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Issues Surrounding Teachers' Readiness in Implementing the Competency-Based 'O' Level Geography Syllabus 4022 in Zimbabwe

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Abstract. The qualitative study, which involved a multiple case study design, focused on the issues surrounding the readiness of teachers to implement the competency-based O-Level Geography Syllabus 4022 in the Zimbabwe secondary school system. In adopting a multiple case study design, the research sought to solicit the opinions of all Geography teachers in the Kwekwe district of Zimbabwe on their readiness to implement the competency-based O-Level Geography Syllabus 4022. A technique involving an analysis of primary documents published by MoPSE was done, and ten in-depth interviews with Geography teachers drawn from two secondary schools and two Focus Group Discussions (FDGs) from the same schools were adopted to generate data. The study established that the updated O-Level Geography Syllabus 4022 was introduced without enough consideration of the readiness of teachers for its implementation. It also emerged from the study that the breadth and depth of the issues surrounding teacher readiness to implement an updated syllabus require action to be taken from several fronts to ensure that the subject community is ready for its rapid delivery. Finally, the research paper recommends massive advocacy and sensitisation of O-Level Geography teachers who are at the helm of the user system to allow for effective delivery of the O-Level Geography Syllabus 4022 in the secondary school sector in Zimbabwe.

Keywords: readiness; educator; competency-based; syllabus; geography

1. Introduction

The introduction of the competency-based curriculum in Zimbabwe posed a repertoire of challenges as classroom practitioners grappled with coming to terms with the underlying assumptions, goals, content, and principles that guide the operation of the new practice in both the primary and secondary schools system. Thus, most of the world's knowledge societies considering adopting reform initiatives in their education systems have primarily focused on holistic and integrated professional and pedagogical training concepts as a step toward

promoting basic theoretical levels of knowledge, skills, and personal qualities in teachers (Mizambaeva & Baimyrzaev, 2019). However, contemporary research evidence has revealed that introducing reforms in some less Economically Developed Countries (LEDCs) is not always perfect and, as such, often results in adverse effects on the envisaged curriculum package. The problem has been attributed to policies and mandates introducing innovations with little regard for teacher readiness before the implementation phase. For instance, the state of teacher readiness for implementing the updated O-Level Geography Syllabus 4022 in Zimbabwe seems to project a negative picture following its adoption, which cynics claim was impromptu. Georgescu (2015) reports that at the inception of the competency-based curriculum, the Government of Zimbabwe (GoZ) committed itself to taking the curriculum seriously and promised that it would give teachers total support to make curriculum implementation more effective. As a priority, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE) arranged for teacher capacity development programmes meant to provide direction for classroom instruction and effective implementation of the new practice (Mipfide & Mapolisa, 2021 and Simba, 2021). An operational plan was established based on the terms of reference that included:

- ❖ provision of new syllabuses to all teachers for reviewing so that adjustments are made, if necessary,
- ❖ provision of professional development for teachers, pre-service training to help teachers learn to develop lessons and material resources, follow-up support through clusters, district, provincial, and national staff,
- ❖ preparation, printing and delivering new learning materials including textbooks and giving first preference to the poorest schools
- ❖ introduction of continuous assessment system (CA) and
- ❖ Monitoring and feedback.

The operational plan was sound and laudable, although its implementation failed to live up to policy expectations due to pushback and lack of buy-in by the people who were to deliver or benefit from the scheme. Meanwhile, a gap in practice emerged because teachers were not well grounded in the philosophy that informs the curriculum syllabus in question. This scenario is believed to have demotivated teachers to engage the updated curriculum with learners in their classrooms (Moyo and Hadebe, 2018). For Dube & Jita (2018) the competency-based curriculum in Zimbabwe faced serious challenges of being resisted by teachers, parents, and even learners themselves. Along the same thread, the Progressive Teachers' Union of Zimbabwe (PTUZ) alleged that teachers and parents were not consulted, so schools were inadequately prepared to implement the curriculum framework (Newsday Zimbabwe, 9 January 2017). PTUZ expressed concern about the lack of coherent programmes to train teachers to operationalise the competency-based curriculum, particularly continuous assessment (CA), despite the government's insistence that the new assessment should be adopted in schools. This decision of the government sparked a lot of noise from different stakeholders, leading to the suspension of CA without formal communication to schools. Thus, the then minister of education publicly announced:

We have totally scrapped the issue of tasks, so we are saying we will no longer have tasks in our schools. From my study, these tasks are not part of the syllabus, and even if one would look at our syllabus, it has no tasks. Above all, the tasks were too much a burden to both teachers and learners because if a learner is doing ten subjects, they are required to do at least one task per subject, meaning ten tasks for the ten subjects per term or simply 30 tasks per year. We will compress the curriculum especially for lower levels, because the learning areas are too much (Sunday Times Zimbabwe, 4 March 2018).

The announcement in the national media implied that the implementation of the competency-based curriculum was abortive at this point in time and that this was due to the lack of support and collaboration within the system. This also justifies the assertion of Barrow & Delisle (2010) that the inherent lack of support from stakeholders makes implementation more difficult. Several other studies reveal that teachers were uncomfortable with the way the new curriculum was adopted, citing as reasons that the introduction was impromptu without giving teachers opportunities to prepare for operationalising it. In a study conducted by Mangwaya, Blignaut & Pillay (2016), the authors allege that there was lack of consultation on the part of teachers who for this reason found it difficult fulfilling their roles effectively. Elsewhere in the literature, it is further alleged that the introduction of the competency-based curriculum created challenges for teachers who were not well acquainted with the demands of the new practice, especially its mode of assessment (Newsday Zimbabwe, 9 January 2017). In a survey conducted by Dube & Jita (2018), the authors reported that the introduction of CA brought more pain, friction and agony between teachers, school heads, parents, as well as curriculum planners themselves.

Above all, there is overwhelming evidence to support the observation that the introduction of the competency-based curriculum faced many challenges that impeded its effective implementation. In that regard, there is therefore definite need for research to be done in this area to build on the body of knowledge about these challenges with respect to the O-Level Geography Syllabus 4022 in the Zimbabwean context.

2. Review of the literature

This section sets the scene to provide the theoretical discourse surrounding issues about teacher readiness to implement the competency-based O-Level Geography Syllabus 4022 in the Zimbabwean secondary school sector. The section begins by laying out the theoretical dimensions of the research and looks at the nature and dynamics of the O-Level Geography Syllabus 4022 and finally ends by examining the teacher readiness for the updated O-Level Syllabus 4022.

2.1 Theoretical framework

This research article contextualises the study within the theoretical discourse of the Readiness Theory, mooted by Colney (2008). This theoretical discourse alludes to the readiness discourse to imply a high level of professional competence, which involves a combination of professional and personal qualities necessary for high quality work in educational endeavours (Ozhegov,

2007; Belin & Gonchar, 2013; Lane & Bourke, 2019). Authors such as Mizambaeva and Baimyrzaev (2019) use professional competence to mean the theoretical and practical readiness of a teacher to carry out educational activities at the highest level of professionalism. In the current study, the research problem has been approached through a multidimensional and interconnected component classification model involving gnoseological, axiological, praxiological, and professional-personal components presented by Mizambaeva & Baimyrzaev (2019) in Table 1.

Table 1: Classification of teacher readiness components
(Mizambaeva & Baimyrzaev, 2019)

Components	Contents	Competencies
Gnoseological	<p>The content involves various aspects of the Knowledge System as indicated below:</p> <p>Knowledge of Geography: The focus of the content is on:</p> <p>Understanding the role of Geography in the modern scientific worldview and its value.</p> <p>Knowledge of basic Geography concepts, relationships, theories, cause-and-effect relationships, laws, and regularities underlying school Geography courses.</p> <p>Knowledge of ecology: this aspect of content is concerned with developing:</p> <p>Knowledge of environmental issues as a cross-cutting line of Geography.</p> <p>Knowledge in the field of education and methods of teaching Geography,</p> <p>Knowledge of modern teaching aids, professional methods, and techniques.</p>	<p>What follows are the competencies developed from the proposed component classification.</p> <p>Readiness to use knowledge of modern science and education problems in solving professional tasks.</p> <p>Readiness to interact with the parties of the educational process and social partners, to lead the team, with a tolerant perception of social ethno-confessional and cultural differences.</p>

	<p><u>Geographic knowledge of the teacher:</u></p> <p>The aim is to develop the</p> <p>-Geographical worldview, geographical thinking, Geography methods, Geography terms.</p>	
Axiological	<p>The aspect emphasises the development of values of individual teachers with respect to their educational needs, interests, emotions, and attitudes to teaching, as well as the development of readiness for self-education and self-development.</p>	<p>Readiness to recognise the social significance of their future profession and to have the motivation to carry out professional activities.</p> <p>Ability to carry out professional and personal self-education, to design further learning routes and professional career.</p> <p>Ability to develop the trajectory of your professional growth and personal development.</p>
Praxiological	<p><u>Professional Skills:</u> The main thrust is to develop the following readiness skills:</p> <p><u>Gnostic Skills:</u> ability to work with scientific papers on Geography, education, methodology; the ability to master the methodology of pedagogical research, etc.</p> <p><u>Design Skills:</u> the ability to measure, observe, predict, and model natural and social processes and phenomena in time and space, etc.</p> <p><u>Constructive Skills:</u> creating a lesson plan, selecting the best teaching methods and techniques, and using modern teaching tools.</p> <p><u>Organizational Skills:</u> The ability to organize interaction</p>	<p>Ability to analyze the results of scientific research, apply them when solving specific research problems in the field of science and education, carry out independent scientific research, the ability to apply modern methods and techniques to organise the learning process, diagnose, and evaluate the quality of the educational process within various educational programmes.</p> <p>Ability to develop and implement methodological models, methods, training techniques, to analyse the results of their application in educational organisations.</p> <p>Ability to systematise, synthesise, and disseminate international methodological</p>

	<p>with students, the ability of teachers to control themselves and be tactful in unforeseen situations, etc.</p> <p>Communicative Skills: the ability to carry out a conversation or a discussion, the ability to establish rapport with students, teachers, parents, etc.</p> <p>Reflexive Skills: Self-analysis and self-esteem, the ability to adequately assess the activities of students, etc.</p>	<p>experience related to teaching.</p> <p>Readiness to conduct professional communication to solve problems related to teaching.</p> <p>Readiness to interact with the parties to the educational process and social partners to lead the team.</p>
Professional-Personal	Emotional and Intellectual Features of Geography Teachers, as well as Operational and Voluntary Qualities.	Readiness to work as a teacher.

The study used the component classification presented in Table 1 in relation to the readiness model developed by Colney (2008) to provide a theoretical basis for interrogating the issues surrounding teacher readiness to implement the competency-based O-Level Geography Syllabus 4022 in Zimbabwe. The Colney (2008) model focuses on three related key facets directly linked to teacher readiness development, namely cognitive strategies, content knowledge, academic behaviours, and contextual skills (Mizambaeva & Baimyrzaev (2019). The following paragraphs provide an apt exposition of the key facets of the model and subsequent action plans necessary to ensure that teachers are ready to deliver a new practice in an expeditiously timely manner.

Colney's cognitive strategies represent the praxiological component in the Mizambaeva & Baimyrzaev component classification (Table 1). The authors are of the idea that readiness relates to the functional level mechanics of an innovation, and therefore adopting cognitive strategies during teacher capacity development allows them to integrate constructive skills, such as those required for creating lesson plans, selecting the best teaching methods and techniques, and using modern teaching tools (Colney, 2008). Apparently, key cognitive strategies are necessary tools for developing professional skills that subsequently lead to the development of various competencies, including the teacher's ability to apply modern methods and techniques, organising the learning process, diagnosing, and evaluating the quality of the educational process within various educational programmes (Mizambaeva & Baimyrzaev, 2019).

In addition, Colney (2008) considers the acquisition of key content knowledge as critical to enhancing teacher readiness to deliver the content for the criterion-referenced assessment. The refined consensus model considers five pillars to be

critical for a teacher to effectively deliver subject content. The five include curricular knowledge, assessment knowledge, content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and students' knowledge (Carlson & Daehler, 2019). The assumption is that an appropriate praxiological plan of action should be adopted during teacher capacity development to equip them with adequate knowledge that is intrinsically specific to the subject taught in the school curriculum (Young, 2012). Similar conception finds expression in the classification of the gnoseological component, which involves teacher readiness development covering issues such as readiness for the knowledge of modern science problems, as well as skills required to solve professional tasks, team leadership and tolerance, perception of social ethno-confessional and cultural differences (Mizambaeva & Baimyrzaev, 2019). Elsewhere in the literature, Colney (2008) perceives metacognitive skills as critical for developing teacher curriculum implementation readiness. The author draws distinctive categories of metacognitive skills to develop teacher readiness that includes self-awareness, self-monitoring, and self-control. These skills relate quite well to the classes of the praxiological and personal components presented in Table 1. The assumption is that the possible outcomes from a teacher readiness development programme necessitate the development of axiological and praxiological related skills such as organisational skills, communicative skills, and reflective skills (see Table 1).

Finally, Colney (2008)'s readiness model values the development of contextual knowledge readiness for the development of systemic readiness in addition to the generic understanding of the norms, values, and conventions of a new practice. Colney (2008) further argues that contextual knowledge promotes the teacher's ability to cope with and adapt to new systems. Thus, according to Colney, teachers who do not understand or who are not ready to adopt the institutions' norms, values, and expectations are more likely to feel alienated and thus foster intentions to withdraw from the system voluntarily. Similarly, Colney (2008) sees early readiness for organisational change as one of the most important factors that affect the successful implementation of change. For this reason, many teachers are expected to acquire readiness as an important construct for the first step in the change process. According to Vakola (2013), once teachers attain readiness, they become confident and motivated to implement change. The literature further acknowledges that change can best be made when members of an institution are ready to implement it. The assumption is that if the change is accepted and understood by every institutional member, then the members become motivated and committed to provide support to implement it effectively. However, if change is ignored and resisted, obstacles that inhibit the success of the planned change often emerge (Vakola, 2013).

2.2 The Nature and Dynamics of the Geography Syllabus 4022

One of the major changes in education (post 2015) was the shift toward a competency-based curriculum. More precisely, economic and political challenges overwhelmed the need for a new curriculum; one that responds to the external pressures and lived realities of the 21st century world (Mipfide & Mapolisa, 2021; Simba, 2021). The upgraded O-Level Geography Syllabus 4022

was one such reform initiative. In essence, the upgraded O-Level Geography Syllabus 4022 was developed from the MoPSE-designed Curriculum Framework for Primary and Secondary Education (CFPSE) template. The syllabus adopted competency-based approaches that allow learners to manipulate geographical data and make informed decisions in their day-to-day experiences. Such approaches are learner-centred and can be managed through the application of orthodidactic principles and multisensory approaches to teaching (Zimbabwe Schools Examination Council [ZIMSEC] O-Level Geography Syllabus, 2015-2022). It is worth mentioning that in its programmatic whole; the upgraded O-Level syllabus 4022 has been designed to cover the study of Geography from Forms One to Four progressively, unlike the previous one, which only focused on Forms Three and Four. Basically, programmes grounded within the competency-based phenomenon have a link with what learners need to know, what they need to learn to do, and to be able to live and work with other people (MoPSE, 2021). Simply put, effective learning under a competency-based system is one that endures and is capable of being put to good use in differing situations in the future (Georgescu, 2015). Despite this educationally sound initiative, teachers seem to be still not in terms with the best practices for delivering the new practice yet. This has overwhelmed the need to ask questions about teacher readiness to implement the O-Level Geography Syllabus 4022. The ensuing section attempts to explain the concept of readiness, which is the theoretical basis for this research paper.

2.3 Teacher readiness for the updated Geography Syllabus 4022

Teacher readiness is the premier phase of curriculum innovation; hence, curriculum change should be framed by telos, which means by 'sense of purpose' (Biesta, 2012). The implication is that developing readiness in teachers requires a deliberate decision to ensure that they are ready before the start of the implementation phase. Most importantly, Biesta is of the idea that ongoing professional development campaigns should be adopted to get teachers ready to use approaches that match the new practice. Hall & Hord (2006) use the analogy of an implementation bridge to express the need for a thorough thought-out strategy to direct teacher readiness development. The analogy of the implementation bridge represents teacher readiness development programmes whose purpose is to prevent teachers from failing to achieve the desired results of their teaching.

Just like crossing a bridge, the implementation of an innovation is problematic when teachers lack the praxiological skills that are important for maintaining the use of a curriculum syllabus. In Zimbabwe, for example, some important stakeholders, including teachers' unions and PTUZ particularly, concede that at the start of the new curriculum, professional development programmes were not properly executed to promote pedagogical skills, making it difficult to transfer the required syllabus competencies into practice. Evidence is available that shows that teachers could not embrace the three competency-based pedagogical skill related goals namely, helping students acquire important information and work-related skills, making meaning of the content, and effectively transferring the learning to new situations both within school and beyond (by Wiggins & McTighe, 2008). In line with the challenges mentioned before, Whitehead in

Brown (2019) proposed the rhythm-of-learning model as an intervention avenue that (Geography) teachers may adopt to make their teaching enjoyable. Whitehead argues that courses and curricula evolve around three well-meshed phases of learning, namely romance, precision, and generalisation stages; all which characterise the rhythm of learning. Thus, the ideal introduction to a curriculum subject is to be romantic, full of excitement and attractive, making it alive, real, stimulating, and worth studying. In summary, the rhythm of learning emphasises the acquisition of knowledge and skills that continue to sustain interest, eventually leading to the generalisation phase. For Brown (2019), in the rhythm of learning, learners need not be pressured to cover the topic, but should be invited to explore it. Certainly, the rhythm of learning model exhibits ascertainable general traits which are valid for most pupils, as it links quite well with the component classification and therefore, teachers need to receive appropriate training that makes them ready to adapt their teaching to suit the stages in the rhythm to which learners have advanced (Brown, 2019).

3. Methodology

The approach to empirical research adopted for this study was one of a qualitative multiple case study design. The technique drew data from analysis of the primary documents published by MoPSE and ten in-depth key informant interviews involving five Geography teachers from each of the two purposively selected secondary schools. In addition, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted with two groups consisting mainly of O-Level Geography teachers from each of the two secondary schools. To investigate the research problem, the interview with Geography teachers took 10 to 15 minutes and 30 to 40 minutes for each FGD. In all instances, data were generated through asking questions based on a set of three categories that emerged as subthemes upon which the discussion of results is centred. In addition, literature reviews were specifically used to provide conceptual and theoretical support as well as to demonstrate to the readers how this research particularly fits into the larger field of inquiry.

4. Limitations

Although the purpose of this research article was to solicit the opinions of all Geography teachers in the Kwekwe district of Zimbabwe regarding their readiness to implement the competency-based O-Level Geography Syllabus 4022, this was not possible due to several limitations. The potential limitations were its small population size. Often, the generalisability of findings is problematic if the data are not representative of wider contexts (Creswell, 2014). The deliberate selection of such a sample arose from the small establishment of the schools that were used as research sites, limitation of time, financial constraints, as well as the Covid-19 restrictions on movement.

5. Results and Discussion

In soliciting participation in this study, informants were made aware that the research was not going to use actual names. Instead, pseudonyms were used to conceal the identity of the participants. The informants were identified by letters: A B C D E while schools by numbers 1 and 2. The reader will find that the results are presented and then immediately discussed. This approach has been adopted

for this study to avoid unnecessary repetition that usually results when presentation of results and their discussion are separated (Mouton, 2008). In addition, a thematic analysis approach has also been adopted in which the presentation is structured into three major themes, viz:

- Dissemination of the O-Level Geography Syllabus 4022,
- Availability of Resources and
- Teacher readiness for implementation of the O-Level Geography Syllabus.

These three themes formed the basis for discussing the research findings. In adopting this approach, McMillan & Schumacher (2010) stated that it is prudent for the researcher to interpret the collected data organised according to themes and categories.

5.1 The Dissemination of Competency-Based Geography 4022

The way a syllabus is distributed is a critical factor that cannot be ignored in any serious analysis of issues such as those surrounding teachers' readiness to adopt and subsequently implement a new curriculum package. For instance, an analysis of the primary documents published by MoPSE suggests that the adoption and dissemination of the updated O-Level Geography Syllabus to secondary schools around the country was a fait accompli. In that case, teachers were only asked to implement the syllabus without prior training. In confirmation of this evidence, reference is made to a circular published by MoPSE, part of which reads:

"This circular deliberates on the direction to the implementation of Phase 2 of the new Curriculum commencing January 2017. Therefore, it is incumbent upon every school to effectively implement the provisions of the circular."

It emerged from documentary evidence that the proposed change was more revolutionary (in the sense that it was introduced using circular/it came as a directive) rather than evolutionary (Mangwaya et al., 2016). This was a flawed process to develop the readiness of the teacher to adopt the new practice, and surprisingly, the change was resisted. In fact, the use of a circular is a clear indication that no meaningful programmes were put in place to prepare teachers for the updated O-Level Geography Syllabus 4022. One of the key informants did not hide to say:

"We need thorough training, and this should be done by subject managers from ZIMSEC. The idea of using circulars dilutes the quality of information that ends us up with something different altogether as circulars are prone to different interpretations by individual teachers. I even doubt very much if the education inspectors themselves are knowledgeable of what is supposed to be done. I am reliably told that during a one-day seminar with school heads, the inspectors told the school heads to go back to their schools and continue with what they thought was the correct thing."

This is consistent with the position of Stronge (2018) that teachers need an induction of some sort prior to the implementation phase. If they are not ready

as curriculum end users, they can reject all planned changes in schools and can act in negative ways such as being hesitant and fearful, and they can even attempt to undermine the efforts of the changes that are to be implemented. During a focus group discussion, Participant A from school 1 expressed resentment by saying:

"I never received any training; instead, circulars were read to us during a briefing after assembly, at which time we had different interpretations of what the curriculum intended to achieve. The school head who usually read the circular avoided questions at all costs fearing he wouldn't be in a better position to explain satisfactorily."

The consensus from participants in School 1 is that the new curriculum was brought in without consultation and sufficient guidelines; a situation which could have triggered some confusion along the way. Teachers struggled to understand the procedure, particularly on the issue of tasks and projects. Teachers who participated in the focus group discussions at school 2, generally agreed in their observation that pilot testing of the curriculum and a needs analysis were not carried out. Pilot testing and needs analysis are critical practices for effective implementation of reform initiatives as pointed out by Ndawi & Maravanyika (2011) who acknowledged that these practices identify the exact nature of the deficiency to be addressed and eventually single out the exact change to be instituted. In some instances, needs analysis may reveal that some conceived changes are not fundamentally different from the present practice or cannot be instituted in a system for some reason or another. Therefore, the omission of a need analysis during the decision to disseminate an innovation often creates a disjunction that jeopardises the implementation of a reform initiative. Teachers from both schools confirmed that they experienced a disjunction in engaging the new curriculum in their classrooms.

5.2 Availability of Resources

An analysis of issues surrounding the readiness of teachers to implement O-Level Geography would be incomplete without an examination of the availability of resources, since their availability determines the extent to which teachers are ready to use them for successful operationalisation of any instructional practice carried out in the school with learners. Although it is true that the Government of Zimbabwe (GoZ) provided material resources as indicated in its terms of reference, the resources were grossly inadequate. Participant C from School 1 remarked:

"When the new curriculum was introduced, the Government promised it would provide resources to all public schools. I am appalled by the existing state of affairs as not much in terms of material resource support has been offered. There are no funds to purchase textbooks and other essential resources like project files which are a requirement for every subject in addition to several exercise books we used to ask for. This has put an extra uncalled-for burden on the parents who are already struggling to raise money for tuition."

The available evidence suggests that the GoZ paid little attention to the provision of adequate resources, as initially promised. To confirm this observation, Participant A from school 1 made the following remarks.

“Considering the urgency that was given to introduce the curriculum, most of us teachers were expecting the government to provide a school with adequate resources and to train us on the proper handling and use of curriculum material but that was not the case. We definitely need resources in order for us to operationalise the new curriculum successfully. Most of the concepts that were included to the curriculum cannot be implemented without or with limited knowledge of the resource use. For instance, you cannot just walk into the computer lab and teach learners without having first to be trained.”

5.3 Teacher readiness for implementation of the O-Level Geography Syllabus

Teachers are the main hub around which the successful implementation of the new curriculum revolves. However, it is particularly troubling to find that there was an inherent lack of orientation for Geography teachers; therefore, the implementation of the syllabus was made difficult. For example, teachers who participated in the FDGs at both schools shared the sentiment that they were asked to implement the updated curriculum immediately without understanding how they were going to do it, as no explanations were provided as advance information. As a consequence, the teachers involved experienced serious problems in interpreting the new syllabus, the hallmarks of daily classroom delivery, and practice. Based on the FDGs, the teachers of the two schools did not receive a proper orientation to the new curriculum. An informant who participated in FDGs at school 2 indicated that he was committed.

“I was introduced to the competence-based curriculum at a one-day cluster workshop. The training I received was not adequate. I still do not understand certain aspects of the competency-based curriculum to effectively implement it. The trainers who happened to be fellow teachers were not very much conversant with the competency-based system. The training was too theoretical for teachers already in the field to understand yet it was supposed to be hands-on to facilitate understanding.”

All FGD participants agreed in their opinions that there was a need for ongoing reconfiguration of professional development approaches that correspond to the new practice, which should be done through a positive engagement of teachers already in the field. The issue of positive engagement is supported by Ndawi & Maravanyika (2011), who pointed out that policy makers and leaders must positively engage teachers by fostering values of respect and justice to promote the new idea and change the attitude of teachers. One of the findings of this study is that the method used to induct teachers was dictatorial and full of threats, and because of that, teachers fearing victimisation did not voice their concerns, but just accepted what was dictated by the authority. The consensus of the teachers who participated in the FDGs was that those who facilitated the workshops were not knowledgeable, so they responded to the questions of the participants in a threatening way. Participant E from school 1 expressed concern:

“Some schoolteachers could not attend workshops organised by MoPSE as their schools could not manage the travel and subsistence allowances as schools were left to sponsor their teachers to go for training. Instead of sending a reasonable number of teachers, only one or no representative would be sent. We were lucky as a cluster centre that all our teachers received training although it was superficial to say the least.”

One of the most significant findings to emerge from this study is that teachers were expected to implement the new curriculum with too little support, guidance, and coherent orientation programmes and their readiness was doubtful. In fact, this situation has been blamed for stifling gnoseological competencies that are necessary to promote teacher readiness to effectively deliver the O-Level Geography Syllabus 4022 as suggested by Mizambaeva & Baimyrzaev (2019). The results of the study support the idea that change can best be done when members of an institution are ready to implement it. Meanwhile, Vakola (2013) agrees that if change is accepted and understood by every institutional member, then members become motivated and committed to provide support to implement it effectively, but if change is ignored and resisted, obstacles that inhibit the success of the planned change often emerge. Teacher B who participated in the FGD at school 2 had no kind words about the way the new practice was introduced. The following comment was made:

“The cluster workshops we attended were actually useless to say the least. They were facilitated by HoDs who were sufficiently confused and were not confident. When asked to give more explanation, they failed. We were left with no option except to do what we used to do.”

The general observation made in the study is that some certain aspects of the updated syllabus were resisted because teachers were prematurely ready. The study also went some way towards making it understood that when readiness for curriculum change must be developed in teachers, action must be taken from several fronts and that intervention strategies that must be instituted must be done so through positive engagement of teachers to ensure expeditious delivery.

6. Conclusions

This study has taken into account the issues surrounding teachers' readiness to implement the competency-based O-Level Geography Syllabus 4022 in Zimbabwe. In general, the study found that the competency-based O-Level Geography curriculum was introduced with insufficient consideration of teacher readiness for its implementation. The study also found that the breadth and depth of the issues surrounding teacher readiness to implement the competency-based O-Level Geography Syllabus 4022 requires action to be taken from several fronts to ensure that the subject community is ready for its rapid delivery. One such action is to have in place an ongoing reconfiguration of professional development approaches that correspond to the new practice. To be more successful, this must be done through positive engagement of teachers already in the field.

7. Recommendations

Taking into account the findings of the study on the issues surrounding teacher readiness to implement the competency-based O-Level Geography Syllabus 4022 in the Zimbabwean secondary school system, this research recommends ongoing intensive training to get teachers ready to ensure high levels of performance. In addition, the study implores policy makers to make massive advocacy and sensitisation of Geography teachers, the end users of the updated competency-based O-Level Geography Syllabus 4022 for more effective implementation.

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