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**Constraints to Optimal Implementation of Curriculum
and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) in the
North West Province in South Africa**

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Abstract

Curriculum and Assessment Plan Statement in South Africa was introduced to develop, maintain and support a South African school education system. This curriculum policy was envisioned to give more detailed guidance on what teachers need to teach and how they should assess. However, Curriculum and Assessment Plan Statement appears not to be optimally implemented by rural public-school teachers. This study investigated the constraints faced by North West Province in the implementation of Curriculum and Assessment Plan Statement to suggest the intervention mechanisms to bring improvement in the rural public schools teaching and learning. This is in line with UNESCO's believe that any education system should strive to transform lives and build peace and security, eradicate poverty and drive sustainable development. Using the qualitative approach, data were collected through interviews and focus group discussions with grade 9 to 12 teachers from the secondary schools in the North-West Province, Zuluboy Moloto Region. The grounded (thematic)

method was used to analyse the data. The findings revealed that the current state of the infrastructure, limited resources and limited teacher training fail to promote and support the implementation of Curriculum and Assessment Plan Statement. The study recommends that continuous CAPS training should be given to teachers on pedagogical knowledge and skills training related to specific subject matter disciplines.

Keywords: Curriculum Policy, Curriculum And Assessment Plan Statement, Rural Schools' Teachers, Pedagogical Training, Curriculum Implementation

Introduction

The advent of democracy saw many changes implemented in South Africa and one of these was the review of the National Christian Education Curriculum of the Nationalist Party government. A new curriculum based on an outcomes-based approach was introduced in 1998, called the Curriculum 2005. Curriculum 2005 was streamlined and strengthened between 2000 and 2002. Curriculum 2005 and its implementation were reviewed by a Ministerial Committee in 2000. The Review Committee recommended that strengthening C2005 required streamlining its design features, making it more efficient and simplifying its language. The Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) was the result of that process. Towards the end of 2002, the then Minister of Education, Professor Kadar Asmal, launched the RNCS which was further streamlined and strengthened, and is now referred to as the National Curriculum Statement (NCS). In 2011, the NCS was further streamlined and strengthened into CAPS (Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement) which was introduced in the Foundation Phase and Grade 10 only at that point.

Any change is directed at a particular group of people. No change can be successful if it does not involve the people directly affected by the change (Berkhout et al., 2010:175). As indicated above, teachers are the implementers of the curriculum and should be involved in its dissemination (Taole, 2014). The broad aim of the South African National Department of Basic Education's (DBE) Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) is to develop, maintain and support a South African school education system for the 21st century (RSA DBE, 2010a). With the introduction of CAPS, every subject in each grade has a

single, comprehensive and concise policy document that provides details on what teachers need to teach and assess on a grade-by-grade and subject-by-subject basis (Pinnock, 2011). This curriculum review has the aim of decreasing the administrative load on teachers and ensuring that there is clear guidance and consistency for them when teaching. On the other hand, Carl (2009:119) argues that there are human factors which may impede dissemination, namely poor leadership; poor training; lack of time; other interests and divided attention; other administrative duties; negative attitudes and emotions; a variety of educational philosophies; passivity; defective self-confidence; confusion; and lack of motivation.

Statement of the problem

The implementation of CAPS is mainly the responsibility of teachers and other stakeholders such as teachers' unions like SADTU, matriculation board, Department of Basic Education, curriculum committees, school principals, textbook writers, moderators and examiners, departmental examination committees, examination services (Carl, 2009:129). Therefore, to implement CAPS, teachers should have theoretical knowledge, skill and adequate experience in the areas of CAPS' components. While CAPS was among the decisive policy directions in South Africa, scant empirical research has been done to explore the perspectives of rural secondary school teachers on the optimal constraints of CAPS implementation. Although quite several scholars have written about CAPS in relation to primary and secondary school education, very few have examined the needs of people on the ground, namely rural secondary school teachers. Even the few existing studies on the CAPS improvement programme remain limited in scope.

The implementation of CAPS points to a need to examine the constraints that arise with its implementation, focusing on the teaching and learning environment. Thus, the question that the researcher seeks to answer is *what are the optimal constraints in the implementation of CAPS in secondary schools of North West Province?*

The sub-research questions are as follows:

What are the optimal constraints of implementing CAPS in rural secondary schools?

What are the intervention mechanisms of implementing CAPS in rural schools?

This study identifies optimal constraints in the teaching and learning process and the school learning environment in the CAPS implementation. It also recommends possible solutions to the challenges facing CAPS implementation. These recommendations will hopefully contribute to an improved implementation of CAPS. The study is significant because it can add to the existing knowledge base on CAPS, especially at secondary school level. The results from the study can help policy makers in South Africa, mainly in the North West province, to make informed decisions about reform in secondary schools. Furthermore, it will inform the DoBE and the South African Democratic Teachers' Union (SADTU) of the performance gap in the implementation of CAPS. Above and beyond this, the study will hopefully improve the practice of teaching and learning, thereby contributing to the success of public secondary schools. Finally, it will also serve as a springboard for other researchers to carry out in-depth studies in the field.

The study has the following limitations:

first the study considered only Grades 9–12 CAPS practices in secondary schools. This paper is delimited to assess the constraints of CAPS in secondary schools in the areas of the teaching and learning process and school learning environment and to measure the current performance of the CAPS implementation in secondary schools in terms of inputs, processes and outcomes. In the study, the data collected was limited to rural secondary schools in the Zuluboy Moloto Region.

Research methodology

This study was designed to explore the teachers' perspectives on the optimal constraints to the implementation of CAPS in South Africa. It takes us beyond the scope of other studies to gain a better understanding of the perspectives of teachers on the implementation of the curriculum. This study investigated the constraints faced by North West Province in the implementation of Curriculum and Assessment Plan Statement to suggest the intervention mechanisms to bring improvement in the rural public schools teaching and learning. Convenience sampling was used, meaning that respondents who happened to be available at the time of data collection were selected as the sample. It is worth noting that most of the schools visited are Quintiles 1, 2, and 3 schools. These quintiles

represent deprived schools that are prioritized to receive resources and declared to be non-fee-paying schools by the government (Murtin, 2013:19). Using the qualitative approach, data were collected through interviews and focus group discussions with grade 9 to 12 teachers from the secondary schools in the North-West Province, Zuluboy Moloto Region. The interviews were conducted during the busiest and shortest fourth term of the year in secondary schools. The grounded (thematic) method was used to analyse the data.

Informed consent was obtained from each participant in the study in order to ensure that they understood what they would be doing and to verify their willingness to participate. The respondents were assured of their rights, including the right of consent, protection from disclosure of information, and respect for their privacy. SADTU office at Zuluboy Moloto Region communicated with teachers to ensure their willingness to participate in the study. All research participants voluntarily participated and not forced to take part in the study. The researchers ensured that the participants were not at any risk and not exposed to embarrassment, unusual stress, or any demeaning treatment. Anonymity and confidentiality were promised and maintained. The information provided will not be made available to anyone else who is directly involved in the study. Information cannot be traced/identified to the participants. The researcher also ensured that the participants remained anonymous throughout the study.

Findings

This section discusses the findings of the study. The purpose of the study was to discover teachers' perspectives on the implementation of the CAPS curriculum in order to propose intervention mechanisms. The teachers' viewpoints, thoughts, intentions and experiences are highlighted by making use of direct quotations in the findings. The findings were consolidated into the following three themes identified from the teachers' perspectives, judgements, and experiences, namely (1) Usefulness of the CAPs document; (2) identification of the optimal constraints of CAPS implementation in secondary schools; and (3) exploration of intervention mechanisms for CAPS implementation in secondary schools.

Usefulness of caps document: educators' view

This section answers the question:

How effective is CAPS in improving teaching and learning in secondary schools with regard to the curriculum? Respondents showed great divergences in their opinions regarding the effectiveness of the CAPS curriculum.

Interviews with teachers revealed that the CAPS in rural secondary schools is aimed at having a significant contribution to the improvement of the quality of education. One teacher indicated that *CAPS has a teaching plan specifying what to do each week*. Participants indicated that *CAPS allows learners to apply information outside classroom, which make them easy to understand*. Another teacher highlighted that *“CAPS allows open-mindedness of both teachers and learners. It makes it easier to plan your lessons, it guides and it is useful to new teachers”*. Another teacher indicated that *“CAPS is life connected, outcome-based and has more assessment”*.

In answering the question:

from your experience in implementing CAPS, how long does it take you to feel confident with the planning, teaching, and assessing aspects of your learning areas, most teachers indicated that *“with experience is easy to plan, teach and assess learners, but it is a bit challenging without experience”*. Another teacher lamented that *“one cannot say he is confident in implementing CAPS as things change every year, this year is this and next year is another thing, there is no consistency”*.

Teachers' understanding of the CAPS curriculum

The DOE expects all teachers to implement CAPS in their classrooms (FET CAPS Guide, 2012:2). The majority of teachers concur that they understand the CAPS curriculum (in terms of age, relevance, and integration) and the development and use of supplementary materials in the classroom to improve teaching and learning process.

Teachers indicated the following:

CAPS is curriculum specific and content is well-outlined for teachers to know when to teach and how.

It is easy to integrate languages with subjects like Life Orientation, History, Business Studies and Economics.

And from the interviews, teachers indicated that CAPS makes it easy to integrate their teaching of the learning areas they teach. One question was as follows: How easy has it been for you to use the CAPS document you teach from? The response was:

In languages the document is too rigid, followed to the letter. One will not be able to cover everything that will appear in Paper 1 [comprehension, summary, language] as learners have to know all the language structures and conventions by the time they write Test I in Term 1.

CAPS develops successful learners, creative individuals, and responsible citizens

From the interviews, teachers indicated the following:

The fact that CAPS is learner-centred and skills-oriented gives learners the opportunity to express themselves, and it is user-friendly and easy to understand.

CAPS' implementation has the potential of producing independent and critical thinkers.

If used correctly, CAPS could bridge the gap/content gap between grades and this could allow learners to link the subject for late Intermediate Senior FET.

However, the 10% of teachers who disagree with the sentiments that the CAPS curriculum is designed and sequenced to nurture successful learners, creative individuals, and responsible citizens considered that:

Learners pass marks at Grade 12 are very low (30%), making it difficult to qualify to get access to university.

Each learner is able to work at his/her pace. Learners are able to develop the culture of learning at an early age.

CAPS minimized the quality of Mathematics and Science and BSc learners struggle to pass first year university examinations.

OECD (2012:80) recommends that upper secondary education should assist learners with knowledge that gives confidence to contribute to the

labour market in post-secondary education and to adapt to the higher education system.

Another teacher indicated that: Slow learners and learners who absent themselves from school have a difficulty in catching up with the pace of CAPS. Additionally, most teachers highlighted that:

CAPS is not successful because most learners drop out of school. We need to take lessons from Botswana and Zimbabwe's education system, where learners can become entrepreneurs when they drop out of school.

OECD (2013) emphasizes that educational reforms should address issues on youth development that hamper their development.

Clear curriculum/learning standards and goals

From the interviews, it seems that the majority of teachers have achieved consistent understanding of the curriculum levels within their school indicating:

CAPS makes it easier to plan your lessons, it guides and it is useful for new teachers.
CAPS gives learners the opportunity to express themselves, it is user-friendly and easy to understand.
It clearly shows the teachers how to reach their objectives.
It is useful in the sense that learners are supposed to discover the knowledge by doing or practising what they have been taught.
CAPS is more goal/outcome oriented.

Breadth and depth of learning for all

From the position of teachers, it became clear that:

Lack of major resources (physical and human resources) and insufficient training of teachers on CAPS [make it difficult to provide for breadth and depth of learning with adjustments to ensure access for all].

For teachers, lack of resources in some schools is a call for concern as:

Learners do not have resources for practical lessons; in this case lessons are more of theory than practice.

When questioned on the impact of the new curriculum, the overriding sentiment was that CAPS represented an increase in workload and, consequently, a rushed curriculum with little time for extra mural activities.

Teachers recommended that:

- Government should assist with resources and cooperation with relevant stakeholders (schools, communities and the private sector).
- If CAPS could lessen much of the administrative work (paperwork) by teachers, there would then be ample time for them to teach and for learners to learn.
- The department should adhere to teacher-learner ratios.

Lecture method

The lecture method is perhaps the oldest and most popular type of teaching and learning method presented here. Teachers indicated that:

Due to the nature of our classrooms, overcrowding and limited time to use other methods of teaching, the lecture method is the most used.

This implies that despite the fact that teachers are trained on the importance of facilitation in class, they are often forced to go back to the lecture method because of overcrowding in their classrooms. To circumvent this challenge, teachers advised that:

The use of paperwork must be reduced ... the teacher-learner ratio must be adhered to.

One teacher noted that:

CAPS require a well-resourced classroom, the availability of LTSM and the knowledge of coining of what teachers know and what is required. The class arrangement, desks and overcrowded classrooms, does not provide the teacher space to explore, use and excel in his or her teaching method.

Lastly, it is worth noting that teaching methods can vary, from methods such as group work, lecturing, self-discovery, to being learner-centred, using the environment in learning, as well as looking at the learning strengths and intelligence of the learners.

Teacher professional development

Carl (2009:7) defines empowerment as a process of growth and development through which people go which enable them to take independent decisions and to act autonomously and independently with a view to making a contribution towards the development of their particular environment.

Carl (2009:130) states that since 1997 many mistakes have been made concerning curriculum dissemination. Teachers have been expected to implement the curriculum with the very limited in-service training that occurred during school holidays. From the interviews, teachers maintained that:

With the type of learners we have and a congested syllabus there is no time to do action research.

Teachers agree that they themselves participate in continuous professional development (CPD) in order to learn new knowledge and skills and their application in the classroom. This might imply that a limited number of teachers participate in continuous professional development for varying reasons. The overriding impression gleaned from responses from the interviews was that the teachers' general behaviour patterns at school were determined by the workshops attended (or lack thereof).

Most teachers substantiated that they did participate in CAPS workshops where clear curriculum standards and goals at classroom and school level were clearly spelt out. This exercise, according to Marais and du Plessis (2015), guided teachers in their teaching activities rather than leaving them on their own regarding content, as was the case with NCS. However, some teachers expressed their concerns about the inadequate/limited training workshops they had received on the implementation of CAPS.

The following are teachers' concerns: *Once-off training programmes are a problem. Not enough training.* One teacher reiterated that: *We need to be workshopped every year as they teach new grades in which we were not developed.*

From these assertions, it is clear that the inadequate training of teachers has always been, and still is, a serious impediment to the implementation of CAPS. This is evidenced in Monyai & Skosana's (2013) study when they emphasised that poor training of teachers by trainers does exist in CAPS, which results in poor teaching in schools.

From the interviews, one teacher contends that:

The way CAPS is structured, it speaks to learners with good foundation and much is not done in the junior classes and this hinders performance in the senior classes because the structuring is very high.

Planning the classroom programme

One question was: To what extent is CAPS flexible enough to allow you to plan for and meet individual learners' needs and interest? One teacher indicated that:

The CAPS document is very clear and guides one to be flexible; the only impediment is that it has a lot of paperwork and quality is being compromised as much of the time is dedicated to satisfying the curriculum and assessment needs.

On the other hand, one deputy principal highlighted the fact that:

Our classrooms are not CAPS compliant; we still have inherited classrooms which were used by the Bantu education system. Most of the classrooms are vandalised and repairs are taking place at a snail's pace.

One interview question was: How easy has it been for you to use the CAPS document you teach from? One teacher indicated that: *It was not easy to adapt from NCS to CAPS with limited resources.*

Developing specific learning outcomes based on the achievement objectives

The interview question: How does the CAPS document help you to improve teaching and learning in assessing learner achievement and progress? The question elicited these responses: *Specific aims are in the document therefore I do not have to scratch my head to develop LOs.*

On the other hand, another teacher contended that: *Based on a lot of paperwork that is envisaged in CAPS, it is difficult to develop specific outcomes because of limited time.*

Assessing student achievement and progress

Some teachers responded that the CAPS policy document and guidelines do not assist them in assessing their learners' achievements and progress. From the interviews, teachers indicated that:

...they teach diverse learners in their classes (justice is not done in assessing learner achievement and progress) and specified that: Those who are advantaged mentally (fast learners) tend to benefit more than mentally disadvantaged ones (slow learners).

Other challenges revealed by teachers were:

Overcrowded classrooms; lack of commitment of learners; non-participation of parents in the teaching and learning of their children; lack of resources.

Achieving consistent understanding of learning levels within the school

Teachers regard the CAPS policy document and/or guidelines as useless in terms of assisting them to achieve consistent understanding of the learning levels within their schools. However, from the interview, the teachers indicated that: *The CAPS was not effectively cascaded to us as we only received a week's workshop.*

Another teacher indicated that:

The department introduced the Funza Lushaka programme to reduce under-qualified teachers in the sector. However, the training does not cater for CAPS, so there is no consistent understanding of the curriculum and the achievement leaves much to be desired.

Teachers indicated that CAPS implementation become difficult because *parental involvement is lacking in rural secondary schools. Teachers call for parents to be involved in the teaching and learning of their children.*

Another interview question was:

How do you evaluate the status of your school facilities that enable all staff to work? In response, teachers flagged the following as hampering CAPS curriculum to meet the needs of learners in their schools:

Limited training of teachers; lot of administrative paperwork; dilapidated classrooms; overcrowding and lack of resources, especially unavailability of textbooks

Results on optimal constraints of CAPS: teachers' views

The main objective of the interviews was to identify the optimal constraints of the implementation of CAPS in secondary schools. The question presented to the participants was: What are the main constraints in implementing CAPS in secondary schools? Concerning the interviews held in the North West Province secondary schools, discussions held with the teachers all uniformly confirmed that the following are the major challenges of the implementation of CAPS in secondary schools:

- Time limit for CAPS does not allow implementation and monitoring
- Limited training of teachers on CAPS
- Abnormal teacher-learner ratio and congested work schedule
- Overcrowding in classrooms and lack of learner discipline
- Lack of resources and training textbooks
- Absenteeism of learners
- Level of parental involvement
- Learners who do not want to do their homework
- Too much paperwork instead of actual work of teaching
- Too little time to finish everything (syllabus)
- Learners' inability to interpret the assessment given to them
- Reporting practices that are not aligned to the curriculum
- Appointment of learners who do not meet curricular needs of the school
- Lack of discipline and use of drugs at school by learners
- Learners who are not academically fit to be in secondary school
- Difficulties in implementation of the inclusive system
- CAPS created increased number of dropouts

DBE (2014) indicates that the current state of the infrastructure and limited resources fail to promote and support the implementation of CAPS and lead to bottlenecks in schools. In an interview, one of the teachers revealed that:

The buildings are dilapidated, leaking roofs, potholes in classrooms, insufficient furniture... For instance, from Grades 8 to 11, three learners share a desk. Classes have broken doors; ceiling in the computer science room which is used as a staffroom fell off.

Christie (2008:216) suggests that those schools that perform poorly will need more support in terms of resources to uplift the standard of education in our country and to become a winning nation. In addition, Berkhout et al. (2010:187) are of the opinion that the socioeconomic conditions in families determine the quality of the learning environment at home. To circumvent the above-mentioned challenges, teachers suggested possible solutions for the above problems of CAPS implementation.

**Possible intervention mechanisms to achieve positive results:
teachers' views**

These responses were made by the teachers:

- Reducing of topics for learners to be well equipped with what they are supposed to know;
- Correct allocation in line with major subject; reduce workload of educators; involve parents in teaching and learning process;
- The teacher-learner ratio should be considered to allow individual attendance to learners who have difficulties in the subject;
- Expand work schedule to allow learners to master the contents of particular subject; increase contact time with the learners;
- Allocate more teachers to the school because of dual medium (Afrikaans and English);
- Government assistance and co-operation with relevant stakeholders;
- Reduce a lot of paper work to get ample time to teach the learners;
- Involve parents in the teaching and learning of their children;
- The department should adhere to teacher-learner ratio;

- Bring back the OBE curriculum because it is much easier than CAPS;
- Government must bring back corporal punishment as there is a lot of lawlessness; not talking about the issues of discipline;
- Learners should be given more time to study;
- Provision of physical and human resources is necessary; more resources and more teachers are needed for the implementation of CAPS;
- To copy countries like Zimbabwe and Botswana system (to avoid youth unemployment);
- Continuous training development of teachers and training must be focused on teacher's pedagogical content knowledge;
- Learners to be trained not to depend on teachers all the time; learners must be able to get information on their own and not to depend on teachers for everything;
- Installation of portable camp containers to rationalise the number of learners in classes; additional teachers are needed to share the subjects; do away with post provisioning model (PPM), it only adds distress on SMT and teachers; just employ teachers according to subjects offered and classes available, not according to the number of learners.

Although the findings are limited to the Zuluboy Moloto Region (North West Province) situation, other provinces may also find these findings valuable. Based on the findings in the literature and from the analysis of the findings, the conclusions and recommendations are made in below.

Conclusion

This study examined the constraints on optimal adoption of CAPS' implementation in secondary schools to suggest strategies to address such constraints. CAPS in secondary schools is aimed at making a significant contribution to the improvement of the quality of education. CAPS prescribes learner-centeredness and learning outcomes with the expectations of what teachers and learners should know and be able to do at each grade and within each subject area. Although CAPS recommends a learner-centred approach to teaching and learning, from the interview results, most teachers resorted to a teacher-centred approach. Teachers agree that there is on-going continuous professional development undertaken by teachers that they hope will have a positive

impact on learner results. However, a sizeable number of them indicated that in a three-to-five days' workshop there is no time to share experiences with colleagues. Teachers also highlighted that there is no time to conduct action research, establish study groups or provide mentoring with CAPS, or similar activities in their schools. The reason for this (according to the teachers) is *limited time, ill-disciplined learners, overcrowding and a congested syllabus*. Teachers testified the usefulness of CAPS in assessing learners achievement and progress. On the other hand, some teachers indicated that *continuous assessment is hampered by large class size, parental non-involvement and a high workload for teachers*.

Despite the progress made in the CAPS implementation, there were challenges that made the efforts of CAPS' improvement fruitless. Consequently, rural secondary schools must address the implementation challenges of CAPS with emphasis on improving continuous professional development of teachers; provision of resources; solidifying community and parental involvement; improving teacher-learner ratios; overcrowding; and learner discipline. Despite the issues raised regarding flaws in the implementation process, most teachers reiterated that CAPS is an improved curriculum. From the teachers' point of view, if more emphasis were put on intensive CAPS curriculum training (not 3 to 5 days' workshop), they would have achieved better results. The next section presents the recommendations of the study.

Recommendations

The recommendations presented emanate from the findings and conclusions reached in the study. Stakeholders' involvement in the planning of any curriculum is crucial for its effective implementation in schools. From the literature and empirical investigation, it is clear that all stakeholders in the education sector should work harmoniously in the implementation to bear good results. Stakeholders' involvement would promote a common vision in curriculum implementation and break down resistance to change while also creating a climate of renewal. To overcome the main constraints of implementing CAPS in secondary schools, teachers suggested that:

- Greater emphasis should also be given to learners' actual learning rather than paperwork and a rushed completion of the syllabus.
- Resources (human and physical) should be made available for teaching and learning purposes in rural schools.
- The teacher-learner ratio should be adhered to.
- Learner discipline in schools should be adhered to with the aim of improving learners' poor discipline during the learning process.
- Continuous CAPS training should be given to teachers on pedagogical knowledge and skills training related to specific subject matter disciplines.

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