

Art. #2365, 11 pages, <https://doi.org/10.15700/saje.v44ns1a2365>

Principals' experiences of support in the management of the implementation of curriculum change in secondary schools

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Principals' management of curriculum change is critical in successfully implementing transformation in schools. This is particularly crucial in South Africa where the curriculum has been in a constant state of flux since 1994. In this article, we explore principals' experiences on the support they receive in the management of the implementation of curriculum change in the Sekhukhune district of South Africa. Data were generated by using interviews and documents. The thematic content analysis approach was used to analyse the data. We found that the principals did not receive the necessary support that they needed to be able to manage the implementation of curriculum change in schools successfully. Furthermore, the implementation of curriculum change has been hindered by under-provisioning of staff and resources. We argue that unless the government alters its approach to the support that it provides to principals, the challenges regarding the implementation and management of curriculum change in schools will persist and perpetuate the wastage of resources.

Keywords: curriculum change; experiences; implementation; management; principals; support

Introduction

Change due to the epic paradigm shift from apartheid to democracy in South Africa affected the school curriculum directly (Mafora & Phorabatho, 2013). The curriculum had to change to meet the new socio-economic demands imposed by democracy (Department of Education [DoE], 2006; Mokgaphame, 2001). However, the changes were imposed on stakeholders in the education system through bureaucracy (Dimba, 2001). Most striking was that the changes also placed new demands on both teachers and school principals that consequently required more support for them to succeed (Maringa, 2016).

The early curriculum changes, namely the outcomes-based education approach, which culminated in the design of Curriculum 2005, fell short of addressing the new curriculum demands imposed by the establishment of a non-racist, unitary education system (Cross, Mungadi & Rouhani, 2002). Subsequently, the Revised National Curriculum Statement Grades R to 9 and the National Curriculum Statement Grades 10 to 12 produced the Curriculum Assessment and Policy Statement (CAPS), which was introduced with the sole purpose of addressing the socio-economic needs, equity, and equality which were imposed by democracy and then to prepare learners with qualities necessary for responsible citizenship (Department of Basic Education [DBE], 2010; Republic of South Africa [RSA], 1996). The policy implications of CAPS at school level include the following: principals should serve as leaders regarding curriculum change implementation, and they need support to be able to succeed (Ganon-Shilon, Tamir & Shechter, 2021; Glatthorn, Jailall & Jailall, 2016).

In South Africa, the onus of capacitating school principals lies with the DBE. Many studies on principals have been conducted in both rural and urban settings with a focus on teachers and heads of department (HoDs) (Dimba, 2001; Mafora & Phorabatho, 2013; Moodley, 2013). Furthermore, studies conducted can be categorised into different themes. Themes include the experiences of principals in managing curriculum change (Kaphe, 2017; Maringa, 2016), the role of the school principals in the implementation of curriculum change (Kobola, 2007; Legodi, 2001), the transformation of the South African schooling system (Gumede & Biyase, 2016), the principal as curriculum leader (Dimba, 2001; Glatthorn et al., 2016; October, 2009), politicising curriculum implementation (Molapo & Pillay, 2018) and South African teachers' perspectives on support received in the implementation of curriculum change (Govender, 2018). In addition, some studies have been done on the perceptions of principals regarding their instructional leadership (Mestry, Hendricks & Bischoff, 2009; Naidoo, 2019; Swanepoel, 2008). However, little is known about the principals' experiences of the support they receive in managing the implementation of curriculum change in South African secondary schools. As an emerging economy, South Africa cannot afford to invest huge amounts of money in curriculum change without focusing on the necessary support that the principals, who are expected to be the drivers of the implementation of curriculum change, need. The kind of support that principals receive may assist them to monitor and implement curriculum change in a manner that will contribute towards quality education which is appropriate for learners to become productive citizens in the economy of the country. This may serve as a lesson for developing economies and developed economies because as Mestry (2017) indicates, large sums of money have been invested in education systems globally as an effort to deal with unemployment.

Literature Review

The National Policy on Whole-school Evaluation (DoE, RSA, 2001:s. 3.5) stipulates that the key role of "the executive authority of the professional management of schools is vested" in the school principal. As a result, every

principal is duty-bound to oversee the curriculum across the school, monitor the school management team's (SMT) work, ensure that effective learning occurs, and ensure that the SMT monitors the work of fellow teachers within different streams. The mere fact that leaders and managers of schools evince a weak grasp of the curriculum has adversely impacted the principals' capability to adopt eminent curriculum changes (Bubb & Early, 2004). Despite the principals' endeavours to implement curriculum changes, they experience inadequate support from the government. That is compounded by the erratic monitoring of the implementation of change (Marishane, 2014; Ramparsad, 2001). Moreover, curriculum facilitators are poorly equipped to capacitate principals, and this exacerbates the problem (Gleeson, Klenowski & Looney, 2020). Subsequently, curriculum changes are often rejected, mainly because they nudge change agents to strive to acquire and implement new knowledge and skills without providing the necessary support. In schools where change is received well and where appropriate support exists, the attitude of the workforce is likely to be positive and the implementers may become innovative and develop a passion to apply the changes in pursuit of better learner achievement. In such cases, principals may willingly go the extra mile to augment their skills and knowledge and adjust their attitudes (Day, 1999). As Mestry et al. (2009) indicate, principals who receive support are likely to derive excitement from their new responsibilities. An effort by the government to provide support to schools is likely to beget a healthy school environment which is mainly characterised by high productivity.

Since change is perceived to be complex (Fullan, 2001), its implementation in either business or education has always brought uncertainty or surprise. Therefore, principals should continue to hone their skills and knowledge on curriculum change and receive the required support to remain a step ahead of their staff members and not waste school resources (Bourne, 2012).

The meaning of the concept "support"

Due to the focus of the study on support, we thought it appropriate to explain what the concept means. Kobola (2007) explains it as the training of principals, regular meetings with principals, circulars to schools, and the supply of resources. Mamela and Ramathan (2022) explain it as the empowerment of principals to create new content and acquire pedagogical skills to manage the implementation of curriculum issues. This is in line with Steyn and Fuller's (2023) comment summarising it as continuous training of principals and development to manage the implementation of curriculum changes in schools. From a psychosocial perspective, it includes aspects such as counselling, acceptance, and friendly interaction that help a

person to have confidence and be effective in the working environment (Hlalele, 2012; Moyo, Tshivhase & Mavhandu-Mudzusi, 2023). In this article the term "support" refers to the harmonious interaction between the DoE, provision of resources, and continuous training of principals to manage the implementation of curriculum changes in schools.

Theoretical Framework

Different theories can be used as a lens to explore the experiences of principals concerning the support that they receive in the management of the implementation of curriculum change in secondary schools. These theories include the PROSCI learning centre's Awareness, Desire, Knowledge, Ability and Reinforcement (ADKAR) change management model which has been widely and successfully used in corporate and government sectors (Hiatt, 2006; Hiatt & Creasy, 2012), the change management theory with different aspects that include stimulus for change and situational analysis, communication with stakeholders, planning phase, implementation, monitoring/transition management and evaluation (Mahboob & Evans, 2015), and the concerns-based adoption model (CBAM) (Hall & Hord, 2020). For this study, the CBAM was adopted because as Olson, Lannan, Cumming, MacGillivray and Richards (2020) indicate, it has different aspects that provide a more complete picture of the implementation process which includes the principals' beliefs, experiences and attitudes that could be deeply explored through qualitative interviews.

The CBAM is appropriate to serve as a lens in this study as it focuses on individuals' experiences and concerns about how change is implemented and/or support is given. As Hall and Hord (2020) indicate, it also helps to look at change – not as an event but as a process that involves personal experiences, developmental growth, feelings, concerns, and skills. In this study, the theory allowed us to explore the experiences of principals concerning the support that they receive in the management of the implementation of curriculum change in secondary schools (Bourne, 2012; Hiatt, 2006).

Problem Statement

Principals play a key role in successfully implementing curriculum change in schools (Lampen, 2014). This is because they are expected to play a crucial role as curriculum leaders, among other roles, in schools (Dimba, 2001; Glatthorn et al., 2016). The problem addressed in this study was the challenges that principals experienced because of a lack of support as key agents in the management of the implementation of curriculum change in South Africa (Steyn & Fuller, 2023). This is a result of continuing complaints by principals about not

getting support in their efforts to manage the implementation of curriculum change (Magongo, 2011). Consequently, this obstructs them from becoming leaders who are expected to create an environment that is conducive to effective teaching and learning. If they are empowered and supported, they will be able to promote innovative ways of teaching by integrating technology into schools' instructional programme sets, encourage quality instruction, and set high expectations for teachers and learners. They blame the lack of support on the DoE for using the top-down approach on issues related to curriculum change without the necessary support (Molapo & Pillay, 2018). Their experiences may have adverse consequences on the management of the implementation of curriculum change in schools which, in turn, may lead to the wastage of resources and affect the transformation of education in South Africa. It is against this background that this study was conducted to focus on the experiences of principals in the Sekhukhune district of the Limpopo province regarding the support they receive in managing the implementation of curriculum change. The purpose with the study was to explore the experiences of principals to contribute to the development of a suitable support model that caters for their needs in managing the implementation of curriculum change. The main and sub-questions are presented below.

Main question

What are the principals' experiences of the support provided for the management of the implementation of curriculum change in South African schools? To elicit appropriately responses to the question, the following sub-questions were formulated.

Sub-questions

- 1) To what extent is there advocacy and inclusion of principals during the conception and inception of curriculum change?
- 2) How do principals exhibit the desire, knowledge, and ability to execute their duties as agents of change?
- 3) What contextual curriculum barriers do principals encounter in their implementation of curriculum change?
- 4) What strategies do principals use to execute their duties in the absence of support from the Department of Education?

Methodology

The qualitative research approach was employed in this study because the approach uses narratives or statements to arrive at the findings (Bryman, 2012; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Silverman, 2011). In this study, the approach was used to explore secondary school principals' experiences regarding the support that they get in the management of the implementation of curriculum change in schools. As researchers we assumed the co-constructivist and interpretive roles since we sought to understand the phenomenon through the real-life experiences of the

participants in real-life situations (Dyson & Genishi, 2005; Fullan, 2001; Robinson, 2011).

Research Design

Due to the nature of the study, which was on the support provided for principals in the management of the implementation of curriculum change in South African schools, a case study design was adopted to help us respond to the research questions. It also assisted us to focus on principals' experiences in the school context (Lucas, Fleming & Bhosale, 2018) and to develop an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon (Heale & Twycross, 2018).

Sampling/Selection of Cases

Five rural secondary schools were purposefully selected as research sites. Considering the advice of Neuman (2014), each school was assigned a unique code to conceal its identity in compliance with ethical considerations (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014; Bryman, 2012). For funding purposes by the government, schools are classified according to quintiles. Schools that are well resourced receive less money from the national government. Poorly resourced schools receive more money. The quintiles range from quintile 1 to quintile 5. Quintiles 1, 2, and 3 are schools that cater for learners from poor families. Quintiles 4 to 5 cater for learners who are from more affluent families. SS001 is a quintile 2 school, 28 km away from the nearest town of Groblersdal in Limpopo. The school principal was a mature Indian male with a mature African female as deputy. SS002 is a quintile 1 secondary school 24 km from Groblersdal. It also had clean surroundings. SS003 is a quintile 2 school situated 70 km from Groblersdal. The principal is a middle-aged African male with a mature African female as deputy. S004 is a quintile 1 school, 87 km from Groblersdal. Both the principal and his deputy were mature African males. SS005 is a quintile 1 school, fenced in with a large gate, which is however, not manned by security personnel.

The five principals were purposively selected because we were of the opinion that they would help us collect appropriate data to answer the research questions. The selection criteria for the participants were that they should be principals, heading schools in rural areas and they were expected to have attended either workshops or any kind of training on the management of curriculum change. Pseudonyms (P01, P02, P03, P04 and P05) were used to refer to the principals to protect their identity. The principals' experiential knowledge was adequate to yield thick descriptions required when analysing the data thematically.

Data Collection

Two methods of data generation were used to generate data for the study, namely, semi-structured interview techniques and documents.

Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interview were used as data-gathering tools in line with the CBAM which is appropriate in researching leaders or principals who are attempting to implement and manage an expected change (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The semi-structured interview method helped us develop dialogue with the participants, and we were able to ask follow-up questions and comment on instances where responses were not clear (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). That provided participants the opportunity to give detailed accounts of their experiences regarding curriculum management and implementation. Interview sessions took place at the respective schools during free periods during the day or after hours when there was a need to do so. The interviews were conducted in English. The interviews were digitally recorded and thereafter transcribed verbatim. Each interview session lasted approximately 30 minutes.

Documents

Documents linked to the support that principals had received from the DoE were referred, which included minutes of SMT meetings, minutes of staff meetings, minutes of meetings of deputy principals with HoDs, portfolios of SMT members (particularly those of principals and deputy principals), the Employment of Educator's Act (EEA), strategic plans/action plans, reports on school-based training developmental workshops, report-backs on training workshops outside of the school, class visit programmes, comments from lesson observations, and circulars from the DoE.

Ethical Considerations

Permission to conduct the research was obtained from the Ethics Committee of the Limpopo University, the Sekhukhune South district of the DBE, and the managers of the research sites. Before the start of the data collection phase, the participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and that the research was done with their consent (Punch, 2009). The research procedure, purpose, risks, and benefits were clarified (Ragin & Amoroso, 2011). Consequently, we avoided anything that could put the participants at risk and cause them any harm. This was done by avoiding harmful and embarrassing questions during interview sessions. The participants were also informed that they had the right to withdraw at any time or to withhold answers to any question that they were uncomfortable with. Codes were used to refer to the participants to conceal their identities (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). No conflict existed as we were neither friends with nor relations of the participants.

Data Analysis

A thematic data analysis approach was used to analyse the data. This was done in line with

Lochmiller's (2021:2030) advice that the approach is more appropriate in answering the "what" and the "why" questions. The approach helped us to follow an iterative process using the steps of qualitative data analysis. As Lester, Cho and Lochmiller (2020) indicate, the steps involve familiarity with the data, developing preliminary codes, searching for patterns and preliminary themes, appraisal of themes, explanations, and the attachment of names to the themes which led to the themes as they are outlined in this article. We familiarised ourselves with the data by listening to the interview recordings and transcribing them into texts. Thereafter, we developed codes where the focus was on the more important statements and their associations. That led to the formulation of categories and preliminary themes. The review process led to the final themes as they are presented here.

Presentation of Findings

Five main themes on the support that principals received on the management of curriculum change emerged. Themes include the advocacy and inclusion of principals during the conception and inception of curriculum change; the mismatch between principals' desire for change and their inadequate knowledge and ability as change agents; their difficulty in sustaining change momentum because of inadequate support and reinforcement; and contextual barriers to curriculum change strategies that they used in the absence of support.

Advocacy and Inclusion of Principals During Conception and Inception of Curriculum Change

Ideally, advocacy, where change agents are exclusively consulted through two-way vertical and horizontal communication should precede the orientation process to inspire the change agents and to involve them in the decision-making process for their buy-in into the change phenomenon (Hiatt, 2006). In this study, responding to the question "Was the information about curriculum change well explained to you?" the participants maintained that the inception of curriculum change was ineffective because awareness was raised simultaneously with orientation regarding curriculum change without involving them in the decision-making process. Awareness of the need for curriculum change, which, according to the CBAM, is one of the levels of change, was communicated through pyramidal management through which consultation occurred only among the curriculum designers and other experts in the Department.

The participants' perceptions were that information about the curriculum change was not clarified, which led to overt or covert resistance. Furthermore, as a result of their exclusion from decision-making, they were negative about the entire process of curriculum change. The negativity was reflected in the minutes of meetings of a school

headed by P03. This was also evident through the language that they used during the interviews by referring to the curriculum support staff as “*guerrillas*” whose purpose was merely a “*witch hunt*.” This implies that the participants’ relations with the officials from the Department of Education were not affable. The DBE’s persistence to use top-down communication lacked credibility since the participants were more comfortable with a collaborative bottom-up approach during both the conception and inception of the change. P04 was emphatic by stating that the Department should “*consult and get ideas from the managers as to what their inputs can be. There must be advocacy workshops. Before the change, let people go out there and talk about the change and involve us in the decision-making process....*” Tabulawa (2009) acknowledges that pyramidal management has led to problematic communication within the DBE in general because it is not open to any new ideas. The new curriculum was imposed, and compliance was also enforced on the participants.

As such, Kumar (2014:219) notes that the CAPS does not reflect the “perceptions, experiences, feelings and beliefs” of the relevant stakeholders. Trochim, Donnelly and Arora (2016) concur that the CAPS is not a reflection of the different stakeholders’ views. The only form of communication experienced was when imposing and enforcing compliance regarding the curriculum change on implementers. The process disempowered the principals and as Quesel, Näpfli and Buser (2017), Silas-Casillas and Perales-Franco (2014), Trujillo, Møller, Jensen, Kissell and Larsen (2021) and Yurkofsky (2022) indicate, they were unable to lead the teachers to shared meanings and goals about the implementation and management of curriculum change.

The Mismatch Between Principals’ Desire for Change and Their Inadequate Knowledge and Ability as Change Agents

Hiatt (2006) points out the importance of employees’ desire and interest to implement and sustain change if change management is to be successfully operationalised. The findings of this study indicate that the school principals were indeed desirous of change. In response to the question, “How do you feel about curriculum changes in general?”, participants were of the opinion that the CAPS curriculum should be embraced because it brings about innovation and improved life chances for learners. The excitement is also reflected in the minutes of SMTs of schools headed by P02 and P04. The excitement indicated that principals had a desire, knowledge, and willingness to execute their duties as agents of change.

However, principals’ initial excitement about the inception of the curriculum was not matched with the adequate knowledge and abilities necessary

to manage the curriculum change and to effect the meaningful empowerment of their teaching staff because of their exclusion from the conception of the curriculum change process. The knowledge about the change process and the skills and abilities needed to drive the process should have been imparted to principals before the implementation phase. Hiatt (2006) stresses that employees must acquire knowledge about the change process and skills so that the end goal of the change will become clear to them. However, findings indicate that the principals were very poorly informed about the CAPS curriculum and were excluded from its conception. The principals also hinted that curriculum change was imposed on them. In addition, some school principals remained unfamiliar with the process of curriculum change management. Principals’ responses show their yearning for inclusion in decision-making and proper professional development since they were aware that they were ill-equipped to manage the curriculum effectively.

They further complained that their employer (the DBE) did not value their role in the management of curriculum since they were not prioritised for inclusion at its conception and for professional development. To this day, the DBE prioritises the empowerment of teachers during and after curriculum change implementation, whereas principals are subjected to developmental training sessions which are hastily done and are led by inept facilitators. This is also reflected in the report on training workshops presented outside of the schools. As a result, they seldom conducted onsite developmental workshops for their staff members. They could also not initiate capacity-building programmes at their schools. Principals lamented their isolationist experience to fend for themselves regarding the inception of the new curriculum with which they lacked familiarity. This was clearly summarized by P05 who succinctly stated:

We were never trained as curriculum managers ... We also experience marginalisation in terms of continuous professional development to the point where we resort to passive resistance. There is a need that we be trained to be able to manage the implementation of curriculum change.

There were also no follow-up training sessions to assess the principals’ capacity to use the tools. Therefore, some principals filed these tools without using them, which constituted a type of passive resistance. D’Ortenzo (2012) affirms that people often indulge in passive resistance to conceal their anger and frustration. There was also no support at all from the DoE to determine the gaps regarding the principals’ knowledge and skills on the accurate implementation of the CAPS. Principals devised their strategies on how best to manage the curriculum change. This is contrary to the advice by Tamir (2004) who indicates that for the successful management and implementation of curriculum

change there is a need for support and continuous training of both principals and teachers. However, P01 and P02 indicated that they were trained. The differences might be a result of having different expectations of the level of training that they were supposed to have had.

Contextual Barriers to Curriculum Change

In general, curriculum change is inhibited by several contextual barriers. In response to the question, “What contextual barriers do you encounter in the management of the implementation of curriculum change?”, the participants responded by outlining various barriers which include the lack of resources and the lack of sufficient training of principals by the department officials. As Ramírez Romero, Sayer and Pamplón Irigoyen (2014) indicate, there is a need for the effective training of principals on the management of curriculum change implementation. The participants in this study were more concerned with the kind of training that they had received about curriculum change. They viewed the training as a barrier. P04 expressed as follows: “*I wouldn’t consider myself having been trained because the training I attended was haphazard ... it was just a window-dressing....*” Due to the kind of training that they had received, they perceived training sessions as a waste of time. Trainers were regarded as inept and possessing shallow knowledge. P03 emphatically stated that

... you could read as they were busy trying to unpack, trying to show us why and how we can make these changes, they did not have what it takes. They were in a way, not sure of what they were talking about, because if you train a person, you must demonstrate that you have knowledge, you have got the information and you are confident about what you are saying.

The complaints were also reflected in report on training workshops presented outside of the schools. There is a need to look at how principals are trained on curriculum change. This finding is in line with the findings by Kobola (2007) who revealed that principals were not trained on the implementation of the Revised National Curriculum Statement, and consequently, they could not assist the teachers. However, contrary to what others have said, P01 and P05 indicated that they were trained well. P05 said: “*We were well trained even though there might have been hiccups here and there.*” The differences might be due to the different needs that principals had when they went for training.

Difficulty in Sustaining Change Momentum Through Inadequate Support and Reinforcement

Hiatt (2006) highlights the role of support and reinforcement in sustaining the momentum for change. The question about support was, “What kind of support do you get to manage the implementation of the curriculum?” Participants’ responses indicate that the curriculum support staff from the DoE was

not helpful in that they were delegated other duties when visiting schools. Consequently, they could not support schools to manage the curriculum accordingly. The documents analysed (minutes of SMT meetings, staff meetings, meetings of Deputy Principals with HoDs, portfolios of SMT members [particularly those of principals and deputy principals], EEA, 76 of 1998, strategic plan/action plan, reports on school-based training developmental workshops, report on training workshops outside of the school, class visit programmes, comments from lesson observations, and circulars from the DoE) did not show any trace of evidence of how gaps were detected in the support and how mechanisms were put into place to address the gaps. Participating principals confirmed that they managed the implementation of the curriculum change at their schools by trial and error. P02 emphasised the lack of support by stating as follows:

We need some kind of a curriculum management manual, which the principal can refer to, having a summary of specifics in each subject. We need that because that can actually be at hand and be a very good handbook that the principal can use at any given time.

Furthermore, the DoE did not have a standardised and well-coordinated reinforcement mechanism for principals who achieved specific milestones in the curriculum implementation process, no matter how small they might have been. External reinforcement includes formal acknowledgement, rewards, and celebrations in recognition of the achievement of change. Internal reinforcement refers to the satisfaction that an employee experiences in achieving change successfully (Hiatt, 2006). Visits to schools by departmental officials were also not helpful because principals viewed the officials as people on a “witch-hunt.” Principal 05 (P05) said: “*their visits had more to do with fault-finding than supporting principals on propitious curriculum change implementation and management.*” This is in line with the findings by Ni, Yan and Pounder (2018) who indicate that principals viewed state agencies as inhibiting instead of supporting them. However, contrary to what P05 said, P01 indicated that they were supported. “*We were supported. The department officials supported us well.*” The differences might be as a result of the principals’ different interpretations of what they regarded as support.

Strategies that Principals Use Without the Support

Notwithstanding the challenges that principals experienced due to a lack of support, they developed strategies that they used to be able to do their work with regard to the implementation of curriculum change. Responding to the question, “Which strategies did you use to cope with the management of the implementation of curriculum change?”, they outlined various strategies which included peer support and self-development by registering for

curriculum management courses with universities. Principals organised themselves into groups to advise each other on strategies that they could use to deal with the challenges that they were facing in the management of curriculum implementation. This is also reflected in the reports on school-based training development workshops and training workshops outside of the schools. Those who had registered for some courses on curriculum management did assist. P03 stated the following:

We have organised ourselves into groups to assist each other regarding the challenges in managing the implementation of curriculum change. Those who seem to have a better understanding, especially those who have registered for management courses, do help us to continue managing the implementation of curriculum change. However, it remains a daunting task.

This finding is in line with the observation by Mestry (2017) who found that there was a need for compulsory training and development of programmes to empower principals to lead and develop themselves.

Discussion

The study was meant to respond to the question on the experiences of school principals about the support that they received in the management of curriculum change. Overall, the findings suggest that principals who participated in the study raised several concerns regarding the management of the implementation of curriculum change in South African schools. Concerns raised included inadequate advocacy of curriculum change by the DoE, exclusion of principals in the decision-making process, principals' inadequate knowledge and ability to manage the implementation of curriculum change, inadequate support and reinforcement from the DoE, and the lack of competency on the part of the officials from the DoE to offer appropriate and sufficient training to assist principals to manage the implementation of curriculum change. This confirms the findings by Nkambule (2018) and Tabulawa (2009) who observed that curriculum support teams were poorly equipped to assist principals to be able to manage the implementation of curriculum change in schools. As Moir (2018) argues, this has implications for the implementation of curriculum change in schools. These implications include the lack of motivation, the lack of confidence, and a lack of preparation for the management of change implementation which is likely to affect education transformation in South Africa.

There is, therefore, a dire need for principals to efficiently manage the implementation of curriculum change. They should also be included in the decision-making process and in the advocacy phase, and have adequate knowledge of the management of the implementation of curriculum change. Additionally, they should be well-trained

and should receive adequate support and reinforcement. Furthermore, as Gleeson et al. (2020) indicate, trainers should be aware of the need to be prepared well and be knowledgeable to be able to train principals and teachers. We argue that unless the government alters its approach concerning the support that it provides to principals, the challenges regarding the implementation and management of curriculum change in schools will persist. This has the potential to perpetuate wastage of resources and give rise to unemployment which has the potential to affect the economic growth of the country.

Limitations of the Study

A limitation of the study was that the results may not apply to primary schools within the district because they were excluded. Moreover, the study depended on the views of the selected secondary school principals.

Conclusion

Curriculum change in South Africa was required for redress to address apartheid injustices in the education sector. However, we revealed that the lack of support to principals resulted in them regarding the process as a top-down approach and something imposed on them without the necessary assistance. The top-down approach was used by the DoE to advocate curriculum change and there was an expectation of compliance from the participants. This is reflected in some of the circulars from the Department that were consulted. Ideally, two-way vertical and horizontal communication begets credibility and co-ownership from the stakeholders because it is collaborative. This was lacking in this situation, and thus, relations between departmental curriculum support staff and principals became strained, leading to a form of passive resistance.

The following factors hindered participants to perform their managerial duties effectively: principals not being included in the decision-making process during the conception phase and advocacy campaigns, the lack of two-way vertical and horizontal communication between school principals and departmental officials, the lack of training of principals in terms of the management of curriculum change, the lack of continuous professional development programmes, inadequate curriculum support, incapacity to train staff members due to ineffective trainers who lacked the requisite knowledge and skills. This resulted in participants being negative about the implementation of curriculum change in schools.

We argue that, unless the government alters its approach regarding the support that it provides to principals, the challenges regarding the implementation and management of curriculum change in schools will persist, and perpetuate the wastage of resources. This may ultimately derail the transformation. More research is needed to shed

light on the reasons why a top-down approach was followed by the DoE in a democratic state. More research is also needed on the consequences of the lack of support by district officials on the implementation and management of curriculum change by school principals.

The study has implications for the theory and practice of issues related to school curriculum change. They are meant to contribute to the implementation of curriculum change and improve educational results in secondary schools, and they are outlined in detail in subsequent paragraphs.

The implications for the theory include:

1) other studies on support for principals should be done using other theories than the CBAM theory; 2) identification of additional strategies for supporting principals in managing curriculum change; 3) observation as method is used to observe how principals are trained; 4) the use of surveys to get a broader picture of the problem.

Lastly, we present several implications for practice. Implications for practice include:

1) principals should be included in issues related to curriculum conception; 2) principals should be prioritised with regard to capacity building on issues related to curriculum change and implementation; 3) there should be an overhaul of the approach to the training of principals on curriculum change and implementation management; 4) there should be systematic inclusion of principals in the planning for principals' professional development and ensuring that vigorous advocacy proceeds the implementation of curriculum change; 5) support through the provision of resources and materials need to be followed by continuous training; 6) the development of a framework that could be used to determine gaps in the management of the implementation of curriculum change; 7) the development of simple guidelines to assist principals in the implementation of curriculum change; 8) in dealing with the challenges associated with top-down principal support, principals should be included in the decision-making process in the conception and inception of curriculum change, individual initiatives at school level, and a peer support system should be encouraged where principals are allowed to initiate innovative ways of providing solutions to the challenges in the management of curriculum implementation.

Authors' Contributions

MAMA conceptualised the article, harvested data from the doctoral thesis, and contributed to the writing of the article. LTM assisted with the conceptualisation of the article, research methodology, and the writing of the article. All authors reviewed the final manuscript.

Notes

- i. This article is based on the doctoral thesis of Makwetle Aubrey Mabitla.

- ii. Published under a Creative Commons Attribution Licence.
- iii. DATES: Received: 12 July 2022; Revised: 19 April 2024; Accepted: 26 July 2024; Published: 31 December 2024.

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