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ORIGINAL RESEARCH

Curriculum leadership and support for enhanced economics curriculum implementation

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Abstract

This study aims to report on the nature of curriculum leadership and support provided to Economics teachers by departmental heads in order to enhance Economics curriculum implementation within Mediated Learning Experience (MLE) theoretical framework. Underpinned by an interpretive paradigm, the study adopted a qualitative case study approach. The study employed purposive sampling to select participants n=6, three departmental heads, and three Economics teachers based on their experience, knowledge, and understanding of the phenomenon under research. Data were generated through semi-structured interviews and were analysed using thematic analysis. The study revealed that departmental heads were providing curriculum leadership and support through moderation of assessment tasks, monitoring the assessment feedback provided to learners, observing teachers' lessons and providing feedback to teachers on how to better their lesson delivery, interpreting policy documents, and providing resources. However, the study also revealed that some departmental heads were not providing leadership and support in subject content matter and setting of assessments as they were not competent themselves. The study recommends continuous departmental heads-initiated training so that they are able to provide teachers with meaningful curriculum leadership and support to enhance Economics curriculum implementation.

Keywords: Assessment, Curriculum implementation, Curriculum leadership and support, Departmental heads, Economics education, Mediated learning experience.

Introduction

Education is key to the development of any nation. The quality of human resources a nation possesses is dependent on the quality of education learners are exposed to (Indrawan, Muntholib & Armida 2021). Teachers are the cornerstone of the quality of education and the quality of human resources a nation possesses (Asyiah, Muntholib, & Hakim, 2023). Teachers are expected to possess the knowledge, skills, and expertise to produce the much-needed high-quality human resource to solve the ever-increasing 21st-century global economic challenges. Teachers should possess adequate pedagogical content knowledge to effectively deliver the Economics curriculum if the knowledge, skills, and values embedded in the subject are to be realized. However, considerable literature points to ineffective Economics curriculum implementation across the globe, including in developed countries such as the United Kingdom (Darling-Hammond, Flook, Cook-Harvey, Barron & Osher, 2018), the Philippines (Cabautana & Dacles, 2021), and in developing countries such as Nigeria and South Africa (Manzi & Moreeng, 2023; Olebhiele & Oko, 2018). Some of the reasons advanced relate the inability of teachers to effectively deliver the Economics content to lack of content knowledge, lack of knowledge on how to use instructional resources meaningfully, and inadequate knowledge on how to assess learners and provide meaningful feedback amongst other reasons (Cabautana & Dacles, 2021; Olebhiele & Oko, 2018).

In an attempt to address some of the challenges faced by teachers in curriculum implementation, there is a growing body of literature that seeks to understand the impact of curriculum leadership and support provided to teachers by departmental

heads (Edwards-Groves, Grootenboer, Hardy, & Onnerman, 2019). Bryant, Ko & Walker (2019) and the Department of Basic Education (PAM) (2016) jointly posit that departmental heads are teachers who have been formally appointed to positions of authority at the school level to be responsible for a department or phase. These teachers are appointed on the basis that they are subject specialists and experienced (PAM, 2016). Departmental heads are the immediate supervisors of teachers and have the responsibility of leading, supporting, and monitoring curriculum implementation in their respective departments (Magnaye, Serrano & Serrano, 2023). Leithwood and Jantzi (1999) make us aware that in other countries like England, departmental heads are known as middle managers and curriculum coordinators. Without the guidance and support of departmental heads, teachers find it difficult to navigate through the ever-mounting curriculum demands and challenges (Lipscombe, Tindall-Ford, & Grootenboer, 2019) and consequently, learner academic achievement is adversely affected (Edwards-Groves, Grootenboer, Hardy, & Onnerman, 2019). This understanding that curriculum leadership and support immensely contribute to the improvement of curriculum implementation, management, and outcomes, has resulted in an increased interest in educational research on the practices of departmental heads in providing curriculum leadership and support to in-service teachers (Grootenboer, 2018).

Given the consensus in the literature that departmental heads' instructional leadership and support practices are more critical in improving curriculum implementation (Dania & Andriani, 2021; Hallinger & Hosseingholizadeh, 2019), it is important to explore the departmental heads' leadership and support practices. Whilst there is adequate research on instructional and leadership research for instance (Cahapay, 2022; Lipscombe, Tindall-Ford, & Grootenboer, 2019; Magnaye, Serrano & Serrano, 2023; Ogunode & Ajape, 2021; Tapala,Van Niekerk, & Mentz, 2021), amongst others, to the researcher's knowledge, only a few studies in South Africa (Hlatshwayo, 2021; Morowane, 2019) have focused on the curriculum leadership and support provided to Economics teachers by their departmental heads. Thus, this study sought to describe the curriculum leadership and support provided to Economics teachers to enhance Economics curriculum implementation in the selected schools in Northern Cape. In order to achieve this objective, the following research question was formulated: What leadership support is provided to Economics teachers to ensure proper Economics curriculum implementation?

Problem Statement

Although research on instructional leadership dominates the literature (Hallinger, Heck & Murphy, 2014; Leithwood, 2016), there is still poor implementation and supervision of the Economics curriculum in many countries ((Ohiare, Ogunode & Rauf, 2021); Ogunode & Richard, 2021). This poor Economics curriculum implementation and supervision might be accountable for the poor learner academic achievement. In South Africa, and in the Northern Cape Province in particular, learner academic achievement in Economics has been poor. The DBE National Senior Certificate (NSC) results for the past five years show that on average, only 28% of the learners who sat for the NSC Economics Examination managed to pass at 40% and above (DBE, 2018; 2019; 2020; 2021; 2022). The researcher has been a teacher for the past 10 years and has observed that departmental heads barely perform most of their duties for various reasons and is of the opinion that the lack of meaningful curriculum leadership and support by Economics departmental heads might be contributing to these shortcomings and predicaments in Economics.

Theoretical framework

This study is framed by the Mediated Learning Experience (MLE) theory. This theory owes its origins to social constructivism theory as espoused Piaget and Vygotsky (Tzuriel, 2011). Feuerstein developed MLE after spending many years working with marginalised children (Feuerstein & Lewin-Benham, 2012). Feuerstein extended the work of Piaget and Vygotsky who believed that learners construct knowledge through social interaction or with the environment. He, however, went further and discovered that the mediator played a more crucial role on how learners learn (Greenberg, 2010). In his view, there should be

deliberate mediation by peers, parents or educators for learning to take place.

Feuerstein's theory has 12 parameters, however the first four are crucial for mediation to take place (Feuerstein, Todd, Moskowitz, Bruns, Stoler, et al., 2010).These parameters include intentionality, reciprocity, mediation of meaning and transcendence. Intentionality has to do with the intent of mediator on when and what to mediate (Greenberg, 2010). It focuses on changing awareness, attention and reaction. Reciprocity is the verbal or non-verbal response by the learner to the mediator's efforts (Tzuriel, 2011). Mediation of meaning is when mediators facilitate learners' reflection on how they found the solution to the problem and the generalisations that can be made. Transcendence refers to how the learner is able to connect what they are learning to other situations (Tzuriel, 2011).

Feuerstein posit that an intentional, reciprocal mediator manipulates the learner, the task and his own mediational activities (Killen, Lee-Kim, McGlothlin & Stangor, 2002) .Equally for Economics teachers to enhance their implementation of the Economics curriculum, in this study, the departmental heads had to manipulate the teachers, the task and their own mediational activities. The mediator thus is an activist interventionist and therefore departmental heads were deemed as activist interventionists to mediate between the support and leadership needed in Economics curriculum implementation and the teachers (Lidz, Bond & Dissinger,1991). Mediated Learning Experience advocates for cooperative learning since learning is a social activity (Killen, Lee-Kim, McGlothlin & Stangor, 2002) .Equally for Economics teachers to enhance their implementation of the Economics curriculum, there is need for them to share knowledge and learn from their departmental heads and peers. The mediation done by departmental heads should be goal seeking, goal setting and goal achieving. It should provide guidance for teachers to be able to effectively implement the Economics curriculum (Killen, Lee-Kim, McGlothlin & Stangor, 2002) .It is also important to note that for the purposes of this study, these parameters will be viewed as intertwined and not as stand-alone parameters.

Literature review

Research on curriculum leadership and support is not new in the literature. In Malaysia, Ghavifekr and Ibrahim (2014) conducted a study on the effect of the instructional supervisory role of departmental heads. The study findings revealed that departmental heads influenced teachers' curriculum implementation effectiveness. This influence was through developing and providing support to the teachers so that they can enhance their professional performance. The study emphasized the need for departmental heads to be practicing teachers so that they are able to provide valuable information on how curriculum implementation can be enhanced. In the same study, data revealed that those departmental heads who provided meaningful instructional resources and facilitated professional development had a huge impact on the effectiveness of teacher practices and effective curriculum implementation. Related to the above study on the effect of curriculum leadership and support provided by departmental heads, Morowane (2019) examined the role of contextual intelligence in leading the instructional program for Grade 12 Economics in South Africa. The study findings revealed that departmental heads neglect their duties of supporting teachers and monitoring how the Economics curriculum was implemented. The study suggested that departmental heads should provide leadership and support on what, how, and when to teach and assess. In addition, Ogunode and Richard (2021) conducted a study on the supervision of secondary school education in Nigeria. Their study revealed that there was a shortage of Economics supervisors in schools and as a result, people who are not competent to supervise the subject were appointed. This practice, they concluded, hindered quality control and support of Economics curriculum implementation and consequently resulted in poor learner academic achievement. The study recommended that more resources should be invested in equipping departmental heads with the necessary skills so that they are able to provide adequate curriculum support to the teachers.

In the next section, attention turns to the conceptualization of Curriculum implementation and Economics Education.

Curriculum Implementation

To Chacha and Onyango (2022), curriculum implementation is an activity performed by teachers to acquire a country's education objectives. For Ohibime, Mohammed, & Adebisi, 2023), curriculum implementation is putting a planned program that is meant to be learned in educational institutions into action. Curriculum implementation can also be conceptualized as the translation of the planned content, knowledge, and skills into operation (Ohiare, Ogunode & Rauf, 2021).To Nevenglosky (2018), it is putting the planned curriculum into action. In the view of Ramli, Sudadi & Afendi, 2023) curriculum implementation refers to the realization of curriculum plans, values, and the learning process which are aimed at changing the learners' behaviour. Key to these definitions is that curriculum implementation involves putting into action a planned program. For the purposes of this study curriculum implementation is conceptualized as the act of executing a learning program. It refers to the actualization of the intended knowledge skills and values into practice. It is when learners in a learning environment experience learning programs.

Economics Education

Economics is a discipline that is concerned with how people use available resources by making choices based on the alternatives available to make a living (Ogunode & Tanimola, 2023). It is a social science because it deals with human behaviour. Economics concerns itself with business, government, and household activities such as production, consumption, and exchange (Ogunode & Ibidiran, 2021). The study of Economics equips learners with analysis, critical thinking, creative thinking, and problem-solving skills (Idika, 2021). These skills are necessary for the 21st century as we now leave in the global world. Learners should be responsible global citizens who are able to survive and solve the challenges of the global world. Through the study of Economics, learners are able to function as citizens of society, country, and global world. They will have an appreciation that resources are scarce and as such people have to sacrifice some of their needs and wants. The subject also alerts learners of the consequences of their actions on the environment and develops an appreciation of conserving resources so that future generations can also benefit.

The roles and responsibilities of departmental heads as instructional leaders and supporters of curriculum implementation include planning and provision of resources, curriculum management, assessment and monitoring (Bush, 2014). In the following section the aforementioned roles and responsibilities of departmental heads are discussed.

Planning and Provision of Resources

As instructional leaders, departmental heads should collaboratively plan with the teachers in their departments on how and when they will implement the curriculum and assessment tasks according to policy direction (Mampane, 2017). Planning is on two levels. The first is at a departmental level which involves formulating curricular vision and goals and convincing teachers to work towards the intended vision (Thorpe & Bennet-Powell, 2014). Through engaging with teachers on curriculum, assessment, and instructional strategies a sense of collegiality is cultivated, and the shared vision and goals may act as an incentive to motivate teachers to give their best in Economics curriculum implementation (Irvine & Brundrett, 2017; Sayed & Macdonald, 2017). The second level of planning is at the classroom level where decisions are made on the content to be taught, the teaching strategies to be implemented, and the instructional resources to be used (Aydin, Ozfidan, & Carothers, 2017).; Ulusoy & Incikabi, 2021), and the forms of assessment to be administered to achieve the intended objectives (Tataroglu-Tasdan, Tekin Dede, & Yiğit Koyunkaya, 2022). Although the second level of planning primarily rests on the teachers' shoulders, departmental heads are expected to offer support to teachers to ensure effective curriculum implementation (PAM, 2016).

Instructional resources are pivotal in enhancing curriculum implementation as they

enable learners to comprehend concepts with ease, therefore, they should be purposefully and carefully selected (Cevikbas ,Konig & Rothland, 2023). It is documented in the literature that departmental heads should organize instructional resources that support teaching and learning (PAM, 2016).

Curriculum Implementation and Management

Departmental heads should focus on activities that are related to ensuring that meaningful teaching and learning take place rather than focusing on management activities (Bryant, 2019). The focus should be on activities that support better and more effective curriculum implementation through sharing experiences and working collaboratively with teachers on curriculum articulation (Bryant, Ko & Walker 2019). Capacity building has the effect of enhancing the quality of teaching and learning in Economics (Marishane, Marishane & Mahlo, 2015). This is a result of teachers having been empowered to have good knowledge of the subject as well as cognitive and pedagogic competencies. The plausible argument here is that effective teaching and learning are achievable when departmental heads are instructionally located closer to the classroom (Morwane, 2019). It is the understanding of DBE that a departmental head should be an expert in the subject and someone who is able to conduct staff development workshops for his/her colleagues (Mthiyane, Naidoo, & Bertram, 2019).The implication here is that once departmental heads identify a gap in teachers' practices, they should be able to intervene and support the teacher.

Assessment Setting and Monitoring of Marking

Assessment is a key contributor to the discourse on improved teaching and learning (Van der Merwe, 2016). It cannot be separated from teaching and learning as it forms part of instruction and gives feedback to parents. For an assessment to be meaningful, it should be properly designed and evaluated (Brown, 2019). Sometimes teachers struggle with setting and assessing assessment tasks and require support (Brown, 2019, Motsoeneng, Manzi & Morning, 2023). It is the duty of departmental heads to provide this support at the school level (PAM, 2016). Departmental heads are expected to provide and contribute to the professional development of the teachers at the school level and with other professional bodies outside the school (Dinham, 2007). This includes on–school support such as workshops, and professional networking to ensure that teachers are competent in setting quality assessments and that marking is done fairly and just (Shirrell, Hopkins & Spillane, 2019).

Methods

This study adopted a qualitative research design underpinned by the interpretive paradigm to answer the research question: What curriculum leadership and support is provided to Economics teachers for enhanced Economics curriculum implementation? The interpretive paradigm believes that reality is socially constructed and that there are multiple realities that people can construct. (Thanh & Thanh, 2015). The researchers intended to explore the curriculum leadership and support provided to Economics teachers; therefore different departmental heads and teachers gave their own interpretations of what kind of support they provided and were provided. A multiple case study research methodology was employed to get in depth information from the three purposefully selected departmental heads and three purposefully selected teachers from three research sites. Multiple case study allowed the researchers to capture the individual departmental heads' lived experiences and realities on the nature of support, they provided to Economics teachers as well as how the selected Economics teachers perceived the support they received from the departmental heads(Allan, 2020).

Sampling

All departmental heads in the Northern Cape constituted the population, however, the researchers used purposeful sampling to select the participants for this study. In purposive sampling, participants are selected based on the researchers' personal judgment that the selected participants have the knowledge, experience, information and qualities needed to answer the research questions (Rahi, 2017).In selecting the participants for this study, the researcher deemed the selected departmental heads and Economics teachers to

have an in-depth knowledge about how leadership and support are being provided to Economics teachers in the selected schools.

The three research sites were purposefully selected based on the variances in the academic performance of the Grade 12 Economics National Senior Certificate results. All the teachers and Departmental Heads selected had some form of professional teacher qualification which ranged from Diploma in Secondary teaching to Bachelor of Education. Site A, where Teacher A was working, led by DH1 has been obtaining a pass percentage of 80% for the past five years. Research site B is where Teacher B and DH2 are based. This school has been obtaining Economics pass rate of 60-70% for the past five years and research site C is where Teacher C and DH3 have been working for the past six years. At this site, the Grade 12 Economics pass rate has been below 50% for the past five years.

As the researchers collected data through face to face semi-structured interviews, the researchers were searching for purposeful (intentional) practices by departmental heads to enhance Economics curriculum implementation. The MLE theory is not only based on teaching and learning; it also concerns itself with how curriculum and leadership support is rendered to the teachers. Semi-structured interviews enable the researcher to ask open-ended questions and probe the participants' responses for further clarity (Magaldi & Berler, 2020).The semi- structured face to face interviews were conducted with each departmental head and teacher separately. The researchers pre- arranged with the participants on the days and times the interviews were to be conducted. The interviews were conducted either on the free periods of the teachers and departmental heads or after school. Each interview lasted about 50 minutes. These semi- structured face to face interviews were audiotaped, and transcribed word-by-word. The researcher asked further questions on curriculum leadership and support provided to Economics teachers based on information that emanated from the discussions with the participants. To minimize mental tiredness as warned by Adams & Lawrence (2018), interviews only were conducted once for fifty minutes with each of the participants. The interview discussions were audio recorded so that every detail of the interview was not missed. In order to make sense of the shared meanings and experiences of the participants as indicated by the data, the researchers made use of thematic analysis. Emerging themes and sub-themes were identified based on the data from interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2013. The final stage involved the researcher analysing data inductively and deductively (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

It is ethical practice to seek permission before conducting research (Creswell, 2014). Ethical considerations were conformed to as the researcher first sought and was granted ethical clearance from the University of the Free State ethics committee (UFS-HSD2021/1088/21). The researcher also obtained permission from the Northern Cape Department of Education, the principals of the research sites, and the departmental heads. To address the credibility of the study findings, the researcher used peer debriefing and member checking (Maree, 2007) and colleagues were asked to do critical peer checks on the interpretation of data (Rule & John, 2011). More so, the research participants were requested to verify whether the analysis and interpretation of data was a true reflection of what they had said in the interviews (Rule & John, 2011)

Findings and Discussion

This section reports on the codes of meaning; Lesson planning, Setting of assessment tasks, Feedback and Comments on Learners' work, Monitoring classroom instruction and curriculum support, Interpretation of Policy documents, and provision of resources that emerged from data analysis of the face to face semi-structured interviews in conjunction with available literature and the theoretical framework to examine the curriculum leadership and support provided to Economics teachers for enhanced Economics curriculum implementation.

Lesson Planning

Cevikbas, Konig & Rothland (2023) postulate that lesson planning is critical to effective curriculum implementation. It is the initial phase of a lesson where the teacher decides on the objectives to be achieved, the strategies and the material to be used. The objectives to be achieved should be measurable and cater to all cognitive levels from

low, middle to high-order skills (Aydin, Ozfidan, B & Carothers, 2017).Well-formulated objectives help to give feedback to the teacher on whether learners learned or not (Ulusoy & Incikabi,2021, Manzi & Moreeng, 2023).

Notwithstanding the above, the findings of this study revealed that there was no consensus from the teachers on the support that was provided to them by their departmental heads. Teachers A and C were struggling with lesson planning and needed support in this regard, yet it was not forthcoming, however, Teacher B applauded his departmental head for the support he was providing on lesson planning. Teacher A confessed his challenges with lesson planning:

I am still new and trying to find my feet, I don't know how to design my own lesson plans with proper SMART objectives.

The challenge of lesson planning was not only peculiar to Teacher A, Teacher C also experienced challenges with lesson planning. She confessed:

As someone who majored in Business Studies, designing solid lesson plans with proper objectives, strategies, and adequate content for the fifty-minute period is a nightmare for me.

When the researcher asked how departmental heads were supporting their teachers with lesson planning, DH1 had this to say:

I assist my teachers by downloading lesson plans on the internet from other provinces and areas so that they don't have to spend time designing their own lesson plan.

DH1 was intentional in assisting his teachers with pre-planned lessons as he believed that those lesson plans will be properly formulated and the content paced accordingly. However, whilst DH1 thought he was assisting his teachers and reducing their responsibilities, this kind of assistance is against what the literature advocates for in terms of lesson planning (Author & Author, 2023; Tataroglu-Tasdan, Tekin Dede, & Yiğit Koyunkaya, 2022). Pre-planned lessons from other areas might not be relevant to the learners' context. Such practices defeat the principle of reciprocity as learners will not respond to stimuli that are not relevant to their context (Feuerstein, Todd, Moskowitz, Bruns, Stoler, et al., 2010).Lesson plans should be designed based on the abilities of the learners and the resources at the disposal of the teacher. When lesson plans do not relate to the learners' interest, context and abilities, curriculum implementation is affected negatively as learners lose interest in the lesson.

In contrast, teacher B was happy with the support he was receiving from his departmental head. He mentioned that he got assistance from his departmental head even though he was competent in lesson planning.

We always share good practices with my departmental head and discuss how to better lesson planning by making the lesson more learner centred and interesting. He is very supportive, sometimes we do lesson planning together.

The data set shows that there is heterogeneous support provided to Economics teachers by their departmental heads in terms of lesson planning. However, it should be noted that the assertion by Teacher B that they "share good practices with his DH" shows reciprocity which is one of the parameters of MLE. It also shows intention by both the teacher and the departmental heads to improve Economics curriculum implementation.

The setting of assessment tasks

Effective Economics curriculum implementation cannot be complete without meaningful assessment (Brown, 2019). The quality of assessment tasks set by teachers and the quality of marking is critical to the realization of effective curriculum implementation. Assessment is an integral part of teaching and learning as it serves to; inform teachers about the effectiveness of their teaching, inform learners about their progress, and help teachers to modify their teaching practices where necessary amongst other purposes (Yan & Yang, 2021). To ensure these purposes are recognized, there is a need for leadership and support on the quality of assessments set by teachers. Departmental heads seem to be appreciative of this as DH1 had this to say:

I moderate the assessment tasks set by teachers to ensure that they comply with the Blooms' taxonomy before they can be administered to the learners.

His assertions were supported by DH3 who opined that:

Assessment is an integral part of teaching and learning as it provides feedback primarily to the teacher, learner, and parents. I, therefore, make sure that assessments administered to the learners are of an acceptable standard.

From the data set, it emerged that departmental heads were alive to the fact that the quality of assessment tasks is critical to enhanced Economics curriculum implementation (Yidan & Partey, 2018). They also understood that assessment provides valuable information to different stakeholders (Khechane, Makara, & Rambuda, 2020). The intentionality of the departmental heads to ensure that assessments are of a good standard is underscored when DH3 said "I, therefore, make sure that assessments administered to the learners are of an acceptable standard". These mediational efforts by the departmental heads were to ensure that there is enhanced Economics curriculum implementation

Departmental heads acknowledged that it was their duty as leaders and supporters of Economics curriculum implementation to ensure that high-quality and meaningful assessments were administered to the learners. Thus, the mediational efforts they undertook to ensure that assessments were of high standards.

Whilst Teacher A acknowledged the efforts made by departmental heads to ensure that assessments of good quality were administered to the learners, he had this comment to make:

I get annoyed when I submit my tasks for moderation to my departmental head and they come back literally torn apart, green pen on every question. I feel belittled and as a result I have resorted to cutting and pasting questions from past question papers.

Similar sentiments were shared by Teacher C who postulated.

Honestly my departmental head is not supportive when it comes to setting assessments. He sticks to the moderation tool provided by the department but does not workshop me on how to set assessments as prescribed by policy.

The parameter of mediation in MLE theory supports that departmental heads should play a mediational role in supporting the teachers to effectively implement the Economics curriculum. Moreso, DBE clearly stipulates that departmental heads should take the responsibility of facilitating professional development for teachers (Nicholson, Capitelli, Richert, Bauer,& Bonetti, 2016), it was abundantly clear that teachers are not receiving adequate support in the setting of assessments. Departmental heads were more focused on the monitoring part of the quality of the assessments set by teachers and seemed to be neglecting the support part; where they either conduct workshops themselves or facilitate workshops where lead teachers or subject coordinators train teachers on this aspect. The failure to support teachers on setting assessment tasks results in ineffective curriculum implementation (Yan & Baud, 2021) as teachers might design assessments which do not provide them with meaningful feedback on how learners are progressing and how they can modify their teaching to enhance learners' understanding.

Feedback and Comments on Learners Work

Teachers have to provide constructive and timeous feedback to learners if the assessment is to be effective (Kruger, 2019). The PAM document issued by the Department of Basic Education (PAM, 2016) clearly states that departmental heads should ensure that the moderation and monitoring of all assessment tasks take place. Departmental heads, through moderation, ensure that marking is fair, accurate, just, and of acceptable standards. More so, of paramount importance to note is the importance of feedback to learners. It is vitally important that learners are provided with meaningful feedback and not just ticks so that they know where to improve (Khechane, Makara, & Rambuda, 2020; Walker, Oliver & Mackenzie, 2021). DH1 had this to say on the moderation of scripts:

I help my teachers in terms of quality marking of learners' scripts by discussing the differences in marks (if any) between the mark I get and the teachers mark.

I discovered that teachers appreciated the efforts of departmental heads in assisting them to be quality markers. Teacher B appreciated this by saying:

I was not comfortable with these discussions about marking. However, I realised that my departmental head does it for professional development purposes and I now welcome such initiatives.

He continued.

Sometimes when we discuss the mark differences, he also sees mistakes on how he would have moderated my scripts.

From the discussions, it was clear that departmental heads were intentionally supporting teachers in ensuring that the quality of marking was of acceptable standards. It was also clear that just as it is spelled out by the Department of Basic Education in the PAM document (PAM, 2016), Economics departmental heads were executing their monitoring and moderating assessments. The parameter of reciprocity is scored when Teacher B asserted that he welcomed the initiative of the departmental heads to engage the teachers after the moderation of scripts. With quality marking, assessment serves its purpose of guiding teachers on how to modify their teaching strategies as well establishing where learners are in terms of learning. This information is critical as it enhances Economics curriculum implementation.

DH3 had this to say on feedback:

I sometimes call individual teachers so that we discuss the feedback given to learners. Just putting ticks and marks on the learners' scripts is not enough.

From the data set, it emerged that departmental heads were also assisting teachers to give meaningful feedback to the learners. Departmental heads' assertion that providing learners with a mark alone is meaningless is in line with what is contained in the literature such as (Walker, Oliver & Mackenzie, 2021). Learners should be provided with comments on how they can improve their work and when they have achieved, they should be commented on what they did well. This deliberate (intentionality) effort by departmental heads is meant to improve teachers' practices so that Economics curriculum implementation can be enhanced. The discussions between the teachers and departmental heads align with the pillar of MLE theory of social construction of knowledge

Monitoring Classroom Instruction and Curriculum Support

Effective teaching and learning are dependent on regular monitoring of teachers' work (Ndungu,Allan, Bornett, & Emily, 2015). Monitoring acts as a yardstick to measure the degree to which teaching and learning are taking place. Mbiti and Kiruja (2015) conceptualizes monitoring as an ongoing process that aims to provide a report on the work underway. Departmental heads are not only tasked with providing feedback on the successes and failures of the teaching and learning process but also provide suggestions and support on how teaching and learning can be enhanced.

The data presented by the participants showed that departmental heads supported teachers in their classroom instruction practices as opposed to finding fault in teachers. However, some teachers needed more curriculum support on the content itself than on teaching strategies to use. Sadly, not all departmental heads could provide this support. On classroom monitoring, DH1 stated:

I visit teachers in their classes whilst they are teaching. My visits are meant to check on whether teachers are using appropriate strategies which engage learners in the learning process.

The same practice was taking place at the second research site where the departmental head (DH2) conducted class visits for support, he mentioned that:

My class visits are not a witch-hunt, they are meant to support the teacher to the best of my ability.

Whilst it is the duty of the departmental head to monitor curriculum instruction, it is also their responsibility to offer support (Pont, 2014). Teacher A under the supervision of DH1 confirmed what his departmental head had said:

I acknowledge the efforts of my departmental head in supporting me on the teaching strategies to use that appeal to the learners. However, the support I need is on some Economics concepts. I have challenges with Dynamics of markets graphs and my departmental head cannot assist.

When the researcher further probed him on why the departmental head could not assist, he had this to say:

He told me that he did not major in Economics, and he too does not know what is happening with those Dynamics of markets graphs.

It was interesting to note that Teacher C had a similar challenge with the graphing and calculations in the Dynamics of markets. However, what was different with teacher C is that she had taken initiative to get help from her peers.

My departmental head majored in Economics but rarely supports me in terms of my developmental needs because he is more focused on other managerial responsibilities, so I took it upon myself to look for assistance from my peers in neighbouring schools.

Teacher C's departmental head confirmed what Teacher C had said about his inability to assist the teacher with some Economics concepts. He attested:

As much as I want to assist my teachers, time is limited due to other managerial responsibilities.

Although departmental heads have the responsibility of providing leadership and support (Pont, 2014), it emerged from the data that not all departmental heads could do so as was the case with research sites where Teachers A and C were working. Important however to note was the initiative taken by Teacher C to ask for assistance from her peers. She intentionally sought assistance so that she is able to teach the content she was struggling with. This shows that mediational efforts are not only between the teacher and the learner but also between the teacher and the content to be taught. Seeking assistance from peers in encouraged by the MLE theory since the theory is anchored on social constructivism where knowledge is socially constructed.

Interpretation of Policy Documents Provision of Resources

The CAPS document and the National Protocol Assessment Practices provide direction on the content to be taught and the forms of assessment that learners should be exposed to (van Wyk, 2021). Principals, departmental heads, Subject Advisors, and teachers have to understand and interpret these documents accurately. As instructional leaders, it is the responsibility of departmental heads to assist teachers in interpreting and implementing the contents of these policy documents (PAM, 2016). It is also the duty of departmental heads to ensure that teachers have the necessary resources for them to effectively implement the Economics curriculum.

It was clear from the interviews that departmental heads were supporting Economics teachers to interpret and implement curriculum policies. There was evidence that they had face to face sessions with teachers to unpack the Economics curriculum documents.

DH1 said:

I ensure that every Economics teacher in my department has the CAPS document. I also make sure that I support teachers to comply with the CAPS document and the National Protocol of Assessment Practices.

In unison, DH2 added that as a departmental head, he was a policy interpreter and implementer as he stated:

I call for meetings with my departmental members where we interpret the departmental policies on the work to be covered, volume and nature of assessments to be given to learners in terms of formal tests, assignments, projects, informal activities, tests and homework.

All three teachers confirmed the assertions of the head of departments that they were provided support on the interpretation of policy documents (van Wyk, 2021). They also alluded to the fact that it was critical that they had the same understanding as their departmental heads on what was expected of them. More appreciative of this group's interpretation of the policy was Teacher A who posited:

I am a novice teacher, and it is very helpful for me when we sit and discuss these policy documents. It increases my confidence when I get in my class and start implementing what the policy says.

On the provision of resources, it emerged that departmental heads were supporting teachers to ensure that teachers had the resources needed to

implement the Economics curriculum. Confirmation of this support is witnessed when DH3 said:

I try my best to ensure that my teachers have the needed resources. I liaise with the principal and sometimes subject advisor to source resources which my teachers might be in need of.

The three teachers acknowledged that their departmental heads were supporting them in terms of resources. For instance, Teacher C appreciated the efforts of her departmental head when it came to the provision of resources. She acknowledged:

My DH (departmental head) is very resourceful and supportive, when I need internet connection for my lesson planning, he sometimes provides me with his router if the school internet is down.

She went further to say,

If there is an additional resource, I need like a textbook which the school does not have, he pushes the LTSM (Learning and Teaching Support Material) committee to place an order immediately. He doesn't rest until I have what I requested.

Literature provides that one of the duties of departmental heads is to provide resources to their teachers (PAM, 2016). The departmental heads in this study were conforming to what literature dictates as teachers applauded them for being resourceful. Providing resources is in line with MLE as the theory believes that mediation is not only done by the teacher, but resources too can be used to mediate between the learner and stimuli (Feuerstein, Todd, Moskowitz, Bruns, Stoler, et al., 2010).When teachers are provided with the necessary assistance, they are able to effectively implement the Economics curriculum and consequently result in enhanced Economics curriculum implementation.

Conclusion

This study sought to address the knowledge gap on how Economics departmental heads were providing curriculum leadership and support for enhanced Economics curriculum implementation in selected schools in the Northern Cape. The findings of the study revealed that departmental heads provided teachers with support in terms of moderation and providing feedback to the learners' written work, interpreting policy documents, assisting with teaching strategies, and providing resources for Economics teachers. It should however also be noted that departmental heads fell short in supporting teachers in certain aspects. In this study, some departmental heads could not meaningfully assist teachers with lesson planning as some departmental heads resorted to downloading pre-planned lesson plans from other provinces and areas for their teachers without taking the contextual differences into account. Strikingly was the failure of departmental heads to assist regarding content knowledge where some Economics teachers had challenges with certain concepts. Interesting to note was how some teachers had taken the initiative to look for assistance from their peers on the content which they had difficulty in teaching.

Recommendations

The study recommends that relevant support should be provided to departmental heads in terms of lesson planning, assessment, monitoring, and evaluation of teachers' daily classroom practices so that they are able to support their teachers. District officials, specifically subject coordinators should provide subject–related support to ensure that departmental heads have the requisite subject knowledge to support Economics teachers in their department. There is a need for further research to investigate the challenges faced by departmental heads in supporting Economics curriculum implementation in the selected schools and what support they need to overcome those challenges. Since the study was conducted in three schools, the findings of this study cannot be generalized to represent the curriculum leadership and support of all departmental heads in the Northern Cape. A larger study with a bigger population sample should be conducted in the future to get a broader perspective of the curriculum and leadership support provided by departmental heads.

Concluding remarks

With the ever-increasing economic challenges facing global economies and curriculum designers continuously adapting the Economics curriculum to address these challenges, it is prudent that Economics teachers are supported in terms of

content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, assessment practices, and resources. Departmental heads as immediate instructional leaders, need to exhibit unquestionable competence and appetite to support Economics teachers in effectively implementing the Economics curriculum for enhanced Economics curriculum implementation. The study findings have shown that to a larger extent, departmental heads are providing Economics teachers with curriculum leadership and support on many fronts.

Author Contribution

Both authors contributed to the writing of this article. First author: Introduction methodology, literature review, Theoretical framework , Findings and Discussions. Second author critical analysis of all sections and provided guidance and suggestions. Also assisted in data analysis. Both authors agreed on the final version.

Conflict of Interest

No conflict of interest is declared by both authors

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