



The Sustainability of Curriculum Reform and Implementation Through Teacher Participation: Evidence from Social Studies Teachers

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ABSTRACT

Globally, there is a movement toward curriculum development and reform as states, governments, and education departments work to provide future-focused curricula to address the demands and difficulties of the 21st century. Despite public knowledge that curriculum reform and implementation are universal trends infested with intractable challenges, little is understood about why the participation of teachers in reform activities from design through implementation should be considered essential. This paper, a part of earlier work, reports on a qualitative case study examining how teachers made sense of their participation in curriculum reform and implementation activities. Twelve teachers representing six primary schools in Zimbabwe were interviewed in Focus Group Discussions and semi-structured interviews to gather data. Using the sense-making theory as a lens, thematic analysis of qualitative data suggests that teacher participation in curriculum reforms enables teachers to be co-designers, which in turn improves ownership of the innovations, leading to an improved implementation fidelity of the new curriculum as teachers are provided with the authority to go through the implementation process with a comparable level of rigor as policymakers. These insights could inform curriculum design and development policy, potentially improving curriculum implementation worldwide. The study implores policymakers to rope in teachers as potent fountains of curriculum content and as partners in curriculum design and development. The study contributes to scholarship on policy formulation and implementation in educational settings.

KEYWORDS

Curriculum reform; implementation; social studies; teacher participation.

INTRODUCTION

Globally, there is a movement toward curriculum development and reform as states, governments, and education departments work to provide future-focused curricula to address the demands and difficulties of the 21st century (Brendan & Gordon, 2023). The reforms have been necessitated by several developments, some designed to respond to global trends, the hopes and aspirations of nations, social priorities and goals, and the need to address socioeconomic challenges facing nations. However, the reform and implementation processes are not without their challenges. Regardless, Zimbabwe launched a new curriculum in 2015, although substantial evidence demonstrates that educational reform implementation is riddled with flaws and fraught with challenges. Not only is the blame tossed from policy designers to teachers in Zimbabwe but also worldwide.

Worryingly, previous studies report that teachers who are the last persons on the implementation trajectory are neither consulted nor listened to; hence, their voices are silent (Carl, 2005; Fullan, 2015). However, recent studies have unraveled the teachers' voices on how they navigate the complexities of implementing education reforms by exploring their lived experiences (Bentrovato & Chakawa, 2022; Guerrero & Camargo-Abello, 2023; Heng & Song, 2023; Korhonen et al., 2023). Findings from most of these studies reveal that teachers are at fault because of their unpreparedness, incompetencies, attitudes and beliefs, frustrations, and resistance to reforms' intentions. However, when asked for their opinions on why gaps exist in policy and practice, teachers lament the way the curriculum is cascaded, which tends to be from top to bottom (Chimbunde & Kgari-Masondo, 2021a; Guerrero & Camargo-Abello, 2023; Heng & Song, 2023; Korhonen et al., 2023). The teachers propose that curriculum designers consult them and allow them to participate in all curriculum activities from inception to implementation. It is unclear why they want to participate in the reform's activities.

While past studies were helpful in our understanding of the problems teachers had when implementing curricula and the strategies that can ameliorate them, little is understood about why the participation of the teachers in the reform activities, which they often refer to, is essential. Thus, despite rigorous research on the teachers' perspectives on educational reforms, what remains unclear is the reasons they proffer for the justification of their participation in curriculum reform activities. This study explores the teachers' reflections on their involvement in curriculum reform and its effects, using Zimbabwe as a case, given that the country recently undertook a significant curriculum reform from 2015 to 2022 to bridge this lacuna. The study addresses the question, *how can teacher participation in educational reforms benefit sustainable curriculum implementation?*

With the ongoing revisions to the curriculum at the time of writing, this study is essential and timely to equip teachers and policymakers in Zimbabwe with evidence-based recommendations. Thus, by uncovering the teachers' reflection on the significance of their involvement in educational reforms, this study is insightful to Zimbabwe and contributes to

scholarship on policy development related to curriculum design and implementation across the globe.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Curriculum Changes and Challenges

In many nations, curriculum reform is essential to raising educational standards (Pham et al., 2023). Research on educational transformation and implementation has been spurred by the prospect of the many difficulties that accompany the implementation of any new curriculum reform, which has sparked broad interest in academic circles. For instance, earlier research on the prevalence of issues with curriculum implementation has been done in Europe (Guerrero & Camargo-Abello, 2023; Heng & Song, 2023; Korhonen et al., 2023; Simmons & Maclean, 2018). Much research has been conducted in Africa, revealing the difficulties in implementing curricula (Nyika & Motalenyane, 2023; Pule & Raxangana, 2024; Rakolobe & Teise, 2024). Most of these studies have concentrated on teachers' anxieties, beliefs, attitudes, readiness, resistance, and incapacity.

Current studies from Zimbabwe (Bentrovato & Chakawa, 2022; Chimbunde & Kgari-Masondo, 2021a; Dube & Jita, 2018) have significantly added their voice to the challenges of curriculum implementation, although they have overlooked teachers' voices in curriculum design, development and implementation. Some of these studies support that teachers resist change. Nevertheless, based on a literature review, a recent study by Chimbi and Jita (2022) contends that teachers do not think they are as resistant to change as has historically been claimed. Numerous studies have demonstrated for decades that curriculum implementation is a challenging, painful, and complex phenomenon beset by challenges, anxieties, and expectations (Dube et al., 2022; Dube & Jita, 2018; Heng & Song, 2023; Kilinc et al. 2023; Moloji et al., 2023; Pham et al., 2023; Winoto, 2022) since many change agents fear the unknown and claim that innovations could make them feel threatened about their capacity to complete the tasks at hand or even about losing their jobs (Guerrero & Camargo-Abello, 2023).

Considering the above, Fullan (2015) articulates the many factors confronting the implementation phase in his seminal work, 'The New Meaning of Educational Change,' which aligns with Gross's (1971) 'Sociological Analysis of Planned Educational Change.' According to the literature search, some studies (Budak, 2015; Nevenglosky et al., 2019) examined whether teachers implemented the new curriculum faithfully, while other studies (Dube & Jita, 2018; Vandeyar, 2017) focused on teachers' beliefs, stages of concern, and philosophical contradictions. Accordingly, prior research indicates that teachers' contributions to educational reform and professional experiences are frequently overlooked (Fullan, 2015; Yidana & Aboagye, 2018). However, recent studies have shown that teachers' voices are now evident in curriculum change and implementation (Chimbi & Jita, 2022; 2023; Chimbunde & Kgari-Masondo, 2021a; Skhephe & Mantlana, 2021), but what remains under research is their

reflections on why they advocate for their involvement in the design and execution of curricula, which this study attempts to explore.

Teacher Participation in Educational Reforms

A notable body of evidence indicates that experts and policymakers continue to be those responsible for establishing curriculum matters. According to Gasva and Moyo's (2017) testimony, the new curriculum in Zimbabwe included additional information for which teachers lacked preparation. Dube and Jita (2018, p. 907) further this argument by saying that because politicians "form the curriculum," teachers "get a curriculum which they wonder what its purpose is," which is again challenging to apply. Because of this, some authors (Nziramasanga, 2018; Rogan, 2007; Simmons & Maclean, 2018) contend that politicians should not prescribe to teachers when recommending changes to the curriculum. Because officials and the government often push curricula on teachers through a top-down strategy, no literature review indicates that teachers were widely recruited to construct curricula. Many educational changes, as Prendergast (2018) explains, tended to take a top-down approach that overlooks the concerns and views of teachers. As mentioned, Carl (2005) found that teachers are frequently left out of curriculum modifications outside the classroom at most curricular levels. It would appear from this that teachers are only told about the new reforms and do not participate in the decision-making process on improvements to education.

According to Rahman et al. (2018), the lack of teacher participation in the curriculum creation process causes issues with implementing the curricular modifications. According to some research (Chimbi & Jita, 2022; 2023; Chimbunde & Kgari-Masondo, 2021a; Chinyani, 2013; Sung & Choi, 2022), the way the curriculum is put together and distributed is a significant contributing factor to difficulties with implementation. In a study conducted in Kenya, Syomwene (2013, p. 80) also made note of this, reporting that the process of developing and implementing educational policies is political because administrators and planners "hardly undertake policy formulation and implementation without meddling from politicians which the intrusions take several forms like rulings and political declarations from the top." Similar trends may be seen in Zimbabwe, where national curricula for use in schools are planned and developed under the direction of the Curriculum Development Unit (Chinyani, 2013). Thus, curriculum resolutions are completed at the central office and distributed to teachers, who carry them out locally. Chinyani notes several obstacles with this technique, including the possibility that "the user system at the furthest end receives an altered copy of the originally established curriculum" (2013, p. 128), showing that the curriculum which policymakers had in mind might not reach students in the way that they had intended. There are numerous issues with the top-down, centralized approach to curriculum development when viewed in this light.

Different opinions are emerging regarding the implementers' lack of involvement in curricular revisions (Nziramasanga, 2018; Zindi, 2018). Proponents of teacher participation in decision-making have been vocal in their writing (Guerrero & Camargo-Abello, 2023; Heng & Song, 2023; Korhonen et al., 2023). They contend that change cannot be left to the experts alone

and that teachers' supremacy in the classroom may have been misplaced when they became regular teachers and were only responsible for delivering a new curriculum rather than being held accountable for its successful design and implementation. While teachers are the primary force behind proper implementation, according to some authors (Nyika & Motalenyane, 2023; Pule & Raxangana, 2024; Rakolobe & Teise, 2024), it is best to involve policymakers and teachers in all implementation-related activities to maintain balance. It is, therefore, more likely than not that there will be challenges with implementation because policymakers and educational leaders leading curriculum innovations and renovations for future adoption might have overlooked the people at the implementation level, making the implementation implausible and irrelevant. This is because literature suggests that policymakers tend to overlook the contribution of teachers. Including teachers in decision-making is crucial. Rogan (2007, p. 94) contends that "teachers who did not input into the innovation are going to have little loyalty to it and lack any sense of ownership." Therefore, if teachers are not involved, policymakers impose the curriculum without input. The drawback is that those who implement the reforms can reject them because they don't understand their rationale and feel alien. Similarly, Simmons and Maclean (2018) contend that involvement fosters teachers' creativity and ingenuity, enabling them to create ground-breaking data-sharing strategies, which helps teachers become competent decision-makers.

Based on the literature previously cited, not consulting the teachers who serve as the implementation's supporters can thus lead to a significant setback in the process because their contribution has an advantage in that the teachers will be familiar with the methods and strategies used in the classroom where the implementation will take place (Rahman et al., 2018). If experts alone are tasked with implementing the educational transformation, they may lack the necessary skills and knowledge to provide favorable outcomes for real-world application. This implies that all parties involved in the development and execution of the new curriculum must collaborate. Another critical aspect revealed by the literature condemns implementers' lack of participation in decision-making. It depicts that the absence of information on the curriculum change makes teachers who oversee its implementation ignorant of what is expected (Cobbold, 2017). As a result of their opinion being disregarded, these teachers will adopt specific curriculum modifications that counter the change's theoretical foundations.

Context of the Reforms in Zimbabwe

When Zimbabwe realized that the educational system was too redundant to produce individuals with a sense of citizenship, it revised its curriculum to direct instruction from 2015 through 2022 (MoPSE, 2015). Zimbabwe demanded that the education system be rebuilt using an updated curriculum, that was implemented in 2017 and was to remain in effect until 2022, after acknowledging the system's futility, which was proved by the outdated and inapplicable nature of the system's bequeathed curricula (Nziramasa, 2018). This followed recommendations suggested by the Commission of Enquiry on Education and Training (CEET) of 1999, which was

enlisted by the then President of Zimbabwe and assigned the duty of looking into and recommending the crucial changes the nation's curriculum needs (Zindi, 2018). The analysis showed that Zimbabwe's educational system was overly intellectual and desperately needed reform, citing significant deficiencies in curriculum material, national values and the ideology guiding the educational system (MoPSE, 2015). As such, Zimbabwe launched a new curriculum in 2017 to address the country's socioeconomic, cultural and political problems. The 2015-2022 curriculum has social studies as one of its disciplines, launched simultaneously with other subjects. However, Zimbabwean social studies teachers doubted the feasibility of the new curriculum on several fronts. They cited irreconcilable contradictions in aligning curriculum design and implementation with societal expectations and classroom instruction. Based on those assumptions, several studies, including this study, were undertaken to unpack teachers' challenges (Chimbunde & Kgari-Masondo, 2020; Chimbunde & Kgari-Masondo, 2021a; Chimbunde & Kgari-Masondo, 2021b).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study, couched by the sense-making theory, uses the case of the social studies curriculum reform and implementation in Zimbabwe to explore the teachers' reflections on the utility of their participation in education reforms. Weick (1995) advanced and popularized the sense-making theory, which is the act of creating a sense of understanding the situation in which one finds oneself (Alsaad, Alam & Lutfi, 2023). The sense-making theory is based on the idea that reality is a continuous achievement that arises from efforts to build order and make retroactive sense of what happens (Longmuir, 2023; Weick, 1995). School teachers employ sense-making to make sense of educational innovations and the contrasts and surprises they encounter in new working contexts (Spillane & Anderson, 2014). Longmuir (2023) defines sense-making as the process by which meanings are formed not just through interpreting events but also through integrating and adopting to bridge existing experiences with new knowledge. Thus, sense-making enables people to learn and seek information constantly when confronted with several challenges.

When social studies teachers are asked to implement educational innovations, they must first make sense of the obstacles they encounter before looking for solutions that bridge the gap. As Lim and Kumar (2023) correctly point out, the concept of sense-making is thus a process by which individuals construct cognitive maps of their environment, where these cognitive maps attempt to offer clarity and meaning to an otherwise perplexing phenomenon and enable informed action. The theory fits easily in this study since it explains what teachers feel throughout educational reforms and the significance of those experiences to policymakers, which will lead to their engagement in productive activities for the success of the implementation. Teachers use sense-making to create plausible explanations for their experiences with educational changes and implementation. So, in the study, we used sense-making theory to consider how we could comprehend and integrate the perceptions of social

studies teachers into something we already do in educational reforms. Sense-making allows us to explain the unknown and make sense of streams of input from social studies teachers by labelling what they encountered to eliminate misunderstanding in curriculum design and implementation.

METHODOLOGY

The present study's data were gathered as a component of a broader investigation into Zimbabwean teachers' perspectives of the new curriculum's implementation from 2015 to 2022. The qualitative case study examined the teachers' opinions about the value of their involvement in educational changes from conception to execution by using the sense-making lens. We opted for a qualitative methodology to value participants' experiences and collaboratively create knowledge. Again, using a qualitative approach was beneficial because it allowed us to elucidate the nature of teachers' involvement in reforms and their implementation as they were experienced, structured, and interpreted by them during their jobs (Ledford & Gast, 2018). Because it was qualitative, it easily fits into the interpretive philosophical presumptions, which seek to comprehend individuals in their natural environments or contexts (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). We explored the participants' opinions and perceptions during interviews and examined how their experiences emerged within their sociocultural contexts by placing this research in a naturalistic setting (Heng & Song, 2023; Yin, 2018).

Sampling

Using purposive sampling, which is different from random sampling in that it is selection based on relevance, we selected six schools for semi-structured interviews and FGD. The six schools represented all the different types of schools in Zimbabwe and provided a wealth of information. From the six schools, twelve teachers were purposively picked. We considered what Yin (2018) said about qualitative research samples being purposeful, which meant that the teachers employed in this study were chosen for that reason. The two teachers from each school were selected based on their background in social studies, familiarity with the study's goals, and experience teaching third and fourth graders in Zimbabwean schools implementing the new curriculum.

All in all, six males and six females were chosen to participate in the study. The teachers were over thirty and had at least five years of social studies teaching experience. This allowed us to collect data from social studies-trained teachers rather than inexperienced teachers unfamiliar with the subject. The research began only after approval was received from the University of KwaZulu-Natal Ethics Committee protocol reference number HSS/0855/018D. Teachers completed consent forms, and issues of privacy and confidentiality were discussed. Pseudonyms were used to ensure the participants' anonymity.

Data Collection and Analysis

To gather data, we used focus groups and semi-structured interviews. When ambiguity emerged, we used these tools to investigate deeper. Semi-structured interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGD) were employed in the present investigation to augment the trustworthiness of the results. That was methodological triangulation, which Yin (2018) defines as a strategy that uses various data-gathering techniques to elicit differing viewpoints on a comparable study object from multiple contributors. The information was audio recorded, listened to, copied, clarified, coded, condensed, presented, and analyzed while still fresh in our brains. We analyzed the data from focus groups and semi-structured interviews using the basic coding techniques described by Miles and Huberman (1994). Coding is the process of summarizing content in tiny sentences that are written line by line. As a result, our focus was on the meaning participants made of their narratives and the rationale for those viewpoints (Yin, 2018). As a result, data were analyzed alongside the themes that arose in line with the study's focus. To improve trustworthiness, we employed member checking by returning findings to the participating teachers, who checked to see if the data was correct and aligned with their lived experiences.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Participation Empowers Teachers to be Collaborators in Curriculum Development

During the interview process and focus group discussions (FGDs), it came out that the teachers preferred to be collaborators rather than spectators in the design of the social studies curriculum. S2 remarked, *"We want to participate in the design and implementation as partners who select the relevant topics, unlike what happened where irrelevant topics were packaged for use in schools."* Furthermore, it was discovered that African themes like cohabitation were excluded from the content as they were mirrored in the social studies curricula, which were expanded to cover topics connected to global and governance concerns. In words from J2:

As I previously stated, new subjects were added, such as "global issues" and "governance." I'm curious as to why they omitted a subject like "Living together," which upholds African ideals like tolerance and respect and fosters humanity. They introduced concepts that are Eurocentric and may not be beneficial to African culture. This type of content was not what we anticipated from a homegrown curriculum. We are rich reservoirs of information for the social studies curriculum. Consequently, we can contribute to the advancement of the curriculum content.

The finding suggests that the teachers find themselves out of the curriculum design process, violating their expectations; this is consistent with the sense-making theory, which argues that people begin to make sense when their expectations are violated or when they encounter an uncertain event or subject that is important to them. This frequently threatens assumed roles and routines, prompting school social studies to reassess core beliefs about how they should behave and work (Turner et al., 2023). As argued by Weick (1995), identity

construction underpins sense-making because when people choose a specific meaning or interpretation for an experience, they activate a distinctive identity for themselves, which the social studies did and suggested to be co-designers of the curriculum. The findings, however, support a finding that describes the educational system as “factory-style, industrial age, and weak in flexibility” (Heng & Song, 2023, p. 315). It also shows that policymakers did not view teachers as powerful providers of Social Studies content. As a result, the policymakers denigrated teachers by treating them like mere implementers of a predetermined policy. They failed to acknowledge the teachers’ experiences as springs of information. The significance of the African themes that comprise the African way of life eluded them. To consolidate their claim to be involved in the process of curriculum design through to implementation, one of the teachers in the FGD attested that:

We need to take part in the design stage because we know what is suitable for what grade level. We cannot teach learners at Grade three level issues to do with a country’s governance and global issues. The language on its own is beyond the cognitive level of such learners. We must lower our content to suit the learners.

The finding sharply contrasts with a study by Pham et al. (2023) that found that during curriculum reform in Vietnam, teachers employing chosen textbooks created a year-long syllabus, which they then adjusted to meet the specific learning objectives for every session by changing the tasks and content. Nonetheless, teacher’s accounts indicated that since they were the cogs in the machine that could propel the implementation process, their involvement in the planning and executing the educational change was essential to the success of the reforms’ implementation. In the words of J2:

It is usually crucial to involve teachers who will be carrying out any new components of the upcoming curriculum changes. These individuals will discuss among themselves what is required (the subject matter and its workload) and how they would go about putting the changes into practice (their pedagogy expertise). By doing this, the implementation process’ inherent complexities would be lessened. Planning ought to begin at the local level, where implementers like us debate and decide on modifications and tactics for carrying them out. The implementation map will be unpacked during the conversation, helping us better understand the innovations’ goal and how to continue our quest. After that, we can work on perfecting and refining the recommendations made by policymakers. Should they impose as happened, then challenges are inescapable.

This contribution aligns with the conclusions of Dube and Jita (2018), Nziramasanga (2018) and Yidana and Aboagye (2018), which state that teachers’ active involvement is essential to the curriculum’s successful implementation. According to the findings, teachers’ participation during the design phase is critical to successfully implementing a new program, even though their contributions are frequently disregarded, particularly in systems of centralized curriculum development. All teachers agree that the bottom-up strategy is essential for reducing challenges encountered throughout the curriculum’s implementation phase. As a

result, the teachers disclosed that meaningful involvement in curricular change depended on pedagogical competency, subject matter content, scheduling, and change vision sharing. Social studies teachers can integrate significant life lessons into the curriculum since they are human. The problems of introducing unfamiliar topics that were beyond the students' grasp and knowledge would not have arisen without teacher consultation. The teacher's experiences gained throughout their careers and lives sufficed to develop the social studies curriculum in the African context.

The uniqueness of this finding is that teachers now have a different role than just carrying out curriculum policies. Research had not revealed anywhere that teachers had expressed a desire to be included as co-designers of the curriculum. Instead, research has only indicated how crucial it is that they be included in the implementation process in the classroom (Carl, 2005; Dube & Jita, 2018; Yidana & Aboagye, 2018; Zindi, 2018). Accordingly, this is the first study in social studies where teachers suggest that their functions may be expanded to include developing curricula, a completely new position.

Failure to partake in drafting the content of the social studies curricula was a sign of detachment from the society they were taught. J2 further states that *"teachers are potent sources of the curriculum content."* This discovery is significant because there is little research on the subject, and it has been observed that teachers are keen to create original content for the curriculum. This illustrates that teachers had extensive knowledge of what should be covered in the Social Studies curriculum to meet community problems and understood the values that the children in the village needed to be taught. Because of this, their job description could include content development and curriculum implementation for social studies. Due to their familiarity with the local environment and dynamics, teachers are qualified to construct curricula, proving Eisner's assertion that people need to take on the role of "architects of their knowledge" (Sanchez, 2010, p. 14).

Participation Promotes Ownership of Reforms

When teachers were asked why they were to participate in all stages of curriculum development, from formulation to implementation, it emerged that their participation increased buy-in and ownership of the reforms. It emerged that teachers' ownership of the curriculum diminishes if changes are imposed without their input. As stated by S2, *"I regard the changes as an imminent danger that can undermine my sense of self-efficacy and challenge my convictions and faith in my existing practice. I do not own the changes."* In concurrence, G1 complained that:

We cannot be the final implementers of the mooted curriculum without our involvement. Its success or failure is not our problem. It is their curriculum that they imposed on us and so its fidelity is not our business. We will continue to work the way we used to do.

The finding aligns with Schleicher's (2011) argument that teachers must have an active role in both the planning and execution of curriculum changes. In support, Guerrero and Camargo-Abello (2023) argue that teachers involved in the curriculum development process are

more capable of ensuring that their teaching reflects the goals of the curriculum. The teachers' sentiments indicate that the consequences of their non-participation explain the high degree of resistance they exhibit against what may be a commendable initiative by policymakers. Therefore, the teachers' lack of engagement in the change created unfavorable sentiments that eventually resulted in resistance. Their sense of alienation because of not being involved in curriculum design motivates this type of opposition rather than anything inside. Teachers who do not participate in specific ways may lose their sense of purpose and direction, their framework of reality, and their confidence that they know what must be done. According to Makewa and Ngussa (2015), individuals may experience confusion and feelings of alienation. Expanding on that, Fullan (2015) contends that teachers play a critical role in implementing the curriculum because they apply new teaching approaches, directly utilize newly revised materials, and share their beliefs and comprehension of the new policy regarding the new curriculum. Making decisions about changes in the curriculum is just as crucial as the decision to implement the social studies curriculum itself, meaning that consultations should take place not only during the implementation stage but also from the beginning until the end of the process. From the sense-making theory, Weick (1995) explains the finding as a demonstration of the willingness of people to rework their initial role of being implementers of the curriculum and adopt a newer role of being co-designers that is more sensitive to recent educational reforms which consider the local context (Longmuir, 2023). This results from making sense of the situation and finding solutions to the gaps.

The importance of teacher's participation in curriculum construction was clarified when J1 said:

As implementers, we are aware of both the benefits and drawbacks. We can look around to see what resources are appropriate for putting this and that into practice. We can examine our societies to determine how best to put the suggested reforms into practice. By working together, we may evaluate and arrange suggested modifications according to our preferences and the goals of our country. Results from a one-man operation can be terrible because it is not good for our country.

This finding resonates with the sense-making theory, which argues that throughout their everyday lives, teachers take part in constant tasks and circumstances where they identify and analyze pertinent curriculum deficiencies for closer considerations that are significant to learners and the nation (Alsaad et al., 2023). This is because retrospective reflection is an inherent component of the sense-making process, wherein signals that have been initially observed are assigned meanings (Alsaad et al., 2023; Weick, 1995). The expressed sentiments suggest that policymakers take it for granted that teachers are good at implementing what they would have crafted. However, this is a fallacy, as pointed out by Graves (2023, p. 200), that curriculum frameworks and materials do not cause or ensure effective learning because they may be "theoretically coherent, provide clear pathways, define learning outcomes and so on, but they are inert and meaningless formulations until they are used in the classroom by the teachers." All things considered, the teachers who were being interviewed stated that the

successful execution of the new social studies curriculum depends on the process of consultation wherein the teachers' opinions are gathered and considered. That suggests engaging in teamwork to make a concerted attempt to prevent curriculum implementation from becoming a stalemate. The socioeconomic and political authority to start an innovation is vested in curriculum designers, but implementers also have influence that should not be underestimated since those who are putting the command into practice dare to disobey or disregard it; in other words, one can lead a horse to water, but one is unable to make it drink.

CONCLUSIONS

The study was seized with the exploration of the justification of teacher participation during curriculum reform and development. It showed that the involvement of teachers in the process of both curriculum change and implementation is crucial. This involvement empowers them as partners in the curriculum's design, development, and implementation. It is also essential for their buy-in and helps build a sense of ownership. These findings suggest the need to implore policymakers to rope in teachers when designing and developing the school curricula. Considering this, the study concurs with Rahman et al. (2018, p. 1121), who recommends that policymakers, irrespective of the locations of their schools, should seek "*teachers' consent and participation in curriculum development and implementation.*" Teacher involvement in curriculum development can increase their ownership and dedication so that when implementation fails to unfold as planned, no one is at fault because they constitute both the designers and implementers. As a result, even though the current teachers' participation in curriculum changes and implementation is minimal, the importance of their involvement is too loud to ignore. Teachers have the same authority as policymakers to negotiate the implementation process with the same level of rigor.

The study demonstrated that using teachers to construct the curriculum content is useful here, though unique and may be time-consuming. However, we are more worried about the results of our intentions rather than cosmetic take-homes. Thus, reviewing the Social Studies curriculum with teachers as developers is vital to align the learning area to the demands and dictates of the African community. We conclude that efficient collaboration, a readiness to make concessions, and teacher participation in the design and execution of reform can increase the likelihood of success in the process. The reform process shifts from consultation to involvement, putting teachers at the center and focusing on turning schools into learning institutions for the community.

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