Centrality of the Teacher in Mentorship and Implementation of School Curriculum in Zambia

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Abstract

This paper argues that the classroom teacher should be placed at the centre of all curriculum development efforts. It further argues that most teachers graduate from teacher education programmes ill-prepared to competently implement the curriculum. In doing so the paper focuses on the type of training received at university/college as an impediment to new teacher competence in curriculum implementation. In view of this, this paper advocates that offering school-based mentoring focussed on curriculum implementation makes mentorship of NQTs not only important but a necessity that can help ameliorate the problem. The paper also discusses various local and external forces affecting curriculum development and implementation. The paper concludes that while improving teacher education is one option, school-based new teacher mentorship appears more feasible in the short term.

Key words: Teacher mentoring, curriculum design and development, curriculum implementation, newly qualified teachers

Introduction

This is a positional paper that emphasises the importance of mentorship of newly qualified teachers (NQTs). Simon and Wardlow (1989) found that mentored teachers exhibited more effective teaching behaviours, higher levels of teacher efficacy, and were better

equipped to handle classroom issues; exhibited and expressed more positive attitudes than did teachers without formal mentorship. In addition, mentoring has been found to increase job satisfaction, reduce the stress level of NQTs and assist their professional growth (Galvez-Hjornevik, 1985). In Zambia, very little is known about the practice of mentorship as a strategy for supporting NQTs and helping them to grow personally and professionally. In support of this, Malasha (2009) established that mentorship programmes for NQTs in Zambian secondary schools were isolated and uncoordinated.

The benefits of mentorship as an effective tool for ensuring quality teachers are well known in other parts of the world. Against this background, this paper engages the theme of mentoring newly qualified teachers as a key component of successful curriculum implementation. The aim of the paper was to argue the case for the importance and necessity of NQT mentorship in curriculum implementation if NQTs are to contribute meaningfully to the achievement of national development goals in education in Zambia. Although there have been numerous curriculum shifts in Zambia since independence in 1964, Kalimaposo (2010) observed that most of these curriculum innovations had been on experimental basis and without strong philosophical underpinnings.

The main rationale for the change in curriculum especially in subject matters is to enhance the quality of teaching and learning. While some of the reforms intended to resolve such issues as; overloading, compartmentalisation, examination-orientation and inflexibility Mulenga (2015); other reforms were an attempt by the government to incorporate the latest technology as well as economic, political and social developments brought about by a fast-changing world (MoE, 2003). This, calls for a fundamental pedagogical change from rote learning, repetitive tests and a type of instruction to a more engaged teaching and learning that promote greater innovation and creativity. The initiative aims at enabling the child to succeed and fulfil his or her potential. This paper argues that this transformation cannot succeed without a classroom teacher. However, all reform efforts have not addressed the critical role of mentoring of NQTs to fully equip them

for the task of curriculum implementation. This is the focus of this paper.

In addition to the place of the teacher, there are a number of factors that should be taken into consideration by curriculum designers and policy makers when effecting a curriculum change of the magnitude envisaged in the New Curriculum Framework of 2013. This shift requires more than anything else, a mental shift in view of the many new aspects been introduced in the curriculum.

Political interference stands out among factors affecting curriculum review in Zambia and other African countries. Political influence in curriculum design and development takes root through government funding to the Curriculum Development Centre, the organ charged with spearheading curriculum matters in the country. It relies on government to operate effectively. Another source of interference in curriculum design and implementation with particularly negative consequences is bilateral and multilateral donors. In explaining this influence, outspoken critic of donor aid in education systems of Africa Samoff (2007: 502), states that 'to secure funding and to meet aid requirements, African governments and education ministers regularly incorporate into their plans and programmes what they understand the funding agencies to expect.' In agreeing with Samoff, Mulenga (2017) states that:

Receiving countries are instead told that it is safer, prudent and cost-effective to use well-established ways of doing things. In this regard, it can be argued that Zambia's education curriculum has not been changing but rather has only been fusing-in foreign educational programmes.

Mulenga (2017) further explains that a number of donor funded educational projects failed in their implementation due to their incompatibility with local needs and conditions. Many teachers could not participate because of donor bias towards short-term projects instead of long-term projects preferred by the Ministry of Education. Once such funders depart, donor programmes in the curriculum tend

to be discontinued. Kalimaposo (2010: 195), also noted that 'some of the changes introduced in the curriculum by foreign experts did not suit the Zambian situation.' He further stated that the foreign initiated programmes were not sustainable and not compatible with the reality in the classroom, and thus reliance on foreign technical assistance was detrimental in the local contexts.

This paper is underpinned by the Mentor Role Theory postulated by Kram (1985). According to Kram mentoring enhances both growth and advancement in a novice employee in the hierarchy of an organisation. They also facilitate a novice employees' sense of competence, identity, and effectiveness in a professional role by helping such novices develop an interpersonal relationship that fosters mutual trust and increasing intimacy. According to Kram (1985) such mentoring equips novice employees with the capacity to address the challenges that come at every stage of their career. Kram‟s mentor role theory has relevance to the current discussion because helping a newly qualified teacher to function well in a school is anchored on his/her ability to understand, interpret and implement a curriculum; but the capacity to do so depends to a large extent on the post-qualification assistance and guidance he/her receives from experienced and competent staff in the school**.**

Definition of key concepts
This section provides a background discussion of the concepts of mentorship and curriculum implementation that form the bulk of this discussion.
Mentorship

To understand the concept of mentorship, we need to go back in history to Homer's story *The Odyssey* where Mentor, a wise and faithful adviser and trusted friend of Odysseus was entrusted with the responsibility of guiding, counselling and protecting Odysseus's son, Telemachus during Odyssey's absence at war (Ragins and Kram, 2007). In this regard Anderson and Shannon (in Kerry and Mayes, 1995) analysed the classical derivation of Mentor from the Odyssey and came up with four key components of what mentorship is. These were

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that mentoring is an intentional process; it is a nurturing process which fosters the growth and development of the mentee towards full maturity; it is an insightful process in which the wisdom of the mentor is acquired and applied by the mentee; and that mentoring is a supportive, protective process. In other words, as Engstrom and Jenson (2005) state, mentoring describes a process by which a more experienced or knowledgeable individual offers assistance to a less expert individual.

From the definitions provided above, it is clear that the mentoring relationship in education has the prime objective of helping the inexperienced teacher graduate into independence and autonomy after attaining competence in the discharge of his/her duties within a brief lifespan. In general terms, the intention of all mentorship programmes is to transform a trainee teacher into a competent career teacher. In specific terms, the purpose for a formal approach to mentoring is to promote the newcomer's career advancement, personal development and education and to provide newly qualified teachers with the support they need to gain self-confidence, to provide models of effective practice, and to provide in-depth assistance in curriculum implementation.

Mentors are needed to model appropriate classroom management and curriculum implementation (Feiman-Nemser, 2008) to NQTs. In support of this view Moir (2010) argues that mentorship of NQTs includes a number of factors key of which is exemplary teaching practice. Mentors draw upon their own experiences as effective classroom instructors to quickly guide NQTs toward best practices that help them to discover what is working in their classrooms as well as identifying, facing and whenever possible resolving the challenges.

Research has shown that many head teachers feel that a mentoring programme is one of the most influential resources for new teachers (Greiman, 2007). A strong teacher mentoring programme facilitates the sharing of information with the novice teachers about both the professional work of a teacher and the daily job of classroom teaching

to assist them in being adequately prepared and engaged in the educational process (Clutterbuck, 2007).

Curriculum

In the context of this discussion, the definition of curriculum by Tanner and Tanner (1975: 12) is adopted:

> ...the planned and guided learning experiences, formulated through the systematic construction of knowledge and experiences, under the auspices of the school, for the learner's continuous and wilful growth in personal and social competence. Thus, a curriculum is more than content, which in fact is just one of the elements of a curriculum.

In agreeing with the above definition Mulenga (2011: 19) cited in Banja (2017), further defines a curriculum as 'all the selected, organised, integrative, innovative and evaluated educational experiences that are provided to learners consciously or unconsciously under the school authority in order to achieve the designated learning outcomes'.

In discussing the curriculum, it is important to distinguish between curriculum design (also known as curriculum organization) and curriculum development. The former refers to the ways in which we arrange the curriculum components while the latter refers to the 'planned, a purposeful, progressive, and systematic process to create positive improvements in the educational system'. (https://www.kenyaplex.com/questions/16290-what-is-the-difference-between-curriculum-development-and-curriculum-design.aspx). Mulenga (2011:19) cited in Banja (2017) explains that, based on these definitions, curriculum development is more than just updating subjects, such as replacing 'old' mathematics with 'new' mathematics. It is instead a purposeful and systematic construction of learning experiences and their continual evaluation. It captures all the processes that are necessary to design, implement and evaluate a functional curriculum. The curriculum development process includes several stages such as planning, preparing, designing, developing, implementing, evaluating, revising, and improving the curriculum.

Curriculum development is the planning for a sustained process of teaching and learning in a formal educational setting. No educational institution can operate effectively without a curriculum.

One of the goals in the curriculum is development and learning. In the curriculum it is stated that pedagogical activities should be carried out so that they stimulate and challenge the child's learning and development. It becomes clear therefore that the process moves first from curriculum design to curriculum implementation which is the focus of this discussion, to overall curriculum development.

The Curriculum implementation process
Curriculum designing must take into consideration its implementation. At the centre of all efforts to test the quality of a new curriculum and its practicality and utility in a real world or life setting is the teacher. Whether the new curriculum can be implemented successfully depends to a large extent on the abilities of teachers to interpret and implement it with regard to the methodology in implementing it. Apart from the social, economical and political influences which may lead to the curriculum failure, teacher competence is key.

A curriculum is intended to act as a campus for a teacher to translate the national vision through the educational system. The curriculum has to do with how to translate knowledge in the classroom, the methodologies to be used and the expected outcomes. This understanding of curriculum resonates well with the views of the proponents of the 'New' Sociology of Education theory.

The most important single factor for the quality of education is to have a sound curriculum coupled with effective and efficient teaching and learning. Therefore, quality education cannot be achieved if the teachers are not well prepared. They must understand the curriculum in terms of focus, content, skills and knowledge.

Without doubt, the most important person in the curriculum implementation process is the teacher. With their knowledge, experiences and competencies, teachers are central to any curriculum

development effort. Better teachers support better learning because they are most knowledgeable about the practice of teaching and are responsible for introducing the curriculum in the classroom.

The curriculum should be clear on what each component means and what is expected to be achieved. This will make it easy for the NQT to interpret the curriculum. It must not be abstract. In circumstances where a new curriculum is being offloaded such as has been the case in Zambia, curriculum developers must consider the people who are going to interpret that curriculum for implementation and how everybody is going to be brought on board especially NQTs. NQTs must understand the curriculum and what it is trying to achieve in order for them to interpret it correctly and implement it fully. The objectives of the curriculum cannot be achieved if the implementers are ill-qualified to interpret and implement it. It is these same implementers that are in the ideal position to understand the country's philosophy of education.

Teachers know their pupils need better than others involved in the curriculum process. With their knowledge base and skills set teachers can provide insight into the types of materials, activities and specific skills that need to be included. Teachers from multiple grade-levels may collaborate to identify skills students need at each level and ensure that the curriculum adequately prepares students to advance to the next grade-level and to meet the standards.

Because teachers must use the curriculum, they should have input in its creation (Mulenga, 2017). Sadly, in Zambia, teachers seem to be side lined in curriculum initiation and development. This agrees with the observations of Mooney and Mausbach (2008) that curriculum development is viewed as a process conducted by experts away from schools and is simply handed down to teachers and head teachers for implementation. But for teachers to implement a curriculum effectively, they must identify with it and own it as their own. A teacher can gauge whether an activity will fit into a specified time frame and whether it will engage students. As teachers provide input, they will gain ownership in the final product and feel more confident

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that the curriculum was created with their concerns and the needs of their particular pupils in mind.

When a teacher fails to properly implement the curriculum, he/she also risks failing to implement effective practices in the classroom. Teachers should be equipped with the skills to reflect on a curriculum and where they find any weaknesses in the curriculum, they should attempt to make it better. Teachers reflect on curriculum in multiple ways, such as reviewing the results or analysing assessment data and individual pupil performance. Teachers help learners understand the overall goals or aims for the curriculum such as the learning goals and outputs for every course and subject to ensure that they are compatible with the mission of institution in particular and the mission of the nation at large. At this level, they consider which content should be included, how content should be organized and with which educational methods shall be used in their delivery, how elements of curriculum should be communicated, what kind of educational environment and climate should be developed for effective implementation. As Mooney and Mausbach (2008) have stated:

> Conversely, having high academic standards isn't enough if they are not implemented through powerful instructional methods. Unfortunately, many of us have spent time writing guides that outlined great standards only to have them sit on the shelf while classroom instruction remains unchanged. Curriculum and instruction are interdependent, and curriculum work needs to be approached with this important precept in mind.

What this entails is that in curriculum development stakeholders should ensure that teachers teach learners and not merely focus on regurgitating elements of the curriculum, for the curriculum is meant to serve the learner and not the other way round.

Mentoring Newly Qualified Teachers in Curriculum Implementation
Among the many requirements for successful curriculum implementation is teaching environment, which, as a matter of necessity, should be encouraging for both pupils and teachers. Other considerations in curriculum implementation include the age and gender of learners, subjects being taught, which teaching tool to use or any other criteria. This paper argues that one key aspect to successful curriculum implementation missing from the Zambia educational setup is that of mentoring the newly qualified teachers in fundamental aspects of curriculum implementation. Mentoring is crucial irrespective of whether NQTs were trained using the consecutive or concurrent mode of teacher education or indeed any hybrid mode in between. Mentoring is a cross-cutting matter that helps in the transfer of key competencies expected of every teacher. It is a school-based response to the many needs of newly qualified teachers. In this arrangement, career guidance and mentorship should be accorded a significant role in our education system.

The needs of newly qualified teachers are many and can be traced back to their time during initial training. Poor initial training has the potential to affect the competence, effectiveness and efficiency of a newly qualified teacher. Lankau and Scandura (2007; 95) have expressed their concern regarding this situation as follows:

> Learning from training programmes and books will not be sufficient to keep pace with required competencies for success in today's fast-paced work environments. Individuals often must look to others to learn new skills and keep up with the demands of their jobs and professions. Mentoring relationships can serve as a forum for such personal learning in organisations. Since their training is not adequate NQTs need assistance in the schools.

Newly qualified teachers tend to lack additional knowledge and support such as classroom management, lesson planning, school policies and procedures, and effective communication skills with

students, parents, and fellow teachers. Thomas, Thomas and Lefebvre (2014) have argued that just like elsewhere around the world, NQTs in Zambia faced a myriad of challenges that included transitioning to new geographical locations, navigating school and organisational cultures, assessing the ability levels of their learners and improving their pedagogical practices. In addition, NQTs, both in Zambia and globally, also lack in the comprehension of curriculum and curriculum implementation strategies. Mentoring responds to all the needs listed above. Mentors who are experts, need to be on hand to help NQTs. Significantly, they should help NQTs in the understanding of the content of the curriculum and application of knowledge learnt thereof. After all, the necessity for mentorship of NQTs lies in its contribution towards developing effective and competent teachers able to interpret the curriculum.

In line with this view, scholars have advanced that mentorship seeks to provide services that assist new teachers to develop and sustain skills for successful classroom instruction (Eby and McManus, 2002). They add that induction [mentoring] is also meant to help the NQT understand the purposes for teaching each unit and successfully use the resources and strategies for teaching each unit, establish teaching competence and introduce the teacher to teaching as a continuously developing and life-long profession. The curriculum should be developed and broken into appropriate units which allow for effective mentorship to take place. To achieve this, a NQT needs to be exposed to a variety of teaching techniques and evaluation processes to enhance his/her skills as an upcoming career professional.

They argued that, every time there are changes or developments happening around the world, the school curricula are affected in one way or the other. Nevertheless, to the same extent that the quality of the national curriculum is based on the extent to which it meets individual attributes, the requirements of the national economy, the needs of society and the future challenges and aspirations of the nation, its successful implementation depends on the competences of teachers to interpret and implement it. Further, in Zambia the need for mentorship is heightened by the constant curriculum changes for

which teachers are rarely prepared (Kalimaposo, 2010). However, considering that curriculum reforms are inevitable in this fast-paced and emerging technological world, teachers must be well prepared for curriculum implementation. Where they are not for various reasons, mentoring becomes important to help NQTs take on the new challenges posed by a new curriculum. It is evident that NQTs need support to meet the demanding requirements of today's classroom (Banja, 2017).

However, Continuous Professional Development efforts have been unsuccessful in equipping teachers with information and skills regarding the ever changing practices in education (Mulundano, 2010). In the U.S.A, NQTs reported receiving little help or support in trying to navigate a new curriculum, amongst other concerns (Kauffman, Johnson, Kardos, Liu, & Peske, 2002). This brings out clearly the need for mentoring in curriculum implementation. Considering that initial teacher training hardly fully prepares teachers for the demands of the classroom as argued by Lankau and Scandura (2007), mentoring of NQTs must be part of curriculum implementation. In groups NQTs can discuss the curriculum and see what has been achieved and how to achieve it. The curriculum has content but teachers must be equipped with the ability to link this knowledge through instruction. This should include strategies for including the most effective instructional practices in the content area, and data about the gaps in the current curriculum. Mentor teachers can help NQTs improve student achievement by implementing best instructional practices for teaching high content standards.

In other words, As Mooney and Mausbach (2008) have stated there is need to pay attention to both what is to be taught and how it is to be taught. This calls for a policy for mentoring new curriculum implementers so that the standards that are supposed to be attained in terms of content are not compromised. Mooney and Mausbach (2008) have called such mentors curriculum mentors. These mentors will help NQTs implement the curriculum with appropriate strategies in order to improve learner outcomes. Specifically, newly qualified teachers should be helped to understand issues relating to the

curriculum such as assessment, lesson planning, syllabus interpretation, curriculum interpretation, instructional strategies as well as identifying what is important to be taught. This agrees with Banja (2017) who found that the majority of NQTs in a sample of 91 NQTs reported that mentorship helped them learn how to carefully select what they needed to teach and what to leave out. Following from the above discussion, it should be apparent that mentorship of newly qualified teachers is a key stage and component in the curriculum implementation stage.

While it is expected that programmes of education produce effective teachers who are able to interpret the curriculum, assuming that NQTs as implementers have a solid foundation on instructional practices from their initial teacher education programmes is an assumption that could be costly to the system as a number of scholars have reported (Banja, 2017; Mulenga, 2015; Manchishi and Masaiti 2015). This is particularly important because donor influence on the Ministry of General Education which controls schools, may not affect the teacher education institutions such as the universities thereby creating a disparity between what is being taught in universities and what the MoGE expects from its new teachers. While the assumption is that students of education programmes are being taught content in line with the curriculum in secondary schools, this is not always the case. As Mulenga (2017) points out sexuality education represents one such case. While children in schools are expected to learn about sexuality [from as early as the second grade], student teachers are not directly exposed to sexuality education in their curriculum/syllabus. In similar vein, Chinnammai (2005), noted that the introduction of technology into the classroom is changing the nature of delivering education to students; and is gradually giving way to a new form of electronic literacy. More programmes and education materials are being made available in electronic form. Teaching and learning materials including students' assignments and projects are generated in electronic form. Newly qualified teachers may leave university without training in these areas.

Consequently, such NQTs may struggle to know, understand and implement such aspects of the curriculum. For how do NQTs interpret a curriculum that they are ill-trained in; a curriculum whose content they do not fully understand? The evidence on this point relating to the mismatch between the training teachers receive which is supposed to also prepare them for curriculum implementation and teacher practice is well captured by Mulenga (2015) who found that over 60% of University of Zambia students pursuing the Bachelor of Education degree reported that the content of the degree was not related to the knowledge and skills set needed for teaching in a secondary school.

Arising from the above scenario, there is need to conduct instruction more effectively and efficiently in various courses which are already a part of the curriculum. It is necessary that during training NQTs are prepared to understand and learn how to interpret the curriculum and implement it effectively using the best instructional practices for the betterment of the learner (Mooney and Mausbach, 2008). Mentoring them helps plug in the gap especially when considered that CPD opportunities are few for most teachers. As implied by Mooney and Mausbach (2008) a curriculum will not improve schools, but quality teachers will. Further, Mooney and Mausbach (2008) state that:

> …In the rush to produce the curriculum guide, we forget that our purpose for developing curriculum in the first place is to improve instruction. The desire to produce a product trumps the process, and as a result we have curriculum guides collecting dust that have little relevance to teachers or students. As leaders, we need to help teachers understand how the curriculum takes the kids where they need to go and show them how to use instruction to get the kids there. We need to ask questions about not only the objectives, but also the methods for helping students meet the objectives.

And as the curriculum changes, NQTs must constantly be trained to respond to the shifting landscapes. When considered from this

perspective, mentorship becomes a key cog in the curriculum implementation process. The essence of the argument of this paper is therefore that what has not been addressed at design level both prior to and during teacher training to enable NQTs learn content tailored towards the needs of the school can be rectified through mentoring the graduates of such education programmes at the school level. This brings in the place of mentorship to help the NQTs. If well utilised, mentoring NQTs can be an invaluable cornerstone to improving educational delivery. In other words, when developing a curriculum, developers should have at the back of their minds issues of instructional delivery.

Curriculum initiatives must as a matter of necessity translate into practice. The curriculum should not be implemented by a few teachers only but by all teachers in a professional learning community if there has to be full implementation of the curriculum for sustained achievement. According to DuFour (2004), a professional learning community is a team of teachers who meet on a regular basis to establish curriculum standards and collaborate on how to teach these standards.

Conclusion

The essence of this paper was not to argue for how curriculum must be designed but to advocate for the mentoring of NQTs in the area of curriculum implementation. From this discussion, it is clear that curriculum implementation is not a stand-alone activity; it starts with curriculum designing and is part of curriculum development. To implement a curriculum successfully, the implementers should be well versed in it. Considering the constant changes in curriculum in Zambia, it is high time authorities re-looked NQT mentoring to better position them for curriculum implementation. While the nature of the curriculum is important, even more important is the ability of teachers to understand and interpret it. My argument is that there is need to look at the role of mentorship in curriculum implementation. In this regard, we want to argue that NQTs cannot be expected to correctly understand and interpret the curriculum and should be at the centre of any efforts to policy implementation in schools. This entails challenging the status quo.

The current Zambian teacher training regime requires strengthening in terms of having clear goals and foresight of what we want them to become by developing capacity in our teachers to interpret curriculum and link it to the values and needs and aspirations of the Zambian people and their quest to produce a responsible, productive and self-sustaining citizenry. Therefore, as educators teach students, mentorship is of the essence in helping NQTs marry theory and practice.

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