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ORIGINAL RESEARCH

Exploring challenges of continuous assessment learning activities (CALA): the case of a selected primary school in Bindura Urban in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

The study examined the nature and extent of challenges faced during the implementation of Continuous Assessment Learning Activities (CALA), particularly focusing on one primary school in Bindura urban in Zimbabwe. The researchers employed the Centre-periphery model of curriculum change as the bedrock of the study. A qualitative research approach was adopted, which utilised the case study conducted at one selected primary school. The purposive and stratified sampling procedures were used, and yielded a sample of forty learners, four facilitators and four administrators. In-depth interviews and focus group discussions were employed as the data collection instruments. The results of the study revealed that learners and facilitators encountered challenges such as lack of materials, lack of training, large workloads, high teacher-to-pupil ratio, lack of knowledge and skills, lack of parental support, and too many tasks given. The results also revealed that stakeholders provided materials, and organised staff development workshops. These findings led to a conclusion that availability of resources, CALA awareness training programs, supervision of both learners and facilitators, involvement of all stakeholders, especially facilitators and parents in curriculum change could enhance the effectiveness of CALA implementation.

Keywords: Continuous Assessment Learning Activities (CALA); continuous assessment ; curriculum change; primary education

Introduction

A new curriculum, based in part on the Nziramasanga Commission's (1999) report, introduced an outcome-based and broad-based curriculum that connects school-related content to job-related skills in accordance with recent global trends (Dube & Jita, 2018). The Nziramasanga Commission's (1999) report had criticised the old curriculum, which was inherited from the Rhodesian government, for its heavy reliance on summative evaluation for assessment. Since 2014, the Zimbabwe Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE) has been engaged in an extensive national curriculum reform process to improve educational quality in Zimbabwe. A new competence-based curriculum framework was established in 2015 with a step-by-step implementation schedule, beginning in 2017. The new curriculum framework included several innovations that had far-reaching implications for all stakeholder levels (MoPSE, 2021). As part of the new curriculum implementation, learners would be graded on projects and tasks assigned during normal learning by their teachers, as well as the final examinations.

CALA was introduced in 2021 by the Zimbabwe School Examinations Council (ZIMSEC) as a candidate assessment procedure, which demands learners to exhibit their performance, proficiency, knowledge and understanding in their learning areas prior to the final examinations. CALA requires students to complete subject-related tasks and projects

in schools, which accounts for 30% coursework mark for the final examinations administered by ZIMSEC. This meant that students would be assessed on both course work and the final examination, as opposed to the past where they were only graded on the final examination. Continuous assessment acts as a learning evaluation strategy, which evaluates the performance or development of learners throughout a program. This helps to prevent the sole reliance on the tests written at the end of the academic year. Continuous assessment is a method of assessing the final grades of learners in the affective and cognitive performance areas over a set period of time. Therefore, it is a phenomenon which tests students on a regular basis throughout their schooling. Continuous assessment, as defined by Aboni in Nyamudzodza, Mthombeni, Siziba, Sifile, and Manuere (2021), is an evaluation method for the learners' competences in the acquisition of character, understanding, cognition in the knowledge learning activities using several instruments. Evaluation instruments include quizzes, interviews, observations, projects, tasks and examinations. Thus, continuous assessment is a method of acquiring student information from the school administration. It takes into account the periodic or termly performance of students in projects, tests, assignments and other educational activities. The assessment method emphasises allocating points to pieces of work done by the students. It also considers a variety of evaluation methods and modes, with the aim of improving and guiding the learning capacity and accomplishments of students. The entire thrust of CALA lies on integrating theory with practical experience.

Osadebe and Oghenekaro (2018) conducted research in Nigeria and found that lack of resources, use of unqualified teachers, and inadequate continuous assessment materials hindered the implementation of CALA in the Delta Central, Nigeria. Another study was conducted by Nyamudzodza et al. (2021) in Nyanga, Zimbabwend , and they found that the MoPSE had not planned and prepared properly before they introduced the CALA. Therefore, to promote the success of any initiative, funds should be budgeted for before its implementation. Funding could facilitate workshops from the grassroots levels, for example. Another study conducted by Sithole, Dziwa and Matsvange (2021) on the challenges of implementing the CALA in Masvingo, Zimbabwe, has found that too many learners' tasks were being demanded and this had inhibited the smooth take off of the program. Moreover, the findings revealed that teachers' stressful workloads affected curriculum implementation. Kasowe (2018) conducted a study in Guruve secondary schools to assess the factors affecting CALA implementation and found that stakeholders had a limited idea on the CALA concept and that ZIMSEC and the Ministry were dispatching conflicting information. Kasowe (2018) also found that there was over-assessment and scoring of learners, which led to malpractice. The literature on the African, regional and Zimbabwean context provides a yardstick against which to explore the challenges encountered at primary schools in Bindura and to compare if there are any similarities and differences. Exploring challenges encountered in the implementation of CALA in primary school settings in Bindura makes this research new and unique.

Given these and other facts, it is reasonable to assume and anticipate that the disruptive nature of CALA's introduction had far-reaching consequences for the student. The foundation of success in such initiatives is strong teacher engagement as educational reform implementers, successful implementation that relies on standard tools of interoperability and assessment, and state resources for workshops, as well as ample time for piloting the expected reforms before implementation. This study, therefore, sought to explore the challenges of implementing CALA and to come up with recommendations for effective CALA delivery in the Zimbabwean context.

The problem

Continuous assessment is an evaluation method for the learners' achievement and progress in educational situations, Its goal is to obtain the most accurate

picture of each learner's abilities, while also assisting each learner in developing his or her abilities to the fullest. CALA has been misunderstood to the point where it appears to be a burden that only adds to the workload of learners and facilitators. Thus, this study sought to explore the challenges of CALA at primary school level during the teaching and learning process, with a goal of making recommendations on how to achieve effective CALA.

The research question

What are the challenges of implementing CALA at primary school level?

Sub research questions

i. What are the challenges encountered by students when implementing CALA?

ii. What are the challenges encountered by facilitators when implementing CALA?

iii. How are the stakeholders working on strategies to alleviate the challenges posed in the implementation of CALA?

Theoretical framework

The study was guided by the Center-periphery model of curriculum change.

The models of curriculum change

This study examined the implementation of a new competence-based curriculum; therefore, the selected model should bring forth the relevant literature about the challenges encountered during CALA implementation. Since this study involves the implementation of a new Zimbabwean competence-based curriculum, the Center-periphery model of curriculum change was therefore useful in reaching at relevant findings. Hall and Hord (2006) argue that change is viewed as a process by which organisations and people gradually understand and become competent and skilled in the use of new methods. Carlson (1971) states that educational changes are changes in practices that alter instructional programs in order to provide better education to clients. Thus, the new competence-based curriculum introduced in Zimbabwe strives to put theoretical learning into practical learning through CALA initiative.

According to Havelock (1971) models that are used to outline the change procedure assist curriculum developers in understanding factors that inhibit or promote changes, resulting in more successful implementation. The curriculum changes in Zimbabwe on the implementation of CALA followed the power-coercive approach as it used the Centre-Periphery model because it exemplifies a top-down innovation movement. Goodson (1994) agrees that change in curriculum should be discussed by those who will have to implement it instead of imposing change on the implementers. In Zimbabwe, CALA implementation faced a lot of problems as teachers, the main actors, were hardly consulted in preparation for the implementation of CALA. Dalton (1988) concurs that teachers faced the burden of incompetence, meaning that if the teachers had not been trained and involved in the process of change they would not possess the skills needed for the new curriculum implementation. According to Koegh (1987), involving end users in the development of innovations and curriculum materials is critical because it can result in acceptance and this could increase the opportunities for effective implementation of CALA in the classroom.

The Centre-periphery model of curriculum change helped the researchers to understand the challenges that teachers, parents and learners faced in implementing CALA. The fact that the innovation was centrally controlled and imposed on the user system in a one-way manner, implied a wide gap between policy and practice, planners' expectations and the realities of change implementation. There is a high probability of having loss of credibility and lack of understanding of an innovation by the user system. The success or failure of an innovation is likely to be affected by lack of clarity, resources, skills and knowledge on the part of the user system. This model narrates the change process, and that has assisted the

researchers to examine the factors that promote or inhibit the implementation of CALA.

Literature review

The study highlights the literature on CALA, challenges faced by students in implementing CALA, challenges faced by teachers in implementing CALA, and literature relating to the strategies which stakeholders work on to alleviate the challenges posed in the implementation of CALA. This study also explores and highlights the existing gaps in knowledge.

Challenges of continuous assessment

Various studies indicate various types of challenges that face continuous assessment implementation.

Student-based problems

The COVID-19 outbreak hampered the implementation of the CALA initiative by disrupting the teaching and learning process, thereby leaving learners unprepared to write the final ZIMSEC examination. After schools opened, learners had more work to cover, which left them with inadequate time to concentrate on the CALA initiatives. According to Ellington and Earl (1997) continuous assessment may cause learners to believe that every mistake they made during the process would be counted against them, resulting in a different type of stress than which learners experience as a result of terminal assessment. There was high risk that students would be grossly over-assessed unless continuous assessment was carefully coordinated and planned, especially at certain times of the year. The Africa Press (2022) reviewed that facilitators were opposed to the programme's implementation, claiming that CALA disturbed the students' learning unnecessarily at a period when time was insufficient to cover the syllabi following the nationwide disruptions due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Learners had been stressed because they were attempting to catch up on their unfinished syllabi, while also dealing with the assigned CALAs that the facilitators did not fully understand as well (Sithole et al, 2021). The literature on students' workload tends to discourage learning, because it encourages a superficial rather than a deep approach to learning (Mukute, Burt, Francis & De Souza, 2020). Therefore, this literature is important in that it enables us to be aware of the challenges faced by students from other institutions versus the challenges faced by students in one Bindura urban primary school.

Teacher-based problems

According to Olufemi, Olufunbi and Kassim (2011), a study conducted in Nigeria found that the workload of teachers, differences in set standards between schools, lack of qualified facilitators and resources, and the issue of large classes were all barriers to the effective implementation of continuous assessment in Nigerian schools. According to Lawal, as cited in Ebhomien, Paul, Oriahi, Chrstie and Diahi (2012), there were numerous issues impeding continuous assessment practices, including an insufficient supply of teaching resources, a lack of tools for non-cognitive behavior, an inadequate supply of facilitators, a lack of technical experience on the part of facilitators, heavy teaching loads, insufficient time for testing and recording, a lack of enjoyment and test dodging by learners. Lack of training of facilitators to cover the aim of innovation appears to be a common issue in developing countries (Juli, 2017; McQuirter, 2020; Mandikiana, 2020). From Kasowe's (2018) study in Zimbabwe, there were significant differences between the continuous assessment principle and its practice, owing primarily to the backlog of tasks, teachers' limited understanding of CALA implementation, and contradictory information dispatched from both ZIMSEC and MoPSE. Vurayai (2022) asserts that facilitators are regarded as important role players in as far as implementing a new curriculum successfully is concerned. This is because they are the crucial means by which innovations are transformed into classroom realities (Vurayai, 2022). Facilitators are expected to embrace new ideas and incorporate them into their classroom instruction. For example, curriculum changes necessitate changes in teachers' practices (Mandikiana, 2020). According Mukute et al. (2020) training teachers is an important step in ensuring successful implementation because it

ensures that facilitators are aware of the changes and what steps to take to put them into action. The literature available on challenges faced by teachers provides a basis that enables us to view the challenges that teachers faced during the implementation of CALA in one primary school in Bindura and find ways to eradicate them.

Stakeholders' work on strategies to alleviate the challenges posed in implementation of CALA

Collopy (2003) argues that facilitator support resources are an essential part of facilitators' day-to-day work as they assist during the teaching and learning process. According to Stronkhorst and van den Akker (2006) curriculum resource materials are important in implementation as they shed light to facilitators on the implications of initiatives and innovations on how they can be implemented. Thus, this is very crucial in the take-off stages of implementation. Teachers' early implementation concerns are reduced when they have a clear vision about implementing the new curriculum (McQuirter, 2020). According to Mandikiana (2020), to support resource materials can be very educative because materials assist facilitators in their classrooms as they plan and structure the students' activities.

Another finding from facilitators was that the MoPSE had not properly planned before implementing CALA. To make sure that the initiative was successful, the MoPSE should have reserved funds for CALA implementation. Moreover, it was necessary to conduct teacher training to ensure that the program's drivers fully understood what was expected of them prior to the initiative's launch. Facilitators had not been trained fully on how to help learners during the process, which caused some teachers to resist. Those who appreciated the new system had seen a way to make money because they did the tasks for the learners for a fee (National Association of Schools Heads, 2020).

In a study conducted in Zimbabwe, Nyamudzodza et al. (2021) concur that on important issues, key stakeholders, particularly school teachers, should be sufficiently involved. To reduce resistance to change, key stakeholders such as facilitators and parents were supposed to have been informed about the implementation of CALA before its launch. Parents and facilitators should have been involved in the implementation process because they have a direct impact on the development's success. Facilitators and parents should be the drivers of the initiative. Therefore, they should have been consulted prior to the implementation phase. The available literature was important since it enabled the researchers to be aware of the strategies adopted by stakeholders to alleviate the challenges posed in the implementation of CALA by other schools and compare them with those of one primary school in Bindura urban.

The literature provided served as a yardstick in the investigation of the challenges encountered by students and teachers during the implementation of CALA in primary schools and the strategies adopted by stakeholders to alleviate the challenges faced. To this end, this study sought to find the challenges encountered when CALA was being implemented at primary school level.

Methodology

This study adopted a constructivist/interpretivist perspective, which views the world as experienced, interpreted and constructed by people during interactions with one another as well as with larger social systems (Maxwell, 2006). It also adopted the qualitative approach in order to fully understand the challenges encountered by students and teachers on CALA. The qualitative interpretive approach is used when a researcher studies problems that require an understanding of the meanings of groups or individuals so as to identify a human or social issue (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In this case, since the study sought to explore the challenges of CALA, the best method of data collection was qualitative in nature. Therefore, in relation to this study the researchers observed and recorded behavior and perceptions on challenges encountered during CALA implementation and analysed people's individual and group social actions. The research design for this study was a single

case of one urban primary school in Bindura district of Mashonaland Central province of Zimbabwe. In this case, this study was ideal as data was based on observations from learners, facilitators and the administrators so as to reveal the challenges encountered during the implementation of CALA.

The population of the study was all grade seven learners (327), their facilitators (10) and the administrators at that primary school (4). In this study, it was difficult to include every member of the population due to time and resource constraints. Therefore, a representative sample of the larger population was drawn and used in gathering data for the purpose of exploring the challenges on CALA. The purposive sampling technique was selected due to its suitability in addressing the purpose of this study. Patton (2015) observes that purposive sampling allows researchers to identify information-rich sites. Thus, the purposive sampling technique was selected due to its suitability in addressing the purpose of this study. Ultimately, 40 grade 7 learners and 4 facilitators were selected because the Grade seven learners do CALA, which constitute 30% of their final mark. In addition, stratified sampling was used for the selection of learners. Stratified random sampling is a commonly used method because it allows researchers to find a sample population, which best represents the whole studied population, while also ensuring that each subgroup of interest is represented. . In-depth interviews for facilitators and the administrators and focus group discussions for students were used to collect data.

The data collected was presented using a thematic approach which entails that while collecting data the researcher identified commonly emerging themes and group similar responses as themes, and then briefly discussed each identified theme. The data was presented in a descriptive form and was validated using the theoretical framework.

Presentation and analysis of data

This study presents and analyses data, which were collected at one primary school in Bindura urban, focusing on the challenges encountered by students and teachers during the implementation of CALA. This study also outlines and discusses the findings in relation to literature on CALA, challenges faced by students in implementing CALA, challenges faced by teachers in implementing CALA, and the strategies used by stakeholders to alleviate the challenges encountered during CALA implementation.

Student challenges

The findings showed that learners encountered challenges during CALA implementation. Interviews with learners and teachers, and focus group discussions showed that it was difficult to implement CALA. Students encountered many challenges, such as shortage of learning materials to make models for tasks, too many tasks, limited time, and inadequate support from parents and schools. Students also reported factors, such as lack of monetary support to purchase learning materials, lack of conducive learning environments at their respective homes, and overburden of tasks, as the major sources of their challenges.

During interviews, one student (S3) stated that:

Some learners did not manage to submit given tasks on time because of different challenges such as lack of gadgets to use for research at home, lack of internet connections and lack of parental support. (S3).

In addition to that, another student (S7) stated that:

Parents do not know anything about CALA and its importance, and they do not know what is really wanted. Therefore, they end up turning their backs on us, and ask us to be assisted by teachers since they pay school fees. That way, we end up copying other learners' work so that we do not fail to submit given work. (S7)

These findings indicate that the parent, who was supposed to assist the learner with his

or her tasks at home, was unaware. Furthermore, the findings from focus group discussions revealed that the level of education attained by parents had a positive/negative impact on the academic achievement of the learners. In the majority of cases, families regularly involved their children in learning activities. Nonetheless, different social groups exhibited different trends. Families with poor socioeconomic status had fewer learning opportunities. This could have been due to the difficulties faced by families living in economically and socially disadvantaged backgrounds when they want to acquire social and financial resources that are required to enrich the home learning environment. Findings indicated that children from poor socioeconomic backgrounds pursued education, although with much difficulty, because a child's academic performance was positively "associated" with his or her home learning environment.

Lack of policy guidelines

The findings in relation to the policy guidelines followed while CALA was being implemented showed that no guideline had been given. During interviews, one facilitator (F4) stated:

No policy guideline was given to us, and if any, it should be with the administrators.

Another facilitator (F1) stated:

We were just given a directive, and no policy guideline was given.

The findings from interviews with facilitators showed that no policy guideline had been given and it was difficult to implement CALA. One facilitator (F3) stated:

They should have given us a guideline to give clear instructions on activities, but it is different as school A is doing it differently from school B and C. There is no uniformity on these tasks.

The above observations show that policy guidelines had not been given to the facilitators and that had compromised the attainment of quality. Policy guidelines equip students and instructors with clear understanding of what they are expected to do, thus, making CALA easier to manage. According to Smith (1999) the cognitivists regard learning as an internal mental process that involves perception, information processing, insight and memory. Hence, policy guidelines facilitate the flow of CALA, since everyone would know what is expected to be accomplished. Also, the findings reveal that the quality of CALA could be compromised if there are not policy guidelines.

From the findings it has been observed that the implementation of CALA followed the power-coercive approach as the process adopted the Centre-Periphery model which exemplifies a top-down innovation movement. The implementation of CALA could have been more successful had it used the Periphery-Centre model, which recognises curriculum innovations as starting with the needs of the school. In this sense, the policy guidelines ought to have been designed by the facilitators as they are the ones who know what to expect from learners.

Lack of materials and resources

This theme is based on the responses from the majority of interviewees. Concerning CALA challenges, facilitators revealed that there was poor infrastructure and insufficient basic materials which hampered the effective implementation of CALA. CALA is a composite form of several means and resources. A lot of resources, such as bond paper, portfolio racks, files, and progress charts are needed for CALA implementation. Information collected through interviews and focus group discussions showed that there was lack of learning materials. During the interview, one student (S17) stated that,

CALA is so demanding since we were asked to buy files, bond paper and photocopy materials.It was very difficult for us since we could not afford to do that, so we ended up improvising. Instead of photocopying, we drew the required task but it took a lot of time to finish.

A facilitator, (F3), stated:

Most schools could not afford to acquire the necessary teaching and learning materials which could meet the expected evaluation benchmarks. Resources were grossly inadequate to support the implementation of CALA.

Another facilitator (F1) stated:

In my opinion, the government made a mistake by introducing CALA, with inadequate resources at its disposal. It was necessary to provide manuals to teachers to direct them through the process of unpacking the new tasks.

These findings indicated that the competence-based curriculum's resources were not adequately funded by the government. This implied that there was need for teachers' workshops for training, manuals for guidance, text books for learners, along with other materials associated with the implementation of CALA.

According to the findings from the interviews and group discussions, implementation of the competence-based curriculum was being hampered by lack of material and human resources. This was in agreement with Kapambwe's (2010) study which reported that the majority of facilitators in Zambia lamented the lack of resources during CALA implementation in their country. As a result, teachers had been generally unprepared to implement the new curriculum in schools, owing to lack of materials, and due to more workload on the facilitators and students. This sparked opposition to the implementation of CALA. According to Dube and Jita (2018) teachers faced difficulties in interpreting the syllabi and had limited resources, including instructional media.

Teachers reported that due to time constraints they had experienced difficulties in marking projects during the design activity. One facilitator (F4) who was interviewed stated:

CALAs were implemented under duress and the learning areas are numerous and very stressful on the learners' end. Learners end up doing tasks for the sake of doing them but producing sub-standard work. This added unnecessary stress to us facilitators who were trying to mark and correct the numerous tasks because of the high teacher-to-student ratio.

According to the periphery-centre model of curriculum change, there should be a link between teachers, as curriculum change implementers, and government, as donors, so that the implementation of CALA would flow smoothly. The Ministry and teachers should engage in two-way communication in which challenges and requests from teachers are considered and resources are provided from the top.

High workload

The participants cited excessive workload and insufficient time-frame within which to complete the tasks as the major barriers preventing the effective implementation of CALA. Most of the participants agreed that many tasks were given to primary and secondary school learners to work on. One student (S26) from a focus group discussion stated:

These activities are too many for us. Preparing thirty CALAs for six learning areas, as well as preparing for the final examinations puts us under a lot of pressure.

The number of tasks assigned to students and teachers was excessive. This additional burden weighed heavily on the lowly-paid Zimbabwean teacher. It was also compounded by a lack of resources, among other issues. Findings also revealed that one of the CALAs's other issues in Zimbabwe was that too many tasks had been created, which hampered the programme's smooth implementation because each of the six learning areas had its own five learning tasks, which required teachers' supervision. According to OECD (2019) the stressful workload of teachers has an impact on curriculum implementation. As a result of the many tasks that candidates had to complete and submit, it became difficult for teachers to assist all the learners.

According to the findings, high enrolment of pupils in schools meant that there

was a need to employ more teachers to assist with the increased workload, but alas, no more teachers were recruited, putting a strain on the lowly paid and overworked teacher.

Keogh (1987) believes that involving the end-user in the development of innovations and curriculum materials is important because it can lead to acceptance, and thus more effective implementation in the classroom. The top-down models have been known to always encounter problems, as demonstrated in the experiences of previous innovations.

Lack of training programmes

Findings from interviews with facilitators revealed that without proper ideas on how to use CALA, teachers are unable to use CALA and its tools such as the portfolio. So, based on this researcher's observations, lack of critical teacher training workshops on CALA was a drawback on the successful implementation of CALA. According to the views expressed by participants, lack of teacher training in CALA implementation posed significant barriers to the meaningful teaching, learning and assessment of learners. Teachers believed that CALA workshops were essential. The findings showed that facilitators tended to have negative attitudes toward CALA implementation. During interviews most facilitators (F1) questioned:

Why introducing this innovation without proper training when teachers are already facing difficulties teaching with inadequate materials? This has happened since the implementation of the competence-based curriculum.

This suggests that the facilitators had a negative attitude toward continuous assessment. Teachers' attitudes, whether positive or negative, influence their work commitment. For example, when facilitators develop positive attitudes toward their work, there will be a substantial improvement in learners' academic achievement.

Findings indicate that students also need proper training on how to carry out their tasks. During interview, one learner (S21) stated:

We are just following orders on what should be done from facilitators. We need guidance so that we are equipped with what needs to be done. We want to do our tasks independently with minimum supervision unlike consulting the teacher on what to be done every time.

This view showed that learners did not also know what to do. They always had to be told by the facilitators, which compromised the thrust of CALA. CALA was supposedly thought to thrive to produce an independent student, and a problem solver with vast critical thinking skills.

According to the findings from the interviews and focus group discussions, facilitators objected to the program's implementation, claiming that it would disturb the learning of students who had already lost time during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown period. During the interviews, one facilitator (F4) stated:

Students get stressed when they attempt to finish their syllabi, while at the same time they would be working on many tasks that are expected to be submitted before writing their final examinations.

Another finding from teachers was that the MoPSE had not properly planned before implementing CALA. Teachers also suggested that for the CALA initiative to succeed, the MoPSE should have consulted facilitators and dispatched adequate resources. This observation is consistent with the Ministry's use of the centre-periphery model to impose the initiative without having taken proper consultation with the facilitators who are the key drivers of CALA implementation. Thus, it was suggested that the periphery-centre model should be used to promote a sense of belonging among all stakeholders and in order for curriculum change to be successful. Teachers felt that CALA had been imposed on them without adequate input from them as stakeholders. Teachers found it difficult to effectively supervise the learning tasks as they lacked the required expertise.

Findings also revealed that the teachers' motivation levels were low, making it difficult for them to accept change. As a result of the country's economic hardships, the welfare status of teachers has deteriorated. Consequently, facilitators are now focusing on making money through performing the tasks on behalf of the learners to get paid rather than do their primary mission of supervising the learners perform the tasks. This undermines the entire goal of the CALA initiative, which seeks to improve education output and students' research skills to help them contribute towards national socioeconomic development.

Strategies to alleviate the challenges posed in implementation of CALA

Findings from the interviews and focus group discussions showed that some strategies had been implemented to assist students on CALA. The researcher found out that staff development workshops were being done at school level to assist facilitators with knowledge on CALA marking and monitoring so that they use the same standard at school level. During interviews, one administrator (A1) stated:

We tried everything we could to help facilitators by organising staff development meetings at school.

Another facilitator (F2) observed:

Our administration was very helpful in ensuring strategies to alleviate CALA challenges because they provided us with learning resources. Although they were insufficient due to a lack of funds, they tried to support us with materials to use.

A student (S38) said:

Facilitators work around the clock to provide feedback on the tasks we perform. This makes our job easier as we make corrections and move on. Giving timely feedback helps us stay focused and gives us direction on what is expected of us.

Such views indicate that stakeholders did not provide much support for the implementation of CALA and more work still needed to be done on the part of all stakeholders. Kennedy (1996) emphasises the significance of appropriate linkages in the centre's role, which is the government, ministry, and the curriculum developers who offer long-term political support and the necessary pressure for systemic reform, while the periphery (at the school level) conducts staff development, adopts materials, designs and performs teacher training close to the classroom.

Summary of findings

This section presents a summary of the major findings on the challenges encountered by students and facilitators during CALA implementation in Bindura. The summary of findings is guided by three research questions

Challenges encountered by students during CALA implementation

According to results obtained from interviews and focus group discussions, students encountered challenges. Challenges included lack of materials to use while doing tasks, and lack of parental support as parents were not aware of what was expected from them. As a result, parents showed a negative attitude towards CALA. Findings from the interviews and focus group discussions also revealed that tasks expected from learners were too many such that learners were overburdened by work from facilitators who were racing to cover the syllabi in an attempt to catch up with CALA deadlines.

Challenges encountered by facilitators during CALA implementation

Results from the interviews and focus group discussions indicated that facilitators faced a lot of challenges during the implementation of CALA such as lack of resources to use, lack of training, unbearable workload, lack of knowledge on marking CALAs, high teacher-to-pupil ratio in classrooms, low morale because of economic hardships, and lack of support from parents who were expected to assist their children with research on the given tasks.

Coping strategies

Based on the findings, researchers recommend that key stakeholders, particularly school teachers, be involved in important issues of curriculum change. Parents and facilitators, for example, should have been consulted prior to implementation of CALA. The implementation process has a direct impact on the success of the initiative. Since the facilitators and parents should be the drivers of the initiative, they should be included well before the implementation phase.

However, to eradicate the challenges which were hindering the smooth flow of CALA implementation, the administration at the school under study (stakeholders) facilitated staff development workshops so as promote uniformity in teachers' marking or giving of tasks to learners. Resources were provided and parents were asked to provide bond paper and flat files for their children. Findings indicated that feedback from facilitators assisted learners to successfully meet the CALA submission deadline. Moreover, supervision of facilitators and learners enhanced the smooth flow of CALA.

Conclusion and recommendations

Basing on these results, this study makes important recommendations, which, if followed, could help eliminate the difficulties encountered by students and facilitators during CALA implementation. Firstly, to reduce resistance to change, key stakeholders, including parents and facilitators, should be enlightened about the importance of any educational initiative before its launch. Parents and facilitators should take part in the implementation process because they have a direct impact on the success of the development. Secondly, teachers ought to be trained. Thus, there is greater need for concerted efforts to conduct CALA teacher training workshops so that facilitators, as program implementers, are fully aware of what is expected of them. Furthermore, students should also be trained on how to conduct research. Schools should hold seminars to help students develop research skills. Hence, lack of the necessary research skills, which has compelled learners to hire consultants to complete the tasks on their behalf, could be eradicated. Fourthly, to properly implement CALA, the teacher-student ratio should be reduced to a manageable size so that learners can be effectively facilitated and monitored as the facilitators' work load would be reduced. In addition, education officers and school administrators should supervise and monitor the progress of teaching and learning processes, with a particular focus on assessments, for effective implementation of CALA. Most importantly, it is unfortunate that teachers' continuous assessment practices are being hampered by a lack of instructional resources. To improve continuous assessment in the classroom, there is need for the Ministry to address issues concerning the availability of teaching resources, such as record books to prepare learners' profiles, manuals to give guidance on how to usefully implement CALA, to name a few. Moreover, data for research purposes should be provided to learners and facilitators. Lastly, the number of CALA tasks could be reduced from five per learning area to one per learning area, which could lessen the volume of work for both teachers and learners.

Basing on the data analysis presented in this study, it is possible to conclude that students and facilitators faced a variety of challenges, including lack of resources, awareness, training, and support from the Ministry and parents, as well as work overload, and high teacher-to-pupil ratios. However, it is possible to conclude that lack of awareness and resources contributed to a decline in the quality of activities and tasks, resulting in the poor academic achievement of learners. As a result, this study concluded that in order for CALA to be successful, all stakeholders should collaborate and be involved in decision making, while implementing the new curriculum, so that all stakeholders feel a sense of belonging, and hence, fully support the initiative. Furthermore, resources should be made available prior to the implementation of curriculum changes.

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