



## Teachers' views on support provided to implement CAPS guidelines to their teaching in South African schools

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### Abstract

Teaching is amongst others informed by guidelines outlined in policy documents. In South African schools, teaching is informed by the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS). However, measures to make teachers implement this policy correctly are limited. Hence, this study explored teacher's views on the support they receive to effectively implement the CAPS policy in their classrooms. The paper followed a qualitative approach guided by an interpretivist paradigm. Specifically, an exploratory case study design was used. A convenient sampling strategy was used to select eight teachers from four schools in the Capricorn district. Semi-structured interviews and document analysis were used to collect data. Rogan and Grayson's Theory of Curriculum Implementation was used as a frame to the study, and data collected through semi-structured interviews, and analysed through a thematic approach. The study revealed that the teachers had a dim view of the support provided to effectively implement CAPS in their classrooms. In relation to the above results, guidance should be provided to teachers to support them in the implementation of this policy. Thus, Continuous Professional Development programme are need to pay attention to this gap between policy and practice.

**Keywords:** CAPS guidelines, classroom practice, curriculum implementation, support strategies, South African schools and teachers' views

### Introduction

The CAPS document provides clear and specific guidelines on what to teach and how content should be taught in the classroom. However, research (Molala, 2015) shows that most teachers struggle to implement these guidelines in their classrooms. Despite this challenge, Stronge and Xu (2021) indicate that principals should insist that teachers follow the prescribed content to produce an improved classroom teaching environment. Ayua (2017) further argues that effective planning and understanding of the CAPS guidelines is necessary as it contributes to teaching, which allows teachers to focus on the objectives or goals of teaching. Noticeably, teachers still fail to understand and comply with the requirements (Stephen, 2018). This is a dilemma for teachers.

One area where this challenge is more pronounced in how they should go about their

classroom planning and teaching within the CAPS prescripts. Romiszowski (2016) argues that classroom planning is more significant than any other level of planning since it emanates from curriculum planning that impacts directly on learners in the classroom. This encourages teachers to research the subject matter to be delivered in the classroom, to show their understanding of the content. The strategies should be part of the planning to enable learners to understand the subject matter (Malema, 2023). Additionally, teachers should research the best instructional materials needed to enhance the teaching and learning aims, goals, and objectives of the lesson. This is a huge task for most teachers.

Teachers differ regarding their understanding of how they should apply the CAPS Guidelines in the classroom. What makes this challenge worse is that teachers are not always keen to consult the policy documents for better implementation in their teaching. They normally

rely on their natural craft to improvise. (Zimmerman, Eubank, Goldberg, Lahr, Sneed, & Welch, 2022). Furthermore, teachers do not entirely understand the policy document. However, despite this shortcoming it is important to prepare teachers regarding their beliefs, attitudes, and values for successful teaching. Effective teaching requires the teachers to understand guidelines and account for any learning that happens. Jansen and Ngema (2024) assert that teachers in the process of teaching and learning interpret and implement the curriculum guidelines effectively and build an understanding of the content in learners. Additionally, teachers need to be trained on how to develop their own instructional materials, which are not time-consuming. Scholars like Darling-Hammond, et al. (2017) add that teachers who are not trained lack better strategies to implement curriculum. Therefore, this calls for better support on teachers responsible for teaching. To this end, the following research question guided the paper: what are the teachers' views on the support they get to implement CAPS guidelines when teaching prescribed content in their classrooms?

### Problem statement

The CAPS document has been challenging to most experienced and novice teachers as they struggle to implement its guidelines effectively in daily teaching practices (Oguoma, 2018). Amid such challenges, the CAPS document aims to provide an approach to teachers in their daily teaching practice to adhere to the assessment standards in South African Schools. However, teachers often lack the necessary support from educational specialists and School Management Teams, instructional materials, and regular training to continuously implement the CAPS guidelines in their classrooms (Tapala, 2019). This paper explores the support strategies that can help teachers in South African schools to effectively implement the CAPS guidelines into their teaching. To situate this problem in its proper perspective, a brief literature review is necessary.

### Literature review

To provide a foundation for my research question, and to identify gaps and existing inconsistencies in knowledge that helped me to

make sense of my current study, the literature review focus on three themes: *policy documents*, *curriculum reform*, and *teacher agency*

### Policy documents

Policy documents like CAPS form a foundation for any curriculum reform. They outline vision, goals, and framework for educational changes. Without a clear cut and well-defined policy, imperative curriculum change will be difficult if not impossible. Thus, policy documents are important for any curriculum reform. They are the backbone of any curriculum review and implementation. However, despite their importance, not much is known as to how far they go in facilitating curriculum change and whether they are effective or not. CAPS is not exception to this challenge. Its implementation has faced a myriad of challenges (Nkambule & Amsterdam, 2018). Australia, and Zambia are the typical examples of how the gap between policy formation and implementation remains a huge challenge. However, to mitigate against this challenge, these countries have invested huge amounts of money. Its doubtful if South Africa has done the same this far. To establish the validity of this question, there is a need for empirical evidence, hence this study. Certainly, the best source to establish this support if from the teachers themselves.

So far, this studies highlight the significance of extensive teacher training and ongoing support to facilitate curriculum implementation and integration in the classroom. Phiri, Haambokoma, Kelinda, Nalube, and Muleya (2023) found that teachers struggled to adopt a new competency-based curriculum due to insufficient pre-service and in-service training. Collaborative lesson planning has been identified as a strategy to support curriculum implementation in the classroom. Researchers like Mwanza and Mkandawire (2020) suggest that when teachers collaborate to develop lesson plans, they can better contextualize the curriculum to their learners' needs and share best practices. Strategies applied to support curriculum included intensifying the monitoring, improvisation of teaching and learning resources and infrastructure development (Mbewe, 2022). However, even though support

has been provided in the country, the authors were not specific about monitoring teachers or learners for implementation of curriculum guidelines.

### ***Curriculum reform***

Support for teaching involves the willingness of teachers to make curriculum guidelines visible in the classroom. Scholars like Van der Merwe-Muller and Dasoo (2021) argue that professional development programmes that include workshops, classroom demonstrations, and peer-to-peer learning can help teachers interpret and apply CAPS guidelines in the classroom effectively. Kahts-Kramer and Wood (2023) found that teachers who engaged in collaborative planning felt more confident in their ability to interpret CAPS guidelines and implement in their teaching. This approach can foster a sense of collective ownership and professional learning among teachers, leading to the effective implementation of CAPS guidelines in the classroom. Researchers like Care, Kim, Vista, and Anderson (2018) highlight that teachers need to align practices and instructional teaching materials allocation with the goals of the curriculum.

Ndabankulu (2022) further emphasized the need for strong leadership and administrative support to ensure that CAPS guidelines are consistently implemented into practice. The Support strategies that could facilitate the implementation of CAPS in South African schools could be a need for comprehensive and ongoing professional development programs to equip teachers with the necessary knowledge, skills, and instructional teaching materials to implement CAPS guidelines effectively into practice (Johns, & Sosibo, 2019). These programs should focus not only on the content and structure of CAPS but also on pedagogical approaches, assessment practices, and classroom management strategies aligned with the curriculum. Additionally, scholars like Dlova (2019) add that providing sufficient teaching and learning instruction materials, such as textbooks, lesson plans, and assessments, that are aligned with CAPS guidelines are crucial for successful classroom practice.

### ***Teacher agency***

Teacher agency is at the heart of every successful implementation. Macintyre (2015) emphasises the need for a "curriculum literacy", equipping teachers with a deep understanding of curriculum's rationale, content, and pedagogical approaches. Godinho and Chao (2019) state that the support to curriculum implementation could be through designing professional development programmes. When teachers are receiving training in new methods of teaching, through these programmes, relief teachers can be drawn in who can release permanent staff.

Benjamin (2019) adds that teachers may struggle to effectively translate the CAPS curriculum guidelines without proper instructional materials into their daily teaching practices. Therefore, school-based support, such as mentoring programmes, peer-to-peer learning, and collaborative planning, can help teachers navigate of complexities CAPS guidelines. These strategies foster a teaching and learning environment where teachers can share best practices, address challenges, and learn from each other's experiences.

Moreover, Ntuli and Mahlangu (2023) emphasise the importance of effective leadership and management at the school and district levels to successfully implement CAPS guidelines. Overall, South African teachers in schools are encouraged to implement CAPS guidelines. However, it appears that none of the school management teams or school leadership monitor the proper implementation of the CAPS guidelines in the classroom. This shows a gap between policy and classroom practice that guide teaching. Therefore, South African implementation of CAPS guidelines requires ongoing guidance, monitoring, and support from school leadership, the school management team, and district officials so that teachers can better implement curriculum guidelines in the classroom.

### **Theoretical framework: Rogan and Grayson's curriculum theory**

The present paper is informed by Rogan and Grayson's theory (2003). According to Aldous (2005) and Rogan (2007), the chosen theoretical framework is relevant to the implementation of curriculum guidelines in education and the context

of developing countries. This framework draws from school development, educational change, and the development of teachers. In the teaching practice, this theory emphasises the three pillars: Profile of implementation, capacity to support innovation and support from outside agencies. However, the present paper only focused on one pillar as it addresses teacher support with four sub-pillars to show how to enable teachers to effectively implement the CAPS guidelines in the teaching practice.

### ***Physical resources***

Physical resources are a major factor in the curriculum that supports teachers in implementing the guidelines because teaching and learning cannot take place without proper infrastructure, as dictated by the constitution of South Africa. Researchers like Beckwourth (2023) assert that physical resources create a conducive climate for teaching and learning by stimulating teachers' and learners' emotional and psychological needs. Harindintwari (2022) further argues that conducive learning environments positively fulfil educational goals and objectives in the classroom. This positive effects leads teachers and learners to perform better in the classroom and school contexts. The present paper shows that effective implementation of CAPS guidelines in the classroom requires physical resources. Practical subjects require instructional materials such as laboratories and libraries to enable learners to learn theory and practice concurrently as a way for teachers to fulfil the implementation of CAPS guidelines in the teaching practice.

### ***Teacher's Capacity***

In the school context, teachers are individuals with different beliefs and attitudes, which are significant in supporting the curriculum guidelines that influence the effectiveness of the implementation in teaching practice. The teacher's responsibilities in the classroom change daily and should be in line with the standards of different subjects in the school context to show proper understanding and implementation. Pak, Polikoff, Desimone and Saldívar García (2020) argue that teachers' concerns should properly be addressed for Curriculum and Assessment policy guidelines implementation in the classroom to be successful.

This is supported by Ridgeway (2023), who argues that teachers' attitudes, beliefs, and values should be aligned to an effective curriculum and minimise the resistance to educating and communicating with other stakeholders concerned by giving adequate and accurate information about the change.

Ramnarain and Hlatshwayo (2018) further argue that the implementation of the CAPS guidelines depends largely on the teacher's values, beliefs, attitudes, and experiences in the school context to apply the practice of the document in the teaching and learning processes. Therefore, it is important for supervisors to shape the teachers' beliefs and values at the implementation stage by providing a good orientation and preparation to support and reduce attitudes towards effective teaching and learning

### ***School Ethos and Management***

The school is an environment where teaching and learning processes enforce how knowledge and skills are passed on from generation to generation (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2015). However, school ecology and management are factors that must be considered in the implementation of CAPS guidelines into the teaching practice of any subject. This entails that good leadership and management are the basic requirements to support teachers in the implementation of CAPS guidelines for teaching practices. Garza, et al (2014) argue that effective school management enables teachers to plan and encourage learners to commit to their work, enhancing their performance and achievements. The leadership and management qualities offer a good environment for implementing CAPS in Schools.

To support the implementation of CAPS guidelines to the teaching practice in South Africa, the capacity to support innovation has a huge impact. It needs to be strengthened in the classroom to allow learners to be creative in their field of study. The office bearers, from national to provincial, should offer both teachers and learners ongoing support to empower the knowledge and skills enforced inside the CAPS (Department of Basic Education, 2011). Hence, the DBE has introduced a notion in schools to restore basic

functionality to enhance curriculum at the school level. Moreover, innovation should be for all stakeholders in the school context, as the document involves every individual within that space of teaching.

This framework helped me to unearth teachers' difficulties in understanding and interpreting the CAPS guidelines and adapting their teaching practices to align with the new curriculum (Gudyanga, 2017). The failure to interpret and implement CAPS guidelines leads many school teachers to resort to existing problems, such as a lack of instructional teaching (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019). Additionally, materials, infrastructure, and support systems facilitate the smooth implementation of CAPS guidelines into their teaching classrooms.

### Methods

The study adopted a qualitative research approach guided by an interpretivism paradigm to answer the research question. I used the qualitative approach as the most appropriate technique, given that I intended to comprehend teachers' experiences in their daily lives regarding the support that they receive for implementing CAPS guidelines into the teaching practice. The interpretivism paradigm was useful to get insights of the teachers on the teacher support implementation of CAPS.

The exploratory case study design was employed in four secondary schools in the Capricorn district, South Africa. Convenient sampling was used to select eight teachers since the focus was on teacher support strategies to understand the support that teachers received. The researcher used convenient sampling because the participants of the study are very close, and it saves time. Semi-structured and document reviews such as policy, assessment and daily lesson plans were used to gather views about the support to teachers for better implementation of CAPS guidelines. Data was analysed through emerging themes. The University of Limpopo approved ethical issues, and permission to conduct the study. Participation was voluntary, and participants in this study were informed of the right to withdraw from the study (Xu et al., 2020). Codes (teacher A-H) were used

to protect the identities of teachers and during the presentation and analysis of findings.

### Findings

From the data analysis process the following four themes emerged: *gap of content and practice; lack of regular professional support; reluctant movement from theory to practice; learner motivational absence.*

#### **Gap between policy and practice**

Teachers seemed to struggle to bridge the gap between theory and practice. This was evident in area of assessment. They looked not confident in how assessment in CAPS was to be carried out. The CAPS document requires that assessment should be both informal (formative) and formal (summative), with regular feedback provided to learners. This requirement was seemingly ignored as either they were too busy or did not know how to do it. Participants remarked that, *"I use formal and informal assessment in relation to the content taught to be in line with the CAPS document."* Teacher B: *"I use the group discussion even though some of the learners would ask questions that we, as teachers, are not able to give proper answers."* The participants highlighted that they used various strategies to implement the CAPS guidelines in the classroom. The views clearly reveal that the policy document in the classroom is not easy because some teachers lack proper feedback to give directly to learners. Additionally, Teacher C noted that: *"I am trying to match technology with content as a way to implement the CAPS document as learners are different."* Teacher F remarked that *"the type of strategies I use in the classroom is based on accommodating different learners in the classroom."* In addition, *teachers try one-on-one, but overcrowding in the classroom is bad.* "The views clearly show that teachers use various ways to implement CAPS guidelines in the classroom teaching practice. Teachers use the policy document, but the implementation is not well mastered due to overcrowding observed in the classroom.

#### **Lack of regular professional support**

The support structure for the implementation of the CAPS guidelines is the district officials (educational specialists) and

school management team. This team includes the principal, deputy principal, and departmental heads in the school. The structure should be well-strengthened to attain one goal in the educational institution. This is what the participants had to say, *Teacher A*: “regular workshops in order to be reminded because teachers after workshops continue with their negligence of the CAPS document implementation.” *Teacher G* noted that: “our seniors, such as departmental heads, need to push teachers in order to do better on the implementation of CAPS as teachers are lazy.”

Additionally, to the above views, teachers felt that it would be better to get support from the officials in a workshop to tackle the content in line with the document. The internal and external workshop could serve the purpose of implementing the CAPS document in the classroom. *Teacher D* remarked that “proper workshop should be internal and external, as teachers or whoever form part of the educational institution needs guidance to do proper implementation of the curriculum policy statement document.” *Teacher F* noted that: “teachers should be given proper teaching resources, as insufficient resources frustrate the teachers and learners in a particular grade. “From the perspectives of the participants, one can argue that teachers believe the support received from district officials and school management team in a school is not sufficient. The provision of such support encourages teachers to implement the policy in the classroom appropriately. However, monitoring and supervision should be provided to teachers for good implementation.

### ***Reluctant movement from theory to practice***

The policy document focuses more on practicality than theory in the classroom. The skills are outlined for learners to acquire in their various subjects. This entails that teachers need to be conversant with skills such as observation, recording, analysis, and evaluation. However, this is what the participant had to say, *Teacher B*: “CAPS emphasises more on practical experimentation, but it is not easy to dwell more on practical as learners fail to understand the theoretical section of the subject.” *Teacher E* noted that: “content should be taught in line with

*the lesson plans and annual teaching plans, with the involvement of activities that are well outlined.”* *Teacher G* remarked that “as a teacher, reflection should be made in the form of skills for curriculum implementation in the classroom. “The participants' views show that most of the teachers do not focus on the skills that need to be transferred to learners. Additionally, teachers focus on the knowledge to be taught in the classroom rather than the skills that must be carried out in the classroom context. This clearly shows that teachers do not necessarily focus on the learners' acquiring skills but on the progression policy, which depends on the subject's content.

### ***Learner Motivational Absence***

Knowledge is the basis upon which one's learning and intellectual capacity will be judged. The foundation of understanding the content lies with learners and what they bring to the classroom, how they respond to information received, and what they gain from their learning. This is the participant's view, *Teacher D*: “Learners need to understand that content emanates from daily experiences in their own context.” *Teacher C*, noted that “learners need to understand that subjects are very practical, and learners are expected to understand the content from a perspective or view of life.” *Teacher E* remarked that: “learners should be able to apply the prior knowledge from previous grades to the present content in the classroom”. The participants revealed that most of learners did not understand the concepts found in the subject where teachers are responsible for the implementation. This entails that teachers need to be very clear in their lesson plans and inform learners about the knowledge that needs to be acquired by individual learners in the process of teaching and learning.

### **Discussion**

The study sought to explore teachers' views on the curriculum support they received in the implementation of the CAPS policy. The study followed a qualitative research approach to answer the research question, what are teachers' views of the support they receive on the implementation of the CAPS policy? From this data, it is evident that the implementation of curriculum CAPS guidelines remains a challenge to teachers, as they

feel unsupported. When using Rogan and Grayson (2003) to make sense of these findings, one can conclude that CAPS will remain a pipedream unless adequate support is provided to teachers for its implementation. For example, to support this, Rogan, and Grayson's (2003) theory emphasises that curriculum guidelines require the significance of assessment in the classroom. Therefore, teachers need to master the content and assessment criteria to implement the guidelines properly in the classroom. This finding is consistent with other findings elsewhere. Zulu (2018) adds that assessment is crucial for both teachers and learners in the classroom. This requires that assessments on all subjects be integrated with CAPS guidelines in schools. Cranley, Johnson, and Harmon (2021) further argue that assessment needs to provide concise feedback and explicit evidence of the children's progress. The integration of the assessment should be taken as an activity to obtain evidence on the knowledge and skills of learners as far as teaching and learning are involved (Bowe, Ball & Gold, 2017). The theory that is proposed by the study emphasises that assessment is part of the teaching process and provides clear guidance and consistency for teachers when teaching (Rogan & Grayson, 2003). Additionally, the effective implementation of CAPS guidelines in the teaching practice requires teachers to be informed and monitored to implement CAPS guidelines.

The support teaching structure in the educational institution includes all the office bearers, from national to local. The study revealed that teachers believe the support received from district officials and seniors in school is not sufficient. DiPaola and Wagner (2018) assert that principals need to monitor and supervise teachers in the school on the implementation of curriculum policy guidelines in the classroom. The idea is supported by scholars like Nene (2019), who state that principals interact directly with teaching and learning by monitoring learner-centred, content-centred, and teacher-centred approaches to the implementation of CAPS guidelines in the classroom. Therefore, proper support should be given to teachers. Additionally, the theory of Rogan and Grayson (2003) confirms the findings by emphasising the school ethos ecology and management as factors that must be considered in the curriculum implementation of any subject.

Therefore, management should be enforced on all angles of education without fail.

On the other hand, educational specialists are responsible for ensuring that programmes in schools are conceptualised, designed, and implemented (Chabalala & Naidoo, 2021). This is supported by Marais and Wessels (2020) who argues that the support from the educational specialist should be to check the daily lessons, including the reading and writing of learners in the subject, as far as possible. This will serve as a support to teachers on the implementation of CAPS guidelines in the classroom. Smit (2022) argues that support strategies should make provision for the curriculum's implementation into practice, including training, observation of classroom teaching, and a schedule of regular meetings for reflective discussion. To make teachers understand the implementation of curriculum guidelines, regular checks of their work in relation to the curriculum be monitored.

Creativity and creative skills in the classroom are observed through how deep learning is merged with the supportive prior knowledge on teaching and learning within the rising challenges of 21st-century competence (Tan, 2021). This entails that classrooms require critical and creative skills to engage different learners in the content to be taught. Additionally, Bereczki and Kárpáti (2021) argue that creativity in the classroom explains that a teacher should introduce innovative ways of teaching to enable learning through experience and observation. The present study revealed that teachers focus on the knowledge to be taught in the classroom rather than the skills that must be carried out in the classroom context. The theory by Rogan and Grayson (2003), underpinned by the study, emphasises that the capacity to support innovation is recognised through the uniqueness of schools in their context. The researcher's view is that teachers need to embrace all learners and allow for critical and creative skills across the school.

Scholars like Darling-Hammond, et al. (2017) further argue that schools are primarily concerned with delivering curriculum to all learners to access knowledge and skills relevant to their career growth. This entails that for learners to

have skills that add value to their academic path, opportunities should be given to everyone in the school beyond their own experiences to gain skills as individuals (Frey et al., 2019). Scholars like Bean and Melzer (2021) argue that actions that align with curriculum implementation requirements must be connected and exposed to teaching and learning that allow learners to be creative and critical thinkers. In support of the above, creativity is an important figure in the educational system, leading to good curriculum implementation guidelines in the teaching practice.

All diverse learners found in various schools and governed by policies must be ensured with equity and fair treatment in education. In this study, it was revealed that most of the learners do not understand the concepts found in the subjects. Therefore, the learner monitoring progress tool is essential. As Rogan and Grayson's theory (2003) emphasises, learners' knowledge, skills, and background help shape their beliefs and attitudes towards the content and should be considered. Kormos and Smith (2023) argued that learners experience greater difficulties in understanding the concepts due to the language used in that subject. Therefore, teachers need to ensure that learners understand concepts in the subject.

The school's responsibility is to make learners develop knowledge, skills, talents, and attitudes to face different situations in life (Rieckmann, 2018). Learners are also a critical element in effectively implementing the CAPS guidelines into the teaching practice, and teachers should monitor and control classroom practice, which holds the key to what is transmitted and adopted from the official curriculum (Wilson, 2017). This requires teachers to equip learners with knowledge aligned with the CAPS guidelines. Therefore, learners can only acquire knowledge and skills to be mastered if teachers properly implement the CAPS guidelines into the teaching practice.

### Study limitations

The study was limited to public secondary schools in Capricorn district, Limpopo Province in South Africa. The researcher could not include all schools found in the province because

of time and financial constraints. In this study high, average, and low achieving secondary schools were chosen to get the teachers' views on support provided to implement CAPS guidelines to their teaching. The researcher chose the schools because of familiarity and convenient access.

### Conclusion

This study aimed to explore teacher's views on the support they receive to effectively implement the CAPS policy in their classrooms. The study was pursued to provide specific guidance on how teachers can be supported in effectively implementing the CAPS guidelines in teaching practice. The study encourages teachers to have details about learners' prior knowledge before attaining new skills as stipulated by CAPS policy guidelines. Moreover, teachers should be regularly trained to implement the content according to the CAPS guidelines to fulfil the purpose of teaching and learning. Thus, educational specialists and school management teams such as the principal, deputy principal, and head of departments need to provide monitoring tools and supervision for teachers to prepare the lesson in alignment with CAPS guidelines.

### Disclosure

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