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Politicising curriculum implementation: The case of primary schools

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Since 2012, the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS) comprise the new National Curriculum Statement currently implemented in South African schools. CAPS encapsulates a series of radical curriculum changes since the dawn of a new democratic dispensation in 1994. This study aims to understand how Grade Three educators in Limpopo, South Africa, approach the implementation of the most recent CAPS. The analysis of data revealed inconsistencies between the 'optimistic' view of the Department of Basic Education (DBE) to improve curriculum implementation despite continuously changing the curriculum, and the 'pessimistic' scenario where educators consistently refer to obstacles to curriculum implementation. Respondents suggested that CAPS implementation is hampered by inadequate training of educators, a lack of resources, and too much paperwork. The study points to the politicisation of implementation signalled through educators' dissatisfaction with the DBE and their positive view of trade unions. This article argues that in the highly politicised education context of South Africa, curriculum implementation takes a back seat to institutional and individual political machinations.

Keywords: Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS); curriculum change; curriculum implementation; politics; primary school educators; South Africa; teacher unions

Introduction

A large body of empirical evidence shows that educational change has been a topical point of discussion for many years, not only in South Africa, but also worldwide (Du Plessis, 2013; Flores, 2005; Hongbiao, 2013; Rogan & Aldous, 2005; Yin, Lee & Wang, 2014). In his article, *Large-scale reform comes of age*, Fullan (2009) points to extensive education change that focused on curriculum reforms in Finland, Singapore, Alberta, Canada, Hong Kong and South Korea during the period 2003–2009.

In Hong Kong (Cheung & Wong, 2012) and Korea (Park & Sung, 2013), two separate studies found that educator workload had a significant impact on curriculum implementation. The same studies also noted that teacher training was key to improved curriculum implementation. The importance of training is also evidenced in Makunja's (2016) study in Tanzania, and a similar challenge is evident in South Africa (Bantwini, 2010). In other words, this article recognises that curriculum implementation is a global challenge. It seeks to extend the global scholarship on curriculum implementation beyond the repeated recognition of educator overload and the need for training. It therefore aims to encourage educators to develop creative solutions to the contextual and individual curriculum implementation challenges. It takes an 'empowerment' stance for educators globally and aims to take curriculum implementation beyond the boundaries of resource and limitations.

In South Africa, the period after 1994 was followed by a process of transformation in all sectors of society, and education was a key focus of transformation. Several curriculum revisions were introduced as a shift away from the racist curricula that entrenched the values of apartheid, moving towards a single non-racist, non-sexist curriculum for basic education (Jansen, 1999; Mnguni, 2013). The major curriculum changes of the post-apartheid curriculum included the introduction of Curriculum 2005 (C2005), the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) with their outcomes-based education (OBE) approach and CAPS that discontinued OBE to strengthen successful curriculum implementation by focusing on the acquisition of learner skills. The shift to a democratic curriculum was highly politicised, as the new government wanted to undo the legacy of the apartheid past. Key educational changes included minimising rote learning, textbook bound and exam-driven learning and an increased spotlight on a learner-centred pedagogy that would promote active learners and critical thinkers.

The politicality of education is summarised in Herman and Herman's (1994:43–44) argument that "[E]ducation is, significantly, located in an area of social disputation, and as such it is always political. The dominant political ethos has an influence on education, which in turn forms part of the overall socio-economic policy of the nation that must be implemented at local level."

Dowden (2013) takes a similar view and says that the curriculum is always political. While the inevitability and arguably the necessity of the politicality of the curriculum are recognised, this article interrogates the nature of the politicality of implementation. The findings show that when implementation becomes political, the value of the curriculum may indeed be lost. In this instance, it appears that curriculum implementation has been a focal point of a contest between political forces. These political forces constitute the teacher unions on the one side, and the government on the other. Caught in the centre of this conflict are educators. This study focuses on educator responses to the implementation of CAPS in a highly politicised context. It does not aim to evaluate or analyse CAPS.

Problem Statement

When Curriculum 2005 (C2005) was initially introduced as a new curriculum in the democratic South Africa, it was welcomed with high expectations (Dada, Dipholo, Hoadley, Khembo, Muller & Volmink, 2009), but its implementation encountered unexpected problems. This led to its review in 2000, making way for the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) that was introduced to simplify the implementation challenges of C2005. A key factor here was the preparedness and skills of educators to implement C2005 (Dada et al., 2009). The RNCS in turn faced ongoing implementation challenges that led to its review in 2009, producing CAPS as the new curriculum that has been implemented in South African schools and is in use today. In essence, the introduction of CAPS in South Africa is a government reaction to the confusion and implementation challenges of previous curriculum revisions (Nakedi, Taylor, Mundalamo, Rollnick & Mokeleche, 2012). The Ministerial Review Committees of 2000 and 2009 made several recommendations to improve the implementation challenges of C2005 and RNCS, respectively (Chisholm, 2005; Dada et al., 2009). However, findings show that curriculum implementation continues to be fraught with challenges.

The DBE has historically aimed to improve the quality of education by changing the curriculum. Fullan (2001) identifies three sequential phases for effective curriculum development, namely: initiation, implementation, and adoption. He further asserts that after initiation of a new curriculum, policy-makers rush to have it adopted, without taking into account how the innovation would be implemented. This naiveté during the implementation phase widens the gap between the curriculum and its implementation. The haste of the DBE to implement repeatedly revised curriculums without adequately attending to its implementation challenges may have contributed to the view that teaching and learning remains compromised in South Africa (Guthrie, 2012; Swanepoel & Booyse, 2006). Put differently, it is arguable that the DBE tried to 'fix' implementation by repeatedly revising the curriculum. It envisioned that a revised curriculum would have the knock-on effect of improving implementation. For the most part, this did not happen. Instead, educators became tired of change, and implementation became increasingly fraught with politically embedded challenges located in ownership of the curriculum, as well as inappropriate and adequate teacher training for implementation.

This study points to the value of understanding the implementation challenges experienced by educators who are at the coal face of implementation (Yin et al., 2014). In their study of Korean elementary teachers, Park and Sung (2013)

posit that frequently, educators do not feel well-equipped to implement a new curriculum. If educators feel that they are not well-equipped to innovate, their approach to implementing a new curriculum is fraught with persistent problems.

Background of Political Contestation between the DBE and Teacher Unions

The work of improving educational affairs at national level lies with both the government and the teacher unions (Mahlangu & Pitsoe, 2011), with government (represented by the DBE) making policy, and teacher unions (representing teachers) implementing it. According to Govender (2008), the formulation of policy in the school sector has become the responsibility of government policy makers and policy specialists, while its implementation is perceived as the responsibility of teachers. A gap is therefore created between policy formulation and policy implementation, which leaves teachers marginalised. This is because, firstly, government policy makers consult with teacher unions' representatives, and not with the polity of teachers; and secondly, because teacher unions themselves are unable to sufficiently involve grassroots' members in policy making activities within their unions (Govender, 2008).

Although teacher unions' consultation is acknowledged, this article presents considerable evidence to suggest that teachers view policy making at the national level as something far removed from their classroom realities. Educators themselves asserted:

We are not involved in decision-making. What they do they just go outside to other countries, collect the type of curriculum and just come and pass it to schools [Katlego H].

We don't know where they gather and take decision that this curriculum is good; this one is not good because of this or this. They don't involve us educators in decision-making when coming to the selection of a new curriculum [Kholo H].

We do not know how to handle the changes because we are uncertain of what is expected of us.

We have not been involved during the planning [Dimpho H].

Govender's (2008) argument confirms the concerns raised by the respondents of this study, of limited representation by their unions in curriculum development process, with the outcome that make educators to feel that they do not own CAPS.

Methodology

A qualitative research approach was adopted for this study, towards a holistic understanding of educators' experiences when implementing CAPS, how they were prepared for CAPS implementation and the challenges they encountered during implementation. As such, it sought to obtain in-depth qualitative data that focused on the experiences of individual educators (Denzin & Giardina, 2013). Maree (2007:78) defines quali-

tative research as “a naturalistic approach that seeks to understand phenomena in context.” The context in this study was three primary schools in the province of Limpopo. The qualitative approach afforded researchers the opportunity to observe the educators in their natural settings and in their classrooms (Maree, 2007). The interactive nature of qualitative research (Maree, 2012) facilitated a conversational approach that encouraged probing questions and opportunities to obtain details of the respondents’ experiences.

Sampling

Purposive sampling was employed (Creswell, 2002) to select the research sites and the participants from which pertinent information to understand the central phenomenon could be obtained. The central phenomenon in this case is the implementation of curriculum changes. Martella, Nelson, Morgan and Marchand-Martella (2013:305) state that “purposive sampling is defined as deliberately selecting particular persons, events or settings for the important information they provide.” Daniel (2012) adds that such a selection of the target population is done on the basis of their fit with the purposes of the study and specific inclusion or exclusion criteria.

In this study, three Limpopo primary schools in the Sekgosese East circuit were selected as research sites, using school size as a criterion for selection, and from these schools, nine Grade 3 educators were subsequently selected on the basis of their teaching experience. They were further selected because they were in the second year of CAPS implementation, whereas their counterparts in the intermediate phase were in their initial year of CAPS implementation in 2013. The criterion of school size for selecting research sites allowed the researchers to sample only bigger schools, that is, schools with an enrolment of 800 learners and more. This created a larger target population out of which to select participants with the required teaching experience in each of the selected schools. We aimed for at least three respondents per school as a means towards enhancing internal validity and seeking corroborating data in the same context. The respondents should have at least 15 years of teaching experience. Having taught for 15 years means that the respondents would have gone through all the post-apartheid curriculum change. However, we acknowledge that this choice of sample might have influenced the study findings, where younger educators could be more enthusiastic to implement because they have not been exposed to so many changes as compared with older educators, who appear to have suffered burn-out from a change in implementation. Retrospectively, this is a potential limitation to the study. Given that the study focused conceptually on curriculum implementation challenges, Limpopo

was selected because it is one of the country’s persistently underperforming provinces.

The instruments used to collect data in this study were interviews, classroom observations, and document retrieval from the sampled primary schools. The three data sources allowed for triangulation through substantive and in-depth data (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). The interview protocol was guided by the following core questions:

- 1) Briefly tell me about yourself.
- 2) How do you plan for CAPS implementation?
- 3) What kind of resources does your school have to facilitate CAPS implementation?
- 4) How were you trained to implement CAPS?
- 5) What kind of external support do you receive to help you to implement CAPS?
- 6) What challenges do you encounter when implementing CAPS?
- 7) How committed are you to teaching in a CAPS classroom?
- 8) Is there anything else you would like to share with me regarding the implementation of CAPS?

Data Collection and Analysis

Nine educators from three primary schools (three educators per school) were interviewed individually after school hours at their schools at times convenient for them, with each educator interviewed once for approximately one hour. Each educator was also observed once for 30 minutes, teaching in their classrooms using an observation protocol. School documents like lesson plans were also collected for analysis.

The Atlas.ti (computer assisted qualitative data analysis software) computer programme was used to analyse the interview data. Data were thematically coded using the following themes that were guided by the research questions, the theoretical framework sustaining this study and repeated readings of interview transcripts: 1) practices educators engage in to implement CAPS; 2) educators’ preparation for CAPS implementation; and 3) challenges experienced by educators in CAPS implementation.

Conceptual Guidance

This study was guided by Rogan and Grayson’s (2003) curriculum implementation theory, which is underpinned by three major theoretical constructs: support from outside agencies; capacity to support innovation; and profile of implementation. We have combined the first two constructs of Rogan and Grayson’s (2003) curriculum implementation theory as they both focus on support for curriculum implementation.

Support from outside agencies focuses on the support given by organisations outside the school, for example government departments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and teacher unions, as well as internal school-based support

mechanisms that work together with the school to support innovation.

Capacity to support innovation considers aspects that either support or hinder the implementation of innovations. The aspects are divided into: 1) physical resources such as classrooms and textbooks; 2) teacher factors such as teacher qualifications, training and level of confidence and their commitment to teaching; 3) learner factors and the school ethos, such as learners' proficiency in the language of teaching and learning; and 4) ecology and management such as the commitment by everybody to make the school work.

The profile of implementation aspect of Rogan and Grayson's (2003) curriculum implementation theory focuses on educators' classroom practices. In other words it looks at what educators do or are unable to do in the implementation process. This construct overlaps with the first two in that the ability of educators to acquire and implement support shapes the profile of implementation.

While Rogan and Grayson (2003) acknowledge that curriculum implementation will differ from school to school given the individualised context of each school, they do not fully accommodate the extent to which external political forces influence curriculum implementation. Put differently, the profile of implementation, that is, what happens in the classroom, is influenced by the broader political forces in which the schools and educators live.

However, in the context of this study it is not the politicality of the curriculum that takes centre stage, but the politicality of implementation.

Findings

This section discusses the following findings from the study: inadequate training of educators, lack of resources, and too much paperwork. These factors appear to be the key factors that frustrated the respondents and subsequently thwarted implementation. In a preliminary analysis of the data it became evident that respondents could be divided into two categories, namely; those who were optimistic about curriculum change and implementation and those who were not. In grouping 'optimistic' and 'pessimistic' respondents we found that those who were optimistic had a Master's degree and those who were pessimistic had an Honours degree, or lower qualification. The two better qualified and optimistic respondents were also relatively young compared to the others in the sample. It is feasible to assume that the relative youth of the two participants, their wider skills set, as well as their commitment to improve their professional qualifications, may be a factor contributing to their enthusiastic and innovative stance towards implementation of CAPS.

It seems feasible that the respondents' lack of confidence and feelings of being overwhelmed in the face of so many curriculum changes over such a short period of time, has compromised their individual ability to learn on their own, to be courageous and to test implementation strategies. They seem to have placed the responsibility to implement at the door of the DBE, and in so doing, they abdicate their own responsibilities. In the sections that follow, we focus on the key challenges to curriculum implementation, as identified by the respondents.

Inadequate Training of Educators

Firstly, the respondents gave a clear political statement on their preference about the training they received for CAPS implementation. Respondents were very critical about the training offered by government. They seem to prefer training offered by their teacher union:

Our teachers' organisation helps us because when we are at workshops we are grouped and are assisted in planning, and I think this is much better than what the department is doing right now; and then when we are at workshops organised by the unions we are clustered at schools and our union make sure that our education desk sends the representatives to check what kind of the challenges we are facing at our schools [Kholo H].

Probing further the above respondent went on to say

Our department levels do not provide the necessary support that is needed to develop good strategies that will help all learners. The support that is needed should come from the national level, district level, circuit level and from the school. The curriculum advisors visit our schools once a year and when they come, they focus only at our mistakes rather than providing the support needed. I think they should provide support by helping us to overcome barriers in the system that prevent us from meeting the learning needs. They should also assist us in creating flexibility in our teaching methods and the assessment of learning. The external support that we are receiving now is from our teachers' organisation. Our teacher organisation sometimes organises teacher workshops that are beneficial within the classroom situation.

Josephine H also elaborated on her preference for union training:

As far as union is concerned, they help us by taking other teachers to the training and call them lead teachers, and the lead teachers have already given us lesson plans, but lesson plans are not enough because they are only for Mathematics and FAL [First Additional Language].

If indeed union training was better and more helpful, as asserted above, the respondents might be looking forward to the same quality of training from the department to help them implement the curriculum adequately. The respondents raise a repeated need for government to improve educator training initiatives. Without proper training, the

respondents seem to be overwhelmed by the curriculum changes introduced by the government. Adequate training of educators in lesson planning is imperative to equip them with planning skills for successful implementation. While every effort was made in the interview to draw respondents out on the gaps in the government training programmes, respondents were not forthcoming on this issue. Instead the strength of union training was highlighted. Josephine H said that she preferred union training, because “lead teachers” gave them lesson plans. She views this as beneficial, appreciates it as a form of support she gets from her union. Gloria H too spoke of the support from her union

Eeh, well! My teacher union eeh [...] sometimes call us to give us support in the form of workshops where we are just gathered there and then they give us some information as far as CAPS is concerned.

A clear call from the respondents was the need for increased support and training from the government. Interview data show that there is very little evidence of educators seeking out training on their own, or using internet support mechanisms. In other words, collaboration with each other to actually develop their own implementation strategies was not forthcoming when they were asked how they plan for CAPS implementation, or when asked to share any strategies regarding CAPS implementation. This is an indication of a dire need for continuous training to support educators when a new curriculum is introduced. Dimpho H emphasised this point by saying: “As long as there is not enough training – teachers’ training as far as CAPS is concerned – I won’t be confident.”

The above explication confirms the importance of intensive educator training from the side of government, without which educators would find it difficult to adequately implement the curriculum. Rogan and Grayson (2003) argue that training should encourage ownership of innovation. In this case, the inadequate training of educators by the DBE hampered implementation, as the respondents’ level of confidence and commitment to CAPS teaching was low. While educators commended the support they received from NGOs in the form of physical resources, they were less satisfied with the DBE:

The NGOs support us with resources, not with the workshops [Lydia H].

They help us by giving us grade readers, the toys, the books and also by erecting the swingers for the young ones and also by giving us the plastic balls and wall charts [Josephine H].

Rogan and Grayson (2003) point out that support in the form of resources and training is therefore vital for successful curriculum implementation.

Lack of Resources

Respondents raised a concern that implementation is compromised by the lack of resources, most particularly the shortage of textbooks. A recent study by Makeleni and Sethusha (2014) confirms that countries such as Brazil, Ghana, Guinea and the Philippines had shown improvement in learner performance due to sufficient supply of textbooks. The respondents commented as follows:

We don’t have enough reading books because they give eeh [...] four similar books and expect learners to share. Even though we divide learners into groups, with four books is impossible [Malebo M].

The big challenges we encounter implementing the CAPS, one; we are poorly resourced, is the challenge. So the other one I have indicated the shortage of CAPS workbooks and the textbooks [...] [Victor H].

Observations of classroom practices showed that learners had workbooks and each educator has a textbook. However, the respondents raised a valid concern in that learners did not have textbooks and that they had to share the few available textbooks. The lack of resources in a developing country like South Africa is not surprising or unusual. Of significance though is that the focus on resources places the responsibility for implementation at the door of the Department of Education. The respondents said that teaching cannot take place if the Department did not supply enough textbooks for learners. While it is widely accepted that any curriculum extends well beyond a textbook, it is arguable that the available textbook provided some form of basic curriculum guidance. Van den Akker (2003) developed a curricular spider’s web that includes the several components a curriculum statement may contain, namely: the rationale underpinning the curriculum; aims; goals and objectives; content; teacher role; learning activities; materials and resources for teaching and learning; grouping; time allocation; and assessment modes and criteria. The components are interrelated and the structure that connects them is vulnerable such that if any discrepancy happens to one of the components, the whole system is thrown out of balance, with the risk of destroying it altogether (Van den Akker, 2003). In this study, the author’s typology confirms the discrepancies that may have been caused by educators’ lack of clarity about the intended aims and objectives of the reform (generally), and inadequate materials and resources (specifically). Their statement that they cannot teach or understand the curriculum because learners do not have textbooks does not appear to be grounded on any substantive evidence.

While it is valid that not having a textbook is a serious limitation, the position that the

respondents have taken is not how they can overcome such limitations. It seems as if they use insufficient resources as an explanation for inadequate implementation, and that they have not found creative ways to overcome such shortages. Considering that these are primary schools – in other words Grade Three learners – an educator can teach despite the fact that not all children have textbooks (Cirka, 2014). Furthermore, the fact that learners have workbooks is a good place to start, but educators did not take that view. What became evident was that educators seemed to place the responsibility for curriculum implementation outside of themselves, and often seemed to be teaching just because they had to. As Lydia H put it, “*I am just teaching for the sake that I had to work, and cannot just sit down and do nothing.*”

Too much Paperwork

A third concern raised by the respondents was the increased paperwork linked to CAPS. They did not differentiate time for doing administrative work from teaching time. Josephine H remarked:

The tasks are too many. When coming to language, every quarter you must see to it that you cover for four tasks and we know that there are more things in the language. There is reading, there is story telling ... so there is no time for that reading. Most of the time we are writing. We are giving them tests, the projects to be done in the class. That is why I said there is more paperwork ...

This is a problem across the globe. In a study prepared for the Education Labour Relations Council (ELRC) by Chisholm, Hoadley, Wa Kivulu, Brookes, Prinsloo, Kgobe, Mosia, Narsee and Rule (2005), it was found that there are many international studies involving countries such as Australia, Korea, Mexico, the Slovak Republic, Turkey, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Jordan, Malaysia, Paraguay, Peru, the Philippines, Russian Federation, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Tunisia, Uruguay and Zimbabwe that were conducted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) on educators’ workload. The study revealed that despite increased workloads, the percentage of working time spent teaching as opposed to other activities such as administrative or extramural activities is larger than 50% in only a minority of countries.

As such, all educators are likely to say that they have too much administrative work; but this cannot be an explanation for not implementing in the classroom, as paperwork time is not classwork time. In other words, when the educator is in the classroom and teaching, administrative work should not be done. Administrative time is outside the classroom, so the explanation of too much paperwork is not an explanation for why the curriculum is not being implemented in the classroom. Again, educators show that they had

politicised implementation by removing their responsibility to implement the curriculum. However, this study found that the individual’s context and not so much the school’s context actually had a strong influence on curriculum implementation.

In setting the Department of Education and the unions alongside and against each other with respect to educator training and readiness for implementation, the respondents in this study chose to make implementation political. There is no doubt that there are challenges. There is widespread acknowledgement in the literature that curriculum implementation is fraught with challenges, and in developing nations, these may indeed be intense (Chisholm, Motlala & Vally, 2003; Davies, 1994; Lekgoathi, 2010; Rogan & Grayson, 2003; Sharp, Hopkin, James, Peacock, Kelly, Davies & Bowker, 2009). What this study suggests is that the intense politicisation of implementation means that educators do not feel pushed to find creative solutions to implementation challenges. Indeed, it is arguable that in such a volatile and highly political context, educators are likely to turn their backs on implementation and focus instead on heeding the political forces at play. Put differently, the politicisation of implementation creates opportunities for educators to renege on individual responsibility for implementation.

In a developing context where limited resources are a key factor, implementation challenges are not easily remedied. Overcoming implementation challenges will no doubt require educators to be creative, resourceful and inventive. This study did not focus on educator resourcefulness, and perhaps in hindsight this may be identified as a limitation. While we recognise the challenges that educators face, we have no explanation for why educators with degrees and often with postgraduate qualifications find it difficult to understand and implement a curriculum designed for Grade Three learners. As we see it, the lack of training and resources is not an adequate explanation for limited implementation. It is feasible that the individual profile of implementation played a key role – the attitudes of educators, the lack of ownership about the change, and the unwillingness to be creative. It is also possible that the individual profile may be embedded in the school over a number of years, because educators have been working in this context for a long time. Put differently, it is feasible that educator profiles may not be clearly distinguishable. Educators felt that they had not been consulted during curriculum development processes. Although unions represent educators during curriculum development processes, unions do not necessarily carry a curriculum specific mandate, and so it remains largely a paper representation. Kuiper (2009) developed a

theory that illustrates where curriculum practices at school and classroom level originate.

The theory suggests that when curriculum is 'handed down from the top' it is not enthusiastically implemented by educators. Simultaneously, when educators themselves implement the curriculum, it is a bottom-up curriculum development process. It further indicates that the support educators should get from outside without which implementation would be difficult (Kuiper, 2009). In this study, the perception is that educators are not supported by managers, government, other agencies or resources; so they develop an attitude of consistent resistance to change implementation. The view that they perceive the curriculum to have been handed down to them serves to exacerbate resistance.

Lydia H revealed that she had no desire to learn more or develop creative teaching skills. She said: "*In [her teaching subjects] I am just teaching them as I am expected even if eeh [...] I am just teaching for the sake of teaching.*"

The above expression shows that she teaches because she has to do something. Josephine H says she does what she too has little idea of what to do. "*We don't know what we can do. We are trying to use the old methods by writing the notes on the chalkboard, which is not necessary.*"

It is interesting that Josephine H says she implements the curriculum in a manner she knows is not necessary, but continues to do so anyway, that is, she resorts to using "old methods" of writing notes on the chalkboard possibly because she does not have a grasp on how to implement the new curriculum, or does not seem to have an alternative.

This behaviour does not tie with Rogan and Grayson's (2003) profile of implementation that encourages educators to find numerous implementation alternatives that encourage them to discover their strengths and make progress by building from these strengths. Another respondent, Katlego H, shows an absence of active teaching and engagement with learners and says: "*... and we don't have that [teacher's guide]. We only have learners' books wherein I just take a book, open it at any page and instruct learners to complete the work.*" This suggests limited actual teaching and engagement with learners. Needless to say, this approach cannot be blamed on a lack of resources or too much paperwork. Instructing learners to do the work shows that learners are left to fend for themselves. It is arguable that learners are left with the task of implementation with little if any guidance from educators. In sum, Kholo H categorically stated that there is confusion about how to implement CAPS without assistance from her colleagues:

... at our institution I am the only one involved in planning and implementing CAPS as there is no

assistance from the school level and grade level. I think it is caused by the lack of knowledge on the implementation of CAPS.

The above statement shows unilateral planning that is not consistent with Rogan and Grayson's (2003) idea that supports developmental planning that encourages members of the school community to work together. From our observation, the challenge is not the administrative paperwork per se, but the pressure that educators feel from everything that has to do with the new curriculum. To be specific, educators would, for instance, complain that they have to repeat same tasks. For example, in English First Additional Language, they repeatedly do orals and grammar for Task 1 and Task 2 in a term. This repetition appears to increase the pressure on their time, taking away from other activities like reading, writing and conversation.

Conclusion

This study concurred with Rogan and Grayson's (2003) assertion that successful curriculum implementation hinges on adequate support in the form of resources and training from various agencies. Additionally, we show that implementation also depends on how curriculum is introduced and politically framed at the policy level (top-down) and how it is perceived and encouraged at the school level (bottom-up) (Kuiper & Berkvens, 2013).

Biesta, Priestley and Robinson (2015) point to the centrality of teacher agency with respect to curriculum implementation. They suggest that teacher agency refers to "a pattern of influences from the past, orientations towards the future and engagement with the present" (Biesta et al., 2015:626). Because of its highly prescriptive nature, CAPS is a largely top-down curriculum that could potentially minimise teacher agency. In the final analysis we posit that in the context of this study, teacher agency and willingness to implement CAPS is compromised, owing to the perceived absence of support from the school leadership; the perception that additional resources were required for implementation; and most significantly, the highly politicised context in which teachers worked. The study points to the politicisation of implementation signalled through educators' dissatisfaction with the DBE and their positive view of trade unions. In the highly politicised education context of South Africa, we show that curriculum implementation takes a back seat to institutional and individual political machinations. While supporting Rogan and Grayson's (2003) view that the profile of implementation, that is what happens in the classroom, will be defined by school-based and individual educator profiles, this study also shows that the broader political forces are also influential in defining the profile of implementation in a school.

Note

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