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# Implementing the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement: A Case Study of the Vhembe West District, South Africa

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study was undertaken to investigate how district officials implemented *Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement* in the Vhembe West District in South Africa. Interview data were collected and used for themes identification. The study identified the following challenges that the district officials experienced as they performed their duties: insufficient resources, lack of finances to buy learning and teaching support materials, infrastructure failures, the district's inadequate support to schools, shortage of district officials in certain disciplines, unclear roles, lack of collaboration, unavailability of follow-up visits, the shortage of computers for the district officials and teacher support materials, bribery and corruption of selling principalship posts, slow filling of district officials posts, and inappropriate skills for school management and leadership. The study concluded that qualified district officials should be appointed, ongoing support from the Department of Basic Education and provision of resources in ensuring smooth curriculum implementation is needed, and bribery and corruption should be stopped when school principal appointments are made. This study also concludes that the district officials should be continuously capacitated so that they should be able to meet curriculum challenges, and the Department of Basic Education should speed up the curriculum delivery by ensuring that the vacancies are filled up.

## 1. Introduction

Curriculum change has a poor record of implementation in South Africa. It is an arguable fact that implementing a curriculum is not a smooth-sailing journey. Curriculum implementation is a very complex process (Guro & Weber, 2010).<sup>[17]</sup> Countries worldwide have experienced changes to their curriculum and this has had an intense impact on the way in which it has been conceptualised and implemented (Horsthemke, Siyakwazi, Walton, & Wolhuter, 2013).<sup>[19]</sup> In South Africa,

educational reforms were in response to inequalities and imbalances in the education system, which were created by apartheid government in South Africa. This called for curriculum changes in South Africa to address the education system which was characterised by racism, discrimination and inequalities. The district officials were introduced by the Department of Basic Education (DBE) to assist the previously disadvantaged schools by ensuring that the education served as the tool to transform society. They mainly focus on the provision of common

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curriculum framework for curriculum management and effective implementation for all schools. District officials are the link between the Provincial Education Department, the schools and public at large. Teachers and school principals who are involved in curriculum change process should be prepared and supported in their endeavours. Jacobs, Vakalisa, and Gawe (2011)<sup>[20]</sup> note that teachers need support to implement the curriculum.

Challenges such as neglect of district officials, undefined roles, education policies, capacity of district officials, and lack of collaboration are indication why the districts do not thrive in their endeavour to support curriculum at schools and they are still not properly addressed. The roles of district officials are unclear and lead to subjective decisions on how curriculum should be supported. This is evidenced by Department of Basic Education (DBE) (2010)<sup>[9]</sup> as it did not mention the specific roles to be played by the district officials. Lack of professional development for district officials leaves the quality of support to the ability of district officials which may not match the curriculum needs at that time such as supporting only on what they know or are comfortable with. The roles of district officials are meant to improve curriculum delivery at schools, whether the support is directly or indirectly linked to subjects because learning is holistic. Taole (2015)<sup>[49]</sup> indicates that district officials should be the intermediaries between curriculum policy and implementation in the classroom.

It is so imperative that the district officials have a greater understanding of their roles in transforming education so that it can meet national goals and objectives. It appears the district officials do not understand the legislation that is pertinent to education so that they can help teachers to implement new policies that will assist them to be effective school managers that are proactive, visionary and goal-orientated but also work with all stakeholders. Follow-up visits after training are crucial to ensure that the curriculum is properly implemented. Visiting schools regularly is the mandate of district officials to see if what teachers have learnt during training can be implemented in the classroom. It can be pointed out that after workshops, no district official cares about what teachers are doing. District officials do not come to schools but they are only seen during training. There is a need for empowering district officials to make follow up visits after the training to ensure that the anticipated actions are effected. Although district officials conduct teacher development workshops, school principals also mentioned that there was no follow up visit to determine the impact the training had on the classroom performance (Nasser, Kidd, Burns, & Campbell, 2013).<sup>[38]</sup> District

officials are supposed to monitor, support and implement curriculum change but they are not capacitated to be more qualified and acquire knowledge of subject in order to give enough support to teachers and learners. It appears that the district does not increase its support services to train district officials in order to help teachers to implement curriculum change.

Curriculum transformation in South Africa has become the topic of much debate within the past 25 years. "The neglect of curriculum change process and stakeholders is the cause of many failed educational reform projects" (Sahlberg, 2012, p. 1).<sup>[46]</sup> "Curriculum change requires the input of different stakeholders such as teachers, school heads, parents, community members, students, district administrators and school boards" (Lumadi, 2015, p. 29).<sup>[25]</sup> As an educator in the Further Education and Training (FET) phase of the school system and in Vhembe West District in particular, the author has noticed that district officials are not trained adequately in curriculum change which impacts on learners and the economy at large and district officials are unable to demonstrate sound knowledge of subject content and various principles, strategies and resources appropriate to teaching in a South African context. Again, it is a well-known fact that there is no provision of necessary specialised and adapted materials for effective implementation of the curriculum in South African schools. These are major problems throughout South Africa where very little has been done to resolve the problems since political independence in 1994. In light of the foregoing, this study investigates how district officials are empowered to implement *Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement* effectively in the Vhembe West District in South Africa.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Defining Curriculum Implementation

Curriculum implementation is defined as the process of putting into practice a new curriculum and checking if it makes a difference or change (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2014).<sup>[43]</sup> This definition suggests that the whole aim of implementing a curriculum is to make a difference. Guro and Weber (2010)<sup>[17]</sup> define curriculum implementation as a continuous, negotiated, contested, unpredictable process with policy adaptations resulting in unexpected outcomes. This definition suggests that curriculum implementation is a complex process, which needs thorough planning by the designers and in most cases curriculum implementation is not given the attention it deserves. Curriculum implementation is one of the most critical elements of the curriculum process yet it is the most neglected (Yang, 2013).<sup>[56]</sup>

## 2.2 The Role of District Officials in Implementing CAPS

The Action Plan to 2014: Towards the Realisation of Schooling 2025 (Department of Basic Education, 2010)<sup>[9]</sup> is the Department of Basic Education's strategy to strengthen weak areas in the education system that has been identified as needing support. Goal 27 "highlights the importance of improving the frequency and quality of monitoring and support services provided by district offices to schools". But it did not mention the specific roles to be played by the district officials. It is a challenge to learn that the roles and responsibilities of district officials in the "guidelines for organisation, roles and responsibilities of education districts" 2011 are vague. The roles of district officials are to manage curriculum delivery and to train teachers to implement curriculum change but curriculum implementation has been affected by the shortage of subject specialists to support teachers in schools. According to Diko, Haupt and Molefe (2011),<sup>[11]</sup> roles of district officials are not only limited to manage curriculum delivery, but stretched to internal assessment and examination processes. Many teachers described the current role of the district officials demanded unnecessary administrative tasks and 'box ticking' by teachers. Teachers considered the role and job description of the district officials to be mainly centred on their immediate teaching needs (Adendorff & Moodley, 2014).<sup>[1]</sup>

The training that teachers received from the district officials is not satisfactory. Lumadi (2014)<sup>[26]</sup> indicates that the training the teachers received from the workshops was insufficient as it was conducted haphazardly. Similarly, Fomunyam (2013)<sup>[14]</sup> emphasises that teachers have reported that the necessary teacher-training and support to assist them in their new tasks have not been adequate to bring about the needed changes in the schools. Troudi and Alwan (2010)<sup>[51]</sup> suggest that "training and support should be of great help in reducing the stressful effects of change during implementation" (p. 117). One cannot also lose sight of the fact that poor provision of teacher training by unskilled district officials assigned by concerning the perceived implementation of *Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS)* might de-skill and limit learners' potential. Furthermore, training is not enough because the teachers were given 2–5 days workshop. Teachers were trained and maximum was about five days, so nothing can be achieved in such a short period of time (Taole, 2015).<sup>[49]</sup> It is a well-known fact that teachers have been trained to become teachers for 3–4 years and they were doing core curriculum. Fullan (2007)<sup>[16]</sup> indicates that such one-shot workshops are ineffective, as topics for training are selected by other people than those receiving training

and that follow-up support for implementation is rare. The workshops were too short and insubstantial to equip staff to deal effectively with the changes that they needed to make in class and to improve learner performance. The teachers experienced none of the envisaged external supervision, monitoring or support from the district officials in implementing the curriculum change required.

The support school principals received from district officials is not satisfactory. Bantwini (2015)<sup>[3]</sup> indicates that in the South African context, the general lack of support to schools by districts has been emphasised by researchers. Similarly, school principals and teachers note that the district only came once a year to check how far they were with the curriculum because they do not have the means or resources to come to schools (Mc Lennan, Muller, Orkin, & Robertson, 2017).<sup>[31]</sup> Evidence confirms that district leadership matters when it comes to driving curriculum reforms, as well as improving schools and student learning (Fullan, 2016).<sup>[15]</sup> The teachers are often frustrated by curriculum changes due to the lack of technical expertise to carry out teaching responsibilities, and the lack theoretical knowledge and familiarity with principles informing the implementation of curriculum change (Maharaj, Mkhize, & Nkosi, 2016).<sup>[28]</sup>

## 2.3 Challenges Faced by District Officials in Implementing CAPS

The implementation of curriculum is dependent on many factors such as resources that the schools have. Mohapi (2014)<sup>[33]</sup> argues that resources influence the quality of teaching and learning and the degree to which the curriculum can be managed and implemented (p. 1224). Resources are often insufficient in schools and in the Vhembe West District. This is evidenced by Musetha (2013),<sup>[35]</sup> who emphasises that there is a shortage of classrooms and that Grade 12 pupils are taught in empty rooms without furniture. It is difficult to find a school with well-equipped laboratory, enough classes and adequate learner support materials. Moorosi and Bantwini (2016)<sup>[34]</sup> assert that many districts in South Africa lack the resources and capability to provide professional curriculum management support. Veriava (2013)<sup>[53]</sup> revealed that Swobani High School in Vhembe District, near Musina, had received no supplies of textbooks at the start of 2012. A recent study by Makeleni and Sethusa (2014)<sup>[29]</sup> points out that the countries such as Brazil, Ghana, Guinea and the Philippines had shown improvement in learner performance due to sufficient supply of textbooks (p.105). It can be emphasised that curriculum cannot be relevant when appropriate resources are not supplied. Resources have always been a problem and they are still a problem and the government does

not provide enough resources to all schools equally. It would be a grossly unfair to expect teachers to implement the curriculum if they have not been properly prepared to do so, or if they do not have sufficient Learning and Teaching Support Materials (LTSM). Availability of resources plays a critical role in the efficient delivery of the curriculum. Lunenburg (2010),<sup>[24]</sup> argues that teachers need to have access to curriculum guides, textbooks or training connected to the school curriculum. "Curriculum change is a process of using resources effectively in order to improve curriculum" (Yasmin, Rafiq, & Ashraf, 2013, p.1).<sup>[57]</sup> It is the mandate of the district to ensure that the resources are timeously provided to schools.

Inappropriate skills for school management and leadership exist in South African schools. School principals do not have appropriate management skills to manage their schools effectively. This is evidenced by Naidoo (2014, p.1)<sup>[37]</sup> who points out that school principals need to be properly trained and skilled in school management but they are faced with a challenge to motivate the staff to accept the envisaged change. The duties of the school principals are hampered by lack of skills and by the fact that district officials fail to execute their mandate satisfactorily. District officials need to be capacitated to make sure that school principals attend workshops in order to acquire skills in the management and implementation of curriculum change. It appears that the workshops that are conducted by district officials to school principals come to nothing as they are ineffective.

There is increasing bribery and corruption at the provincial and district levels when school principal appointments are made. This tendency impacts negatively on the implementation of CAPS in the district. Heystek (2015)<sup>[18]</sup> argues that at the school level, school principal effectiveness may also be limited by the overt control of unions on the school environment. According to Tandwa (2015),<sup>[48]</sup> school principals' posts were being sold for more than R30 000 each and also in exchange for sex (p.1). These activities of selling teaching posts and capturing the state weaken the implementation of CAPS. Bribery and corruption affects district officials as they are afraid to go to schools that are run by unions and they have no say when school principals fail to implement curriculum change. It can be pointed out that the school principal who might be appointed through bribery and corruption would not be able to implement curriculum change at school. The school principal might also lack the necessary skills, knowledge and attitude to lead and manage school effectively and efficiently. Again, it can be noted that the union-run schools in the district result in poor performance by learners, ill-disciplined teachers,

mismanagement of schools and failure to execute the implementation of CAPS.

District officials are expected to visit schools and support teachers directly in their classrooms, but this is quite unrealistic, given the large numbers of schools allocated to each district officials. The moment district officials visit schools; they perform classroom observation, which many teachers do not like. If classroom observations are to be effectively used for professional development of teachers, the basic step should be the establishment of a relationship between district officials and teachers, as observation must be built on a foundation of trust (Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2011).<sup>[21]</sup> Fielding (2012)<sup>[13]</sup> indicates that one of the most important factors which affect the effectiveness of supervision is the unclassified, ambivalent relationship of teachers and supervisors. Orenaiya, Adenowo, Aroyeun and Odusoga (2014)<sup>[42]</sup> suggest that co-operative attitudes and behaviours must be established between the teachers and education supervisors for achieving positive results whether by an individual, group or organization. Furthermore, the heads of the school and staff members alike prefer working with someone who has a positive attitude (Tesema, 2014).<sup>[50]</sup>

There is a lack of collaboration among district officials in supporting schools. Mavuso (2013)<sup>[30]</sup> found that district officials tend to work in isolation and make input in the process of quality management at school and classroom level and their input is more directed at school than at classroom level. Bantwini and Diko (2011)<sup>[4]</sup> were also concerned about the knowledge gap regarding how district officials collaborate. There is no direct link between what is happening at classroom level and district officials. For effective functionality of schools, there has to be collaboration between district officials and school principals as well as teachers. Collaboration has been identified as a powerful tool to improve outcomes for all learners (Louw & Wium, 2015).<sup>[23]</sup> Altun and Yildiz (2011)<sup>[2]</sup> indicate that school improvement includes collaborative activities that are aimed to develop teachers, staff, school environment and physical conditions in addition to student achievement. However, Naicker and Mestry (2015)<sup>[36]</sup> found that collaboration between school principals collectively and district officials was lacking.

A challenge to district officials is inadequate supervision. Inadequate supervision results in teachers' inability to demonstrate adequate knowledge and understanding of the structure, function and development of their disciplines (Ololube, 2014).<sup>[41]</sup> Ololube (2013)<sup>[40]</sup> found that in Nigeria the present system of education is control-oriented rather than service-oriented and tends to focus on maintaining the status quo by regulating

institutional functions and by ensuring that bureaucratic rules and regulations are adhered to. Most district officials use their office title to create fear in the minds of teachers through their actions, thus they are more occupied with the office and title of district officials than with effective supervision. In South Africa, Dilotsothle, Smit, and Vreken, (2001)<sup>[12]</sup> found that the education system is largely about compliance with departmental regulations rather than engaging with educators about their work. Their research findings support other research done outside South Africa that the focus of the curriculum advisory service (CAS) is on management rather than on curriculum issues related to subject content, teaching or learning. De Clercq and Shalem, (2012)<sup>[6]</sup> also established that follow-up district work was ineffectual as it was more about monitoring teachers for compliance rather than to support them.

There is a lack of feedback to teachers from district officials. Productive feedback and follow-up initiatives are lacking in supporting teachers. There is thus little opportunity for discussing findings such as the need for more in-service training of teachers and whether new initiatives satisfy the identified need. Given this lack of follow-up, there is no way to ensure that supervision will contribute to school development in a cost effective way. The lack of feedback from district officials frustrates teachers and their efforts to improve. The World Bank (2010)<sup>[55]</sup> indicates that in many education systems worldwide, schools are required to submit information on which they receive virtually no feedback. This does not help schools since underperformance and poor teaching practices may continue. If feedback is provided, then the system can improve.

Teachers and school principals are in charge of curriculum change at school level and they need to be supported in a variety of ways. The teachers are not supported well by district officials as they still use outdated methodology and strategies of lesson delivery for CAPS implementation. This is evidenced by Limpopo DBE (2011)<sup>[8]</sup> which confirms that teachers teach the new curriculum using their own methodology and have difficulty in interpreting certain aspects of the official curriculum documents. It appears the district officials do not do their work effectively as teachers are not competent enough in CAPS implementation. Wallace and Fleit (2005)<sup>[54]</sup> cite factors affecting the success of curriculum reform makers to accurately diagnose the systemic problems or correctly evaluate programmes before implementation, as factors leading to successful reform in one situation may not necessarily apply to another.

## **2.4 Strategies Used to Empower Implementation**

### **of CAPS**

There have been attempts by the department to ensure that teachers are kept informed about the curriculum demands of the curriculum change. However, De Clercq (2008)<sup>[7]</sup> indicates that the capacity of the South African education system to provide appropriate professional support to schools has a poor track record. Overcrowded classrooms make it difficult for teachers to successfully implement curriculum change. It is a well-known fact that overcrowded classrooms have been an issue for years. The DBE (2009)<sup>[10]</sup> confirms that the issue of overcrowding requires further investigation. The reduction of teacher-learner ratio could bring relief to overworked and overloaded teachers. This will in turn reduce paper-work, which, most teachers lamented, hinders their effective implementation of curriculum change. It is not easy to teach CAPS and therefore it is difficult to implement as teachers are not adequately supported by district officials. District officials lack knowledge about CAPS and they impart wrong knowledge and information to the teachers. So, the department needs to empower district officials in order for them to train teachers properly. Ngubane (2014)<sup>[39]</sup> stated that the DBE is tasked with leadership, policy-making and the monitoring responsibility of improving the quality of learning and ensuring quality sustained education, but fails to do it properly.

School principals should be aware of the importance of the pillars of implementation and management in order to implement CAPS successfully. The government officials at the meso-level, as well as the secondary school principals at the micro-level are supposed to adhere to these principles. This process will help the district officials and the school principals to manage, co-ordinate and implement the new curriculum properly. Planning includes training of the staff, teaching materials, human resources and encouraging the school community to participate (Magongoa, 2011).<sup>[27]</sup> In-service training in CAPS implementation is vital as it will familiarise school principals and teachers with innovations of the curriculum implementation. Magongoa (2011)<sup>[27]</sup> argues that the DBE should train and retrain school principals to become effective in managing the new curriculum. This training should be extensive and not a once-off five-day workshop. Relevant intensive training to school principals need to be provided by district authorities and short programmes that address specific issues regarding curriculum change should also be provided. Such training may include aspects like identification of relevant learning teaching materials. Attendance at seminars and workshops on managing curriculum change implementation and sharing best practices with peers from other provinces should

be encouraged and maintained. This, in turn, will help schools to be professionally managed and provided with the necessary administrative skills. Again, training before the implementation of curriculum change is a prerequisite for meaningful and successful implementation of change.

Theories in change management have been used as frame for this study. Change denotes making or becoming distinctly different and implies a radical transformation of character or replacement with something else. Applied to empowering district officials to implement *Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement* effectively in the Vhembe West District in South Africa, change is the process of transforming the schools' organisational practices into new behaviours that support a shared vision of achieving the institutions' goals. The basic framework followed in this study to examine this change process was Lewin's (1951)<sup>[22]</sup> Force Field Model to embrace change and achieve organisational goals (Robbins & Judge, 2010).<sup>[45]</sup> According to Senior (2002),<sup>[47]</sup> Lewin's Force Field Model states that "organisations are held in equilibrium by equal and opposing, driving and resisting forces" (p. 308). The driving forces may include competitive pressures, legislative mandates, new technology, and environmental factors while resisting forces include fear of change and negative attitudes, among others. Kurt Lewin's Force Field Model comprises three stages:

- *Unfreezing: In this stage district officials have to reflect on their current practices before they adapt new behaviours.*

- *Moving or changing: District officials consider making changes that will most likely contribute to achieving the organisational goals of schools.*

- *Refreezing: Once changes are effected, new behaviours become apparent through what is observed within the organisation.*

(QueenMary & Mtapuri, 2014, p. 3)<sup>[44]</sup>

In the case of this study, it is evident that the government's legislative mandates are the driving force in organisational changes at public schools. Resisting forces include established customs and practices, teacher union agreements and the organisation's culture. Senior (2002)<sup>[47]</sup> argues that the main focus of the "unfreezing stage is centred on changing the district officials' habitual modes of thinking" as a result of new legislation, diversity in school population and technological advancement, to heighten awareness of the need to change (p. 308). Thus, there is a definite need to move away from established behaviours to create new behaviours. Once the district officials have chosen a course of action, they have to share insights about the problem, its probable causes, and the identified solutions with school management teams,

teachers, school governing bodies and other stakeholders of the organisation.

Moving (change) is the second stage of the process that essentially makes the actual changes. School principals embark on managing the implementation of CAPS programmes that will move the district officials to new types of behaviour. Van der Westhuizen (2002)<sup>[52]</sup> agrees that movement involves the development of new norms, values, attitudes, and behaviour through the identification of changes in the structure. In the refreezing stage, the district officials' behaviours become apparent where a "shared vision" could inspire the participation to attain the desired future goals of the institution (Mestry, 2017).<sup>[32]</sup>

The objectives of this study are: To find ways on how district officials are empowered in CAPS implementation in the Vhembe West District in South Africa, to identify the challenges faced by Vhembe West District in implementing CAPS in schools, to examine the kind of support that Vhembe West District provides to facilitate CAPS implementation, to identify strategies used by Vhembe West District to empower CAPS implementation and to identify the role of Vhembe West District in CAPS implementation. The rationale behind these questions was to investigate how district officials are empowered to implement *Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement* in the Vhembe West District in South Africa.

### 3. Methodology

Interpretivism was adopted as the underpinning philosophy for the study. A qualitative phenomenological design was used and produced a large amount of data that had to be analysed. The population in this study comprised all school principals and officials from the Vhembe West District in South Africa. Purposive sampling was used to select five school principals as they are curriculum managers and five officials from the district as monitors and managers of curriculum change implementation. The samples were chosen because of their professional roles, expertise, experience and knowledge that made them information-rich participants. School principals were purposively sampled as their schools are performing well in the district. District officials were selected on the ground of their long service in curriculum department. Participants were capable of making informed, independent decisions to participate or not.

This study used individual interviews which were conducted at the convenience of interviewees. The semi-structured interview was found to be suitable for this study because it allowed the participants to express their viewpoints about empowering district officials to implement *Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement* in the Vhembe West District in South Africa. This rich

and in-depth information-gathering was made possible by helping respondents relax by asking them general questions related to empowering district officials to implement *Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement* in schools in the Vhembe West District in South Africa. The semi-structured interviews were recorded using an audio-recorder with the permission of the participants. Questions which were not clear to the participants were rephrased and follow up questions were asked to assist participants answer the questions. The questions were linked to the literature review. With a semi-structured interview, I have a specific number of questions to put to the interviewees, but there was room for me to probe emergent themes raised by the interviewees. I did not limit the discussion of issues or ideas raised by the respondents on empowering district officials to implement *Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement* in the Vhembe West District in South Africa. The discussions were recorded and transcribed. Individual interviews were conducted with five school principals (participants) from five schools and five district officials. Interviews for all participants took 30 minutes. Initial contact was made through written communication, (letter of invitation to participate in the study) and then through email and face-to-face contact.

This study used a thematic data analysis technique. This study followed the six steps of Braun and Clarke (2013).<sup>[5]</sup> These include transcription, coding, searching themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and producing a report. The transcriptions were carefully and attentively read and re-read in order to be familiarised with the content thereof. Notes were taken, sorted, and organised according to objectives of the study in order to identify important themes that emerged. Based on this initial reading, clarification system for major topics and issues was developed. To protect the identity of the participants and their schools and for ethical reasons, codes were used. In order to code the data, I looked for small and large chunks of data that potentially addressed the research question of the study. I generated an initial list of ideas about the data. The data was coded and categorised so that repeated themes emerged. The initial codes were derived from the interview guides and school principals are referred to as SP whereas district officials are referred to as DO. The searching-for-themes stage begins after all the data have been coded and collated and a list of different codes has been identified across the data set. I analysed the data by forming categories or themes that were used to describe the meaning of similarity coded data. The established themes were in line with common ideas given by the participants. I conducted a review of themes by going back to the coded and collated data, and

by going back to the whole data set in order to review themes and determine the ones that were appropriate. The themes were reviewed by double-checking the coded data and making sure that data were used. I wrote the report that involved choosing examples of transcribing to illustrate elements of the themes. These extracts clearly identified issues within the theme and presented lucid examples of the point being made. The more frequently a concept occurred in the text, the more likely it would be regarded as a theme.

#### **4. Findings and Discussion**

The study used theories in change management to investigate how district officials are empowered to implement CAPS in the Vhembe West District in South Africa. On the basis of these theories, themes were developed in answering the research objectives. The discussions were summarised in five themes for the study. The five themes are the following: The role of the district in CAPS implementation; challenges in CAPS implementation; insufficient support from the district; inadequate training received from the district; and strategies used to enhance effective implementation of curriculum.

##### **Theme 1: The Role of the District in CAPS Implementation**

From the interviews I had with the participants, the study revealed that the role of district officials is vague. This is evidenced by Department of Basic Education (DBE) (2010)<sup>[9]</sup> as it did not mention the specific roles to be played by the district officials. Participants do not exactly know what is expected of them in CAPS implementation. The findings of this study suggest that the curriculum in the district was fairly well implemented. It emerged from then study that district officials know their roles and responsibilities in theory but to but the practicality of it is challenging. The study indicated availability of district officials in schools, managing curriculum by school principals, staff development efforts by a number of the district officials, availability of well-developed curricula which were clear on the goals, objectives and content to be taught as evidence that the district officials know CAPS implementation. In support of the above responses the following comments serve the purpose:

“The district supports schools concerning curriculum change. The district officials are trained for the curriculum so that it will be easy for them to monitor the curriculum that they know”. [DO1] “The district makes sure that the relevant information concerning CAPS reaches schools urgently. School principals are consulted for the new development in the district. Almost every week we send

circulars to circuits so that they reach schools urgently. These circulars are helpful and informative to teachers as they will implement and manage curriculum". [DO2] "The district is a source of inspiration to schools and it makes sure circulars are sent to schools immediately. District officials are always available in schools although they are not sure of their roles. Our roles are written in the document but they are difficult to follow". [DO3] "The district officials are deployed to help schools". [DO4] "Policy documents are usually provided by district office. The district plays a major role to ensure that all learners have access to quality education although there are challenges faced by district officials". [DO5]

Evidence from participants suggests that the district officials know their role. It appears that the district office is dedicated to help in curriculum change. The visibility of district officials in schools is an indication that they are ready to execute their role although their roles are not clear. The district is seen as doing its part by consulting schools principals and making sure relevant information concerning CAPS reaches schools. This is supported by DBE (2011)<sup>[8]</sup> by indicating that teachers are provided with policy documents which guide them as to how they can prepare their lessons. (p.5). The findings revealed that the comments from the participants are in contrary with the department as there are challenges facing the district officials. Circulars are distributed to schools but reading these circulars cannot replace workshops from the district. The district has a nice document on the roles of the district officials but to put the theory into practice is difficult. Ngubane (2014)<sup>[39]</sup> confirms that the DBE is tasked with leadership, policy-making and the monitoring responsibility of improving the quality of learning and ensuring quality sustained education, but fails to do it properly.

### **Theme 2: Challenges in CAPS Implementation**

All the participants agreed that there are challenges in CAPS implementation. It emerged from the study that there is increasing bribery and corruption when school principal appointments are made. This study found that school principals are promoted provided one produces money or accepts the position in exchange of sex. Findings indicated that teacher support materials remain the challenges in the district and school principals are also receiving inadequate training. Participants raised a concern that CAPS implementation is compromised by the lack of resources, most particularly the shortage of textbooks. The study differs from a recent study by Makeleni and Sethusha (2014)<sup>[29]</sup> who indicated that countries such as Brazil, Ghana, Guinea and the Philippines had shown improvement in learner performance due to sufficient

supply of textbooks. The views of the participants were encapsulated in the following statements:

"We don't have enough textbooks in our school. The big challenges we encounter in implementing the CAPS, are that we are poorly resourced". [SP1]. "Teaching cannot take place if the Department of Basic Education did not supply enough textbooks for learners". [SP2]. The participant raised a valid concern in that learners did not have textbooks, so they had to share the few available textbooks. The lack of resources in a developing country like South Africa is unusual. The focus on resources places the responsibility for implementation at the door of the district.

"Another pressing challenge to district officials is inadequate supervision." [SP3]. Musetha (2013)<sup>[35]</sup> affirms that there is a shortage of classrooms and that Grade 12 pupils are taught in empty rooms without furniture. (p. 1). "Workshops are not impressive and we are not doing enough in training for the curriculum because there are no materials to be used by district officials and the government does not have funds for workshops". [SP4].

DO1 commented in this way: "Teachers complained that the CAPS needed resources but most schools were under resourced. There is a problem of infrastructure failures". DO2 said: "Teachers are requested to exchange promotional positions with money and sex. Teacher unions are running the district". DO3 confirmed: "There is inadequate follow-up support for school principals after training. We lack resources like computers and vehicles to use when we go to workshops that are scheduled for us. There are also burning challenges of teacher support materials which are used for workshops and the materials that are to be used in the classroom, slow filling of district officials posts, and inappropriate skills for school management and leadership.". DO4 proudly stated: "There is a lack of collaboration among district officials in supporting schools". This can be evidenced by Mavuso (2013)<sup>[30]</sup> who indicated that the district officials tend to work in isolation and make input in the process of quality management at school and classroom level and their input is more directed at school than at classroom level. DO5 had the following to express: "I think we should stop copying other country's curriculum, burdening our country or our kids with things that are not suitable for the conditions that we are in overcrowded classes, under-resourced schools. Feedback to teachers from district officials remains the challenge".

The preceding responses are an indication that there are many challenges faced by both district officials in CAPS implementation. While it is valid that not having a textbook is a serious limitation, the position that the



participants have taken is not how they can overcome such limitations. It is a well-known fact and widely accepted that any curriculum extends well beyond a textbook, but it is arguable that the available textbook provided some form of basic curriculum guidance. It seems as if the district officials and school principals use insufficient resources as an explanation for inadequate implementation, and that they have not found creative ways to overcome such shortages. Furthermore, the fact that learners have textbooks is a good place to start, but teachers did not take that view. What became evident was that teachers and school principals seemed to place the responsibility for curriculum implementation outside of themselves, and often seemed to be teaching just because they had to. Bribery and corruption indicates that quality education in the district is non-existent. It appears that the failure of curriculum implementation in schools is a result of the curriculum that is not researched and this leads to copying curriculum change from other countries. Heystek (2015)<sup>[18]</sup> confirms that at the school level, school principal effectiveness may also be limited by the overt control of unions on the school environment.

### **Theme 3: Insufficient Support from the District**

It emerged from the study that there is a lack of finances in the district to buy Learning and Teaching Support Materials. It was found that the district officials were not doing enough to support schools to implement curriculum change. This is supported by McLennan, Muller, Orkin and Robertson (2017, p.6),<sup>[31]</sup> who assert that school principals and teachers note that the district only came once a year to check how far they were with the curriculum because they do not have the means or resources to come to schools. The study indicated that monitoring and support in schools is not that much possible. The study revealed that there was no adequate support concerning workshops. This is in line with the following responses:

SP1 stated: “The level of monitoring and supporting curriculum change by the department at school level is not satisfactory. The district officials sometimes come to visit schools on development purposes. Teachers are not professionally well developed”. SP2 had to say the following: “The district has got financial constraints and it fails to support district officials to go for workshops”. I had never attended workshops on CAPS that are adequate”. SP3 responded as follows: “The district does not support the schools adequately. Yes, we were trained on CAPS, but the training session on CAPS lasted for a short time. After training I was not ready to implement the CAPS. I relied on the knowledge of other teachers who attended the training. The workshops that were

conducted by the district officials are a waste of time because they just read manuals which the teachers can read for themselves”. SP4 said: “Challenges facing school principals are not amicably resolved. There are no enough policy documents in our schools”. SP5 confirmed: “Teachers are not professionally developed. In-service training and programs to update teachers are non-existent”.

From the above interviews and quotes, it is clear that the support schools received from the district was inadequate. It appears that the department conducted workshops without the budget thereof. Thus school principals were invited to attend the workshops in order to be exposed to curriculum changes but workshops seem to be insufficient. It is indicated that the district officials rarely come to schools in order to develop teachers professionally. This may be argued that the workshops which were conducted by the department were not useful to some teachers as the district officials read manual for teachers. It appears that schools cannot function smoothly without the supply of resources. The department must ensure that the resources are timeously provided to schools. This is supported by Bantwini (2015)<sup>[3]</sup> who confirms that in South African context, the general lack of support to schools by districts has been emphasised by researchers. Jacobs, Vakalisa, and Gawe (2011)<sup>[20]</sup> note that teachers need support to implement the curriculum.

### **Theme 4: Inadequate Training Received from the District**

It emerged from the study that school principals were insufficiently trained to manage CAPS implementation. All participants indicated that school principals felt threatened by knowledge and expertise of teachers as they received more training opportunities than school principals. The study found that the district conducted workshops and teacher training for the CAPS although they were not up to standard. The study revealed that school principals are ill-informed about curriculum change. It was pointed out that the district officials are not qualified to train schools. To validate the above assertion, the following participants reported that:

“The district organises workshops on an on-going basis. Workshops are organised during the holidays and even on Saturdays and Sundays. [DO1]. “We did our part and school principals should do the rest”. [DO2]. “The district has provided policy documents to schools and it is the turn of school principals to read and interpret them”. On the contrary SP3 responded in this fashion: “District officials were incompetent to conduct curriculum change workshops. Workshops should also be conducted by experts who know their stuff.” [SP3]. SP4 confirmed: “The

training schools received from the district is not enough. Training received by school principals to manage their schools is considered as time wasting”.

The preceding responses and quotes are an indication that the district fails to train schools satisfactorily. This implies that district officials do not have the expertise when facilitating curriculum change. Thus, the district officials should be retrained in order to know their stuff. It appears that the district officials did not get enough training or there was no training at all. It might be shameful to see district officials struggling in the presence of school principals. It can be arguable that the quality of training workshops was poor and questionable and that schools are mismanaged on account of inadequate training school principals received from the district. This implies that incompetency is common in schools. Lumadi (2014)<sup>[26]</sup> confirms that the training the teachers received from the workshops was insufficient as it was conducted haphazardly. (p.177). One may question the competence of school principals as they were trained as teachers for three years. The experience gained by the school principals in managing CAPS and school can be challenged. They mustn't rely on district officials to implement curriculum change. School principals' comments reveal that they received common training before the implementation of CAPS. The kinds of training received by school principals included district workshops, in-service trainings and cluster workshops. The school principals' responses revealed that workshops and in-service training were of low quality due to the incompetency of district officials.

#### **Theme 5: Strategies Used to Enhance Effective Implementation of CAPS**

From the interactions I had with the participants, it was evident that the retraining of district officials can make a difference in CAPS implementation. It emerged from the study that district officials are not trained adequately. Findings indicated that consistent monitoring should be done through classroom observations, class visit, moderating tests and examinations and looking at learners' work. Participants' comments are listed below:

“Retraining in the implementation of the curriculum change is necessary. Again, competence and qualifications of district officials need to be considered”. [DO1]. “Monitoring of the curriculum implementation at school level should be regularly done. District officials need to be equipped in order to help school principals and teachers with ease”. [DO2]. “The district conducted workshops in order to involve, train and keep teachers up to date with the curriculum changes. Teachers were grouped in clusters for the performing schools and the non-performing schools. The district should communicate

the CAPS through meetings, seminars and pamphlets”. [DO3]. “School principals should have a week for workshop in order to be conversant with the curriculum change. District officials should train school principals and teachers before the implementation of any curriculum change and after the launch of curriculum change”. [DO4]

On the other hand SP2 responded in this way: “Teachers should be trained to have knowledge about curriculum change. I attended workshops offered before CAPS implementation, in-service training, and other workshops organised by the district together with district officials”. Collaboration between, teachers, school principals and district officials should be emphasised”. SP3 confirmed: “The district should create enough time for the advocacy of the new curriculum before proper training can take place. District officials from the Department of Basic Education should embark on curriculum change awareness campaign through meetings, seminars and pamphlets so that teachers can accept the changes in the curriculum before they go for training”.

SP4 responded in this fashion: “Some implementation strategies to avert the challenges of curriculum change should be initiated. We are not fully involved in curriculum change, we are just being told that this is a new curriculum and this is how it works. So district officials need to come back to us. Involve teachers as to what should be done, what's best for our learners, so they must stop taking curriculum from other countries. They will formulate something that will work”. On the contrary SP5 said: “The district officials are office based and they use theory to manage the implementation of CAPS. School principals and teachers are the ones faced with the challenges on a daily basis and they are the ones interacting with learners. Teachers could formulate the best policy based on the CAPS, because they already know that assessment must be outcome based”.

From the above responses it is evident that there are strategies that can be used by the district office to enhance effective implementation of curriculum change. The above responses support the fact that the district conducted workshops inadequately. Retraining of district officials can change the standard of curriculum change. The strategies announced by the participants should be looked into as they are helpful to the implementation of curriculum change and they cannot be considered as business as usual. It is a well-known fact that district officials rarely come to schools and this make them to use theory for the implementation of curriculum change. The implication is that regular school visit will help the district to know and understand the challenges schools are facing concerning CAPS. The above responses is supported by

Fomunyan (2013)<sup>[14]</sup> who emphasises that teachers have reported that the necessary teacher-training and support to assist them in their new tasks have not been adequate to bring about the needed changes in the schools.

## 5. Recommendations

Based on the results discussed in the previous sections, the following recommendations are made to help enhance the implementation of Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement in the Vhembe West District, South Africa:

(1) Retraining of district officials should be done. It emerged from the study that district officials are not trained adequately. These district officials should be capacitated to implement curriculum change in order to address the challenges of curriculum change implementation.

(2) Provision of funds should be considered when curriculum change is launched. It emerged from the study that the district has got financial constraints and it lacks funds to buy Learning and Teaching Support Materials.

(3) Research should be done before the launch of curriculum change. The study indicated that curriculum change has been copied from other countries and it is difficult to implement CAPS in South African schools. Research should also help district officials with skills to implement curriculum change effectively.

(4) Capacity building workshops should be provided to teachers, school principals and district officials. The study found that the district officials should be capacitated to implement curriculum change in order to address the challenges of curriculum change implementation. The district should identify and prepare potential school principals before appointments are made.

(5) Promoting district officials competence should be of priority. It emerged from the study that competence and qualifications of the district officials should be given preferences. The study revealed that incompetency is ripe in schools due to the training school principals received from district officials who do not know their stuff. Thus district officials should be qualified to train schools better. The appointment of qualified officials to assist in the implementation of the CAPS should make a difference.

## 6. Limitations of the Study

This research study took place in Vhembe West District in South Africa whereby five school principals and five district officials were sampled and participated to gather data. As such, other school principals and district officials were not involved in the interview. A further research will be required to involve district officials and school principals in curriculum change from all districts in South Africa. A further limitation was that the 10 participants

interviewed were too few and that all the participants were from same education district. Their experiences with the phenomenon of CAPS were therefore similar. A further study may interview other districts and many participants in CAPS implementation to yield different results from what this study would suggest. This research study is qualitative in design and, as a result, its findings cannot be generalised to the population of this study; instead, they can be transferred to other schools and districts with similar contexts and/or experiences. A further research will be required to involve school principals and district officials in CAPS implementation from all districts in South Africa. A larger number of participants from more schools and districts might have contributed to the variety of responses thus enriching the findings.

## 7. Conclusion

In conclusion, results have shown that there are many impediments faced by district officials in curriculum change implementation. The implementation of CAPS has brought many challenges in schools and that proper training of district officials should be done before the implementation of curriculum change. This study concludes that ongoing support from the Department of Basic Education and the provision of resources in ensuring smooth curriculum implementation is needed. The repetition of similar answers by different participants proved to me that the instrument I used was valid for the purpose of this study. The instrument I used to interview participants did not disappoint me – it was suitable and reliable. In conclusion, during interviews, this study produced similar results from different participants; therefore, this study is valid and reliable.

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