

Primary School Teachers' Perceptions and Needs towards the Implementation of Standard Based Curriculum in Kpandai District, Ghana

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Abstract: This study investigated about the primary school teachers' perceptions and needs towards the implementation of standard based curriculum in Kpandai District of Ghana. The study utilized the descriptive survey design. The target population was 439 public primary school teachers in the Kpandai District. The researchers used the simple random sampling to determine the sample of 150 teachers to participate in the study using a questionnaire. Data was analyzed through descriptive statistics. The study established that teachers have a positive perception towards the standard based curriculum which they felt is good and can help develop learners to think independently and grow into productive adults. The implementation of the standard based curriculum poses several challenges, which need to be addressed. Some of recommendations are that teachers need to develop a positive perception towards the standard based curriculum. Furthermore, information on the standard based curriculum should be readily available for teachers to understand and appreciate the curriculum.

Keywords: Standard-Based Curriculum; Perception; Need Assessment; Curriculum.

How to Cite: Bingan, G. S., Asoma, C., Amenu, E. S., Appiah-Kubi, E., and Afriyie, K. (2023). Primary School Teachers' Perceptions and Needs towards the Implementation of Standard Based Curriculum in Kpandai District, Ghana. East African Journal of Education and Social Sciences 4(3)115-124.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.46606/eajess2023v04i03.0283>.

Introduction

Curriculum is the main document that directs teachers and learners what to teach and learn in a school situation. It defines the goals, aims and objectives of learning. It also provides teaching and learning strategies towards the achievements of set standards. Ghana introduced a new curriculum (Standard-Based Curriculum) that had taken effect since 2019. The curriculum is aimed at getting every individual learner to be able to demonstrate competency and mastery of knowledge (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2019). Implementing this curriculum intends to change the context of teaching in relation to content and methods. The changes mean that teachers should possess the requisite knowledge to implement the curriculum without impediments (Wiles & Bondi, 2014). Teachers, therefore, become the principal focus in the implementation of the curriculum and they determine whether the curriculum would succeed or fail.

Adopting a new curriculum requires teachers to be competent and confident in their delivery so that they can ensure effective curriculum implementation. Teachers determine whether a curriculum is delivered effectively and with efficacy to bring about learners' progress and growth. A high-quality standard curriculum is purposely written to align with standards to bring about reputable gains for learners (Lochner et al., 2015). Therefore, much effort should be geared towards providing infrastructure, materials and required human resource so as to realize effective results. Furthermore, teachers as curriculum implementers must be trained for the new curriculum to be effectively implemented. Needs of the implementers must also be given credence so as to achieve success.

Teachers must be well informed and prepared on any new curriculum in terms of content, pedagogy and needs for an effective implementation. Several challenges may surface if the implementers are not well informed and prepared for the task. According to Mandukwini (2016), building the capacity of teachers is essential in the successful implementation of any curriculum change. Teachers are the key players in promoting quality education. This implies that, when there is inadequate training on curriculum implementation, lack of guidelines for successful implementation of curriculum changes and the complexity of managing any new curriculum will create serious challenges for the teachers. Maodzwa-Tarwiza and Cross (2009) agreed to this

by saying that, some teachers believe it is an easy task to continue with familiar teaching methods than adapting to new programs. Implying that, teachers will always want to practice what they are familiar with rather than taken on new changes.

There has been a public outcry in Ghana over the years for a curriculum that meets the aspirations and needs of Ghanaians. There have also been issues of Ghana in producing examination-passing graduates who are not fit for industry. Again, there are issues of the tertiary institutions producing memory and recall-students and graduates who are job seekers but not job-creators. All these formed the diagnosis of the Ghanaian educational system and the need for a new curriculum. This led to the adoption and inception of the standard based curriculum in 2019. However, Implementation of the standard based curriculum poses numerous challenges to learners, parents and teachers, such as inadequate information on the curriculum, lack of teaching and learning materials, adoption of new pedagogies among others (Apau, 2021).

Bell (2015) analyzed the advantages and disadvantages of an English grammar curriculum; specifically, the guidance and directives provided to support teachers. Though Bell found the curriculum to be accurate, it was realized that the materials lacked pedagogical guidance to help teachers understand the lessons accurately enough to teach. The implication of this finding is that, when there are no guidance and directives to a new curriculum, it creates confusion and many challenges for the teachers to adopt. This implication share similar impacts with the standard based curriculum, which does not have any guidelines and directives for the Ghanaian teachers.

Causarano (2015) pointed out another necessary component when considering the adoption of a new curriculum, by reinforcing how proper training played into implementing the curriculum with confidence. This was also support by Bell (2015) that lack of training for a new curriculum hindered accurate delivery to students, which influences student growth and learning. The implication of this finding in comparison with the standard based curriculum will mean that lack of training (both induction and refresher) for teachers will cause backwardness in the adoption and implementation of the curriculum because teachers will not have much insight on how to go about the implementation process.

Tweedie and Kim (2015) found that certain aspects, such as social acculturation, proved to be overlooked by instructors and curriculum planners in the process of learning English, which was something students rated as vital to success in school. This implies that there are misalignments, which may prevent students from fully connecting to and understanding the objectives of the curriculum. The standard based curriculum did not take account of concerns of teachers, parents and students at the developmental stage (Aboagye & Yawson, 2020) which will put the curriculum at risk of social acculturation since Ghana is a multicultural country.

Aboagye and Yawson (2020) found out in a study on the perceptions of Ghanaian teachers towards the new curriculum that most teachers appear not to have enough information on the curriculum and are therefore not seeing the need for the new curriculum. As a result, the teachers are not implementing the curriculum though they pretend to be doing so. This gap is believed to have resulted from teachers not being well informed on the new curriculum and lack of guidelines, textbooks and other curriculum materials for effective implementation.

Therefore, there is a need to investigate the perceptions and needs of primary school teachers towards the implementation of the standard based curriculum especially in the northern part of the country where there are schools that are more deprived and with few studies conducted to ascertain the perception and need assessment of the teachers.

Literature Review

Curriculum Implementation

Curriculum implementation refers to how teachers deliver instruction and assessment through the use of specified resources provided in a curriculum (Mandukwini, 2016). According to Wiles and Bondi (2014), Curriculum designs generally provide instructional suggestions, scripts, lesson plans and assessment options related to a set of objectives. Such designs focus on consistency to help teachers successfully implement and maintain the curricular structure in order to meet various objectives. DuFour (2002) reiterated that teachers could not make student learning their focus until they know what each student needs to learn. It is therefore prudent that the standard based curriculum should have provided scripts, lesson plans and different

forms of assessment to guide teachers in the implementation. This was however not done before the inception of the curriculum and is still not being done as teachers continuously struggle to teach without any textbook.

Curriculum implementation involves aligning instructional planning with learning outcomes, which are specified in the curriculum framework (Bennett, 2007). This will lead to the realization of expected goals of any curriculum implementation and bring an improvement in students' learning. This implies that, curriculum implementation is a process that is based on the fundamental assumption of students' growth and improvement of learning. Selection of resources should therefore be based on their usefulness in meeting learner outcomes. Effective curriculum implementation leads to a change in practice that enhances student learning (Mandukwini, 2016). This implies that, planning instructions must also include how to assess the achievement and growth of students.

DuFour (2002) posits that from the planning of instructions to assessment, the teacher must possess a chunk of knowledge on what the curriculum demands before the teacher can be effective in the implementation process. Curriculum implementation is a shared responsibility for all stakeholders such as the curriculum designers, government, teachers and parents. Its sustainability must be systemically reviewed and the necessary resources put in place before the inception. If this is not done, the tendency of the curriculum failing will be high.

Frey (2001) identified some key challenges in curriculum implementation to include but not limited to, lack of basic management in providing materials and resources, which make most teachers, revert to old methods of teaching. Another challenge identified is lack of the ongoing professional development for the new curriculum. Frey stressed that procedures must be in place in terms of improving the management and providing professional development opportunities for teachers to effectively implement the intended curriculum. This suggestion by Frey is not heeded by NaCCA who designed the standard based curriculum and has therefore created huddles for newly appointed teachers.

Teachers' Perceptions

Standard based curriculum is one that combines predetermined standards of knowledge and

experiences with assessments to ensure that students are meeting those standards (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2019). Usually, these standards are developed at the national level. Teachers' perceptions towards the standard based curriculum would be paramount for the overall success or failure of any curriculum. According to Mandukwini (2016), understanding the beliefs and concerns of teachers can provide insights into whether curriculum implementation would be successful or not. McNeill et al. (2016) agree that teachers' beliefs significantly influence their decisions for instruction. The authors argued that beliefs of teachers have an influential role in curriculum implementation. Therefore, establishment of teachers' perceptions could help those in authorities to come up with appropriate strategies that can inspire teachers to implement the curriculum effectively (Al-Shabatat, 2014; Rakes & Dunn, 2015). Furthermore, provision of training and professional development opportunities would help teachers to understand what to do to implement the curriculum (McNeill et al., 2016). It is therefore prudent that the perceptions and needs of teachers be accorded credence to enhance effective implementation.

Teachers' Needs towards the Standard Based Curriculum

Need assessment may be viewed as a systematic process for determining and addressing the gaps between current conditions and desired conditions. The roles of teachers remain instrumental in the success or otherwise of a curriculum (Loflin, 2016). In many cases, researchers have supported that, there is the need to thoroughly understand teachers' roles and concerns before the implementation of a new curriculum (Hall & Hord, 2015). This will mean that for a gain to occur in the implementation of a new curriculum such the standard based curriculum, teachers ought to be thoroughly engaged to make their suggestions on things to be put in place before the curriculum can be started. This will make them adjust themselves appropriately to meet the change effectively and with efficacy.

Again, both Bell (2015) and Causarano (2015) are of the view that teachers' concerns play a major part in the implementation of any new curriculum because the concerns of the teachers sometimes direct the choices they make when deciding to add or omit items from the curriculum. Once it is the teachers who are implementing the curriculum, their

concerns often serve to direct decisions about how best they can be supported. Support in terms of professional development opportunities and access to teaching resources can be of great help to teachers when implementing a new curriculum. This is supported by Lambert et al. (2015) who thought that when specific concerns of teachers are considered, it offers a chance to refine and provide professional development opportunities that may reduce anxieties during the implementation.

Gautam et al. (2016) suggested that, there is the need to understand the challenges brought on by change and ways of supporting teachers to overcome the identified frustrations and anxieties that are caused by the implementation of any new curriculum. Conceiving that change will definitely bring challenges, it is obvious that subscribing the needs and concerns of teachers in the change process will help inform the curriculum designers and government on how to support the teachers absorb the frustrations at minimal levels.

The study of Apau (2021) found that collaboration was the highest concern of the basic schoolteachers in the implementation of the standard-based curriculum. Most basic schoolteachers faced challenges in collaborating with each other in the implementation of the curriculum. Teachers should therefore be encouraged to work in teams and support one another. They may derive new and different ways of handling a particular topic from colleagues especially during professional learning centers (PLCs).

The study of Mpuangnan and Adusie (2021) investigated the concern of public basic schools' teachers about the implementation of the standard-based curriculum in Ghana. Their study revealed that basic schoolteachers did not have adequate information regarding what the standard-based curriculum entails. This makes it essential to regularly organize refresher training sessions on the curriculum for teachers already in the system and induction training sessions for newly appointed teachers.

The results further indicated that majority of teachers expressed high concern about awareness stage, information stage and management stage. The awareness stage is where teachers are not yet exposed much knowledge about the change and might appear unready to use the new curriculum in the classroom. They mostly will have no interest or even reject implementing the curriculum.

Information stage is where teachers start to show interest and want to have much information on the new curriculum. Certainly, they develop a strong zeal towards the change and what it entails. This makes them seek opportunities to discuss new ideas in relation to what their colleagues are doing. Management stage has the teachers participating fully and giving all needed and necessary attention to finding ways of handling recurring problems in the implementation process. They become more concerned with practical solutions on how the curriculum can best be utilized for its purpose.

The study of Aboagye and Yawson (2020) revealed that teachers were of the view that the government should involve them in planning the curriculum. Furthermore, the government should provide books and other learning materials, train teachers in advance and pilot a new curriculum before its implementation. The needs of the teachers for effective implementation of the curriculum should be properly addressed. This will improve the teaching and learning in the Ghanaian classroom and lead to higher learner attainments.

Challenges in Implementing the Standard Based Curriculum

Curriculum change poses more challenges to most schoolteachers. Tadesse and Meaza (2007) outlined several challenges during the implementation of a new curriculum in Ethiopia. Some of the identified challenges were inadequate supervision, time mismatch with school calendar, lack of financial and material support and negative attitudes of teachers towards the new curriculum. These challenges highlighted by these researchers appear to be similar to those experienced in Ghana where the procedures for developing the new curriculum were done by a few experts without considering preparedness of the teachers for basic teaching. The comprehension of teachers on the new curriculum was considered. Again, the standard based curriculum seems to favour well-resourced schools with well-qualified teachers. It is obvious the new curriculum is being implemented without considering the contextual changes needed to make it effective. Similar challenges were identified by Aboagye and Yawson (2020) such as teachers feeling they are not able to meet their expectations as most of the materials such as textbooks, curriculum books and teaching aids, have not been readily supplied by government. This implies that, for reasons not known, government has stumbled in her commitment in procuring and supplying such

teaching and learning materials. Studies in Ghana (Nudzor, et al., 2015; Apau, 2021; Mpuangnan & Adusie, 2021) reaffirmed these same challenges of the standard based curriculum. This study sought to confirm or reject these claims especially in the Kpandai District.

Methodology

Research Design

The study utilized the descriptive survey design. Descriptive survey attempts to establish the range and distribution of some social characteristics such as education or training to unveil how these characteristics may be related to certain behavioral patterns or attitudes. In response, this study sought to investigate the perceptions held by primary school teachers and how that could interfere with the implementation of the newly introduced curriculum.

Population and Sampling

The target population of this study was 439 public primary school teachers in the Kpandai District. These included 355 male and 84 female teachers. The researchers used the simple random sampling technique to determine the sample of 150 teachers to participate in the study. However, only 137 teachers (76 males and 61 females) responded to the questionnaire.

Instrument

The study used a questionnaire as data collection instrument. The questionnaire had three main sections: Demographic characteristics of respondents, perception of teachers, needs assessment and challenges teachers encountered in implementing the curriculum.

Validity and Reliability

Tavakol and Dennik (2011) defined validity as the extent to which a research instrument measures accurately a desired concept in a quantitative study. Validity is portrayed as the outcome of the research reflecting exactly what the study set out to investigate. Two aspects of the validity were considered namely, face validity and content validity. The face and content validity were established by thoroughly subjecting the questionnaire and interview guide to scrutiny where grammatical errors, spelling mistakes, and ambiguity were rectified to generate the best data for the study. The same author defines reliability is explained as the extent to which results are consistent over time and are accurate

representation of the total population under study. Joppe (2000) explained that if the results of a study can be reproduced under a similar methodology, then the research instrument is considered reliable. This implies that, consistency in results provided by the same instrument administered at different times makes the data reliable. The instruments were pilot tested to eliminate any ambiguity and establish the reliability.

Statistical Treatment of Data

Quantitative data from the questionnaire was analyzed through descriptive statistics in terms of frequencies, percentages, mean scores and standard deviations. Mean scores were interpreted as follows: 3.5 – 5.0 = agree, 2.5 – 3.49 = undecided and 1.0 – 2.49 = disagree.

Ethical Considerations

Polit and Beck (2008) explain research ethics as a system of moral values that are concerned with degree to which procedures follow professional, legal and sociological obligations of the study participants. Participants were made to be aware that their responses were purposely for scholarly

work and would not be used for anything else without their permission. This increased their confidentiality and informed consent. The names of participants were not taken on the questionnaire or during interviews. This was to make them anonymous.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the results based on data collected from the field. The analysis begins with the demographic information for respondents.

Demographics of Respondents

As reported before, 137 teachers participated in the study. Of these, 76 (55.5%) were males while 61 (44.5%) were females. Furthermore, 81 (59.1%) teachers held diploma education while 54 (39.4%) held bachelors' degree and two (1.5%) held masters' degrees. Four (2.9%) teachers had an experience of less than a year. On the other hand, 59 (43.2%) had the experience of one to five years, 24 (17.5%) of six to ten years, 25 (18.2%) of 11 to 15 years and 25 (18.2%) of above 15 years.

Table 1: Teachers' Perception towards the Standard-Based Curriculum

SN	Statement in the Questionnaire	Mean	Std. Dev.	interpretation
1	SBC puts Ghana at the same level as developed countries	2.92	1.471	Undecided
2	SBC is the best curriculum for our learners	3.13	1.322	Undecided
3	SBC contains difficult content which makes teaching difficult	3.03	1.300	Undecided
4	Teaching methods in SBC are difficult to adopt	2.93	1.441	Undecided
5	The SBC promotes group work and collaboration	4.06	1.076	Agree
6	SBC promotes inclusivity in basic schools	3.77	1.146	Agree
7	SBC prepares students for job market	3.57	1.193	Agree
8	SBC takes care of diverse cultures of the Ghanaian societies	3.53	1.064	Agree
9	SBC assists students acquire lifelong knowledge and skills	3.72	1.163	Agree

Analysis of Research Questions

This section presents the results based on research questions that guided the study as follows:

Research Question 1: What are the perceptions of primary school teachers towards the implementation of the standard based curriculum?

From table 1, respondents were uncertain with the first four items in the questionnaire as their response ranged between the mean score of 2.50 and 3.49. Teachers were undecided whether standard based curriculum puts Ghana at the same level as developed countries, is the best curriculum for learners, it contains difficult content which makes teaching difficulty and whether teaching methods in the standard based curriculum are

difficulty. The undecidedness of the teachers with the four items suggests that teachers are not well conversant with what the standard based curriculum entails, therefore calling for awareness creation on the role of the standard based curriculum. This certainly agree with the findings of Mpuangnan and Adusie (2021) that teachers did not have much information on the standard based curriculum. Again, Apau (2021) confirmed that the awareness stage of the standard based curriculum was one of the concern bases of most teachers. Causarano (2015) in a study supported that the need for teachers to know the curriculum well will strengthen instructional practices. This finding means that much information on the curriculum

was not marketed to teachers who are the implementers.

Table 1 further reveals that teachers agreed with the last five items in the questionnaire. They agreed that standard based curriculum promotes group work, collaboration and inclusivity, prepares students for job market, takes care of diverse cultures of Ghanaian people and assists students to acquire lifelong knowledge and skills. This agrees with the findings of Aboagye and Yawson (2020) that the standard based curriculum was useful in terms of promoting collaboration and inclusivity, preparing students for job market, taking care of diverse cultures and assisting students to acquire lifelong learning.

Research Question 2: What are the needs of primary teachers towards a more successful implementation of the standard based curriculum?

This research question called for teachers to indicate the needs of primary teachers towards a more successful implementation of the standard based curriculum as shown in table 2. Likewise, Mean scores were interpreted as follows: 3.50 – 5.0 = agree, 2.50 – 3.49 = undecided and 1.00 – 2.49 = disagree.

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Table 2: Need Assessments of Teachers on Standard-Based Curriculum.

SN	Statement in the Questionnaire	Mean	Std. Dev.	Interpretation
1	Teachers' concerns were considered in designing the SBC	1.90	1.995	Disagree
2	Basic school teachers are well informed on the SBC	2.05	1.133	Disagree
3	Teachers are well trained and prepared for the SBC	2.40	1.336	Disagree
4	Textbooks and other materials are needed in advance	4.38	0.986	Agree
5	Pilot testing of SBC is necessary	4.28	0.945	Agree

Results in table 2 shows that teachers disagreed with the first three items in the questionnaire as the mean score ranged between 1.00 and 2.49. Teachers held the view that their concerns were not considered in designing the standard based

curriculum, they are not well informed on the standard based curriculum and they were not trained and prepared for the standard based curriculum. This suggests that consideration of teacher's concerns, educating teachers on the role

of the standard based curriculum and training and preparing them to use the standard based curriculum are critical needs for effectiveness in implementing the standard based curriculum. This is in conformity with the suggestions of Bell (2015) and Causarano (2015) who are of the view that teachers' concerns play a major part in the implementation of any new curriculum because the concerns of the teachers sometimes direct the choices they make when deciding to add or omit items from the curriculum. In addition, McNeill et al. (2016) confirmed this by saying that provision of training and professional development opportunities would help teachers to understand what to do to implement the curriculum.

Research Question 3: What challenges did teachers encounter when implementing the standard based curriculum?

This research question called for teachers to indicate challenges they experienced in the implementation of the standard based curriculum as shown in table 3. With that regard, mean scores were interpreted as follows: 3.50 – 5.00 = agree, 2.50 – 3.49 = undecided and 1.00 – 2.49 = disagree. Mean scores for all six items in table 3 ranged between 3.50 and 5.00 which suggests that teachers considered the five items as challenges encountered in the implementation of the standard based curriculum.

Table 3: Challenges of the Standard-Based Curriculum

SN	Statement in the Questionnaire	Mean	Std. Dev.	Interpretation
1	There no textbooks for the SBC	4.72	.745	Agree
2	There are no teaching aids such as videos and wall charts	4.67	.796	Agree
3	It is difficult differentiating instructions due to large class sizes	4.28	1.110	Agree
4	The SBC contains a lot of work loads	3.83	1.252	Agree
5	Planning lessons on the SBC is time consuming and tedious	3.91	1.234	Agree
6	Length of class period reduces time for pre-planning of activities	3.58	1.321	Agree

Therefore, lack of textbooks and teaching aids, inability to differentiate instructions due to large class sizes, being overloaded, limited time for planning lessons and length of class periods reduced time for pre-planning activities. Tadesse and Meaza (2007) and Aboagye & Yawson (2020) have all stated that, inadequate or unavailability of teaching materials (textbooks and aids), time constraints, changes in instructional strategies all form major challenges during curriculum change. Again, Hockings (2005) accepts that large class sizes inhibit student participation, the activities involved in the learning and the ability of the teacher to meet the needs of the learners.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This section presents conclusions of the study and then gives recommendations as follows:

Conclusions

The study concludes that teachers have a positive perception towards the standard based curriculum which they felt is good and can help develop learners to think independently and grow into productive adults. Again, the study concludes that the concerns of teachers were not taken and a proper need assessment of teachers should have been done before the implementation of the

standard based curriculum. Lastly, the study concludes that the implementation of the standard based curriculum poses several challenges, which need to be addressed for effectiveness and efficiency in the implementation process.

Recommendations

The study recommends for teachers to develop a positive perception towards the standard based curriculum. There is a need for regular in-service training. Furthermore, information should be readily available to all teachers on the standard based curriculum to help them understand and appreciate the curriculum. Again, the study recommends that teachers' concerns and needs should be addressed to solicit the views and needs of teachers on the curriculum for an improved implementation. Lastly, the Kpandai District Directorate should liaise with the government, NGOs and other educational stakeholders to provide and supply textbooks and other teaching aids to schools for teachers to work to meet the standards and laid down goals of the standard based curriculum. This will cater for the challenge of lack of textbooks and other teaching materials in most public basic schools.

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