

CHALLENGES FACED IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE LOCALIZED ADVANCED LEVEL GEOGRAPHY SYLLABUS: A CASE OF HARARE HIGH SCHOOLS.

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Abstract

The paper examines the challenges met in implementing the Localized 'A' Level Geography Syllabus. The study was conducted at 2006 in 52 Harare High Schools offering the localized 'A' Level Geography syllabus. The sample for the study consisted of 108 'A' Level Geography students, 54 'A' Level Geography teachers, 3 education officers and 14 former Geography 'A' Level students already enrolled at the University of Zimbabwe. The research used both qualitative and quantitative aspects of research. Data was analysed using the manual sort and count, grouping, coding, classifying and categorizing to identify trends and patterns as they were emerging. Thick description was also employed using information and excerpts from questionnaires, interviews, observations and document analysis. The major findings were that teachers are not using the new 'A' Level Geography syllabus in planning their lessons. Teachers are still using notes that they made from the previous syllabus and students' exercises, which are derived from the old syllabus. Teachers are not confident when teaching the new syllabus and in planning their lessons. The content in available textbooks is largely not relevant to the new 'A' Level Geography syllabus as some case studies are out-dated and that the textbooks do not have local and regional examples. Teachers are having problems in implementing the new 'A' Level syllabus as intended by the curriculum planners. The study recommends that teachers, as classroom practitioners, should discuss approaches in their districts or cluster workshops, seminars and staff developments on how to improve the implementation of this new 'A' Level Geography syllabus with a view to making them feel more confident in the teaching and learning of Geography.

Background to the study

The implementation of new programmes and curricular innovations is a critical component of educational research. The last five years in Zimbabwe have been a time of changes in all subjects of the secondary curriculum due to the localisation of the Advanced Level ('A' Level) curricular in 2002 (Chavhunduka & Moyo 2003). In some cases, there have been a general updating and rationalisation, while in others traditional subjects have been integrated. (ibid)

In Zimbabwe, from the colonial era up to the year 2000, the Cambridge University, as an external board ran 'A' Level examinations. The Zimbabwe School Examinations Council (ZIMSEC) took over in November 2002 (*Sunday Mail* 2004). The new syllabi were introduced in the wake of the localization of the 'A' Level examinations.

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In 'A' Level Geography, over and above sections A and B, a third section, section C was introduced and the topics were re-arranged. The new Syllabus 9156/1/2 was introduced in November 2002. A new topic in Physical Geography, "*Hazardous Environments*" and a new topic in Human Geography, "*Environmental Management*," were introduced. New content was added, and some of the older content removed. A particularly noteworthy addition was the inclusion of human impacts at the end of each major topic (ZIMSEC 'A' Level Geography syllabus 2003). The development of the new syllabus also affected the structure of the questions in both papers in that each question now considers Bloom's taxonomy of questioning techniques where all abilities are tested in one question using structured questions. The concentric approach is greatly emphasized. (ibid)

The aim of these changes was to capture contemporary issues such as global warming, environmental issues and disasters and relate the subject's content to the interests, needs and context of Zimbabwean learners. This research seeks to find out approaches used in implementing the new localized 'A' Level Geography syllabus and challenges encountered. A syllabus may have a perfectly sound aims and objectives, which can be distorted in the implementation process. Gross (1990) reports that lack of understanding of the new roles to be played by the teacher, students, absence of training facilities and school organization may fail to respond sufficiently. Insufficient physical resources and inappropriate teaching and learning groups are factors that militate against successful implementation of curricular innovation. This means that successful implementation of a new syllabus depends on the orientation of the implementers. Griffith and Howson (1996) advise that no matter how good a curriculum looks on paper, that curriculum becomes worthless if the whole spirit of the curriculum is lost in the translation into actual lessons. This implies that teachers may actually garble the message intended as mediators during the implementation of the syllabus. There seems to be a public outcry over discrepancies between curriculum intent and curriculum reality.

Ottevanger (2001) notes that materials are produced to support teachers to implement new teaching strategies and whilst promoting such strategies, the materials are also meant to guide teachers in planning and actual teaching of lessons in a way intended by the curriculum. This means that curriculum implementation materials are those that close the gap between the curriculum developers and the curriculum implementers, that is facilitating the new curriculum or new intentions to be carried out in a way as close to what the developers intended as possible. The study will establish how the available materials in schools are helping in implementing the localized syllabus.

The curriculum may be seen as made up of three components; the intended curriculum which is drawn up in the form of syllabus policy statements, teaching materials and the implemented curriculum which is the most important part that the attained curriculum or what the learner has actually learned (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2001).

In a study of the school curriculum by Jaji and Nyagura (1989) noted that the attained curriculum clearly shows divergence from the intended curriculum. In other words what the syllabus is intended to achieve and what is attained is different. Winter (1998), in his study of science education in Asia, pointed out that some of the greatest problems of curriculum reforms are examinations. The author cites external examinations as the major obstacle to development

of science education courses, which are relevant to the local situations. In other words, the curriculum has to be relevant to the needs of students, teachers and society but the question lies on whether the new syllabus is effectively implemented, and how examinations constrain adoption of curriculum innovations. In view of these challenges, Geography teachers have multiple responsibilities in syllabus implementation. They must help students learn some of the accumulated knowledge by human kind and they must help them to acquire skills for the acquisition and discovery of new information. In addition, they must also help students acquire more general problem solving communication and social skills. It is therefore, essential to assess the implementation of the new 'A' Level Geography syllabus.

Munowenyu (1997) assessed the ability and needs of teachers for the implementation of Geography in Zimbabwe. He assessed teachers' perception of the practical Geography kit, which was distributed to secondary schools in Zimbabwe from 1989 to 1990. The study explored the kit's influences on promoting the use of fieldwork in the teaching and learning of Geography in the country. The findings were that the Geography kit was not fully utilized as was intended in the teaching and learning of fieldwork. In some schools, the instruments were gathering dust in the storerooms. Teachers have inadequate training in how to use the Geography kit. This has motivated the researcher to find out whether the new 'A' Level Geography syllabus is being implemented as intended and to establish whether the teacher uses the available resources to plan their lessons.

On the role of instructional materials in syllabus implementation, Nieveen (1999) asserts that practicality was viewed with respect to the ability of the material to stimulate learning content through contextualization of subject content, use of locally available materials and support for learner-centred teaching and learning. Specifically, the study seeks to determine the practicality of the new syllabus and how it is being implemented. Textbooks are viewed in terms of their functionality, that is, their ability to facilitate the teaching and learning process as intended by the syllabus.

Exemplary curriculum materials have been produced in a number of curriculum innovations. Ottevanger (2001) asserts that in these innovations, materials were produced to support teachers in implementing new teaching strategies. This implies that whilst promoting such strategies, the instructional materials must be produced to guide teachers in planning lessons in a way intended by the syllabus developers. Such materials or textbooks are effective if they contain procedural specifications for both teachers and students. The study sought to establish the usefulness of the available textbooks to the teachers and students and find out whether content in the available textbooks is relevant to the new 'A' Level Geography syllabus.

It was against this background that this study sought to find out how the Localized 'A' Level Geography Syllabus is being implemented in Zimbabwe. Specifically, the study sought to answer the following research questions.

- a) What challenges do schools/teachers face in syllabus implementation?

- b) How are the teachers prepared before syllabus implementation?

Methods

Research design and Sample

The research used both qualitative and quantitative aspects of research to enable the researcher to collect both qualitative and quantitative data from schools offering localized 'A' Level Geography syllabus. The qualitative research methods allowed the researcher to pursue themes emerging from the data, during the research process. Lincoln and Guba (2000) assert that qualitative research is concerned with the process rather than simply with outcome of products. Quantitative methods were used to collect data through an inventory and checklist. The checklist includes available resources, textbooks, schemes of work and students' exercise books. The study was conducted in Harare High Schools offering localized 'A' Level Geography. The sample for the study consisted of 108 'A' Level Geography students, 54 'A' Level Geography teachers, 3 education officers and 14 former 'A' Level students already enrolled at the University of Zimbabwe. The respondents in the sample represented all the High Schools in Harare offering localized 'A' Level Geography.

Instrument

The main focus of the questionnaire to the 'A' Level Geography teachers and students was to find out the main challenges teachers, current 'A' Level students were facing and former 'A' Level students faced in implementing the syllabus and to investigate their experience in the Geography classroom. The questionnaire was also meant to establish the preparedness of the teachers before syllabus implementation. In- depth informal and formal interviews with the teachers, former students, current students and education officers were conducted to build up rapport, explore key aspects and probe deeper into emerging categories about the challenges schools/teachers are facing in syllabus implementation.

Procedure

A pilot test of the questionnaire and interview was done to teachers and students at three schools in Chitungwiza offering localized 'A' Level Geography. The researcher self-administered the questionnaire after getting informed consent from the respondents. The purpose of the research was explained to the respondents and procedures to be followed during the research. The researcher employed non-participant observation using schedules and checklist prepared in advance on the items to be observed. A number of relevant documents were analysed, these included the syllabus, textbooks used by teachers and students, previous examination questions, schemes of work and students' exercise books. Collected data was analysed using the manual sort and count, classified, categorized and trends and patterns analysed as they emerged. Thick descriptions were also employed using information from the questionnaire, interviews, observations and document analysis.

Results

Table 1: Summary of results from current ‘A’ Level Geography students’ questionnaire.

Question/Theme	Current students (2005-2006) (n=108)				
	SA	A	N	D	SD
a) I find it difficult to interpret the Geography ‘A’ level syllabus.	30(28%)	47(44%)	0 (0%)	23(21%)	8 (7%)
b) What is the extent of the relevance of the content in available textbooks to the new syllabus?	VG	G	P	VP	
	27(25%)	33(31%)	31(29%)	17(15%)	
c) What sections of the syllabus do you find most difficult to learn? List them in order of difficulty.	-1 st order 90% indicated Climatology and Hazardous environments. -2 nd order 81% indicated Hazardous environments, Sketch map and Fieldwork.				
d) What topics are given more time/attention in content coverage? Why?	Population, Settlement, Hydrology, maybe the topics are easy to teach, textbooks are readily available for the topics and they are interesting topics.				
e) Do you have books recommended for syllabus? (a) Yes (b) No	Yes		No		
	64 (59%)		44 (41%)		

KEY

Strongly agree (SA), Agree (A), Neutral (N), Disagree (D)& Strongly disagree (SD)
Very good (VG), Good (G), Poor (P) & Very poor (VP).

The results from the current ‘A’ Level Geography students reveal a number of outcomes from the respondents:

The ‘A’ Level Geography students are having problems in understanding the new ‘A’ Level Geography syllabus. Seventy-two percent indicated that they find it difficult to interpret the Geography ‘A’ Level syllabus.

The current ‘A’ Level Geography students thought the extent of relevance of the content in available textbooks is very little as to the requirements of the syllabus.

The students were also asked to list sections of the syllabus that they found most difficult to learn and 90% of the students indicated that they found *Climatology* and *Hazardous Environments* difficult to learn and were in the first order of the list. In the second order of the list, 81% indicated they found *Hazardous Environments*, *Sketch Map* and *Fieldwork* difficult to learn. They also reported that they found *Geomorphology*, *Manufacturing*, *Biogeography*, *Environmental Management* and *Structural Landforms*, difficult to learn.

However, the current ‘A’ Level Geography students elaborated that the textbooks do not have local and regional examples, case studies are outdated and that there were topics that were not well covered in the textbooks, which include, *Mapping* and *Fieldwork*, *Hazardous Environment* and *Environmental Management*. Former ‘A’ Level students also supported

this by revealing that the textbooks available were not adequate though in schools, D. Waugh: “An Integrated Approach” and M. Carr: “New Patterns: Process and Change in Human Geography” were 100% and 85% respectively in order of their availability. But of major concern was the absence of B.J. Lennon and P. G. Cleves; “Techniques and Fieldwork in Geography” and J. M. Pritchard: “Practical Geography for Africa” which were 27% and 18% respectively. The above textbooks form the basis of both Sketch map and Fieldwork at ‘A’ Level Geography. Fifty-five percent of the students mentioned in the interview that they shared or are sharing textbooks in Geography classes.

Table 2: Summary of results from former ‘A’ Level Geography students’ questionnaire.

Question/Theme	Former students. (2004 & before) (N=14)	
a) What is the extent of the relevance of the content in available textbooks to the new syllabus?	-No relevance 62%.	-With relevance 38%.
b) Did your teachers cover all topics in the syllabus? Elaborate.	Yes 3 (21%)	No 11 (79%)
	<u>Elaboration</u> Only one optional topic was covered.	
c) What topics were given more time/attention in content coverage? Why?	Hydrology, Fluvial processes, Settlement and Population-they had available textbooks in the school, and teachers had resources on these topics. They are easy topics to teach.	
d) Did you have books recommended for syllabus? (a) Yes (b) No	Yes	No
	4 (28%)	10 (72%)

The former ‘A’ Level Geography students who sat for the 9156 syllabus and were given a questionnaire and interviewed indicated that they wrote ‘A’ Level Geography examinations in 2003 and 2004. Former ‘A’ Level Geography students indicated that the available textbooks used had little relevant content to the requirements of the syllabus.

The students revealed that teachers were not covering all topics in the syllabus, teachers covered only three core topics in both Physical and Human Geography papers instead of four and only one optional topic was taught instead of two which are recommended by the syllabus.

The results also reveal that 64% of the former ‘A’ Level Geography students indicated that the topics “*Population Geography*” and “*Hydrology*” were given more time in content coverage and were listed in the first order. The same topics were placed in the second order with about 57% indicating that they are given more attention in content coverage. The findings revealed that these topics were given more time or attention because the topics are either easy or that the information is readily available in the textbooks.

Table 3: Summary of results from ‘A’ Level Geography teachers’ questionnaire.

Question/Theme	‘A’ level Geography teachers responses (n=54)	
a). Are you confident when teaching the new syllabus and in planning lessons? a)Yes b)No	Yes 20 (39%)	No 34 (61%)
b). What is the extent of the relevance of the content in available textbooks to the new syllabus?	-No relevance 37 (63%)	-With relevance 17 (37%)
c). What sections of the syllabus do you find most difficult to teach? List them in order of difficulty. Reasons	-39% indicated Sketch maps and Fieldwork -29% hazardous environments and environmental management -29% Climatology, Biogeography and Geomorphology Operate without recommended books; content in textbooks has little relevance.	
d). Where do you derive your objectives and students’ tests and exercises? a) Old syllabus b) New syllabus	New syllabus 23 (42%)	Old syllabus 31 (58%)
e). Do you have books recommended for the syllabus? (a) Yes (b) No	Yes 17 (33%)	No 32 (67%)
f). Was a try-out stage done at your school before implementation of the new syllabus? (a) Yes (b) No	Yes 0 (0%)	No 54 (100%)
g). Did you attend any in-service training on how to implement the new ‘A’ Level Geography syllabus?	Yes 0 (0%)	No 54 (100%)

From the teachers questionnaire only 39% indicated that they are confident to teach the syllabus. Teachers were asked to list sections of the syllabus that they found difficult to teach and indicated that they found “Sketch map and Fieldwork” difficult to teach and others found “Hazardous Environments” and “Climatology” difficult. They also reported that Biogeography, Geomorphology and Environmental Management were difficult to teach. Reasons outlined were that of relevant textbooks which tackle the content as required by the ‘A’ Level Geography syllabus.

A matter of very grave concern is that when asked if they had recommended textbooks, 67% indicated they were teaching without recommended textbooks. Only 33% indicated that they had relevant textbooks. Geography teachers revealed that neither a try-out stage nor in-service teacher training was done on the implementation of the localized ‘A’ Level Geography syllabus.

Results from Interviewing Education Officers

The Education Officers from ZIMSEC, Curriculum Development Unity (CDU) and Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture also revealed that neither a try-out stage nor in-service teacher training was done. This was blamed on the lack of finance and human power on the part of the government. This has resulted in teachers lacking confidence in the implementation of the new localised 'A' Level Geography syllabus. However, the Ministry of Education Sport and Culture is making an effort to encourage teachers to organize themselves into cluster groups and discuss problematic topics in the subject.

The education officers from ZIMSEC said the syllabus was implemented as intended since 70% of the content was accessible to the teachers. This was deduced from the examiners' reports of the previous examinations. The education officers from CDU and Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture revealed that there were no follow-ups after the production of the syllabus. The CDU officer indicated that it was the duty of the Ministry of Education Sport and Culture to make a follow-up on how syllabi are implemented, whilst the officer interviewed from that Ministry complained about the lack of finance and shortage of work force. When asked whether teachers were confident in implementing the new syllabus, there were no clear answers, since there was no follow-up to the schools. However, the education officers from ZIMSEC and Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture mentioned topics that teachers are facing challenges in teaching such as *Hazardous Environment*, *Environmental Management*, *Sketch map*, *Fieldwork*, *Climatology* and some Optional topics such as *Glacial* and *Peri-glacial Environments* and *Coastal Environments*.

In the development of the new localized 'A' Level Geography syllabus, only six high school teachers were involved which is 9% of the Geography 'A' Level teachers in Harare. The six teachers were in fact representing the whole nation. A representative sample of the teachers was not used in developing the syllabus.

Results from Lesson Observations

The lesson observations and exercise books analysis revealed that 63% of the teachers' schemes of work used the new 'A' Level Geography syllabus, whilst 25% were still using the old syllabus and 12% were using both. On trying to establish where the objectives were derived from, 56% of the teachers were using the new 'A' Level Geography syllabus content topics, 25% were using the textbooks content topics and 19% were using the old syllabus content topics. Only 45% of the teachers' schemes of work for lessons met the goals and objectives of the syllabus whilst 55% were not.

Results from Document Analysis

The students' exercise books revealed that of the written exercises, homework and research assignments, 17% were taken from the past examination question papers Syllabus 9056 before November 2002 and 9% from the past examination question papers Syllabus 9156 after November 2002. Fifty-eight percent of the questions were taken from the textbooks and hence most of the questions were not derived from the syllabus objectives. Sixteen percent

of the questions were set neither from the past examination question papers nor textbooks but were set directly from the 9156 syllabus objectives.

For the students' test, 49% were from the 9056 past examination question papers the old syllabus, and 23% were taken from the 9156 past examination question papers the new syllabus and 28% of the test questions were taken from the textbooks.

Discussion

The findings from both current and former 'A' Level Geography students reveal that teachers are not covering all the topics in the syllabus. In light of this, teachers should teach all the topics in the syllabus in order to give the students a wide choice of questions in examinations or follow the syllabus guidelines. Winter (1998) pointed out that the greatest problems of curriculum reforms are examinations. If all topics in the syllabus are not covered this will leave students with a narrow choice of questions in the examinations and it will affect the quality of results in Geography. There are some topics in the new 'A' Level syllabus that both teachers and students regard as easy and others they regard as difficult.

The findings from the teachers and students indicate that the content in the available textbooks had little relevance to the requirements of the syllabus and most of the recommended textbooks are not available in the schools. Heyneman, Forrel and Sepulveda-Suardo (1985) say, on the issue of textbooks availability and their extent in relation to relevance, deficiencies in the availability of such essential materials such as textbooks have very adverse effects on academic achievement in Geography. This was likely to affect the performance of the students in the learning of Geography. Provision has to be made of the recommended textbooks with relevant content that caters for the requirements of the syllabus.

Results in Table 1 and Table 2 seem to indicate that there is a close correlation between topics found difficult to teach by the teachers and the topics found difficult to learn by the students. There are no recommended textbooks for these same topics. This affects the teaching and learning of Geography. Ottevanger (2001) and Cochran-Smith & Lytle (2001) noted the importance of support materials to support teachers in implementing new teaching strategies.

The findings from the education officers indicate that neither try-out stage nor in-service teacher- training were done before syllabus implementation. The education officers believe that teachers are capable of organizing themselves to undergo some staff development, since among them; there are experts and experienced teachers. Gross (1990), Griffith and Howson (1996) and Munowenyu (1997) suggested the idea of in-service training before implementation of any programme. The revelation by the education officers of no follow- ups to the syllabus implementation and lack of finance could mean that whatever is taking place, as far as the implementation of the new localised 'A' Level Geography syllabus is concerned, is not known by the responsible authorities.

On the approach used in the development of the new localised 'A' Level Geography syllabus, one would conclude that it was more of participatory rather than inclusion. Lockhard (2000) and Wright (1992) say that in developing new syllabi, all stakeholders must be actively involved. This means that the teachers' confidence will be built since they will be implementing what they would have developed. This will result in effective teaching and learning of Geography.

The document analysis results indicate that teachers are not using the new localized 'A' level Geography syllabus. Therefore, teachers need to undergo in-service teacher training through workshops and seminars on how to implement the new 'A' Level Geography syllabus. In scheming and deriving objectives the administrators should encourage teachers to use the current Geography syllabus following the goals and objectives of the syllabus. If there is no proper supervision, Shumba (1998) and Jaji and Nyagura (1989) explain that it will result in what they referred to as divergence of the intended curriculum from the attained curriculum.

The challenges faced by the teachers are quite genuine that if addressed, there would be an improvement in the quality of 'A' Level Geography results. There is need, therefore, to eliminate these challenges if all parties who play an important role in improving the teaching and learning of Geography are made aware of the challenges the teachers and students are facing.

Implications and Recommendations

The study highlights some challenges 'A' Level Geography teachers and students are facing in implementing the new localized 'A' Level Geography syllabus. Since neither induction nor in-service of teachers was done when the new localized 'A' Level Geography syllabus was introduced, teachers are not confident in implementing the localized syllabus. In view of the challenges faced in implementing the new localized syllabus teachers, as classroom practitioners, should chart the way forward on how best to implement the localized 'A' Level Geography syllabus as enunciated by the national curriculum policy. Teachers are encouraged to use the objectives from the new localized 'A' Level Geography syllabus to set their exercises and tests. Syllabus developers are encouraged to include teachers when developing new syllabi. There is need for the try-out stage and in-service training for teachers before syllabus implementation. There is need for practical examinations in the form of projects to be done internally. There is also need for subject education officers at district levels in order for them to supervise the teaching and learning of Geography and that the examiners' reports be published timeously every year. Teachers are encouraged to cover the whole syllabus, if the candidates are to have a wide choice of questions to answer in the examinations. Local scholars should be encouraged and supported to write textbooks, research papers with current information and case studies, which includes local, regional and global examples. The internet will assist to provide the most recent materials and journals can be purchased and teachers will have relevant information. It is the contentions of this study that if the challenges teachers are facing are addressed, this will result in a smooth implementation of the syllabus and yielding of quality results.

Conclusion

The findings from this study suggest that the majority of the 'A' Level teachers are encountering challenges in implementing the new localized 'A' Level Geography syllabus. There was neither a try-out stage nor in-service training done before implementing the new localized syllabus. Some respondents reveal that they are not confident in implementing the localized 'A' Level Geography syllabus. There is also evidence from the findings that there are topics, which are difficult to teach and to learn, for example, Climatology, Hazardous Environments, Fieldwork and Sketch map. Teachers do not adequately cover some topics. Some topics are given wider coverage than others and hence there is inadequate coverage of all the topics in the syllabus by the teachers. The content available in textbooks is, to a greater extent, not relevant and case studies are out-dated.

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