

Teachers' Strategies in Embracing Curriculum Change: A Case of Lesotho Urban Teachers

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Abstract

Curriculum reforms involve changing organisational structures, administration, resource distribution and allocation, communication links, stakeholders' practices, beliefs, and attitudes. They could devastate the consequences of teaching and learning to teachers as curriculum implementers. They could further affect teachers' cognitive stability and psychological and social well-being. This study explores the teachers' experiences in implementing curriculum reforms at the primary school level in Lesotho. An interpretive paradigm and appreciative inquiry framework guided this qualitative study. Thirteen teachers were selected purposively from three primary schools in Maseru. Semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions allow for the collection and interpretation of data. Their experiences with curriculum change and the coping mechanisms they utilised to survive the demands and challenges surfaced. The thematic findings highlighted how teachers' resistance to change, inadequate training, and increased workload pressured most participants. To survive the pressure, challenges, and demands of educational change, teachers highlighted the need to form subject panels and schemes, accessibility and the use of technology and the Internet, and support from school management and the Ministry of Education and Training. Educational change can positively and negatively affect teachers as curriculum implementers. Therefore, teachers need to improvise appropriate coping mechanisms.

Keywords: Coping Mechanisms, Curriculum Change, Lesotho, Teachers' Experiences, Urban Teachers.

1. Introduction

Individuals, organisational or institutional policies sometimes need a paradigm shift or change to calm them in the rapidly and continuously changing world. Research has revealed that curriculum reforms are influenced by various factors, which include philosophical perspectives (Irez, Han, 2011), economic developments (Akala, 2021), social orientation (Simmons, 2009), globalisation (Gleeson et al., 2020), technological advancement and artificial intelligence (Thurzo et al., 2023) or political profile (Balarin, Saavedra, 2021; Zajda, 2020). In a rapidly and continuously changing world, countries are indulging in existing professions in the evolving world, and new professions are generated by the education sector (Kunnari, 2018). Therefore, the role of the education system is to allow teachers to implement educational policies at the grassroots level (schools). Gouédard et al. (2020) point out that curriculum reforms or paradigm shifts are difficult

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because they involve a change in organisational structures, resource distribution and allocation, communication links, practices, beliefs, and attitudes of the implementers and policymakers.

In the 1990s, curriculum reforms in sub-Saharan Africa were a complex issue influenced by, but not limited to, societal, socioeconomic, and political variance due to internal and external heterogeneous forces (Chisholm, Leyendecker, 2008). Post-2010, Lesotho (also situated in sub-Saharan Africa) was floundered by the winds of educational change. The Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) introduced the integrated and continuous assessment policy, and the first enrolment was carried out in 2011. It has been developed and published as the first comprehensive, integrated curriculum and continuous assessment policy after more than four decades of Lesotho's independence (Raselimo, Mahao, 2015). The intention was to do away with the adopted Cambridge curriculum policy, which has existed for over two decades. The integrated education policy is localised for content comprehension and assessment to respond to Lesotho's educational needs, socioeconomic status, and development prospects (Raselimo, Mahao, 2015). In providing this background, the present study investigated the coping mechanisms of Lesotho primary teachers who are arrayed to survive the challenges posed by educational change.

The present article emerged from one of the authors' dissertations investigating the psychosocial implications of curriculum change on primary school teachers' performance. However, this article focuses on determining the coping mechanisms of any teachers who are deployed to survive the challenges posed by curriculum change. As a new education innovation in Lesotho, the integrated curriculum lacks documented information on its effects on how teachers embraced, appreciated, and orchestrated the survival mechanisms to cope with the changes in education.

Despite the rapidity and need for educational change across the African continent, it is disturbing to see how research interacts with the effects of educational changes and coping mechanisms that teachers use to survive the challenges posed by such changes. This leaves teachers in despair, isolated, and disgruntled in their careers. Many teachers view educational change as a risk, a threat, or an insult to school traditions, norms, and teachers' autonomy and status quo (Caponi, 2022; Jorgenson, 2006). Therefore, this study intends to identify and determine the effectiveness and efficiency of the coping mechanisms teachers employ while implementing educational changes. The outcomes of this study may stimulate extensive discussion on the effects of educational change and the effectiveness of the mechanisms that teachers apply to survive the challenges of such changes. Hypothetically, the study may reveal valuable information and insights to policymakers on formulating suitable coping mechanisms for teachers and educational changes. This study's findings may prompt other researchers to undertake further studies on various issues relating to the implications of educational change and coping mechanisms in Lesotho and beyond the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region. The objective of this study was to identify teachers' psychosocial coping mechanisms during the implementation of curriculum changes.

Teachers' Response to Educational Change

As front-line workers in educational change and curriculum implementation, teachers are viewed as the first victims of the negative effects of education and continuing change Mutereko and Chitakunye (2014). Kurata, Selialia, and Mokhets'sengoane (2022) indicate that teachers operate under duress due to the shortage of working aids, increasing service demands, poorly clarified organisational goals, and ever-changing performance goals. Teachers usually use their managerial autonomy and discretion to devise coping mechanisms or survival skills to manage the compulsion. Fernández-Batanero et al. (2021) observe that educational changes appear threatening while simultaneously bringing anxiety, discontent, and suspension to teachers. Olsen and Sexton (2009) assert that educational reforms can jeopardise teachers' confidence, leaving them in despair, disrupted, and confused. Hence, McLaren and Dunn (2016) concluded that curriculum change affects not only teachers' knowledge and beliefs but also their effectiveness and self-efficacy in delivering quality education.

Educational change is dynamic and complicated; hence, teachers' responsibility and participation are crucial and sensitive. Alsubaie (2016) proposes that curriculum reform and development can be challenging. It is, therefore, vital to involve all stakeholders, especially those directly involved in student instruction. Bascia et al. (2014) indicate that role-players involved in curriculum development include teachers, parents, educationists, principals, students, and curriculum specialists. However, teachers are central in designing, developing, and implementing

educational changes. They play a critical role in determining the type of curriculum that benefits students and how to benefit from such changes (Jadhav, Patanka, 2013).

Teaching is one of the best available jobs in our society, but it is also the most stressful job a person can have. Clipa (2017) indicates that teaching under stress can be more profound than working in other related jobs. This causes the highest occupational stress in teaching the job. Researchers concede that the main source of teachers' psychosocial stressors is based on the workload of educational reforms (Redín, Erro-Garcés, 2020; Xhelilaj et al., 2021). They include heavy workload, problems in co-operation with colleagues, poor administration and management, multiple roles, constantly changing requirements, lack of support, lack of autonomy, pupils' problematic behaviours, deprived working conditions and lack of time and learner assessment, time pressure, being evaluated by others and coping with change. Admittedly, the success or failure of educational changes depends primarily on whether teachers are sufficiently conversant with change and have a suitable coping mechanism to allow them to be a significant part of the reform process (Lingam et al., 2017; Stacey et al., 2023).

The change in educational policy can positively or negatively impact teachers' psychological state in and outside of the classroom and their social welfare regarding their relations and patterns. However, in curriculum change and implementation of new content, application of new teaching methods, and assessment procedures, the question is, "*How do teachers survive and cope with the emerging challenges in their daily teaching endeavours.*" The researchers comprehended that primary school teachers' psychological, social, and working lives had been affected since the integrated education policy was introduced in Lesotho schools. Avidov-Ungar and Eshet-Alkabay (2011) report that unfamiliar practices, multiple and simultaneous innovations, abbreviated timelines, and external impositions negatively affected teachers' working lives.

Teachers' Coping Mechanisms During Educational Change

The various reforms that education systems across the globe are experiencing are bound to have a profound impact on teachers' professional work. Several large or small-scale reforms that occur in modern days throughout the world necessitate well-trained teachers, with their roles and functions becoming more challenging and demanding as they must respond more effectively to the radically changing nature of the learners in the 21st century (Lingman et al., 2017) and demands of the fourth industrial revolution. The success or failure of these education changes depends primarily on whether teachers have suitable coping mechanisms, such as skills and knowledge, to play a significant role in the reform processes.

In a rapidly and continuously changing education environment, some teachers experience change as a threat, while others perceive it as an opportunity to develop their skills (Kunnari, 2018). As agents of educational change, Brown et al. (2023) propose that teachers must be learners during the educational change, allowing them to participate in learning activities and reciprocally contribute to implementing education policy. This enables teachers to develop coping mechanisms that will allow them to survive and manage the challenges posed by educational changes. To implement education changes, teachers too must learn to learn (Lingman et al., 2017) to sharpen their skills and acquire relevant knowledge, which may allow them to keep pace with the ever-changing work demands in case educational organisations fail to achieve their professional expectations (Butt, Gunter, 2005).

Educational policy change brings about unforeseen and stressful experiences for teachers and other stakeholders. However, the stressful experience of a particular teacher is unique to that individual and depends on the complexity of interaction amid their personalities, values, beliefs, skills, and circumstances (Harnova Research Report, 2015). Conversely, teachers can utilise various coping mechanisms to survive the challenges and demands of curriculum change. If teachers are aware of the negative mechanisms they use (which do more harm than good), exploring more positive ways of managing change in their schools' work is empirical.

Various researchers describe coping mechanisms as "survival skills" that people use to deal with stress, pain, or the changes they experience (Algorani, Gupta, 2023; Smith, 2012). There are learned behavioural patterns that other people use to manage stress and external pressures. There are negative and positive coping mechanisms that many people use to benefit themselves in a positive way (Feltoe et al., 2016). Nevertheless, Smith (2012) points out that teachers coping mechanisms include distancing themselves from stressful situations, adopting problem-solving tactics and help-seeking skills, and accepting failure and dependence on a social support network.

Tummers and Bekkers (2014) indicate that teachers' coping mechanisms in policy implementation remain a critical refrain.

In contrast, Mutereko and Chitakunye (2014) illustrated that teachers adopt diverse coping mechanisms when implementing such policies. In this regard, each teacher can adopt a suitable mechanism depending on the prevailing situation and context. The Hanover Research Report (2015) reveals that teachers can rely on their strategies for stress management, as opposed to systematic or formalised programmes provided by their respective schools. In this regard, Aulén et al. (2021) contend that teachers working in stressful environments must develop coping strategies to be resilient to the various stressors because some can be more effective than others.

Theoretical Framework

This study is restricted to inclusive education from the perspective of positive psychology to determine the coping mechanisms teachers employ to survive the demands and challenges posed by educational changes. An Appreciative Inquiry (AI) was engaged to establish how educational change affects teachers psychosocially and how teachers accept, embrace, and appreciate such changes. The aim of engaging AI in this study was to search for the best in people and their organisations. For this reason, Cooperider et al. (2008) assert that organisational life must be viewed as a universe of strength rather than a place to solve problems. The application of AI in this study is determined by its relevance as a collaborative process that engages people to discover the best in their context. AI is also applied to understand how teachers appreciate, embrace, and cope with educational change as individuals or groups. As a capacity-building approach, AI seeks to locate, highlight, and illuminate life-giving forces among teachers (Kaminski, 2012) and to demonstrate how they can apply the coping strategies that can enable resilience and survive the challenges posed by educational changes.

Significance of the Study

In determining the implications of curriculum change on teachers, the study thus allows teachers to embrace change, when curriculum change is appropriate, and why curriculum change is necessary. Many teachers regard change as a risk, threat, or insult to the school's traditions, norms, and teachers' autonomy (Jorgenson, 2006). Therefore, the study also intends to determine the effectiveness and efficiency of coping mechanisms teachers use to survive threats and psychological implications brought by curriculum change.

2. Methods and Materials

Research Approach

This qualitative study engaged the interpretive paradigm to determine teachers' views, principles, and beliefs (Thanh, Thanh, 2015) regarding the implications of curriculum change and appropriate coping mechanisms that teachers employ to manage and survive the challenges of implementing educational changes. A brief teacher profile was adopted from the teachers' demographic information. All participants and their schools were given pseudonyms to warrant confidentiality and anonymity (Silverman, 2017). This qualitative study has dualistic foci: teachers' duress and challenges during the implementation of curriculum change and the coping mechanisms teachers employ to survive any foreseen and unforeseen dares while implementing educational changes.

Research Design

A qualitative research design was used to discover teachers' underlying factors, motives, and desires regarding curriculum reforms. Indu and Vidhukumar (2019) illustrate that a research design constitutes the blueprint for collecting, measuring, and analysing data. This study was framed within the instrumental case study design due to its descriptive nature (Thomas, 2017) to establish teachers' experiences and coping mechanisms toward implementing the integrated curriculum. The instrumental case study is used to provide insight into a phenomenon and understand a particular case under study (Kekeya, 2021). This design facilitated the researchers' exploration of teachers' experiences and the coping mechanisms that they used to survive the demands and challenges of curriculum change. The urban primary school teachers were the case under study, and their coping mechanisms during curriculum change were regarded as the phenomenon to be investigated.

Research Site

Two schools were sampled as the research sites. The first school, Maseru Primary School (MPS), is a public school that has been operating for over forty years (40). This school comprised fourteen (14) teachers, a principal, and two office assistants. The school had grades one to seven. From 2018 to 2021, the learner enrollment ranged from 600 to 630. This enrolment exceeded the teacher-learner ratio of 44 % on average. During its roll-out, the MPS was identified as a pilot site for the integrated curriculum. The second school, Union Private School (UPS), is privately owned and has been operating for over 25 years. UPS is situated eight kilometres north of Maseru city centre. It also has seven grades, starting with grade one. In the foundation phase (one, two, and three), each grade has three classrooms, while grades four, five, six, and seven have two classrooms each. Since introducing the integrated curriculum, UPS has admitted learners with different learning disabilities. The teacher-learner ratio in this school is 1:42. Seven teachers were interviewed. At the same time, the other six participated in group discussions to exchange thoughts, ideas, and opinions to understand and learn from each other (Mogea, 2023).

Participants

Thirteen primary school teachers (four males and nine females) who teach grades 1 to 7 in two schools were interviewed, while six teachers participated in the focus group discussion in one of the schools. All the participants were snowball sampled due to the tight research budget and because no research has been conducted on this issue. The interviews and group discussion instruments were used for crystallisation, triangulation, credible outcomes (Creswell, 2018), and data verification from different sources (Gilbert, Stoneman, 2016). Both primary schools were conveniently sampled due to their accessibility, recruitment, and cost-effectiveness in terms of monetary, time, and effort (Thomas, 2017).

Data Collection Processes

Data collection processes were conducted on the respective school premises during the teachers' spare time. One-on-one semi-structured interviews were conducted to obtain a description of the coping mechanisms that were used to interpret the meaning of the gathered data (Brinkmann, Kvale, 2015). The interview guide had space for open-ended comments to allow the interviewees a degree to share their thoughts and explain their views about educational change and the coping mechanisms used while implementing a new curriculum. While assembling the focus group, the researcher, with the backup of the research assistant, took into consideration the size, purpose, composition, participants' feelings, and reactions of the participants (Krueger, Casey, 2015; Sarfo et al., 2021). The researcher kept detailed written field notes before and during the data collection processes on the school premises and about participant interaction and reactions. The interview proceedings and focus group discussions were tape-recorded with the consent of the participants and for analysis and interpretation purposes.

Data Analysis

The researchers engaged the thematic data analysis process interactively across both data collection sources. The data analysis process is conducted systematically and is transparently communicated to the reader (Nowell et al., 2017). The researchers used the inclusion and exclusion criteria before and during data analysis. The inclusion criteria are used to pre-define and characterise the subjects that can be included in the data analysis. In contrast, the exclusion criteria selected the subjects or applied the eligibility criteria to rule out certain subjects in the research study (Velasco, 2010). The inclusion criteria were also optimised to enact the sub-themes and describe the conditions a subject had to meet to be included in the study (Porzolt et al., 2018). Some subjects from verbatim quotations were eligible to be included in the analysis process, while others were not. The gathered data were categorised into sub-themes for conciseness, accuracy, and simplicity (Javadi, Zerea, 2016).

3. Results

Biographic results

Table 1 outlines the profile of the teachers interviewed in this study. Teachers' pseudonyms, gender, age, teaching experience, and the grade taught constituted their profiles.

Table 1. Biographic results of teachers in School A

Participants	Gender	Age	Teaching experiences	Grade levels
Nake	Female	31-40	5-10	7
Mokhotsi	Female	31-40	5-10	6
Ngoaneso	Female	31-40	5-10	5
Khaitsele	Female	31-40	5-10	4
Motho	Male	31-40	10-15	3
Nana	Female	41-50	15-20	1

Table 2. For teachers in school B (UPS)

Participants	Gender	Age	Teaching experiences	Grades levels
Ouma	Female	41-50	10-15	1
Sisi	Female	51-60	10-15	2
Anti	Female	51-60	Above 20	3
Chomi	Female	31-40	5-10	4
Cousi	Female	21-30	5-10	5
Mama	Female	51-60	15-20	6
Ausi	Female	41-50	15-20	7

Thematic Findings

As discussed below, the manifestation of teachers' experiences in implementing curriculum reforms emerged in three dimensions: increased workload, inadequate teacher training and teachers' resistance to change. The teachers' coping mechanisms are presented as another sub-section of the findings. The dimensions are the formation of teachers' subjects' panels and schemes, the use of technology and the Internet, and stakeholders' support.

Teachers' Duress and Challenges During Curriculum Reforms Implementation *Increased Workload*

The increased workload may result in teachers' duress and the challenges caused by the process followed when implementing curriculum reforms in their respective workstations (primary schools). Most teachers mentioned that implementing educational changes was difficult to cope with in many instances, as reforms required adopting new teaching practices. The changes comprised lesson plans, reporting, teaching and learning approaches, accommodating learners with special needs, a high teacher-learner ratio, and learner assessment. Some teachers had this to say about the increased workload.

"There is a lot of work that needs to be done by the teacher, especially when the teacher-learner ratio is too high" (Anti).

"There was too much work in terms of preparation and planning, which is a challenge of teaching approach since I am used to a teacher-centred approach, and now I have to use a learner-centred approach" (Mama).

Based on the teachers' concerns, there was a need for teachers to develop suitable strategies that enable them to survive the challenges brought about by educational change. The coercion and ambiguity experienced by most teachers required them to improve their coping mechanisms to stay and manage educational changes during the implementation phase.

Inadequate Teacher Training

Nearly all the participating teachers indicated that the Ministry of Education conducted a one-week orientation training workshop about the changed curriculum. The workshop was conducted once in January 2013, a few weeks before the new academic year commenced. In this regard, most teachers emphasised that the training workshop was too short for them to grasp the

vast amount of content delivered in five days. This is what participants had to say about the training workshop.

“We attended a one-week workshop since this curriculum was introduced; I went to the workshop once, and we never had training from the Ministry of Education” (Mama).

“Sir, be aware that the one-week training was supposed to happen over two years” (Koko).

The emphasis made by these teachers regarding the length of the training workshop is that the workshop was too short. This led to uncertainty and unclear application of teaching approaches and assessment procedures and the relevance of other operating concepts. The findings reveal that it was difficult for some teachers to manage and survive the challenges of implementing educational changes. Many of them emphasised that sufficient training and refresher training are essential to equip teachers with appropriate skills and to help them appreciate and embrace change in the education system.

Teachers’ Acceptance and Resistance to Change

The findings reported in this sub-section illustrated teachers’ resistance towards educational change while others accepted, embraced, and appreciated it. Teachers who embraced and appreciated change indicated that the curriculum had pros and cons. Those in denial and with resistance whined and nagged about its shortfalls and poor implementation. For instance, they complained about inadequate teaching resources, unclear concepts, and improper implementation by the Ministry of Education and Training. These two teachers had this to say;

“The curriculum is too abstract due to lack of material; it is irrelevant to learners in preparing them for the future” (Sisi).

“Integrated curriculum is not suitable for our country due to its demands, this curriculum was poorly introduced and implemented, and there is a poor merging of private and public schools, so imposing this curriculum on teachers is not a good idea” (Anti).

Teachers’ resistance to change resulted in poor classroom lesson planning and content teaching, a negative attitude towards change, poor learner assessment, and bad relationships among the teachers, the school management, and the learners. Resistance also resulted in unbearable stress and pressure on such teachers. However, those teachers who accepted the change embraced it and appreciated it, were grateful and enjoyed their work with less stress. They were willing to learn with the learners. Their acceptance and appreciation of change propelled impressive learners’ performance and positive outcomes.

Coping Mechanisms

Participants disclosed their opinions and experiences on what worked best for them to survive the challenges posed by educational changes. This refers to any coping mechanisms utilised by teachers. Teachers’ coping mechanisms indicate the formation of subject panels and schemes, the importance and use of technology, the Internet, and stakeholders’ support.

Formation of Teachers’ Subject Panels and Schemes

The interviews and focus group discussions revealed that teachers had to orchestrate some strategies to survive the challenges posed by implementing curriculum changes. Therefore, teachers decided to work in pairs or groups to advise and assist each other. Participating teachers emphasised how they formed panels and schemes. These two teachers share the same views. They say:

“To survive demands and challenges, we formed teacher schemes with other schools and shared ideas and advice” (Cousi).

“We assisted, supported, and advised each other as teachers, and we also formed panels from our school and schemes as teachers from different schools” (Khaitsele).

One participant from the discussion group exemplified how teachers formed a panel and how they collaborated on their efforts as teachers. In his own words, Thaha had this to say:

“... we formed subject panels as teachers from our school and other schools. We collaborate efforts and ideas. For instance, there is a Maths panel, a Science panel, an English panel and others” (Thaha).

Most participating teachers referred to the subject panels and schemes as another strategy teachers use to manage the challenges and demands of curriculum change. Teachers formed groups, schemes, and subject panels to coordinate their concerns and challenges regarding

implementing the integrated curriculum. Teachers from different schools formed subject panels such as the Mathematics, Science or English panel. Teachers supported each other from the same or different grades, same or different learning areas, and same or different schools.

Importance and Use of Technology and the Internet

The change in curriculum introduced many unfamiliar concepts that brought uncertainty to many teachers. They used the Internet as a social coping mechanism to implement the changed curriculum and to familiarise themselves with the new concepts and their application in the classroom. Teachers had to browse most of the information from the Internet and do much research and reading. Two participants shared their views about the use of the Internet in assisting them to plan and prepare lessons and as another way to cope with the demands of the curriculum change:

“I searched for the concepts on the internet and researched for books which can give me information...” (Nake).

“We have access to the internet on the school campus to browse unfamiliar concepts” (Sisi).

The findings from the group discussions and interviews also indicated that teachers had to use the Google search engine to browse most of the information for research and reading. The findings show that internet use assisted teachers in teaching what is correct through appropriate teaching methods. Responses have emphasised the importance of technology and the Internet’s use in helping teachers download graphics or pictures. For this reason, the Internet assisted teachers in managing challenges posed by the curriculum change. Technology use also empowered teachers to become co-learners with the learners during the trying times of implementing educational changes.

Support Offered to Teachers by Stakeholders

Teachers believe they cannot face change independently; they expect different stakeholders, such as the school governing bodies, the principals, curriculum designers, assessment package designers, parents, teachers’ unions and other bodies to support them. According to the interviews and focus groups, teachers illustrate that any form of support would be vital to implementing curriculum changes effectively. Participants indicated they received little or no support from the curriculum or assessment package designers. However, Chomi voiced out the form of support received.

“Ministry of Education offered textbooks and teacher’s guides for effectiveness, but there are no follow-ups on how we are working with the learners and whether we are using the materials correctly”.

Mokhotsi, like other participants, shared the same concerns. Like Nana, lower graders also illustrate how they wished to receive support from District Resource Teachers (DRTs) or school inspectors. This is what Nana said:

“.., no follow-ups on how we are working with learners and using the materials correctly.... we, in the lower grades, were not offered any support. There are no assessment packages, follow-ups or inspections on how we deliver the concepts” (Nana).

Teachers were expecting material support from the Ministry and school management or parents for emotional and professional support. Most teachers indicate that they received encouragement only from their principals. According to other participants, school inspectors and curriculum designers did not bother to make surprise visits to their schools. School inspectors only visit when they have a specific interest or personal agenda against a particular individual, such as humiliating them or a group of teachers. Support (either emotional or professional) offered by the school principals enabled most teachers to survive the challenges posed by educational changes. It motivated and inspired most of them to tackle each challenge as it came.

4. Discussion

In perfecting the outcomes of this academic research work, the article explored teachers’ compulsion and the forms, as well as the effectiveness of the coping mechanisms employed to survive the challenges posed by educational changes in Lesotho. The negative attitude to educational change prompted resistance to change for some teachers. This steered teachers to experience frustration and pressure while implementing such changes. The unbearable and increased workload was deemed to be one factor that required teachers to orchestrate strategies to survive all sorts of challenges posed by educational change. Another factor is inadequate

orientation and training on the integrated curriculum and continuous assessment, which required teachers to improvise coping mechanisms to survive any challenges posed by curriculum change.

The following section discusses how mechanisms enabled teachers to accept, embrace, appreciate, and survive challenges posed by educational changes. Teachers' increased workload during the implementation of educational changes became a concern for most participating teachers. Teachers revealed that lesson planning, reporting, application of teaching and learning approaches, learners' assessment, and high teachers-learner ratio are some factors that contributed to the unbearable and increased workload. Most participating teachers mentioned that shifting from a teacher-centred to a learner-centred approach amplified their workload. These findings reverberate with Mutereko and Chitakunye's (2014) findings, which showed that some teachers complained that the increased workload made their work difficult and demanding. The study's findings in Japan revealed that about 87% of teachers in lower secondary schools mentioned that the heavy workload during curriculum reforms hindered their participation in professional development (Gouëdard et al., 2020). It is the teachers' call and responsibility to orchestrate mechanisms to manage and adjust to the expected and unexpected workloads and challenges posed by educational changes.

During the interview sessions with teachers, it was revealed that a one-week training workshop was inadequate and that the facilitators who conducted the workshops were unclear about other concepts and teaching approaches. They could not explain other assessment procedures. Consequently, the lack of training or poor training contributed negatively to the attitude problems of teachers. The findings of this study resonate with the findings of a study conducted by Indoshi et al. (2010), which revealed that teachers' lack of in-service training towards a new curriculum had left many teachers with negative attitudes. Despite that, they had to use their acquired skills and knowledge. Bantwini's (2010) study also revealed that some teachers had mixed feelings due to limited orientation and lack of support from the Ministry of Education officials. Some teachers felt optimistic about educational changes and were willing to accept, appreciate, and celebrate change.

The researchers observed different reactions among teachers towards curriculum change, but the study revealed that few teachers accepted and embraced the initiated educational changes. Teachers' acceptance of educational change is based on their reactions and understanding of the need for change in Lesotho's education curriculum. These findings resonate with Mutch's (2012) study findings, which reveal that teachers who accept and embrace curriculum change do not mindlessly or stubbornly resist change as portrayed by others, but such teachers become innovative. They embraced, accepted, and appreciated such initiated changes as they unfolded. These teachers also said there was a need for educational change; therefore, they possess a positive attitude as a token of appreciation.

The negative attitude observed among other teachers triggered resistance to this educational change. The present study's findings indicate that this led to the teacher's frustration and resistance to implementing educational changes. They are like findings by Wagah et al. (2009), which revealed that teachers who display negative attitudes in other learning areas resist adopting new teaching approaches and assessment procedures. When people develop a positive attitude and appreciative inquiry, they appreciate and embrace change by the simple assumption that change can result in something positive that works well and that some strengths and capabilities can make a positive change in education (Cooperrider et al., 2005).

The findings revealed that as teachers are curriculum implementers, coping mechanisms are essential to managing educational changes. Through the gathered data and other findings in the literature (Boyle, 2012), peer support was revealed to be one strategy teachers used to manage the challenges posed by educational changes. Teachers supported each other from the same or different grades in the same or different learning areas at the same or different schools. They also formed groups or schemes and subject panels where they discussed their concerns or challenges regarding properly implementing an integrated curriculum. It is essential for teachers to support each other as colleagues and to use appropriate strategies to find the methods and approaches that work best in the classroom (Boyer et al., 2012). Teachers' tendency to support each other provides clear evidence that the teacher's partnership includes planned opportunities for peer coaching to create a stimulus for professional development. Daily interaction, metaphors, and teachers' discourse with each other is a co-construction of what they embrace and appreciate (Bushe, 2011).

Teachers' interaction and support are mutual, and they assist each other in managing, surviving, accepting, embracing, and appreciating educational change as it unfolds.

This section focuses on teachers' use of the Internet and technology as a coping mechanism to overcome the challenges posed by curriculum changes. Teachers use smartphones with the Internet to browse through the concepts, teaching, and assessment procedures and apply them appropriately in their classes when teaching. Technology empowers teachers by building new experiences for deeper content exploration to enhance teaching and learning (King, South, 2017). Most teachers use the Google search engine and e-dictionaries to search for the meaning of concepts, teaching approaches, and learner assessment. The Internet was also used to translate some concepts into English for academic purposes (Dogruer et al., 2011). Internet use assists teachers in managing and overcoming the challenges posed by curriculum change. Technology and internet use also empower teachers to become co-learners with their learners, collaboration engineers, designers of learning experiences, leaders, guides, and catalysts of educational change.

The findings reveal that teachers cannot do the work alone; they expect and believe that stakeholders, including the school management and principals, curriculum designers, assessment package designers, parents, teachers' unions, and other authorities, should provide the necessary support. The interview and focus group outcomes illustrate the support teachers expect from concerned stakeholders. They illustrated that any form of support during that difficult time is vital to cope with any possible challenges posed by educational changes. The findings also reveal that the school management and principals support teachers in properly implementing educational changes. The findings reported in the previous literature confirmed that teachers and principals work together as a team to enable teachers to cope with the challenges posed by educational change (Habbegger, 2008). As part of school leadership, the principals are engaged in different things to facilitate the successful implementation of change (Yuen, 2004), and teachers must be supported by school leadership to monitor all school activities and buffer staff against distraction while working (Habbegger, 2008). Against the above-revealed findings, the literature indicates that heads of departments fail to support teachers when they are overburdened and burnt out with administrative and teaching work (Govender, 2018). However, participating teachers mention that they never receive support from the curriculum or assessment package designers. In collaboration with the school governing bodies, the school principal managed to provide constant support to teachers to appreciate and embrace education and to survive the challenges posed by educational changes. The support provided to teachers is meant to implement curriculum changes effectively and innovatively in schools.

5. Conclusion

Educational change can affect teachers as front-line workers in implementing curriculum changes. The findings show that teachers can be victims of adverse effects of educational change and continuing assessment. Such changes leave teachers in despair, anxiety, and discontent. They are disrupted, confused, and threatened. The study has enhanced researchers' knowledge and thoughtfulness on how inadequate teachers' training, resistance to change, and increased teaching workload can harm teachers' effectiveness in implementing curriculum changes. This has crucial implications for their psychosocial life and well-being. As shown in the findings, this academic work has revealed that, regardless of teachers' experience and competence, teachers encounter duress and foreseen and unforeseen stressful moments while implementing curriculum changes.

This research work also reveals that, regardless of one's experience and competence, teachers had to orchestrate strategies that should enable them to survive any foreseen and unforeseen demands and challenges posed by the implementation of curriculum changes. The study reveals that most teachers decide to form schemes and subject panels that enable them to address their concerns and advise each other. Teachers' interaction was also meant to improve appropriate coping mechanisms for embracing, accepting, and appreciating educational changes. Teachers' need to use the Internet was seen as another strategy to cope with the demands of academic changes, including the appropriate application of integrated teaching methods, assessment procedures, and the use of concepts.

Relevance and application of appreciative inquiry allow teachers the opportunity to value and understand the need for change and how important it can be to improve teaching and learning. As curriculum implementers, teachers are responsible for creating, embracing, and appreciating

the best in the changed education policy. By improvising appropriate coping mechanisms, teachers can mobilise change and reaffirm their teaching role and ability to pursue what is best for the education system. The positive attitude of teachers towards educational change can also minimise duress and stress. However, it is assumed that every teacher is unique in bringing effective and positive changes in the system, allowing and valuing their strength, capabilities, and worthiness. Lastly, most teachers regard support from different stakeholders as an important strategy that enables them to embrace, accept, and appreciate educational changes instead of nagging about their shortfalls and weaknesses. Using other coping mechanisms for curriculum implementation may allow teachers to shape their cognitive aptitudes and acts instead of abandoning the work during times of uncertainty.

6. Declarations

Ethical considerations

The researcher received consent from the Ministry of Education and Training for school access. The University of the Free State endorsed the ethical clearance to allow the researcher to interact with the participants. Ethical clearance was essential when conducting this study to uphold research integrity, honesty, fairness, intellectual property, and participant protection. While ethical clearance is integral to protecting human and animal participants, it is also meant to protect the researcher against the ethical issues of a research process. By embracing the various principles of justice, non-maleficence, confidentiality, autonomy, transparency, and beneficence, the outcomes of this study can contribute to positive outcomes in education research (Sywelem, Mahklouf, 2024; Udo-Akang, 2013).

Consent for publication

Not applicable.

Availability of data and materials

Data and materials associated with this study are available upon request.

Conflict of interest statement

The authors of this article reported no potential conflict of interest for how the research was conducted, authorship, or publication of this study.

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Author's notes


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