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Factors Affecting the Implementation of Four Selected Areas of the Zimbabwe Infant Competence-Based Curriculum in Shamva: Educators' Experiences.

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the experiences of infant teachers (ECD A-Grade 2) in the teaching of the four selected areas of the New Curriculum namely: Mass Displays, Visual and Performing Arts, Physical Education and Information Communication and Technology. The New Curriculum, which is competence-based, was introduced in January 2017. The study was guided by the self-efficacy theory. A qualitative approach was used in this case study. Twenty participants were purposively selected from 3 primary schools and one teachers' college in Shamva District of Mashonaland Central Province in Zimbabwe. Data generation was done through face-to-face interviews, semi-structured questionnaires which yielded open answers, focus group discussions and classroom observations. The data gathered were analysed using the constant comparative method for thematic coding in line with the research questions. The major findings were that teachers felt that they were not competent enough to teach the selected areas of the curriculum and that there was high teacher-pupil ratio, lack of support from parents, inadequate resources and failure to use the mother language. This study recommends that the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE) should address the needs of teachers through professional development so as to ensure effective implementation of the selected areas of the curriculum at infant level.

Keywords: Infant teachers, competence-based curriculum, Information Communication and Technology, Mass Displays, Visual and Performing Arts, Physical Education

INTRODUCTION

The recent curriculum came against the background of lack of full implementation of the Nziramasanga (1999) report and the continued problems it was supposed to have resolved if it had been fully employed (Nziramasanga, 2018). The New Curriculum is premised on the development of competences (knowledge, skills and attitudes) in each learner as well as the promotion of national identity including inculcating values of Unhu/Ubuntu/Vumunhu (MoPSE, 2017, p.2). Accordingly, it may be mandatory to lay down a proper foundation at Early Childhood Development (infant) level, so that learners get exposure to the said competences during early years of schooling.

The New Curriculum rationalizes the infant curriculum into seven learning areas. This was achieved by identifying principal learning areas into which several cross-cutting themes were embedded. According to the Secretary's Circular Number 2 of 2017 p. 3, the areas for the infant school (ECD to Grade 2) in the New Curriculum are: Languages; Visual and Performing Arts;

Physical Education; Mass Displays; Mathematics and Science; Heritage Studies (Social Studies) and Information and Communication Technology (ICT).

The focus of this study was on the experiences of Early Childhood Development (infant) teachers (ECD A up to Grade 2) in implementing four selected areas of the Zimbabwe New Curriculum namely: Physical Education, Mass Displays, Visual and Performing Arts (VPA), and Information Communication and Technology (ICT).

Physical Education and Mass Displays

Related areas in the New Curriculum are Physical Education and Mass Displays (hereafter PEMD). The introduction of mass displays and sports has several benefits to the child's future, well-being and development. Turner et al. (2017) state that there is overwhelming evidence that children who are involved in sporting activities are healthy and better learners. PEMD lies in the acquisition and accumulation of various personal, social and socio-moral skills which, in turn, can act as social capital to enable young people to function successfully and acceptably in the society in a variety of situations (Bailey, 2005; Ngwenya, 2019). Although primary school teachers may have knowledge of Physical Education from their training, the element of Mass Displays is foreign and totally new to the majority of teachers who are expected to implement it. PEMD is an avenue for engaging school-aged children in developmentally appropriate physical activities designed for learners to develop their fitness, gross motor skills and health. In the context of this study, inadequate knowledge and skills to deliver subject content, particularly Mass Displays, may contribute to poor methodology as well as low confidence. Darling-Hammond, Hyler and Gardner (2017) assert that Professional Development (PD) increases teachers' knowledge and skills and empower them to modify their teaching in ways that benefit learners. Findings yielded by Abacioglu, Fischer and Volman's (2022) study indicated that teachers who received PD during in-service education had more positive attitudes towards multicultural practices compared to those teachers who did not undertake PD. Accordingly, educators in PEMD are likely to benefit when they engage in PD.

Visual and Performing Arts

In the Zimbabwe New Curriculum, various subjects which require aspects of creativity were fused and they make up the Visual and Performing Arts (VPA) curriculum. Concepts which were done in Music and Art were integrated to form the VPA, as one curriculum area. Alter, Hays and Hara (2014) affirm that Arts-based processes allow learners to express their knowledge, ideas and feelings in ways that do not necessarily involve words. Teachers may not be familiar with VPA where learners should be empowered to develop their cultural and social values (Ngwenya, 2019). Research done in Australia by Alter, Hays and Hara (2014), on challenges in implementing the Arts education curriculum, revealed that one of the challenges in teaching music was lack of confidence, which subsequently caused teacher stress. Ballantyne and Zhukov (2017) conducted a study in Australia and concluded that continuing professional development is critical in assisting early-career teachers in acquiring new skills and teaching strategies. In a related study conducted by Mujuru (2019) in the Shurugwi District of Zimbabwe, findings revealed that primary school teachers were not effectively trained to teach new learning areas since the duration for in-service training was too short and those who

conducted training did not fully understand the nature of the learning areas. Therefore, in the context of our study, a strong background in the teaching of Visual and Performing Arts is needed by all teachers so as to boost their confidence.

Information Communication and Technology

ICT is another curriculum area which was infused in the ECD (infant) New Curriculum. ICT is viewed as an important curriculum area which may mean an acceleration of economic and social development and greater inclusion of isolated, particularly rural populations, into the mainstream society (Kabanda, 2012). Ngwenya (2019) believes that the strong technological aspect incorporated into the new competence-based curriculum assists learners to develop skills which are necessary in linking the school to industry, thereby enhancing economic development. In Zimbabwe, ICT in education is not a very widespread phenomenon, especially considering rural settings where most schools are not connected to electrical power supply and where some schools hardly have any buildings to house the computers (Mujuru, 2019).

Shamva District is in remote areas of Mashonaland Central and most of the schools in this district are farm schools which were built by former white settlers, while others are former mine schools. Some of the major challenges that schools in Zimbabwe in general are facing are largely associated with the prohibitive costs of purchase and maintenance of computers in the schools, as well as shortage of qualified personnel to operate the ICT gadgets (Mandoga, Matswetu & Mhishi, 2013; Ngwenya, 2019). Research conducted by Tondeur et al. (2016), based on comparison across four cases involving Sri Lankan, Israeli, Australian and Kenyan schools, concluded that provision of resources, coupled with teacher professional development, enhances application of ICT in education. In a related study in Tanzania, Charles and Mkulu (2020) established that inadequate resources contributed towards overcrowded classrooms in public primary schools. As a result, academic performance was affected since learners could not focus on their schoolwork.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study was guided by the self-efficacy theory proposed by Bandura (Adeyemo & Onongha, 2010; Hussein & Khan, 2022). The self-efficacy theory explains motivated behaviour in terms of conscious cognitive processes which involve the capability to anticipate goals and rewards, and use "judgement, evaluation, and decision making rather than unconscious biological or mechanical processes" (Borich & Tombari, 1997, p. 215). This theory was considered relevant because teachers must develop a feeling of self-efficacy, which strengthens the feeling of self-confidence to enable them to adopt and implement new teaching strategies (Bitan-Friedlander et al., 2004; Matoti, Janqueira & Odora, 2011; Kalinowski, Gronostaj & Vock, 2019).

Adeyemo and Onongha (2010) express the view that self-efficacy assists in two major ways. The first is that self-efficacy beliefs influence task choice. The second is that self-efficacy determines effort persistence, resilience and achievement. Accordingly, the trend in self-efficacy is that people take joy in and pursue activities which they believe they have the requisite skills (Bhatt, 2007). Thus, in the context of this study, those infant teachers who believe that they do not have the ability to effectively teach VPA, PE, ICT and Mass Displays are likely to ignore effecting the

changes under the prevailing circumstances at their respective schools.

Dale Schunk (1991; 1995), a leading researcher on self-efficacy, identifies sources of self-efficacy beliefs which are relevant to this study, namely, mastery experience, vicarious experience and verbal persuasion (Borich & Tombari, 1997; Adeyemo & Onongha, 2010; Matoti et al., 2011). The first antecedent of self-efficacy judgement is mastery experience, also known as past experience of success or failure. Pajares (2002 cited in Matoti et al., 2011) claims that mastery experience is the way a person interprets the results of previous performance. Thus, those teachers who experienced success in previous performance will have higher self-efficacy than those who failed. Therefore, the implication for this study is that if teachers have to effectively teach VPA, PE, ICT and Mass Displays as new areas in the infant curriculum, they need to develop capacity for successful achievement through training in order to be empowered to handle implementation (Pella, 2015; Serin, 2017; Abdulkerim, Nasır, Parkinson et al., 2022).

The second source of self-efficacy beliefs is that of social persuasion or encouragement. Individuals can create and develop self-efficacy beliefs by being encouraged by word of mouth from others. It can, thus, be concluded that, those infant teachers who may believe that they do not have adequate skills to handle the new areas, can often be persuaded that they are able to succeed by a convincing and inspiring significant other. According to Sergiovanni (2005), such encouragement can be achieved when teachers engage in collaboration and collegiality as a professional community (Tondeur et al., 2016).

The third source is vicarious experience of observing others perform tasks, also referred to as modelling effects. When people are uncertain about their own capabilities or when they have limited prior experience, they become more sensitive to it (Mwamwenda, 2004; Matoti et al., 2011; Ballantyne & Zhukov, 2017; Hussein & Khan, 2022). When people observe failure by peers or hear about the difficulty of a task, then their estimates of self-efficacy are lowered. In the context of this study, modelling by way of demonstration lessons by fellow teachers may make the teaching of VPA, PE, ICT and Mass Displays appear easy, thereby enhancing teacher self-efficacy. It is, therefore, pertinent to assess what educators value, the information and beliefs that they have, as well as their motivation and commitment to implement the New Curriculum areas at infant level.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Implementation of the New Curriculum was done in phases in primary school education. Though most of these affected grades are being manned by qualified teachers who in some cases possess high qualifications, these teachers were not exposed to these curriculum areas before. Some of the changes in the New Curriculum are teaching methods, assessment criteria and learning areas. Research on challenges faced by primary school teachers on implementing the New Curriculum was done in Zimbabwe (Mujuru, 2019; Ngwenya, 2019). However, not much research has been documented on the implementation of the new competence-based curriculum at infant level in a rural setup. The curriculum is to be implemented over a period of six years with continuous evaluation, beginning January 2017. Our study was conducted when implementation of this New Curriculum was in its fifth year. Hence, it was deemed necessary to assess the experiences of educators in teaching the four selected areas so that the recommendations made would be

considered when implementing other phases.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What competences do teachers have which enable them to effectively teach the four selected areas of the competence-based curriculum at infant level?
- What challenges are experienced by infant teachers in implementing the New Curriculum in respect of ICT, Mass Displays, Visual and Performing Arts and Physical Education?
- Which initiatives are needed by educators to enhance effective teaching of the four selected areas of the New Curriculum?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employed a case study research design and a qualitative approach. The qualitative approach was selected in order to provide a close fit between the research methods and the research questions being asked (Punch & Oancea, 2014).

Twenty (20) participants were purposively selected, and the sample consisted of6 ECD (infant) teachers, 3 school heads, 3 TICs and 8 ECD student teachers who had completed their teaching practice and were on their final residential phase at one college in Shamva. Student teachers were regarded as suitable in describing their mentors' experiences in teaching the New Curriculum since they had been attached to them for 3 terms. Only experienced infant teachers were selected as they were in a position to provide rich data pertaining to their experiences as infant teachers. All the school heads and the TICs for the three sampled schools were involved in the study as they were the supervisors at infant school level.

Data for this research were collected using a semi-structured questionnaire, an interview guide, focus group discussion and observation. The researchers obtained raw data from naturally occurring situations through observation (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). The researchers observed the learning environment, facilities available and some assessment records which were introduced as a result of the New Curriculum. In addition, lesson observation on the teaching of VPA, ICT, PE and Mass Displays was done, with the main focus being on the methods used and the use of mother language across the curriculum as required by the New Curriculum guidelines.

6 teachers and 3 school heads responded to a semi-structured questionnaire which allowed participants to explain and qualify their responses (Cohen et al., 2011). The interviews were held with 3 TICs at their respective schools, while student teachers participated in focus group discussions. Each interview lasted approximately one hour, and the use of a semi-structured interview guide enabled participants to give their own views on the experiences of ECD teachers in implementing VPA, ICT, PE and Mass Displays as areas of the new competence-based curriculum.

The constant comparative method (Cohen et al., 2011) was used to analyse data collected from the open-ended questionnaire, face-to-face interviews, focus group discussions and observation check lists. Reliability was guaranteed through triangulation since information was gathered through the use of multiple tools and multiple sources (Gray, 2009).

Permission to conduct this research in Shamva primary schools was granted by the Head Office (MoPSE) and subsequently by the Provincial Office and the District Office of Education. Participants were

informed about the ultimate purpose of the research prior to the interviews, observation and the focus group discussions. For confidentiality, pseudonyms were used for the participants and names of their schools.

FINDINGS

The main aim of this study was to explore the experiences of infant teachers (ECD A to Grade 2) in implementing the new competence-based curriculum in four selected areas of VPA, PE, Mass Displays and ICT. After reading responses from the semi-structured questionnaires and transcriptions from interviews and focus group discussions several times, data were categorised into themes which were developed from research questions that guided the participants' accounts, namely: teacher competences, challenges in teaching ICT, PE, VPA and Mass Displays, use of the mother language, and possible initiatives that teachers feel are needed to enhance effective implementation of the competence-based curriculum at infant school level.

Teacher Competences

Under this theme, participants indicated that they did not undergo meaningful training to empower them to gain confidence in teaching the four selected areas of the competence-based curriculum at infant level. All the participants indicated that they were trained before the New Curriculum was introduced. The following excerpts represent what was said by many of the four groups of participants:

> Teachers attended the workshops on the New Curriculum but most have no relevant skills to teach ICT and Mass Displays. Some are buying schemes for use in their classes and these schemes have shallow information. In ICT teachers either ignore the subject or only do theory as they do not have skills. In most cases they leave these subjects untaught. This is because they run short of content as they try to teach these subjects. (Discussant 6, FDG)

> I cannot say I am adequately trained. The term adequate is not the correct term for explaining my position. Though I can teach some concepts, I am not adequately trained. I lack confidence in teaching a number of concepts. As for other teachers and heads, they think that the New Curriculum has new information, new content and concepts which they are not knowledgeable of. (TIC, School C)

> The biggest challenge is that we do not teach these learning areas because we also do not know what to teach. Teachers and school heads were not given adequate training on how to teach the New Curriculum. The concepts are new and we were not trained at college on these new concepts. (Teacher, School B)

> Teachers do not have knowledge and skills of teaching the Mass Display learning area since most of them didn't encounter it both at school and college. In VPA, for example, teachers are failing to teach theatre and dance. (Head, School C)

The above vignettes show that participants who were school heads, TICs and infant teachers had little knowledge on the teaching of ICT, VPA, PE and Mass Displays. From the classroom observations, it was noted that there were displays in the form of charts, models, children's work and mobiles but very few were related to the teaching of VPA, ICT, PE and Mass Displays. It was also observed that some of the displays (toy laptops) were new and still sealed, showing that they were not being

used for the benefit the learners, an indication that teachers did not have the knowledge. Basing on the information presented, it can be concluded that teachers do not have the needed competences which enable them to effectively teach the four selected areas of the competence-based curriculum of the infant school.

Challenges in Teaching ICT, PE, VPA, Mass Displays

The four selected areas of the new competence-based curriculum had many factors which appeared to hinder their effective implementation in the schools under study. The main challenges identified by study participants include teacher-learner ratio, inadequate resources, lack of parental involvement and barriers in the use of the mother language when teaching.

Teacher-learner Ratio

One factor which was raised as negatively affecting the implementation of the New Curriculum in the selected areas was the teacher-learner ratio. The recommended teacher-to-learner ratio in these areas is 1:30. The concern was expressed by the head of School C, who indicated that there was high teacher-learner ratio at that school. In their questionnaire responses, two teachers corroborated this sentiment when they indicated that one of the classes had 56 learners while the other had 65. At these schools, researchers observed that teachers found it difficult to move around supervising learners as the space was not adequate due to the high number of learners.

Insufficient Resources

Many of the participants indicated that they were concerned about shortage of resources which are critical for effective implementation of the new competence-based curriculum. These sentiments were expressed as follows:

> Teachers lack confidence in teaching VPA, ICT, PE and Mass Displays as a result of shortage of resources. (Discussant 2, FDG)

> Positive attitudes were being shown but lack of resources causes stress during implementation. Teachers are failing to deliver as some of these subjects are new and they need resource backup. (Head, School B)

> There are not enough resources for effective implementation of the New Curriculum. We just work with what is on the ground. (Teacher, School A)

Participants believed that addressing the issue of resources would greatly improve the effectiveness of the new curriculum.

Parental Involvement

Results show that the parents were not fully involved in the learning of their children. Community involvement in the infant school was seen by all educators as having a crucial role in the teaching of the four selected areas of the competence-based curriculum.

> We need resources even in form of cash to purchase ICT tools, and also to buy equipment that we need in VPA and PE. We also need community artefacts and labour from parents so as to carry out projects at our school. (TIC, School A)

> Parents should be seen to be providing very big support in terms of resources, and supplying equipment in the learning centres. They should contribute to the activities that support the learning of their children such as making toys

for their children. (Teacher, School C)

Most participants were concerned about the support of parents which was lacking in the learning of their children. Forms of support were identified and teachers felt that they needed material resources and labour. The researchers observed that the teaching and learning resources in the selected areas were inadequate. Some learners were found to be without resources at one of the schools. The number of dolls and balls at the play areas observed in the play areas did not correspond to the number of learners, despite the fact that all learners were given newsletters about the school's requirements to take home to their parents. This significantly hampered the New Curriculum's effective implementation in the targeted areas.

Mother Tongue Usage

The majority of the participants were of the view that the use of the mother language when teaching ICT, PE, VPA, and Mass Displays is critical in helping learners to understand concepts. This view was presented by some of the participants who stated that:

> I strongly agree with the use of mother language because at this stage, learners understand best when they are taught in the mother language. The use of mother language assists learners in teaching ECD children to understand the concept taught much easier. (Teacher, School A)

> The use of mother language is good for the young children as it enables them to understand concepts especially in VPA and Mass Displays. (Discussant 4, FDG)

> Yes, mother language is quite good and I highly recommend it since most pupils understand it much easier but I also suggest that pupils should be taught in both languages so that they learn the second language which is English. (TIC, School B)

However, some participants said they experienced some challenges as they used the mother tongue in implementing the new competence-based curriculum in the four selected areas. The views of these participants were expressed as follows:

> Though children can imitate and copy what is being done by the teacher, teachers are having problems in translating the content in the syllabi for the four selected curriculum areas since they are written in English. There are other words that do not exist in vernacular language because some of these materials are not part of our culture. For example, how do you use the mother language where it says 'choreographed'? (Teacher, School B)

> When conducting lesson in VPA and ICT we have challenges in finding words to replace. We tend to use the international language English like what we were doing in the old curriculum in science. Therefore, children should be taught using both languages to suit the international world. I personally believe in catching them young hence children should be taught in English even at ECD level. (TIC, School C)

> While it may assist learners to learn fast, it however makes them have shortcomings in concepts that

> are to be tested later as they use the official language which is English. The teachers should not wait for time to lapse. Learners should be taught using L2 since it is the medium of instruction used in most subjects. (Head, School A)

The perceptions of these participants showed that while the use of mother language in the four selected areas is appreciated, effective implementation of the mother tongue policy was not possible due to challenges of translation as well as English hegemony. School heads and TICs mainly appeared to be concerned about the performance of learners during tests, hence they preferred the use of English right from ECD level.

Proposed Initiatives Needed to Enhance Effective Implementation of the New Curriculum

Participants suggested that [in order] for effective implementation of the New Curriculum in the selected areas to be possible, teachers should be empowered primarily through staff development.

The sentiments were expressed thus:

> I believe a lot should be done. It starts with the teacher training. To effectively implement, teachers should undergo training on these four selected areas. I recommend in-service training for teachers so that they receive adequate knowledge. The content in the New Curriculum sometimes you feel that it does not really suit the level of the learners. (TIC, School B)

> There are no textbooks and there is shortage of equipment. Teachers should be given material resources like text books, ICT gadgets and incentives. (Head, School A)

> If a policy has been put in place the government should respect that policy through the ministry by considering the teacher-learner ratio of 1: 25. (Head, School C)

It can be concluded that in-service training was the major aspect needed since there is new content in the selected areas of the New Curriculum. The other intervention strategies suggested include mobilisation of resources and maintaining the Ministry's policy of the teacher-pupil ratio.

DISCUSSION

The role and influence of the teacher in the process of new curriculum implementation is indisputable (Abacioglu, Fischer & Volman, 2022). Teacher participants in this study were found to be struggling to teach the four selected areas, implying that they did not have the required competences and confidence to implement the competence-based curriculum. Mujuru's (2019) study revealed that there were critical shortages in trained personnel to teach new learning areas such as ICTs, VPAs and Mass Displays in primary schools in Shurugwi District, in the Midlands Province of Zimbabwe. The student teachers who were participants in our study and were supposed to benefit from qualified and experienced infant teachers, observed that their mentors appeared not to have requisite skills and content to demonstrate the teaching of the four areas of the competence-based curriculum. It follows that at all the schools where our research was conducted, most of the objectives in VPA, ICT, PE and Mass Displays were not met. The possible explanation is that in line with the self-efficacy theory, teachers may not have experienced lesson demonstrations in order to observe others performing tasks so as to

be encouraged, convinced and inspired and hence experience success (Gavora, 2010; Adeyemo & Onongha, 2010; Matoti et al., 2011; Serin, 2017; Hussein & Khan, 2022).

Educators in our study did not have the needed competences which are necessary to allow them to effectively teach the four selected areas of the competence-based curriculum of the infant school. Research on implementation of any new competence-based curriculum found that professional development is a key component to allow teachers to continuously improve on how to implement a quality educational system (Jallow, 2011; Tambwe, 2017; Zindi, 2018; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Abdulkerim, Nasır, Parkinson et al., 2022). Tondeur et al. (2016) established that Teacher Professional Development is critical in educational change, especially in the application of technology to enhance learning. Teachers are active learners who need to continuously acquire knowledge through participating in intense and frequent in-service programmes, attending conferences and organising meetings where they can exchange ideas with colleagues pertaining to teaching and learning (Darling-Hammond, 2017; Serin, 2017; Abacioglu, Fischer & Volman, 2022). Such PD is essential in developing educators' self-efficacy so that they may take joy in pursuing activities which they believe they have the essential skills. Thus, in the context of this study, those infant teachers who believe that they do not have the ability to effectively teach VPA, PE, ICT and Mass Displays are likely to ignore effecting the changes under the prevailing circumstances at their respective schools.

The use of indigenous languages in the teaching and learning of ICT, Mass Displays, PE and Visual and Performing Arts was viewed as a challenge. The issue of using the mother language was viewed differently by school heads and TICs on one hand, and the infant teachers and student teachers on the other hand. Whilst infant teachers advocated for use of the mother tongue, school administrators recommended the use of the second language as they were concerned about examinations which are written in English. It was indicated, in our study, that there was limited vocabulary to substitute the English words in implementing the language policy in the four selected areas. The Secretary's Circular Number 2 of 2017 clearly states that, the medium of instruction in the infant school shall be an indigenous language which is commonly used or spoken in a particular area as outlined in the constitution of Zimbabwe. Despite the significance of using the mother tongue in education, some studies conducted in other African countries (Agbedo, Krisagbedo & Eze, 2012; Mokibelo, 2018; Mandillah, 2019), as well as in Zimbabwe (Ndamba & van Wyk, 2018; Ngwenya, 2019) produced findings which indicate that there are factors which hinder effective use of indigenous languages in education in the primary school context. Therefore, self-efficacy can be enhanced when educators collaborate and engage in PD which is targeted towards development of positive attitudes on the use of indigenous languages (Tondeur et al., 2016).

Adequate resources are a critical factor on the success of a competence-based programme (Turner et al., 2017). The findings of this study indicate that lack of resources hindered the effective implementation of the new competence-based curriculum as infant learners were not exposed to functioning computers where they are supposed to format, draw and change colour of text. It was observed that very few materials were found in learning areas as compared with the numbers in the classes. Similar findings were yielded by Mujuru (2019), whose study exposed that

inadequate infrastructure hindered effective implementation of the New Curriculum in the Shurugwi District of Zimbabwe. The possible explanation for inadequate resources may be that parents may not be aware of the demands of the schools (Emmanuel & Asah, 2019). Parents are the children's custodians from birth, and it is their duty to make sure that the child is well protected, is healthy and attains quality education (Ngwenya & Pretorius, 2013; Ngwenya, 2019). Ngwenya and Pretorius (2013) observed that the provision of educational materials can only be made possible if parents' representatives know about the legal statutes which empower them to be meaningfully involved (Tambwe, 2017). For example, in the VPA area, the School Development Committee is expected to source televisions, computers, tape recorders, and musical instruments to use when conducting theatre lessons, building halls for drama and dance exercises, laboratories for experiments and artwork, and sports facilities for various sporting activities at infant school level.

Teacher-learner ratios in schools sampled for this study were very high, hence affecting individual tutoring in the four selected areas of PE, ICT, Mass Displays and VPA. The ratios in the classroom were found to greatly affect implementation of the competence-based curriculum in the Zimbabwean context due to inadequate resources (Ngwenya, 2019). Similar findings were yielded in Nigeria (Ikediashi & Amaechi, 2012) where the teacher-learner ratio was as high as 50 or higher and it was observed that in such a scenario, teachers may not perform optimally. In Kenya, Mwirigi and Muthaa (2015) found that classes which were overcrowded had learners with destructive behaviour who were found not paying attention to the level of intensity required. Overcrowded classrooms tend to be teacher-centred where learning is passive, with the result that learners may lose motivation, whereas lower teacher-learner ratios result in higher-quality education (Cortes, Moussa & Weinstein, 2012; Ikediaskhi & Amaechi, 2012; Chingos, 2013; Boyi, 2014; Marais, 2016; Charles & Mkulu, 2020). In view of the large numbers of learners at infant school level in Zimbabwe, infant schoolteachers in Shamva may not be able to create conducive environments as per demands of the new competence-based curriculum.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Teachers need to be re-trained so that they are confident enough when implementing the competence-based curriculum. This professional development can help overcome shortcomings that may have been part of teachers' pre-service education and keep teachers abreast of new knowledge and practices in the field.

In line with the self-efficacy theory, at individual school level teachers should collaborate with each other in the teaching of the four selected areas.

For the learners to acquire the needed materials, the MoPSE should come up with programmes where partners may offer loans to schools so that they are given ICT tools and other relevant gadgets which they can pay for later.

School heads should always campaign for strong parental involvement so that the implementation of the four selected areas of the curriculum is effective.

The MoPSE should increase the number of teachers in schools in order to cater for teacher-learner ratios which appear to hinder effective teaching of VPA, PE, ICT and Mass Displays.

CONCLUSION

The focus of this research was on the experiences of educators on the teaching of VPA, ICT, PE and Mass Displays at infant school level in Shamva schools. Implementation failure may be attributed to ECD (infant) teachers' lack of confidence in teaching, high teacher-learner ratio, challenges in using the mother tongue as the language of education, scarce resources, as well as insufficient support from parents. Staff development was viewed as the most appropriate way of empowering infant teachers to embrace the new areas of the competence-based curriculum whose implementation started in 2017.

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