

Curriculum Implementation Strategies of Education Standards Officers in Choma District of Zambia: A Critique of their Effectiveness

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Abstract

Effective curriculum implementation by teachers is recognised as a lynchpin for achieving educational goals of any education system that leads to improved learner outcomes. In this article, authors make a critique of the effectiveness of Education Standards Officers' (ESOs) curriculum implementation strategies that were used to support teachers' effective teaching and learning in Choma district of Zambia. They set the argument by riding on the six premises of Fullan's curriculum implementation model against the contemporary backdrop and knowledge that ESOs monitoring and evaluation roles are critical to effective curriculum implementation in schools. In this qualitative study, researchers identified and critiqued strategies that were employed by ESOs in the contemporary milieu of Choma district. Using interview guides and focus group discussions guides, data was collected from head teachers and teachers in five, public secondary schools. Additionally, interview guides were also used to collect information from ESOs themselves. Findings pointed to the fact that curriculum implementation strategies such as formation of subject associations, follow-up visits and the recommendations from ESOs and the use of common schemes of work in schools did not yield desired results in terms of supporting teachers to improve their teaching based on what ESOs identified as areas of need during their school visits. In fact, it was also noted that ESOs missed a golden opportunity to practice clinical supervision and to make lesson demonstrations as they interacted with teachers. Arising from the factors which led to this scenario, researchers make two main recommendations. They first and foremost suggest that the Ministry of Education needs to provide sufficient funding to aspects of curriculum implementation at both the district and school levels. Researchers also recommend that ESOs should consult teachers and their administrators as they come up with curriculum implementation strategies in order to have them aligned with the realities of the schools.

Key words: *Strategies, Monitoring and Evaluation, Education Standards Officers, Curriculum Implementation*

1. Introduction

School inspection and monitoring by Education Standards Officers (ESOs) is not uncommon in the education system. In Zambia, the practice of school inspection and curriculum implementation supervision has been in existence since the introduction of formal education by the Christian missionaries and the British colonial government. It was aimed at determining whether there was effective teaching and learning taking place in classrooms (Gosh, 1992). In other words, school inspection was intended to ensure that the curriculum was being effectively implemented and that education standards were adhered to by school administrators, teachers and other staff in the schools. The duty of ESOs is thus to provide guidance to schools and teachers about curriculum implementation and standard assessment for quality assurance in all educational learning institutions except institutions of higher learning as Mathew (2012) rightly observed. To this very day, the significance, purpose and focus of school inspection and supervision is still upheld in Zambian schools (Kapalu *et al.*, 2020).

Kasanda (2015) observed that school inspection as a mode of monitoring quality education provision offers the following benefits: it provides standards officers with an opportunity to observe teaching and learning, thereby establishing a better basis for discussing the development of the school with the head teachers and provide an opportunity to learn about the schools, teachers, the curriculum and the learners. It also provides a learning experience for all those involved in the running of the school and leads to a better understanding of curriculum implementation.

In 2000, the Ministry of Education in Zambia was restructured and decentralised in line with the policies of education as articulated in *Educating our Future: National Policy on Education* so as to improve efficiency in the ministry (Kapalu *et al.*, 2020; MoE, 1996). During this process the inspectorate was renamed as the Directorate of Standards and Curriculum. Consequently, the ministry created several positions in the department of standards at national, provincial and district levels. This was also done to change the attitude of teachers and standards officers about their perception and work. The Directorate of Standards and Curriculum in the Ministry of Education was thus established through an *Act of Parliament on Education Number 23 of 2011* to monitor and supervise teachers in curriculum implementation (GRZ, 2011). Although the enactment through parliament took this long from the time restructuring started, the Act mandated ESOs to inspect schools suspected of being in operation, examine and audit the accounts in schools and advise school administrators accordingly.

Since ESOs report to authorities in the Ministry of Education and give feedback on curriculum implementation to relevant stakeholders, they should therefore have refined skills and knowledge such as report writing and good communication skills (Etindi, 2001). Above all they should have very good pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) in the subjects of their line of duty. They should also be well grounded in curriculum content knowledge (CCK). Such particular competencies would enable ESOs to have confidence and authority to properly guide school administrators and teachers. Additionally, ESOs should have a cordial and friendly relationship with teachers who actually actualise the process of teaching and learning. This is very important since teachers not only are central to achieving universal access to high quality and equitable education for all learners but also have first-hand knowledge of the learning environment, the learners and how the two relate, as Chibesakunda and Mulenga (2019) explained.

2. Statement of the Problem and Objective

Since ESOs are not permanently stationed in schools but only visit schools from time to time, it is, therefore, imperative that they put in place mechanisms to ensure continuous and sustainable quality assurance practices in schools with the sole aim of improving education quality and standards (Ajuoga *et al.*, 2010). If that is not addressed, then curriculum standards maybe compromised and this may eventually affect learners' attainment of curriculum learning outcomes. Monitoring and evaluation of curriculum implementation is an important aspect of the curriculum implementation process and a very good practice because it provides the Ministry of Education with a way to monitor the actualisation of the curriculum (Muhammad, 2012). The dynamism of the curriculum,

therefore, may call for new innovations and flexibility in the manner in which teachers and ESOs work to improve teaching and learning strategies. It was for this reason that researchers in this study sought to critique the effectiveness of the curriculum implementation strategies which ESOs in Choma district used to support their evaluation and monitoring practices in public secondary schools.

3. Theoretical Framework

In trying to understand curriculum implementation practices of ESOs, researchers in this article were guided by Fullan's curriculum implementation model of 1991. Fullan (1991) identified six premises which are necessary for effective curriculum implementation. These premises include vision building, curriculum innovations, staff development, time, observation and curriculum dynamism. Researchers of this critique found these aspects quite beneficial to informing the study in the following ways.

Vision building as explained by Fullan (1991) is the way in which organisations establish a shared vision to create the direction and plans for appropriate implementation. In his model Fullan proposed that vision building should involve all users of the curriculum in order to create a sense of ownership, which in turn encourages commitment and development. In this case, ESOs are supposed to actively engage all the stakeholders in the schools as they visit by explaining the focus of the curriculum. This aspect is critical for the Zambian education system given that at the time this study was done, the Ministry of Education was still implementing the revised curriculum. Thus, apart from ensuring that standards of the revised curriculum were followed, ESOs also needed to share the vision with teachers, administrators, parents and the community as a way of building a shared vision of the revised curriculum together with all stakeholders.

Fullan also explained that curriculum leaders must be conversant with the curriculum innovation requirements. He further argued that successful schools were guided by focused administrators throughout the implementation process. Once again this aspect fits well with this critique because ESOs are usually part of the curriculum development processes and thus are very much in tune with the innovations which the Ministry of Education would be proposing. However, ESOs need to possess the necessary professional and minimum academic qualifications if they are to correctly understand, interpret and then share the curriculum innovations to teachers and school administrators in very simple but effective ways. In other words, ESOs should have very good pedagogical content knowledge in subjects of their specialisation as well as curriculum content knowledge and effective communication skills.

In his model, Fullan further suggested that staff development was key to successful adjustment to practice. In order to have an effective curriculum implementation process, there is a need for training before implementation and continuous training during the implementation process for all key stakeholders of the curriculum implementation process. ESOs need to promote in-service training of teachers aimed at facilitating better implementation of the curriculum. ESOs would be in a better position to make such in-service recommendations and facilitations because they have first-hand experiences in

classroom teaching and learning. Fullan and Pomfret (1977) further observed that effective implementation of educational change required time, personal interaction and contacts, teacher professional development and other forms of support. Therefore, there should be enough time allocated to allow for both workshops and interactions with teachers. More importantly, effective curriculum implementation in the classroom requires conscious and effective use of time. This is critical because some studies done in Zambia regarding curriculum implementation, revealed that time was one of the resources that was not well managed as noted by Mulenga and Lubasi (2019) and Zulu and Mulenga (2019). Observations of the curriculum implementation within the classroom context is significant and vital for the effective implementation process. Actual lesson observations as they are done by ESOs provide opportunities to appreciate possible limitations and the suitability of new ideas during the implementation process (Fullan 1991). Through the observation procedure, ESOs would find out whether activities were being implemented as planned and if they were producing the desired results.

A curriculum is dynamic thus; it needs to improve over time to cater for the country's new needs. In this case ESOs should be flexible and innovative enough to restructure their supervision practices in line with new innovations and changes. Their implementation strategies should be targeted at influencing teaching and learning for quality assurance and not simply following rules which may not be applicable to every situation. Education of the 21st century is the most dynamic as scholars such as Mulenga (2020) rightly observed. Reflecting on the six aspects of Fullan's model gave the researchers of this article a clear theoretical understanding of the curriculum implementation as it should be supported by ESOs curriculum implementation strategies.

3.0 Brief Review of Literature

3.1 The Aspect of Quality Education through the lens of Educational Supervision

Quality education, according to Kelly (1999: 127) is about 'the achievements of learners and their success when they leave school for further education and productive work'. It is largely dependent on teachers, the quality of teaching and learning approaches, the availability of appropriate teaching and learning resources and facilities relevant to the curriculum, family and community support, together with a safe and conducive learning environment (Farrant, 1980).

Muhammad (2012), however argued that among all the factors which contribute to learner success, teachers play the most pivotal role in meeting the many challenges of providing quality education in any country. As also documented in the *Zambian National Education Policy, Educating our Future*, the importance of employing well-qualified and competent teachers is meant to ensure quality and effectiveness of the education system, which largely depends on the quality of its teachers (MoE, 1996). Thus, teachers as curriculum implementers have a very critical role to play in this regard. No wonder most ministries of education around the world have within their structures a wing that supports teachers as they discharge this noble task of teaching. For example, the Tanzanian school inspection system is based on the educational evaluation which is modelled on the British education

system. The role of the school inspectors in Tanzania is to supervise teachers and assess their performance in the classroom as observed by Grauwe and White (2001). In Nigeria, school inspection is perceived as an educational assessment of the state of the educational system that ascertains acceptable standards as reported by Mohammad (2012). Similarly, England considers school inspection as an act to monitor school improvement initiatives and offer guidance to teachers and administrators. In England, school inspection is created as an independent, non-ministerial government department and its main task is to set up a new school inspection system and maintain a good number of qualified inspectors to fulfil the obligations of each inspection cycle (Ferguson, *et al.*, 2001).

In the case of the MoE in Zambia, ESOs support teachers by evaluating their teaching as a way of quality assurance of their work. Agesa (2015) observed that quality assurance is a process through which an educational institution guarantees itself and its stakeholders that its education and other services reach a standard of excellence. Thus, ESOs promote quality education by evaluating teaching and learning to guarantee that the curriculum is effectively implemented. School administrators also see to it that teachers teach in line with the syllabus and ensure that there is teaching and learning going on in classrooms. In a school set up, quality management deals with the assessment and evaluation of learning objectives, the appraisal of teachers' performance and measurement of pupils' performance through tests and examinations. Quality education can therefore be measured to a large extent by the learners' performance in different assessments which are both formative and summative.

The curriculum implementation practices by those in charge become the quality control management strategy (Chizya, 2018). As supervisors of the curriculum, ESOs provide guidance to teachers on curriculum matters and promote teaching and learning strategies which are cardinal to quality assurance of education provision. Nyaki (2006) studied the effectiveness of school inspection of Quality Assurance and Standards Officers in improving quality of secondary school education in Kenya. The findings revealed that these inspections did not have a significant effect on curriculum implementation since there were just one-off exercises which were conducted after very long periods of time for most schools. Thus, Nyaki recommended that the department of curriculum and standards should provide regular and sustainable effective strategies for monitoring the pedagogical process and efficiency of inspection including close follow-ups of school visits. Other studies that were reviewed from countries such as Nigeria, Tanzania, and Ethiopia also pointed to the same fact that school inspections in those countries were faced with a number of challenges (Kabati, 2017; Okumbe, 2007; Nkinyangi, 2006; Wardworth, 2002; and Canham, 1983). These studies provided insights to critique the Zambian situation.

3.2 In-Service Training of Teachers

For any professional body of workers to improve in performance it needs to conduct in-service training programmes or refresher courses for its members. In-service training of teachers may include promoting staff development activities in teaching (Wasanga, 2004). Teaching, training and development or professional development, refer to any experience designed to enhance teacher performance with the ultimate aim of promoting learners

effective learning. Education Standards Officers (ESOs) should organise and promote in-service programmes for teachers at an appropriate time to cater for all those in need. This suggestion is made given the fact that ESOs have a chance of seeing teaching taking place in classrooms and can easily identify teachers' needs. To this effect, the Ministry of Education in Zambia has in its structures an in-built Continuing Professional Development system knowing very well that the in-service training of teachers greatly improves the quality of curriculum implementation as noted by Kabati (2017). Masumba and Mulenga (2019) also agreed that effective in-service education had the necessary flexibility to respond to the changing needs of teachers since not all the details of in-service education can be planned prior to implementation and all problems and concerns cannot be anticipated. It is for this reason that ESOs should be on the lookout for such needs as they visit schools. Ornstein and Hunkins (1998) further observed that effective implementation of any given curriculum involves innovations, adequate time for personal interactions and contacts and in-service training, among other support services. In their study on the challenges of implementing the curriculum for Computer Studies in Mufumbwe district of Zambia, Masumba and Mulenga (2019) however found out that in-service training for teachers was not conducted effectively and as a result teachers had enormous challenges in implementing the 2013 revised curriculum. Arguments by Ornstein and Hunkins (1998) and the findings by studies such as done by Masumba and Mulenga (2019) were quite relevant to this critique because they triggered the need to carry out a study on the influence of ESOs in helping teachers improve their teaching and learning activities through sustainable strategies which may come in the form of in-service training. As a matter of fact, in the guidelines for ESOs' duties, the Ministry of General Education (MoGE, 2015) stipulated that ESOs should be involved in the organisation, monitoring and evaluation of teacher Continuing Professional Development (CPD) initiatives and give professional advice to stakeholders on the direction of the programmes. ESOs are also supposed to give reports on the results of monitoring CPD activities, observe lesson demonstrations and participate in the post-demo discussions.

3.3 Teachers' Perception of Education Standard Officers' School Visits

Teachers' perceptions of the monitoring and evaluation by ESOs is of paramount importance since it would determine how teachers are likely to benefit from their interactions with ESOs. Lack of a cordial relationship between teachers and supervisors, for instance, may lead to ineffective supervision and may negatively affect the provision of education to learners as observed by Kanayia (2010). This does not, however, mean that head teachers, deputy head teachers and heads of departments have no significant influence on teachers' performance.

According to UNESCO (2005), teachers have a lot to say on the role of ESOs and other educational supervisors. The findings of some studies such as those of Wasanga (2004), Okumbe (2007), Etindi (2001) and Mobegi (2020) have indicated that many teachers were unhappy with ESOs because they were more of "fault finders" than professional advisors. Teachers said the ESOs intimidated them instead of giving them advice or providing an opportunity to learn from them. Additionally, other researchers had indicated that the

working relationship between ESOs and teachers was characterised by fear and suspicion (Mabiru 2008; Stone 1984 and Nkinyangi 2006). Moreover, Wanjohi (2005) in Kenya also noted that teachers perceived inspectors as fault-finders who were only interested in reporting them to the ministry instead of giving them advice to enable them improve their teaching techniques. That resulted in a poor relationship between teachers and the ESOs. An analysis of most of the studies about ESOs' interactions with teachers especially in Africa seemed to suggest that there was fear on the side of teachers and there was a clear dispersal of a catalogue of faults and threats given by ESOs because the greater majority of ESOs and other education supervisors behaved as if they were higher executive officers who felt too superior and greater than teachers and felt that they could not discuss anything with teachers other than to interact with files (Wanjohi, 2005).

Wanjohi (2005) further observed that most ESOs were accused of being autocratic and authoritarian by always insisting on the maintenance and observance of departmental rules. ESOs forgot that education in the postmodern society was inherently complex and dynamic that called for collaboration between the supervisor and the supervisee in charting the way forward and help each other in the quest for quality assurance. Olembo, Wanga and Karagu (1992) on the other hand, observed that whenever ESOs visited a school their relationship with teachers was highly tense. Although in the majority of studies it was noted that teachers' perceptions of their interactions with ESOs was not good, in some very rare cases and isolated findings such as the one by Mooya and Mulenga (2021), a few teachers in Zambia revealed that they benefited from the feedback received from ESOs. The teachers' perceptions with negative opinions of ESOs as indicated by the various findings were important to the critique of the strategies used by ESOs because they aroused the researchers' interest to analyse the situation in Choma district of Zambia.

4. Methodology

Research Approach and Design

The study methodology approach employed was qualitative where views and opinions of teachers, ESOs and head teachers were sought based on their experiences in the curriculum implementation strategies. The researchers applied more emphasis on exploring the richness, depth and complexity of participants' experiences. The research design employed was descriptive in nature and specifically the multiple-case design (Creswell, 2013). This design was used because of the nature of the study required that researchers explore the real life of a multiple-bounded system of the curriculum implementation as supported by ESOs inspection of different schools but in the case of Choma district. Thus, a detailed in-depth data collection technique involving multiple sources of information was done in five schools in addition to information generated from ESOs at both provincial and district levels.

Sampling and Data Collection

Five (5) schools were purposively sampled from each of the five (5) zones of Choma district, based on recommendation by the district office of the schools which were visited

and those not visited in the year of the study. All the head teachers of the sampled schools were purposively included in the study sample and ten (10) teachers from each school were also purposively sampled following only those that had been in a particular school for over five years. However, it was decided that each school was to provide five male and five female teachers. Four (4) Senior Education Standards Officers (SESOs) at provincial level and two (2) Education Standards Officers were purposely sampled at district level. Thus, the study had a sample of sixty-one (61) participants. Semi-structured interview guides were used to collect data from head teachers and ESOs while focus group discussion schedules were used to collect data from teachers through interviews and focus group discussion, respectively.

Trustworthiness and Data Analysis

Although there are arguments to accept the trustworthiness of qualitative findings, criteria for ensuring rigour in this form have been in existence for many years including credibility, transferability and confirmability (Munsaka, 2001; Shenton, 2004; Munsaka, 2009). Morrow (2005) suggested that since specific information is maximised in relation to the context in which the data collection occurs, it was therefore prudent to use purposive sampling in order to ensure transferability of the research findings in similar contexts. Shenton (2004) defined confirmability as a degree of neutrality in the research findings. In other words, this means that the findings should be based on the participants' responses and not on any potential bias or personal motivations of the researchers. This also involved making sure that the researchers' bias did not skew the interpretations of what the research participants' views were (Munsaka and Kalinde, 2017). In order to address conformity in this study, member checking was applied by asking the interviewees to clarify some responses which could have seemed too ambiguous to the researchers. Additionally, credibility was addressed by prolonged engagement with participants and triangulation was also employed by collecting data of the same aspects of the study from different participants as suggested by Manion and Morrison (2007).

Data was analysed thematically. As Kombo and Tromp (2006) guided, thematic analysis involved coding and then grouping the coded information into similar groups according to themes. Analysis of data, however, began whilst in the field as soon as data collection commenced. At the end of data collection, all collected data was categorised for the purpose of orderly examination and to refine differences in the emerging and grounded concepts.

5. Findings and Discussions

In this section, findings are presented and discussed based on the effectiveness of the curriculum implementation strategies that ESOs used and that they could have used as a way to influence the quality of teaching and learning. No matter how good the curriculum may be have been designed, a curriculum needs effective strategies for it to be well implemented in order to have a positive impact on the target group. A strategy could be a mechanism developed and employed for the perfection of the work to be done, in this case, the improvement of teaching and learning in schools.

5.1 Formation of Subject Associations for Teachers

The study sought information from participants on the strategies ESOs had come up with to improve teaching skills for teachers. Responses from research participants indicated that there were three strategies that were employed to improve the provision of education. One of the identified strategies from the respondents' responses was the formation of subject associations for teachers as one head teacher observed from School 4 when he commented that:

There is a formation of subject associations at whose meetings teachers exchanged ideas on better ways of teaching their specialised subjects. Teachers attend the different subject specialisation meetings regularly. We have also seen them organise fares for different subjects as a way of strengthening their teaching skills and subject matter knowledge.

The observation seemed to be similar to what the Head of Department (HoD) from School 1 said when he also observed that:

The District Education Board Secretary's office through the Education Standards Officers have been promoting subject association meetings and teachers often attend these subject meetings though they have not done so this year due to the COVID 19 pandemic.

Asked in a separate interview if this strategy was beneficial to teachers and learners, one head teacher acknowledged that the strategy was beneficial despite the challenge of costs when it came to sponsoring teachers to attend the same association meetings when held outside their district as he explained that:

They are very beneficial except for the challenge of inadequate resources since they cost money and thus we do not have sufficient money to send every teacher. So you find that only one or two teachers will go to represent the others and then come back to orient t those who did not attend. But as you know when second hand information is given the reliability may be watered down. It would have been better if everyone attended and had their own experiences and contributions.

The head teacher's observation was shared by a good number of teachers who in their own words mentioned that though subject associations were a good strategy, they did not cater for all of them. For instance, one teacher actually said that:

I have attended subject association meetings which are organised by Education Standards Officers in the province at least twice and in both instances they were very beneficial since I had an interaction with colleagues who have the same passion for my subject as I do. I learnt a lot from fellow teachers and came back re-energised to teach well. However, I am just among the lucky few because not every teacher in my school has had this chance and the case is the same for most teachers in Choma district.

Another teacher complained that:

Although the association meetings are a good strategy, they do not benefit all teachers. For instance, in my school for the past four years no teacher has attended such a meeting. ESOs came to our school a month ago and wondered why no teacher from our school

attended these rich meetings. But as we all know the school has no money to sponsor us. We understand it is at these meetings that ESOs share most of their findings from their visits and explain some possible solutions to the challenges that teachers face in teaching. We miss a lot.

The curriculum in Zambia is, at the moment, centrally designed by the Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) and as a result may not cater for all the needs of every teacher and learner in the country in terms of pedagogical up-skilling. At the same time the curriculum is not supervised by the CDC personnel but by school administrators and Education Standards Officers who ensure that it is well implemented and standards adhered to by all stakeholders. Bishop (1985) alluded to the fact that there may be a mismatch between the intended curriculum and the actual classroom situation where the curriculum is implemented. The study findings agree with Bishop that these mismatches are a reality which cannot be ignored. Fullan's (1991) curriculum implementation model which guided this study identified six premises of effective curriculum implementation. In that model, Fullan emphasised the importance of staff development and planning when implementing the curriculum as one of the six premises for effective curriculum implementation. Subject association meetings in this case are a typical example of a continuous way of developing teachers' competencies in teaching. However, respondents in this study all pointed to the fact that although this strategy was being implemented not every teacher benefited from it. As can be noted from the findings, both teachers and head teachers confirmed that using subject association meetings to make teachers share good practices in teaching was very good. However, it was not very effective since not every teacher had a chance to attend the subject association meetings despite the meetings being so good for the few who attended them. In fact literature shows that at the time of this study, there were a number of established national teachers' associations such as the Social Sciences Teachers' Association of Zambia (SOSTAZ), Business Studies Teachers' Association of Zambia (BUSTAZ), Zambia Association for Mathematics Teachers' Association (ZAME), Language Teachers' Association of Zambia (LATAZ) and the Home Economics Teachers' Association of Zambia (HEAZ) (Mooya, 2021). It is thus clear that such associations, if well planned, could benefit teachers since they even exist at national level. What the literature did not clearly indicate, though, was whether all these associations were instigated by ESOs in all the provinces.

5.2 Follow-Up Visits and Implementation of Recommendations of Education Standards Officers

The practice of having ESOs observe teachers teach without giving recommendations for improvements on some of the teaching and school aspects identified may not be useful enough in terms of helping teachers improve their teaching competencies. Moreover, making recommendations is one thing, while ensuring that such recommendations are implemented is yet another thing. When interviewed almost all Education Standards Officers indicated that they made recommendations to teachers on how teachers could improve their teaching skills. At this point researchers wanted to find out how ESOs ensured that such recommendations were implemented by teachers. Asked on how Standards

Officers ensured that the recommendations which they made were implemented by teachers a teacher from **School 3** stated that:

When they come and find weaknesses or gaps in teaching, ESOs usually make suggestions and recommendations on how such gaps can be filled and how the weaknesses can be strengthened. Although the recommendations are good, most of them are not practical and feasible because the weaknesses and gaps that they mostly noticed are as a result of the lack of appropriate teaching and learning resources and sometimes as a result of a lack of enough teaching time in subjects such as social studies. Maybe no wonder they do not even bother to come back for follow up visits. Our school supervisors know all these weaknesses and their causes.

Asked in a separate focus group discussion, one teacher from **School 2** shared that he had never been followed up by ESOs to check on the improvements he had made as he explained that:

I have never been followed up after observation. Standards officers would just come for another observation with a different teacher but they will not enquire or follow up with me whether there is improvement in my teaching from what they observed previously. I wonder why it is like that.

When responding to the same question a teacher from **School 4** made the above view much stronger when she explained that:

From the two encounters that I have had with ESOs in the last five years, I have not been followed up based on the previous recommendations. It is just verbal engagement that is given. Sometimes you would even feel as if the ESO is warning you instead of giving clear suggestions where there was a weakness but there is no follow up. The only follow up would be upon oneself to improve on the needy areas. Some ESOs as I mentioned even lose track of what they are supposed to say in relation to the observations and start talking about how relevant their observations are to the teacher's promotion. I think that is irrelevant because their visits are not to see who is to be promoted but to support and guide teachers in their curriculum implementation efforts.

A similar view was shared by a teacher from **School 5** who raised the same concerns as those of the teacher from **School 4** that;

There are no measures they put in place after making their findings. The school administrators may carry it up from there to ensure that what ESOs had recommended has been worked on by the teacher. But the school administrators are always with us and they know our struggles especially with teaching and learning resources, which are not enough and some not even there.

Education Standards Officers were asked the same question to which they shared mixed sentiments in response. Some said that they made follow-ups while others said no follow ups were made. Responses were as follows as **SESO 1** explained that:

There is what we call follow up inspection, when we go to observe we give advice to teachers but at the same time we give them a bit of time for them to implement what we have advised. Then later on we go back to find out whether those issues we had raised were implemented. But most of the times we find challenges especially with schools that are in far places. We take time to go back because of financial challenges that the ministry faces regarding transport and other resources.

When asked the same question a Secondary Education Standards Officer (SESO) **SESO 3** gave a different view, saying that ideally ESOs should make follow ups but it was rarely done due to limited resources. She explained that:

That is why I was saying if we had the chance to go back, we could check. But sometimes we only use a phone to call the head teacher to find out whether he or she has supported the teacher. But in reality, if things were done in a normal manner we are supposed to be getting back to see if there was improvement. Now when we find little resources it will require us to go to new schools than going back to schools that we had already visited.

ESOs were also asked if they by any chance engaged teachers in clinical supervision which is a more modern and appropriate way of working with teachers. All the ESOs mentioned that they did not due to lack of time As one ESOs actually said:

You see Sir, our work is really difficult due to lack of resources such as transport and money. So each time we have a chance to move out and see teachers we do not have the luxury of going into such kind of supervision. It is not possible. We have no time to do that with teachers.

It was clear from the findings that during classroom observations ESOs were able to identify areas which needed improvements by teachers and thus made recommendations. Recommendations are meant to help the implementer to improve on some of the weaknesses observed. Findings, however, revealed that there were no follow-ups that were done to ensure that recommendations made were worked on by teachers. This implied that this strategy may not be effective because there was no evidence that ESOs' recommendations were actually implemented as a way of helping teachers to improve their teaching skills.

ESOs confirmed that the ideal situation was that after observing teachers and recommendations were given, they were supposed to go back after some time to see whether there was any improvement. However, when resources were available, the ESOs would rather go to new stations that were not visited. This further implied that there were no means of tracking teachers who had challenges in teaching so as to help them improve. This finding is similar to the one by Kapalu *et al.*, (2020) and Silwamba and Daka (2021) whose studies about ESOs lesson observations in Zambia noted that even though a few schools were observed, the observations from ESOs were not effectively acted upon. This compromised the work of ESOs by not having information on whether there were improvements among teachers after instructional supervision or not. This challenge actually seems to have been with ESOs for some time now because Kambunga and Cheyeka (2014), which is seven years from the time this study was done, made the same observation in a study that was done in Southern province of Zambia regarding ESOs monitoring of teaching activities. This study had also revealed that ESOs were willing to go back and make follow ups but they seemed to have no enough resources to do so. It is for this reason that some resorted to making desperate measures of phoning head teachers as a way of finding out if teachers were making use of the recommendations. This measure, however, does not guarantee any effectiveness of the strategy. Once again the issue of funding and provision of resource for their work seemed to be a limitation to ESOs' work, an issue

which scholars such as Mulenga and Kabombwe (2019) and Mulenga (2021) have that was constantly mentioned as a factor impeding effective curriculum implementation. Although Fullan's model of (1991) insists that time is important in ensuring that effective curriculum implementation is done, in this case despite giving some time to teachers to work on the recommendations, the lack of follow ups was an impediment.

5.3 Missed Opportunity for Clinical Supervision and Lesson Demonstrations

ESOs' visits are a very good opportunity to interact with the teachers especially when they prepare to teach and evaluate their lessons. Thus, their presence in the school is not limited to observing lessons only but to actually be part of the preparation, teaching and reflections which come at the end of the lessons. In the focus group discussion teachers expressed concern that ESOs focused a lot of attention on being outside observers than on being part of the process of teaching in order to understand and appreciate what teachers experienced. It is for this reason that this study inquired from teachers and ESOs themselves whether the latter practiced clinical supervision as a more appropriate way of working with teachers when supervising lessons. The study thus sought to find out whether ESOs guided the teachers practically in the lesson preparation stages as well as make reflections and demonstrate the lessons. One teacher from **School 1** said that;

They don't have that time. All they do is provide verbal feedback and most of the time they do not even have time to listen and learn from us. I see it as a one way of communication from those who think to know much to the ones who are presumed to not knowing. How I wish they could change their approach.

A teacher from **School 5** also re-echoed this observation by affirming that:

They have no time for that. I don't think there is any Standards Officer who has done that in this country. If they are there then it is one out of one hundred. All they want is to observe the teacher according to the instruments they have come with and come up with a grade using that. I learnt about clinical supervision during my university years but I have not seen it practiced here in school. It is a very modern and effective way of supervising teaching. I think that is what is needed.

Responding to a question on ESOs making lesson demonstrations, a teacher from **School 2** expressed his view by stating that:

They have never offered any lesson demonstration. Maybe it's because they have not been invited but even then, when they come for teacher observation, they should be able to suggest. I personally would like to see how they can teach and learn from them. But each time they come they seem to be in a hurry. They create an impression that they are very busy. But I thought that their coming to visit our schools is part of the busy schedule so once they come we need all their time and attention. I personally have a number of unanswered questions that I would like to find out from ESOs regarding teaching especially about the competency based curriculum.

Education Standards Officers were also asked the same question their responses were as follows. **SESO 3** explained that:

During conferences and subject association meetings we make lesson demonstrations to teachers, but again the problem is that very few teachers are supported to attend these

conferences. You will find that from the same school it will be the HoD again coming and yet people who need these interactions more are ordinary class teachers.

When asked in a separate interview **SESO 1** explained that:

We have a WhatsApps group for all HoDs in the province so they will bring out those issues that are thorny from their teachers then those are some of the things we plan for when we have association meetings. We compile those issues then we see who to invite and what activities to take. Lesson demonstration is one of the things that we always have on the agenda but when it comes to lesson preparation and reflections I think we miss that since this needs to happen in the school before and after teaching is done. This is a learning point for me.

The view was supported by another teacher from **School 4** who explained that:

ESOs planning with us on a particular lesson that I am to teach would be interesting and beneficial, I suppose. But I doubt if they ever think of such a thing.

Lack of clinical supervision by ESOs was one of the findings which emerged from the responses that respondents gave. Clinical supervision entails that the supervisor should find time to sit with the supervisee to mentor them, coach them, evaluate, inspire and create an atmosphere that promotes self-motivation, learning and professional development and finally guide them through the process of curriculum implementation. Kapalu *et al.* (2020) actually recommended in their study that since ESOs were experts in teaching and possess a wealth of experience in education pedagogy, it was important that they plan with teachers and provide demonstration lessons targeting teachers in schools through various platforms such as workshops, seminars and other professional forums. With all the advanced technology in the world today, several other platforms could be used to provide demonstration lessons to teachers before and after they are observed.

This finding was actually in contrast with Fullan's (1991) curriculum implementation model which guided this study and emphasised the importance of empowering staff and do clinical supervision for effective implementing of the curriculum. It was not good enough for ESOs to give verbal instructions and advice. Verbal instructions may not provide the guidance that the teacher needed because talking about how to do something and actually doing it may not be the same thing. African indigenous knowledge is full of wisdom and sage sayings about giving help and instructions for one to improve their practice. A wise Bemba saying states that, '*Umulangilishi wamuntu alapalama*' which is literally translated as '*If one is giving instructions, he or she should be close*'. The word "close" here is not just geographical but it implies that the instructor in this case the ESOs should demonstrate his or her teaching skills by providing the exact guidance instead of giving verbal instructions which might be easy to say than actually putting it into practice. Clinical supervision combined with lesson demonstrations are actually a missed opportunity for ESOs visits to schools as one ESO actually indicated in an interview. This strategy is feasible and attainable for ESOs and teachers given the fact that both parties realise the need for clinical supervision and lesson demonstration noted from their expressions during interviews. The fact that lesson demonstration is done at subject association meetings is a clear indication that its value is known. However, as already noted, most teachers do not

attend these meetings and the lesson demonstration atmosphere at workshops and conferences is not natural since learners are not part of such meetings. Thus, naturally, the school becomes the most ideal ground for lesson demonstrations by ESOs.

5.4 Common Schemes of Work and Examinations for Learners

ESO's in Choma district promoted and encouraged teachers to centrally prepare common schemes of work for all subjects either at provincial or at district level. The purpose of common schemes of work is usually to have a uniform kind of teaching in all schools so that all the teachers can move at the same pace and for easy monitoring of the progression of teaching and learning. When asked about strategies that ESOs had employed to improve the quality of education, the HoD from **School 3** explained that:

As Southern province we are using common schemes of work in all subjects. Teachers are called from different schools to take part in the scheming exercise and those are the schemes all schools in the province are using.

Asked the same question in a focus group discussion, one teacher from **School 2** acknowledged the use of common schemes of work though he expressed discontent about the effectiveness of this practice due to variations in learner progression rates. He explained that:

Common schemes of work are provided to us but it is a bit difficult to follow them as required by the district authorities because you find that the progression rate of learners is not the same thus not common. This creates a lot of frictions with ESOs when they come for supervision because they expect teachers in particular subjects to be moving at the same pace. It is not just practical and realistic as we all know learners are not the same. I cannot just keep on moving from one topic to the other regardless of learners not learning, all in the name of moving at the same pace with other schools.

Regarding the same matter, another teacher from **School 5** observed that despite schemes of work being beneficial to both the teachers and learners, there were still challenges in the reference books that were recommended especially for schools in rural areas. She explained that:

Provincial or district schemes of work are beneficial quite alright but we still find challenges sometimes in accessing reference books which they recommend for us to be using because such books are not available especially in places like here in rural areas. We don't have materials to use that are prescribed in common schemes of work.

Commenting on the same matter, one teacher from **School 4** expressed dissatisfaction with the use of common schemes of work, citing that learners learn at different levels. Therefore, once we used common schemes of work, supervisors would want to see all schools moving at the same time which may pose a challenge. She explained that:

For the common schemes, they haven't been really beneficial because different schools use different ways of handling their learners. When you look at the learners even in our assessments, we don't have learners who understand things at the same pace so I find common schemes of work from the province or district to be very unrealistic because we have children that are slower than others. So we needed to pay much attention to slow

learners but then if we had the common schemes of work you will find that some learners are behind and others are moving at the so called right pace. So it would be better if teachers taught at the pace depending on the type of learners they have.

Assessment is a very critical part of improving the quality of education as rightly explained by Mulenga (2021). It can help education evaluators who include ESOs to assess the effectiveness of teaching methods, strategies and other factors that are vital to the quality of education provision. Common examinations are introduced to ensure that all the learners in the district write the same examination regardless of the school location. The idea is to assess all the learners in the district and be able to make a realistic comparison of the performance in schools. When asked the question on what strategies ESOs had introduced in the district to help teachers improve their teaching skills, one teacher from **School 3** stated that:

They have introduced common examinations though we had challenges with implementing this practice in my school due to the challenge of finances since such examinations need to be typed and printed. Paper is very expensive as you know.

This view seemed to be supported by another teacher from **School 4** who also noted that schools had challenges in administering common examinations and observed that:

Common exams were introduced but schools had a challenge of finances to run these exams. So, they were discontinued for us.

The head teacher from **School 3** shared the same observation that examinations were better localised because that way teachers would be better placed to see what was good for the learners. He commented that:

We used to do common exams but this practice could not be sustained due to difficulties in having them printed all at the same time but we also had very little money for this. Moreover, we also need to look at the unique progression rate of the learners in different schools. For instance my learners might not be at the same level with other learners at other schools. In order to examine them it will be fair and realistic to set an exam myself than someone do it on my behalf as if he or she knows what was exactly taught.

Asked further as to whether this strategy was beneficial to teachers, one teacher from **School 2** responded that:

It was not beneficial because for instance common examinations were set by teachers from different schools and those teachers conspired to prepare what they have taught thereby disadvantaging learners from other schools. It is not correct.

Common schemes of work and examinations were introduced to ensure that all the learners in the district or province learnt at the same pace covering the same material and, in the end, examined on the material they had covered. In this study common examinations and schemes of work came out as one of the strategies that the ESOs had employed in order to improve the quality of education in relation to their evaluation and monitoring of teaching and learning. However, the findings in this study revealed that common schemes of work and examinations were not beneficial in the sense that learners

in different schools had different learning abilities and progressed at the different rates. Variations in school financial statuses, availability of teaching and learning resources such as textbooks, also posed a challenge to this strategy and initiative. It is interesting to note that this strategy seemed to have been arrived at without the involvement of teachers. This issue pointed to the aspect which Mwanza and Mulenga (2018) noted in their study that generally good initiatives about curriculum implementation failed to take root due to lack of teacher and school administrators involvement. Moreover, Fullan's (1991) model emphasised vision building as one of the premises of effective curriculum implementation. Taking decisions without involving key stakeholders such as teachers would result in what we see about common schemes of work and examination in Choma district.

6. Conclusion

Through their curriculum implementation strategies ESOs came up with a number of seemingly good practices, though most of them lacked well thought out considerations. Strategies such as subject associations, follow-up visits and recommendations and common schemes of work and examinations could all have been used to the advantage of curriculum implementation. However, they lacked clear implementation frameworks and considerations of different schools. As a way of helping teachers improve their teaching skills, ESOs gave a number of good recommendations following the traditional verbal method.

However, there seemed not to be measures put in place to ensure that the recommendations were implemented by teachers after school inspections. ESOs alluded to the fact that if evaluation and monitoring was to be done in a normal way, ESOs were supposed to go back to schools to check whether teachers had improved on the weaknesses pointed during the school inspections. It can then be concluded that while the strategies could have worked well, there was lack of a well thought out implementation plan bearing in mind that not all schools were the same. Additionally, the lack of follow ups by ESOs rendered all supervision exercises to be a routine and a fulfillment of Ministry of Education rules. When it comes to implementing curriculum, Fullan's (1991) model point to flexibility and innovativeness. Lesson demonstrations from ESOs could a very good practical way of sharing the innovations. However, this was another missed opportunity in this case. Every curriculum is not static since it is meant for a society which society itself is quite dynamic. It is for this reason that Fullan also noted that the dynamism of the curriculum should also be coupled with the dynamism of its implementation strategies. While the strategies employed by the stakeholders in the education sector were all well-intentioned but could not yield positive results because of their ineffectiveness.

Two main recommendations are made by the study. . Firstly, the government of the Republic of Zambia (GRZ) to fund the Ministry of Education adequately if curriculum implementation is to be effective. ESOs failed to do their work more effectively due to lack of resources. Secondly, ESOs should involve schools in coming up with curriculum implementation strategies because this would promote a common vision building and avoid making suggestions which may not reflect the realities in the schools.

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