Education in One World

Perspectives from different Nations

ELIZE DU PLESSIS

DO TEACHERS RECEIVE PROPER IN-SERVICE TRAINING TO IMPLEMENT CHANGING POLICIES: PERSPECTIVES FROM THE SOUTH AFRICAN CASE?

Abstract

Worldwide there is a responsibility of governments to provide learners with quality education to face the challenges of change. Emanating from this challenge, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) in South Africa introduces in the last decade several curriculum changes which impacted on the delivery of quality education for all. This research focuses on the question if the DBE can provide proper in-service training for teachers to comply with the challenges of the implementation of a new national curriculum: Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS). The theoretical framework for this paper is based on systems theory. A qualitative research design will be employed in this paper. A selection of 15 different schools in Gauteng was used as a sample of a bigger population. Data collection consists of document analysis and semi-structured interviews exploring teachers' experiences regarding in-service training towards the implementation of CAPS. Findings revealed that CAPS is implemented prematurely and without proper in-service training.

Introduction

The role of the teacher has changed a great deal since the new South African government took office in 1994. The main concern of this paper centres on teachers who have to adapt to new challenges and policies. The researcher wants to find out how effective curriculum implementation takes place and what type of in-service training teachers receive. According to Christie (2003: 173), "it has become commonplace for members of the government to admit themselves that South Africa has excellent policies but knows nothing about implementation". The question is: Do teachers receive any in-service training, and if so, is it sufficient?

In presenting this argument, the researcher firstly attends briefly to systems theory, where after she focuses on curriculum change in South Africa and the research design. She closes with some critical findings and recommendations.

Conceptual framework

This research is predicated on a general systems theory approach. The term "systems theory" originated from the Viennese biologist, Bertalanffy's, General System Theory (GST). The system theory approach is a worldview that is based on the discipline of system inquiry. In the most general sense, system means a configuration of parts connected and joined by a web of relationships. A system is a group of interrelated, interdependent and interacting groups of activities that form a coherent whole. A system is designed to seek self-maintenance. In this process of self-maintenance a system generates creative forces within itself that enable it to alter circumstances and, in any case, the system cannot remain healthy if it precludes the possibility of change (Cain, 1999: 15).

Systems can be opened or closed or partly both. According to the explanation of Finlay (2011: 2-3), a closed system is self-contained and is capable of having a clear boundary placed around it with regard to input and output. There is no interaction with the environment.

The school system is an open system with permeable boundaries and it functions in active equilibrium with the environment according to both internal and external inputs and outputs. Schools function within a larger context in which they exchange matter, power and information through formal and informal feedback processes. According to Finlay's (2011: 1-7) explanation, the school is an open system that depends on its environment as well as on the interactions between its component parts or subsystems. The teacher as a subsystem is a useful point of focus for attending to system malfunctions.

The external environment includes a wide variety of needs and influences that can affect the school system, but which cannot directly control it. Such influences can be political, economic, ecological, societal and technological in nature. Accordingly, teachers are being challenged by changed school systems and policy.

Curriculum change in South Africa

Since 1994, South Africa has undergone a great deal of educational change, which was necessary because of the situation inherited by the first democratic government. In 1995, the government carried out a national audit on teaching that revealed many disparities and problems. In 1997, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) launched its new curriculum policy, Curriculum 2005. In its ideology, content and pedagogical approach, this curriculum was in strong contrast to that which had traditionally been in operation. It was an outcomes-based model linked to the objectives

approach in education. It drew from models operating in some highly developed countries and it sought to place the South African curriculum among the most progressive internationally. This curricular policy became a highly contested issue within South Africa (Department of Education, 2000). In 2000, the Minister of Education set up a Curriculum Review Committee. This led to a modification of the curriculum, the National Curriculum Statement (NCS), with a more "streamlined" approach. The policy and the ensuing debate caused much confusion and uncertainty. The "cascade model" of in-service education proved to be very inadequate and reached the schools in a much-diluted form. In 2000, the government published the Norms and Standards for Educators (NSE). This set out, in a broad and generic manner, the requirements of the Department of Education (DOE) in respect of the knowledge, values and skills that an educator must acquire. It represents a competence based approach to teacher education. The word "educator" is preferred to "teacher" and is aimed at encompassing all personnel with an educational role to play" (DOE, 2000). In 2002 the curriculum was reconstructed once again into a Revised National Curriculum Statement or 'RNCS' that was approved on 15 April, 2002 and implemented in 2004 (DBE, 2010: 2–7). In 2006, the DOE issued The National Policy Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa, a policy which, it stated, "has been a long time in preparation, and is certainly overdue given the state of our education system." (DOE, 2008: 27). In July 2009, the Minister of Basic Education appointed a panel of experts to investigate the nature of the challenges and problems experienced in the implementation of the NCS. During 2011 the NCS was replaced by the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) (DBE, 2009, 2011; Pinnock, 2011).

What is CAPS?

CAPS is not a new curriculum, but an amendment to the NCS (Grades R – 12). It therefore still follows the requirements of the same process and procedure as the NCS (Pinnock, 2011).

There is much debate and discussion about Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) being removed, however, OBE is a method of teaching, not a curriculum. It is the curriculum that has changed (repackaged) and not the teaching method. The way the curriculum is written is now, in content format rather than outcomes format. There is one single comprehensive National Curriculum and Assessment Policy for each subject (Maskew Miller Longman, 2012: 8). CAPS will be implemented as follows:

- The Foundation Phase (Grades R - 3) and Grade 10 will be implemented in January 2012
- The Intermediate Phase (Grades 4 - 6) and Grade 11 will be implemented in January 2013
- The Senior Phase (Grades 7 - 9) and Grade 12 will be implemented in January 2014.

The question is if teachers are equipped to implement CAPS?

In-service training of teachers

The continuous professional training development of teachers is vital for the wellbeing of any education system.

Teachers were not trained in the previous curriculum and in September 2010 yet another policy, namely CAPS, was introduced (DOE, 2010). According to Coetzee (2012), Grade 3 teachers already missed out on CAPS in-service training during 2011.

It is widely accepted that the initial professional education of teachers is only the foundation of their professional education (Teacher education, 2010: 3). The development of professional practices is a continuing process that lasts for the duration of the career of a committed teacher. Continuous professional development is the process by which teachers reflect on their competences, keep them up to date and develop them further (Teacher education, 2010: 3).

Smith and Gillespie (2007: 216–218) state that professional development can be effective if it is designed to be of longer duration – longer-term professional development permits more time for teachers to learn about their own practice, especially if it includes follow-up training, focuses on subject-matter knowledge and includes a strong emphasis on analysis and reflection, rather than just demonstrating techniques. It should also include a variety of teaching activities and should encourage teachers from the same workplace to participate together in teaching opportunities. Furthermore, it should focus on quality and features of professional development, rather than on format or type of in-service training.

Against the background, the following methodology was deemed suitable for investigating how returning teachers cope with the new curriculum and the type of professional development they receive

Research design

The researcher used a qualitative research design to study the issue of in-service training of teachers to implement a new policy. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2001:393), qualitative research extends the understanding of a phenomenon and contributes to educational practice, policymaking and social consciousness. Purposive and convenient sampling was used to select teachers from different schools. In purposive sampling, researchers purposefully seek typical and divergent data within easy reach of the researchers (convenient sampling) (de Vos, Strydom, Fouche & Delport, 2005: 329). A selection of 15 different schools (11 primary and 4 secondary schools) from the General Education and Training (GET) and Further Education and Training (FET) bands in schools in Gauteng was used as a sample of a bigger population.

Data were gathered by using an interview schedule to interview participants regarding in-service training they received to implement a new curriculum.

The interview schedule consisted of two sections of which the first covered biographical detail and the second information about the type of in-service training teachers received. Interviews were recorded verbatim and transcribed by the researcher. Data were grounded by hand coding for internal consistency. Comparisons were drawn to point out generalisations and contrasts. The ethical considerations adhered to by the researcher included gaining informed consent from the school principals and participants. Participation was voluntary and anonymously and confidentiality was assured. The trustworthiness was attended to through verification measures, such as comparison of the responses as they were acquired to identify and confirm specific trends and patterns in the data. The researcher aimed at reporting the participant's viewpoints, thoughts, intentions and experiences accurately by making use of direct quotations in the findings.

Findings and discussion

The results in the first section on the participants' (teachers') biographical data were as follows: The participants consisted mainly of female teachers (73%), teaching in different schools in the GED (75%) and FET (15%) bands. From the participants, many of the teachers had more than 20 years' teaching experience.

In the second section the researcher wanted general information about the type and length of in-service training regarding CAPS teachers attended.

According to the participants training varied from 2 hour workshops to 3 day workshops. Providers were curriculum advisors from district offices, book publishers companies and subject advisors. One female participant, teaching Grade 2 learners indicated that she did not attend any CAPS workshop and that she received the CAPS documents from the principal. Most of the participants indicated that their school principal didn't receive any CAPS training and if they did, it was just in the form of a meeting for the introduction of CAPS or to receive the CAPS documents downloaded on a CD.

To the question: What are the main changes from NCS to CAPS according to them? The following were some of the points mentioned: Learning areas are changed to subjects, time allocated to Home language and First additional language changed; there are specific concepts or topics for each grade. Home Language and Mathematics pass mark changed from 35% to 50% and 40% respectively. The following was stated by a Grade 10 Male teacher: "We no longer talk in terms of learning outcomes and assessment standards. Teaching is more teacher centred than NCS (which was learner centred)".

Participants were asked what is positive about CAPS? According to the participants the subject content is clearly stated for each grade. Teachers engage themselves in lesson preparations rather than a lesson plan, which also benefit the learners. There are less tasks and teacher's administration and written work reduced. It will produce learners that are able to identify and solve

problems and make decisions; learners will be able to think critically and creatively. This is in line with system theory by striving towards a dominant and common goal to improve the whole education system.

To the question what is negative about CAPS, the following were stated: Subject Advisers are not involved enough during training, not enough intensive CAPS workshops has been done. No textbooks were delivered to schools yet. CAPS does not cater for learner diversity. No in-depth workshops were conducted. CAPS has been implemented prematurely as educators were not equipped with relevant knowledge. According to a Grade 3 Female teacher: "Time given to time tables are very limited - too much work to fit into one period". According to system theory schools function within a larger context and if schools do not receive proper support and training from the DOE, they can't function properly.

Participants were asked to make recommendations. The following recommendations were made by some of the participants: Workshops must be for a month and subject specific, textbooks must be delivered on time to schools, paper work must be reduced so that educators may have good contact with learners and workshops must be conducted to School Management Teams and principals for implementation and monitoring.

Conclusion

Teachers were concerned about the plethora of policies, guidelines and interpretations of policies and guidelines. Referring back to Systems theory – all stakeholders should be involved in the education system, from the DOE down to provincial, district and Subject Advisor level. Subject Advisor roles should be clarified nationally and specify the exact nature of in-classroom and school support they should provide to teachers. New documents, including the national curriculum need to be made available to all schools, district offices and to parents via print and digital media. In the absence of role clarification and training for the subject advisors, many have resorted to developing tools to help interpret policies and guidelines that have contributed to the confusion and proliferation of documents and paperwork. It became clear from the research that teachers need to be better equipped in their role as educators to implement CAPS successfully. The DBE needs to improve on their implementation plan to make sure that new policy document is implemented and doesn't stay a policy document only.

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Dr Elize, C. du Plessis

Department of Curriculum & Instructional Studies

UNISA

E-mail: dplesec@unisa.ac.za