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## THE ZIMBABWE TWO PATHWAY EDUCATION CURRICULUM: INSIGHTS INTO POLICY IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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**Abstract:** *The study investigated the implementation of the Two Pathway Education Curriculum in rural secondary schools. A descriptive survey research design was adopted for this study. The research used questionnaires and interviews to solicit information from ninety teachers and ten school heads respectively that had been selected using purposive and simple random sampling techniques. The study found out that the schools studied were at different stages of implementation of the Two Pathway Education Policy. Implementation was flawed by lack of human and material resources, knowledge on ways of channeling pupils into middle secondary school, congested school timetables and removal of the Zimbabwe Junior Certificate examinations. The study recommends that the government complements parents' efforts, empower schools through in-service training of teachers and marshaling material resources. Channeling of pupils into upper secondary school could be based on continuous assessment and Zimbabwe Junior Certificate public examinations.*

**Key words:** *Two Pathway Education, policy implementation, challenges, opportunities, secondary schools.*

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Education curricula can never remain relevant and perfect for all ages as society changes (Munikwa, 2011; Zvobgo, 1996; Shiundu and Omulando, 1992). Globally, the education system, as a vehicle of social transformation, is undergoing a period of transformation to suit the prevailing societal interests, development, needs and aspirations by enhancing learners' achievement. This implies that the learning situations should be inclined towards the goings on in the society. Hence it is imperative that the curriculum should be designed in such a way that the learner is considered as a key variable.

From the foregoing, the Zimbabwean education system has undergone numerous reforms since the attainment of independence in 1980. However, a number of these curricular reforms experienced still-births. According to Chiedza, Makaye and Mandiudza (2013), while it was necessary to review the Zimbabwe education system at the attainment of independence in 1980 no commission was set up to spearhead the review. Instead, policy enunciators set up task forces as a strategy to improve the education system without taking on board ideas from the public. In an attempt to revamp education and training in Zimbabwe, the government set up the Nziramasanga Commission of Inquiry into Education and Training (1999) to check on the relevance of the then education system. In its findings, the Nziramasanga Commission noted that while the then secondary school education was academically good, it did not prepare learners for the world of work. The curriculum tended to place more emphasis on academic subjects which offer less relevance to the world of work.

The Nziramasanga Commission (1999) recommended a Three Pathway Education system which the government adopted but only implemented in 2006 as the Two Pathway Education system (Zimbabwe Government, 2006). The Two Pathway Education system offers a skills pathway in Technical and Vocational (Tech/Voc) subjects and Business/Commercial subjects to cater for the interest, aptitude and demands of the students' world of work. The Policy circular requires that all Zimbabwe secondary schools adopt the Two Pathway Education curriculum. The study investigated the implementation of the Two Pathway Education Curriculum in rural secondary schools, Zimbabwe.



## 2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The study sought to:

- Establish the level of implementation of the Two Pathway Education system.
- Ascertain the challenges schools faced in the policy implementation of the Two Pathway Education system.

## 3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Coltart (2012:02) laments that “One of the key concerns about our education system has been the bias for academic subjects and the resultant failure of our education system to prepare students adequately for Zimbabwe’s economy”. He further observes that this scenario became one of the agenda items for the Nziramasanga Commission of Inquiry into Education and Training (1999). The majority of Zimbabweans are in favour of an integrated curriculum which offers both academic and vocational subjects because they are relevant for the development of a complete man, skilled in art and industry (Nziramasanga Commission, 1999). The Commission recommended a two-pronged secondary school curriculum with strong Tech/Voc and Business/Commercial components to make the curriculum relevant to the world of work. This two-pronged education curriculum referred to as the Two Pathway Education curriculum was as per policy to be implemented by all secondary schools throughout the country. Policy Circular Number P77 of 2006 (Zimbabwe Government, 2006) provided guidelines on the implementation of the new-look curriculum initiative. The policy initiative aimed at providing a wide range of Tech/Voc and Business /Commercial subjects from which students could choose so as to shape their career opportunities in vocational education courses.

Several factors that can restrict curriculum innovation have been identified in the literature. These relate to both the teacher and the context in which the innovation is taking place.

*They include issues of time, parental expectations, public examinations, unavailability of required instructional materials, lack of clarity about curriculum reform, teachers’ lack of skills and knowledge, and the initial mismatch between the teacher’s ‘residual ideologies’ and the principles underlying the curriculum innovation. (Bennie and Newstead, 1999:1).*

Other obstacles relate to organisational arrangements such as role overload, rigid scheduling of time, reporting systems, and failure of administration to recognise and understand its role in change (Nolder, 1990; Gross et al as quoted in Snyder, Bolin, & Zumwalt, 1992).



There are different ways of implementing new policies such as 'direct cut-over', 'parallel', 'phased' and 'pilot'. The method chosen depends on the organization and the type of policy and implementation approach; top-down or bottom-up theory (Honig, 2006). In direct cut-over there is a set of dates and time where the new policy overrides the old system or a brand new system is implemented. The parallel method entails that the new policy runs in tandem with the old system for a predetermined period of time. According to Honig (2006) and Adams, and Chen, (1981) this implementation process allows for the old policy to act as a backup process while any issues or problems with the new system are rectified. As for the phased method, the new system is implemented in stages as the old policy is phased out. In the pilot method, Honig (2006) and Bishop (1995) emphasize that the new policy is trialed in a particular area to rectify any issues before wide scale implementation. In such a setup, both human and material resources are channeled towards the identified pilot schools and the activities are closely monitored by public agencies for effective implementation.

Hill and Hupe (2008) states that the top down theory assumes that policy implementation begins with central government decisions with clear objectives. He goes on to suggest that clear policy objectives will guide implementers to accomplish policy goals. In view of the above assertion, the top down approach which is a rational model is criticized for being too idealistic as it does not take into account the roles of policy implementers; it assumes that clear objectives from top officials will lead to successful implementation. The bottom-up implementation theory stresses on starting at the actual implementer level (Chompuot, 2011). Winter (2006:153) denies that public policy starts from the top since the bottom level staff knows a lot more about problems than the top level ones and it is prudent that the bottom-up theory begins with those directly involved in policy implementation. Winter (2006) suggests that public and private players should be involved in the implementation process to enable them to examine the goals, strategies, and programmes they have created. Implicit in the theory is that local implementers are those that bring the policy to successful implementation and that implementation depends on the bargaining prowess among local implementers.

Mahere (2006) points out that the Two Pathway Education Curriculum should be on the basis of learner aptitudes, interests and Zimbabwe Junior Certificate examination results. Mahere (2006) says "At Form 3 all students continue to do their academic core subjects with



a combination of subjects chosen from skills area.” According to Zimbabwe (2006) Policy Circular Number P77of 2006 stipulates that a student can pursue one of the following options:

**Option 1:** General/Academic core subjects including Computer Studies where a student may choose to pursue Business/Commercial as a major (at least two subjects) and one subject from Tech/Voc as an elective.

**Option 2:** Consists of general/academic core subjects including Computer Studies where a student pursues at least 2 Tec/Voc subjects as major and one subject from Bus/Com as an elective.

From the Policy pronouncement, it can be sifted that after the initial two years of secondary school education a student would study basic subjects from the General/Academic core subjects and choose any two subjects from either Tech/Voc or Business/Commercial pathways. On top of that Computer Studies is compulsory.

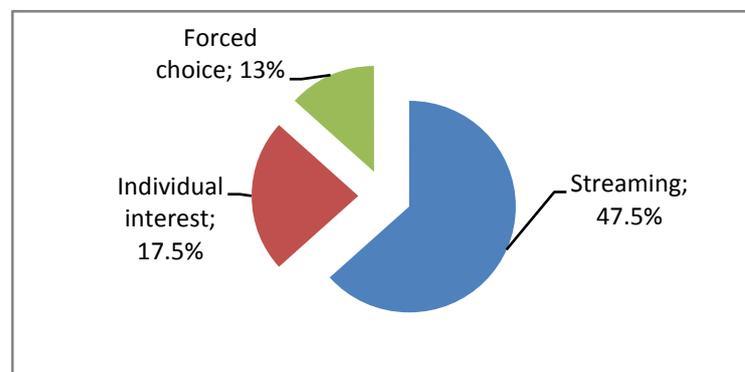
Makinde (2005) reveals that corruption, lack of continuity in government policies, lack of information and inadequate human and material resources lead to implementation gap that widens the distance between stated goals and realization of such planned goals. Egonmwan (1990) cited in Makinde (2005) suggests that inadequate information can lead to misunderstanding on the part of the implementers who may be confused as to what is exactly required of them. Implied is that vague or inconsistent implementation instructions may cause serious snags to policy implementation. Hence it was the object of this study to investigate the implementation of the Two Pathway Education Curriculum in rural secondary schools.

#### **4. DATA COLLECTION METHODS**

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. Surveys present an opportunity to fuse both quantitative and qualitative data as a means to reconstruct the ‘what is’ of a topic (Murphy, 2014) as was the case in this research. This in turn can help to describe and give an answer to certain life experiences of the respondents. A total of 100 participants (90 teachers and 10 school heads) took part in the study. The research used purposive and stratified random sampling techniques to come up with the sample. Semi-structured questionnaires for teachers and interviews for school heads were used to collect data. The collected data were analysed using SPSS.

## 5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study revealed that both options of the Two Pathway Education system were at different stages of implementation in the schools studied. The majority of the respondents (60%) indicated that they were offering Option 1; the Business/Commercial pathway. Again, the majority (64%) of the respondents explained that they were only able to offer eight subjects, 20% only offered seven subjects and only 12.5% were offering the stipulated nine subjects as per Policy Circular Number P77 of 2006. In line with Mahere (2006) an Ordinary level student was expected to offer a minimum of nine subjects, five of which were the core subjects and four from the options. Four out of the ten school heads interviewed (40%) confirmed that students undertook the core subjects and two subjects from a chosen skills area; usually Agriculture and Commerce. The study revealed that the modal number of subjects offered were below the minimum set standards and thus at par with the express dictates of Policy Circular Number P77 of 2006. Schools adopted different modes to channel students into Form three after the first two years of secondary education as shown in Figure 1 below.



**Figure 1: Models of channeling pupils adopted**

The majority of the teachers (70%) reported that there was no uniform system for channeling students into Form 3. Each school devised its own method or adopted a strategy practiced by a neighbouring school. The sentiments of the 10 School heads interviewed concurred with those of the teachers (100%) wherein they indicated that students were channeled into Form 3 basing on their performance in the Form 2 midyear and end of year examinations. Almost half of the respondents (47.5%) indicated that streaming was used to channel students into Form three. Some respondents (17.5%) indicated that channeling was based on individual student interest and 13% of the respondents said that their schools



forced students to study a particular Option. Generally, the results imply that schools decided on the placement of students into a particular Option thereby denying the pupil the opportunity to make an individual choice of the pathway the student was skilled in. In a way the results contradict Mahere (2006) who asserts that channeling of students into Form 3 should be based on both continuous assessment and ZJC public examinations. According to Policy Circular Number P77 of 2006 the implementation of the Two Pathway Education system was hinged on continuous assessment as a mode of channeling students. Chiedza et al., (2013) observe that students should have personal preferences for a skills pathway; but teachers are there to provide guidance in choosing the subjects.

Only a few schools (30%) had well equipped computer laboratories for instructional purposes. Some teachers (38.9%) indicated that they had personal laptops which the schools borrowed for the teaching of Computer Studies. This study also found out that although Computer Studies was supposed to be compulsory, it was a preserve for the bright segment of the students. Those schools with internet connectivity allowed Advanced level students to use the computer laboratories for their research.

Challenges of the Two Pathway education policy implementation revealed apparent realities of change at school level in Zimbabwe. The policy was adopted eight years after the ZJC public examinations had been suspended. This study was conducted at a time when the ZJC public examinations had not been reintroduced.

**Table 1: Respondents indication of challenges schools faced in the implementation of the Two Pathway Education Curriculum**

Challenge	F	Valid %
Inadequate material and financial resources	100	100%
Lack of skilled teachers	92	92%
Congested timetables	85	85%
Lack of information	65	65%
No uniform system for channeling students into Form 3	53	53%

The issue of inadequate material resources was cited as a major stumbling block for the successful teaching of the two available options of the Two Pathway Education system. All the respondents (100%) lamented the high material and financial support requirements by



Option 2; the Tec/Voc pathway. They thus preferred the less costly Option 1; the Business/Commercial pathway. Policy Circular Number P77 of 2006 clearly spells out that choice of a pathway should be based on availability of resources. This study revealed that school heads considered timetable policy implications regarding time allocated for each subject on the curriculum space. However the highly resourced schools (N=3) had adopted Option 2 since they had the financial muscle. The respondents went further to explain that there was need for the Zimbabwe government to give material and financial support to schools if the new look and worthwhile education initiative was to succeed. Coltart (2012) concurs with the findings from the questionnaire and the interviews when he suggests that schools throughout Zimbabwe lack resources and infrastructure to implement the two pronged curriculum. Generally the findings are consistent with Policy Circular Number P77 of 2006 which, as alluded to earlier on, highlights that choice of an option by the schools should be based on the availability of resources.

As regards Tec/Voc subjects, 82.2% of the teacher respondents pointed out that they were not satisfied with the level of implementation of the Tec/Voc subjects. The respondents indicated that the majority of lessons were conducted in theory as material resources were not readily and timeously provided to match lessons planned as per school syllabus. Englehart (2001), a practicing administrator, argues that theory and practice are two halves of a whole. The inability of the schools to marry theory with practice undermined the implementation of the Two Pathway education curriculum. Practice enlightens theory and theory enriches practice.

All school heads explained that they understood the policy but were worried about the implied dynamics related to implementation such as institutional changes regarding staffing. Almost all heads (90%) and teachers (92%) reported that they had challenges in finding qualified teachers for Computer Studies. The minority of the teachers (82.2%) also indicated that teachers in the schools studied were not fully prepared to teach the Tec/Voc and Business/Commercial subjects in a way expected of them by the new policy. These participants were of the opinion that during their teacher training the emphasis then was not much of churning out students who could be employment creators but employment seekers. They also indicated they were not that computer literate as required of them in the implementation of the new look education initiative. Stoner and Johnson (1999) cited in



Chiedza et al., (2013) argue that a good human resource base plays an important part in policy formulation as well as implementation. Some heads (80%) reported that they lacked teachers who would support them and model the expected change in terms of managing the change and delivering lessons as expected.

The majority of the respondents (68%) explained that contextual realities in relation to policy intention were not being realized. All heads of schools and 53.3% of the teachers lamented that the Two Pathway Education structure had resulted in congested timetables. All school heads indicated that their choice of an option was influenced by the amount of time a subject occupied on the timetable. Business/Commercial subjects need four lessons per week each with duration of thirty five to forty minutes. A Tec/Voc subject is allocated six lessons per week on the school timetable. This finding was supported by all the teacher respondents. The results indicate that schools offered Option 1; the Business/Commercial subjects because they occupied less space on the timetable. The number of subjects offered was also influenced by the school capacity, availability of resources (human and financial) and appropriate infrastructure.

Another major drawback brought out by teachers was lack information (96.7%) about the Two Pathway Education curriculum. The interviews conducted with all heads of schools studied, indicated that the one day workshop which they attended did not give them adequate information on the modalities of the Two Pathway Education system. Makinde (2005) posits that inadequate information can lead to misunderstanding on the part of the implementers since they may be confused as to what is exactly required of them.

Almost all teachers (92%) confirmed the school heads challenges when they opined that they and their heads had challenges in explaining the change to parents in order to inspire them to support the curriculum innovation. The majority of the teachers (86%) indicated that their schools lacked relevant infrastructure. The parents were supposed to contribute to developing infrastructure such as workshops and computer laboratories. They were also expected to contribute to resourcing these workshops and laboratories. Rural communities needed to fundraise and or participate by taking part in brick moulding and or building of these structures. This was a task that was not successfully carried out in the schools studied. Munikwa (2011) supports the finding by explaining that teachers need not only to be fully



prepared for change but also be continually supported for effective implementation of the curriculum innovation.

## **7. CONCLUSIONS**

Non uniform implementation of the Two Pathway education structure by schools was necessitated by lack of information and the unavailability of both human and material resources. Also non uniform implementation of the Two Pathway Education system was caused by lack of finance for infrastructural development such as workshops and computer laboratories. One day workshops that school Heads had to learn about the new system did not give them ample time and grounding to fully grasp the guidelines and principles of the Two Pathway Education structure. The use of streaming as a technique of placing students was a clear indicator that schools administrations were not aware of the dictates of the Policy Circular Number P77 of 2006 which is clear on how students should be channeled into form 3. The empowerment of teachers on the new education programme can contribute towards the successful implementation of the Two Pathway education structure. In addition, the success of this new-look curriculum initiative hinges upon the availability of human and material resources.

## **8. RECOMMENDATIONS**

The study recommends that:

- The government should complement parents' efforts and empower schools through in-service training of teachers and marshaling material resources.
- Channeling of pupils into upper secondary school could be based on continuous assessment and Zimbabwe Junior Certificate public examinations. Hence there is need to reintroduce the ZJC examinations.
- Students should have personal preferences for a skills pathway; but teachers are there to provide guidance in choosing the subjects.
- The number of school subjects students could study could be reduced to avoid congestion on the school timetable.

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