

Teachers' perception of the new educational curriculum in Ghana

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ABSTRACT

The present study examined the perception of teachers of the new educational curriculum in Ghana. Responses from six teachers interviewed were developed into a questionnaire and posted on the websites of teacher unions via WhatsApp. In all, 74 teachers responded. From the study teachers perceived that the new curriculum is important as it will encourage group work, assist students to get lifelong skills, prepare students for the job market, promote inclusive education, promote gender equality, and considers Ghanaian students' culture and society. The findings further revealed that the current curriculum does not includes difficult content for teaching but contains a lot of workloads, lacks teaching and learning materials and includes long class periods. Teachers were also of the view that the government should involve teachers in planning the curriculum, get books and learning materials ready, train teachers in advance and pilot a new curriculum before implementation. In a nutshell, the new curriculum should involve many teachers in planning before implementation.

Keywords: Teachers' perception, new curriculum, educational curriculum.

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INTRODUCTION

Teachers over the world are important as they contribute to the success of educational reforms (Smith and Desimone, 2003; Spillane and Callahan, 2000). The knowledge, beliefs and perception of teachers play a pivotal role in understanding curriculum reforms (Blignaut, 2007; Haney et al., 2002). Therefore, teachers are not likely to accept the educational curriculum without questions and criticisms when they are not part of the reform process. This is not limited to only teachers as human beings by nature use inquiry in almost everything they do regarding the inquiry learning approach (Simon, 1995). This could be the reason why teachers are reluctant to accept new curricular when they are introduced.

A lot of countries in the world are reforming their curricula. However, the majority of non-western countries adopted their curricular from western countries (Dagher and BouJaoude, 2011; Alshammari, 2013). Dagher and BouJaoude (2011) maintained that the development of the curriculum in many of the Arab states has been

influenced by similar reforms taking place in western countries. The statement was supported by Bashshur (2009) who posited that the development of education systems, educational curricular, and encouraging students to study and change the content for a secular population are just a photocopy of the western system. The current reform of the curriculum in Ghana is an example of the western influence on curricular development in a different part of the world as anecdotal evidence suggests that it contains foreign examples.

In September 2019, the government of Ghana implemented a new curriculum into the educational system. The new curriculum was aimed at addressing the loopholes in the old curriculum which included content-overload, limitations of the objective-based curriculum, and the failure of the assessment system to provide enough data on which teaching and learning could be styled. Considering this, the new curriculum was purposely made to improve the acquisition of reading, writing, arithmetic and creativity skills across the entire

primary curriculum while strengthening the teaching of Mathematics. In furtherance, the curriculum was intended to bring back topics such as the History of Ghana, Physical Education and Sports as a pivotal part of balancing education and development of important basic and lifelong skills. Additionally, the new curriculum intends to improve the teaching and learning of French, focusing learning - centred pedagogy and improving the use of ICT as a teaching tool while emphasising pedagogy with a focus on equity and inclusion (GhanaWeb, 2019).

The new curriculum in Ghana has seen a complete overhaul. There has been a massive change in the content while some subjects have paved way for others. Additionally, approaches to teaching have been revised to a more learner-centred approach with ICT as a tool for pedagogy. Whereas many teachers asserted that the new curriculum would produce a creative, mathematically and scientifically Ghanaian child who will be a critical thinker to solve a myriad of problems confronting the country, others have identified a lot of bottlenecks that need immediate redress. Although infrastructure remains the major threat to the successful implementation of the curriculum, other challenges cannot be overlooked. For example, the decision to use ICT as a pedagogical tool for the new curriculum seems not to match the Ghanaian school infrastructure. Some teachers do not have access to a communication network while others do not have access to electricity. Larger class sizes pose a great challenge to a learner-centred approach as most of the schools in Ghana have larger class sizes (Amofah, 2019). Hockings (2005) argued that large class sizes inhibit student participation, the activities involved in the learning and the ability of the teacher to meet the needs of the learners. Considering this, some key problems have evolved which include; the failure to consider the Ghanaian students' society and culture and the non-involvement of teachers who could have pointed out issues such as poor internet connectivity and lack of electricity in the areas. This also supports the need to do pilot testing before implementing the curriculum. Pilot testing should have helped to at least discover errors and challenges that should have been addressed before the curriculum was introduced (Salamah, 2008). MacDonald and Healy (1999) recommended the need to seek teacher's views when conducting a curriculum reform. The above argument could be an indication that some of the teachers are not satisfied with the curriculum which can affect their motivational levels.

Motivation - hygiene theory propounded by Frederick Herzberg (1964) explains this further to support the present study and to explain why introducing a new curriculum without teachers' involvement can de-motivate them and lead to job dissatisfaction. The theory posits that many factors in the workplace can result in job satisfaction and dissatisfaction. According to Herzberg, job satisfaction and job dissatisfaction are dichotomies

and do not depend on each other. The theory in the present study implies that teachers who are happy with the new curriculum will perform well while teachers who are not happy with the development of the new curriculum will not perform well at work. The dissatisfaction in this instance could be attributed to poorly assessed job-related factors. Herzberg referred to those who are satisfied as motivators and those dissatisfied as hygiene factors. The use of hygiene factors denotes maintenance factors that are relevant to avoid dissatisfaction but in reality, cannot provide satisfaction. Motivational factors are important to intrinsically encourage the individual in the work they do as they enable them to perform better. In contrast, hygiene factors do not add any motivational value when present but demotivate if absent. These factors are, therefore, external to the work itself.

The theory has been applied by researchers such as Boord (2010) who hypothesised a strong relationship between job satisfaction in teaching improvement and professional development. Similarly, Ramdan and Naicker (2011) confirmed that there should be a cordial relationship between the employers-department of education and the employees-teachers. The department of education is expected to implement motivation strategies that can improve the performance of the teachers. This portrays the attitude of teachers at work and they can be influenced to work better. This theory is relevant as teachers who identify deficiencies with the current curriculum can be dissatisfied with the job and subsequently work below average or leave the job.

In Ghana, literature on curriculum reforms is limited. Considering this, the importance of involving teachers in the development of the curriculum has not been given the needed attention. Therefore, the current study is providing teachers with the platform to express their candid views on the introduction of curricular in the country. This is one of the few studies that is purposely informing policymakers of the plight of teachers when new curricular are introduced. This study sought to examine the teachers' perception of the new educational curriculum in Ghana.

The research questions for the study were:

1. What are the perceptions of Ghanaian teachers on the new curriculum?
2. What are the challenges facing teachers in the teaching of the new curriculum?
3. How do teachers expect future curricular to be made to meet their expectations?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The current study employed mixed methods as the main approach to gathering the data. This allowed the researcher to gather data from multiple sources. Patton

(1987) postulated that in educational settings it is important for the researcher to have a lot of information from varied sources to give the findings a strong base.

Data collection

The Exploratory Sequential Design of mixed methods was used for the study. This involves an initial collection of qualitative data through interviews, analysis of the results and use of the findings to develop a questionnaire for a quantitative phase. The purpose of this approach was to design appropriate measurement with a given sample of the population and to examine if data from the few individuals used in the qualitative phase can be generalised to a large sample using quantitative methods (Creswell, 2014). Data collection was therefore in two phases – interview and questionnaire. Using mixed methods is an effective approach to offset the weaknesses inherent in a single design (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003).

Sample and sampling procedure

The population for the study were teachers in the public schools in Ghana. There are over 200,000 teachers in the country who teach at the basic, secondary and tertiary levels. The teachers have various WhatsApp pages use to disseminate information from time to time. The colleges of education have a platform called Colleges of Education Teachers Association of Ghana (CETAG) made up of 133 members while there is a platform for Ghana National Association of Teachers (GNAT) made up of about 250 participants involving teachers teaching at the various levels. Therefore, the targeted population was 383 but 74 people responded to the questionnaire representing 19.32% of the sample. Face to face administration is higher in response rate compared to online despite several ways to lift them (Nulty, 2008). Considering this, the sample size was considered acceptable for further analysis. Random sampling was employed to select the teachers. They were the participants used for the interview and the questionnaires. The interview included 6 teachers 3 males and 3 females with two from each level in the Ghana Education structure – basic, secondary and tertiary (college of education). They were purposively selected from different levels in the educational sector in order to have different perceptions of teachers on the curriculum across the levels.

Interview

Semi-structured interviews were conducted among Ghanaian teachers to find out their perceptions of the new curriculum. The semi-structured interview is used to

investigate defined topics for the best results while ensuring that participants are provided with the opportunities to freely express themselves and to ensure they address the topic in detail (Kvale, 1996). Before the main interview, an initial interview was conducted with a 41-year old teacher as a pilot. The questions were centred on pre-determined questions that were standardised. This was done to ensure that the researcher gets the same information from the respondents. The standardised questions assisted the researcher to base the interview on individual needs (Patton, 1996). The duration for the pilot interview was 15 minutes which revealed the importance of adjusting some of the questions to suit the participants' needs and to elicit their best responses. The interviews lasted for 25-30 minutes and were recorded. After transcription, the transcripts were sent back to the interviewees to confirm whether they represented what they wanted to mean during the interview in a form of validation.

Questionnaire

Questionnaires were designed with google forms and the link to the questionnaire was posted on WhatsApp pages and websites of teacher unions to express their views on the new curriculum. The questionnaire provided opportunities for the teachers to express their perceptions, challenges and difficulties and expectations for future curricular. General information such as age, gender, number of years in teaching and the highest level of education were also inquired from the participants. Closed-ended questions were used for the questionnaire. A 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 strongly disagree, 2 disagree, 3 neutral, 4 agree and 5 strongly agree was used.

RESULTS

Results from the interview

Two teachers each (male and female) at the basic schools, senior high schools and colleges of education were selected for the study. The interviews were analysed using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Responses from the interviews were first transcribed verbatim and were put into four groups. The first section was about the demographic information of the participants which was meant to find answers to questions like, the number of years respondents have been teaching, highest qualification, sex and age category. The next theme was to find out teachers' general perception of the new curriculum. This section was put into eight categories, the proceeded theme was to examine the challenges and difficulties in the curriculum while the last theme was to make recommendations for future curricular. Each of them consisted of four categories as detailed in Table 1.

Table 1. Provide legend.

Theme	Category	Responses
1. General perception of the curriculum	Contributes to the society	Develops creative students 2x Students can discover new ideas 3x Students will be innovative 2x Curriculum is more learner centred 2x
	Assists students to get lifelong goals	Helps students to learn new skills through P.E 3x Can develop new career through P.E and Creative Arts 5x
	Prepares students for the job market	The curriculum is practical 2x Encourages creativity and critical thinking 3x Includes project-based learning and performance-based assessment 4x
	Promotes inclusive education	Attends to the needs of all learners irrespective of disability 5x No tribal or ethnic discrimination 2x Discourages religious fanaticism 3x
	Promotes gender equality	Encourages girls to lead discussions 2x Gives equal treatment to both sexes in class 5x Encourages girls to contribute more in class 4x
	Considers the culture of the Ghanaian students' society	Contains sex education 3x Illustrations were more westernised 4x Teachers methods were foreign
	Promotes group work	Activities contain more discussions 6x Encourages group discussions 3x
	Difficult content for teaching	Easy to follow scheme of work 3x Key indicators are helpful 2x
2. Challenges and Difficulties	Lacks teaching and learning materials	No textbooks with the curriculum 6x No videos and wall charts 4x
	Contains a lot of workloads	Searching for most of the information on the internet 3x Creative Arts demand the teacher to search for other materials as only foreign information are in it 2x
	Encourages large class size	Promotes inclusive education 2x Caters for the needs of all learners 4x
	The length of class period	Extension of the closing time 5x
3. Future curricular	Pilot the new curricular	Can reveal problems and challenges 5x Call for changes 2x
	Train teachers in advance	Teachers will be well informed 3x Teachers will be well prepared for changes 4x
	Involve many teachers in designing and implementation	Point the challenges 3x Bring their needs 2x Attend to their needs properly 5x

Table 1. Provide legend.

Print books and other learning materials in advance	Easy access to reference materials 5x Less hassle in lesson notes preparation 6x Little time spent on notes preparation and lesson delivery 4x
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Results from the questionnaire

The intent of the study was to examine teacher's perception of the new curriculum in Ghana schools. In all 74 responses were received from the online survey. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was 0.731 above the accepted value of 0.600. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant at ($X^2(190) = 739.424$, $p < 0.001$). The respondents were mostly males (85.1%), between 18 to 28 years (45.9%), taught for 0 to 5 years (45.9%) and with degree as highest level of qualification (59.5%). The result from Cronbach Alpha reported an overall reliability of 0.78 for all the scores. The Cronbach Alpha for the three factors were within the range of 0.89 to 0.69. Cronbach Alpha within the range of 0.65-0.80 have been considered adequate for scale used in human research (Spector, 1992; Vaske, 2008). Considering this, the scales were reliable for further analysis (Table 2).

To find out teachers' perception about the new curriculum the percentages of all the eight items were examined in Table 3.

From Table 3, teachers were of the view that the new curriculum encourages group work, assists students to get lifelong skills, prepares students for the job market, promotes inclusive education, promotes gender equality, and considers Ghanaian students' culture and society. However, teachers refuted the claim that the new curriculum includes difficult content for teaching.

Difficulties and challenges facing teachers in the implementation of the new curriculum are displayed in Table 4.

Teachers accepted the fact that the new curriculum lacks teaching and learning materials and contains a lot of workload. In contrast, they did not agree to the fact that the new curriculum encourages large class size and has short class periods.

Suggestions for the implementation of future curricular are outlined in Table 5.

On suggestions for future curricular, teachers agreed to all the four items that future curricular should involve teachers in the planning, training teachers in advance, getting books and learning materials ready as well as piloting a new curriculum as depicted in Table 5.

DISCUSSION

Results from the current study show the perception of Ghanaian teachers on the new educational curriculum,

challenges and difficulties in using the new curriculum and the suggestions for future curricular. Most of the teachers opined that the new curriculum encouraged group work, assisted students to get lifelong skills among others. However, they rejected that the curriculum includes difficult content for teaching. This implies that the general perception of Ghanaian teachers about the new curriculum is good.

The results about the challenges and the difficulties revealed that the new curriculum lacks teaching and learning materials, contains a lot of workload and does not promote short class periods. This is because teaching and learning materials were not provided at the time the curriculum was introduced. Teachers at times have to rely on the internet to search for materials to assist them during lesson delivery. The bottlenecks could have been identified if the curriculum was pilot tested before introduction (Salamah, 2008).

Moreover, when teachers were given the opportunity to suggest for future curricular, they postulated that involving teachers in curriculum planning, getting books and learning materials ready, training teachers in advance and piloting the new curriculum can assist them. The involvement of teachers in designing curriculum is very significant especially when they are the people expected to deliver the contents in the curriculum to the learners. If the teacher is not conversant with the curriculum it could lead to a lot of challenges such as difficulties to achieve the curriculum objectives (Meryem and Sabri, 2009; MacDonald and Healy, 1999). Similarly, it could lead to de-motivation and subsequent job dissatisfaction as explained by the Motivation-Hygiene Theory propounded by Herzberg (1964). Job satisfaction attained through motivation has been hypothesised to have a strong relationship in teaching improvement and professional development (Boord, 2010).

Results from the study also revealed something that was not the intent of the study. Despite the questionnaire being posted on several teachers union websites, only few participants, mostly within the age range of 18 to 28 years, were able to access the questionnaires online. This implies that using ICT as the main pedagogical tool is likely to elicit some challenges on most of the teachers. The government should organise ICT classes for some of the teachers who have been in the system for long as well as assist them to get basic IT tools that can enable them to get the required information for their notes. The findings from this study will be an important information for the Ministry of Education in Ghana and all educational

Table 2. Factors, items, descriptive statistics (mean – M and standard deviation – SD), and Cronbach's alpha.

Factors	Items	M	SD	A
Teachers perception	Encourages students to contribute to the society	3.53	1.11	0.89
	Assists students to get lifelong skills	3.66	1.13	
	Prepares students for the job market	3.47	1.18	
	Promotes inclusive education	3.69	1.24	
	Promotes gender equality	3.76	1.14	
	Considers Ghanaian students' culture and society	3.54	1.29	
	Encourages group work	4.03	1.02	
	Includes difficult content for teaching	3.23	1.17	
Challenges and difficulties	Contains a lot of workloads	3.76	1.04	0.69
	Lacks teaching and learning materials	4.03	1.32	
	Encourages large class size	3.3	1.24	
	Short class periods	3.26	1.16	
Future curriculum	Pilot a new curriculum	3.84	1.17	0.86
	Get books and learning materials ready	4.45	1.06	
	Involves teachers in the planning	4.46	0.91	
	Train teachers in advance	4.49	0.96	

Table 3. Ghanaian teachers' perception of the new curriculum.

Items	Percentages
Encourages students to contribute to the society	56.7
Assists students to get lifelong skills	68.9
Prepares students for the job market	55.4
Promotes inclusive education	67.5
Promotes gender equality	67.9
Considers Ghanaian students' culture and society	60.8
Encourages group work	75.6
Includes difficult content for teaching	47.3

Table 4. Difficulties and challenges of the new curriculum.

Item	Percentages
Contains a lot of workloads	63.5
Lacks teaching and learning materials	75.7
Encourages large class size	45.9
Short class periods	44.6

Table 5. Future curriculum.

Item	Percentages
Pilot a new curriculum	63.5
Get books and learning materials ready	87.9
Involve teachers in the planning	90.5
Train teachers in advance	89.2

leaders worldwide to improve future curricular development.

Future studies should try to reach more teachers by using both face to face administration and online and by providing rewards to the participants as a form of motivation.

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