDU have a data base of those teachers qualified to take part in curriculum development?

Besides the issue of qualifications, experienced teachers complained that they were left out of the curriculum development, yet they had seen and experienced the challenges over the years as classroom practitioners. A very senior teacher with thirty years of classroom practice complained:

*I have not been involved in curriculum issues from the 1980s up to now. I have been teaching for 30 years and I am always surprised when new reforms are introduced. Our concerns are rarely taken into consideration.* (Rural school, Teacher 9, Male Respondent)

Alsubaie (2016) observes that teacher involvement in curriculum development would also assist them to conceptualise the goals of the curriculum as well as the syllabus content – both have an impact on the success of curriculum implementation.

### **7) Lack of standardised preparation in schools**

The teachers indicated that the curriculum was instituted without thorough preparation on the part of the teachers and schools. Different schools and teachers interpreted the curriculum differently and implemented the curriculum. This, coupled with the fact that “the teaching profession in Africa recruits mediocre ability personnel which literature brand as conservative” (Bishop cited in Chinyani, 2013), resulted in lack of uniformity in schools. One teacher from the farm school casually responded, “*We have engaged in partial implementation of the proposed curriculum we just teach what we can afford and understand as a school*” (Male Teacher 3, Respondent).

Implementation depended on the teachers’ understanding and interpretation of policy documents because curriculum information was inadequately disseminated. In addition to poor curriculum dissemination was lack of preparedness in the schools as well as of the teachers. This was expressed by a teacher from the rural school:

*We were not trained adequately on the changes. Our school did not have resources for the new curriculum. Omissions in curriculum implementation are common . . . we were somehow changing the curriculum to suit the existing knowledge, skills and preferences of teachers . . . we teach the basic[s] which enable the learners to at least pass their examinations.* (Female Teacher 8, Respondent)

If all the changes made to the curriculum are so significant then learners in disadvantaged and marginalized schools are disadvantaged because they cannot meet the college and market needs. Closely related to lack of standardization, the teachers confessed that they were only teaching the subjects in which they have textbooks and know how. Commonly mentioned

problematic subjects are Heritage Studies, Mass Display, and Physical Education. It is likely that most schools have not implemented the subjects meaning that whatever the curriculum had tried to achieve by introducing these new subjects in schools would be only partially achieved, if at all.

### **8) Focus on examinations**

The study also established that there is over emphasis on examinations. Implementation had to be started in earnest in 2017 because the first group of learners had to sit for the examinations in 2018. Out of fear of failing the learners, teachers forced themselves to teach the curriculum without thorough understanding. Teachers have analysed examination trends over the years and resorted to teaching for the examination. This has led to a scenario where teachers focus on those aspects which are usually tested in the examinations as teacher said:

*As a seasoned examiner with ZIMSEC I have used my experience to focus more on cross cutting themes which I know are most likely going to be used in setting examinations. (Male Teacher2, Boarding School, Respondent)*

Another teacher expressed concern on the weighting put on the terminal examinations. Except for the practical subjects where learners carry out projects, grading in Zimbabwe is fully based on the examination. The system is unfair as it decides the future of the learner on a two or three hours examinations ignoring two or four years of hard work. The system, as expressed by the teachers, is a barrier to curriculum implementation as teachers only teach for the examination instead of teaching for life. Teachers tend to focus on content expected to come in the examinations because of competition. For a long time, schools' and teachers' competencies have been measured on the basis of their pass rates. This is confirmed by Fullan (2007) and Okoth (2016, p.173) "assessment in form of examinations influences curriculum implementation tremendously." Due to the great importance placed on examinations by African countries in general and Zimbabwe in particular, teachers tend to focus on areas usually included in the examinations. This according to Fullan (2007) can affect the broad goals and objectives of the curriculum.

Eight barriers to curriculum implementation have been discussed. These are: Scarcity of resources, inadequate teacher development, low remuneration and huge workload, learner ability, political interference, non-involvement of teachers in curriculum development, lack of standardised preparation in schools, and focus on examinations. The 'mother' of all barriers is not meaningfully engaging teachers in curriculum development. If the teachers are not meaningfully engaged the following will happen: they will not understand the goals of the curriculum being introduced. They will not contribute to needs analysis and/or clarification of the expectations of the clients of the education system. They will not view the curriculum as their own and will invariably refer to it as the 'their curriculum'. They will be lukewarm in selling the curriculum to the community groups such as parents, business community and

whoever is directly and indirectly associated with the curriculum changes. Worse still, they grab every opportunity to resist change simply because they were not involved. Coupled with poor teacher remuneration, lack of meaningful engagement discourages teachers from mobilising resources to support the implementation the curriculum changes. The excluded teachers and school administrators will also not see the need to improve their educational qualifications.

It is important to note that political interference was also raised as a barrier to curriculum implementation. Contrary to reviewed literature, where political interference was never mentioned as a barrier to curriculum development, teachers complained vehemently about political interference. It is a new practice in education. It can be a hideous barrier since it is associated with muscle power which can coerce teachers to implement a curriculum they do not have faith in. Coercion is also unacceptable in curriculum implementation as it can only assure presence of the teachers in the classroom without assurance of quality of work output. These and the other barriers that have been recurring over time and need to be addressed with urgency and sincerity if curriculum changes are to be effectively implemented and the education sector revived.

#### **IV. Recommendations**

The eight factors discussed in the preceding section work in one way or the other to affect how the curriculum is implemented. In this section we offer recommendations which, if implemented, could ensure successful curriculum implementation.

##### ***A. To the government***

- A1. The government should look seriously into the requirements of the secondary school updated curriculum and provide funds for infrastructure, material, and human resources. If there are challenges of capacity to provide the resources, the government should involve private players in the funding of education at both national and school level.
- A2. Where schools do not have libraries, the government should encourage setting up of teacher resource centers at cluster, district, provincial or even national level.
- A3. There is need for the government, through the ministry of Primary and Secondary Education to approve meaningful amounts of fees which will enable schools to equip themselves adequately for curriculum implementation. Involvement of teachers can be done through workshops at cluster, district, provincial and national level.

- A4. The government should provide funding for in-service training and development of teachers and other stakeholder in curriculum issues. Such training will address standardization issues in curriculum development and implementation.
- A5. Considering the huge responsibility that teachers have as curriculum implementers, the government should improve teachers' remuneration. The meagre salaries can be supplemented with non-monetary incentives agreed upon through consultation with the teachers through their unions.
- A6. The government should take steps to reduce teacher workload so that teachers can participate meaningfully in curriculum implementation. This can be done through reduction of teacher pupil ratio from 45-60 to 25-30 learners per class. Another way of reducing teacher workload is through employment of more teachers to handle co-curricular activities such as sports and clubs.

### ***B. Recommendations to teachers***

Whilst the issues of low remuneration and working conditions are being worked on, there is need for them to develop the zeal for research. The concept of 'teacher as a researcher' should be popularised so that teachers remain abreast with curriculum changes and other aspects relevant in their profession.

### ***C. To institutions that provide teacher development***

All teacher development institutions must put more emphasis on curriculum development and the courses that they offer should be standardised to facilitate transfer from one institution to another.

### ***D. Recommendations to the community***

The school community should be encouraged to participate in school activities that go further than paying fees and financing projects. Of late, the concentration of parents has been more on paying school levies for infrastructural development of schools. There is need for them to take active participation in planning what their children learn and the conditions in which the teachers work.

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