

TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS ON THE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF HISTORY 2166 SYLLABUS REFORM IN ZIMBABWE

Walter Sengai & Matseliso L. Mokhele

ABSTRACT

In 1990, Zimbabwe underwent its first major post-colonial syllabus reform in the teaching of History at secondary school level. Scholars who have studied this reform usually overlook teachers' perceptions when explaining its development and implementation. This qualitative study explores History teachers' perceptions on their participation in the planning and implementation of the History 2166 syllabus reform. Using qualitative phenomenological design methodology, the researchers listened to the voice of the voiceless, as teachers expressed their perspectives, views, understanding, and interpretations on the syllabus reform during semi-structured interviews with five purposively sampled History teachers drawn from five different schools within the Glen View/Mufakose district in Harare province. The interviews were further transcribed, coded and categorised into meaningful themes. All the participants signed consent forms to demonstrate their willingness to participate in the study. This study appreciates that teachers are the chalk-face implementers of syllabus reforms in any given context of change and their views matter. The key finding was that the 'top-down' approach used during this syllabus reform proved disastrous, ultimately producing a teacher-proof syllabus that deskilled and disempowered teachers thereby leading to tissue-rejection and its ultimate failure to effectively address key expectations. The research concludes that previous explanations on the success and/or failure of curriculum reforms were rather incomplete for they sidestepped teachers' perceptions in explaining the development and implementation of the reforms in the first place.

Keywords: curriculum reform, development and implementation, History 2166 syllabus, syllabus change, teachers' perceptions,

INTRODUCTION

Research has confirmed that teachers are key players in the success and/or failure of curriculum reforms since this requires major shifts in teachers' beliefs, understanding and pedagogical practices (Mathura, 2019; Alsubaie, 2016; Al-Kathiri, 2016). Teachers are often left out of discussions on curriculum reforms since focus tends to be on student learning although it has been proven that teachers also need to be lifelong learners (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2014). Teachers are key partners in the process of curriculum change and it should therefore be an opportunity for their voices to be heard before the actual implementation so they should be given the opportunity to make an input during the initial curriculum development processes (Al-Kathiri, 2016). Teacher involvement in curriculum reform debates is important for their practice thereby illustrating that teachers' perceptions are key since they are the agencies of curriculum implementation in the

classroom. Furthermore, teachers express dissatisfaction with their diminished involvement in curriculum reform programmes and hope to be more actively involved since they are at the chalk-face (Mathura, 2019; Chitate, 2010). The majority of curriculum reform programmes fail to appreciate the key role that teachers play. Researchers such as Eger, (2016), Chitate, (2010) and Jansen, (2010) have advanced several explanations over the contrasting fortunes for curriculum changes, with most using the usual political contestations rhetoric to explain the chequered reception of the reforms while turning a blind eye on teachers' perceptions. This study therefore seeks to examine in detail the History teachers' perceptions on the development and implementation of the History 2166 syllabus, specifically their views, understanding and beliefs. It was intriguing to explore such issues as according to Mokhele (2011), teachers are at the heart of reforms for they must execute the demands of these reforms in the classroom.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Background of The History 2166 Syllabus

The introduction of the History 2166 syllabus is regarded as the first curriculum reform at secondary school in independent Zimbabwe (Barnes, 2007). It was taught in schools between 1990 and 2000. The main aims of this curriculum were that, through the study of documents, learners were to be trained to analyse history, interpret and evaluate it, detect bias in documents as well as books, understand points of view, weigh evidence and discover value judgements (Moyo, 2014; Ndebele & Tshuma, 2014). The teachers used primary sources to develop skills required for the new Ordinary Level (O-Level) History syllabus (Ndebele & Tshuma, 2014). The History 2166 syllabus was meant to transform the learning of History and it gradually removed the archaic approach of content regurgitation paving the way for the critical and in-depth scrutiny of historical information (Moyo, 2014). In spite of all its good intentions, the History 2166 syllabus proved to be very unpopular in the country (Moyo, 2014; Chitate, 2010). Many of the church-run, private and even government schools openly disapproved of key aspects of the syllabus' aims, content and methodology. Churches were agitated by some aspects of the syllabus, which they regarded as being incompatible with the Christian faith (Chitate, 2010). Consequently, in 2000 the syllabus was removed from the History classroom.

Curriculum Reform and Implementation

Change is unquestionably a key part of the contemporary world, and education should be included in that change if it is to accomplish its obligation which is the preparation of young people by equipping them with adequate skills to apply in order to live sustainably in the world, and also to shape, control and direct the changing world. Since the society is dynamic and keeps changing, the phenomenon of change is therefore unavoidable (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2014). According to Abudu & Mensah (2016), the meaning and relevance of education depend on how curriculum is developed. Curricula usually operate within organisational and societal constraints, which sometimes lead to the desire for change. Curriculum reform refers to deliberate actions to improve a learning environment by adopting new methods of presenting material to learners that includes

human interaction, hands-on activities and learner feedback (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2014). Teachers are the sole agents of educational change (Fullan, 2007). Curriculum development and implementation should therefore be a seamless flow amongst all the stakeholders involved so as to ensure that teachers will not implement the curriculum in an *ad hoc* manner but will be better prepared and knowledgeable to implement it (Mathura, 2019).

Teachers' Perceptions on Curriculum Reform and Implementation

According to researchers, there is a need for studies whose thrust is to focus on teachers' perceptions of integrating innovations (Mathura, 2019; Nghihalwa, 2018; Al-Kathiri, 2016; Zohrabi, 2014). Findings from these studies confirm teachers' perceptions of syllabus development as a task that is done elsewhere, a task that is said to be beyond their responsibility and capability (Mathura, 2019; Al-Seghayer, 2014). If 'the teacher's voice' is ignored, it thwarts the outcomes of new thinking on curriculum development, thereby prolonging the untenable situation that teachers, as potential curriculum agents, simply remain 'voices crying in the wilderness' (Al-Kathiri, 2016).

Teachers' perceptions of curriculum reforms should be regarded as a fundamental component in ensuring that a new curriculum is successfully implemented (Chidiebere, Obiamaka & Nkechi, 2016). The teachers' backgrounds and what they already know greatly determines their perceptions of curriculum reforms. Teacher perceptions and knowledge of curriculum is very important since they are the implementers of the policies that they ultimately settle for as being suitable for the classroom (Chidiebere, Obiamaka & Nkechi, 2016). Therefore, there is need for the system of teacher-isolation to be urgently replaced by a mutual decision-making process that prioritises the sharing of knowledge among key stakeholders in education such as policy-makers, teachers and teacher leaders.

Teachers' Role in Curriculum Reform and Implementation

In many parts of the world, it is universally accepted that teachers play a pivotal role in any change within the school system (Chidiebere, Obiamaka & Nkechi, 2016). Chale (2018) equates teachers to football players who need to be actively involved throughout the game. Teachers are associated with the success of all reform efforts in education and they are considered as the crucial linkage in any reform process (Mathura, 2019). Researchers agree that teachers have increasingly become the centrepiece of curriculum reform rather than merely waiting to execute the policies prescribed on them (Chale, 2018; Alnefaie, 2016; Zohrabi, 2014; Wadesango & Bayaga, 2013). The optimal involvement of teachers in the curriculum development process makes the outdated focus on the role of teachers as mere 'recipients' redundant (Al-Kathiri, 2016).

Teacher participation during the developmental phases of curriculum reform is very crucial since their lack of involvement in the enactment of curriculum materials has met with assorted outcomes (Oloruntegbe, 2011). The idea that curriculum experts are the most effective curriculum designers confirms the statement by Banegas (2011, p. 429) that the authorities usually believe that designing the curriculum "should be left in the experts' hands" whereas, accordingly, teachers are capable of participating actively in curriculum development. The role played by teachers in curriculum reform and implementation has traditionally been considered as 'executing' the inventive ideas of other stakeholders such as policy-makers and curriculum designers. However,

in modern times, literature concurs that the reform and implementation of the curriculum should be placed in the hands of the professional sector that involves teachers (Alnefaie, 2016; Banegas, 2011; Oloruntegbe, 2011). The conclusion from these studies is that the involvement of the teachers should be more visible in the development and implementation of syllabus changes, particularly when measuring the combined success of the curriculum using their involvement. Curriculum reform will therefore continue to rely on teachers' assurance to claim its ownership, and this will increasingly determine the overall performance of students in learning the revolution integrated in the curriculum notwithstanding the specific discipline (Chidiebere, Obiamaka & Nkechi, 2016).

The teacher is best placed and is the most qualified resource person to be consulted during curriculum reform and implementation (Ogar & Opoh, 2015). Teachers are the link between the ministry and the students since they can perceive the strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum and identify the needs of the students (Alnefaie, 2016). This is consistent with Oloruntegbe (2011, p. 448) who asserts that teachers are "on field and know what and where change is needed". Zohrabi's (2014) study based on the design of a syllabus with teachers in Iran, confirmed that teachers can develop their own curriculum rather than being implementers of another designer's work. Although Alnefaie, (2016) showed that decision-making during the curriculum reform process is authoritative, Zohrabi (2014), however points out that when teachers are given a chance to participate in curriculum development, their involvement impacts positively on their job satisfaction and results in teachers' and students' needs being met.

Curriculum reform and implementation is a learning process for teachers and for their schools. Like learners, teachers also need active engagement in the curriculum so that as they are involved in curriculum planning, they are learning through collaboration with other teachers (Nghihalwa, 2018). If teachers do not get an extensive understanding of the curriculum, the academic standards and learner behaviours may fall. Changing the way teachers teach and students learn requires specific approaches (Alnefaie, 2016). In-service training of teachers is therefore necessary. Helping teachers to create professional learning communities and schools to learn from each other are the recommended approaches (Mokhele, 2011).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper is part of a larger study that qualitatively explored the perspectives of the History teachers on the History 2166 and 2167 syllabus reforms in Zimbabwe. This particular study used a phenomenological design to examine teacher perceptions on the development and implementation of the History 2166 syllabus reform. Creswell & Poch (2018, p. 48) ascertains that "we conduct qualitative research when we want to empower individuals to share their stories [and] hear their voices". Myers (2019) further adds that data collected under qualitative research can be useful in understanding people's behavior and actions, and the broader context within which they live and work. In order to collect the necessary data, a total of five purposively sampled History teachers drawn from five secondary schools in the Glen View/ Mufakose district in the Harare Metropolitan province were selected. The participants were interviewed using semi-structured interviews which were audio recorded. Follow-up telephonic interviews were used to follow-up on issues that were not clear. The data collected was further analysed using content analysis.

Content analysis is a research method which allows the qualitative data collected in research to be analysed systematically and reliably so that generalisations can be made in relation to the categories of interest to the researcher (Hamad, et al., 2016). The audio recorded interviews were transcribed, coded and categorised into meaningful major themes around teacher participation in the development and implementation of the History 2166 syllabus reform. In order to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the study, we used a pilot study and refined the interview protocol for relevancy. All the selected participants signed the informed consent letters to illustrate their willingness to participate voluntarily in the study.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In order to fully understand the perceptions of the teachers involved in the History 2166 syllabus changes, we provided thick descriptions based on detailed stories from the five purposively sampled History teachers drawn from five secondary schools who taught the syllabus. We present the interview conversations we had with the teachers whom we sampled to participate in this study, Mr Mapfumo, Mrs Murakani, Mr Chitondo, Ms Masara and Mr Chituku. (All the names of people used in this study are pseudonyms).

Biographical background of The Participants

The biographical data illustrated in the table below show that all the five participants in this study have rich experience in the teaching of History at secondary school. The most experienced participant, Ms Masara has 32 years of experience while the least experienced one, Mr Chitondo has 24 years of experience. This makes them ideal to share their teaching experiences and perspectives in the subject.

Table 1: Biographical background of the participants

Teacher's Name	Sex	Professional Qualifications	Experience	Subject specialisation
Mr Mapfumo	M	Diploma in Education; Bachelor of Education; Masters in Education.	26 years	History/ Geography
Mrs Murakani	F	Diploma in Education; Bachelor of Education.	26 years	History/ English
Mr Chitondo	M	Diploma in Education.	24 years	History/ English
Ms Masara	F	Diploma in Education; Bachelor of Education; Masters in Education.	32 years	History/ Shona

Mr Chituku	M	Diploma in Education; Bachelor of Education; Masters in Education.	26 years	History/ Religious studies
------------	---	--	----------	----------------------------

The Development Stages of The History 2166 Syllabus Reform

Whenever syllabus reforms are being developed and implemented, it is pertinent to establish the level of participation by the teachers in the process since they are at the chalk face stage of the implementation phase (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2014). Teachers should be viewed as the primary group in curriculum development (Al-Kathiri, 2016; Wadesango & Bayaga, 2013). We therefore took time to find out from all our five respondents as to how much they got involved in the development of the History 2166 syllabus as well as the extent of their involvement.

Asked to comment on her level of involvement in the development of the History 2166 syllabus, Ms Masara pointed out that,

The syllabus designers completely left out the classroom practitioners from the crucial stage of designing the History 2166 syllabus. As History teachers, we were clearly surprised. The genealogy of the syllabus was deeply rooted in political foundations to the extent that so many instructional practices were trampled underfoot.

Mrs Murakani was equally sceptical of the level of teacher involvement during the development of the History 2166 syllabus and remarked thus,

The political premises upon which the syllabus was based led to the design process being restricted to politicians while teachers were excluded. So the foot soldiers were absent from the war!

The above view testifies that History teachers were left out from the development stage of the History 2166 syllabus reform probably due to the overwhelming ideological considerations in the syllabus (Apple & Apple, 2018). Another teacher, Mr Mapfumo pointed out that due to Zimbabwe's centrally prescribed curriculum, teachers hardly participate in the development stages of the curriculum but only come in during the implementation stages.

You see, our curriculum and syllabi for all subjects are designed by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE) through the Curriculum Development Unit (CDU)¹ before being disseminated to the schools for us to implement. The participation of teachers in planning and development stages of syllabi is therefore very limited.

Nonetheless, Mr Mapfumo acknowledged that a few teachers are usually sampled to either take part in pilot studies or make hands-on contributions on a proposed syllabus before it is released for implementation in the schools.

¹ The Curriculum Development Unit is now known as the Curriculum Development and Technical Services Department (CDTSD)

Sometimes, the CDU officials select a few teachers to participate in the planning and designing of new syllabi but such opportunities are given to teachers from the so-called 'big schools' or from teachers' unions so as to give the exercise an air of being inclusive.

He however indicated that he missed out on participation during the development of the History 2166 syllabus, since he was still at a teacher-training college. Asked to shed more light on why teachers were left out of the key process, Ms Masara added that,

When we got our independence from Britain in 1980, we inherited a racially biased education system riddled with racial segregation policies so there was need to address the issue by revamping the syllabus. When the History 2166 syllabus was introduced in secondary schools in 1990, its major aim was to replace the colonial syllabuses such as 2157, 2158 and 2160 which had continued to be used long after independence in 1980.

This shows that the reform of the History syllabus was long overdue, since colonial syllabi were still in use, something that might have justified the government's decision to overlook the procedural widespread consultation of History teachers through pilot tests and in-service training maybe fearing the delays and costs associated with such endeavours.

We also took time to find out from Mr Chituku about his level of participation in the planning and designing of the History 2166 syllabus. He said that he hardly participated in the development stages of the History 2166 syllabus reform but actively took part in the implementation of the syllabus. He therefore remarked thus,

The input of the History teachers was clearly missing from the History 2166 syllabus

The above interviews indicate that during the History 2166 syllabus reform the History teachers were not actively involved in the development stages due to the political exigencies. This may begin to explain some of the findings from previous research (Moyo, 2014; Ndebele & Tshuma, 2014; Chitate, 2010).

The other participant, Mr Chitondo however highlighted that he missed out on participation in the History 2166 syllabus development processes since he was not yet a History teacher at the time when the syllabus was designed having been allocated to teach English at his school, so there was no way he could have participated in the process. He however stated that from his knowledge of the developmental stages of the syllabus, it was widely observed in most schools that History teachers had been snubbed.

There was agreement among all the five respondents therefore on the failure by the policy-makers to involve teachers in the development of the History 2166 syllabus. All the five participants hardly participated during this phase of the syllabus. The diminished role of the History teachers proved very decisive in the ultimate fate of the History 2166 syllabus reform thereby confirming our assertion that teacher involvement was indeed the missing piece in the jigsaw.

Implementation of The History 2166 Syllabus Reform

We proceeded to find out from our participants as to their level of involvement and experiences during the implementation of the History 2166 syllabus reform. Ms Masara said that when she began teaching the History 2166 syllabus at its inception, it was more of learning the ropes since she had not been adequately prepared for the syllabus during her teacher training period. She had no exposure at all to the History 2166 syllabus at college. She pointed out that when she went for teaching practice during her college days she was teaching the History 2158 syllabus.

When I began teaching the History 2166 syllabus it was really difficult for me since I had taught the History 2158 syllabus during my teaching practice at college. It was an experiment on the learners and we would bombard each other (the teacher and the learners) with questions. It was learning in the field and I would like to believe that in my first year some learners were sacrificed and became casualties of this arrangement not because they were poor but because their teacher was unaware of the syllabus requirements. Nonetheless, I consider the experience I derived from my first days of teaching the syllabus as an eye-opener.

This shows that some History teachers were thrown at the deep end when the History 2166 syllabus was introduced, without proper preparations thereby sacrificing the learners. However, Ms Masara added that things went on to improve because they had a very supportive History Education Officer (EO) in the district who moved around organising History seminars, subject panel meetings and cluster workshops to staff develop History teachers.

We told him that we were just teaching but we did not know what was really expected of us in the new syllabus. He then organised workshops for us to be staff developed. Thereafter, I would like to believe that my next crop of learners were better equipped since I gained a lot from the staff development initiatives by the EO and I became aware of what was expected to be done and I became better prepared to deal with the History 2166 syllabus.

The quotation above demonstrates the integral role played by staff development initiatives which were organized by the History EO in the district to try and salvage the situation since this helped History teachers to improve their teaching skills.

According to Ms Masara, the immediate effect of the staff development was the rebranding of the subject to make it more appealing, especially to the learners. She highlighted that the History 2166 syllabus had some interesting aspects such as the thrust on pupils' knowledge of content, analysis and even imagination skills.

In the History 2166 syllabus, I liked the analysis, imagination and the content. The source-based questions were eventful and thought-provoking and they encouraged History pupils to think freely. After getting exposed to workshops I started to apply the skills I learnt there and my students really benefitted. We concentrated on both content and skills. It needed someone who was very imaginative.

Mrs Murakani linked the diminished role of History teachers during the development stages of the History 2166 syllabus to the challenges that they later encountered in teaching the syllabus when she added that,

The major challenges faced by the History teachers had to do with the interpretation of the syllabus since they were out of touch with its requirements having been omitted from the inception stages.

When probed as to when she started teaching the History 2166 syllabus, Mrs Murakani revealed that she first taught the History 2166 syllabus in 1995. She however said that she did not choose whether or not to teach the syllabus since Zimbabwe uses a centralised curriculum where decisions over the syllabi for different subjects are made from a centralised policy making body, the CDU and individual subject teachers just implement the syllabi given to them.

The CDU plans and designs the syllabi before disseminating them to the teachers within the schools for implementation.

Asked about her experiences with the History 2166 syllabus, Mrs Murakani revealed that she had problems in approaching and understanding the History 2166 syllabus so at first she hated it with a passion. She claimed that some of her colleagues teaching the same subject equally disliked the History 2166 syllabus at that time. She explained that their hatred of the syllabus stemmed from the fact that there had been no in-service preparations for the History teachers before the coming in of the new History syllabus so most of them found themselves deskilled. Asked about how the syllabus reform had been implemented, Mrs Murakani said,

Most teachers only came across the History 2166 syllabus in the classroom when they were implementing it. This was regrettable. The way the syllabus reform was carried out created lots of confusion among both pupils and teachers. As History teachers we detested the syllabus due to the challenges which we faced in interpreting it to pupils. We failed to appreciate the History 2166 syllabus because we were not articulate with most of the skills it required.

The quote above testifies that History teachers faced some challenges during the implementation of the History 2166 syllabus and this marked the beginning of the problems for the new syllabus.

Mr Mapfumo actively participated in the implementation stage of the History 2166 syllabus starting in 1994 when he joined the teaching profession and he taught the syllabus right up to the time when it was replaced in 2000. Asked about how he got involved in teaching the syllabus, Mr Mapfumo indicated he taught it since it was the only one being offered in the schools where he worked.

I taught the syllabus because it was the only one on offer. At one school I even wanted to do the History 2158 syllabus because I had done it at college but that was really impossible.

The interesting issue that came up from this quotation is that while Mr Mapfumo trained in the History 2158 syllabus at college, when he was deployed in the field he was expected to teach the History 2166 syllabus. The History 2166 syllabus' thrust on complex skills made it really difficult for both History teachers and the learners. According to Mr Mapfumo, the new History syllabus was very challenging and most teachers struggled to impart the skills to the learners since they had actually trained in a different syllabus at college, the History 2158 syllabus.

At college, the thrust had been on the History 2158 syllabus which concentrated more on content coverage as opposed to skills.

When he got to the classroom after completing his teacher training course, Mr Mapfumo was confronted by the History 2166 syllabus. He therefore found himself deskilled by the new syllabus which appeared unfamiliar to him. Asked to further explain the reasons for his struggles in the teaching of History, Mr Mapfumo indicated thus,

This was due to the shallow coverage given to the skills during my teacher training years at college where we were only taught on other areas like description and analysis and not on source-based questions. The skills were so complex and at one time while emphasising on the skills of empathy and imagination, I asked a student to imagine that he was Shaka's soldier and he said 'sir, why are you asking me to imagine when I was not there during Shaka's time?

This shows the level of challenges that History teachers encountered in trying to impart the complex skills such as empathy and imagination required in the History 2166 syllabus. This may begin to explain findings from earlier studies which blamed the challenges faced by the History 2166 syllabus on the absence of pilot testing and in-servicing of the History teachers (Ndebele & Tshuma, 2014; Chitate, 2010). Teachers should therefore receive adequate in-service training in order to make them become articulate with new curriculum requirements (Alsubaie, 2016).

Mr Chitondo began teaching the History 2166 syllabus in 1996. He taught the senior classes for a long time due to his improvement of History results since he invested a lot of effort. Apparently, he was the only trained History teacher at the school.

I got stuck with the History Forms 3 and 4 classes for a long time. When I arrived at the school, the percentage pass rate was about 16 per cent then with my first batch I pushed it up to 35 per cent and thereafter continued improving. Although I faced several problems during my stay at this school it did not deter me from my commitment to work hard for the benefit of the History learners.

The evidence above shows that Mr Chitondo was quite a competent History teacher since he improved the History results under very difficult working conditions.

Mr Chitondo said that he struggled to impart the required skills to the History learners since he was inadequately prepared for the demands of the History 2166 syllabus.

At college, I had specialised in the History 2158 syllabus but I was being made to teach the History 2166 syllabus. Except for a few topics, every other aspect appeared new to me. I really struggled to articulate the issues as per expectation. In the end the History learners suffered since I did not offer them the best tuition to prepare them for the external examinations.

The evidence above bears testimony to the ill-preparations which History learners were subjected to as a direct consequence of being taught by ill-prepared teachers such as Mr Chitondo. The History teachers had not been in-serviced on the key requirements of the History 2166 syllabus so most struggled to impart the required skills to the learners. The absence of staff development programmes for History teachers on the new syllabus derailed the History 2166 syllabus reform. Mrs Murakani felt that the curriculum planners should have done a pilot study before introducing the syllabus in the schools, in-serviced the teachers and also involved the classroom practitioners during the development of the History 2166 syllabus,

I really did not know how to teach most of the skills which the syllabus expected me to impart to the learners. When I went for my teacher-training diploma, the thrust was on the content-based History 2158 and 2160 syllabi.

The History 2166 syllabus therefore appeared to have deskilled the History teachers who were ill-prepared for the demands of the new syllabus. The learners were equally confused by the requirements for highly abstract skills that the syllabus demanded. The absence of in-service programmes for History teachers on the new syllabus therefore derailed the History 2166 syllabus reform and led to tissue-rejection (Mokhele, 2011). According to the progress report presented to the National History Subject Panel in May 1989, financial and other constraints made it difficult to hold in-service courses on the new syllabus for all the provinces in 1988 as planned (Chitate, 2010). Mr Chituku was more frank,

Due to lack of the necessary in-service on how to teach the new syllabus, I remember that I became one of the worst and most unpopular teachers at my school and my subject was always the worst performing in the external examinations. I remember that in 1999, of the 55 students in my O-Level class no one passed, making me a laughing stock within and even outside the school.

The History teachers that were interviewed also expressed their views on the structure of the History 2166 syllabus. They argued, for example, that the syllabus was too long to be taught with sufficient depth during the two-year O-Level course. Mrs Murakani remarked thus,

Imagine a situation where I had to teach sufficient content to the pupils to enable them to apply the new skills using the content. Then I had to move on to the demanding task of imparting skills to the pupils. Then, there was the requirement to take pupils on field trips, excursions or out-of-school visits to familiarise them with primary sources of history.

Mr Chitondo added that,

Due to the fact that the History 2166 syllabus was too long, I ended up resorting to the 'patch-era' approach to the syllabus whereby I taught some popular topics and skipped others. This caused problems to the learners during external examinations since they could encounter questions on areas that they had never covered at all.

Mr Chituku however appeared to appreciate the 'weighty' History 2166 syllabus since he also acknowledged its strengths thus,

The syllabus was too wide and you could not complete it yet all the sections were very key in the learner understanding historical concepts.

Asked to comment on the structural composition of the History 2166 syllabus Mr Mapfumo supported the earlier views thus,

The need for field trips to equip History pupils with the skills of proper historians created timetabling problems coupled with financial burdens for our shoelace school budgets.

Evidence from this current study shows that teaching of the History 2166 syllabus could only be achieved through frequent out-of-school visits to historical sites, something most schools could not arrange due to the logistical constraints stated in the quote above. An additional point that also came out of the interviews was the History teachers' concern about their impending failure to deliver the 'weighty' content to pupils in the expected time of two years. This seemingly confirms critiques of the 'new history' approach who argue that good History teaching cannot be devoid of content (Mapetere, 2013). Be that as it may, all our five respondents agreed that the History 2166 syllabus had the proper analytical skills meant to train their learners to become 'proto-historians'²

Teaching and learning is normally followed by the process of assessment, as a result, we had to further follow up on the question of assessment. Mr Mapfumo noted that when it came to assessment, the History 2166 syllabus was made up of two examination papers. The syllabus had a challenging Paper 1 which was made up of only three source-based³ questions that were compulsory. He explained thus,

The History 2166 syllabus examination was very challenging especially Paper 1 on source-based questions. Some teachers could not even interpret source-based questions. Even in the current 2167 syllabus examination paper where the first question is on sources very few candidates attempt that question on sources. Maybe if you take statistics, they could be 0, 1 percent of the total candidature.

² Proto-historians refers to 'little historians'

³ A source-based question refers to a question that is based on a picture or photograph with some links to a broader theme or story.

According to Mr Mapfumo most History teachers were not articulate with the skills that were demanded by the syllabus so they did not teach source-based skills in schools since they were too difficult and demanded analytical skills that were not found in most of the learners. He added that some teachers cannot even answer these source-based questions.

Even the examiners marking the papers faced challenges in the interpretation of source-based questions since they (examiners) were drawn from those teachers who were teaching the subject.

Mr Mapfumo pointed out that at one time he took a sample during an external examination marking session⁴ and the statistics showed that source-based questions were very unpopular. He also added that he personally did not like the History 2166 syllabus due to the way in which the questions were structured. He explained,

Can you imagine having an examination paper with three source-based questions, with all of them being compulsory? This was quite cumbersome. So if a candidate is not well versed in sources, he/she gets a zero. The History 2166 syllabus Paper 1 was a complete non-starter since most candidates dismally failed the entire paper and this was a very bad advertisement for the subject.

The complicated skills which characterised the History 2166 syllabus caused challenges for him and other teachers. Consequently this led to poor results.

Mr Chituku thinks that the History 2166 syllabus became unpopular with pupils because some History teachers used poor methods to teach the skills and ended up poorly preparing such pupils for external examinations. He corroborated thus,

Many learners faced difficulties with the History 2166 syllabus due to the nature of the skills that they needed to master in order to effectively respond to questions in the examination papers. In the end, History candidates performed disastrously in the examinations. This was clearly one of the major reasons why the syllabus had to be abandoned.

There was a divorce between examination requirements and the situation on the ground thereby showing that teachers should play an instrumental role in the syllabus changes. Mrs Murakani added that,

There was also a mismatch between the methodology and the resources that were available at the History teachers' disposal so teachers failed to effectively prepare their learners for public examinations.

Therefore, there appeared to be a concoction of challenges in the implementation of the new syllabus since a new syllabus was being taught by ill-prepared teachers to equally bewildered

⁴ Mr Mapfumo is a leader in one of the History 2167 syllabus papers at national level.

learners. Chitate (2010) referred to the ensuing complications during the implementation of the History 2166 syllabus as a 'crisis of expectations'. Consequently, the popularity of History as a subject plummeted to rock-bottom levels.

In the end, the syllabus was unceremoniously scrapped from the secondary school curriculum in 2000 due to the overwhelming criticism that it faced after the public outcry due to the poor results coming from History candidates in public examinations (Chitate, 2010).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it is our contention that teachers are actually at the chalk-face and their input is critical in the success and/or failure of any curriculum reform, which they implement. This is because teachers feel ownership of the curriculum when they are involved in the curriculum development stage too and not only at implementation. The evidence from the biographical information of History teachers involved in this study show that they are qualified and experienced, meaning that they had the necessary skills that could have been integrated into the curriculum during the development phase but these teachers were neither part of curriculum planning nor asked for their contributions. Therefore, there is evidence that teachers' knowledge and experience were not utilised. Evidence from this study further shows that it may not matter whether a curriculum is supported politically, if the teachers are not actively involved, it will see the light of the day but might not be effectively implemented thus leading to its death in the classroom. The teacher as a key player, should be seen in 'every phase' of curriculum making, especially the planning of goals, materials, content and methods. This was however not the case during similar phases of the History 2166 syllabus as confirmed by the respondents. This present study contends that the diminished involvement of teachers in the development stages was a glaring oversight which subsequently meant that most of the History teachers were inadequately prepared to meet the implementation challenges associated with the syllabus. The History teachers as the people at the forefront of curriculum reform and their views were part of the missing piece in the story of the History 2166 syllabus. This view is supported by data gathered from interviews with History teachers who unanimously agreed that the absence of teachers from the development stages of the History 2166 syllabus reform led to the failure of the reform. While the findings of this study may not be generalisable, they succeed in highlighting the primacy of teacher involvement in curriculum reforms in order to avoid catastrophes such as the History 2166 syllabus reform. The use of the History 2166 syllabus reform in Zimbabwe as a context of study serves to bring attention to the need for improvement to curriculum reforms in the teaching of History in the world in general and in developing countries in particular. Further studies may be pursued on teachers' perceptions on the role of other stakeholders in the curriculum reform matrix during the post-colonial syllabus changes in History at secondary school in the country.

REFERENCES

- Abudu, A. M., & Mensah, M. A. (2016). Basic School Teachers' Perceptions about Curriculum Design in Ghana. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 7(19): 21-29.
- Al-Kathiri, F. (2016). The Voice of the Teacher in Syllabus Design. *English Language and*

Literature Studies, 6(1): 87-93.

- Alnefaie, S. K. (2016). Teachers' role in the development of EFL curriculum in Saudi Arabia: The marginalised status. *Cogent Education*, 3(1): 1240008.
- Al-Seghayer, K. S. (2014). The actuality, inefficiency, and needs of EFL teacher-preparation programs in Saudi Arabia. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English Literature*, 3(1): 143-151.
- Alsubaie, M. A. (2016). Curriculum development: Teacher involvement in curriculum development. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 7(9): 106-107.
- Apple, M., & Apple, M. W. (2018). *Ideology and curriculum*. Routledge.
- Banegas, D. L. (2011). Teachers as 'reform-doers': Developing a participatory curriculum to teach English as a foreign language. *Educational Action Research*, 19: 417-432.
- Barnes, T. (2007). 'History has to play its role': Constructions of race and reconciliation in secondary school historiography in Zimbabwe, 1980-2002. *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 33(7): 633-651.
- Chale, W. (2018). Teacher participation in curriculum development process: Views of teachers from selected primary schools in Mwanza City. A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education (arts) in Curriculum Design and Development of the Open University of Tanzania.
- Chitate, H. (2010). Post independent Zimbabwe's new 'O' Level history syllabus 2166: A crisis of expectations. *Zimbabwe Journal of Educational Research*, 17(3): 1-12.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th.ed International student edition.). Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Eger, K. (2016). An Analysis of Education Reform in Sub-Saharan Africa.
- Fullan, M. (2007). *The new meaning of educational change*. London: Routledge.
- Hamad, E. O., Savundranayagam, M. Y., Holmes, J. D., Kinsella, E. A., & Johnson, A. M. (2016). Toward a mixed-methods research approach to content analysis in the digital age: the combined content-analysis model and its applications to health care Twitter feeds. *Journal of medical Internet research*, 18(3): e60.
- Jansen, J.D. (2010). Political symbolism as policy craft: Explaining non-reform in South African education after apartheid. *Journal of Education Policy*, 17(2): 199-215.
- Mapetere, K. (2013). The New History Concept. *Greener Journal of Educational Research* Vol. 3 (3): 134-137.
- Mathura, P. (2019). Teachers' Perspectives on a Curriculum Change: A Trinidad and Tobago Case Study.
- Mokhele, M. L. (2011). Teacher perspectives on continuing professional development: A case of the Mpumalanga secondary science initiative (MSSI) project. Pretoria: University of South Africa.
- Moyo, N. (2014). Nationalist historiography, Nation-state making and secondary school history: Curriculum policy in Zimbabwe 1980-2010. *Nordidactica: Journal of Humanities and Social Science Education*, 2: 1-23.
- Moyo, N. & Modiba, M.M. (2013). "Who does this History curriculum want you to be?" Representation, school History and Curriculum in Zimbabwe. *Yesterday and Today*, (10): 01-24.

- Myers, M. D. (2019). *Qualitative research in business and management*. Sage Publications Limited.
- Ndebele, C. & Tshuma, R. (2014). Examining the extent to which socialist curriculum development and implementation in Zimbabwe from 1980 to 2004 took place through the history curriculum. *Journal of Sociology*, 5(3): 319-330.
- Nghihalwa I. N., (2018) Teachers' Involvement in the Planning and Development of National Curriculum for Basic Education in Namibia. University of Eastern Finland School of Applied Educational Science and Teacher Education, Master's Degree Programme in Primary Education, Unpublished Master's Thesis.
- Ogar, O. E., & Opop, F. A. (2015). Teachers Perceived Problems of Curriculum Implementation in Tertiary Institutions in Cross River State of Nigeria. *Journal of Education and practice*, 6(19): 145-151.
- Oloruntegbe, K. O. (2011). Teachers' involvement, commitment and innovativeness in curriculum development and implementation. *Journal of Emerging Trends in Educational Research and Policy Studies*, 2(6): 443-449.
- Ornstein, A.C. & Hunkins, F.P. (2014). *Curriculum-foundations, principles, and issues*. London: Pearson Education Ltd.
- Wadesango, N. & Bayaga, A. (2013). Management of schools: Teachers involvement in decision making processes. *African Journal of Business Management*, 7(17): 1689-1694.
- Zohrabi, M. (2014). Promoting teacher development through an interactive approach to curriculum development. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 98: 2025-2034

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

WALTER SENGAI (PhD)

National University of Lesotho
waltersengai@gmail.com

MATSELISO L. MOKHELE (PhD)

University of the Free State
mokheleml@ufs.ac.za