

Examining the role of instructional materials in the implementation of History 2166 syllabus in Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

Teachers' capacities to effectively deliver in the classroom can be strengthened if they have more access to instructional resources which facilitate the grasping of concepts by learners. The scarcity of instructional materials worsened by insufficient financial resources to fund the initiatives spelt the doom of earlier curriculum reforms. This paper used a phenomenological design to qualitatively explore the perceptions of History teachers on the role of instructional resources in the implementation of the History 2166 syllabus reform in Zimbabwe. The paper looks at the availability, use and impact of instructional resources on the instructional process during the implementation of the new syllabus. Five History teachers drawn from five secondary schools in the Glen View/ Mufakose district in the Harare Metropolitan province were purposively sampled. The participants were interviewed using semi-structured interviews which were audio taped, transcribed, coded and categorised into the major themes on the role of instructional materials in the implementation of the History 2166 syllabus reforms. Findings from this study show that the scarcity of instructional resources played a part in making the teaching of the History 2166 syllabus almost an insurmountable feat. However, teachers had the obligation to be resourceful and innovative in order to ensure that learners were exposed to the best possible instructional practices. The apparent lack of the necessary instructional materials significantly contributed to the challenges encountered by the History 2166 syllabus which culminated in its withdrawal from the History classroom in 2000. This study concludes that instructional resources are a key factor in curriculum reform since the extent of their availability determines the success or failure of the implementation of a new syllabus.

Key words: History 2166 syllabus; implementation; instructional materials; syllabus reform

INTRODUCTION

Throughout syllabus reforms, instructional materials are considered as crucial tools for supporting instructional change (Seashore, 2015). Instructional materials refer to devices designed to support the learning process by assisting teachers in transmitting, organized knowledge skills and attitudes to the learners within an instructional situation (Chacha, 2018). Instructional materials also refer to resources obtained online, supplemental textbooks and

activity books, and materials provided by colleagues or from other sources. Chacha (2018) notes that the scarcity of instructional materials worsened by the lack of sufficient financial resources spelt the doom of earlier curriculum reforms. The extent of availability of instructional materials for the implementation of the History 2166 syllabus reform in secondary schools affected the quality of education. During their implementation of curriculum guidelines teachers must evaluate the possibilities and constraints of their instructional materials to

select those tasks that are most appropriate for their learners (Edenfield, 2010). One major challenge to implementing the History 2166 syllabus was the lack of textbooks aligned with the new standards. As a result of the absence of texts aligned to the History 2166 syllabus and the inability to teach in more student-centered ways, some teachers were left feeling unsure of their own abilities to teach this new curriculum using new teaching strategies (Edenfield, 2010). Instructional materials play a very important role in the teaching and learning process since their appropriate use enhances the memory level of the students. At a time when education is getting widespread, oral teaching cannot be the key to successful pedagogy so the teacher has to use instructional materials to facilitate conceptualization and make the teaching and learning process interesting (Effiong, Ekpo, Igiri, 2015).

The influence of instructional materials in promoting learners' academic performance and teaching and learning in educational development is indisputable (Dhakal, 2017). The materials teachers choose to use and how they use those materials to implement the curriculum influence their learners' learning opportunities (Edenfield, 2010). The use of instructional materials gives the learners opportunities to touch, smell or taste objects in the teaching and learning process. Knowledge and skill can be passed into learners with different types of relevant instructional materials. The use of instructional materials becomes very crucial in improving the overall quality of the learning experiences of learners especially during the implementation of new learning material (Dhakal, 2017). A common goal a teacher carries wherever he is, is to make lesson presentation vitally fresh, stimulating and testing for learners. This will help the teacher to individualize the learning method

as well as the content and also working according to the learners' need. This goal can be reached most effectively through the use of instructional materials. The need to emphasis on the use and importance of instructional materials in any learning and teaching environment cannot be underestimated. For any learning to take place, the teacher has to make use of these materials that would enable him to teach effectively (Effiong, Ekpo, Igiri, 2015).

RELATED LITERATURE

Background of the History 2166 syllabus

The introduction of the History 2166 syllabus is regarded as the first curriculum reform at secondary school in independent Zimbabwe (Barnes, 2007). The main aims of this curriculum were to train learners to analyse history, interpret and evaluate it, detect bias in documents as well as books, understand points of view, weigh evidence and discover value judgements (Moyo, 2014). The teachers used the primary sources to develop skills required for the new Ordinary level history syllabus (Ndebele & Tshuma, 2014). The History 2166 syllabus was meant to transform the learning of history and it gradually removed the archaic approach of content regurgitation paving the way for the critical and in-depth scrutiny of historical information (Moyo, 2014). In spite of all its good intentions, the History 2166 syllabus proved to be very unpopular within the schools and it was removed from the History classroom in 2000 (Chitate, 2010).

The role of instructional materials in the classroom

Instructional materials and learning resources are associated with objects, persons or other aspects of the environment which can be used to impact, or help in instruction so as to make the learning objectives clearer and teaching easier (Dhakal, 2017).

According to Okobia (2011) the importance of using instructional materials in the classroom include making the subject matter more real, explicating difficult concepts, making the learner experience what is being learnt, helping to fire the imagination of the learners, preventing misconceptions as well as making learning interesting. Instructional materials greatly influence education quality and standards and they affect the teaching and learning process. This implies that the use of instructional materials is inevitable if effective teaching and learning must be achieved. It is said that one picture is equal to one thousand words. This agrees with the Chinese proverb which states that ‘the thing which I hear, I may forget, the thing which I see, I may remember, the thing which I do, I cannot forget’ (Dhakal, 2017). When instructional materials are properly used, they help to consolidate learning in the learner’s mind.

The relationship between the curricular materials provided to a teacher and the tasks used in the classroom depends on the teacher’s past experiences; contextual factors; the teacher’s interpretation of the texts; the teachers’ knowledge and beliefs about mathematics, pedagogy, and students; and how well the provided materials meet the teacher’s needs and beliefs (Lloyd, 2008). Regardless of the materials provided by the school, the teacher is the ultimate decision-maker and curriculum developer in the classroom (Edenfield, 2010). Teachers do not merely implement the curriculum but they also develop, define and reinterpret it. The kind of learning that young people are subjected to largely depends on what teachers think, believe and do in the classroom (Edenfield, 2010). The introduction of reform ideas or instructional materials, even if one agrees with them, may not be able to overcome the images one has of teaching (Edenfield, 2010). During the process of trying to implement reforms, teachers often

assimilate new ideas such as the use of new materials, class organization, and activities into their more familiar, traditional instruction (Lloyd, 2008), possibly as a way to maintain self-efficacy. This assimilation can lead to positive changes in teachers’ identities since teachers willing to interact with innovative materials have an improved self-efficacy (Remillard, 2005).

Success in enacting reforms depends on teachers, who are at the front line of reform efforts. Their ability to create classroom interactions that foster learning is critical. Reform asks teachers to build on student understanding. This differs from telling or showing students what to do without consideration of their ideas and perceptions. It also differs from unguided “discovery” of concepts. Instead, reform recognizes that students come to class with their own conceptions and make their own meanings of classroom activities. The teacher’s job is to guide and monitor their progress, designing instruction in response to student understanding (Seashore, 2015). However, questions remain about how to support teachers in implementing these curricula effectively. Studies of curricular implementation often focus on “fidelity” – curricular implementation in ways consistent with the designers’ intentions (Collopy 2003). Remillard (2005) notes the distinction between intended and enacted instructional materials by pointing out that although some researchers focus on fidelity in implementation, others do not assume that fidelity between text and teaching is possible. Much of the research on teacher learning from instructional materials involve teachers’ use of an instructional program for a sustained period of time, accompanied by professional development designed to support teachers in using the program.

Conceptual framework: the concept of curriculum implementation

Curriculum implementation refers to the unpacking of the officially approved syllabi, courses of study and subjects into practice (Chaudhary & Damani, 2015). The curriculum implementation stage is the most interactive part of the curriculum process and it takes place in the classroom through the mutually complimentary efforts of the teachers, learners, school administrators and parents (Ogar & Opoh, 2015). The application of physical facilities and the implementation of suitable instructional approaches is also incorporated. The bedrock of any society's political, economic, scientific and technological welfare arguably depends on the quality of its curriculum implementation (Ogar & Opoh, 2015). There are two critical players in the implementation process, inter alia, developers and users who should see the process together in the same way from the planning process to the implementation stage (Mupa, 2020).

For curriculum reform to be implemented successfully, there is a need for careful planning, as well as a focus on people, programmes and processes. In the context of the Zimbabwean curriculum, there is a glaring lack of implementation guide as evidenced by the lukewarm approach where the education authorities seem to abdicate responsibility to school leadership to run their own schools without getting relevant instructional materials from the government (Mupa, 2020). The implementation of a new curriculum should be tailor-made to suit the context it is given in a particular school. Some schools are in deprived contexts and find it very difficult to procure relevant and adequate resource materials like the relevant texts, computers, laboratories, among others. In some cases, school leadership will sit back waiting for the government to bring in such resources because some communities cannot manage to buy such gargets and also to construct the required laboratories (Mupa, 2020). The issue of having school leadership

with the capacity to implement the curriculum is critical through the provision of adequate resources. Therefore, many learners may end up grasping very little or nothing at all from the concepts that are taught due to the lack of appropriate instructional resources. The implementation capacity of a new curriculum therefore largely depends on the availability of and access to human, financial, material, technological and logistical resources (Nafungo, 2015).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper is part of a larger study that qualitatively explored the perspectives of History teachers on the History 2166 and 2167 syllabus reforms in Zimbabwe. This particular study used a phenomenological design to examine the role of instructional resources in the implementation of the History 2166 syllabus in Zimbabwe. Creswell & Poch (2018, p. 48) ascertain that “we conduct qualitative research when we want to empower individuals to share their stories [and] hear their voices”. Myers (2019) further adds that data collected under qualitative research can be useful in understanding people's behavior and actions, and the broader context within which they live and work. In order to collect the necessary data, a total of five History teachers drawn from five secondary schools in the Glen View/ Mufakose district in the Harare Metropolitan province were purposively sampled. The participants were interviewed using semi-structured interviews which were audio tapped. The audio recorded interviews were transcribed, coded and categorised into meaningful major themes around teacher participation in the development and implementation of the History 2166 syllabus reform. Follow-up telephonic interviews were used to seek clarification on issues that were not clear. The data collected was further analysed using content analysis. Content analysis is a research method which allows

the qualitative data collected in research to be analysed systematically and reliably so that generalisations can be made in relation to the categories of interest to the researcher (Hamad, et al., 2016). In order to deal with the credibility and trustworthiness of the study, we used a pilot study and refined the interview protocol for relevancy. All the selected participants signed the informed consent to illustrate their willingness to participate voluntarily in the study.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY AND DISCUSSION

This section is presented through the stories of teachers who took part in the teaching of the History 2166 syllabus. Pseudonyms were used for the teachers in the study.

Brief backgrounds of participants

Masara has 32 years of experience in teaching History. Her highest professional qualification is a Master of Education degree. In all her professional qualifications, she majored in the teaching of History. She taught the History 2166 syllabus right from its introduction until it was replaced.

Mapfumo has been teaching History for the past 26 years. His highest qualification is a Master's degree, specialising in teaching History. He taught the History 2166 syllabus for a very long period.

Murakani has been teaching History for the past 26 years. Her highest qualification is a Bachelor's degree in education with a specialisation in History. She also taught the History 2166 syllabus for a very long time.

Chituku has 26 years' experience as a History teacher. His highest qualification is a Master in Education degree specialising in the teaching of History. He taught the History 2166 syllabus for a considerable period of time.

Chitondo has been teaching History for the past 25 years. He holds a Diploma in Education. He taught the History 2166 syllabus from 1996 until it was replaced in 2000.

Availability, use and impact of instructional materials during the implementation of the History 2166 syllabus reform.

Instructional materials as the name suggests, are materials of visual, audio and audio - visual category that helps to make abstract concepts and ideas concrete during the teaching and learning process. They can be in print or electronic form. According to Collopy (2003), teachers' capacities to effectively deliver in the classroom can only be strengthened if they have more access to instructional resources.

We looked at the availability, use and impact of instructional materials during the implementation of the History 2166 syllabus reform. When asked about his experiences in the teaching of History 2166, Mapfumo indicated that when he began teaching the History 2166 syllabus in 1994, he was confronted by the acute shortage of text books to use in order to properly illustrate the concepts to learners.

The schools at which I taught were poorly equipped in terms of History text books. The few text books which were there were either torn and tattered or irrelevant.

The ideal text books for the History 2166 syllabus were mostly available outside the country due to their foreign publishers. Mapfumo explained that such text books were authored by renowned scholars like Peter Morse, Hebert Peacock, Dennis Richards, David Thomson and were difficult

to access locally. The situation was pitiful at most schools since the funds to purchase the required text books were usually not available. Mapfumo had to go out of his way to improvise so that he could get the requisite texts usually through borrowing from teachers from neighbouring schools.

I remember when I taught at a school where History text books were as scarce as white elephants. I befriended the History teachers from the neighbouring boarding schools so that I could borrow their texts and other instructional materials which I then photocopied for use during my lessons. This material greatly helped since my learners could at least get familiar with sources in order to practice answering source-based questions.

This is evidence of Mapfumo's resourcefulness as a History teacher which in the end helped him to illustrate the History 2166 syllabus concepts to his learners. Nevertheless, this did not overshadow the challenges that he encountered in looking for instructional resources.

This was corroborated by Chitondo who alluded to the fact that there was a serious shortage of instructional materials such as text books.

The scarcity of resources worsened the plight of History learners since the higher order skills demanded in the History 2166 syllabus became inaccessible for most learners at secondary school.

This was Chitondo's first time to teach since he was coming from college with all the pedagogical theories that he had been equipped with by his lecturers. He was surprised to discover that his expectations were very different from the situation prevailing on the ground.

The school Head even said to me, "my friend you have to make do with what is available" but surprisingly, that which was available was close to nothing since there was not even a text book for me as the teacher to use. I then had to rely on my college lecture notes. I ended up buying some key texts to use in my lessons. Imagine a situation where 16 pupils could share one text book. At one time I almost cried.

The evidence shows that the unavailability of instructional resources at some schools was really acute and History teachers faced challenges in imparting concepts to learners. Chitondo revealed that at first he was even afraid that he would be in

The role of instructional materials in the implementation of History

trouble if the History Education Officer (EO) would come and find him teaching without resources. He, however ended up getting used to the situation with the passage of time and somehow resigned to his fate and resolved to work with what was there. Nonetheless, he maintained his work ethics by striving to assist the learners to the best of his ability with the limited resources. He even gave up his own personal copies to the school since the pupils were so hungry for knowledge.

The situation was really pathetic and I was really a sorrowful man, but at the end of the day I said these pupils are innocent and just hungry for knowledge so let me help them because there was no need for me to expect someone to drop me a lifeline by offering me History texts. The pupils had so much hope that education would be their only gateway to success. I therefore felt naturally obliged to go an extra mile in order to support them to realise their dreams.

Nonetheless, Chitondo was disappointed that despite all the efforts that he invested in preparing for lessons, at the end of the day the learners still struggled to grasp concepts due to the critical shortage of resources.

Chituku further pointed out that when he taught the History 2166 syllabus, it was

not easy to fit the syllabus into the classroom activities because of lack of resources so he ended up dominating most lessons in order to cover up for the deficiency in instructional materials. He also said that he resorted to giving the learners piles of notes which were all supposed to be stored in their heads. Even when there was an improvement in the availability of materials, sometimes there was recourse to the old school of the teacher-centred approaches since teachers wanted to finish the syllabus which was too long.

Our major worry was the timetable versus the content coverage. The syllabus was too wide and you could not complete it yet all the sections were very key in the learner understanding historical concepts. Although the access to resources improved, the time factor was a problem.

This shows how Chituku struggled to balance the time in order to complete the lengthy syllabus. Still, this could be solved by careful planning and timetabling. Chituku further faced challenges with regards to instructional resources necessary in the teaching and learning of the History 2166 syllabus since there were no computers which could be used to 'google up' for information to supplement the learners' needs. The schools where he taught were ill-equipped in terms of text books.

At some schools you found that there were no text books at all.

He was, however, fortunate that he worked with very supportive experienced teachers. Still, he acknowledged that junior teachers faced challenges of instructional resources especially in schools where the senior teachers were uncooperative.

Some experienced teachers avoided working with junior teachers because they wanted to be the 'centres of information' and denied other teachers access to the meagre instructional materials. Junior teachers also faced challenges with the History 2166 syllabus since they could not pronounce some foreign names common in History topics, failed to interpret the syllabus and also struggled to get the relevant texts.

In some schools, the teacher was the fountain of knowledge and learners exclusively relied on the teacher for their learning content. The chalk-talk and the dictation of notes were the dominant methods of teaching due to lack of resources. As the Head of Department (HOD) for History at his school, Chituku went out of his way to look for resources in order to facilitate the teaching of the subject. He said that he looked for texts and cartoons instrumental in the History 2166 syllabus in order to help his pupils practise the interpretation of cartoons and also networked with other History teachers from nearby schools to get past examination papers, cartoons and text books.

I would go an extra mile to source for instructional materials and network with other teachers who taught the subject at other schools.

According to Masara, the History 2166 syllabus was relevant to the learners' classroom activities but the teachers had challenges of resources.

It was a very good syllabus that was prematurely introduced since teachers were ill-equipped in terms of resources and staff development. We needed appropriate media in order to adequately prepare the learners for external examinations.

The lack of instructional materials was worsened by the fact that most secondary schools could not afford the field trips needed to complement lessons.

We struggled to have field trips since our school was still growing and we did not have resources to spare and parents were equally not supportive. We also did not have the requisite text books which pupils would use when they were away from the teacher. Even the old

The role of instructional materials in the implementation of History

text books that we had were not so essential since they did not have good practice questions and sources for the pupils. The questions in the books were not so challenging so they could not match those in the examinations.

Masara further pointed out that one textbook by Muronda tried to bring up the pertinent issues but fell way short of expectations although there was an attempt to address the History 2166 syllabus requirements. Even in the common People Making History series, the practice questions were not up to the level required by the History 2166 syllabus.

Murakani also shared her experiences regarding the instructional materials needed to facilitate the teaching and learning of the History 2166 syllabus. Pupils really needed help in order for them to be objective when dealing with the highly abstract concepts in the History 2166 syllabus so the availability and adequacy of essential instructional materials was key in the successful implementation of the History 2166 syllabus. Asked to comment on the issue, Murakani pointed out that the History teachers could not find adequate instructional materials in order to facilitate the illustration of concepts to their learners. Asked on the level of preparedness for the new syllabus with regards to instructional materials, she revealed that:

When I was first assigned to teach the History 2166 syllabus, the essential text books were like white

elephants! We hardly ever accessed them. So I ended up teaching without the recommended texts. The old textbooks that I used did not have information on the skills required by the new syllabus. They only helped me to 'load' the pupils with content since they had been written for the old content-based approach to teaching History as required by the old syllabi such as 2158 and 2160.

The recommended texts, if available, would have been a useful resource since they contained cartoons, pictures and sources from which the examiners picked their examination questions. However, teachers had the obligation to be resourceful and innovative in the quest to ensure that the learners were exposed to the best possible instructional practices. From Murakani's submissions, the apparent lack of the necessary instructional materials significantly contributed to the challenges encountered by the History 2166 syllabus which culminated in its withdrawal from the History classroom in 2000.

Mapfumo had his best experiences teaching the History 2166 syllabus at a certain secondary school due to the abundance of instructional materials as well as the quality of students at the school.

The school was well equipped in terms of History texts and other instructional

gadgets so both I and the learners extensively used them. I was given the freedom to exercise my expertise at this school. The calibre of the students that I was teaching was just excellent. They were so good that they made me read well in preparation for lessons because they were so sharp that they could ask you questions that you could struggle to answer so I would adequately prepare before going for lessons and would go there with a positive mind that I was going for a History lesson.

In line with the current trends towards the popularisation in the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in the teaching and learning of History, Mapfumo observed that the use of ICT in the teaching and learning of History is now more pronounced in most secondary schools. When I asked him to elaborate, he added that,

There is proliferation of the use of gadgets such as MP4s, smart boards, projectors computers in most secondary schools in the district. This has helped to modernise teaching and learning in History thereby facilitating

the grasping of concepts.

Mapfumo acknowledged the assistance that he got from other teachers in the same subject who were very helpful in his professional development. He got resources from the more experienced teachers as well as teaching methods and this helped a lot in building his confidence.

I learnt quite a lot from other teachers since we were sharing resources and also practised team teaching. I remember someone teaching on the concept of the scramble for Africa when he brought eight sweets into the classroom then he put them on the table then went on to call five pupils to scramble for the sweets. A fight almost broke out as the pupils jostled for the sweets in a typical winner-take-all, law of the jungle style. I was very impressed by the way he illustrated the concept of the scramble for colonies in Africa.

The scarcity of instructional resources played a part in making the teaching of the History 2166 syllabus almost an insurmountable feat. The situation was however mitigated by some resourceful teachers who went the extra distance to look for instructional resources for use in their

The role of instructional materials in the implementation of History

lessons thereby facilitating the grasping of concepts by the learners. In some cases resourceful teachers did not wait to get the ideal text books but used available resources as media. The nature of the History 2166 syllabus meant that a teacher had to be very resourceful in order to adequately illustrate concepts to the learners. Resourcefulness for History teachers meant gathering as many relevant texts and other learning materials as possible.

Masara indicated that she exposed her pupils to cartoons from those newspapers which posted political cartoons so that she would develop their skills of analysis and imagination.

For me and my learners that was a very good starting point so as to develop imagination and interpretation of facts. They looked at cartoons from different angles and that was what the syllabus wanted since there was no definite answer. In the end they also became very imaginative.

From there on Masara began to appreciate the History 2166 syllabus more and began to emphasize more on skills than the content.

At times I would just give learners a topic to go and read then I would give them a picture on the same topic to comprehend over a particular theme. It motivated

me and my learners and inspired us to aim higher. This was evidenced by the improvement in results in the external examinations.

Her History learners began to understand and appreciate the subject. This shows that the History 2166 syllabus needed multivariate approaches and learners were supposed to look at the cartoons from different angles in order to come up with all possible answers. Masara came up with various activities for her pupils and this seemed to be the ideal teaching approach for the syllabus.

Source-based questions were eventful and thought-provoking, field trips and workshops were hard to come by due to financial constraints. In the end teacher clusters worked well since they brought uniformity since teachers worked together and shared experiences. Ultimately, it was progressive.

From the prior discussion on the implementation of the History 2166 syllabus, it has become apparent that the teaching of the syllabus was heavily based on the availability, use and impact of instructional resources.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that instructional resources are a key factor in curriculum reform since the extent of their availability

determines the success of the implementation of a new syllabus. The History 2166 syllabus reform was plagued with mixed fortunes due to the apparent lack of adequate instructional materials for use by the teachers. The teacher as the authority in the classroom needs more than “chalk and talk” instructional methods since learning is also based on relevant instructional materials. The teacher is instrumental in evaluating, selecting, and using instructional materials that offer learners a variety of experiences for learning in a positive and supportive environment.

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The role of instructional materials in the implementation of History

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