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## Incorporating a Cooperative Teaching and Learning Approach in Life Orientation Lesson Planning

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**Abstract:** In the field of education, globally, teachers are recognised as important contributors in shaping learners' interaction in a cooperative learning environment through effective lesson planning. There is a plethora of research conducted internally on lesson planning, as a critical instructional competency for good teaching and as a purposeful activity that precedes the delivery of instruction. This study aimed to explore Life Orientation teachers' lesson planning incorporating a cooperative teaching and learning approach in secondary schools in De Aar, South Africa. The researchers adopted a mixed-methods phenomenological research design. Seven Grade 10 Life Orientation teachers were purposely selected to collect semi-structured interviews data, non-participatory observation, and document analysis. Data were analysed using inductive thematic analysis and supported with the literature review and the theory underpinning this study. This paper suggests an enactment between teachers' subject and pedagogical content knowledge and instructional material. Lastly, it is also evident that many teachers lack knowledge, insufficient instructional resources, and an understanding of effective lesson planning to implement a cooperative teaching approach.

**Keywords:** *Life orientation teachers, lesson planning, cooperative learning, teaching approach, secondary schools.*

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### Introduction

Over the past century, there has been an increasing interest in the effective teaching of Life Orientation in South African schools. Since the introduction of Life Orientation in the late 1990s as a non-examinable subject, the purpose was mainly to equip learners to face life challenges in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, since 2008 Life Orientation has been an assessed subject, even at Matric (Grade 12) level, and as a result, teachers have had to bridge the gap between the content that has to be taught and the ability of the learners to absorb this content and apply it in assessment tasks. To achieve the aforementioned objectives, the Life Orientation teacher needs to be a knowledgeable and skillful person who can effectively plan for the teaching-learning process. On the other hand, the knowledge and experience of the teachers who interpreted the curricular policy documents to teach the subject are undervalued (Department of Basic Education [DBE], 2011). Therefore, teachers need to be equipped to design effective and in-depth lesson plans to make the teaching and learning process a success by creating a learner-centered teaching and learning environment. Some countries see it as a more accessible way to support and provide teachers with technology-infused lesson plans that will guide the preparation and delivery of the lesson because the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) is demanding technology integration with a change to creating digital communities (Janssen & Lazonder, 2015). Therefore, the widespread use of technology makes lesson plans a potentially appropriate means to assist both pre-service and in-service teachers in integrating technology in the classroom and creating cooperative teaching and learning opportunities.

From a social-constructivist perspective that claims that teachers have to adapt to the role of facilitators, teachers facilitate learner understanding of the content (Bakersfield, 1995). A facilitator provides guidelines and creates an environment conducive for the learners to participate in constructing knowledge. Several studies in the literature report on the implementation of teaching and learning approaches. Aldridge et al. (2004) examined ways to assist teachers in improving their classroom teaching practices through reflection to implement the necessary curriculum changes. This implies that the teachers' role and the classroom environment must change to ensure effective teaching

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and learning. In a similar vein, Van Wyk (2010) identified didactic principles followed by teachers in economics. While this study focused on didactic principles by teachers, van Wyk argued that planned lesson outcomes could be purposefully achieved. If teachers are familiar with the didactic principles, they have a sound knowledge of these as they apply to the teaching of a specific subject. These didactic principles, among others, includes aspects such as teachers should structure well-designed discussion assignments which facilitate meaningful cooperation among learners, thereby encouraging active, participative teaching and learning. To ensure continuous learning, teachers need to provide feedback which includes information feedback and acknowledgment feedback. Teachers should also facilitate effective communication following clear guidelines for interaction with learners to meet the high expectations of their learners and acknowledge learners' diverse talents and ways of learning (Van Wyk, 2010). These principles guide lesson planning which is regarded as a complicated task. Despite the complexity, the ability to plan instruction is a skill that teachers require in an educational setting (Koni & Krull, 2018).

A recent doctoral study, which included content analysis of Life Orientation teachers' documents, revealed that teachers complied with the requirements of a lesson plan. Still, it also indicated that teachers were not quite sure about developing the phases of the lessons and describing the phases thoroughly (Seherrie, 2020). This indication implies that teachers need to plan their lessons and be confident inadequately presenting the subject matter. However, this area of concern is of vital importance. Teachers need to be up skilled and abreast of the essential components of a lesson plan that incorporate cooperative teaching and learning. The researchers opine that when teachers are familiar with the content of their lesson preparation, they will implement and initiate teaching and learning effectively using a wide range of strategies that ensure that learners acquire and develop the relevant knowledge and skills values attitudes. Planning to reach the desired outcomes is an essential instructional competency required for effective teaching.

### *Context of the Problem*

Internationally, lesson planning is widely regarded as an essential part of the teaching process and has had global prominence in policy-led and pedagogical reform. Although standardised lesson plans (SLPs) have become an accepted strategy to guide, support, and improve instructional practices in schools, teachers' standards in England are expected to plan and teach well-structured lessons. Despite the recognition that planning is an important teaching skill, schools [teachers] were not required to provide individual lesson plans to departmental officials (Bassett et al., 2013; John, 2006). This situation created confusion over the need for lesson plans highlighted as an issue in teacher lesson preparation (Black et al., 2019).

In recent years, research has suggested that lesson plans are a potentially powerful means to facilitate teachers' use of technology in the classroom (Janssen & Lazonder, 2015). Even though most technologies can promote learning, technology is not always used to its full potential because not all teachers are ready to use technology in the classroom. Therefore, it is recommended that additional guidance be provided to teachers to develop and integrate technological and pedagogical content knowledge to effectively implement lesson planning (Mishra & Koehler, 2006; Voogt et al., 2013).

Since the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) document indicates a layout of the content to be taught in the Annual Teaching Plan (ATP), as well as the Programme of Assessment (PoA), designed to spread formal assessment tasks for each subject throughout the school year, there has been a strong movement and emphasis away from detailed lesson planning templates in the South African context (DBE, 2011). However, standardised lesson plans were criticised because they seemed to deskill the teaching profession and reduce the workload of teachers to that of mere technicians (Shalem et al., 2018). Many provinces in South Africa have been moving towards SLPs despite critiques against the prescriptiveness that it brings to the education fraternity (Janks, 2014; Msibi & Mchunu, 2013). This aligns with the position in which the education department finds itself concerning inadequate curriculum coverage, poorly structured teaching practices, and even the poor state of results of the education system in South Africa (National Education Evaluation and Development Unit [NEEDU], [DBE], 2013). Magano (2009) alludes that the planning process should involve educators identifying themes, the purpose of the lesson, learners' prior knowledge, methods of teaching, and what the author describes as a systematic development of instructional requirements used for teaching. Indeed, researchers have discovered that using lesson planning as a vehicle for teaching indicates that teachers lack creativity and innovation and that more extensive training is required (Adewumi & Titilawo, 2015; Magano, 2011; Prinsloo, 2007; Rooth, 2005; Sedibe, 2014). Teaching strategies and approaches have to be learner-centred and to the benefit of the learners. Besides, skills such as, among others, emotional intelligence, working in teams, decision-making, planning, and time management skills need to be emphasised (Matshoba & Rooth, 2014). Still, in many instances, learners are disadvantaged because of the ineffectiveness of the role that teachers play (Zulu, 2016).

This study aimed to investigate the knowledge and skills concerning lesson planning for a cooperative teaching and learning approach that teachers should acquire. Contrary to the expectations of the Department of Education, as stipulated in the National Strategy for Learner Attainment (NSLA) that states that teachers must adhere to the correct implementation of the curriculum, research indicates that teachers in South African schools are not yet fully capacitated in effective lesson planning. As a result, the researchers believe that the gap between the department's theoretical

aspirations and the successful execution of instructional planning cannot be overcome unless teachers know the current situation. Emanating from the aforementioned discussion, the general view is that Life Orientation teachers are an integral part of managing the implementation of the curriculum. The following research question: How do Life Orientation teachers in secondary schools' design lesson plans *to enhance cooperative teaching and learning approaches?*

The literature, thus, highlights the policy interest in lesson planning, debates about the nature of lesson planning, and how it will be implemented in a learner-centred classroom environment. Planning is regarded as the central task of teaching with a focus on learning to teach. It is crucial to establish what planning entails and how teachers and novice teachers best learn planning. As stated in the NSLA, Section 4 for high and secondary FET schools, the primary purpose of planning and lesson preparation is to ensure adherence to curriculum needs which refer to the understanding and implementing aims and skills (DBE, 2015). Goal 16 of the NSLA refers to improving teachers' professionalism, teaching skills, subject knowledge, and computer literacy throughout their entire careers. The Life Orientation teacher can be thought of as a facilitator in the classroom who attends to the students' emotional, psychological, social, and physical well-being. The teacher also ensures that they acquire the necessary knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes to become successful and productive citizens in the twenty-first century.

#### *Conceptualising lesson planning of Life Orientation teachers*

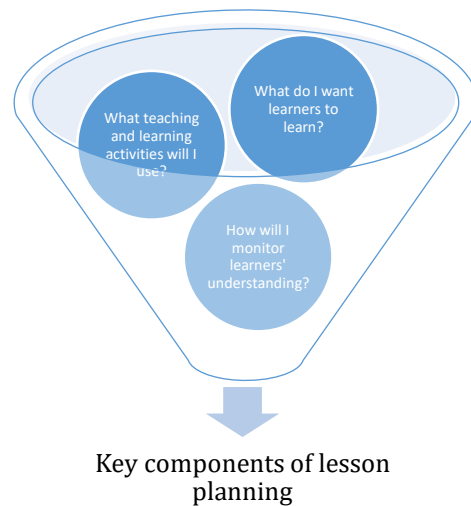
Lesson planning is the instructional planning of the desired outcomes and the layout of the Life Orientation teacher's procedures. Plans include, among others, linking prior knowledge, realistic aims and objectives, sequence and development, explanation and indication of phases, and lastly, how lessons connect with curriculum objectives. Lesson planning has its roots in Tyler's (1950) attempt to organise teachers' preparation activities before starting with the instructional activities. Subsequently, there has been an interest in investigating the lesson plan process and its impact on learning.

Lesson planning is described as one of the professional requirements guided by teachers' beliefs about learners' needs. The objectives of the lessons arising from activities and teachers can pursue goals that emerge rather than adhere to a pre-determined plan. Moreover, a good lesson plan enables interaction between the teacher and the particular subject matter. The teacher decides how to deliver a specific subject content in a suitable teaching environment (Calderhead, 1996; John, 2006; Lai & Lam, 2011). Moreover, lesson planning involves different forms of knowledge for teaching, including goals for students' learning, instructional activities, and keeping track of learners' assessment for learning (Santagata et al., 2007). Therefore, a teacher displays careful planning and preparation, which enables familiarity with the content and serves as a guide to clarify the reason behind covering a particular lesson topic (Simwa & Modiba, 2015). On the other side, the literature also refers to it as instructional planning, which is regarded with different levels of generalisations whereby decisions are taken well before an instruction is implemented with varying phases of assessment (Drost & Levine, 2015; Eggen & Kauchak, 2013). In addition to the previously mentioned definitions and descriptions, it is evident that the term instructional planning [lesson planning] also refers to multiple forms of planning where a lesson is planned for a week, a unit, or even a year (Woolfolk, 2016).

#### *Developing initiatives for instructional proficiency of Life Orientation teachers*

Instructional planning of lesson units can take the form of a single lesson, a unit of lessons, or even a long-termed phase which is decisive in determining the success of the day's work of the teacher (König et al., 2017). Some schools expect teachers to provide daily lesson preparation which specifies which content is to be taught. This could be to assist the substitute teacher in knowing what to do in the classroom, especially in cases where the class teacher is not available. Besides, one of the core challenges that teachers face when planning a lesson is how to adapt planning elements to the learners' particular needs. Scholars have illustrated that effective teachers prepare their lessons in a process-driven way that aligns the instructional decisions with the learners' needs (Enow & Goodwyn, 2018; Stigler & Miller, 2018). Therefore, this implies that the decision taken by teachers in their planning process should consider the successful integration of the learners' teaching and learning environment.

A lesson plan is the teachers' road map of what the learners need to learn and how it is done during contact time. Over the years, scholars have developed various strategies and models of lesson planning (Clark & Yinger, 1987; Milkova, 2012). The following figure illustrates the key components of lesson planning:



*Figure 1: Key components of lesson plan design (Adopted from Fink, 2005)*

Lesson planning serves as a reminder to monitor whether the teachers are still following the planned direction of the lesson. The above illustration highlights three components of successful lesson planning: the learning objectives, the instructional activities that include activities for both the teacher and the learner, and lastly the assessment. The first step is to develop an outline of the learning objectives. The teachers must determine what they want the learners to learn, what they should do during and at the end of the class. Teachers will assess if the learning objectives have been met after engaging in teaching and learning activities. Objectives also refer to the learning the teacher would like the learners to achieve and the cognitive skills developed during these learning activities. The role of teachers is to consider that learners play an essential role in the construction of new knowledge (content), how learners' prior knowledge is linked to their existing knowledge structure, and the relevance, complexity, and evaluation of the content. The effective implementation and integration of these elements illustrate the layout of the activities given by the teachers (Hedge, 2000). Coupled with the objectives and learning activities, the teachers have to perform different roles concerning learners' work, such as demonstrations, facilitation, monitoring, and evaluation. It remains vital that all engagement must happen in a learner-centred environment conducive to effective learning within these roles.

Many teachers start their lesson planning with learning objectives (John, 2006). Others prefer to follow the backward planning approach where the lesson identifies the assessment (Jones et al., 2009; Wiggins & McTighe, 1998). The latter is to the advantage of teachers to avoid challenges to write unrealistic objectives and consequently misalign the objectives and the learning activities. Assessment data can be regarded as valuable information with specific reference to identifying any misconceptions regarding the content covered and learners' knowledge before the intended lesson (Chizhik & Chizhik, 2018).

From the literature analysis on the role of lesson planning in cooperative teaching and learning, Researchers concluded that effective planning of a lesson as an instructional activity needs to be purposeful with clear, intentional outcomes. The literature analysis confirms the value of alignment and incorporation of components of lessons in the process. It is also evident that teachers, especially novice teachers, need to be supported and developed to improve their understanding of planning to achieve teaching success. The particular challenge is encouraging creativity and innovation in teachers finding ways to ensure learner participation in lessons. Therefore, this inquiry is a consideration of the knowledge and skills concerning lesson planning that teachers should acquire.

## Methodology

### *Research Goal*

In the naturalistic setting of participants, this investigation draws on Edmund Husserl's phenomenology and Wilhelm Dilthey's interpretative understanding and hermeneutics (Denzin & Lincoln, 2010; De Vos et al., 2011). The intention was to gain knowledge and insight from the teachers' responses to the teaching Life Orientation. A mixed-methods phenomenological research design was adopted, which explored the lived experiences in everyday situations and relations of the participants (Maree, 2016).

### *Sample and Data Collection*

Purposive sampling was utilised to select participants with experience, competence, and understanding of the phenomenon that informs the data needed for this study, which is a non-probabilistic method in nature. One Life Orientation teacher, each from the seven secondary schools in the Pixley Ka Seme District in the Northern Cape

Province in South Africa, was purposefully sampled. (Three male and four female teachers, (n=7)). Initially, ten teachers from the 25 secondary schools in the Pixley Ka Seme District were chosen to participate in this study since all teach Life Orientation as a subject. However, three of the ten schools withdrew from this research study. Participants ranged from age 24-50, and their teaching experience ranged from 1-3 years of teaching experience to more than eight years of teaching experience in the Further Education and Training (FET) phase.

Reliability and validity are ensured by the requirements for effective lesson planning based on the curriculum and assessment policy statements underpinned by the Department of Basic Education in South Africa. Data collection included face-to-face semi-structured interviews, non-participatory observation, and document analysis. The interviews focused on the experiences of the Life Orientation teachers' teaching praxis in a cooperative teaching and learning environment to understand the participants' perceptions (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). The quantitative data were collected using a self-designed closed structured observation checklist. The observation schedule covered the evaluation of how teachers employed a learner-centred teaching approach in the Life Orientation classrooms by using the five-point Likert scale observation checklist (strongly agree to disagree strongly). The document analysis included primary and secondary data such as teachers' master files, lesson plans and notes, assessment records, departmental Life Orientation circulars, learners' portfolios, and learners' exercise books.

### *Analyzing of Data*

Data analysis employed the constant comparison analysis of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to analyse qualitative data. Inductive methodologies included categories and sub-categories that emerged from the data being analysed. Independent researchers transcribed the data, coded and analysed it manually, and presented it narratively following the themes generated with the objectives the study sought to achieve. The information gathered from semi-structured interviews, non-participatory observation, and documentation was distilled into valuable units (Miles et al., 2014). Dependability was assured through the use of two researchers working independently and together, analysing the data through critical discussion and consensus making. The researcher videotaped the interviews and observations and discussed these recordings with the participants every afternoon to ensure member-checking and create an audit trail.

The researchers applied multiple data collection processes concerning dependability, namely, face-to-face interviews, observations, video recordings, and document analysis. This study included direct quotations from interviews and narratives to support conclusions to obtain confirmability. The researcher ensured credibility through a complete explanation of participants and the context of the research. Long-term interaction with research participants in the field was necessary to ensure the study's credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). For this study to be credible, the researchers had frequent meetings with participants to validate member checking and allow the participants to play an active role in confirming by bringing their interpretations. The participants were requested to review the data and make changes and suggestions where they felt necessary. The researcher also assured that personal preferences and biases did not influence the findings of the study.

Regarding ethical considerations, the University of South Africa (UNISA) and Ethics committees approved the research (Reference number 2019/11/13/41003276/08/AM). The Northern Cape Department of Education granted further permission to conduct the study at schools. Participants obtained and signed informed consent forms. Aside from that, the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants were handled.

## **Findings / Results**

The following themes emerged from the data analysis process, which incorporated qualitative and quantitative data: teachers' urgency for on-site service training, Life Orientation content and pedagogical content knowledge support, need for support in planning, planning of the lesson, and teaching methods.

### *Theme 1: Teachers' urgency for on-site service training*

This theme, an urgency for on-site service training, emerged after teachers were asked if they had received training in implementing CAPS in Life Orientation. If they had received training, they were also asked their opinion on the effectiveness of this training. There were mixed responses, with some having received in-depth training while some had not received any at all:

*"Yes. Twice per year for about three years concurrently, although only two periods per week for Life Orientation ... The training was local, and it was done by the departmental official and the provincial coordinator... I attended the CAPS training for two weeks per year for about three years" (tV).*

*"Yes. The Department of Education provided the training, and it was facilitated by the Learning Area Manager in the district of Pixley Ka Seme. Sessions were very fruitful, and one would like to go and teach and apply the many methods of delivering the content..." (tU).*

*"Yes, I have received training. In Life Orientation, the training was positive. I do not think that more can be done in terms of training because the books that we receive are so obvious and the information provided is also so obvious"* (tP).

*"Yes. The training was good, and the new topics were introduced. New topics were not only introduced but the relationships among the topics and the assessment standards were discussed..."* (tM).

*"No. I have never received any formal training in Life Orientation, only in Physical Sciences, ... because I have taught Physical Science and Life Orientation. I have to choose between the subjects ... (Life Orientation) training after school hours on-site, and I believe that I am not the only teacher who missed out on training and received such training. You could ask anything you do not understand because it was just you and the subject advisor. This, for me, was very positive and developmental, and so to say, I was able to ask a question on a follow-up school support visit. Those sessions were, in fact, training from the subject advisor. The SETA was two hours.... The only workshop I attended was by SETA Bank conducted by the Life Orientation Provincial Coordinator. ... I have come on board with CAPS during the subject committee meetings that the Northern Cape Department of Education district office was having once per quarter, except the last quarter of the year. During the school support visits, the subject advisor took me on one-on-one sessions through the content of CAPS ... Those sessions were my training from the subject advisor"* (tR).

The participants indicated that the training they had received from the district departmental subject advisors enabled them to implement CAPS. The responses also revealed that there was training in other subjects and an initiative of the Northern Cape Department of Education (NCDoE) to implement CAPS in all districts. Although teachers expressed their satisfaction and were optimistic about the training, one teacher (tR) indicated that he had had no formal training in CAPS. He had had to attend training in the other subjects he taught. According to the responses above, afternoon sessions and school support visits were more common. However, there is an urgent need for more in-depth on-site service training sessions to support those who missed out on training and still feel the need for further training to enhance their teaching.

Lesson planning is regarded as an essential component of curriculum delivery. Some schools demand that teachers provide daily lesson preparation evidence, while others want cyclical planning. Teachers must be thoroughly prepared and knowledgeable facilitators who can give guidance and support to the learners. Teachers expressed valuable insights about the advantages of lesson planning and why it is crucial to be prepared in the subject content. The teacher (tV) feels that thorough planning instills confidence: *"You have so much confidence in yourself, and you are better prepared to work with learners."* Participants believe that lesson planning is an essential aspect of cooperative teaching and learning strategies. Training in cooperative teaching and learning strategies ensures that effective procedures and methods are followed, which informs the teaching and learning process; however, some respondents believe that more lesson planning and preparation for cooperative teaching of Life Orientation:

*"...When the teacher is well-prepared learners see it, and then you can act with authority"* (tU).

*"The preparation of group investigation needs a thorough planning"* (tV).

*"Yes. What I have notice in group work, it empowers you, it allows you to speak, you who never talk, become involved"* (tP).

*"Specific training for me would be cooperative learning and why different strategies within cooperative teaching can be used"* (tM).

*"It is important to mention that I have never received any formal training in group investigation"* (tR).

*"CAPS is exciting, and I will appreciate training in CL"* (tC).

The above quotations explain how teachers regard proper and adequate planning as a vital component for successful and sustainable teacher development. Teachers need continuous professional development to be efficient in teaching and learning and ensure good performance outcomes.

#### *Theme 2: Life Orientation content and pedagogical content knowledge support*

This theme emerged from the interviews with the Life Orientation teachers when asked about their understanding and perspectives concerning subject content and subject content knowledge. Teachers had interesting opinions on the teaching of Life Orientation and the need for subject content and pedagogical content knowledge:

*"It is not just anyone who can teach the subject, although people assume that. When you understand the method, you teach with great confidence, and you are on top of the content (know the content well)"* (tV).

*“Teachers should have a broad knowledge and understanding. Teacher knowledge is the basic knowledge a teacher must have when specialising in a specific subject. It is specialised skills and experiences a teacher acquires to perform the day-to-day teaching activities. You must have a good understanding of the subject matter, and even to say, you must be an expert and knowledgeable on the subject matter. It is also a professional competence a teacher should possess in teaching a specialised subject. Teacher pedagogical knowledge is the way you apply your teaching methods to improve learner achievement. Content is being presented in special ways to learners to understand the new information, acquire the needed skills and values, and become competent individuals in society. Teachers also accommodate learners in a diverse teaching setting” (tU).*

*“One demonstrates teacher knowledge when you disseminate information to learners. It is the theory you learned during your studies and the experience you have gained over the years. Pedagogical knowledge is how do you do knowledge in the classroom, how to make information understandable to learners, the assessment they will do after you explain it to them and lastly, how learner must show an understanding about the content they learned” (tM).*

From the above responses, teachers acknowledge the need for an in-depth understanding of the subject knowledge and the pedagogical content knowledge to teach the subject so that an environment conducive to learning is created for learners to acquire and develop a better understanding of the information.

### *Theme 3: Need for support in planning*

Theme 3, emerging from document analysis, involved planning to focus on strategies to improve teacher’s proficiency regarding cooperative learning as a teaching approach in Life Orientation. The following sub-themes emerged: lesson preparation support, learner-centred teaching strategies, and the use of learner support material.

#### *Category #3.1 Lesson preparation support*

Lesson preparation was evident in all schools, with various forms being found, such as in hardcover exercise books or completing a template or on the Annual Teaching Plan (ATP). However, the lesson preparation plan sub-headings were not fully completed, with teachers just indicating the topic and sub-topic without any clarification. What was also lacking in lesson preparation was a description of the different stages when group investigation was implemented, which is an indication that Life Orientation teachers need extensive training with regards to the implementation of group investigation as a teaching approach.

#### *Category #3.2 Learner-centred teaching strategies*

The lesson preparation revealed that teachers used different teaching and learning approaches in the Life Orientation classroom. Evidence revealed that teachers used, amongst others, a traditional teaching approach, a cooperative direct instruction approach as well as a cooperative learning approach. This evidence corroborates evidence from the teachers’ interviews where they reported using different teaching approaches. It has to be understood that teachers in different learning environments and different school settings do not use a one-size-fit-all-approach; they tend to use approaches applicable to their diverse school settings.

#### *Category #3.3 Appropriateness of learner support material (LSM)*

Lesson preparation files indicated that learner support material (LSM) was particularly relevant in lesson planning and needed to be appropriate to the age and grade level of the learners for the attainment of the learning outcomes. The observation indicated that the LSM was well integrated with the subject matter, which promoted learners’ knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Although some lesson planning was very textbook-driven, other lesson plans included various sources, such as worksheets, prepared informal tests, PowerPoint presentations, group work settings, videos, and expanded learner notes. The approved learner textbooks and other extra resources were used to build the teacher and learner notes.

To sum up this section of themes emerging from the qualitative data, it was found that teachers need further support and training in effective lesson planning that incorporates aims and objectives, learner outcomes, the strategy followed detailing the process, activities, and LSM. In many cases, teachers need continuous professional development which focuses on subject content and pedagogical knowledge to become expert teachers of Life Orientation. The following themes emerged from quantitative data, which substantiate the qualitative finding. These include planning of the lesson and teaching methods.

### *Theme 4: Planning of the lesson*

Planning of the lesson was an aspect observed by the seven peer observers before the teachers engaged in teaching and learning in the classrooms. Table 1 indicates the responses of the peer observers.

Table 1: Peer observers' views on the planning of the lesson (n=7)

Peer Observers views on the planning of the lesson	The five-point scale of agreement/disagreement				
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Moderate agree	Agree	Strongly agree
The layout of the lesson plan is clear, logical, sequential, and developmental	0%	0%	0%	6 (85.7%)	1 (14.3%)
Aims and objectives are realistic	0%	0%	1 (14.3%)	5 (71.4%)	1 (14.3%)
Phases of the lesson indicated	0%	0%	1 (14.3%)	4 (57.1%)	2 (28.6%)
Explanation of phases given	0%	0%	1 (14.3%)	5 (71.4%)	1 (14.3%)
Lessons are relevant by connecting the curriculum to learners' lives	0%	0%	0%	4 (57.1%)	3 (42.9%)

Table 1 shows that six (85.7%) observers indicated that teachers' layout of the lesson plans was clear, logical, sequential, and developmental. In comparison, one (14.3%) observer indicated strongly agreed that all these aspects were well in place. Furthermore, five (71.4%) observers indicated that the aims and objectives were clear and realistic, with one (14.3%) strongly agreeing and another one (14.3%) moderately agreeing that the aims and objectives were in place. This implies that all observers agreed that the set aims, and objectives were evident in the lesson plans.

Researchers' observation, as illustrated in the table below records that, four (57.1%) agreed, two (28.6%) strongly agreed, and only one (14.3%) moderately agreed that phases of the lesson were indicated. Moreover, five (71.4%) observers agreed that the explanation of the phases appeared in the planning of the lesson in contrast to the one (14.3%) who strongly agreed and the other one (14.3%) who indicated a moderate agreement. Lastly, four observers (57.1%) agreed, and three (42.9%) strongly agreed that lessons were relevant by connecting the curriculum to the lives of the learners. This shows that 100% of observers acknowledged that teachers had ensured a link between the curriculum and learners' lives.

#### Theme 5: Teaching Methods

Group investigation as a cooperative teaching method should be effectively applied and should speak to the needs and skills of the learners. Respondents have illustrated their observations as reported in Table 2.

Table 2: Peer observers' views on teaching methods (n=7)

Peer Observers views on teaching methods employed	The five-point scale of agreement/disagreement				
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Moderate agree	Agree	Strongly agree
The cooperative teaching model used	0%	0%	5 (71.4%)	1 (14.3%)	1 (14.3%)
The method is effectively applied	0%	0%	2 (28.6%)	5 (71.4%)	0 (0%)
Explain relevant material and skills	0%	0%	1 (14.3%)	5 (71.4%)	1 (14.3%)
Respond constructively to learners' concerns	0%	0%	0%	6 (85.7%)	1 (14.3%)
Level of motivation and interaction	0%	0%	5 (71.4%)	1 (14.3%)	1 (14.3%)

Overall, 100% of the observers felt that cooperative teaching methods were used in the Life Orientation class they observed. The above table shows that five (71.4%) of the observers moderately agreed that a cooperative teaching model used in the lesson, one (14.3%) strongly indicated and another one observer (14.3%) indicated that the teacher incorporated cooperative teaching in the lesson. Concerning effectively applying a cooperative teaching method, five (71.4%) observers agreed, while two (28.6%) observers moderately agreed that the method was effectively applied.

The above table indicates that five (71.4%) observers observed that teachers explained material and skills relevant to learners. On the one hand, one (14.3%) observer strongly indicated that the teacher undertook in-depth explanations of material and skills needed to complete the task. On the other hand, one (14.3%) observer felt that the teacher only moderately engaged in explanations.

Noteworthy, one (14.3%) observer strongly and six (85.7%) observers agreed that teachers responded constructively to learners' concerns and addressed any issues that arose during the lessons. Two observers (28.6%) strongly agreed and five (71.4%) moderately decided that the teachers they observed used an appropriate teaching method that promoted a good level of motivation and interaction among learners, which facilitated the teaching and learning process.



## Discussion

This study aimed to investigate how Life Orientation teachers in secondary schools' design lesson plans to incorporate a cooperative teaching and learning approach to enhance the teaching and learning process.

### *Teacher training*

Life Orientation teachers agreed that there was an urgent need for on-site service training regarding the effective implementation of the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS), which impacts the quality of the lesson planning of teachers. Despite the need for training, schools still move teachers from one subject to another depending on the school's demands and fill up the subject gaps in the timetable to ensure fair distribution of teachers' workload (Diale, 2016). However, these findings corroborate those of Stroebel et al. (2017), who affirm that because of the lack of prior training and the directive to deliver on the mandatory outcomes of the curriculum, in-service training is inevitable. Furthermore, when teachers are not adequately trained and skilled, it has a negative impact on the quality of teaching and performance of the learners (Spaull, 2013), exacerbated by teacher shortages which are a challenge in many schools and the education system in general (Britto & Limlingan, 2012). The report revealed a shortage of approximately 30 percent of qualified teachers in primary and secondary schools, with even more significant deficiencies in remote [deep rural] or high-risk areas. It is noteworthy that teachers who lack competence, knowledge, and skills are themselves compromised, and their skills are to be questioned.

### *Lesson preparation, planning, and support*

As referred to earlier, lesson planning plays an essential role in strengthening teachers' confidence during teaching and learning. Proper and adequate preparation and planning is a vital component for successful and sustainable teaching and learning. Participants agreed that extensive preparation is essential to ensure that the plan includes what needs to be taught, the most effective teaching technique, and how learners should collaborate in groups on a specific topic to achieve a given goal (Van Wyk, 2019).

For a teacher to be effective, the National Policy Framework for Teacher Education and Development regards continuing professional teacher development as an essential component of a high-quality teacher education system (Department of Education [DoE], 2008). According to Heidemann et al. (2005), professional development can help teachers lessen their bewilderment and increase their self-assurance.

Teachers, especially novice teachers, should be given support with lesson preparation. In some schools, lesson planning is completed in a prescribed template. In others, lesson planning is completed in the Annual Teaching Plan (ATP), incorporated in the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement document (CAPS), which is the primary source of the content to be taught to the diverse group of learners in the different grades (DBE, 2011). This policy document provides teachers with specific content to teach, knowledge and skills that learners must demonstrate, and attitudes and includes assessment, informal, formal, and continuous.

This study found that teachers' lesson preparation was lacking, and it was evident that teachers did not properly explain the procedures followed when they used specific cooperative teaching strategies. This finding is supported by Sharan's (2010) study on cooperative learning for academic and social gains, which asserts that teachers must prepare themselves thoroughly to ensure that cooperative learning succeeds. Significantly so, teachers must be committed to the preparation, ensuring that the process and procedures are described and include a strong support structure and learner feedback. This study argued for the effectiveness of cooperative learning, which is supported by Van Wyk (2007), who postulates that new teaching methods have become essential features in delivering the content and, by doing so, will promote effective teaching and learning in the classroom.

### *Learner-centred teaching strategies*

Van Wyk (2010) states that for teachers to make a responsible choice concerning the teaching strategies, they should have a sound knowledge of the didactic principles, as previously mentioned, that apply to the teaching of a school subject. A variety of teaching approaches should be used in the teaching of Life Orientation and should be learner-centred. Blumberg (2008) and Van Wyk (2016) suggest that in developing an environment conducive to effective teaching and learning, teachers should not employ a single teaching method but use various teaching strategies that shift the role of the teachers as information depositors to facilitators of student learning. Onojerena and Eromosele (2018) also argue that learner-centred pedagogy is a teaching and learning process whereby learners are at the centre of curriculum design, classroom interaction, and assessment activities. This argument implies that learners become active and critical participants in the teaching and learning milieu to construct knowledge and skills. On the other hand, teachers perform the vital role of mediator and facilitator through learner support techniques which help learners take responsibility for their learning.

Even in multi-grade classrooms, teachers in this study diversified their teaching strategies to ensure that all learners were included in the lessons. This aligns with Van Wyk (2019), who acknowledges that participants mostly enjoy cooperative learning methods and applying them to their teaching, despite the many challenges they experience when teaching multi-grade classes. Therefore, it is essential that teachers are eager and committed to becoming influential designers of learning that take the curriculum and, through a cooperative learning approach, ensure that the outcomes of the Life Orientation curriculum are accomplished.

#### *Life Orientation content and pedagogical content knowledge support*

For teachers to be effective in teaching the subject of Life Orientation, they need to have adequate and relevant competency and skills to teach the subject. Teachers were aware that they needed to have a solid foundation of the content of the curriculum. Shulman (1987) recommends that it is essential for teachers to have subject content knowledge. Still, they must acquire and develop pedagogical content knowledge to teach the subject matter so that it results in a clear understanding of the new content. The Life Orientation CAPS (DBE, 2011) document offers the teacher an in-depth outline of content, the skills and attitudes needed, and the time frame in which the content should be taught. Mapotse and Gumbo (2012) revealed that teachers in their study indicated the importance of using the textbook and the curriculum policy documents for their planning. This means that the teacher should be completely informed on the curriculum content, and it is thus imperative that the teacher develops an in-depth understanding of the curriculum. Inadequate subject and content knowledge left teachers frustrated (Diale, 2016; Swarts et al., 2019) with feelings of inadequacy, which relates to the need for ongoing professional development to overcome challenges experienced, particularly with a changing curriculum placement of random teachers to teach Life Orientation.

Classroom observation revealed the teachers' praxis and evaluated how teachers employed group investigation as a cooperative teaching and learning approach. Lesson planning was clear, logical, sequential, and realistic, with the aims and objectives and different components of a lesson highlighted and explained and the phases of the lesson. The efficacy of a lesson is increased when it is divided into several units, each of which has a particular purpose and outcome that must be clearly stated in the lesson structure. It was concluded that all lessons were relevant and connected the curriculum to real-life experience, indicating a link between the curriculum and learners' lives. Hartell et al. (2013) revealed that completed lesson plans often do not correlate with the prescribed schedules from the Department of Education and thus, do not complement learning activities and assessment activities. However, this study revealed that teachers, in general, comply with the requirements that constitute effective lesson planning.

To conclude, the findings indicate that teachers should engage in a variety of curriculum material and activities and, in so doing, will establish a teacher-curriculum relationship as a transaction in which they participate with these materials (Eli & Wood, 2016).

#### *Cooperative learning teaching methods*

Teachers' skills, competencies, and the ability to design effective teaching methods for implementation in the Life Orientation classroom are vital and go hand-in-hand with the appropriate time allocation. Also, as a new curriculum is implemented, it requires a wide range of teaching approaches, ensuring that teaching makes a move from a traditional teaching style to that which is inclusive and learner-centred. Prior studies have noted the importance of Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) as a reaction to the conventional teaching methods. This aligns with Maphalala and Mpofu (2018), who found that teachers in their study used diverse strategies to teach values and highlighted favoured strategies such as case studies, role-play, and discussion. The dissemination of information was at the forefront, in contrast to OBE's goal of developing critical thinkers who can work independently in a learner-centered environment (DBE, 2011; Killen, 2007).

In conclusion, the study argues for a cooperative teaching and learning approach to Life Orientation to help learners acquire and develop the necessary knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values to respond appropriately to life's responsibilities and opportunities. This is incongruent with what the (DBE, 2011) indicates that teachers should guide and prepare students to respond appropriately to life's obligations and opportunities.

### **Conclusion**

The current investigation was designed to explore how Life Orientation teachers in secondary schools incorporate cooperative teaching and learning approaches when designing lesson plans which enhance the cooperative teaching and learning process. This investigation has shown that many external factors could impact what the teachers have planned and how they have to improvise in such situations. Therefore, this article has argued that in designing lesson plans, Life Orientation teachers in secondary schools could enhance the teaching and learning process through cooperative teaching and learning approaches.

This study has suggested that it has become imperative that teachers in the 21st century apply effective learner-centred teaching strategies. The secondary school teachers value the idea that they can use and differentiate their teaching methods, ensuring learner-centred strategies demanded by the 21st century and accommodating diverse learners from various socio-economic backgrounds. There should be more control and support of lesson planning with teachers submitting their lesson preparation well in advance before implementing and commencing the lessons so that support is given, if necessary, so that learner outcomes are achieved in the teaching and learning process. It should be encapsulated as a pre-requisite in a revised CAPS document and become mandatory.

The quality of Life Orientation teaching is compromised if school management teams (SMTs) continuously restructure and adapt their timetables. Teachers who have not received subject-specific training are required to teach Life Orientation despite not being trained. The SMTs use the untrained teachers for substitution and the opportunity for equitable workload distribution. Besides, a primary concern lies in the idea of the pre-service and student-teachers who enter the education environment with little training to teach a subject such as Life Orientation. In such cases, teachers should be guided by mentors and senior teachers to ensure that content knowledge is acquired, and pedagogical skills are developed in addition to continuous professional teacher development by the Department and higher education institutions. The study found that the teachers' sound content and pedagogical subject knowledge of Life Orientation provide presenting abilities and improve learner achievement. Finally, the primary task of teachers in a cooperative learning approach is to facilitate learner participation and interaction. Therefore, well-designed lesson plans ensure that all components are covered will ensure that learning involves acquiring in-depth content and developing critical thinking skills.

### Recommendations

The first recommendation is concerned with policy implementation. Group investigation as a cooperative learning technique should be infused in the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS). Life Orientation teachers should be encouraged to implement the cooperative teaching approach.

Secondly, for a Life Orientation lesson to be learner-centred, teachers should receive adequate training to use the cooperative approach method in a class. The training should ensure that teachers can use various paradigm shifts from the traditional teaching approach that is teacher-centred to a learner-centred teaching approach. There is a need to train teachers to employ different teaching and learning techniques that cater to different learning styles. Implementing a learner-participatory approach will enhance learners' performance in the Life Orientation classroom and ensure that diverse learners are actively involved. Researchers suggest further research to be conducted in a larger scale sample to compare different cooperative teaching approaches teachers can employ in their classrooms.

### Limitations

The study was conducted in the Pixley Ka Seme district with over 25 secondary schools, and only seven schools from the district's high and combined secondary schools participated. Ten schools were selected, but three withdrew from the study. The researchers' discretion was used when determining the research participants, and those selected had the necessary teaching experience and information required to answer the research questions. Two teachers per school were sampled, one for teaching and one as a peer observer, and they did not necessarily represent the views of the entire school.

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### Authorship Contribution Statement

This work emanated from the researched Ph.D. study conducted by Dr. AC Seherrie, entitled "Group investigation: a teaching approach for Life Orientation in selected Northern Cape secondary schools" Under Prof AS Mawela as supervisor from the University of South Africa.

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