



Original Research Article

Variation in teacher implementation of the geography syllabus in secondary schools in Fako division

Yaro Loveline and Agba Paul Machiva

Abstract

Department of Curriculum Studies and Teaching, Faculty of Education, University of Buea. Cameroon.

*Corresponding Author E-mail:
lukongemms_20@yahoo.com

No country has achieved constant economic development without considerable investment in human capital which is achieved through education of its citizens. As a matter of fact, everything that is created today is based on the knowledge that is obtained through education with school as an aspect. One of the characteristics of the school is that it has specific subjects like History, French, English Language, Physics, chemistry and Geography. For these subjects to be used in schools, they are drawn up in the form of curriculum. The curriculum development process involves planning, implementation and evaluation. This study focuses on the implementation stage of the national syllabus that was drawn for teachers to implement. It investigate the extent to which schools differ in the implementation of the reviewed geography syllabus in secondary schools in Fako Division and finds out reasons why schools differ in implementing the reviewed syllabus in secondary schools in Fako Division. The responsibility for the quality of the educational experience in geography (as with any subject) resides mainly with school teachers (Morgan and Lambert, 2005). This is because it is they who are in a position to guide policy makers to design and create appropriate curriculum and pedagogic experiences (content selection, materials production and choice of learning activity). It is they who use the subject resource to create productive teacher-learner relationships. It is desirable that teachers' professional responsibilities in this regard are underpinned with a clear sense of purpose. This enables specialist geography teachers to undertake their task carefully. Teachers need a sophisticated concept of geography and what it means to learn with geography. It is probably this sense of purpose that transforms a series of lessons to an enriching curriculum experience.

Keywords: Curriculum/ Syllabus, Curriculum Implementation, Geography Syllabus.

INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM

Education plays a basic role by transforming the society through the acquisition of skills and attitude in the socio-cultural, economic, political and physical domains. It is a determined element for the civilization of human society. Not only does it help in developing healthy surroundings but it also generates an advanced community. Education has an essential role in creating a better life style specific for a society based on knowledge and learning.

In Cameroon specifically, section 5 of the 1998 education law stipulates that education in the country is to train citizens who are deeply rooted in their culture yet open to the world, Such citizens need a mastery of their

local environment as well as a deep understanding of the regional and national geographical concepts. The study of geography aims at providing learners with models and concepts for the understanding of their local, regional, and national challenges as well as their potentials. The national syllabus is drawn to enhance the acquisition of skills through the effective implementation of the syllabus which have content and learning experiences which can equip students with problem solving skills. Unfortunately, students leave school without showing proof of the competences and skill that were planned for them to acquire. For example, waste management is taught in

schools with the intention of reducing the problem of waste disposal but the reverse is on the rise in Cameroon cities. Students graduate from our secondary schools with excellent grades but value in terms of solving basic environmental problems facing our communities is absent (Tchombe, 2001). Among other factors, the implementation of the geography curriculum needs to be paid attention to because, it is through effective implementation that students are able to learn skills, attitudes, behaviours, and competences that can make them of positive valuable to themselves and the societies in which they leave. The study therefore seeks to investigate the extent to which schools differ in the implementation of the reviewed Geography Syllabus in secondary schools in Fako Division. A related purpose for study is to find out whether and why schools differ in implementing the reviewed syllabus in secondary schools in Fako Division.

Review of Concepts and Theory

Various studies related to the topic on investigation are examined in this section. It provides information about recent research that has been conducted to examine any possible link to this study.

Curriculum Implementation

Curriculum implementation entails putting into practice the officially prescribed courses of study, syllabuses and subjects (Chikumbi and Makamure, 2000). Putting the curriculum into operation requires an implementation agent. The teacher is identified as the agent in the curriculum implementation process. Curriculum implementation therefore refers to how the planned or officially designed course of study is translated by the teacher into syllabuses, scheme of work and lessons to be delivered to students. Implementation is said to take place when the teacher constructed syllabus, the teacher personality, the teaching materials and the teaching environment interact with the learner.

Implementation further takes place as the learner acquires the planned or intended experiences, skills, knowledge, ideas and attitudes that are aimed at enabling the same learner to function effectively in the society. The learner is therefore seen as the central figure of curriculum implementation process. Obanya (2004) view implementation of curriculum as day-to-day activities which school management and classroom teachers undertake in the pursuit of the objective of any given curriculum. Obanya (2007) contends that effective curriculum is the one that reflects what the learner eventually takes away from an educational experience, which he termed, the learned curriculum.

In order to understand the extent of teacher

involvement in curriculum implementation process, it is important to establish the extent of teacher involvement in other curriculum development processes from planning to evaluation. This is because teachers need to understand the intents and rationale for curriculum change, innovation or reform that they are supposed to implement.

Curricula are not always implemented as planned. The gap between what is planned and what is taught or implemented is an indicator of success. If it is narrow, then the set goals will be attained, if it's wide, the goals are not achieved. Bishop (1985) observes that involvement of the teacher in education reform and innovation is crucial, noting that the teacher is indeed the heart of the matter. He further notes that, in the final analysis any curriculum comes through decisions by teachers in the classrooms. Bishop is of the view that there must be endeavour between all those working on new programs. Instead of the arrogant we-know-what is good for you attitudes, the teachers must be consulted rather than told what to do; they must be respected rather than patronized.

Bishop underscores the importance of teacher involvement in all stages of curriculum development by noting that not only must the teacher understand the reasons behind the change or innovation, he must fully appreciate the philosophy underlying the innovation. For example, if the intention is to introduce more discovery/enquiry-oriented teaching and learning in the classroom, the teacher must fully comprehend the rationale behind the methodology. He further notes that no change in practice, no change in curriculum has any meaning unless the teacher understands it and accepts it. Shiundu and Omulando (1992) notes that many curriculum projects in Africa have ignored the role of the teacher and the end result has usually been a disastrous failure.

This means that, where once teachers were able to exercise considerable professional autonomy over the selection of knowledge and the ways it would be taught, their initiatives in the classroom are now more tightly controlled leaving the teachers with less room for exercising both professional autonomy and professional authority. In the case of Cameroon, for example, those directly involved in the curriculum development process are mostly National Pedagogic Inspectors with little or no contribution from the class teachers, limiting their readiness to implement the curriculum.

Doll (2008), views the teacher's role in planning and implementing the curriculum at the classroom, school, and district levels. In his opinion, the teacher should be involved in every phase of curriculum making, including the planning of specific goals, materials, content, and methods. Teachers should have a curriculum coordinating body to unify their work and develop relationships with supervisors and other teachers involved in curriculum. To Oliva (1999), teachers are the

primary group in curriculum development. They constitute the majority or the totality of the membership of curriculum committees and councils. Their role is to develop, implement, and evaluate curriculum.

In his words, teachers work in committees and initiate proposals, review proposals, gather data, conduct research, make contact with parents and other lay people, write and create curriculum materials, obtain feedback from learners, and evaluate programs.

It is teachers who decide and adapt the learning content, activities and pace that children need to move through the curriculum in ways that ensure they learn effectively. (If this professional autonomy is not accorded to teachers, it will require highly prescriptive curricula for children of differing strengths and abilities) Teachers need accordingly relevant advice in Teacher Guides on adapting the curriculum to meet all learners' needs. They should be provided with guidance on how to plan learning and progression, and on the kinds of classroom learning activities that bring the curriculum to life. The content of any topic in the curriculum can, after all, be presented to students in an almost endless variety of ways, and teachers should be helped to create situations and activities, both in the classroom and beyond, that will make learning most effective (Hall and Roucks, 1978).

To Palmer (1988), adaptation of the curriculum to meet the learning needs of all children is the responsibility, after all, of the teacher and not of the curriculum itself. If this is not the case, education systems occasionally develop special or adapted curricula for different groups of pupils. This carries great risks of inequity. All children should have the opportunity to learn the entire curriculum – it is the teacher who can make this possible by adjusting tasks, activities and pace in adapting the curriculum to the specific interests and needs of learners.

Teachers can be provided with ideas for teaching in ways that add value to the curriculum through professional development courses or written Teacher Guides which can provide: a clear explanation of the philosophy of teaching, learning and assessment which underpins the curriculum; sample approaches to learning and teaching that outline a topic or unit within a syllabus; and where appropriate or required, more detailed lesson notes and resources which describe how to conduct a lesson on a particular topic in a step-by-step way. Of course the level and extent of such guidance and support for teachers would depend on the professional education and experience of the teaching corps in any particular country (Leslee, 1976)

Teacher Guides can also provide teachers with clear guidance about assessment as the bridge between teaching and learning. This does not mean that teachers should be making students write tests every other day. Teachers need rather to be made aware of the importance of continually providing feedback to their students through continuous assessment of where each

learner is in her understanding, so that each student can ask herself about her learning (Stabback, 2016).

School leaders should understand the content of the curriculum and make management decisions within their areas of responsibility to support its delivery. They should encourage and support teachers in adopting new and innovative teaching practice.

To Hattie (2009), the responsibilities of school leaders with regard to curriculum implementation and curriculum advice for their school are important roles to include in school leadership. Within their responsibilities, schools should also ensure that learning environments are as safe and well-equipped as possible, and that the best materials to support good teaching, learning and assessment practice are provided. The objective is to provide learner-friendly environments that enable and encourage effective and enjoyable learning.

Social Constructivist Learning Theory.

Vygotsky and other social constructivists view knowledge and hence learning as constructed by the interactions of individuals within society (Applefield et al., 2001). Learning is seen as resulting from the internalization of social interaction, reshaping and transforming new information (Warnich and Meyer, 2013). Furthermore, in the constructivist classroom, there is a notable emphasis on social and communication skills as well as on the exchange of ideas (Du Plessis and Muzaffar, 2010). This is in contrast to the traditional classroom in which learners primarily work individually and learning might be attained through repetition as part of the conditioning in behaviourist theory, which is criticised in social constructivism (Van Harmelen, 1999). Rather than emphasising the role of learning outcomes in behaviourism, social constructivist learning requires learners to actively participate in problem solving and critical thinking in their learning activities.

This learning can be constructed through interactions with friends, families and other groups and it is believed that knowledge is mutually constructed (Lambert and Balderstone, 2010).

The zone of proximal development [ZPD] in social constructivist learning is one of the instances in which knowledge might be mutually constructed (Roberts, 2003). ZPD refers to how learners can solve problems that are beyond their existing levels of understanding if they are provided with "slight assistance". This provision of assistance takes into account the difference between what a learner could do without assistance and what the learner could accomplish with some kind of support. Vygotsky's ZPD notions demonstrate that teachers have an important part to play in providing support in enquiry learning. In this regard, "[t]he teacher becomes more of a classroom observer carefully studying the actions of the learners, listening to conversations about the task, trying

Table 1. Target Population.

School	Teachers Population	Geography teachers	Sample
Government High School Limbe	60	4	4
Baptist High School Soppo-Buea.	28	5	5
Government Bilingual High School Limbe	71	6	6
St Therese International	31	3	3
Government Bilingual High School Tiko	69	4	4
PCHS Buea Town	20	3	3
Government Bilingual High School Molyko	61	5	5
Total	279	30	30

to make sense of their reasoning and the strategies being used to resolve the cognitive conflict” (Lambert and Balderstone, 2010). Vygotsky’s research work with children revealed that, when learners worked in collaboration with adults, their concepts could be developed. Thus scaffolding, according to Plessis and Muzaffar (2010), is changing the level of support given to a learner in teaching and learning as learners navigate between upper and lower cognitive levels in a teaching session.

In this case adults or indeed teachers are seen as providing “light assistance” to help learners handle problems that they could otherwise not handle independently. This suggests that scaffolding comprises aspects such as a collaborative interactive process between teacher and learners engaging in dialogue (Plessis and Muzaffar, 2010). At the same time, this enables the learners to get to higher levels that they would not easily achieve without support. Furthermore, the overall aim of scaffolding is to provide learners with opportunities for carrying out learning activities independently without the need for scaffolding (Catling and Willy, 2010; Roberts, 2003). In Cameroon, if the goal of making teaching student centered must be attained, the role of the teacher has to be seen more as providing “light assistance to students in areas where they have difficulties.

METHODOLOGY

The study has adopted descriptive survey research design. The population of this study was made up of all teachers and students in Fako Division. The target population of this study comprises of form two, three, and four geography teachers of secondary schools in Fako. (Table 1)

The number of teachers above shows the total number of teachers in the schools concerned for all the subjects but Geography teachers is the accessible population.

The convenient sampling technique was used to get

the area for the study. Simple random sampling technique was used in selecting the six schools for this study two schools were selected from each of the categories made up of government, confessional, lay private in order to avoid the issues of bias.

The instrument used to obtain data in this research was an interview guide. The interview was employed by the research to answer the research question which seeks to investigate how schools (government, mission, and lay private) differ in implementing the reviewed geography syllabus. Respondents were all the Heads of Departments (HOD) in the sampled schools. They were asked six questions in which the researcher recorded using pen and paper method.

The instruments constructed by the researcher and approved were administered to teachers of the selected schools in the sample. The researcher went to each school of the schools concerned and sought and obtains permission to administer the questionnaires from the respective heads of the schools. In administering, the researcher gave necessary guide to respondents on how to answer the questions.

The thematic data analysis method whereby concepts are grouped under umbrella terms or key words was used in analyzing the data. (Table 2)

FINDING AND DISCUSSIONS

Results from research shows that, schools generally do not implement the reviewed syllabus in the same way but they do not differ greatly. The respondents hold the view that schools differ in their objective, some use just the GCE syllabus which is aimed at testing exams without taking into consideration the national syllabuses. That some schools do not even have the revised syllabuses and teachers do not organize or attend seminars. In addition, they think the nature (Mission, lay private and government schools) and location of schools (urban and rural schools) do matter. This is so because the different school type has their organizational, administrative/leadership style making them to differ in

Table 2. Extent to which schools differ in the implementation of the reviewed Geography Syllabus in secondary schools in Fako Division.

Item	Responds
Do schools generally implement the reviewed syllabus in the same way? If they differ, how?	They do not differ greatly Some schools use just the GCE syllabus which is aimed at testing exams without taking into consideration the national syllabuses. Some schools do not even have the revised syllabuses and teachers do not organize or attend seminars. The nature and location of schools do matter.
How does the school leadership style in different schools (public, mission and private) affects teacher implementation of the reviewed syllabus?	School leaders who follow up the implementation of school programs facilitate the effective implementation. Some denominational schools are guided by their religious practices; create their own syllabuses and teaching styles. Teachers should be motivated

Reasons why schools differ in implementing the reviewed syllabus in secondary schools in Fako Division

Item	Responds
What could be some reasons why schools differ in implementing the same programme	They want high percentages in the GCE. Some schools like the denominational schools have their own organizational set up that focus on implementing syllabuses in their own way. Teachers differ in their teaching methods and approaches. Many schools do not allow their teachers to attend seminars. The quality of teaching staff also matter.
How does that affect the attainment of the objectives of the curriculum?	Students graduate without obtaining the necessary skills because they focus on passing exams.
What could be done to ensure that public, denomination, and private schools respect the national syllabus?	Schools should develop programs that make students to gain skills not just passing of exams. Teaching resources should be made available in all schools. Seminars, forums and the association meetings should be frequent not just at the regional level but also at the divisional level and in schools. More supervision should be done.

their approaches towards the national syllabus.

The respondents point out some reasons why schools differ in implementing the same programme. Here they think that some schools want high percentages in the GCE while some schools like the denominational schools have their own organizational set up that focus on implementing syllabuses in their own way and that, teachers differ in their teaching methods and approaches. They also hold that many schools do not allow their teachers to attend seminars, affecting the quality of teaching staff. As a result, students graduate without obtaining the necessary skills because they focus on passing exams. This is in line with Bishop (1985) who was of the opinion that, a curriculum is only as good as the quality of its teachers. He observed that there are many reasons for the discrepancy between the intent of curriculum projects and what actually happens in the classroom, between theory and practice, between desire and actual achievement, between plan and execution.

The findings also show that school differ in the use and availability of teaching resources. This is because school leadership style in different schools (public, mission and private) affects use and availability of teaching resources and teacher implementation of the syllabus. This is in line with Eshiwani (1993) who asserted that educational resources account for scholastic differences between schools.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study the following conclusion can be made The findings have shown that there is disparity in the follow up of the national syllabus by all teachers and schools as a result, there are omission of topics in geography syllabus that teachers seem not to be prepared fully to handle due to lack of certain materials and time.

The findings also showed that schools generally do not implement the reviewed syllabus in the same way. Reasons being that, different schools have different objectives. While others focus on skill acquisitions, others focus on having high percentages in national exams.

RECOMMENDATION

All schools should be encouraged to use the national syllabus and focus mainly in skill development by the student and not passing end of year exams only.

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