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Teachers' representation of the mitigation strategies to challenges of implementing the 2015 to 2022 Zimbabwean social studies curriculum

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The impromptu launch of the 2015 to 2022 Zimbabwean social studies curriculum invited vilifications and public outcries from parents, teachers and other key stakeholders professing numerous challenges. In this article, we report on the teachers' representation of the mitigation strategies to abate the aforesaid challenges. This interpretive case study engrained in the qualitative approach, was drawn from interviews and focus group discussion (FGD) to establish the teachers' representation of the mitigation strategies that could be employed to curtail challenges faced in implementing that curriculum. In the study, informed by the *ubuntu* philosophy, we used 12 purposively sampled teachers from Zimbabwean primary schools located in different contexts to generate data. The findings show that implementers of policies are too often not consulted during the policy development process leading to challenges which could be mollified by listening to the advice from the implementers, adopting the bottom-up approach and promoting good relations among educators. Considering these findings it was concluded that, for effective policy development, there must be wide consultation and involvement of all stakeholders in the planning, designing and articulation of policies before proper implementation can take place.

Keywords: challenges; curriculum; implementation; mitigation strategies; representation; social studies teachers

Introduction and Background

Zimbabwe, at political independence in 1980, inherited an education system that was too academic and examination oriented and thus needed an intensive overhaul. Conspicuously, Zimbabwe has never had a complete overhaul of her education system for the past four decades despite studies that pointed in that direction (Nziramasanga, 1999). Subsequently, a Commission of Enquiry into Education and Training (CEET) was set up in 1998 to check the gaps and redundancies with the aim of filling that void in line with global trends of the day. The CEET report exposed the irrelevance and inapplicability of the inherited education system and hence called for its refurbishment on a new vision. That saw the birth of what was termed the 2015 to 2022 new or updated curriculum anchored in *ubuntu* as its philosophical base, in which social studies was embedded.

The impromptu launch of that curriculum invited vilifications and public outcries from parents, teachers and other key stakeholders professing numerous challenges, which they claimed could weaken the already fragile education system (Maravanyika, 2018; Zindi, 2018). Undeniably, the roll out of the Zimbabwean New Curriculum Framework from January 2017 was an activity that had elicited a mixed bag of feelings, comments and insights. While most articles in the print media were clearly justifying the need for educational reform in Zimbabwe (Muranganwa, 2017; Rusare, 2017), little was said on how the reforms should be implemented, hence the public outcry. Challenges to curriculum implementation began to look imminent.

Literature Review

Globally, a considerable number of studies on curriculum reform and implementation has been conducted which acknowledges that curriculum change and implementations are not always set on a rosy path but is riddled with challenges (Dube & Jita, 2018; Gasva & Moyo, 2017; Prendergast & Treacy, 2018; Rahman, Pandian & Kaur, 2018). Often, in most countries of the world, the responsibility for the design of curricula is centralised while the implementation is the responsibility of local bodies, leading to several issues. For example, Australia, Ontario, and British Columbia used the top-down approach (Isaacs, 2018). However, it is reported that countries that employ centralised curriculum development permit disparities in the interpretation of the curriculum as it is taught in the classroom and in the practical implementation of that interpretation.

Teachers globally, and even during the apartheid period in South African, despite being excluded from formal discussions of curriculum transformation and implementations, in fact have a major role in curriculum development and complementing curricula in the classroom. As Jenkins and Brickley (1991) argue about the national history curriculum of England and Wales, teachers are allowed to engage with the official curriculum in essence through interpretation, to possibilities and multiplicity of dissimilar meanings and knowledge. The same case occurs in Namibia (O'Sullivan, 2002) and Pakistan (Mohammed & Harlech-Jones, 2008) where studies show that the role of the country's teachers is of the utmost importance to the actual implementation of the new policy. However, policy experts seem to undervalue their knowledge and contexts or view these to be insignificant. Studies suggest that teachers are never mere ciphers and play significant roles in developing and complementing curricula in the classroom. While several studies provide critical and meaningful insights into some of the challenges that teachers face in the implementation of the various curricula in Africa, their limitations lie in that they probably draw insights only from Western views overlooking the Afrocentric views of strategising to mitigate the challenges (Kigwilu & Akala, 2017; Rahman et al., 2018, Zindi, 2018). To close

this lacuna, with this study we sought to unpack the mitigation strategies that could be adopted to drive fidelity of implementation of any new curriculum using insights from the Afrocentric views represented by the *ubuntu* philosophy.

A survey of literature acknowledges that curriculum change takes place in the classroom, which involves teachers as chief implementers who strive to translate curriculum documents into practice (Fullan, 2015; Nziramasanga, 2018; Zindi, 2018). But what remains vague is the reason for their non-involvement in the education reforms at the initial stage, if they are key players in the implementation process (Yidana & Aboagye, 2018; Zindi, 2018). We argue that teachers' representation is deemed key to curriculum implementation because in a traditional top-down innovation model in which teachers' perspective is lacking, teachers are usually blamed for the failure of an innovation. This was the case with the Zimbabwean 2015 to 2022 curriculum. Dube and Jita (2018:901) are of the opinion that in Zimbabwe and other developing countries, education is "centralised, in which the curriculum is centrally developed, defined and mandated largely by educationists, curriculum experts and policy makers." That is backed up by research which reports that the teachers' voices in educational change and their personal experiences are frequently ignored (Carl, 2005; Fullan, 2015; Yidana & Aboagye, 2018). Nziramasanga (2018:36) poses that those policies are formulated at "higher levels without easy consensus" from the teachers. But Cronin-Jones (1991) argues that teacher perceptions and beliefs play a significant role in creatively executing the curriculum. This indicates that despite the hindrances of not being consulted, teachers always navigate ways of implementing the curriculum to suit their values and principles.

The literature surveyed suggests that representation of curriculum change is critical as it structures our knowledge of the curriculum issues the same way we form meaning of things such as people, objects or events (Hall, 1997). However, little information is available on the teachers' representation of the implementation of the new 2015 to 2022 social studies curriculum as very few, if any studies exploring this in social studies are available. Therefore, the implementation stage of the new Zimbabwean curriculum lacked teachers' representation, surmising that their voices were inaudible. As such, to evaluate the mitigation strategies that could be adopted to mollify challenges of implementing the new curriculum in Zimbabwe, there was a need to seek the representation of the teachers to determine whether their non-involvement was an accomplice to faulty implementation and how that correlated with the actual implementation. In this study, we only

employed social studies teachers as reference points since their perceptions and experiences are almost similar to those of other teachers in general. This study was, therefore, a mouthpiece for the social studies teachers who were voiceless in curriculum change and implementation. The study thus served as an opportunity for that group of professionals to voice their mitigation strategies that could circumvent the challenges faced in implementing the new curriculum to better policy and practice. Listening to their voices created openings for these teachers to participate in curriculum design and implementation.

The ontological underpinnings of this study were meant to unravel the mitigation strategies that could be employed to abate challenges of curriculum implementation by listening to the side-lined voices in the discursive spaces where reform policies are debated. The uniqueness of this study hinges on the fact that teachers' roles had been known to be confined to the implementation of curriculum policy because studies had only pointed to the importance of their involvement in implementation in classrooms (Carl, 2005; Nziramasanga, 2018; Rahman et al., 2018; Yidana & Aboagye, 2018; Zindi, 2018). Nowhere had teachers been reported in research that indicated they had voiced to become part of the team that designs and develops the curriculum.

Theoretical Framework

The study was grounded in *ubuntu*, whose major tenets echo the African thought of communism, which was aimed to construct the bridge between the policy developers and teachers in the implementation of any new curriculum. The *ubuntu* philosophy is aptly described by Turaki (2006:36): "People are not individuals living in a state of independence, but part of a community, living in relationships and interdependence." The philosophy of *ubuntu* was chosen as an important framework distinguishable from other theories because its essence lies on humanising people rather than discriminating them and disposing of them as lesser beings (Shutte, 2001), as is aptly explained in the idiom, *umuntu akalahlwa* (a human being cannot be disposed) (Kgari-Masondo & Masondo, 2019). This infers that no matter the rank, ability or beliefs of a person, they are important and they deserve respect.

Ubuntu is firstly regarded as a philosophy or world view and secondly as a humanistic work ethic (Chimuka, 2015). *Ubuntu* perspective is made up of work ethics which constitute what scholarship terms social capital, which Smith (2009) describes as networks, shared norms, values and understandings which enhance teamwork within individuals. This indicates that the *ubuntu* philosophy denotes connections among individuals which give rise to social networks and norms of

reciprocity and trustworthiness. *Ubuntu* ethics refer to the idea of morality and use of terms such as good or bad behaviour; respecting or not respecting, et cetera (Chimuka, 2015). It is premised on a common moral position in which the community is the foundation, writer and guardian of ethical fibre or principles. Letseka (2016:16) takes it further and describes it as an “interactive ethic in which our humanity is shaped by our interaction with others.” As a philosophy, Dlomo (1991:51) argues that *ubuntu* “is an indigenous, purely African philosophy of life” which is not borrowed from eastern or western Europe. *Ubuntu* philosophy is an Afrocentric view, centred on using localised, cultural and social reflections of the community. Since it is grown from Africa, it has the potential to offer African solutions to African challenges that teachers face in the education sector. As explained by Pillay and Swanepoel (2019), employing the Afrocentric views is re-centring Africa in the curriculum, ensuring that the curriculums speak to and from the African context.

Samkange and Samkange (1980) submit that *ubuntu* is mirrored in leaders who lead with their subordinates. As such, one maxim rests on the African belief that “the king owed his status, including all the powers associated with it, to the will of the people under him” (Madzanire & Meier, 2014:18). The Afrocentric approach in community tasks is participation. Each time an African village had a task, it was the responsibility of the king to invite his subjects to a traditional meeting (*indaba, dare*, council) to deliberate on issues that affect them as a community. That participation was characterised by frankness and open debate in which all views were respected despite their source of origin. In this article participation is viewed as follows: “being with and acting for others with the aim of advancing the common good” (Pembroke, 2019:1).

The literature surveyed depicts that solidarity is the lifeblood of *ubuntu* on which the African people have relied for years. Without it, African life is not complete because solidarity with one another is cherished through communalism, conformity, compassion, respect, human dignity and collective unity (Mbigi, 1997; Msila, 2014). This indicates that the concept of *ubuntu* is a pre-colonial idea symbolising communalism and human interdependence that has been in existence in Africa for years. Thus, the *ubuntu* philosophy seen this way is that we can refer to the usable past from African societies so that we reconstruct our knowledge on curriculum development and implementation. As such, that spirit of solidarity, which is embedded in the philosophy of *ubuntu*, is the linchpin on which cooperation strategies can be built to permeate the education system. *Ubuntu* operates as an adhesive that glues people from

different backgrounds together, notwithstanding their social standing or access to wealth (Lutz, 2009). Hence, seen this way, curriculum implementation is a shared experience in which teachers from different backgrounds can contribute to its construction through their narratives regarding their aspirations and vision. Benefiting from the major assumptions extracted from the *ubuntu* philosophy, we used these tenets for understanding teachers’ representation of challenges in implementing the social studies curriculum. As such, the tenets of *ubuntu*, namely participation, consultation, love, dignity, respect, togetherness and compassion guided in the provision of mitigation strategies to curtail challenges of curriculum implementation. We argue that involvement in the formulation and translation of the curriculum is possible when the policy makers appreciate the involvement of teachers as partners.

Methodology

We sought to explore the teachers’ representations of the mitigation strategies that could be employed to avert challenges in implementing the 2015 to 2022 Zimbabwean social studies curriculum. We also suggest ways to improve policy and practice in curriculum design and implementation.

The study was framed in the qualitative approach to obtain a deep and comprehensive description of teachers’ representation of the strategies to abate challenges faced by teachers in implementing the social studies curriculum. We used the qualitative approach because the major features of it are meanings and the settings (Cropley, 2015; Yin, 2015). It was advantageous to use a qualitative approach because it permitted us to continually tease out the nature of the implementation as it was “experienced, structured and interpreted by the teachers in the course of their everyday teaching” (Cropley, 2015:13). The teachers’ views and their representations could not be subjected to numerical analysis, hence the appropriateness of the qualitative approach in the study. The study was set to find meaning in text (Creswell & Poth, 2017), hence we searched for an understanding of how challenges of the social studies curriculum manifested and the strategies for averting them.

We employed an interpretive case study on the basis that this research was aimed at understanding human beings in a social milieu by interpreting their representations as a single group, community or a single event, which is a case (Fouché, Strydom & Roestenburg., 2021). This was in line with Tracy (2013:3) who is of the opinion that a case study seeks to answer “specific research questions which solicit a range of different evidences from the case settings.” We also considered Yin’s (2015:16) argument that a case

study investigates a “contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context.”

Since we were not interested in data generation from all teachers in Zimbabwe on challenges they faced during the implementation of the new curriculum, we share Mason’s (2002:65) view that sampling is vital if one is “not interested in the ‘census’ or trying to conduct a broad sweep of everything.” Twelve teachers were purposively chosen from six schools. We focused on a small number of schools because each school had its unique traits in terms of its political, historical and geographical location, although similarities were evident in the socio-economic settings. We employed maximum variation sampling as a “strategy for dealing with the problem of representativeness under the conditions of small sample size ...” to maximize the variation in site selection when we selected the six schools (Patton, 2015:102). It was not possible to collect data from every school relevant to this study but only from some of the schools, with the intention of representing all primary schools in Zimbabwe. Six schools and two participants from each school were selected for “feasibility reasons” (O’Leary, 2014:30). Resource constraints could not allow a large-scale investigation that could cover the entire country. Had we increased the number of participants, the sample could have been too large to attain data saturation. For that reason, the schools were purposively selected on the basis of convenience and that they were true representatives of Zimbabwean schools since they were located in different contexts drawn from the urban, growth point, rural, farm, boarding and mission settings. The selected schools mirrored all the types of schools available in Zimbabwe and were representative enough because purposeful sampling selects information rich cases for study (Patton, 2015). The 12 teachers were chosen on the premise that they were among the first group of educators who pioneered the implementation of the new 2015 to 2022 curriculum when it was rolled out; they were in the trenches and could report their experiences accurately. Furthermore, they were trained in social studies and were connoisseurs on the subject who could provide relevant and rich data – unlike the untrained teachers who were not conversant with the learning area.

We employed semi-structured interviews and FGD to capture the mitigation strategies to challenges of curriculum implementation. The semi-structured interviews were used since they could access the “emic” perspective, that is, taking the perspective of the people being studied by penetrating their frame of meaning (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003:4). It provided us with an opportunity for exploring, probing, and asking questions to clarify and illuminate issues to do with the mitigation strategies as perceived by the teachers.

While the FGD had their limitations in that they compromised confidentiality, this type of data collection was conducted after a series of individual semi-structured interviews to triangulate data. Prior to the interviews, teachers were provided with a tentative interview schedule that indicated when we were visiting their schools.

On the day of the interview and FGD, the first 5 minutes were spent discussing the background of the study, the reasons for conducting the research, and what we hoped to achieve. The teachers were engaged in individual semi-structured interviews that lasted for approximately 45 minutes. The same teachers who participated in the semi-structured interviews later participated in the FGD, which lasted for an hour. This was important because rich and sensitive data emerged, which were not possible to elicit through individual interviews. Being part of a group often created a more relaxed atmosphere than a one-on-one interview (Yin, 2015) and as such varied and rich, in-depth material from several teachers was obtained. Several strategies were used to enhance the trustworthiness of the study. We employed triangulation by using various data sources and multiple informants as a criterion to solidify credibility. We used two methods namely interviews and FGD. These were used to elicit data from different teachers drawn from different schools. We also applied member checking to add to the study’s credibility by giving feedback regarding preliminary findings and interpretations of the study to participating teachers and taking note of their comments.

We derived our data through direct interaction with the teachers and then we adopted a thematic analysis (Yin, 2015) in which the focus was to investigate the teachers’ lived experiences. The researchers interacted and became immersed in the data during the study. We emphasised the “meaning participants made” of the narratives as well as the justification for that position (Yin, 2015:103). As such, data gathered by means of FGD and interviews were analysed in tandem with the themes that emerged in line with the thrust of the study. The data were audio-taped, listened to, copied, explained, coded, abridged, presented and analysed while they were very fresh in our minds.

To uphold ethical issues in this qualitative study, ethical clearance was obtained from the University of KwaZulu-Natal, protocol reference number HSS/0855/018D. Approval was sought from the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, Provincial Education Director for Masvingo Province, the District Schools Inspectors and the school principals to conduct research in Zimbabwean schools. All participants were required to sign agreement forms to take part in the study (Fouché et al., 2021). Permission was also requested for the

use of a tape recorder during interviews and focus group sessions and then later for using the interviewees' quotes for publication. Fictitious names were used to conceal the participants' identities.

Results

Teachers' Representation of the Mitigation Strategies

Teachers' representation of the mitigation strategies is presented thematically using their own words. The findings were analysed and are discussed through an *ubuntu* lens.

Teacher participation

The teachers who participated in the research admitted that while the new curriculum was a noble change with a novel intention, it was fraught with challenges that emanated from the way in which the educational change was enacted. The development and articulation of the new curriculum was devoid of teacher participation. As explained by S2, who shook her head when she said:

Aaah, we were not involved at all because we just heard about this new curriculum through the media. We were then called for a workshop at the implementation stage. Before the implementation there were no workshops that I attended. We just accepted it because it is part of our job to teach. If they say teach this, we just teach.

This means that teachers are mere ciphers of large-scale curriculum change which is imposed upon them by policy makers. As such, implementation is fraught with uncertainty. This demonstrates that implementers of the reforms should be involved in the planning stage so that they get a good idea of what is to be implemented, how that is to be done or the directions of the changes. Teachers who participated in the study suggested their active participation, which would have been meaningful. For interviewee J1, meaningful teacher participation in curriculum construction and implementation means the following:

It is always important to engage the people who are going to implement any new aspects of the new changes that are going to come. Those people are going to share among them what is needed (subject matter and its workload) and how they would implement the changes (pedagogy expertise). This would reduce the complications embedded in the implementation process. Planning should start from grassroots where we as implementers discuss and agree on the changes and the implementation strategies. The discussion will unpack the implementation map which would assist us to see the vision of the innovations and how to trudge on in the odyssey. Thereafter, we can then take that up for fine tuning and perfection of the suggestions by policy makers. If they impose like what happened, then challenges are inescapable.

This shows that teachers' input is indispensable to the implementation of a new programme, although

teachers' contributions are regularly overlooked – especially in systems of centralised curriculum development. That claim resonates with the contributions of Fullan (2015:84) on the need to involve the change agents so that they have an “image of what to do to get there”, otherwise, a curriculum that lacks clarity will result in failure. Prendergast and Treacy (2018:139–140) take that further and advise that “if teachers are to implement an innovation, it is essential that they have a thorough understanding of the principles of the proposed change through their participation.” The implication is that if teachers are made active partners in the development of the innovation, it will allow teachers to take ownership of the innovation and increase their commitment (Pansiri, 2014; Yidana & Aboagye, 2018). That would make necessary educational changes easy in terms of content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, knowledge of educational contexts, and knowledge of educational philosophies, thereby driving the success of the social studies implementation.

Bottom-up approach

From the interviews and FGD it was clear that the top-down approach was adopted in the implementation of the new social studies curriculum. In the words of teacher G1:

The top to down approach used in launching the social studies curriculum was more like a prescription. While I enjoy the new social studies curriculum, it makes me a learner since it was poorly cascaded and hurriedly rolled out without wide consultation.

To mitigate the challenge of the new social studies curriculum that stemmed from the traditional top-down approach, the participant teachers suggested a bottom-up approach or some dilutions of the top-down approach. More importantly, they pointed out that the voices of the implementers at grassroots level should be heard to ensure the success of the new curriculum implementation. Teacher J1 commented as follows:

A bottom-up approach in curriculum change that takes the views of the agents of change is better than the top-down approach, which is a prescription. Policy makers should come down to mother earth and not to take for granted that teachers will implement what they think and feel has to be implemented. We should work together as a team. The teachers' voices are needed to get their concerns of what is to be implemented. It is them who implement and should be listened to.

This shows that teachers viewed the bottom-up approach as key in mitigating challenges faced in the implementation stage of the social studies curriculum. We agree with Prendergast and Treacy (2018:143) that if teachers are to implement an innovation, it is essential that they have a thorough understanding of the vision of the proposed change, which could be done by adopting the bottom-up

approach, which involves participation. Fullan (2015) appraises that the vision of the curriculum must be known by implementers, which is also embraced in the *ubuntu* philosophy.

Partnership in the provision of educational resources

The teachers' narratives in the study indicated that schools were poorly resourced with regard to reference books, the syllabus, learners' books as well as teaching media. R1 recalled: "*The sticking challenge in the implementation of the course was the unavailability of adequate materials.*" That was further illustrated by C2 who said: "*If the facilitator was not well equipped with relevant books and educational materials, the implementation was doomed because implementation is hinged on availability of these items.*" The participants mentioned several challenges – specifically as social studies primary school trained teachers. Teacher C1 from a farm school said the following:

Aah, we do not have the hard copy of the social studies syllabus, not even one textbook for learners as well as concrete media in form of artefacts in the so-called culture hut. We do not have proper and enough physical facilities.

From their comments we understood that the teachers worked at different workstations located in different geographical areas chequered with different socio-economic localities. Regarding resources, teacher M1 from rural school M mentioned that they had only one learners' textbook which was shared by the two teachers. Teachers in the urban areas argued that although they did not have enough textbooks, a reasonable number of copies of social studies books that they had purchased themselves, were available for use by the learners.

From the FGD and semi-structured interviews the word "teamwork" gained currency as a strategy to abate the challenges of a lack of resources which had affected all schools. Teacher C said: "*our values as people in Africa is that we work together as brothers and sisters as demonstrated by ubuntu principles.*" Teachers voiced that players in education had to be collectively committed to lessen the acute shortages of resources in schools. "*Schools have to look for help from the international community and well-wishers to fund the provision of resources*" (M2). This means that involvement of people from all corners of the world is critical if provision of educational resources is to be achieved. This demonstrates the essence of two of the *ubuntu* values, solidarity and compassion, which entail sharing in times of need. This is important as the world is now focusing on globalisation.

Psycho-social support from school principals

From some of the responses it seemed as though school principals lacked love, respect and dignity for the teachers.

Each time I knocked on the door of our principal, I received a cold welcome punctuated with a 'what is it again' expression on the face. When I explain the purpose of the visit, the school principal usually reminds me of my laziness and then an elaboration that we received the same training and as such was not even aware of how to deal with my problems. That is again followed by a serious lecture on why the school cannot honour my requests because of financial constraints. Their behaviour is likened to that of the then Prime Minister of Primary and Secondary Education who once said: 'the new curriculum has now come to stay, shape up or ship out.' (S2)

The teacher's sentiments reflect poor relations in schools. It denotes a lack of concern, love and dignity from the school principals which are values central to the *ubuntu* philosophy, in which the new curriculum is anchored. Significant about this finding is that several studies concentrated on the roles that school principals play in coordinating curriculum implementation (Pansiri, 2014; Yidana & Aboagye, 2018) but overlooked the issue of relations practised by school principals. As such, poor relations have not been considered as a factor that could enhance or inhibit the implementation of the curriculum.

Indigenous knowledge and curriculum reforms

The participants in the semi-structured interviews and FGD bemoaned the lack of African content in the social studies curriculum and demanded that this be rectified. S2 said:

I may say this new social studies is shallower in cultural content as compared to the old social studies. This new social studies is more on global issues which negate our cultural values in the African context. While it teaches learners issues correlated to our indigenous knowledge for instance, types of trees and their herbal uses, it lacks on issues that promotes cooperation. I wonder why they purged off the topic 'Living Together' which was very relevant in the promotion of social living. Our moral fibre has to be strengthened through teaching of our values through social studies. When teaching is based on our knowledge of our values, then it is answers to the realities of our lives and that makes it easy to be cascaded. For instance, when social studies teaches about our heritage and the monuments of Africa it's worth teaching because it focuses on our history.

This suggests that, if content is localised, then teachers find it easy to teach since they would be teaching things that they grew up knowing from birth, hence a plausible implementation of the new curriculum. The finding agrees with Kgari-

Masondo's (2017:87) view that social studies is a social construct located in the activities of the world and reflects the communities it serves and empowers the learners with critical lifelong learning skills. This is in agreement with Berger and Luckmann's (1996) explanation that human beings as a group create and sustain all social phenomena through social practices. Hence, social studies is represented as a curriculum that can have outcomes based on common models from society. That could have been achieved because the teachers could draw from their knowledge of the African values which they grew up practising in their communities.

Discussion

Ubuntu and Curriculum Implementation: Way Forward

The participants in the FGD and semi-structured interviews mentioned the essence of *ubuntu*, namely participation. Participation by all people in community tasks is common in African societies and is aptly etched in the *ubuntu* philosophy expressed in their proverbs. One such idiomatic expression couched in the *Nguni language goes* "Okuhlula amadoda kuyabikwa." This means that what is a challenge to the individual, is declared to the community (Khoza, 2018:6) which suggests that whenever there is a community task, people need to assemble to work towards solutions. From the findings it became clear that the teachers opted for a bottom-up approach to minimise the challenges of the implementation of the new social studies curriculum. In that context, teachers reported that the top-down approach was disrespectful of their concerns as change agents because they were not machines who worked to the command of school principals in offices. The limitation of the top-down approach was premised on the fact that it overlooked the implementers' advice as enshrined in the *ubuntu* philosophy. That was because involvement of all stakeholders in community work was not new in the African villages. Each time the community had a task at hand, they would assemble and make decisions together.

We, therefore, consider participation by teachers as a trait that stems from the *ubuntu* tree of wisdom, which is vital in curriculum change and implementation. If teacher participation was, as reported, not for all teachers, that diminished their values as human beings, which was anti *ubuntu* in nature. Thus, our argument, in line with Oloruntegbe (2017) is that successful reforms are initiated from the grassroots (bottom-up), particularly by teachers who are in the field and know what and where changes are needed. To this effect, we argue that the teachers are very important agents of policy implementation (Prendergast & Treacy, 2018:126; Zindi, 2018:27). As such, policy makers must involve teachers in

educational changes so that they become clear on the course of action to improve policy and practice.

In view of both the extant literature and the teachers' representation it can be inferred that the provision of educational materials must be the responsibility of not only the government, but everyone else. African societies learnt how to survive through sharing resources over many years (Seroto, 2016:47). This also indicates that it is possible for all stakeholders, in following the traditional African way, to share the scarce resources which had negated the success of the implementation of the social studies curriculum. In line with the precepts of the *ubuntu* values, we agree with Poovan (2005) that the sharing of resources among Africans has developed into a collective psyche, which can still allow us as Africans to share the resources that are essential for effective implementation of the reformed curriculum. It is evident from the above that the unavailability of resources could have been abated by the *ubuntu* value of compassion. The significance of this finding rests on the pretexts of globalisation and the axioms of *ubuntu* that demonstrate that resource mobilisation can be done through partnership with both the local and the global community. Towards that end, the Department of Education in cohort with the government must engage with the corporate world to avail the minimum resources needed for the implementation of any new curriculum to arrest the acute shortages of resources.

Based on the findings, the issue of psycho-social support in the context of the social studies curriculum suggests that school principals and curriculum constructors should have leadership values that promote cordial social relations so that team spirit is cultivated during implementation of new reforms. That is connected to the *ubuntu* philosophy which agitates for the need to use every member's contributions for the betterment of society based on respect for others' views. As explained by Pembroke (2019:1), *ubuntu* affirms "positive interpersonal relations and commitment to the common good." School principals are at the epicentre of any curriculum implementation. Their good relations with their subordinates contribute to the success of the curriculum implementation, unlike what was revealed in this study which indicated that some principals were *anti-ubuntu*. As such, Rahman et al. (2018:1122) caution that instead of the arrogant "we-know-what-is-good-for-you" attitudes from principals, the teachers must be consulted rather than told what to do; they must be respected rather than patronised. This suggests that the heads of schools' negative attitudes on the teachers' perceived skills must be altered for them to embrace the essence of sharing ideas. Those who employ school principals are urged to design an assessment tool to evaluate the

attitudes and public relations of these leaders in their daily operations. This would act as a deterrent to the manifestations of poor relations by school principals.

The findings of the study describe teachers as people who have important knowledge of life aspects which can be incorporated into the social studies curriculum. Their involvement in the content construction of the new curriculum could abate the challenges of having new topics which are beyond their cultural aspects. This suggestion is premised on the fact that the experiences that the teachers accumulated during their lives and duties were enough to determine the social studies content in an African context. As such, policy makers are urged to allow the participation of these teachers in developing the curriculum content so that teachers make meaningful inputs towards content that will “address lived realities” (Dube & Jita, 2018:908). In that way, unwanted content material could be purged, relevant concepts could be incorporated and more African values could be added. As this was not done, it was a source of impediments to the effective implementation of the curriculum.

Conclusion

Too often those who have to implement the policies are not consulted during the development of a new process, resulting in a number of challenges. This study is yet another story about teachers being excluded from formal, bureaucratically-driven curriculum reform. This study addresses this very pertinent issue in education and calls for a collective involvement of all stakeholders in the development and articulation of policies. We argue that, for effective policy development, there must be wide consultation and involvement of all stakeholders in the planning, designing and articulation of policies before proper implementation can take place. Other countries in the world could draw lessons from the *ubuntu* values entrenched in African societies to unpack the mitigation strategies to challenges of curriculum implementation. Through this study we have established that the employment of *ubuntu* in various facets of educational reforms such as provision of resources; the promotion of cordial relations and the use of indigenous knowledge in the construction of curriculum content, are critical in the effective implementation of any new curriculum. With this article, we have shown *ubuntu*'s relevance and significance in these dimensions. We, therefore, implore policy makers and the Department of Education in any government to be wary of the top-down approach in curriculum design and implementation that is devoid of teacher participation and consultation. We urge policy makers to listen to the teachers' voices, in which teachers articulate freely their viewpoints and trepidations in educational reforms

to enhance efficacy in policy formulation and practice.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors contributed to the analysis of the fieldwork data and the writing of the manuscript. Chimbunde conducted the interviews. All authors reviewed the final manuscript.

Notes

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