Twenty-first Century Teacher Challenges of Emerging Trends in Primary Education: A Case of Five Primary Schools in Harare Metropolitan Province, Zimbabwe

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Abstract: *The Zimbabwean Primary School Education system in this 21ˢᵗ century caters for the new syllabus which is competence based and requires learners at all levels of education to have an exit profile. This study aims to explore the major challenges that primary school teachers in Zimbabwe face in their classrooms to keep up with Continuous Assessment Learning Areas (CALAs) which are project based. This study is hinged on a qualitative research approach which is interpretive. A case study with five purposively sampled teachers and grounded on a constructivist theory was undertaken. Semi-structured interviews and document analysis of the questions were used to collect data. Collected data which was analysed inductively, answered the study research question. Findings indicate that although CALAs is an innovative method and an emerging trend in pedagogy that allows learners to have an in-depth understanding, they pose challenges to teachers. Their downside is that they are time consuming and learners without ICT resources fail to cope. Schools and learners' guardians/parents lack adequate resources to do CALAs which are project based and also embrace the use of technology. Teachers have negative attitudes towards CALAs and they also lack adequate technological pedagogic skills to assist the learners adequately. The study recommends that Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE) undertake a massive technological project to assist teachers and schools to have adequate and efficient resources that are compatible with the 21ˢᵗ century demands.*

Keywords: *Continuous assessment, Learning areas, Emerging trends, Innovative strategies of teaching, Pedagogic skill, Twenty-first century*

1. Introduction

Implementing learner cantered teaching methods in primary schools is a difficult exercise in many countries and Zimbabwe is not an exception (Culclasure, Longest, & Terry, 2019). One of the reasons it has been difficult to implement learner centred teaching methods in Zimbabwe is that teachers are accustomed to using the chalk and talk teaching method characterised by repetitions and drills (Nyamayedenga, de Jager, & Aluko, 2018). Consequently, interactive methodologies have always been encouraged in the Zimbabwean primary education system although teachers usually want to teach for exams using the traditional methods. Nziramasanga (1999) carried out an inquiry into the state of education in Zimbabwe and recommend the use of interactive activities. Although the use of interactive

methodologies was recommended in Zimbabwe it may seem teachers were not implementing them hence the introduction of Continuous Assessment Learning Areas. The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE) introduced CALAs to improve educational quality as reflected in the Nziramasanga (1999) commission. This saw MoPSE embracing CALAs which are an emerging trend in the 21ˢᵗ century Zimbabwe (New Curriculum Framework for Primary and Secondary Education (CFPSE) 2015-2022). The aim of this policy was to orient the Zimbabwean Education system towards producing learners who have appropriate skills that can make them innovative and versatile in the global world (Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, (MoPSE) 2021). Using CALAs, learners are assessed not only in examinations but in different areas during the learning process. The purpose of the study is

to explore the challenges primary school teachers face in implementing CALAs. The study is guided by the following research question; What challenges do teachers have with the current trends in implementing CALAs?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Defining CALAS

CALAs may be viewed as the kind of assessment model which moves away from using one common form of testing (examinations) to using a structure of assessment where multiple forms of assessment become an integral part of the teaching learning process, placement and certification (Wallace, Gloria, & Munetsi, 2022). It is a teaching and learning method where learners are monitored through out the year on a variety of skills which may entail activities like practical exercises, research and tests (Ababio, & Dumba, 2013). Learners do activities which empower them with critical thinking, communication, creative and research skills (Abejehu, 2016). These skills are not considered in examinations but are considered in learners' performance which is developed into a profile over a given period of time. CALAs may also be viewed as an appraisal/teaching method where each learner is monitored throughout the year on a variety of activities, including weekly and termly tests. The monitored course work that the learners obtain is used at the end of the academic term or year together with the examination marks for the overall results. In the event that the learner does not write an exam he/she is given an exit profile from the CALAs that shows that they have attended school and done some practical or research work at some point (CFPSE, 2015-2022). This study discusses the challenges faced by primary school teachers in implementing CALAs introduced by Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE).

2.2 Possibilities and Drawbacks of using CALAs in primary school

Continuous Assessment Learning Areas (CALAs) are project based and they offer possibilities to both the classroom teacher and learner. One of the possibilities is that learners are given an opportunity to do their own research and learn through discovery (Le, 2021). The role of the teacher is to evaluate what the learner discovers and sometimes also gain more knowledge during this process. In a way, the teacher can assess whether or not learners have gained the skills which come with the use of CALAs like communication, analytical and writing skills. The research that learners do places the teacher in the middle of all performance assessment activities. These activities will in turn assist providing the teacher with information on what individual learners need guidance in, thus facilitating individual learning (Yahya, Yamin, 2014, Shaikh, & Khoja, 2012). CALAs help teachers to move away from the traditional assessment of looking at the class performance to that of determining individual learner's growth and progress. An unbiased judgement in the learners cognitive, affective and psychomotor evaluation of every learner in the classroom is obtained through CALAs. Regular communication between the learner and the teacher facilitates feedback to the teacher and may be obtained through the use of CALAs (Berhe, & Embiza, 2015). This feedback assists the teacher in coming up with remediation exercises that are suitable for individual learners (Nitko, 2004). On the learners' side, CALAs may also have a positive outcome. When teachers give feedback, learners may be motivated to put more effort and improve on their projects. Learners also experience personalised learning through the CALAs. In personalised learning, learners progress and create knowledge in the content that they are given to research on. Their imagination and interest are enhanced through the use of CALAs. Teachers also have an opportunity to give learners more attention by working with individuals and small groups (Pane, 2018). During presentations and group work, learners also get an opportunity to improve their confidence and communication skills.

Birhanu (2013) found that if CALAs is not well monitored it can be surrounded by laxity. Learners need to be followed up and supervised for them to work hard and to meet the deadlines that they are given to complete given work. Sometimes learners may have serious language deficits that make it difficult for the CALAs to be effective. This is all because for learners to carry out their research and make meaningful presentations, they need to be able to use their intellectual skills (Yigzaw, 2013). Teachers may not have the aptitude of using computers which makes it difficult for them to implement CALAs. Well-organized and efficacious implementation of CALAs requires teachers to be computer literate, especially in this twentieth-first century where every teacher should be competitive in the global work. Computers are an important resource for CALAs to be effectively implemented (Shaikh & Khoja, 2012). Learners need to have computers or smart phones to be able to carry out research on given content. Most of the work is done away from the classroom or at home. There is also need for schools to have smart classrooms with a good broad band for internet connectivity. This enables learners to independently carry out their research without assistance from their parents. Makamure and Jojo, (2023) state that time is also important for CALAs to be adequately implemented. The implementation of CALAs are time consuming. This is supported by Chanda, (2022) who states that the timetable needs to allocate adequate time for learners to learn interactively.

Studies have been done in Zimbabwe and elsewhere on CALAs. In Tanzania, Asefa (2015) carried a study on the implementation of CALAs in secondary schools. The study found that both teachers and learners had a positive attitude towards CALAs and they opined that CALAs are important to improve the achievement of learners. A study carried out in Zambia by Kapambwe (2010) found

that the assessment done by teachers on learners' work assisted them in determining learners' weaknesses and subsequently finding solutions to help them to improve in their work. In Zimbabwe, Gama (2022) carried out a study to assess the implementation of CALAs at high school and found that secondary school teachers had negative attitudes towards the use of CALAs as a teaching and learning method. Another study in Zimbabwe on the paradoxical power of Continuous Assessment Learning Areas was done by Firomumwe (2022) and found that if well administered, CALAs may assist learners to be involved in creating goods for sale hence entrepreneurship skills may be established. In Zimbabwe there is a dearth of research done on CALAs at primary school yet primary education is the foundation of all learning. This study aims to cover this gap by exploring the challenges that primary school teachers face during the implementation of CALAs.

3. Methodology

The research is guided by the qualitative research approach which is interpretive in nature (Creswell, & Creswell, 2017). In line with this approach the study used a single case study to solicit from the teachers the challenges that they face in implementing the CALAs. Five participants were purposively selected by the researcher. The participants had to fulfil the conditions of being a qualified teacher who has trained at any teachers' college in Zimbabwe and they had to be a Grade seven teacher who has implemented the CALAs before. Data was collected using face to face interviews and document analysis. In this study data were analysed using the inductive thematic analysis. Interviews and teachers CALAs file were analysed. Aspects from the theoretical framework assisted in mapping the data to come up with themes. To ensure rigour, the researcher considered the credibility and trustworthiness for the quality of the study (Marshal & Rossman, 2010). Transferability, credibility and dependability were used for rigour as recommended by Licoln and Guba (1985).

3.1 Theoretical Framework

The study is guided by the constructivist's theory. The constructivist has the view that learners are active creators of knowledge through the activities that they do. Teachers as guides in the learning process create rich learning experiences through the activities that they give to the learners. These experiences may assist learners to make meaning out of what they are taught (Bas & Senturk, 2019; Major, 2018). The constructivist supports interactive learning teaching method which allows learners to be critical thinkers. The constructivist theory is suitable for the study because the teachers are key facilitators of the CALAs as they should ensure they create a conducive atmosphere for their learners to create their own knowledge. In addition, it is the duty of teachers to ensure they make meaning of this education trend and implement the requirements of the MoPSE.

CALAs resonate well with the constructivists as it is a method of teaching that permits learners to create new knowledge through researching on issues that affect them and their settings (Gilakjani, Lai-Mei, & Ismail, 2013).

3.2 Ethical Considerations

For ethical considerations the researcher followed confidentiality stipulated by Denzin and Lincoln, Giardina and Cannella (2023); Kaiser, (2009) and Nieuwenhuis and Maree, (2007). The participants' schools and names are not disclosed. The researcher used pseudonyms for the participants and they were coded as Participant A to Participant E. Participants were also told of their right to discontinue if they did not want to continue participating. Permission was obtained from the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, the district officer, the head teachers and the teachers who participated.

4. Results and Discussion

Findings for this study show that CALAs, which are project based, have lots of advantages to the learner when carried out effectively but they also pose challenges to teachers. The interviews carried out established that teacher had challenges in implementing CALAs. The study highlighted that teachers do have challenges with the CALAs. One major theme of setbacks emerged to illuminate the challenges that teachers have in implementing CALAS. These setbacks came in form of negative attitudes towards CALAS, teacher to learner ratios, scarcity of resources and teaching both practical and theory simultaneously.

4.1 Setbacks encountered

4.1.1 Negative attitudes towards the CALAs

Findings show that the negative attitudes teachers have when using CALAs is the major challenge in the implementation of CALAs (Kaku, & Williams, 2021). Teachers had the following to say:

> **Teacher A**: *We were never consulted about the introduction of CALAs as a result we are facing challenges that we should have resolved before this method of teaching was introduced. I think we need to stop using this method.*

> **Teacher B**: *The CALAs were imposed on us and we were not prepared to start using them. This method of teaching is not feasible.*

> **Teacher C**: *I am failing to cover the work on the syllabi because the CALAs are time wasting. We should have been consulted before they asked us to implement. We should have suggested what is feasible.*

Teacher D: *The amount of work that CALAs make us go through is too much. We feel these should be cancelled.*

Teacher E: *We were given a directive to start implementing CALAs by the MoPSE. Honestly, we needed time to understand what it is all about.*

The findings show that teachers had a negative attitude with the idea of the implementation of the CALAs. Although teachers appreciated the introduction of CALAs as a measure to produce learners who meet the requirements of national needs and the global world, they seem to have a negative attitude towards the CALAs. The finding is different from Asefa (2015) who found that both teachers and learners in Tanzania had positive attitudes in CALAs. In this study finding it may seem teachers have a negative attitude towards CALAs because of the complaints they highlighted. They opined that they should have participated in the planning process for them to suggest what teachers and learners can handle.

Teachers claimed that they had a lot of work to do which included marking of CALAs, guiding the learners step by step as they worked on their CALAs. This finding is supported by Sithole, Dziwa, and Matsvange (2021) who found that the activities done by both teachers and learners were demanding. Teachers highlighted that the government imposed CALAs on them which came with numerous drawbacks, which obstruct their implementation and, subsequently, their accomplishment. This is similar to the findings made by Arar, Kondakci and Taysum (2019), Darling-Hammond and Rothman (2011) Ahmadi and Lukman (2015) that policy makers usually impose syllabus change on the implementers. Syllabus change should not be imposed on the implementers. The teachers attitude makes it difficult for the CALAs to be implemented effectively making the MoPSE efforts futile.

The other challenge that drove teachers to have a negative attitude was the amount of work and time given for the learners to complete their work. Teachers indicated that CALAs were time consuming to both the learner and the teacher. Learners ended up not having adequate time to revise for the examinations. This finding concurs with Yigzaw, (2013) who found that although CALAs had several advantages they had their downside of consuming time. Teachers also highlighted what parents said when CALAs were evaluated:

Teacher B: *Parents are also stakeholders in their children's learning. When evaluations were done they indicated that it was best to scrap CALAs as they do not have resources to give to their children. We support the parents because as teachers we work with them for the good of the child.*

Teacher D: *I think CALAs are good for university students who are mature and who want to be productive.*

The finding also highlights how teachers agree with the parents who also state that CALAs are expensive and time consuming. According to the Bulawayo Bureau (2023) CALAs were viewed as a timewaster that demanded too much from learners and did not suit the 30% marks awarded to the practical work done. Teachers indicated that CALAs did not only make leaners learning difficult it also made it difficult for them to teach too.

4.1.2 Teacher to learner ratio

The other challenge that teachers highlighted was that of teacher to learner ratio of one teacher to fifty learners plus. Teachers indicated that their classes were huge and they assumed that it could be that their schools are around town which is a central place. One of the teachers highlighted the following:

Teacher E*; We are expected to have a CALAs file for each learner in all the five subjects that are written for public exams. This is too much work for the teachers as we have 50 to 55 learners in the class.*

Teachers expressed their concern about the need to give their learners Continuous Assessment Tests (CAT) on covered topics on a continuous basis to fulfil the CALAs requirements. Teachers were of the opinion that there was need for the MoPSE to have at most 20 learners in a class for them to implement CALAs effectively. This finding is similar to what was found by Abera, Kedir and Beyabeyin (2017) that one of the challenges of implementing CALAs is the teacher to learner ratio. The teacher to learner ratio contributed to an excessive amount of work to mark when dealing with given research work to learners (Vahed, Walters & Ross, 2023). This gives pressure to teachers hence the negative attitude and low motivation as alluded to before. Teachers hinted that they needed to be given incentives to motivate them in doing a lot of work associated with CALAs. In addition, teachers are of the opinion that the MoPSE may employ more teachers to help with augmented workload to make it easier for them.

4.1.3 Scarcity of resources

For CALAs to be successfully implemented there should be adequate resources (Vahed, Walters & Ross, 2023; Hunduma, Abo & Nugusa Gursha, 2023). Teachers indicated that they should have CALAs file to record each student progress of which they do not have. Teachers highlighted that this was a challenge that both learners and teachers faced. Teachers indicated that they also ended up using their meagre salaries to get CALAs stationery for some learners whose parents could not afford. This made them claim that MoPSE should put unlimited WiFi in all schools across the country. This finding is similar to what Sithole, Dziwa, Matsvange

(2021) who found that schools did not have adequate resources like learners' textbooks and teachers guides to carry out the CALAs effectively.

They indicated that CALAS required learners to research on given topics. Teachers indicated that although they did their best for CALAs to be implemented there should be availability of computers, good network and related software. Teachers indicated that the use of technology in implementing CALAs comes with a lot of advantages. Some of the advantages teachers highlighted are that it assists the teacher to use learner centered methods which is a tenent of CALAs and enhances learners understanding. This finding is supported by Kivunja (2015) who found that the use of technologies assists teachers to teach effectively. From the collected data it was evident that teachers did not have adequate technological resources to assist them. In addition, the unavailability of technological resources affected the learner's research. Some of the participants gave the following sentiments.

> **Teacher A**: *We have two computer labs in our school and we all cannot use the lab because there is one ICT teacher who is also following her timetable of teaching all the learners.*

> **Teacher C:** *Technological resources are not adequate in schools and some parents also cannot afford to have data that enables their children to research online.*

> **Teacher E:** *We sometimes fail to meet required deadlines of assessments because most of the learners do not bring work on time. They claim they do have data sometimes they give excuses of lack of electricity. As a result, this retards their progress and ours too.*

This finding is similar to what Hunduma, Abo and Nugusa Gursha (2023) Ghavifekr and Rosdy (2015) who found that teachers did not have enough teaching resources. Another challenge that teachers highlighted was that of lack of skills to implement CALAs. The teachers indicated that although they have been doing this for some time now they still need to be trained to get the proper skills of implementing CALAs. Findings also indicated that these skills that the teachers needed most were the ICT skills to implement CALAs. This notion agrees with Varank and Ilhan, (2013) who states that teachers should have an in-depth knowledge of how to use ICT tools so that they may manage their classroom effectively. This implies that the teachers of the 21st century must possess good in-depth ICT pedagogical skills to meet learners' requirements and challenges in implementing CALAs. The teachers indicated that they needed training so that they are equipped with ICT pedagogical skills to become innovative in implementing colours. Use of ICTs may assist teachers to be innovative as they implement CALAs.

4.1.4 Teaching both practical and theory simultaneously

The other challenge that teachers highlighted was that of teaching both the practical and theoretical aspect of the content. Nyamudzodza, Mthombeni, Siziva, Sifile, and Manuere, (2021), Zhou (2021) state that the main feature of CALAs is the combination of understanding ideas and principles of the taught topics as well as doing practical work to enforce those concepts. This may imply that there is need for teachers to enhance both the theoretical and practical skills to enforce and apply CALAs. Teachers had the following to say:

> **Teacher B:** *It has become difficult for us to cover the theory content as well as doing practicals' exam marks.*

> **Teacher C:** *I have been teaching theory since I engaged as a teacher twenty years ago. I am finding it difficult to blend theory and practical work. Maybe it is because I never trained to teach CALAs.*

> **Teacher D:** *Some of my learners are overwhelmed with work and so am I. Some are neglecting the theory and they are concentrating on the practical yet it only contributes 30% of the total exam marks.*

This finding is similar to the findings made by Sithole, Dziwa and Matsvange (2021), that it is difficult to implement CALAs due to large amount of work teachers have to do.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

Based on the findings, the effectiveness of CALAs as a teaching method cannot be over emphasised although it has challenges that need to be addressed. Some of the challenges emanate from the negative attitudes that teachers have which stem from too much work that they have to do. The negative attitudes that teachers have may hinder the effective use of CALAs as a teaching method. The study implicates that the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education should have planned in consultation with teachers as they best know what is required on the ground. Lack of incentives could have caused the negative attitudes that teachers have towards the implementation of CALAs. Main findings also indicated challenges of teacher to learner ratio which is high and does not allow teachers to effectively assess learners work and help them effectively in their areas of need. The teacher/learner ratio leaves the teacher with inadequate time to cover the huge amount of work that learners are expected to cover. The study also concluded that lack of technological resources and CALAs stationery by both the learners and teachers also hampered a successful implementation. In addition,

teachers highlighted lack of pedagogical skills to teach both theory and practical at the same time increasing pressure on them.

5.2. Recommendations

In light of the findings, the study recommends that:

1. MoPSE should incentivise teachers and also undertake a massive technological project to provide teachers with necessary resources that are compatible with the 21st century demands. This may foster their positive attitudes towards the use of CALAs.

2. MoPSE should ensure they deploy more teachers in schools to address the issue of teacher/learner ratio.

3. Lastly, the study also recommends school heads to initiate staff development programmes necessary to equip teachers with pedagogical skills on how to handle both practical and theoretical concepts simultaneously.

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