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EFFECTS OF THE ‘NEW’ ZAMBIAN HIGH SCHOOL GEOGRAPHY CURRICULUM ON LEARNERS

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ABSTRACT

The need for relevance in school curriculum in Zambia started way back after independence in 1964. This drive for relevance was in response of citizens to determine their own affairs through education, which aspects may have been excluded from formal education by successive colonial rulers. The geography school curriculum has not been spared in such a desire for relevance. Since independence, Zambia has had two high school geography curriculums. The first one was the senior secondary school geography curriculum that was in existence from 1964 to 2004 when the ‘New’ curriculum was put in place. Following the continued need for a curriculum that would be responsive to the needs of local society, the ‘New’ high school geography curriculum was initiated in 2004 and was still in force up to the time of this study in the year 2011.

The purpose of this study was to evaluate effects of such a ‘New’ geography curriculum on high school (HS)/General Certificate of Education (GCE) learners. The study was conducted in two of the four districts of Lusaka province, these being Kafue and Lusaka districts. Basically, 10 schools were involved. The study was guided by the following research questions;

- i) What are the negative effects of the ‘New’ Zambian high school geography curriculum on HS/GCE learners?
- ii) What are the positive effects of the ‘New’ Zambian high school geography curriculum on HS/GCE learners?

- iii) What improvements can be made to the ‘New’ Zambian high school geography curriculum?

In response to these research questions, the study sought to investigate views of policy makers and parents about the geography curriculum. The study further sought to investigate views and experiences of teachers and HS/GCE geography learners.

In order to achieve the objectives of the study and respond to the research questions, the study employed a survey research approach within a quantitative and qualitative design. The study purposefully sampled 26 teachers, 19 were class teachers and 7 were heads of geography departments in the sampled schools. The teachers were drawn from 7 high schools. Furthermore, 246 HS/GCE learners were chosen as respondents using a stratified random sampling method. In addition 2 geography subject specialists were purposefully chosen from CDC and ECZ, one from each respective institution. The study also used the stratified random sampling technique to pick 24 parents who participated in the study. The total study sample was 298.

Data was collected using two types of instruments namely, questionnaires and interview guide. Four separate questionnaires were used and one interview guide. The questionnaires were used to obtain data from the ECZ official, CDC official, teachers and HS/GCE learners. The interview guide was used to obtain data from parents.

The study found that the implementation of the ‘New’ Zambian high school geography curriculum generated both positive and negative effects to both teachers and HS/GCE learners. It was established that among the positive effects was the emphasis of the curriculum on local and regional issues. This was in the case where alien topics that were covered in the previous curriculum were done away with. The ‘New’ high school geography was also observed to have included cross-cutting issues that addressed environmental education, though not in details. The inclusion of the field project component was yet another positive point.

It was further established by this study that the ‘New’ Zambian high school geography curriculum was an objective type of curriculum, meaning that outcomes were

predetermined which facilitated the learning of simple skills. However, when it comes to the actual understanding of ideas, learners experienced difficulties, as the pre-specification of objectives indicated that learners were just mere recipients of information and that learning opportunities seemed to be limited. It was further established that there was no interplay between the curriculum document, teachers, learners and their social setting.

This study also established that the 'New' Zambian high school geography curriculum was prescriptive and limited in scope. This limitation was observed to have arisen from the lack of resources. This was in the case where textbooks that were used were observed to contain insufficient information, hence, restricting both learners and teachers to particular forms of knowledge.

Arising from these findings, this study proposed improvements to the 'New' Zambian high school geography curriculum. Among them was the need to make adjustments in the way curriculum objectives were designed. This study, therefore, proposes an outcomes-based education (OBE) approach to curriculum design and delivery. This study further proposes an improvement in the way assessment is conducted through embarking on continuous assessment criteria. Regarding the curriculum content, this study proposes that issues of national concern are supposed to be addressed in detail. These are issues such as HIV/AIDS and environmental education. It has also been proposed by this study that systematic topic allocation to different levels be made to the curriculum.

This study concludes by outlining various recommendations for consideration in the design and delivery of the curriculum. Among them is the need to conduct a countrywide evaluation on the effects of the 'New' high school geography curriculum on learners.

INTRODUCTION

The quality of educational experiences gained by the learners in the learning of high school geography matters a lot. It is argued by Fien (1984) that the health and development of national geography curriculum depends on regular and effective evaluation. It follows that through conducting an evaluation, the relevance of the curriculum in terms of its effects on learners could be established. The importance of curriculum evaluation is further supported by Posner and Rudnisky (1986) who contend that through curriculum evaluation, a direct link back from the learner achievement to the curriculum improvement could be identified.

However, little had been done in Zambia to evaluate the effects of the 'New' high school geography curriculum. It is against this background that at the time of this study in 2010 the observation by Namafe e tal (2001) that there was scarcity of information regarding the 'geographical education' still stood. This unestablished information referred to a larger extent to the effects of the 'New' high school geography curriculum on learners. This study therefore, sought to establish the effects of the 'New' Zambian high school geography curriculum on learners. Graves (1979) contends that an evaluation that seeks to establish effects of any given curriculum should be an inclusive one, in that it should comprise the whole curriculum setting, changes and implementation. This study was in conformity with the assertion by Graves (1979)

METHODOLOGY

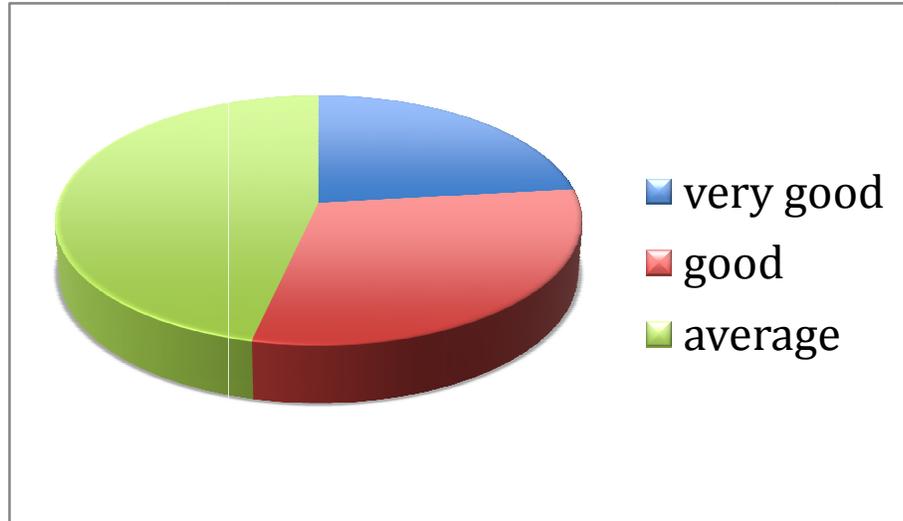
- The research employed an evaluative and descriptive design. In order to conduct a just evaluation the researcher used the survey because it was efficient method of collecting original data from a wide range of respondents.

- The survey was used as supported by Gay (1981) that, it involved the collection and analysis of data that could be used to make perceptions and judgments about the effects of a program.
- The study was evaluative in nature as was used to generate data that would be useful in making informed decisions. It was also quantitative in that the study established a number of responses to various themes and content in numerical terms.
- Data was collected using questionnaires and an interview guide. The study targeted policy makers who were CDC/ECZ officials, teachers, high school geography learners and parents.
- A purposive sampling procedure was used to select 26 teachers from 7 schools in Kafue and Lusaka district, 1 official from ECZ.
- Stratified Random Sampling was used to select 246 high school / General Certificate of Education learners from 7 schools of Lusaka and Kafue districts. Also 24 parents were sampled using stratified random sampling procedure. The total study sampling was 294.

RESULTS

- i) Effects of the ‘New’ Zambian high school geography curriculum on learners. The study found out from the teachers that the content of the high school geography curriculum did not address practical issues that were relevant to the needs of learners and society. The teachers viewed the curriculum to be too theoretical hence attached value to the content in terms of very good, good and average as shown in fig 1 below:

Fig 1: Rating of Content of the ‘New’ Zambian High School Geography Curriculum by Teachers.



Source: Field data (2010)

The six teacher respondents who accounted for 23.07% of the sample were pleased with the content of the curriculum. They thus indicated that the content was enough in response to the demands of tertiary courses such as offered at Nkrumah University College and UNZA among the many institutions. The other reason that was put across was that the content was ideal in that it was related to the environmental experiences of both HS/GCE learners.

As for the 8 teacher respondents who viewed the content to be average, they argued that more was needed to make the curriculum practical. Thus they conceived the curriculum to be too theoretical except a small portion of fieldwork that slightly exposed learners to the issues in the communities.

However though some teachers viewed the content of the 'New' high school geography curriculum to be ideal for the development of knowledge and skills 46.15% of the teachers, which were 12 out of, the 26 teachers sampled did not agree with this view. Thus it was observed that the curriculum did not exploit some important and challenging issues that were practical on environmental protection. These were among the needs of society that a curriculum should address if it was to be responsive.

The need, of having a high school geography curriculum that addressed, environmental protection is supported by Gerber (2003), who contends that Geographical education

should be tightly tied to some curriculum objectives that promote environmental awareness.

- ii) Negative effects of the ‘New’ Zambian high school geography curriculum on learner.
- The study found out from the learners that the learning of the ‘New’ high school geography had enabled them to acquire skills in field report writing, time calculation in varying climatic zones and an understanding of environmental issues. However, out of the 1066 responses, only 28.24% appreciated them.
 - This study established from the learners that they (learners) experienced difficulties in a good number of topics prescribed in the curriculum. Table 1 below is an illustration of the challenging and difficult topics as observed from the learner respondents.

Table 1: Components of The ‘New’ High School Geography found difficulty by Learners.

| Component of the curriculum | F | M | NUMBER OF RESPONSES | % |
|------------------------------------|----|----|---------------------|-------|
| Mathematical Geography | 26 | 42 | 68 | 27.64 |
| Geography of the sub region | 18 | 10 | 28 | 11.38 |
| Settlements and population studies | 5 | 8 | 13 | 5.28 |
| Map work/ map reading | 61 | 31 | 92 | 37.39 |
| Geography of Zambia | 18 | 20 | 38 | 15.44 |
| Meteorology and climatology | 26 | 15 | 41 | 16.66 |

| | | | | |
|--------------------|-----|-----|-----|-------|
| Physical Geography | 48 | 24 | 72 | 29.26 |
| Field project | 28 | 19 | 47 | 19.10 |
| None | | | | |
| | 230 | 169 | 399 | 100 |

Source: Field Data (2010)

The findings revealed that a large number of HS/GCE learners had problems in physical geography and map work. When asked what could have caused the difficulties, the learner respondents indicated that the components were too wide and mostly abstract thus they learnt for the sake of the examination. Some other respondents further indicated that the teachers who handled them were very boring when it came to explaining the physical components that they needed to know.

The other aspect of the curriculum, according to the findings, that learners experienced problems in, were the field project component, meteorology and climatology and the geography of Zambia. Regarding the field project component, learners indicated that they were not given enough skills to enable them collect and analyze data. In short they did not understand the essence of field project such that they ended up paying people to write the project for them.

As regards to the geography of Zambia, it was found out from the learners that there were not enough books that contained information about Zambia. Thus the only book that was readily available was too shallow and did not even address the sub region in details. This book was reported to be ‘a high school Geography textbook of Zambia and the sub – Region’ by Ntalasha e tal (2004).

- It was established from the teachers that the learners experienced difficulties in the learning of high school geography because the teachers themselves had challenges in implementing the curriculum. These challenges are shown in table 2:

**Table 2: Constraints faced by Teachers in the Implementation of the ‘New’
Zambian High School Geography Curriculum**

| NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS, n = 26 | | | |
|----------------------------------|---------------------|-----------|---------------------------|
| RESPONSES | NUMBER OF RESPONSES | FREQUENCY | PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS |
| Lack of reference books | 22 | 22 | 29.72 |
| Inadequate funding | 10 | 10 | 13.51 |
| Lack of teaching aids | 16 | 16 | 21.62 |
| Limitations in the teaching time | 24 | 24 | 32.43 |
| No constraints | 2 | 2 | 2.70 |
| TOTAL | 74 | 74 | 100 |

Source: Field Data (2010)

Among the major constraints cited by the respondents in implementing the ‘New’ high school geography curriculum were lack of teaching aids, reference books and inadequate or no funding in some schools.

With regards to the teaching aids and reference books, it was established from the respondents that they were not provided with teaching aids such that in some certain topics it was difficult to improvise hence the learning was abstract. On the part of reference books it was indicated that the only book that was available for teaching the sub region was too shallow. Above all the book did not have adequate information pertaining to Zambia. The lack of information on Zambia limited the aspiration enshrined in the

policy document 'Educating our Future' (1996), which advocates for relevance of the teaching and learning materials to the local needs.

iii) Improvements to the 'New' Zambian high school geography curriculum.

The third research objective of this study was to propose improvements to the 'New' high school geography curriculum. This section of the study therefore, discusses the improvements as proposed by the researcher in view of the findings. The importance of effecting some improvements to the 'New' high school geography curriculum is meant to ensure that the overall course program is designed to take account of the way in which pupils mature.

Improvement in the Design of Objectives

The 'New' high school geography curriculum was derived by objectives such that as earlier alluded to, teaching under this curriculum involved transferring factual disciplinary knowledge to learners who were expected to learn it for assessment purposes. This study therefore proposed an outcomes-based education (OBE) approach to geography delivery. As described by Donnelly (2007), OBE promotes progressive approaches to teaching and learning which do emphasize rote learning and competitive assessment. The broad aim of the curriculum could be to equip learners with the knowledge competences and orientations necessary for their success once they left school. In this case therefore, disciplinary knowledge could become subservient to learning outcomes.

Improvement in Assessment

Instead of using assessment to determine how much learners were able to remember, this study proposed for continuous assessment. Thus it was important that a variety of assessment strategies were used as a means of monitoring learners' progress towards achieving the specified learning outcomes.

Improvement to Content

As much as the 'New' high school geography curriculum sought to address physical and human geography there was supposed to be emphasis of the learners' immediate surroundings. As such the curriculum could allow for the implementers to exploit as much as possible the local communities as a way of addressing physical and human issues. In this case there could be flexibility in terms of topics on physical geography, which were envisaged to be too wide and abstract.

Further improvement to the high school geography content would include addressing the following issues: -

- **Issues of National Concern**

The 'New' high school geography curriculum should address issues of national concern especially in the area of HIV/AIDS. Thus there is need that a specific topic on HIV/AIDS be included in the curriculum content. Furthermore, the aspect of environmental education should not only be used as a crosscutting issue instead more emphasis should be made towards the issue. Thus every topic in the curriculum should be designed in such a way that the outcomes point to environmental education.

- **Promotion of Attitudes and Values**

The design of the topics needs to possess an element of value-laden content. It is through the provision of value-laden content that HS/GCE learners would be able to understand burning issues in society and in turn make valuable decisions. These are issues such as those that had to do with the problem of water and sanitation, domestic waste disposal and land degradation.

- **Concern for Global Issues**

The topics in the curriculum were not only supposed to address the local and concerns of the sub-region but also the global issues. Thus the curriculum could

be improved by extending the topics to the global world. For instance the topic on tourism could also address tourism at a global level.

Addressing tourism at a global level will help the learners to be aware of their inter-connections with the rest of the world. After all, most of the tourists who come to Zambia are from further away countries. As such learners should understand both the negative and positive effects of tourism in relation to the global world or village. Addressing global issues would also help learners to understand the governance of other nations and in turn find ways of improving their own governments.

➤ Cultural Rights

High school geography curriculum could further be improved by including cultural rights. It was through such inclusion that the contributions of women in the development of the nation could be addressed. Through the aspect of cultural rights, moral judgment could be attained. Thus the curriculum could provide an opportunity for learners to use their ethical principles to help them understand issues and make sound decisions.

➤ Systematic Topic and Grade Allocation

This study further suggested that the curriculum be improved by redesigning the lay out of the topics. Thus these topics were supposed to be written down according to terms and year of study. For instance grade 10 Level could be allocated its own topics. This would help to direct the learners as they progress from one grade to the other.

Above all, this study sought that the best way to make improvements to the ‘New’ high school geography curriculum would be to seek the views of all key players. This meant involving teachers who were the implementers by according them opportunity to contribute towards what they felt could be included in the content. The learners themselves could also be asked on the type of geography that they wanted to learn.

However careful screening should be considered so as to offer them (learners) the best that could help them grow into responsible adults.

DISCUSSION

This study had revealed a number of implications of the ‘New’ high school geography curriculum. These implications were obtained from the findings hence they affect policy makers, teachers, and HS/GCE Learners and the society at large.

Implications for Policy Makers

The challenges that had been observed in the implementation of ‘New’ Zambian High School geography curriculum were due to the fact that policy makers had always taken the implementation to be a top down process, and this was despite the attempts to democratize the process by making it more transparent. This study therefore, did observe the following implications and improvements to the ‘New high school geography curriculum for policy makers;

- The lack of involvement of all key stakeholders in the initial planning had resulted into limited incorporation of the needs of society in the curriculum. These were needs such as addressing the aspect of culture and solutions to the environmental issues as observed by the learners who lived in these communities. Thus the policy makers had a responsibility of addressing the views of society as supported by Pike & Selby (2005), who contend that, almost all of us are caught up in a network of links, interactions and relationships that encircle the planet like a giant and intricate spider’s web.
- As much as the policy makers intended to provide a curriculum that was locally relevant it should be realised that HS/GCE learners should be helped to understand the systematic nature of today’s world. The curriculum of geography

should be such a one that directs its objectives towards the explanation as well as mapping and description of the spatial distribution of wealth, exploring different meanings and models of development, listening to the voices of the contemporary themes that are of global concern and exploring future geographies. There was a great need for re-appraisal of how the geography of the sub-region would be designed and taught. This would be done so as to allow for exploration of the relationship between different aspects of the world system. These were aspects such as those that could have addressed the impact of the environment of the present world economy and vice versa.

Implications for the Teachers of the ‘New’ High School Geography Curriculum

Curriculum reforms such as that of the ‘New’ high school geography had for the most remained on paper. This was due to the fact that there had been lack of specification of how they could be enacted in the field. This study therefore unearthed a number of challenges for the high school geography teachers and discusses improvements as outlined below;

There is a dire need for teachers to develop contextually relevant programmes of learning. These are programmes that would prepare learners for a globally competitive and technologically sophisticated economy. Thus high school geography teachers should facilitate learner participation by promoting co-operation among learners and their parents. Teachers are supposed to use the curriculum to promote socialization in communities amongst young and old people in formal and informal learning.

It is also important that teachers increase the opportunities for HS/GCE learners to examine social economic, political and environmental issues. This need is in response to the findings from the HS/GCE learners who expressed difficulties in conducting field project. It follows that HS/GCE learners should be helped to develop greater appreciation and understanding of the influence of people’s beliefs attitudes and values.

It is also important that teachers recognize the importance of culture and their implications for HS/GCE learning. Thus teachers could work to arrest the declining

culture of citizens by giving learners a stronger democratic voice in the way that they interacted with each other and their environments.

Teachers had to participate as much as possible in writing of books that would have detailed information about Zambia and the sub-region. This follows, the argument by both teachers and HS/GCE learners that the only available book on the sub-region was too shallow and, hence, left learners with limited information.

Implications for HS/GCE Geography Learners

If the HS/GCE learners had to be fully involved in the learning process enough time in terms of periods was supposed to be apportioned to the geography subject. The physical component, which was an important aspect in the learning of geography, had proved to be too wide. The learners therefore had a twofold challenge thus where they could either learn so as to pass the examination or learn to understand. Increasing the period allocation would accord learners an opportunity to exploit the later challenge of learning to understand unlike the former.

How HS/GCE learners were to participate fully in the learning of high school geography was yet another implication that was observed. The aspect of research had been proposed by this study as vital in enhancing learner participation. This was in the case where HS/GCE learners could be given topics to research on before the actual lesson took place. Thus having researched every HS/GCE learner in a particular class would at least be able to contribute by participating in the learning process.

The issue of real objects was yet another implication that was observed. Thus as much as the curriculum was scheduled to be relevant to the local needs some components still remained abstract to the HS/GCE learners. Thus learners needed to be exposed to real objects. This therefore, advocated for learning from the local environment. Thus geography learning should be made interesting by exploiting the local community, which the learners were familiar with. It's from the exploitation of the local community that inter-connections with other communities, regions and the global world could be realized.

The importance of geographical education was one aspect that HS/GCE learners highlighted. This was in response to the proposal by one of the learner respondents who when asked to propose improvement to the 'New' high school geography curriculum said the following; "teachers must give clear and full explanations to pupils and tips on how to study geography for them to get good results and to know more of the world."

Implications for Parents

Parents/Guardians as partners in educational development were faced with challenges of ensuring that the curriculum in place was responsive to societal demand. Thus parents were faced with challenges of how to ensure that the 'New' high school geography curriculum incorporated culture. The fact that culture was not static but dynamic posed a challenge to parents about which culture traits could be incorporated.

The other implication to the parents was that of ensuring that HS/GCE learners received the rightful and needed support in their learning process. How to determine and provide role models to the HS/GCE learners from the communities was yet another implication to the parents.

SUMMARY

The study established main findings as follows;

- 1) The learners appreciated the 'New' Zambian high school geography curriculum as having accorded them an opportunity to;
 - Understand some industrial and farming activities through embarking on field project.
 - Understand the environment they live in and were also able to explain the causes of global warming
 - Calculate and determine time in varying climatic zones

- Appreciate the importance of afforestation hence able to conserve the soils.
 - Read maps which has allowed learners to undertake given activities with less difficulties for instance given a map learners are able to locate different places according to the need.
- 2) The 'New' Zambian geography curriculum did not address fully the needs of Zambians in terms of incorporating the cultural norms and values of communities.
 - 3) The objectivity design of the curriculum was limited in scope due to lack of resources in terms of detailed textbooks.
 - 4) The curriculum exhibited features of lack of interplay between the document, teachers and learners with their school settings.
 - 5) The study did establish that while the 'New' curriculum was designed towards a common mission it did not honor diversity.
 - 6) Since the inception of the curriculum in 2004, no evaluation had been conducted to determine the effects of the curriculum on high school/general certificate of education learners.
 - 7) There was need to make the curriculum content more practical if it was to be responsive to the needs of the learners and Zambian society.
 - 8) It was also obtained from the findings that the 'New' curriculum still presented topics that were abstract. These topics were enshrined in the physical component.
 - 9) The curriculum was also found out to have failed to address the interrelationships between the local factors and the global ones.
 - 10) The teachers had difficulties in meeting the needs of the learners due to the predetermined outcomes as enshrined in the curriculum objectives.
 - 11) The allocation of 12 % towards field project component discouraged both teachers and learners to extensively exploit teaching and learning through this approach.
 - 12) The geography of Zambia and the sub-region was not extensively covered though the curriculum objectives stipulated a need for local relevance.

Arising from the findings the study proposed some improvements to the 'New' high school geography curriculum. These improvements include the following;

- Embarking on a variety of assessment strategies as a means of monitoring HS/GCE learners' progress towards achieving the specified objectives.
- Promoting progressive approaches to teaching and learning through outcomes-based education (OBE).
- Re-aligning the content by incorporating in details issues of national concern such as HIV/AIDS and environmental education.
- Incorporating attitudes and values in the content so as to deliver a value-laden curriculum to the learners.
- Emphasizing the issue of cultural rights and advocating for learning through community participation.
- Addressing the issues of global interconnections in the curriculum.

CONCLUSIONS

Following the findings this study concluded that the success of the high school geography curriculum depended to a greater extent on the involvement of key stakeholders in the initial planning and timely evaluation of the implementation. Thus the involvement of key stakeholders ensured that the interests of all the groups were addressed. From the findings, the value of objectives was recognized to be worthwhile if the curriculum begun with important learner outcomes, unlike beginning with small pieces of content as observed in the 'New' high school geography curriculum.

From the findings from CDC and ECZ officials it was concluded by this study that the search for relevance precipitated the changes that were observed in the 'New' curriculum, however, it was the lack of incorporation of cultural aspects that made the curriculum to continue exhibiting abstract content, especially in the area of physical geography. Motivation of the learners was observed to be important in enhancing learner participation. This study concluded that communities were the key in providing role models, as much as teachers were charged with the responsibility of ensuring a

supportive learning environment. In view to improving standards of attainment to high school geography, this study thought it essential that close attention was supposed to be paid to establishing structures that facilitated geographical learning. It was concluded by this study that learners needed to be aware of the ways in which their own communities had changed and were changing. Finally this study proposed that high school geography curriculum was supposed to accommodate planning of programs of work at different levels through aligning the content and topics to specific grades or groups of learners at a given time.

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