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Journal homepage: www.twistjournal.net

The Influence of School Leaders on the Implementation of Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy in English First Additional Language, Capricorn District, Limpopo Province, South Africa

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Abstract

Effective teaching and learning as per recommended language policies in schools starts with the attitude of the school leaders. The purpose of the study was to explore the influence of school leaders on the implementation of the English First Additional Language (EFAL) teaching, learning and assessment policy. The researcher adopted an explorative qualitative approach in conducting the study. Permission to conduct the study was obtained from UL TREC and the Department of Basic Education (DBE). Participants were given consent forms for their voluntary participation in the study. Four EFAL departmental heads (DH) were purposefully selected to participate in the study. They were selected because of their expertise in supervising EFAL. Data was collected through in-depth interviews. Data was analysed using thematic analysis into emerging themes following the six stages of thematic approach. The findings show that excessive administration duties, lack of resources, overcrowded classrooms, insufficient planning and preparation, lack of interest and time management are some of the challenges educators experiences during the implementation of the EFAL policy. The recommendations are to increase contact time, develop a resource pack for informal assessment activities, improve infrastructure, strengthen support, intensive monitoring and moderation of teaching, learning and assessment activities.

Keywords

Teaching, Learning, Assessment, Challenges, Implementation

INTRODUCTION

The researcher argues that effective teaching and learning as per recommended language policies in schools starts with the attitude of the leaders. Schlaman (2020) emphasizes that school leaders play a critical role in implementing language policy in their local contexts, and thus in shaping learners' learning opportunities of English language. The complex role of school leaders in fostering equity and providing quality educational experiences of English learners is essential (Sugarman & Geary, 2018). In other words, the implementers of English language policies are also influenced by the support they get from their school leaders to show unity and mutual understanding.

The researcher contends that school leaders in schools refer to anyone who is at a supervisory level for a specific purpose in that school. This includes senior teachers, departmental heads, deputy principals and even principals. For this reason, every subject in a school should have someone who oversees it, with no exception to EFAL.

The duties and responsibilities of school leaders in various subjects, including EFAL are outlined in the Personnel Administrative Measures (PAM) from the government gazette no.19767, Department of Basic Education (DBE). The key role of these school leaders in the subject is to be in charge of the subject, jointly develop the policy for that subject, coordinate the assessment tasks, and provide guidance in the subject (PAM, 2022). From this information, the researcher proclaims that PAM is clear on what is expected from being a leader in the school on various activities, including language policy matters. It is, however, the duty of the leader at the school level to carry out this task to bring fruitful quality outcomes.

Additionally, Mavrogordato and White (2020) state that school leaders influence how policies are carried out inside their buildings, and in turn take on the role of arbiters of educational opportunity. For this reason, school leaders both facilitate and impede practices that speak to policy implementation in schools, including EFAL policy. Also, Pak, Polikoff, Desimone and Saldívar-García (2020) demonstrate that school leaders should show how to implement policies. This is so primarily through technical strategies. However, this does not adequately address the adaptive issues preventing teachers from radically changing their practices to better meet the needs of all students and be more in line with the standards. The two articles alert to what describes a school leader regarding language policy implementation. The researcher thinks it is important for school leaders to first understand the language policy to be implemented, so that proper monitoring can be designed. This is equivalent to one of the seven roles of being a teacher, and that is being a lifelong learner. This assists the school leader to know what to monitor, evaluate and support from the policy, particularly EFAL policy, respectively.

Tanjung and Daulay (2019) explain that school leaders should be involved in decision-making in the processes of policy formulation, so that their support is effective during implementation. Likewise, Amon and Bustami (2021:1) suggest that to “improve the implementation and outcomes of policies in schools requires increasing the capacity of school leaders”. It is further suggested that educational departments should support school leaders in implementing the teaching, learning and assessment policies, and improve staff's ability to make operational and instructional changes. Intriguingly, with contrasting views in their study, Tolo, Lillejord, Flórez-Petour and Hopfenbeck (2020) position that when it comes to managing the implementation process without leadership help, school leaders believe that teachers possess the requisite knowledge and skills. Conversely, other school leaders doubt teachers' abilities and believe that the necessary expertise is available outside of the school.

Moreover, Jenkins (2020) avows that teacher effectiveness in implementing teaching, learning and assessment policy is heavily dependent on school leadership, relationships between leaders with teachers and colleagues. In addition, the article shows that personal motivation from the teachers, school culture and school operational practices contribute to the proper implementation of the policy, specifically EFAL teaching, learning and assessment policy. This means that a positive working environment produces decent quality results. “The quality of a school is therefore appropriately judged by the quality of teaching and learning offered and experienced by its members” (Dimmock, 2020:274). The researcher discovered in one of the encounters with other colleagues that most of the time when policy is not well implemented, it was due to the dysfunctional relationships school leaders have with their subordinates in their institutions. These assertions are encouraged by what Jenkins (2020) stipulated in their article.

Furthermore, Tapala, Van Niekerk and Mentz (2021) substantiate that school leaders are mostly affected by lack of training and development, workload, lack of time and lack of facilities to adequately support their subordinates during the implementation of EFAL policy. The researcher observed, for example, that small schools with limited enrolment of learners mostly experience problems when implementing the language policy. The results of this can come from workload and lack of time. Another example involves a school that has the highest enrolment with limited facilities and resources. Teachers and learners in this type of school might experience challenges during the implementation processes of the English language policy. Limited facilities and resources mean that teachers and learners have to exercise necessary arrangements to accommodate everyone in the teaching and learning processes. As a result, contact time might be lost and learning might be discarded due to lack of resources.

An article written by Cheung, Keung, Kwan and Cheung (2019) challenge that the results of core leadership practices can be measured in accordance with the setting of directions for teaching, learning and assessment policy design and development, developing people in schools, building a collaborative and reflective culture, and improving teaching and learning's effectiveness. Simply put, the efficiency of a school leader might be scaled on how well they execute their job both in policy development, implementation and support given to their subordinates in the schools.

Moreover, Ahmad, Ali and Sewani (2021) specify that school leaders should be involved in the processes of monitoring student progress and EFAL teaching, learning and assessment policy implementation. For this purpose, the teacher's professional development is impacted positively and instructional time in the classroom is protected. Govindasamy and Mestry (2022) discovered that most of the school leaders would shift responsibilities where the management of teaching, learning and assessment policy is concerned. The same authors recommend that school leaders should adopt collaborative practices. In addition, the same school leaders should keep up with the latest trends of the teaching, learning and assessment policy to bring high educational standards and learner achievement.

Finally, Chabalala and Naidoo (2021) conducted a study on the role of school leaders aimed at improving teaching, learning and assessment policy. Firstly, the study revealed that school leaders did not understand that their primary role was to direct teaching and learning processes in school. Secondly, the misunderstanding of being instructional leaders during teaching and learning. The study advised that roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders in schools should be explicit to avoid lack of accountability. Likewise, Sepuru and Mohlakwana (2020) attest that school leaders, especially newly appointed ones lack leadership and management experience in the areas of teaching, learning and assessment policy. The article concluded that proper training for the school leaders prior to presumption of duty is vital in preparing the school leaders for their roles and responsibilities.

The reviewed literature above on the role of school leaders reveals the impact they have on the implementation of language policy. It is inevitable that school leaders can impact the processes of language policy implementation both positively and negatively. Therefore, it is crucial for school leaders to take heed of their responsibilities in order to avoid the discrepancies in the implementation of the EFAL policy that the current study seeks to address. Teaching, learning,

and assessment play an integral part in the language policy, especially the development of language skills. Thus, school leaders should be involved from the onset.

The fact that school leaders still lack consistency when supporting their subordinates, which as a result implicates the implementation of the EFAL teaching, learning and assessment policy validates the existence of the study. The researcher wishes to understand the incongruities from the language policy to locate the factual problem.

Nonetheless, the voice of departmental officials is vital, especially with matters concerning teaching, learning and assessment policy. The current study's aim is to explore the implementation of the teaching, learning and assessment current policy, especially EFAL CAPS, so that a proper model is developed to address the challenges already discussed in this study through existing literature. Therefore, the theme below focuses on the subject advisors' role on the correct implementation of the EFAL policy.

PROBLEM BACKGROUND

The problem in this study is about the implementation of the implementation of teaching, learning, and assessment policy in English First Additional Language, Capricorn District, Limpopo Province, South Africa.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study was to explore the role of school leaders on the implementation of teaching, learning and assessment policy in English as a first additional language.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study was grounded within the Social Constructivism Theory, which was invented by Vygotsky in 1978. The theorist maintains that social interaction is an integral part of learning. He further believes that individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work, where they develop their subjective experiences and meanings. The study was about exploring challenges experienced by educators during the implementation of EFAL teaching, learning and assessment policy. Thus, the same policy is implemented in a social interactive setting, which is the school classroom. Hence, the study was conducted in a school setting using educators as immediate policy implementers.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study adopted an exploratory design. Exploratory design is when there is insufficient information regarding a phenomenon or a problem that has not been clearly defined (Swedberg, 2020). Instead of attempting to address the research issues definitively, the researcher merely explores the research topic with varying levels of depth (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh & Sorensen, 2020). The researcher in this case is the explorer. The exploration was on the challenges experienced by educators during the EFAL teaching, learning and assessment policy implementation.

Swedberg (2020) contemplates the six methods of exploratory as follows: the standard exploratory type one, the standard exploratory type two, the informal exploratory study, the high-risk exploratory study, the pilot study, and the exploratory study used in student exercises. In the context of the researcher, especially in Capricorn District, Limpopo province, South Africa, there is no research on the exploration of challenges experienced by educators during the implementation of teaching, learning and assessment policy in EFAL. As a result, the researcher used the standard exploratory type one, as its goal is to explore a topic that is little known and to produce a publishable work.

Population

The population of this study was Limpopo Department of Education (LDoE), Capricorn District, Limpopo Province, South Africa. The Limpopo Department of Education has 59 curriculum officials which include 15 Chief Education Specialists (CES), 41 Deputy Chief Education Specialists (DCES), 3 Senior Education Specialists (SES) and 10 districts. Capricorn District, both South and North combined, has about 162 officials. The 160 officials constituted 2 District Directors (DD), 30 Circuit Managers (CM), 7 Chief Education Specialists, 26 Deputy Chief Education Specialists, 97 Senior Education Specialists, and 1 Education Specialist (ES). In addition, the districts have 33 circuits, over 300 secondary schools, and over 500 English educators, including the School Management Teams.

Sampling

The study adopted purposive sampling. This sampling method involves the purposive selection of units of the universe to form a sample. Berndt (2020) confirms that this sampling technique makes use of methods that depend on the researcher's judgment when choosing participants. For example, typical case sampling, expert sampling, and maximum variation sampling are some of these methods.

Due to time and accessibility, the study sampled Capricorn North District (CND) as the most relevant district, with two underperforming circuits in the district, and two underperforming schools per circuit in the district, which was determined by Term 4 Grade 12 National Senior Certificate (NSC) results. Additionally, the study comprised one Grade 12 English educator from each school. Therefore, the study consisted of four participants.

Data Collection

Qualitative data was collected through in-depth interviews and observations. Data was collected from the LDoE, one district, two circuits, four secondary schools and 4 participants, viz., four educators. Four educators who teach English First Additional Language in the FET band, specifically, Grade 12 in the selected schools were part of the participants. The study adopted in-depth interviews, which allowed the participants to explain, in their own words, how they understand and interpret the world around them by interacting, posing and answering questions. The researcher was also a non-participant observer in the study. Additionally, the researcher observed educator participants in the classroom using an observation schedule on how they implement language skills as per expectations of the CAPS document.

Data Analysis

Data was analysed using the thematic analysis technique (Creswell, 2012). Information from the interview schedules and observation schedules was coded and arranged in themes, then categories. This means that each common codes, created emerging themes.

The researcher used the six stages of the thematic approach to analyse the collected data. In the first stage, the researcher read and re-read the semi-structured interviews and observation schedule. The process applied in the two mentioned data collection tools was also applied to the document analysis. That was done before each data set was analysed. In all three primary data sets, the second stage involved coding and collating. The researcher grouped and categorised similar codes and eventually formed themes out of them. The researcher recapped the themes in the fourth stage and collapsed the themes that appeared in all the data sets. The fifth stage involved the definition and naming of the themes. In the sixth stage, the researcher used the themes formed in the fifth stage to report on the findings based on the participants' perceptions, opinions, and experiences concerning the implementation of the EFAL teaching, learning and assessment policy, CAPS in particular.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Request letter to conduct the study, informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, no harm to participants, respect, dignity and standard of care were considered during data collection to observe ethics.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

Participants Profile

The study comprised of one Deputy Chief Education Specialist (DCES) in English FAL from Limpopo Department of Education (LDoE), two Senior Education Specialists (SES) in English FAL from Capricorn North District (CND), one Grade 12 English educator and one FET Departmental Head (DH) in Languages from each of the four schools. As a result, the study embraced eleven participants. The table below summarises the participants' profiles:

	Institution	Gender	Age	Qualifications	Experience
DH1	School A	Male	45 – 50	Diploma in Education	29 years
DH2	School B	Female	25 – 30	Masters (English Education)	7 years
DH3	School C	Female	30 – 35	Masters (English Education)	7 years
DH4	School D	Male	30 – 35	Honours (English Studies)	7 years

Presentation of Data from the Interview Schedules

1. Role of Stakeholders on EFAL Policy Implementation

Question 10: According to you, is it safe to indicate that EFAL CAPS document is implemented to the latter? Explain.

Presentation:

DH1 answered that, “Yes, it is a policy, therefore, it needs to be implemented to the latter to create a socially and emotionally well-balanced learner who is continuously developing within the context of their environment.”

DH2 had this to say, “Teachers struggle to implement the policy. For example, they struggle to informally assess speaking skills in the classroom.”

DH3 commented that, “While there may be significant efforts and measures in place to implement the EFAL CAPS document to the latter, various challenges impact the fidelity of this implementation. Resource constraints, teacher preparedness, diverse learners need, and inconsistent monitoring are critical factors that can hinder full compliance. Therefore, it might be overly simplistic to categorically state that the EFAL CAPS document is implemented to the latter without addressing these underlying issues and ensuring continuous support and adaptation to meet the curriculum's goals comprehensively. A more nuanced approach involves recognizing areas of strength and identifying gaps where improvements are needed, ensuring that all stakeholders work collaboratively towards achieving the objectives set out in the CAPS document.”

DH4 wrapped it up as follows, “According to me, EFAL CAPS is implemented, although there are still challenges in terms of educator training and development, educator consultation and participation, additional educator workload and lack of resources. The factors mentioned lead to educator stress, frustration and a sense of dis-empowerment, which negatively impacts on the implementation of CAPS in the classroom.”

Analysis:

The data-set undoubtedly reports that the EFAL CAPS document is not implemented to the letter. It is academically believed that the teaching and learning of English as a first additional language prepares the learners for their workspaces (DBE, 2012). However, DH1 introduced the impact of social and environmental development learners would possess provided the EFAL policy is religiously administered. Speaking skill as part of the main skills in EFAL, is singled out by DH2 to emphasize its negligence in the classroom. Both DH3 and DH4 commented on the importance of identifying the ‘*burning issues*’ in the teaching and learning of the language, English to be specific, in order to build a nuanced approach towards improvements in the implementation of EFAL policy. These findings are evidence enough to gauge the relevancy of the study, with the aid of developing a tangible strategy to address the problems that are also stipulated by the departmental heads above. In addition, SES2 raised some disconcerting issues, especially on the allocation of the English language subject to non-language specialists in some schools as a contributing factor to the distress in EFAL policy implementation.

These factors are as a result of disregarding the learning of English language like any other subject. For instance, experience taught the researcher that someone who did not major in Mathematics or Science would not be allocated the subjects. Nonetheless, the EFAL CAPS document is not effectively implemented, but it is important for school leaders, either as a departmental head, deputy principal or principal to identify these challenges and address them. Tanjung and Daulay (2019) explain that school leaders should be involved in decision-making in the processes of policy formulation, so that their support is effective during implementation. The researcher is of the view that through understanding roles and responsibilities for each stakeholder, then the problems mentioned by the participants could be addressed earlier. As Dimmock (2020) alluded, an institution is judged by the provision of quality teaching and learning. Depending on the individual problems per institution, the capacity of school leaders is still crucial to ensure that the EFAL language skills are implemented to the latter, through vigorous support and intervention. Amon and Bustami (2021:1) suggest that to “improve the implementation and outcomes of policies in schools require increasing the capacity of school leaders”. Through the engagements with the participants, the researcher pondered what role the stakeholders play in the implementation process in the interim. Hereunder are their responses.

Question 11: What is your role and responsibility in EFAL CAPS document implementation?

Presentation:

DH1 noted the following, “To ensure that all skills in the learning of language are provided or catered for. i.e., listening, speaking, reading and writing, through which an effective life-long education will improve the learner lifestyles. I also think my role in the implementation of the language is to close all the language gap that can be there in the learning and teaching process.” DH2 holds that, “I think my role is to provide teachers with the policy or inform them on how to access it and monitor the implementation in the classroom”. DH3 elucidated that, “As a Departmental Head, I am responsible for implementing the EFAL CAPS document. My role and responsibilities are multifaceted. I function as a leader, manager, and support system for my teachers and learners. Lastly, implementing the EFAL CAPS document is critical to ensuring that the curriculum is delivered effectively and that both teachers and learners receive the support they need to succeed. I significantly impact the quality of EFAL education at my school by leading with vision, supporting professional development, monitoring performance, and fostering collaboration.” In the words of DH4, “My role is to implement the policy to ensure that children acquire and apply knowledge and skills in ways that are meaningful to their own lives and to ensure that my subordinates follow it without any omissions, since it is the only tool we use to align our teaching with educational expectations of our country.”

Analysis:

The interesting scenario about these responses is that educators believe that they have to teach and assess the learners, which is basically policy implementation. The departmental heads emphasize that implementation and monitoring is necessary in ensuring that language skills are implemented effectively. In the same breadth, departmental officials support what the departmental heads stress, more especially on the issue of monitoring the implementation of the EFAL CAPS document.

The researcher denotes contradicting ideas between words and action. That is, the responses are intriguing because, if implementation and monitoring were sufficient, there would not be inconsistencies in the implementation of the EFAL policy as identified by the researcher thereof. Moreover, it could be that the stakeholders understand their roles, but cannot apply them accordingly. This creates mismatch of roles and responsibilities among stakeholders [either knowing what needs to be done, but not applying it, or completely not knowing what needs to be done] and later result in blame shifting. For instance, experience taught the researcher that every time gaps are identified in language policy implementation, the policymaker would blame the policy mediator or policy mediators blaming policy implementers and vice versa. Policymakers are likely to deflect responsibility by blaming policy mediators, and policy mediators shifting accountability to policy implementers (Heinkelmann-Wild & Zangl 2020). Furthermore, it is worth noting that teachers’ core objective is to ensure that students receive effective teaching (Alisaari, Heikkola, Commins & Acquah, 2019).

Nevertheless, the role of stakeholders, especially school leaders, is to influence how policies are carried out inside their buildings, and in turn take on the role of arbiters of educational opportunity (Mavrogordato & White, 2020). This means that school leaders fail the system [education] by operating it as they wish, and not following its prescripts. Jenkins

(2020) avows that teacher effectiveness in implementing teaching, learning and assessment policy is heavily dependent on school leadership. However, an exception for some stakeholders who do not understand their role in the implementation of EFAL CAPS document is granted. Sepuru and Mohlakwana (2020) attest that school leaders, especially newly appointed ones, lack leadership and management role experience in the areas of teaching, learning and assessment policy. A clear comprehension of the stakeholder's responsibilities on the implementation of the EFAL policy is evident from the preceding sections. The ensuing theme presents data on how the development received (if any) has impacted the implementation of the EFAL policy in these institutions.

DISCUSSION

This theme is mainly focused on policy mediators and policy implementers as role players in the implementation of EFAL teaching, learning and assessment policy. The policy mediators are the departmental officials and policy implementers are the departmental heads and educators.

The responses on school management team interview schedules in 4.3.1.4 categorically individualize role played by the stakeholders based on their own experiences. The roles are different as individual stakeholders have different challenges. The educators believe that their role is proper planning and preparation during the implementation process, while on one hand it is solely the duties and responsibilities of an educator (PAM, 2022). Departmental heads and departmental officials on the other hand mention supporting and monitoring the educators during the implementation process. Nonetheless, at school level, the main role of departmental heads in the subject is to be in charge of the subject, jointly develop the policy for that subject, coordinate the assessment tasks, and provide guidance in the subject (PAM, 2022). That is, departmental heads influence how policies are carried out inside their departments, and in turn, take on the role of arbiters of educational opportunity (Mavrogordato & White, 2020).

Also, some institutions have only one departmental head or no departmental head at all. This can deter the EFAL implementation processes due to lack of support and monitoring. Amon and Bustami (2021:1) suggest that to “improve the implementation and outcomes of policies in schools requires increasing the capacity of school leaders”. School leaders refer to departmental heads in the context of implementing teaching, learning and assessing EFAL policy. In the absence of departmental heads, the misconception is that educators are doing well, whereas they do not cope. Tolo, Lillejord, Flórez-Petour and Hopfenbeck (2020) state that when it comes to managing the implementation process without leadership help, educators are solely trusted to possess the requisite knowledge and skills. This is likely impossible as no man is an island. Jenkins (2020) avows that teacher effectiveness in implementing teaching, learning and assessment policy is heavily dependent on school leadership, relationships between leaders with teachers and colleagues. Lastly, when sufficient support is offered, monitoring is completed on educators, then proper measures can be taken to track learner progress. Ahmad, Ali and Sewani (2021) specify that departmental heads should be involved in the processes of monitoring student progress on EFAL teaching, learning and assessment policy implementation.

Subsequently, in the ELRC (2017), the departmental officials, who are senior education specialists, are expected firstly, to provide professional leadership through the implementation of systems and structures that allow for effective management. Secondly, facilitate correct interpretation and ensure effective planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of English policies. Apart from support and monitoring, it is recommended that correct facilitation on the implementation of the EFAL teaching, learning and assessment policy should be offered. Mthembu (2019) affirms that senior education specialists are instructional leaders.

Therefore, the senior education specialists should instruct on ways in which language policies can be implemented. Equally, Galane (2019) attests that senior education specialists must conscientize teachers of the objectives and aims of the language policies. Moreover, Galane (2019) alludes that they must support them to develop specific lesson objectives that would enable them to accomplish the aims of the teaching and learning policy, in order to enhance performance. This is because failure to mediate the EFAL CAPS document to the educators by the departmental officials, it would clearly and continually cause the deviations on the implementation process. Munyai (2020) states that senior education specialists have a substantial impact in enhancing language teaching and learning.

Conclusively, it is advisable for the stakeholders to work collaboratively, so that the implementation of the EFAL policy is smooth. The reality is that learners are always victims of ineffective teaching and learning of EFAL skills. Therefore, to avoid creating gaps in the learning process of learners, education stakeholders must comply and work closely with each other. Shushu (2023) affirms that lack of cooperation and collaboration between teachers and senior education specialists result in the lack of performance among the learners.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Principals

- Provide necessary support such as developing their institutions for effective teaching and learning, procuring enough materials, dealing with unruly learners and uncooperative staff.
- Productively facilitate the implementation of teaching, learning and assessment policies in the school.

Departmental Heads

- Perform their duties as per PAM directives at school level regardless of the circumstances.

- Trace, evaluate and record minor and major deviations in the implementation of the EFAL policies and effectively hold everyone accountable without fear, favour nor prejudice.

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