

Teachers' Voice in Zambia: How to Make Them Involved in Curriculum Development

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ABSTRACT

Curriculum Development in Zambia is highly centralized, with the Curriculum Development Center (CDC) being charged with developing the curriculum through consultative and participatory approaches through the course and subject panels where teachers are engaged. Nevertheless, there has been no empirical evidence to show how teachers are actively involved in the development process. This study aimed to investigate the phenomenon of teachers' involvement in the curriculum development process in Zambia. This study was qualitative and used a case study design approach. Data was collected using a semi-structured interview guide from secondary school teachers and headteachers. Raw data were collected through semi-structured interview forms from secondary school teachers and headteachers. The researcher analyzed the data using MAXQDA qualitative software to identify initial codes and generate emerging themes quickly. The results showed that secondary school teachers were dissatisfied with the present way of curriculum development, which insignificantly neglects them, and also, the majority of them have never participated in the development of the curriculum. Further, the results revealed that most of the secondary school teachers in Lusaka were willing to participate at any stage of the curriculum development in Zambia. This study concludes by arguing that secondary school teachers are significantly neglected to participate in the curriculum development in Zambia and recommends that the Ministry of General Education (MoGE) broaden the scope of secondary school teachers' participation in the curriculum developed through the Curriculum Development Center (CDC).

INTRODUCTION

Any curriculum designed becomes real when it is adapted to the classroom. Therefore, teachers need to interpret the curriculum correctly to succeed ([Kubitskey & Fishman, 2006](#)). However, most curricular innovations in Africa, Zambia inclusive and a few other parts of the world practice the "top-down" approach ([Ramparsad, 2001](#); [Carl, 2009](#), [Mulenga, 2015](#)) through "power coercive" or unilateral administrative decisions which are externally imposed in absolute disregard of the much powerfully embraced "grassroots" ([Handler, 2010](#)). Researchers have revealed the neglect or non-involvement of teachers in curriculum innovations and development. [Carl \(2005\)](#) confirmed that the "voice" is mainly

ignored or not heard. It creates a challenge because the sustainability of reform initiatives relies on teachers maintaining alignment with the enterprise's intent. Curriculum implementation can be successful if teachers and communities are involved in its development (Kubitskey & Fishman, 2006). Since teachers have the enormous responsibility of implementing the curriculum, the teachers have the tremendous responsibility of implementing the curriculum. They need to be involved far more widely in developing the curriculum (Kubitskey & Fishman, 2006). It may be convenient and usual to separate the administration and professional duties of those who plan and execute educational policies. Still, it is hardly profitable to the process of curriculum development (Munazza, 2004). Also, Marsh (2009) observed that the objectives of any educational system could be achieved mainly through very pertinent curriculum questions that require the teachers themselves to answer rather than the teachers having the questions answered for them by detailed syllabi, study guides, examinations boards, inspectors and other ways employed by central bodies that develop the curriculum.

Teachers in Zambia seem to be treated as recipients of new directives about what should be taught and how it should be taught. In other words, teachers may have been considered mere curriculum implementers. Alsubaie (2016) emphasized that teachers' active participation in curriculum planning is limited, and teachers are regarded as curriculum implementers whose role is to adapt the official curriculum to their classroom. It is evident from the revelations from the Ministry of General Education joint annual review meeting that teachers did not understand the 2013 revised curriculum (MoGE, 2016). The possibility could have been that teachers were not fully involved in its development. Lack of full teachers' involvement in planning and developing the school curriculum hinders the attainment of national education goals. Secondary teachers' interpretation of the curriculum may not be well articulated with the proposed curriculum imagined at the policy and program level. There exists a considerable gap between the prescribed curriculum and the actual classroom practice. Thus, it may cause the curriculum to be inconsistent and ineffective, which may, in turn, affect the academic performance of learners (Munazza, 2004). Teachers are the primary practitioners in developing curriculum (Munazza, 2004). However, it is not clear if teachers in Zambia are provided with enough opportunities to contribute or to fully participate in the curriculum development process because curriculum development in Zambia is highly centralized, with Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) being the central government institution charged with the responsibility of developing the curriculum through the course and subject panels. From this background, the study aimed to explore teacher involvement in the curriculum development in Zambia through the following specific research questions; (1) to what extent were secondary school teachers involved in secondary school curriculum development? (2) What were the challenges that secondary school teachers encountered when implementing the curriculum with or without their involvement in the development process? Based on the literature above, this study was guided by the theoretical framework based on the curriculum development and diffusion theory which highlights that for any curriculum development model to become practical, and the teacher has to be at the center of the model irrespective of their limitations (Lawton, 1973).

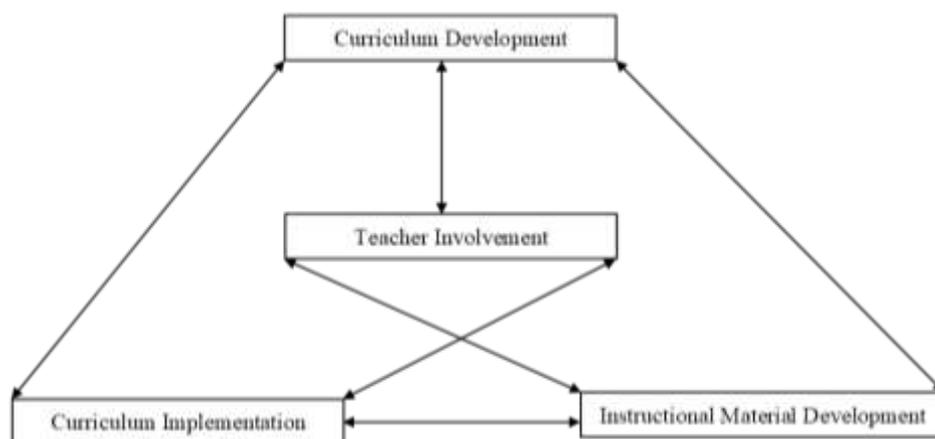


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Many educationists have advanced views in favor of the above theory. [Havelock \(1971\)](#), for instance, observed that teachers should not be made mere curriculum implementers. Still, they should be actively involved alongside the educational administrators and policymakers in developing the curriculum.

METHODS

Research Design

This study implemented a qualitative research design, and this is a research method used to understand the reasons, motivations, or opinions of a small group of individuals regarding a situation through interviews ([Creswell, 2009](#)). The qualitative research method is suitable for this study because the study aims to elicit information from teachers' participation in curriculum development in Zambia. The study used a case study approach to answer the research questions. [Robson \(2002\)](#) states that the case study approach would be helpful if the study aims to gain a rich understanding of the research perspective and the process being used. Hence, a case study approach was used to get a rich understanding of curriculum development in Zambia.

Participants

A purposeful sampling technique was used to select the participants. The participants were sixty (60) teachers and ten (10) headteachers from the ten (10) public secondary schools in Lusaka District, Zambia, to ensure that the sample was representative. The participants were male and female headteachers and teachers who have been working in this capacity for more than twelve years. The overall purpose of the study was explained to the participants before commencing the study. The researcher obtained informed oral consent from the participants before commencing the study. They were coded as T1 to T60, and H1 to H10, respectively.

Data Collection

For data collection, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were employed to collect data from the head teachers and secondary schools in Lusaka District, Zambia. Semi-structured interviews before being conducted, consultations were first made with the selected teachers and headteachers. Afterward, interview sessions were scheduled with the headteachers and teachers at a convenient time and date. The participants were told of the purpose of the study again before commencing the interview session. The interview session was recorded with two recording devices; the zoom application and an external recorder. The researcher ensured that the participants choose a cozy room, conducive, without noise and distractions.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using MAXQDA qualitative software to quickly identify initial codes and generate emerging themes by comparing the cases. Two MAXQD files were created to begin data management, one for teachers and one for headteachers. It was important for managing many interviews, keeping the data sets separately during the analysis, and allowing two different coding systems. Further, transcribed word documents were imported from each of the files into the document system. Two sub-folders in the document system are used for related interviews (focus groups and head teachers) and user interviews conducted in the schools) to further organize the data. The document system enabled the management of documents (activate/deactivate), view the number of codes in each document, and any memos attached to documents (denoted by the yellow "post-it" icon). Once the documents were adequately documented, variables were created for each document and start building the code system influenced by open coding, in which both inductive, exploratory coding and deductive, focused coding were combined to give celerity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Curriculum development in Zambia, to a large extent, neglects the participation of teachers in the process. The results revealed that most teachers are not invited to participate in the curriculum development process due to their dissatisfaction with the way the curriculum is developed. One of the teachers, T1, highlight that;

The Curriculum Development Center (CDC) does not involve the public at the grassroots; the development is done from the top, and teachers are only told what to do, and implementation becomes difficult sometimes because teachers were involved in the development process (interview T1,2020).

The results also highlighted that although teachers were fully engaged in the curriculum implementation process, they were to a large extent not involved in its development. The secondary school teachers and headteachers who took part in this study expressed views that the present level of teacher involvement in curriculum development by the Curriculum Development Center was unsatisfactory because only a few teachers were involved in some stages of the curriculum development process, and the criteria used to select the few secondary school teachers involved in some stage of curriculum development was unknown. One of the headteachers, H4, stated that;

You see, the way they develop the curriculum without consultations from the grass root, it is like teachers are only implementers because even the new curriculum we have now, we were just told by the Ministry of General Education that specialists were going round in secondary schools saying a new curriculum is underway and this is what we expect from you (Interview, H4, 2020).

Teachers' involvement in the Curriculum Development

The research findings of this study highlight the fact that almost all secondary school teachers had no opportunity to participate in the curriculum development process. However, the secondary school teachers in Lusaka stated that they only participated in the curriculum. In this respect, these results suggest that secondary school teachers were not involved indirectly or directly in participating in the curriculum development process. Hence, it can be argued that teachers' involvement in the curriculum development process is somewhat limited. Regardless of the growing support in the research literature for teachers to be involved in the curriculum development process (e.g., [Carl, 2005](#); [Oliva, 2008](#); [Ornstein & Hunkins, 2012](#); [Voogt, Pieters, & Handelzalts, 2016](#)), However, secondary school teachers, as the implementers of the curriculum in the classroom, should be actively involved in the curriculum development process ([Handler, 2010](#) and [Oliva, 2008](#)). As the closest students, teachers are very familiar with their interests and needs ([Mulenga, 2015](#)). Thus, it is necessary to effectively reflect the experiences of teachers gained in the classroom on the curriculum development process ([Kirk & MacDonald, 2001](#)).

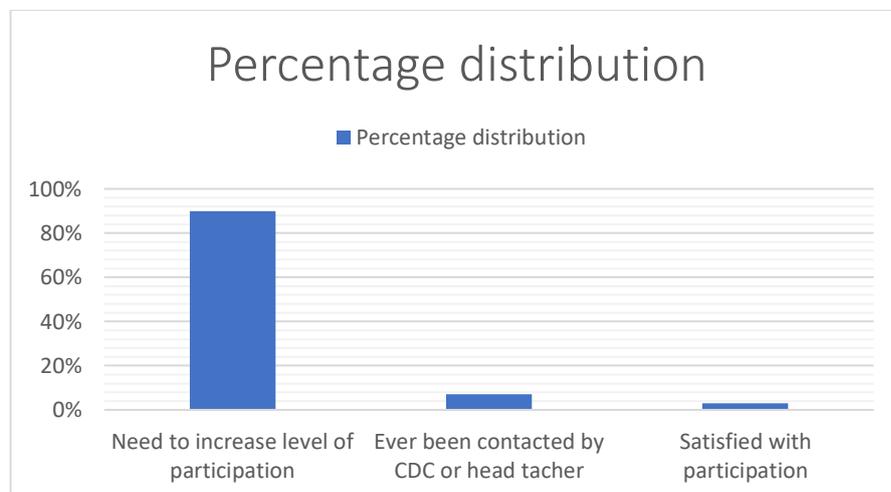


Figure 2. Percentage Distribution of Secondary School Teachers on Present Curriculum development participation levels.

Teachers must assume a more leading and meaningful role in making the necessary adjustments to the curriculum, considering their working experiences. Teachers form an integral part of any country's education system since they are the vehicles through which the curriculum and, by extension, the whole education policy is translated and interpreted to the learners. Research in diverse countries and education systems shows that teachers are the most significant in-school influence on learner achievement and learning. The success or otherwise of curriculum initiatives depends on teachers at the chalk-face, [Mokua \(2014\)](#). Therefore, full teacher participation in curriculum development is a necessity that, once ignored, cannot go without long-lasting effects on the developed curriculum.

In addition, the secondary school teachers who participated in this study indicated the need to increase teacher involvement in curriculum development. In supporting this assertion, [Mulenga \(2015\)](#) argued that the teacher has to be fully involved in the curriculum development process to fully understand the curriculum to enable the teacher to reduce the gap between the stipulated and the achieved curriculum. In this case, the intended curriculum is the planned curriculum, whereas the actual curriculum happens at implementation. This discrepancy is mainly due to secondary school teachers' different ways of understanding and interpreting the curriculum handed down to them. This situation comes from a lack of teacher involvement in the curriculum development process, as the case is with the findings of this study.

The realization of any curriculum depends on how its implementers, the teachers interpret it. [Batwini \(2010: 89\)](#) noted that "teachers' perceptions and beliefs influence and shape the meanings that the teachers eventually attach to the new reforms, which in turn play a vital role in their acceptance and classroom implementation." Therefore, teachers can only interpret the curriculum correctly if they fully understand it, which can only come forth if they are fully involved in curriculum development. As singled out from objective one, the study has established that teachers' involvement in curriculum development is shallow. The majority of the respondents have never been involved in any aspect of the secondary school curriculum development process. Similarly, almost all the headteachers interviewed indicated that they were never involved in any aspect of curriculum development except for only two who mentioned that they were at one point involved in one way or the other. One headteacher, HT6, said that;

I was honored to have taken part in the development of the current curriculum we are using now. It was not all the secondary teachers, but a few were involved in the curriculum planning process (Interview, HT6, 2020).

These findings are worrisome because the study participants are teachers who are the sole implementers of the curriculum. It is the teachers who interpret to the learners what is in the curriculum. So if the teachers are neglected in developing the curriculum that they are required to implement, it is questionable whether the implementation can be done effectively. [Marsh \(2009\)](#) viewed curriculum as what happens in classrooms that are "an ongoing social process comprising of the interactions of learners, and teachers knowledge" This perspective places teachers at the center of the entire curriculum process because it is the teacher who interacts with the learners in the classroom. Adding to this view, [Mokua \(2014\)](#) commented that curriculum is "what the teacher knows, what the teacher does and who the teacher is; the teacher's behavior, knowledge, and personality." This assertion emphasizes that the quality of curriculum implementation depends on the quality of the teacher; hence it is cardinal that teachers are involved in the development of the curriculum if the implementation of the curriculum is to be effective.

Challenges encountered by teachers when implementing the developed curriculum

From the study's findings, it is clear that the majority of secondary school teachers were not involved in the development of the curriculum that they used in schools. It is, however, evidenced that all the secondary school teachers were fully involved in the implementation of the developed curriculum. The achievement of any education policy depends on how the practitioners, namely teachers, in this case, accepted the mandated policy and adopted the desired practices ([Cincioglu, 2014](#)). It only becomes a reality if the teachers were actively involved in the curriculum development process. It was, therefore, vital for the study to establish if at all the teachers encountered any challenges when

implementing the developed curriculum. This study finding established that a large proportion of respondents generally faced challenges in implementing the developed curriculum.

Most teachers indicated that lack of teaching and learning materials hindered effective implementation of the curriculum. It was also noted from this study findings that most challenges that secondary school teachers faced when implementing the curriculum resulted from a lack of comprehensive consultations with the teachers, as indicated in the previous section that teachers were not adequately involved in the development of the curriculum. [Cincioğlu \(2014\)](#) added that the repeated failure of curriculum reform to achieve the desired outcomes was because curriculum developers overlooked the social issues surrounding teachers, schools, or districts. [O'Donnell \(2005\)](#) added that classroom-level implementation had been challenging to accomplish due to a lack of professional support and instructional materials.

The finding of this study indicated that lack of resources was one of the major challenges that teachers encountered when implementing the developed curriculum. Hence, these results are consistent with the observation by [O'Donnell \(2005\)](#), who mentioned lack of resources and inadequate curriculum time, expenses for training, and lack of appropriate materials as other factors that made curriculum seldom implemented as intended. In addition, [Carl \(2009\)](#) observed that teachers faced tremendous challenges, several of which were related to curriculum. The challenges manifested themselves at various levels and in various areas ranging from the national to the classroom level. This scenario becomes evident, especially when teachers were absent to answer the very important curriculum questions in curriculum development.

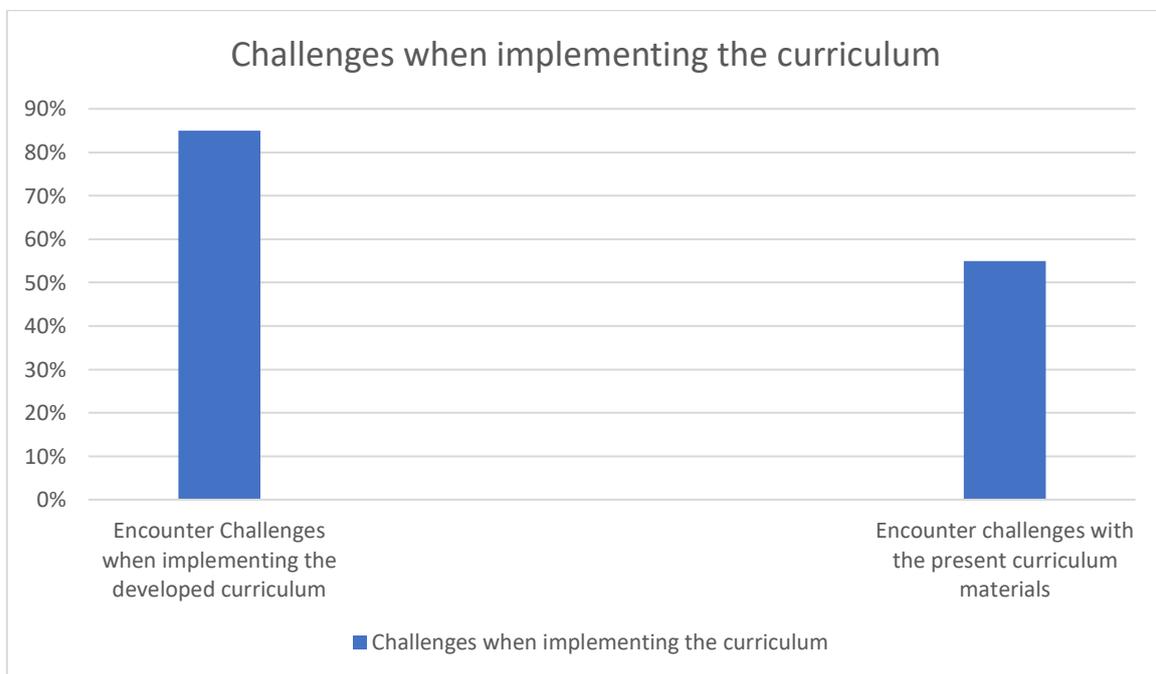


Figure 3. Challenges when Implementing the Curriculum

Furthermore, [Kubitskey & Fishman \(2006\)](#) observed that the objectives of any educational system could be achieved mainly through very pertinent curriculum questions that require the teachers themselves to answer rather than the teachers having the questions answered for them by detailed syllabi, study guides, examinations boards, inspectors and other ways employed by central bodies that develop the curriculum. Teachers' lack of training and understanding of the curriculum was another challenge faced during the implementation of the curriculum. Concerning this, [Sherin \(2004\)](#) argued that curriculum change implies teacher change. If teachers were not empowered to implement the new curriculum effectively, time and resources in developing a new curriculum package could be a waste. It is common for teachers to find themselves teaching the same way they always have, perhaps utilizing

some of the new materials but adapting them to fit traditional patterns (Sherin (2004). To overcome this, teachers should be.

It was also worth noting that the study's findings were in agreement with the theory guiding this study, whose primary emphasis is that the teachers should be at the center of any curriculum development model regardless of their limitations. If the teachers who are the actual implementers of the developed curriculum were well consulted, the challenges they faced when implementing the developed curriculum could be avoided.

It has been noted in this study that most challenges that secondary school teachers encountered when implementing the developed curriculum were as a result of them not being involved in the curriculum development process. Most teachers emphasized that several challenges they encountered when implementing the developed curriculum could be done away with if they were actively and adequately involved in the curriculum development process. Teachers' view was in line with the theory guiding the study, whose main emphasis was that teachers should be at the center of any curriculum development process regardless of their limitations. This finding agrees with Ramparsad (2006), who emphasized that teachers who had been left out of planning the curriculum appeared to be confused by the terminology in the learning program provided to them. These challenges support teacher participation in the curriculum development process for effective implementation of the curriculum.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that teachers can play a significant part in the curriculum development process if they are involved fully because they know the kind of learners they deal with in their schools. Since they are the ones given the immediate responsibility to implement any developed curriculum as they are in a better situation to propose valuable advice and direction on what aspects would work and not work well. However, this study noted that secondary school teachers are not indirect or directly involved in the curriculum development process; thus, their voice is silent.

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