

Voices Confined to Classrooms: The Marginalised Status of Teachers in Curriculum Development in Lusaka, Zambia

Christine Mwanza
The University of Zambia
and
Innocent Mutale Mulenga
The University of Zambia

Abstract

Curriculum development for Early Childhood, Primary and Secondary School levels in Zambia has received much attention since the revision which commenced in 2013 and gradually implemented until 2017. Despite the Curriculum Development Centre (CDC), which is the main institution placed with the responsibility of curriculum development, claiming that the Zambian school curriculum is developed through a consultative and participatory approach through course and subject panels where teachers and other stakeholders are represented, there has been no empirical evidence to suggest the extent to which teachers, who are the major implementers of the same curricular, have been actively involved in the development process. This study, therefore, sought to establish whether secondary school teachers in Lusaka were adequately and actively involved in the secondary school curriculum development process. The concurrent embedded design of the mixed methods approach was employed with the qualitative approach dominating the study while the quantitative was used to add detail. Data from secondary school teachers was collected using questionnaires and focus group discussions while interview guides were used for Head teachers and curriculum specialists. Data collected from interviews

and questionnaires were analyzed using themes and descriptive statistics into significant patterns so as to easily interpret and understand it. The findings of the study clearly suggested that secondary school teachers were dissatisfied with the existing practice of curriculum development which insignificantly involved them.

Keywords: Curriculum Development, Teacher Involvement, Curriculum Implementation

Introduction

Teachers are central in achieving universal access to high quality and equitable education for all learners. Research in different countries and education systems has shown that teachers are the biggest in-school influence on learner achievement and learning (UNESCO, 2015). The success, or otherwise of curriculum initiatives depends heavily on teachers at the chalk-face (Gatawa, 1990). Teachers are the implementers of the curriculum and when they are not aware of the objectives and the curriculum developers are not familiar with the issues faced by the teachers, it may not be possible to work for a practical curriculum. It is crucial for teachers to know the philosophy of a particular curriculum since they have the first-hand knowledge of the realities in the classroom. Their involvement in the curriculum development process is likely to create an ownership of the curriculum thus providing them with the commitment necessary for the success of the new or revised curriculum (Kausar and Akhtar, 2012). It is on similar grounds that Eshiwani (1993) observed that the objectives of any educational system can be achieved mainly through very pertinent curriculum questions that require the teachers themselves to answer rather than the teachers having the questions answered for them by detailed syllabi, study guides, examinations boards, inspectors and other ways employed by central bodies

that develop the curriculum. Bishop (1985) and Havelock (1971) advanced the view that the quality of an education system is dependent on its teachers who should initiate, develop and direct pupils learning. Thus teacher's involvement in the curriculum development process is essential in meeting the needs of society and upholding the quality of education for a nation. In addition, lack of full teacher involvement in curriculum development decisions may lead to lack of ownership and commitment necessary for the success of the developed curriculum. It may result in misinterpretation of innovative features (Okada, 2005) thereby hindering the attainment of educational aims. It is from this background that this study aimed at analysing secondary school teacher's involvement in the curriculum development in Zambia since the Ministry of General Education claimed that curriculum development in Zambia was highly consultative.

Much as it has been affirmed that teachers are represented in the curriculum development process, the level of representation and the degree to which secondary school teachers in the field are involved in the curriculum development process is not stated. It is not known whether secondary school teachers in the field are aware of how the teachers who participate in the course and subject panels are selected and whether they adequately represent them in the curriculum development teams. This study thus sought to establish secondary school teacher involvement in secondary school curriculum development process in Zambia.

Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by the main idea behind the curriculum development and diffusion theory which emphasises that for any curriculum development model to become practical, the teacher has to be at the centre of the model irrespective of his or her limitations (Lawton, 1973). Many educationists have advanced views in favour of the above theory. Havelock (1971) for instance, observed that teachers should not be made mere curriculum implementers but they should be actively involved alongside the

educational administrators and policy makers in the development of the curriculum.

Banners et al (1994) noted that no country can move forward without the full co-operation of teachers since their skills and attitudes play a leading role in the implementation of the curriculum. Ondiek (1986) also described teachers as the key factor in education reform be it in short term changes or long term re-orientation of the school curriculum. It is on this basis that the study was guided by the above theoretical thinking in maintaining that secondary school teachers being the direct implementers of the secondary school curriculum should be made part of the formulation team of the secondary school curriculum.

Research Methodology

This study was designed as a mixed methods approach specifically using the concurrent embedded design where qualitative approach dominated the research. The concurrent embedded design enabled the researchers to gain perspectives from the different types of data or from different levels within the study (Creswell, 2009). In other words, the purpose of this design was to answer different questions that required different types of data, meanwhile, the data that was collected was descriptive in nature and it was used to get detailed information pertaining to teacher involvement in curriculum development in Zambia. Through this design, the researchers got answers to both “what” and “why” questions and gained a deeper understanding of the research problem by comparing the qualitative and quantitative findings. When used in combination within the mixed methods approach, qualitative and quantitative methods complement each other and allow for a more complete analysis of the research situation (Greene et al., 1989; Tashakkori and Teddl, 1998 in Maree, 2007).

According to the Ministry of General Education in Zambia (MoGE), Lusaka has seven (7) zones. The researchers did a cluster sampling of one (1) secondary school per zone which was visited for the study. This method enabled the researcher to have

a detailed sampling frame for selected clusters only rather than for the entire target area. Questionnaires were distributed to 10 teachers per school who were randomly sampled and interview schedules were used to collect data from school head teachers in each of the seven schools. Focus group discussions were also used to collect data from teachers in each school. Data was analysed using descriptive statistics and themes.

Findings and Results

The research followed a mixed methods design specifically the concurrent embedded design where qualitative approach dominated while the quantitative approach was used to add detail to the data. It is also cardinal to note that the research instruments that were used had similar questions in both the questionnaires and interview schedules in line with the study objectives. The researcher identified themes in relation to the research objectives as well as recurrent patterns in the opinions of the study participants and univariate analysis using SPSS was done for the quantitative data where graphical illustration in form of graphs and pie charts were made.

The findings from the secondary school teachers were presented alongside those from the head teachers interviewed. Actual words said by respondents were used as much as possible in the descriptions, while other words have been paraphrased. It is important to note that some ideas presented were interrelated and could fall into more than one thematic section. Both qualitative and quantitative data sets were presented concurrently

Involvement of Teachers in Secondary School Curriculum Development

Teachers were asked to indicate if they felt they were fully involved in the secondary school curriculum development process at any time since they started working as secondary school teachers.

Figure 4.1 gives the analysed illustration of their responses.

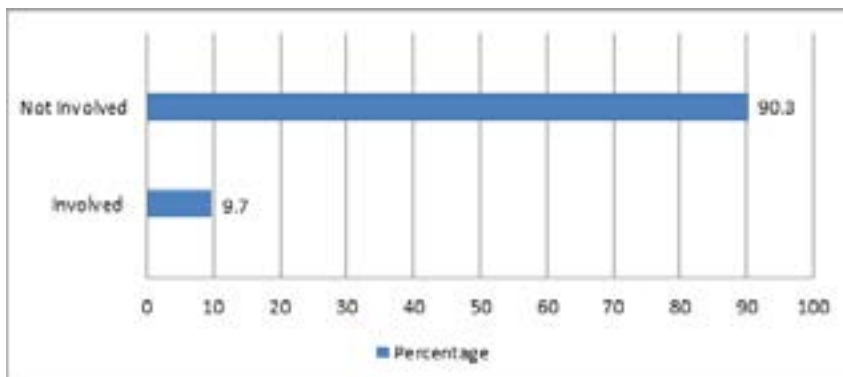


Figure 4.1: Percentage Distribution of Teachers' Involvement in the Development of any Curriculum Materials used in Zambian Secondary Schools (N=70)

The results in Figure 4.1 reveal that participation of secondary school teachers is extremely low. The majority of respondents (90.3%) were not involved in the development of the secondary school curriculum. Similarly, almost all the head teachers interviewed indicated that they were never involved in any aspect of curriculum development except for two who mentioned that they did as shown below:

I did at one point and that was language. We were trying to look at the changes in the curriculum from grade 8 to grade 12 but we never infused any new things.

No, not really, apart from just looking at books in terms of editing them and confirming if they are suitable for the school.

In addition, the curriculum specialist interviewed confirmed that the curriculum was mostly developed by the members of staff at the Curriculum Development Centre (CDC). The curriculum specialist stated that the curriculum development centre developed

the syllabi which were later rolled out into schools where different teachers had access to it. This was evidenced from a specialist explanation as shown below:

We as Curriculum Development Centre develop the curriculum and come up with the syllabus which is then sent into schools for the teachers to have access to it...

Responding to the same question on the extent to which secondary school teachers were involved in the development of the secondary school curriculum as mentioned earlier in this section, a few teachers (9.7%), however indicated that they were involved with the majority (42.9%) being involved in setting up the curriculum project and building the programme (*see Figure 4.2 below*). About 28.6 of the respondents have been involved in improving the new programme. The results further show that equal proportion of respondents (28.6%) have been involved in situational analysis and formulation of educational objectives.

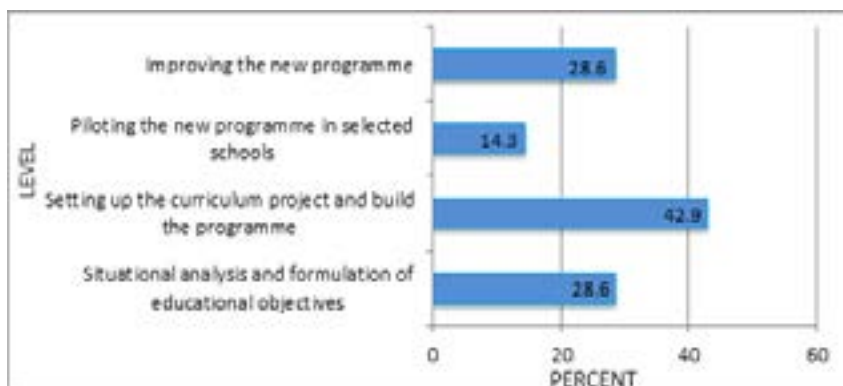


Figure 4.2: Stages at which Respondents were Involved in the Development of any Secondary School Curriculum Material (N=70)

Extent of Teacher Involvement in the Curriculum Development Process

Secondary school teachers were also asked to indicate on the

Likert Scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree as a way of establishing their views on their perceptions on the extent teachers were involved in the secondary school curriculum development process. The five Likert Scale was represented as follows 1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Undecided, 4 = Disagree, 5 = Strongly Disagree. The responses from the secondary school teachers are summarised in Table 4.1 below.

Table 4.1: Perception of Respondents on the Extent of Teacher Involvement in Cecondary Cchool Curriculum Development Process

		<i>Total Posi- tive</i>	<i>Strong- ly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Unde- cided</i>	<i>Dis- agree</i>	<i>Strong- ly Dis- agree</i>	<i>Total Nega- tive</i>
Secondary school teachers are adequately involved in secondary school curriculum development.	N	16.0	5	11	1	37	18	55
	%	22.2	6.9	15.3	1.4	51.4	25	76.4
The selection of secondary school teachers who are involved in curriculum development is very representative.	N	7.0	3	4	5	35	25	60
	%	9.8	4.2	5.6	6.9	48.6	34.7	83.3
Secondary school teachers are adequately involved in the development of curriculum materials such as textbooks used in secondary schools.	N	20.0	4	16	6	33	13	46
	%	27.8	5.6	22.2	8.3	45.8	18.1	63.9
There are adequate channels of communication between CDC and secondary schools in issues related to curriculum development.	N	9.0	2	7	9	37	17	54
	%	12.5	2.8	9.7	12.5	51.4	23.6	75
Secondary school teachers are well consulted on any issues related to secondary school curriculum development.	N	5.0	2	3	1	49	17	66
	%	6.9	2.8	4.2	1.4	68.1	23.6	91.7

The MOGE and CDC officials view teachers as implementers only who do not understand how a curriculum should be developed.	N	46.0	8	38	7	12	2	14
	%	68.7	11.9	56.7	10.4	17.9	3.0	20.9
Secondary school teachers have accepted the revised/new secondary school curriculum..	N	24.0	4	20	18	14	9	23
	%	33.4	5.6	27.8	25	19.4	12.5	31.9
Secondary school teachers have understood the new/revised secondary school curriculum.	N	22.0	5	17	11	24	9	33
	%	33.3	7.6	25.8	16.7	36.4	13.6	50
Teachers are forced to implement aspects of the reviewed curriculum even if they do not agree with the changes made.	N	58.0	19	39	2	6	1	7
	%	86.6	28.4	58.2	3.0	9.0	1.5	10.5
Teachers are in the better position to understand what should be reviewed and changed in the curriculum related to their area of specialisation..	N	66.0	43	23	0	1	0	1
	%	98.5	64.2	34.3	0.0	1.5	0.0	1.5

Table 4.1 shows that the majority of the respondents (76.4%) were not of the opinion that secondary school teachers were adequately involved in secondary school curriculum development with the majority of the respondents (83.3%) either strongly disagreed or disagreed that the selection of secondary school teachers who were involved in curriculum development was very representative.

Among the respondents (63.9%) did not believe that school teachers were adequately involved in the development of curriculum materials such as textbooks used in secondary schools, about 43.5% disagreed with the statement. About three-quarters (75%) either disagreed or strongly disagreed that there were adequate channels of communication between the Curriculum Development Centre and secondary schools in issues

related to curriculum development.

A large number of the teachers (91.7%) were not for the opinion that secondary school teachers were well consulted on any issues related to secondary school curriculum development. Further, the majority of respondents (68.7%) claimed that the Ministry of General Education and curriculum development officials viewed teachers as implementers only who did not understand the curriculum development process.

Opinions seemed divided with regard to secondary school teachers accepting the revised/new secondary school curriculum. Many respondents (33.4%) expressed strong agreement or agreement, but a roughly equal number (31.9%) indicated that they disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Results in Table 4.1 further shows that about half of the respondents (50%) indicated disagreement with the idea that secondary school teachers understood the revised secondary school curriculum. The study also established that (86.6%) of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that teachers were forced to implement aspects of the reviewed curriculum even if they did not agree with the changes made and nearly all respondents (98.5%) claimed that teachers were in the better position to understand what should be reviewed and changed in the curriculum related to their area of specialization.

During the one on one interviews with head teachers, the respondents gave the following reactions regarding the extent to which they thought teachers were involved in the curriculum development process. One teacher said:

I have been involved but, only after the curriculum was developed recently that's when a workshop was organized for the teachers to view the content.

Another teacher said:

It could be that am not connected.

Another teacher commented that:

They (CDC) already have a specific set of individuals that they contact and they only contact administrators and hold rare meetings with a few teachers whom they use as rubber stamps of the already developed curriculum.

Some teachers also argued that invitation to participate was not extended to them making the situation worse for those in rural areas. Other reasons indicated included lack of training and the prolonged process of the curriculum development. Additionally, most head teachers were dissatisfied with the way the curriculum was developed. One head teacher lamented that:

There are a lot of hiccups. The other thing that I have seen is they don't prepare the receivers in this case the teachers like the end users, they would call for a workshop to look at the materials, but then, at the implementation stage, the people that implement are not well informed and expect that the teacher go and teach what is in the new curriculum?.... I feel before they implement these things, they should first look at the materials that teachers are going to use together with the teachers. But in this case like the way this new curriculum was developed, we were just told that there is a new curriculum that has been put in place and all schools must implement it. You know..... that is why we had a lot of problems like when I look *at* the social sciences department, there were a lot of problems you see like the social studies itself, you know social studies has a composition of history, civics and geography, the social studies teacher has not been trained.

Another head teacher observed that;

The way it is now it's like teachers are not involved in the programming but they are involved at the implementation stage because even the new curriculum,

we were just told that the specialists were going round in schools saying no we are going to develop a new curriculum and this is what is expected of you.

Another head teacher explained that;

They (CDC) don't involve people at the grass root, but they do the development from the top and teachers are only told what to do and implementation becomes difficult most of the times.

Similarly, other head teachers stated that;

- I think most of the things seem to be hidden. You only come to know them when they are surfacing like when the books are ready or when the syllabus has been developed. Grass root involvement, I don't know which sample sizes they pick but it's rare to even hear that people got involved in the curriculum or they want to change the curriculum. That information is not there.
- Teachers are only involved at the implementation stage. If they are there, then they are only a few otherwise it's the people at the curriculum centre that work on it.
- It is not to my knowledge that any of the teachers were invited to participate in the development of the curriculum.
- There are 88 teachers in this school and unless I inquire, I have not heard of any teacher being involved in the curriculum development.
- All our teachers are trained, we are 65 but I have never received any invitation from CDC for our teachers. They only participate in the setting of exams under the Examination Council of Zambia but as for curriculum development we have never received any invitation.

Criteria for Selecting Teachers to Participate in the Curriculum Development Process.

Respondents were asked as to whether they knew the criteria that the Curriculum Development Centre used to invite teachers to participate in the curriculum development process. The knowledge on the criterion used would make teachers be in the position to express their views regarding the curriculum development process to their respective representatives. The vast majority of respondents (59.7%) did not know the criterion used in selecting the few teachers who participated in the curriculum development process. About 19.4% cited favouritism in the selection process. One respondent indicated that;

Those I have heard involved are those who know someone there at the CDC or Ministry of General Education.

Experience in subject area and length of service were reasons indicated by 9.7% of the respondents. Other respondents also stated that school managements selected teachers to participate in the curriculum development process.

On the other hand, all the head teachers interviewed indicated that there is no known criteria that CDC used to select teachers who should participate in the curriculum development process. One of the head teachers commented that;

There isn't any that I know because the entire curriculum development process seems to be hidden.

An analysis of all the responses is illustrated in figure 4.3. below

Figure 4.3. Criteria for Selecting Teachers who should Participate in Curriculum Development

The different views expressed by teachers on the selection criteria point to the fact that the way teachers who participate in curriculum development are selected is not very well known to the teachers hence it remains unclear.

Discussion and Implications

It is imperative that teachers should assume a more leading and meaningful role in making the necessary adjustments to the curriculum taking into consideration their working experiences. As Mulenga (2015:168) had rightly put it in his doctoral study ‘teachers must know the subject content matter that they teach since, there may be nothing more foundational to teacher competency than mastery of the subject content matter that a teacher has to teach’. Teachers form an integral part of the education system of any country since they are the vehicles through which the curriculum and by extension the whole education policy is translated and interpreted to the learners. This is in line with what

Mulenga and Luangala (2015:39) had observed that ‘teachers are one of the most critical assets of any formal education system since they play a very important role in the facilitation of the learners acquisition of desirable knowledge, skills, values and attitudes’. As stated earlier, research in diverse countries and education system shows that teachers are the biggest in-school influence on learner achievement and learning (UNESCO, 2015). The success, or otherwise of curriculum initiatives depends on teachers at the chalk-face (Gatawa, 1990). Full teacher participation in curriculum development is therefore a necessity which once ignored cannot go without long lasting effects on the developed curriculum. The success of any curriculum depends on how it is interpreted by its implementers who are the teachers. Batwini (2010; 89) noted that “teachers’ perceptions and beliefs influence and shape the meanings that the teachers eventually attach to the new reforms, which in turn play a vital role in their acceptance and classroom implementation.” Teachers therefore can only interpret the curriculum correctly if they have a full understanding of it which can only come forth if they are fully involved in curriculum development.

The study has established that the involvement of teachers in curriculum development is extremely low. The majority of the respondents comprising 90.3% as shown in figure 4.1 have never been involved in any aspect of the secondary school curriculum development process. Similarly, almost all the head teachers interviewed indicated that they were never involved in any aspect of curriculum development except for only two who mentioned that they were at one point involved in one way or the other. This finding is worrisome because the participants in the study are teachers who are the sole implementers of the curriculum. It is the teachers who interpret to the learners what is in the curriculum and so if the teachers are neglected in the development of the curriculum that they themselves are required to implement, it is questionable whether the implementation can be done effectively. Cornbleth (1990: 5) viewed curriculum as what actually happens in classrooms that is “an ongoing social process comprising of the

interactions of students, teachers, knowledge and milieu.” This point of view places teachers at the centre of the entire curriculum process because it is the teacher who interacts with the learners in the classroom. Adding to this view, Sharpes (1988:1) commented that curriculum is “what the teacher does and what the teacher knows and who the teacher is; the teacher’s behaviour, knowledge and personality.’ This assertion brings an emphasis that the quality of curriculum implementation is dependent on the quality of the teacher hence it is cardinal that teachers are involved in the development of the curriculum if the implementation of the curriculum is to be effective.

As can be noted from the findings of this study, the head teachers interviewed also confirmed that the majority of teachers in their schools were not involved in the curriculum development process as they had never received any invitation for any of their teachers to participate in the curriculum development process. It is fascinating to note that even the curriculum specialist interviewed in this study confirmed that the curriculum is developed by CDC and teachers were only given the syllabus after the development had been done. This information is contradicting with what is stated in the curriculum framework document that the school curriculum was developed through a consultative and participatory approach through course and subject panels where teachers and other stakeholders were represented (CDC, 2013). The question that arises is how are the teachers in the classroom represented? It may be argued that the staffs at curriculum development centre are teachers by profession. However, there is a considerable gap in knowledge between a practicing teacher and a non-practicing teacher because the latter would have already lost contact with classroom and school practice which are a vital component in the curriculum development process. This view is supported by Ben-Perez (1990), who stated that because teachers are familiar with the classroom situation; their role is deemed central for discovering the gaps and bringing about change and improvement. This assertion entails that the teacher who is no longer practising may not be in the position to have the actual feel of what takes

place in the classroom. Therefore, involving teachers who left the classroom in developing the curriculum may not have the same impact on the implementation of the curriculum as it would if teachers who are practising were involved. This is usually the case because the feel of the classroom and the actual school environment are vital to addressing the actual needs of the learners who are the sole beneficiaries of the curriculum.

Involvement of teachers in curriculum development may improve their skills of creating appropriate and effective context for learning. In addition, Oliva (1992) emphasised that through curriculum development, teachers can discover new ways for providing more effective learning experiences.

The results on the extent of teacher involvement in curriculum development are consistent with the results of the study conducted by Ndum and Okey (2015) on teachers involvement and role in climate change curriculum development and implementation in the Nigerian secondary educational system which discovered that teachers were mostly not involved in curriculum development instead, they were just expected to implement the already developed curriculum. In addition, Carl (2005) in his study on the “voice of the teacher” in curriculum development: a voice crying in the wilderness also revealed that teachers in South Africa were not involved in curriculum development. These findings were also supported by Wright (1985), who indicated that teachers were for the most part excluded from participating in curriculum development at curriculum levels outside the classroom. These scholars’ explained that although teachers were subject area specialists, little attention if any was given to their ‘voice’. They were only involved in the implementation of the new curriculum.

As can be noted from the study findings, a large number of the teachers (91.7%) were not for the opinion that secondary school teachers were well consulted on any issues related to secondary school curriculum development. Further, the majority of respondents (68.7%) claimed that Ministry officials viewed teachers as implementers only who did not understand a curriculum to be developed. These findings provide a clear indication that the ‘voice’ of the teacher is to a large extent ignored in the curriculum development process. Teachers are mostly considered

only as curriculum implementers.

These and the related results illustrated that when the curriculum is developed at the top with few individuals and then brought to the teachers to implement, it may have great implications on the education system of the country since the implementers may not know what to do. A good curriculum requires careful planning and development and it is worthless and ineffectual if teachers are not alert and receptive to what is required of them and if they cannot see how the innovation can be successfully applied in their own classrooms (Marsh and Willies, 1998). Teachers' understanding of the principles underlying reform strategies plays a significant role in the degree of implementation of an innovation because teachers with a low degree of understanding may generate a low degree of implementation (Kirgkoz, 2008b).

Most teachers suggested that the involvement of teachers in the curriculum development process should be throughout the curriculum development process with selection which should represent subject teachers, section heads and Heads of Departments. This view was also supported by Beane and Apple (2007) who stated that teachers, having the knowledge and class experience must contribute to the process by conveying their ideas and transmitting the know-how; they must be in the planning stage of what they are going to implement.

Respondents also suggested that, decentralising the curriculum development process at all levels of the education system in Zambia as discussed by (Mkandawire and Illon, 2018) would allow them to make a critical input on issues surrounding the school and education. The findings also support a study by Mosothwane (2012) on the role of senior secondary school teachers in development of mathematics curricular in Botswana which proposed the use of school based consultative committee to gather views of teachers and submit them to local curriculum committees who would then take them to regional committees and then national curriculum development panel. In line with this, Carl, (2012:193) emphasized the need 'to bring the teacher as implementer together with the institution or person involved with the design so that mutual co-operation may be brought about. There must be teacher input; it should not be otherwise.' The findings of the study are in support with the curriculum development and diffusion theory

guiding the study which stated that a teacher should be at the centre of any curriculum development model regardless of their weaknesses.

Conclusion

The study established that the majority of secondary school teachers were not involved in the curriculum development process. They noted that their role has been mainly to receive the already developed curriculum and then implement it in their different schools. The majority of respondents further indicated that the selection criteria of the few teachers involved in the curriculum development process is was not well known by most teachers. They felt that the curriculum that was developed hardly represented their views since there was poor and inadequate representation of secondary school teachers in the curriculum development teams a situation that may negatively affect the curriculum implementation process. It seems teachers' thoughts are only allowed to be expressed in their classrooms and are marginalized from contributing to the curriculum development process which they are expected to fully implement. In short, teachers are expected to be seen implementing the curriculum and not listened to during its development.

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