
Original Paper

Teacher Perception of Diffusion and Adoption of the New Primary School Curriculum in Buea Municipality of the South West Region of Cameroon

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Abstract

The study set out to find OUT primary school teachers' perception and adoption of the reformed primary school curriculum in Buea Municipality of the South West Region of the Republic of Cameroon. Findings showed that teachers were introduced to the curriculum through annual in-service training seminars and workshops. This met an initial resistance, since they were not part of the reform process, and had very little or no knowledge about the reform. Having encountered that, they were in agreement that it was organised into five domains of various weights, shifted the paradigm from the traditional teacher-centred to a learner-centred curriculum with wholesale changes on various elements that constitute the fabric of the curriculum. Adoption started very slowly, owing to the initial resistance to the reform, peaked in the second year, and continued a decreasing downward trend to engulf all teachers by the 2023 school year.

Keywords: Curriculum, Innovation, Curriculum reform, curriculum adoption, Curriculum diffusion, Teachers, Pupils, Seminars.

Introduction

The curriculum innovation process in Cameroon primary education has been guided by the continuous search for quality education. The period following independence saw efforts to adapt the inherited colonial learning programme to the realities of the nation. In this light, a series of reforms geared toward this goal were set in motion leading to the creation of the National Centre of Education, and the Institute of Rurally Oriented Education in Yaounde and Buea in 1963, to reform, harmonise and adapt the curriculum content to local realities. The process was made difficult by the parallel pursuit of the process of content and structural harmonization of the inherited Francophone and Anglophone sub system curricula. This process led to the structural harmonization of the curricula with the publication of the new curriculum for Anglophone schools in 2010. The implementation of this curriculum, which was subject driven and content based, did not meet the set goal, causing the basic education authorities to continue to experiment with the New Pedagogic Approach and the Objectives Based Approach from the 2008 school year. However, the need to curb attrition, increase graduation rates, increase access and equality, reduce educational wastage, raise quality, achieve the national vision for 2035, the Educational for All and the Sustainable Development Goals (goal 4, 2030), a new learner-centred and competency-based curriculum was created and implemented in 2018, bringing to fruition a harmonised national primary school curriculum in Cameroon. Having been implanted in the last five years, it seemed appropriate to find out the avenues through which classroom teachers received this innovation, and how they eventually came to accept and implement it. Consequently, this study seeks to find answers to the following two questions.

1. How was information about the various aspects of the new curriculum shared with teachers?
2. What is the rate of adoption of the new Primary school curriculum?

Review of literature

Curriculum decision making power can be exercised either at the centralised, or at the district and school levels, depending on the choice of the powers that be. In the case of Cameroon, curriculum decision making power is exercised by the central government authorities with a certain degree of consultation and with the relevant stakeholders. The Cameroon model incorporates what (Goodlad and Su, 1992, Elmore and Sykes, 1992), refer to as the policy level or formal body of legislation and regulations, usually published as core curriculum and the societal curriculum, which refers to the macro-level goals and guidelines, and the institutional curriculum, which is the detailed context-specific plans made by educational institutions (Goodlad and Su, 1992). In this vein the curriculum prescribes the curriculum content and organisation - what should be taught, how it should be taught and evaluated by detailing the content of education by determining the targeted competences, content areas, pedagogy, materials, teaching time frames and syllabuses, including teaching practices (OECD, 1998; Marsh and Willis, 2007, Cuban, 1992; Elmore and Sykes, 1992;).

Curriculum diffusion is conceived of as the process by which a 'package' of understanding about a curriculum (or part of a curriculum) is passed from a curriculum development project to the schools in which it is to be put into practice as a teaching and learning activity (Kelly 1970). Rogers (1962, Clark and Guba, 1967), define curriculum adoption as '... the mental process through which an individual passes from first hearing about an innovation to final adoption'.

Theoretical review

There are typically three approaches to educational innovations, the power-coercive, rational-empirical and the normative re-educative strategies (Chin and Benne (1969), cited by Nickols and Forbes (2001). In the power-coercive approach, which is akin to the strategy used in Cameroon, change is achieved through the exercise of power with those wielding greater power enforcing compliance from those with lesser power. This top-down movement of innovation according to Whitehead (1980), involves the passive implementation of a centrally planned innovation thought to be of necessity to the recipients, whose needs are usually not factored in the innovation. The curriculum innovation in Cameroon seems to have followed this centre-periphery model because a completed curriculum prepared by the National Inspectorate of Pedagogy in the Ministry of Basic Education was given to teachers at the beginning of the 2018 school year to implement. The argument has been that the control of the contents and the manner of delivery of the curriculum are of interest to government, who should monitor their progress (Kennedy, 1996).

According to Pinto et al (2005), teachers are the key to the successful implementation of new curricula, as they are the means used to turn innovations into classroom realities. Teachers are expected to change their practices, assume new roles from scratch by adopting new ideas and implementing them in their teaching (Fullan, 1991, Fogleman and McNeil, 2005).

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen and Madden, 1986), encapsulates the accepted beliefs and practice, including individual's beliefs and attitudes, on their intentions to change. These intentions also influence their behaviours. Perceived behavioural control which is the measure of the degree to which an individual believes he/she can successfully change certain behaviours is another factor, which can affect their intention to change (Sanders, 2006a). The concept of self-efficacy, which indicates how teachers assess their competences against self-set standards has much in common with the perceived behavioural control as Stein and Wang (1988), found that teachers' perceptions of their self-efficacy were related to successful implementation of an innovation, as positive perceptions are associated with increased student learning and higher percentages of programme goals being achieved.

Methodology

The study adopted the cross-sectional survey research design. Using the design, data were collected from a sample of 128 primary school teachers in twenty primary schools in the Buea Municipality, embracing public, confessionnal and lay private schools. The design enabled the researcher to collect data using a questionnaire composed of both closed-ended and open-ended items from all teachers teaching from Class One to Six in each school. The purpose of the open-ended items was to solicit information, which could not be captured by the closed-ended items. The data from the closed-ended

questions was analysed quantitatively, using descriptive statistics, frequency counts and percentage, and presented on tables. The qualitative data were analysed thematically, and presented in text (quotations).

Findings

The analysis and presentation were done according to research questions and the type of data collected.

1. How was information about the various aspects of the new curriculum shared with teachers?
2. What is the rate of adoption of the new Primary school curriculum?

Question One

Data collected on how information about the various aspects of the new curriculum were shared with teachers were grouped into the following ten categories:

- a. Initial exposure to new primary school curriculum
- b. Frequency of seminars/workshop
- c. Learned
- d. Familiarity with materials proposed by new curriculum
- e. Availability of curriculum material
- f. Curriculum content change
- g. New teaching methods/strategies introduced.
- h. Lesson modification
- i. Changes in terms of evaluating learning
- j. Organisation of new curriculum

Exposure to new Primary school curriculum

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid Workshop	5	3.9	3.9
Seminar	110	85.9	85.9
Head Teacher	9	7.0	7.0
Friend	4	3.1	3.1
Total	128	100.0	100.0

The exposure rate to the new primary school curriculum stood at 100% amongst participants. Of the 130 who participated in the study the overwhelming majority, 85.9% reported being exposed to information about the new primary school curriculum through a seminar, and the rest through a workshop, a head teacher or a friend.

Seminar Frequency

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid0	2	1.6	1.6
Each School Term	18	14.1	14.1
Twice a Year	18	14.1	14.1
Once a Year	90	70.3	70.3
Total	128	100.0	100.0

Relating to frequency of holding seminar/workshops, the majority (70.3%) reported that seminars/workshops hold once a year, while the minority reported participating in seminars/workshops either once or twice each school term.

Learning from Seminars

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	Very Much	69	53.9	53.9
	Much	51	39.8	39.8
	Little	7	5.5	5.5
	Nothing at all	1	0.8	0.8
	Total	128	100.0	100.0

A majority of teachers (93.7%) who participated in seminars reported to have learned much from the seminars/workshops, while the minority did not benefit enough from same seminars

Familiarity with Teaching/Learning materials

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	0	3	2.3	2.3
	Yes	114	89.1	89.1
	No	11	8.6	8.6
	Total	128	100.0	100.0

The new materials proposed by the new curriculum were familiar to a greater population (89.1%) of the participating teachers.

Availability of Curriculum Materials

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	Easy to Get	74	57.8	57.8
	Difficult to Get	24	18.8	18.8
	Scarce	19	14.8	14.8
	Not Available	7	5.5	5.5
	0	4	3.1	3.1
	Total	128	100.0	100.0

Slightly more than half (57.8%) of the participating teachers reported that the teaching material for the new curriculum could easily be obtained, while a minority (29.1%) reported that the materials were either difficult to get (scarce), or not available.

Curriculum Content Change

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	Less than 40%	26	20.3	20.3
	50 to 60 %	84	65.6	65.6
	80% and Above	16	12.5	12.5
	0	2	1.6	1.6

Total	128	100.0	100.0
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A majority of the teachers (78.1%) situated the curriculum content change above (60%), while the minority (20.3%) reported that the curriculum content change was below (40%),

New Teaching methods/Strategies introduced

The participants reported that amongst the new teaching methods introduced in the curriculum were:

Blended Learning	Demonstration	Computer Assisted	Individualised Instruction
Buzz Method	Differentiated Pedagogy	Content-Centered	Interactive Teaching
Child-Centered	Discovery Method	Cooperative Learning	Task Approach
Competent Based Approach	Guided Inquiry		

Experiential Learning	Projects Based
Explanation	Role Play
Flipped Classroom	Simulation
Individualised instructions	Story Telling
Illustration	Jolly phonics
Peer Teaching	Team Work
Problem Solving	Use of Charts
Use of Songs	

Respondents mentioned the following new teaching strategies that have been introduced in teaching:

Lesson Modification

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid50%	34	26.6	26.6
60 to 70%	81	63.3	63.3
100%	10	7.8	7.8
0	3	2.3	2.3
Total	128	100.0	100.0

Participants were also asked to report on the level of lesson format modification in the new curriculum. The findings on the table above reveal, that generally (60-100%), there was a comprehensive modification of the lesson format in the new curriculum.

Evaluation of Learning

Changes noted in terms of evaluating learning were the introduction of **oral** and **attitudinal** aspects to the existing, **written, and practical**. *“Learners, instead of being evaluated on the theoretical aspects, are now evaluated based on four aspects, which are oral, written, practical and attitude”*, reported a respondent. Another went on to say *“about 80% of changes because evaluation is not only based on the written part, but as well on attitude, practical and oral”*.

A third reported “*evaluating children based on socialisation, participation and orally*”

Organisation of new curriculum

A good number of participants reported that the new curriculum is organised in domains, subjects, weightings, competences, content from simple to complex, as well as in learner profiles.

A respondent reported “*the curriculum has been organised into five broad domains: basic knowledge, vocational and life skills, communal life and national integration, cultural identity and digital literacy*”

Others hold that the new curriculum is organised in monthly schemes, weekly plans and individual plans.

Question Two

Data collected on the rate of adoption of the new primary school curriculum were categorised under the following headings

- a. Adopted new curriculum
- b. Satisfaction with use of curriculum

Adoption

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid Yes	117	91.4	91.4
No	4	3.1	3.1
0	7	5.5	5.5
Total	128	100	100.0

In general, participants reported to have adopted the new primary school curriculum. Of these, 11 reported to have adopted it five years ago. 46 reported to have adopted the new curriculum 4 years ago, 24 reported adopting it three years ago, 22 reported to have adopted it two years ago, while the rest reported to have either adopted it a year ago or few months back.

Participants cited the following elements to have served as motivators to their adopting the new curriculum: easy to use, promotes competences, learner centered, be an agent of change, training and supervision received, inspire aspiration, acquisition of skills, brings out hidden talents, skill-based and promotes creativity. In the words of some respondents:

A: *"The reason why I adopted this new curriculum was because it influences aspiration, personal goals and interaction amongst the learners"*

B: *"it gives each and every learner the opportunity to participate during lessons. Hence, it is more of leaner centered".*

C: *"The new curriculum is learner-centered and skill-based. Thus it helps learners to acquire skills that will help them after completing their primary school course".*

Others, however, said they were compelled by their school authorities, and so had to adopt the new curriculum.

Satisfaction with Curriculum

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	Yes	89	69.5	69.5
	No	26	20.3	20.3
	0	13	10.2	10.2
Total		128	100	100.0

A majority of the participants (69.5%) reported being satisfied using the new curriculum. Respondents advanced the following reasons for contributing to their satisfaction towards using the curriculum: it enables learners and teachers to acquire more skills, promotes creativity, develops competences, guides teachers, all learners are incorporated in lessons, builds learners for real life challenges, facilitates teaching/learning process, eases identification of learner skills.

A: *"I am satisfied using this new curriculum because learners with different abilities and intelligence are given the opportunity to exhibit their talents"*

B: *"It opens up opportunities to self-realisation to (learners) one's own environment and opportunities for development of skills"*.

However, a minority reported that:

"There is little or no incentives, lack of resources, the environment is not equipped to enhance the full implementation of the curriculum. Insufficient training".

Discussion

The respondents reported that information on the new curriculum was received mainly through continuous professional training seminars and workshops, which are held once or at most twice yearly to introduce and deepen their knowledge and now-how on the implementation of the reform. These seminars, they generally affirm, have been very beneficial as they have enabled them grasp the essentials of the curriculum. In relation to the organisation of curriculum, they report that it is organised into five learning domains weighted variously. This is opposed to the former curriculum, which was organised as a list of subjects (subject design), with three broad fields. Each learning domain has the desired competences to be developed, and an exit learner profile. In relation to the elements constituting the content of the curriculum, they generally agreed that they were familiar with the new learning and teaching materials suggested for use, and that these materials were easily accessible. Participants overwhelmingly agreed that the reformed curriculum was revolutionary, having shifted focus from the teacher to the learners. This represents a change in philosophical and pedagogical approaches to teaching and learning, and places the burden of learning on learners, while changing the roles of teachers to that of creating the necessary environment, and providing the needed materials for learners' use in learning as affirmed by Fullan et al (Fullan, 1991, Fogleman and McNeil, 2005) The strategies and methods of teaching suggested in the curriculum they attest, militate for a strong learner centredness approach to instruction, with the lesson format given an overall change to meet the new demands of teaching and learning. The findings also indicate that assessment of the practical work of pupils, as well as their oral skills, have been given prominence.

In relation to the rate of adoption of the new curriculum, participants reported to have done so progressively, beginning with a few in the first year of implementation, and reaching its peak in the second year, then gradually decreasing to embrace all in the 2023 school year. This indicates the initial resistance of teachers to the reform based perhaps, on their unpreparedness as they were not party to the reform that was centrally prepared, and imposed on them for implementation as proposed by Whitehead (1980), and confirmed by Kennedy (1996), who argued that since the control of the contents and manner of delivery of a curriculum are of interest to government, they should monitor their progress. The initial resistance could be understood in the light of Ajzen and Maden's (1986) theory of planned behaviour on teachers' intentions to change. The subsequent continual acceptance of the reform could equally be predicated on their increasing sense of self-efficacy related to their success in the implementation of the reform, as the more they learned about the reform and tried to put in practice, the knowledge, skills, competences and values acquired facilitated the adoption process (Sanders, 2006a, Stein and Wang, 1988). Consequently, they expressed satisfaction with the reform as in practice the implementation process has been enabling both teachers and pupils to acquire the twenty first century knowledge, skills and competences.

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